

## **Wanda Bronson**

- Born 8/28/1928 in Helsinki, Finland
- B.A. (1950) Barnard College, Ph.D. (1957) Clinical Psychology at University of California at Berkeley
- Married to Gordon Bronson

### **Major Employment:**

- U.C. Berkeley, 1957 – 1982, Junior to Associate Research Psychologist at the Institute of Human Development

### **Major Areas of Work**

- Peer Relations

### **SRCD Affiliation:**

- Child Development, 1981 – 1983, Consulting Editor
- Child Development, 1983 – 1987, Associate Editor
- Monographs of the Society for Research and Child Development, 1987 – 1993, Editor



## **SRCD ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW**

### **Wanda Bronson**

Interviewed by Lucy Rau Ferguson  
September 24, 2003

**Ferguson:** And we're starting out the Oral History interview with Wanda Bronson--the beginning of the interview. So how do you want to do this, Wanda, do you want to start where they want you to start?

Bronson: Yeah, I think so. Because--

**Ferguson:** --Which is sort of just the general--yeah--

Bronson: --which is the general intellectual history--

**Ferguson:** --yeah, right.

Bronson: --and past and all that. But what struck me when I was thinking about this is that my early childhood and adolescence has either, you know, shaped, presaged, affected coincidentally, reflected--depending on your theoretical position about relationships--all the rest of my intellectual and otherwise life in that it was a very disjointed youth in a variety of ways. My father was the Polish Ambassador to Finland when I was born, and then he moved--he was posted to Latvia in Riga for a couple of years, and then to Lithuania for a couple of years. And by that time in Lithuania I was 11 and it was 1939, and the war started. And so those first 11 years were really divided completely between different areas, different places, different staffs in the--at the embassies. Being an embassy daughter was a special upbringing--I had one older brother, but didn't go to school because of the languages, of course, and there--so there were no peers, and my friends were the staff, meaning the cook, and the butler, and the chauffeur and all those. And those of course changed each time we changed postings. So it was a very disjointed thing, and also the disjointment somehow meant that I saw...I can't remember ever thinking when I was a child about the past place, and feeling that I missed it. It was a new life, simply a complete change, a forgetting of what was past. And I can't say if I was or wasn't happier. Then when the war started we had to get out of Europe, and wound up in Brazil in Curitiba, a small town. Now it's a very well known town I gather, and very ecologically important, beautifully developed and all of that. But small at the time we're talking about--in early--yeah, '40s, during the '40s--

**Ferguson:** What part of Brazil, Wanda, just out of curiosity?

Bronson: --it's in the state of Parana, so that's towards the north of Brazil. And there was a rather large Polish émigré group, and I think that's one of the reasons we wound up there, and another one was of course that leaving Europe our family fortunes were down to practically nothing. And that was another big change, this disjunction from being a rather spoiled and petted daughter of the ambassador (and the daughter of the ambassador was also attended to because people who came there depended on the ambassador's favorites, and my father was very fond of me). I was kind of a princess, and all of a sudden from being a princess I was an immigrant with no money, and that also--but I can't say, again, that I felt very unhappy. It was simply a total change. I went to high school in Brazil at the Collegio Nossa Senhora de Lourdes, largely because the French nuns took me as a charity student.

**Ferguson: And the French have always loved the Poles.**

Bronson: --yes, yes they wanted to help, and they were--they were very sweet. My mother went to visit Curitiba years later, after we were established here. And she went to visit the nuns they still were praying for me there, because they somehow heard that I got married not in the church, and so they're--and for all I know they may still be praying for me, not very successfully obviously, but nevertheless--so that was another kind of disjunction. Again, there's this odd sense when I think back of not feeling nostalgic about the other earlier life. It was just simply a totally different life. Brazil was not a very happy experience because at that point, especially in Curitiba, the role of women was to sit in the window if your man permitted it--the husband, or boyfriend, or father--and kind of look at what was going on in the streets. Being interested in education or having any kind of career ideas was not there. And yet the notion of being educated and having some kind of a career was always part my background. My mother had a PhD and she had been a nurse in the First World War. I hadn't actually realized what a strong woman she was until my father died in Brazil, and she was left there with my brother and myself, early teenagers, with as I say very little wherewithal, and she somehow managed--by teaching English, at a better British Society of Culture, which I wonder how she did because she knew very much about grammar and all that, but her accent till the day she died was really quite markedly Polish. But she, she managed. So the idea of always having to be able to take care of yourself, and nothing--everything passes, everything is uncertain--became part of me. The only thing that you can be certain of is that which you have within yourself, which was some kind of education. And that too, I think, the experience of having my mother be a very strong woman, and yet kind of discovering her strengths only when we were in Brazil. While she was the wife of the Ambassador, she was just a sweet warm presence, but it was always--I always felt that father was "the" person, and mother was just kind of a shadow, "yes dear, no dear." So it was also something which I suppose was experienced by many women of our generation, especially my generation: of being socialized into never being confrontational, always being pleasant, not knowing how to deal with anger, or--if you were angry, you just swallowed it. And that, I think shaped quite a bit of how I behaved. Anyway, since I decided that I was going to be (since I obviously wasn't going to be a Brazilian) that I was going to be an American quite early on, I learned to speak English at the British Society of Culture there, though I remember on the final test for a proficiency certificate we had a question, "what is the masculine of spinster?" and I said "spider." So as you see my English was not all that perfect at that point, but I spoke enough to get a certificate of proficiency in English. And I applied to Barnard College thinking that I was applying to Columbia University; frankly I had no idea about the difference, and so I applied to Barnard College, the only college I applied to. And bless them, they took me. They had a policy of, you know, accepting "odd" people, and I had done very well in the Brazilian high school, which was not surprising. My math there was taught by a male instructor, who came in once a week, with the nuns sitting all around the classroom because there was a male there, and praying the whole time. So you know, my high school education was not all that good. But they accepted me, and not only accepted me, but Barnard gave me a full scholarship, which was the only thing that made it financially possible to do it. So we moved to New York, and that perhaps was even the most striking disjunction of my life. I was older at that point, I was 18, so I was more aware of the enormous change from this small town in Brazil, and its "Collegio" to New York, Barnard College, America. In Brazil I was one of the tallest women; in fact, I remember that at a dance, a girlfriend of mine kept coming and asking, "What are you doing dancing by yourself?" I wasn't, I had a male partner, but the male--most male partners came up to my bosom at the best. And now here I was, by no means the tallest in my class, and it was a--it was quite a shock. But you know, I was quite definite about what I was going to study. I had decided that I would like to be a psychologist in Brazil, partly because of one of these chance encounters. There was a young man there, Peter Balas' I remember, a Hungarian, who had been an assistant to Szondi if you remember Szondi with his peculiar face cards test? I met him in my early teens, and he was in his 30's, he was an older man, much older man as far as I was concerned. But he was such a model of male. In Brazil the males were often macho, and I didn't like that at all.

And he was kind, and sweet, and a psychologist. And I somehow associated the psychology and being good as being together, and so I decided to be a psychologist, which--

**Ferguson: It sounded as though he was an example of the reflective function.**

Bronson: Something like that--it was just bizarre, the decision, but you know, why not? So I did go in immediately at Barnard into psychology. I wanted to get through as fast as possible because, you know, funds were low, and I thought that the sooner I can get a degree and start earning something the better it would be. So I did my course--I got the BA in three years by going to summer school, and getting--Barnard had a very nice system. If you got very high grades you got extra credits, and so you could get your 120 credits needed for graduation by getting some extras for being on the dean's list and all that. And that was never difficult for me, studying was always very easy. And there I--clinical psychology was my general idea. I think that's the only goal that I kind of thought about. I was lucky to have two very wonderful teachers there. Frances Graham was my teacher, and she was--she was very good. She was interested in her students, she was not a clinician, but she was a good role model. And Bernice Wenzel, who was another role model.

**Ferguson: That's interesting, Wanda, because Fran must have been pretty much at the very beginning of her career--**

Bronson: Yes.

**Ferguson: --at that point, so that you had a model, you know, and a mentor who was not, not much older than yourself, which I think is always good.**

Bronson: --yes, that made a big difference. Yes, she was a very young woman, and--but maybe also because she was a very young woman, she was able to relate to us, her students. She involved me and a couple of my classmates in writing a paper together in our senior year, and this was not necessarily the usual kind of thing to do. That is still my first publication, under Charwat. What Frances Graham was teaching, it was more experimental, things that I thought were not in my ken at all. But her kindness, her involvement--like Peter Balas', she was a very nice model, a nice woman. So I think that reinforced my notion that psychology is the place that I want to go. And from there, when I got my BA, I applied to Cal as well as Stanford, and I think Harvard of all places, and Harvard didn't take me. Stanford was willing to take me, and Cal was willing to take me. But Cal was also willing to give me full tuition, and a teaching assistantship, which continued to be important at that point for economic reasons.

**Ferguson: And Stanford had barely.**

Bronson: Yes, and my brother was in Berkeley, teaching in the engineering department. So we--my mother and I--we all moved here. And that wasn't that much of a difference in lifestyle, though it still was. I remember going to a first kind of graduate student interview with John McKee, who was my advisor, and I remember I wore white gloves in Berkeley! But I was still a European girl, and in New York somehow you still could do it. In New York I was also very involved with affairs of the émigré groups, but I think now, you know, white gloves, and of course a dress and all that, and going to talk to John McKee, who I got to know later and who was not really quite of--in that style of things. So in a sense it was also a total difference. But there I wasn't quite so aware of that, because the continuity lay in work and study. And so I clinical program. And here--I don't know.

**Ferguson: That was in--you know, if I can sort of interject because actually I just sort of, you know, followed along I think probably about two or three years behind you in--**

Bronson: Yeah.

**Ferguson: --more or less the same paths at Berkeley, and it must have seemed a kind of dilemma for you at that point, because all the interesting stuff in a certain way was in clinical, and with some of the people that were teaching, but the really sort of sound, solid foundation was in developmental, and it was kind of, you know, which way do you go, and how do you put them together.**

Bronson: Yes, yes, you're quite right. It--but indeed the only exciting people, Shirley Hecht, Tim Leary, Merv Freedman, those were exciting people, they were interesting and they were in clinical. Developmental--well, Jean McFarlane, and how Harold Jones. Harold Jones I underestimated, and I didn't realize what a wise man he really was.

Bronson: --I just, I don't know. I wish I hadn't, but he was--I felt he was distant, and I just didn't--I didn't grab what he had to say.

**Ferguson: It took me years to understand what a truly kind man Harold was, and how--what good care he took of his students. I was his teaching assistant my whole first year in graduate school, and he worked the h\*\* out of me. And then after that he always seemed so supportive.**

Bronson: Yes. Well I was a teaching assistant for him also. I was scared to death of him all the time. He was very kind to me, but I kind of decided that teaching assistantships were not really quite my thing, and somehow--it may well be that Harold Jones suggested to Jean McFarlane, you know, that she take me on, and Jean took me at the Institute of Child Welfare at that point. And I became a research assistant there to Marjorie Honzik, but at that point of course it was no longer truly developmental work. And Jean would talk about developmental issues and all that, but pretty soon I got to realize that Jean's stories were very interesting, fun, but atheoretical, and I think that was a big problem. And so developmental really didn't grab me at that point, and under Marjorie Honzik I got involved in working on pretty trivial stuff--as a research assistant I was set to transcribing some of the old behavior problem code systems, and I remember I still had to use a pen with--not a quill, but you know, an old fashioned pen with an inkwell, and it was something--indelible ink that you had--

**Ferguson: In those days the copiers wouldn't work with anything else. Yeah.**

Bronson: I didn't have any great intellectual mentors or anything like that there at the institute, the Institute of Child Welfare. A lot of us research assistants worked on the top floor, and there was also Norm Livson, and he was not a research assistant at that point. He was already some higher level somebody.

**Ferguson: He was probably a research associate or something like that --**

Bronson: --yes something like that.

**Ferguson: --because Norm wasn't that much ahead of us again. Yeah.**

Bronson: Yes. And there was Dave McNeil, who later became quite famous. But he was a youngster then, a thin stick of a youngster. But it was somehow this group; we would have coffee together, and talk, talk psychology, talk all kinds of things. And they were more of my intellectual milieu, that and the clinical people. In clinical I couldn't really quite decide on a theoretical orientation till Leary of course got me with his interpersonal position, and that was fascinating as was talking with Merv Freedman. One of my placements was at Kaiser Permanente Clinic, and there was a Mary Sarvis there, a psychiatrist whom I respected a great deal.

**Ferguson: That original Kaiser Permanente group of Mary Sarvis and--**

Bronson: Yes, yes.

**Ferguson: --was probably the kind of an intellectual center for the students--**

Bronson: The clinical supervision and staff discussions--that was exciting, that was exciting, and these talks on the upper floor of the Institute with, with the others, that was exciting as an idea of research. And I didn't quite know what research really was, but I became interested in the idea. Norm Livson was forced to write papers because he was already in academia, and so between him and I we started writing what now I consider god-awful things. But, you know, that kind of correlational work, and when you have these databanks from longitudinal studies you can correlate anything with anything, and always get something--

**Ferguson: Right.**

Bronson: --if you are clever enough, you can always pretty much make up a good story about it. And we were good at that, it was great fun, you know, to, to run these correlations.

**Ferguson: When I got to Stanford Quin McNamara took me in hand—[laughing] I learned. Actually, Reed Tuddenham was pretty good, too. People very much underestimated what a good sort of quantitative person Reed Tuddenham was.**

Bronson: Yes, yes.

**Ferguson: I mean, he, he could get up there in front of 200 students and make factor analysis understandable, and I was amazed, you know.**

Bronson: Yes, yes, yes. Yes, Reed's another person whom I underestimated until much later, until I grew wise enough to, to see what a fine person he was. But of course correlations at that point, we ran them by hand on these machines, so it wasn't quite as easy as nowadays when--

**Ferguson: Which was better discipline because--**

Bronson: --yes.

**Ferguson: --you had to think a bit before you did your entries.**

Bronson: Exactly. But that, that really--now thinking back on it, it was exciting, I'm a crossword puzzle addict, and this had some of the same feeling, you know--how do you put it together, that was interesting. And really what--

**Ferguson: Wanda, let me ask you a question. By the time you got to Barnard, you were clearly multilingual?**

Bronson: Yes.

**Ferguson: Yeah. Do you think that that had anything to do with the sort of, you know, bent that you had, but what interested you, what grabbed you in--at least in a research possibilities?**

Bronson: Probably. It was not just being multilingual, but you see, multicultural.

**Ferguson: Exactly, that's--yeah.**

Bronson: And that's been both a strength and a weakness. It's made it very hard to be absolutist, or convinced of any truth. You know, it's always, "yes, I believe, and I know full well that I could be absolutely wrong, but what I believe I'll stand for." So that--no problem with that. But this absolute belief in one's rightness I never was able to have. So I think that--it's again one of these strengths and weaknesses. I think my inability to become dedicated to any theory, always looking for a theory that would really appeal to me, but always, yes, very excited at the outset, and then beginning to see, yes, but--there's but and there are these arguments, and there are these arguments, and one cannot just dismiss them. Well, at that point I also got married. Gordon, I saw him as a graduate student, and--I saw him and I decided that was it, got married, and we had our first child right away.

**Ferguson: The other thing that was interesting I think in our experience is that the women in graduate school in those days tended to be a lot--any--some of them--at least younger but men were grownups--**

Bronson: Yes.

**Ferguson: --because most of them had been in the war.**

Bronson: Yes, you're quite right, you're quite right. Yes. Mike Boomer is a person I remember in my class--I don't know whether when you were in it was also that way, but my year, just about all the men were returned veterans--

**Ferguson: Yeah.**

Bronson: --and they were in their 30's, and the difference between 21 and 30 is enormous, and it was kind of a sense of inferiority because they were so much wiser. And I don't know whether that was also true for you, but for me, there was quite a bit of ragging about castrating women, and that just as in Barnard when one had to be sure that if one went out with a Columbia boy, one didn't admit to being on the dean's list, one laughed at jokes about "Barnyard"--oh g\*\*. And here it was also kind of feeling embarrassed about the fact that I was doing alright in graduate school because they would be always, you know, castrating women innuendos, and "oh, you like bananas," just these stupid idiotic jokes, but they still hurt, and they still kind of--it was a bit scary, and played into this whole business of how much do you have to hide what you know. Can--you can't really compete. Being competitive is, is just too scary, and not only scary, but probably just bad.

**Ferguson: You know, a book that I came across partly because, for reasons I think you could empathize with, my--Joseph Conrad was actually one of my father's favorite authors, so I started reading Conrad at a certain point. And the first one of his that I really thought was one that's not so well known is called *The Secret Agent*.**

Bronson: Yes.

**Ferguson: You know that one?**

Bronson: Yes.

**Ferguson: Yeah. And I thought, oh, you know, that's what I am, I'm a secret agent.**

Bronson: Yes, there is all that sense, and it's--so yeah, I--and I now hope that the young women, the current young women, really don't have to go through all this.

**Ferguson: Oh no, with the current young women, stand back.**

Bronson: Yes, yes. At least--

**Ferguson: Yeah, I think they're still struggling with it, but it's, but it's at a different stage and a different form.**

Bronson: Thank goodness. That--yes, that was an unnecessary burden that we had to, to have. But the thing that really changed things for me was getting pregnant. My older son was born in '53. So I was quite young and I still didn't have my degree. I was--I remember very well my pregnancy, morning sickness that lasted through the whole day, and still working at Kaiser Clinic, and having a patient, and feeling "no, I cannot throw up till the end of the hour, I just cannot throw up"--Mary Sarvis will say that the patient is going to take this as a rejection or something, and I can't be--so that was rather uncomfortable. But the real thing was my feeling that once my baby was born, I couldn't--I couldn't continue in clinical, that my child had to take priority, and in clinical practices, a patient would have to take priority. Working as a half time researcher at the Institute of Child Welfare was an ideal solution. I could--my time was my own, it was half time, I could spend a lot of time with my son, Mark. And that's--so that kind of took me out of clinical, and got me into research. I got my PhD in '56, and I passed my orals on the strength, I think, of being so pregnant with my second son, Matthew, that my belly was going back and forth with his kicks. The whole committee would ask me a question and then focus on my belly as he kicked, kicked, kicked. So I think that my orals went very well, and very quickly--

**Ferguson: It became a kind of legend among the other women graduate students, that's the way to pass your orals.**

Bronson: Absolutely. It--I think McKinnon was on my orals committee, but otherwise it was Alex Sheriffs and other men, and of course with any stress the baby bangs you inside and makes you twitch. So then I had the two children and continued being half time, but I did discover one thing about research possibilities after I stopped working with Norm Livson on these more, you know, "let's correlate and see what happens" projects, and became interested in a whole big panel of "behavioral problems" so called that were part of the longitudinal data. How

reliable the code were is, came to believe later a very moot issue. But I didn't know that then of course, and it was a question of trying to make something out of it, and I did kind of a cluster analysis, but it was more of a thinking and cluster analysis. So I did have this prior sense of temperament, that there's something about people that makes them have what I finally came to call orientations to the environment, that is, a certain perception of the world--you know, you're an optimist or you're a pessimist, you see the glass half full or half empty. And I think I always felt that I was an optimist in many ways, that I always saw the glass half full even if it was half empty. So that made sense to me, and somehow all of these endless correlations did coalesce into these two dimensions of extraversion/introversion and impulsivity control. And that I found interesting because it gave me the sense of a continuity of personality development, that continuity and development are both there. Maybe again because of these many life changes I felt even though I changed so much throughout my life, I was who I was. So there was this sense of, of identity, and also I guess from the clinical perspective the whole issue of identity, of self-consistency that became interesting.

**Ferguson: And all of, all of those issues about continuity and differences and so forth that, that began to be important to people's thinking, oh about '60s.**

Bronson: Yes, yes. And so the '60s got--I spent most of the '60s working on that and being interested in that. And then I guess a couple of things happened. It must have been at the very end of the '60s that I met Mary Ainsworth who was spending some time at the think tank at Stanford, you know, the Study for the Advanced whatever. I met her there, and she and I became extremely good friends, we just clicked with one another right away. And she was a very important influence on me. She had come back from Uganda, and was all of--she was just beginning to develop attachment theory. Through her I then met John Bowlby, who also was very important. It was that and also coalescing the idea of this continuity in personality, where does it come from, and feeling that one had to go to the beginning, to the early years. And then under the influence of John Bowlby and Mary I decided to try for my own research, and apply for a grant, and I decided to study the second year of life, because my feeling was that Mary Ainsworth had done the first year of life. And many people were working with the third year nursery school and all that, so I was going to do the second year of life. And amazingly enough, I got the grant, and the grant was for a pilot study, but of course I didn't do a pilot study but went the whole hog. It was, it was a very good time and very, very interesting. After all these years of working with dead data to gather my own, to observe, and really I think that my strength was in being a good observer, which was partly the clinical training, I guess. So it was both the enjoyment of observation, and seeing how things seemed to connect.

**Ferguson: There's nothing like having had a couple of those little critters at home, too, I think to sensitize you to--**

Bronson: Yes.

**Ferguson: --to the issues, especially if you're going to study early childhood--**

Bronson: Yes.

**Ferguson: --or the toddler years, but mostly--.**

Bronson: Yes, and I think also that the clinical experience made it possible for me to work successfully with the 40 mother/infant pairs--and partly, as you say, because I had been a mother of small children, and I could understand it. And because of my true interest, they all responded to me, and they--I was very lucky that the 40 worked with me so well. And when I say worked, they had to do a lot of things: home visits where observers would go into the home and observe them; coming in every month for a videotaped play group where their children played in groups of 4 at the Child Study Center, and having all kinds of little experimental situations to participate in once every quarter. So they, they really saw a lot of me and my staff. But of course, that was also part of it: I was at every single thing other than the home visits just to make sure that they knew how important I thought what they were contributing was. I tried to give them a sense of the importance of what they were doing, and it worked very well in keeping their participation. And then, the year after that, when their children got to be nursery school age I ran for them a 4-week summer nursery program where we had observers watching them and then describing their behavior on a Q-sort. It was a short-term longitudinal study; generated enormous amounts of data because I was influenced by Bowlby and his group, ethologists--are we running out of tape?

**Ferguson: I don't think so. No, no--**

Bronson: Okay.

**Ferguson: --cuz it's a 90-minute tape, I think we should be fine.**

Bronson: So it was the problem of, you know, trying to remain at a very behavioral level. And that's really what in many ways undid me again, having no theory. I had worked out a theoretical framework (which I still say was a good one) but I was never able to implement it. My proposition was that a 2-year-old toddler is always under the effect of four goals, attachment, effectiveness, fear and curiosity, and that those--how these four goals were being fulfilled through this period had a lot to do with shaping his, his actual orientation to the environment in later years.

**Ferguson: Wanda, just to sort of, you know, tie this down a little bit, as I remember you ended up with kind of major monograph publication out of that study things, too--some papers at meetings and so forth, what--about what would be the date on these?**

Bronson: --I brought along an old list of publications just because I have no memory for these kinds of things.

**Ferguson: Because I'm so impressed now with how regardless of the particular labels that you use, that system of the kind of interaction between those either behavior systems (if you want to think of them behaviorally) or goal seeking motives, whatever, however you want to conceptualize that collection of what--intentions, systems is what people were and are still working with in the whole area of social development, which started out to be dominated by the notions of attachment. But I think people tend to forget how much attachment in Bowlby's writings, in Mary Ainsworth's writings was always part of the interaction process, and the interacting system of behavior systems if you want.**

Bronson: Yes. And at that point Gordon had been doing a lot of work on fear, and its position in that interaction system. So I was very aware of that, and it always seemed to be very important. And I was very taken by White's work on effectance, his whole thinking and work about competence, effectiveness, competence and the importance of being effective. And maybe again because of personal history effectance always struck me as an extremely important goal and motive. And of course attachment, Mary's field, and curiosity, exploration were always central and the idea that those four were behavioral systems that were somehow part of our evolutionary history, and that in order to survive we would have to be attached, and be effective, and fear of course you had to have to avoid danger, and you have to be exploratory in your ecological niche, and--

**Ferguson: And you have to have mechanisms for the control of impulses.**

Bronson: In a sense I think that conceptualization was probably the best thing I ever did. It was very early on--I guess it was, yes, in 1971. I presented it at a meeting at the Tavistock Institute where both Gordon and I were invited to attend a CIBA meeting in London, largely because of our professional acquaintance with Tony Ambrose, and I spoke of this notion as being what was going to be the guiding ideas behind my work. But--

**Ferguson: So you, you were at the CIBA meeting in what, '71?**

Bronson: Yes. Yes, and really those were, for me, very exciting times. John Bowlby was a--I thought he was just absolutely a marvelous man. I really liked him. Aside from admiring him, I liked him personally a great deal. And of course Mary Ainsworth as I say was really my very, very, very best friend. And she would visit us here in Berkeley, and I would visit her at her home. And a lot of the other British people were exciting, interesting, so that occasional visits to London were very nice. Of course, Gordon and I had spent a couple of sabbaticals in London previously, so we knew London, and I loved it so. But to get back to the point, what made it impossible for me to implement whatever vague theoretical frameworks I was developing were issues of assessment and measurement. Really that, I found in the end, was the thing that stops one. Since, you know, how to "measure"--I've always hated to use the word "measure" in psychology, because it implies a precision we don't have. How would you know for sure what underlying concept you're assessing? And if you don't know that, then how can you feed the data into your theory and test it out? And that became such a, such an impossible thing. And going to what I thought was going to be the salvation, namely looking at very specific behavioral items, that doesn't do it either--



**Ferguson: That way lies madness, because, because given any subset of specific observations the correlation with any other subset of specific observations is so low.**

Bronson: You really have to have a theoretical framework to impose, but since I didn't have any that I really believed in, and that became particularly true in trying to study mother-child interaction, in many ways the most interesting data panel I had, but in coding all of these endless home observations and other video segments I just couldn't come up with something that I felt was really the thing that I wanted to capture. Somehow I was lucky enough to be able to organize the codings of the peer behavior (even though they were very specific, such as takes, gives and the like) not on the basis of correlations, but in a priori defined functional categories. Somehow the peer behavior I could do maybe because toddlers, they don't have all that many intentions, and they are more transparent. The difference between the second year of life and when I saw them in the nursery school when they were 3 1/2-years-old, they'd gotten to be such complicated creatures. They did have intent--

Bronson: I love 2-year-olds. Having had my own I know that this "No, I won't" isn't necessarily something mother feels delighted about, but this marvelous self-assertion, they're wonderful. Three-and-a-half-year-olds, to my shock, were beginning to be humanly nasty, where two kids would really gang up on a third one, and where you got the feeling that some of the friendships were developed not because A and B liked each other, but because they could join in disliking C, or being nasty to C. And that--after those innocent, marvelous, impossible 2-year-olds--

**Ferguson: Yeah, so what you get by the time they're three and a half year olds is as was pointed out long, long ago, the beginnings of group process, and that's what gets interesting--**

Bronson: Yes. But it was--

**Ferguson: But that means a whole change of gears and in conceptual systems and so forth.**

Bronson: Yes, yes. Peer behaviors among 2-year-olds aren't all that interesting. And I think it all has got to do with absence of language. You can't negotiate games and play very well if you don't have language. It much too often then becomes a matter of takes of toys. Playing games is a very complicated thing, and you really become aware how much language can mediate, you can say, "Wait a minute," rather than pushing somebody away, which is, you know, very useful to do in maintaining a game.

**Ferguson: My mother, who finally died at the age of 93 occasionally used to reminisce about little depression in her skull, which she said was the result of her closest quasi sibling, he was really her cousin, but they play-- they were only two years apart in age, and they played together from infancy, having in frustration one day hit her over the head with, with his cast iron train locomotive. Somehow she never held it against him.**

Bronson: Yeah. And yet, it's so clear that it's not aggression in any way. It's frustration. Yes. And since you can't say it in words, this is what you do. But even so when I grouped these simple behaviors into "prosocial," "agonistic" and "neutral," quite amazing relations to the Q-sorted behavior of these highly complicated nursery school kids emerged, which was very interesting.

**Ferguson: But when we resort to Q-sorts you really are resorting to the eye of the beholder, cuz who knows what they really did.**

Bronson: Yes. I used a modification of Diana Baumrind's Q-sort which from my perspective had too much of her own theoretical background, but the behaviors she focused on, if reworded a bit so as not to hit so much on her theoretical assumptions proved very useful. Looking at that longitudinal link became interesting, and it was fun. Actually I sent that work as a monograph to SRCD and was rejected flatly with reviewers who were very, very negative about it. But I was lucky that Lou Lipsitt had heard about the work and read some of it, and at that point he was doing monographs for Ablex, and he said, "Send it to me." And I did, he said, "Hey, that's very good," and so he published it. So my one early experience with SRCD monographs was not very positive.

**Ferguson: That's fascinating. Yeah. Actually you know, Diana, interestingly enough I think had the same kind of experience with Child Development in the beginning.**

Bronson: Yes. I--with Child Development I had had very good early experiences. Alberta Siegel was the editor at the time.

**Ferguson: And that was one of the wonderful things about Alberta was her kind of evenness of mind, and her openness to different ideas, perspectives--**

Bronson: Very much so, and very helpful editorial letters, you know, be it of acceptance or rejection. And I was very lucky to work with her on publications that came out of my IHD correlational studies; she was extraordinarily helpful. On a light note, the one thing that she felt very strongly about was dangling participles, and I had to promise that I was never going to use them again. More seriously, any revisions that she ever asked me to do were so well explained and collegially expressed that it was a pleasure to revise and led to a real sense of, "yes, this is so much better because of her critique." I remember I wrote her a thank you note at one point asking to thank her publicly, and she said, "No, this is my editorial job, and you can't thank me for that." But she was a very good model for me in my later work of somebody who was both critical and helpful. Some of the other "revise" or "reject" letters that I got weren't helpful at all, they were just negative-- "referee B says this, so sorry, I can't accept it." I'm sure all of us have had rejection or revision letters that you felt could have been done in a different tone.

**Ferguson: Yeah.**

Bronson: And obviously what an editor does hurts or helps a great deal, so that served as a lesson. Anyway, throughout these years I had this increasing sense that I really couldn't do what I wanted to do in research.

**Ferguson: What do you think the, the barriers, the constraints were for you (one of the questions that's in here is "reflect on your experiences with research funding apparatus, etc.,") I mean, how much of an issue was that for you, were there other constraints, was it partly issues in your own life, what--**

Bronson: No, I was very lucky with funding. The original funding I got with no big problem, and then when there were site visits for the next renewal I had no problems either. (Incidentally, I'll never forget Alan Sroufe was one of the site visitors and he had a very bad back, and I remember his questioning me while lying on the floor. Quite cozy!) No, it was more a kind of inside feeling that I wasn't going to be able to solve the conceptual problems in the way that I would want to solve them. And to just try to write papers in order to write papers, no. Thank you, but no thank you. This--I simply wasn't good enough--

**Ferguson: You weren't playing the tenure game?**

Bronson: Oh, but since I was never on the faculty it wasn't an issue.

**Ferguson: Yeah.**

Bronson: I actually retired officially from the University as a research associate--I stopped being paid any salary from the University quite early on, I think 1980, or no, 1982. I retired partly because I didn't want to be paid by anybody. At that point my grant had expired--and we were lucky enough that we didn't need my salary to live on. This way I wasn't paid by the University, and I wasn't paid by grants; I felt I could do whatever I wanted to do, and I could, you know, face up to the fact that had I decided that I really wasn't good enough. I was good enough to have good ideas, but I wasn't good enough to really make them come to fruition, and I wasn't going to play any games of pretending that I was. And that was another big change in self-perception. I was at that point--in the '80s--being asked more and more to write reviews as a referee for various journals. Lou Lipsitt was the first one to invite me to be a consulting editor, for *Infant Behavior and Development*. And that, you know, suggests I should have been a teacher because I really enjoyed that kind of work a great deal. Then Mavis Hetherington, during her editorial tenure, took me on as one of her consultants for Child Development, so I started doing that. And then when Bill Hartup became editor he asked me to be an Associate editor, and yeah, I was interested in that. But I did the associate editorship for Bill for only a couple of years. I couldn't stand the pressure, it was an incredible amount of work, just deadly. At that point the only other thing that I was really more and more involved in institutionally was with the IHD. The IHD was all torn up (the staff never got along very well there), and I felt a certain responsibility towards the IHD. They had taken me on from when it was the Institute of Child Welfare. I was there all my life.

They gave me a place from which I could get a grant, and at the University--as you well know--not being a faculty member is not very nice--

**Ferguson: Not very easy, right.**

Bronson: --and at the IHD they kept me, and they were very nice to me. So I thought that anything I could do to help smooth intra-institutional relationships--but that was perhaps, you know, a reversion to the kind of role that my mother played so well at the embassy, having--organizing colloquia, bringing soup and bread to Friday informal lunches where people could talk, trying to create a pleasant atmosphere. And I think that--

**Ferguson: Back to the white gloves.**

Bronson: --it served a good purpose, some of those warring factions somehow came to believe that they could come to me and talk with me, and that I wouldn't tell their secrets to anybody, that I would try to help, and do anything I could. And between that and the reviewing work it all felt quite sufficient. So when Bob Emde called me asking me to consider being the editor for the *Monographs* my first feeling was "Oh my g\*\*", no, after the associate editorship of *Child Development*, which made any life impossible, how can I continue to do that?"

**Ferguson: At that time you didn't have room in your house for all that paper--**

Bronson: That and, you know, if you were going away for five days, you'd clear up everything, and come back to piles of more manuscripts--just endless. I admire associate editors and everybody who works with *Child Development* enormously. I don't know how it is now, because I don't read the journal and I have no contact with any SRCD people. But while I was the editor of the *Monographs* and attending Council meetings, seeing what was happening to *Child Development*, and Susan Somerville and her editorship, and how painful it was for her, and how impossible it was that she was being put in a situation where her mandate was to be more interdisciplinary, and produce more special sections so as to be of greater interest to a wider and wider audience of psychologists. But at the same time keep the costs down because there is not enough money to support large editorial boards and journal page allotments.

**Ferguson: And it's so hard to deal with the diversity and standards that come out of the disciplines too. I mean, that's the wonderful thing in some ways about SRCD--that it still hangs in there as a truly interdisciplinary society even if it was dominated numerically by psychologists.**

Bronson: Yes, yes.

**Ferguson: But it does make for complications.**

Bronson: It does make for complications, particularly I think for somebody like the editor of *Child Development*, who's supposed to represent all of those academic interests, who's also supposed to kind of keep ahead of current trends so that, for instance, all ethnic groups are represented among the authors, but at the same time keep the high standard for publication. So it's really extremely difficult of itself, and at the same time also to be very concerned about how many pages you have accepted because of the costs. Being the editor of the *Monographs* was, was a joy, it was really all that Bob Emde had promised. It has--it was nothing like the--

**Ferguson: Like *Child Development*?**

Bronson: --like the pressure of *Child Development*. Actually, I gather that Bob had troubles in that he didn't have very many submissions. So just before I took up the editorship I sent a questionnaire to everybody who had published a monograph in the previous ten years or so asking about their experiences. And I got quite a lot of responses. And oddly one of the consistent responses was that, well nobody nowadays is interested in doing any serious work that is of monograph type--and this from people who had done just that. And it turned out that that's not true at all, that there were all kinds of people who had potential monographs, and were doing work of monographic proportions, and somehow--

**Ferguson: And sometimes because they were slightly out of the mainstream and were doing more interesting things in a way--**

Bronson: --but longer things--

**Ferguson: Yeah.**

Bronson: --like longitudinal studies, or very major studies.

**Ferguson: Do you think that people got sort of obsessed with, you know, how many publications and that sort of thing more so than was the case in earlier stages?**

Bronson: Yes, and I think that it also led to some false beliefs. I found that in various academia review committees for faculty advancement, monographs counted for quite a bit. Papers of course, as we all know count for a lot, reports that appear in anything that is un-refereed count the least, but that yeah, I think it was Bob Emde who told me that, at least in his group, and some of the other groups that I've talked with, that having a monograph published in the SRCD monograph series counted as, you know, that's important. And that was nice, to be able to get this notion across to the general potential monograph writers, because, of course, writing a monograph takes more time and you could have five or six little papers published in that period. But at the same time I think there was a growing sense in *Child Development* circles that these "little" papers, you know, even if there's nothing wrong with them, do they have real value--I remember Mavis Hetherington, already under her editorship there was some of this feeling, and that Bill Hartup also felt, that just because there's nothing methodologically wrong with something, it really isn't trivial bits that we want for the field. Let's not publish it.

**Ferguson: And there are other places for the trivial bits to--**

Bronson: Exactly, exactly. And that makes journal editor's lives more difficult--

**Ferguson: Yeah.**

Bronson: --because you couldn't easily decide what is trivial and what is not, and it always hurts the author more to be rejected on such grounds. But at least with monographs it wasn't a problem. It's hard to write a trivial monograph, the work may be wrong headed and have all kinds of problems, but it's not--

**Ferguson: But at least it does represent a commitment.**

Bronson: It certainly represents a commitment. And that made it very interesting, because it also gave me the opportunity to enter into people's minds as they thought about issues that I had no idea about.

**Ferguson: Yeah. You learn so many interesting things that way.**

Bronson: Yes, yeah.

**Ferguson: It's interesting that it was Bob who had that perception too, because I'd always been very intrigued with Bob as somebody who came into the mainstream of developmental research from a discipline where people typically are not trained to do research. You know?**

Bronson: Yeah.

**Ferguson: And he made that, that transition and has been absolutely superb.**

Bronson: Yes, yeah, yes. And he, he was very concerned with the field. In some ways he had the best approaches of both worlds in that he was very involved with having research excellence, but also in asking the important questions. And that is what I felt when, at one point, I was very involved with the staff of the Psychoanalytic Institute in San Francisco. We used to have meetings once a month to talk about various issues. And it came so clearly to me that the analysts were asking all the important questions, but didn't know anything about how to

research them, while psychologists knew how to approach research methodologies, but they asked such silly questions. And the analysts there seemed to feel the same way. But to get back to the point, I was very grateful to the Society for giving me the opportunity to be the editor of *Monographs*. That was an eye-opening experience--a mind-opening experience too work with good people in fields that were alien to me. So what do I know about memory? Nothing, except after reading a *Monograph* submission on the subject and reviewer's comments on it, you really see the thoughts of another intelligent person--

**Ferguson: Yeah. You know, it's interesting, because that kind of goes back to the cultural differences. I suppose that for my own reasons I get a little obsessed about that because if you've had to, you know, adapt to a number of different educational systems and the intellectual schemata that then underlie them, I think you're much more able to be open to concepts, and then to the information that fills those mindsets of other people, other subject matter, other disciplines even.**

Bronson: Yes. It could be, because my sense is that overall I was thought of as a good editor--

**Ferguson: And the short of that is that you started out your life as a student, as a quick study.**

Bronson: Yes. And I think that it was also very satisfactory to find that I was doing something that I thought was important and that helped others, and that I seemed to be good at. The authors and reviewer's comments were positive and the general sense was that, yes, I was good at it. And that--

**Ferguson: More than just chasing after dangling participles.**

Bronson: --yes, I was good at something that I thought was important, and that was a very satisfactory kind of thing. So I think my editorial tenure expired in '93, and I kind of did a little bit more around IHD, but I actually was-- somehow at that point I decided I'd had it. And I've always liked leaving parties when they're still going strong. And since--

**Ferguson: True.**

Bronson: -- the spirits--

**Ferguson: You hate to be the one that's left at the party, you know, cleaning up other people's dishes--**

Bronson: Yes. And generally it had been a good party. That whole period of being editor was--it also meant going to the editorial meetings, getting to know the board better, seeing the SRCDC, how it works from the inside, and how it really tries so hard to be meaningful. All of that was a very positive experience. And so it was nice then to, to end. That's why I was also--I told the IHD, "Thank you my dears, but I'm now done," and--

**Ferguson: That was about ten years ago.**

Bronson: --and really soon after that I wrote to Child Development and to the publications' committee and said, "Stop sending me the journals and monographs," which as an editor, you're given forever--

**Both speaking at once**

Bronson: --and it seemed to me a waste of money since I knew I wasn't going to be reading them. So I--and I really completely turned away from that. Gardening is my passion now, and it's again, one of these total changes. I was passionate about everything I did, and I enjoyed it fully. Now it's--yeah, "she" did it, and yes, there is a kind of a tie between that past "her" and me, but it's a different life. And it's equally enjoyable in it's own way.

**Ferguson: Isn't that fascinating, Wanda, when you think about it, how as you describe your childhood it was, you know, these different lives in different places. And now it's easy for you to have a different life, you know, in the same place. Actually you've been in the same house ever since I've known you.**

Bronson: Yes, I have the same husband, and there are continuities--

**Ferguson: Right.**

Bronson: --but my own personal life has changed so much. And yeah, that's why I started out by saying that I don't know how much my early life shaped, reflected, or coincidentally did it, but yeah, I was surprised. I thought that, you know, once I retired from SRCD and from the IHD, I wouldn't know what to do with myself. It just didn't happen. I just moved into gardening, botany is a field I'm interested in and reading about plants and also about some art development, because I like designing garden areas. And animals, my dogs, dog training, being involved in the dog park, just--

**Ferguson: You mean the development, the dog park down here?**

Bronson: --yes, yeah, very much so. All of that, and when you are a dog person you meet all kinds of other dog people, and make friendships with people that you would never know otherwise. And the funny thing is that you always know the names of each other's dogs. You often don't know each other's name, but--

**Ferguson: It's sort of like being, being at a nursery school parent again, isn't it, or a parent in a--of an elementary school child--**

Bronson: --you are known by your child, like, "oh you're Jason's mother," yes.

**Ferguson: They're out to cheer the, the fifth grade soccer team or something.**

Bronson: So that's, you know, essentially it. This is the first time that I've thought about any of this, cuz I don't think about the past.

**Ferguson: Do you think about the future of the field at all? I was noticing they've got this funny little -- questions at the end about, you know, where do you think it might go--**

Bronson: I have no idea. The things that interest me in intellectual readings--that is, beyond light literature--are the combination of genetics, sociology, behavior, patterns and neurology. Matt Ridley's work has interested me a great deal, somehow a feeling that understanding will come from there, but I don't know what we psychologists are doing about it at this point. Occasionally I see in *Science News* or *Scientific American* something about psychology. It seemed to me that recently there was another one of those articles, "is early child care good or bad for--for children," and my feeling was, you know, déjà vu all over again--

**Ferguson: Yeah.**

Bronson: --and to what extent is psychology--as I say, I don't read current publications, so I don't know. Are we still redoing the same issues? Occasionally--I've remained friends with Mary Main, and there I get a bit depressed seeing what seems to me is attachment theory going on, and on, and on with getting more and more correlations between the strange situation and Adult Attachment classifications without understanding any of the underlying mechanism, you know, the why and how, and those are the interesting questions. But I don't know to what extent that represents what's going on more generally.

**Ferguson: You know, in some ways it seems to me that there is some interesting work on the sort of second and even third generation attachment researchers but it gets, it gets so complex now because everybody is into trying to relate the patterns of social interaction to what the heck is going on in the central nervous system, and is it the genes. You know? And how much of it is the genes? You know? And now we can see the genes and we're so excited about that.**

Bronson: Yes. Its how we're going to move there that interests me in Riddley's books--I mean, he's particularly interesting, because he tries to pull together so much of different strands from behavioral psychology, sociology, everything, but how far we're going to get into some testable theories is still moot.

**Ferguson: What do you think about developmental psychopathology? You know, that's sort of one of those idiot questions, like what do you think about elephants, but--**

Bronson: Again, from the little bit I read about it, the incidence of schizophrenia is much greater now among the very young, as is autism, and is his a better understanding, a better observation, or what is truly happening? And I don't know how much people who report these things also have good ideas, or at least ideas that are pursuable about what is happening. There is this interesting (but I don't know how I feel about it) notion that really socialization is not the answer at all, that it's all in predispositions that are genetically preprogrammed and which emerge in any normal expectable environment. What you do to your kid really doesn't make much difference. If either your genome or your environment are very off the norm, then the environment has more and more of an effect. I don't know. That would have a lot to do with psychopathology and the developmental cycle. I continue to think that it's all in developmental--that that's where the real interest lies. But how to grasp it?

**Ferguson: It seems as though we're always hanging onto sort of the lashing tail of the dragon or something, or trying to grab it.**

Bronson: Yeah, and maybe the problem is that, you know, we've gotten such an influx of new information from biology, from all of the genetics work, from cognitive science and you know, it's all the influx of new bits, but how to put them together, even what questions to ask, how to formulate the questions.

**Ferguson: And you know, I've always remembered--I cannot remember who formulated the law of the instrument, which is to the effect of if you give a small boy a hammer, he will find something to pound with it. You know? I mean, everybody is tremendously involved with the new technologies, cerebral imaging, or you know, chemical analysis.**

Bronson: But that, of course, is a big problem as far as I'm concerned, just as in my research lifetime there was factor analysis. Boy, that was going to solve all the problems of personality studies. Technology such as brain imaging, so this part of the brain lights up when you do this, and that part of the brain lights up when you do that. But how do we put that bit of information with other things to make sense of it? It's very difficult. And I'm afraid--I suppose that the old bit of "publish or perish" continues to be a pressure and perhaps in the current economic situation it is even more so. And that has always been I think a big difficulty--I suppose for all fields, but also for psychology. The rushing to publication with any little bit that you found. The bit could be quite interesting, but rather than publishing it and then having other people say, "No, no, no," talking about it with colleagues saying "I put a bit, you put a bit, and let's together put a bigger piece."

**Ferguson: One of the things that struck me about your account was that all along the line you had kind of very supportive work groups to be with, not that you were necessarily working on the same project, the same things, but people that you could really--yeah, kind of exchange ideas with, informally at least critique each other's ideas first sort of graduate student, and then young graduates, IHD group, the CIBA group in London, and the people at the Tavistock, to be able to tap in to those intellectual groups was terribly important.**

Bronson: Yes, very important. I was extraordinarily lucky in that way. I was of course also lucky in being married to Gordon, with whom I could exchange a lot of ideas. We were both always interested in each other's work.

**Ferguson: And Gordon started out in engineering as I--**

Bronson: Yes.

**Ferguson: Sort of like your brother--**

Bronson: It was quite a bit of change for him, but that has worked very well in that we both became interested in developmental issues at about the same time, in different areas of the field, but nevertheless the same time. And Mary Ainsworth was Gordon's friend as well as mine, and it became not just an intellectual friendship, but a personal friendship as well, just as with Bowlby, and Tony Ambrose. My first invitation to a CIBA meeting really came via Gordon's work on wariness that Tony Ambrose was interested in, and Gordon mentioned to Tony that I was doing something in early development, and he said, "Come and bring her, too, and let her tell us about it,"--so you

know, this kind of sheer blind luck that went on and on. And getting into the editorial business. Mavis Hetherington was my colleague in graduate school here. Yes I always had a--

**Ferguson: I knew Mavis from the time I was a first-year graduate student and she had just come back to graduate school cuz she had sort of a gap where she was doing other things.**

Bronson: --yes, I never will forget that red headed, very sexy young woman. I always felt that luck plays a large part in getting you access. Of course, but access is not enough, once you get access you have to prove yourself in some way. But you can't prove yourself unless you're given access. And it's--I've been very lucky in being given access to these various groups who, as you say, supported me not only intellectually, but also personally. That made my life in psychology very happy, and make it quite possible to now say, "Goodbye, and hello," Ave, atque vale.

**Ferguson: Well, you know, Wanda, I think we've covered most of it. I think you have done a wonderful job.**

Bronson: Well it's your personality, your acceptance, your being there--you're an easy person to talk at.