

## **Rudolph Schaffer**

- Born 7/21/1926 in Berlin, Germany; Deceased 2/28/2008
- B.A. (1950) University of London, Ph.D. (1962) University of Glasgow

### **Major Employment:**

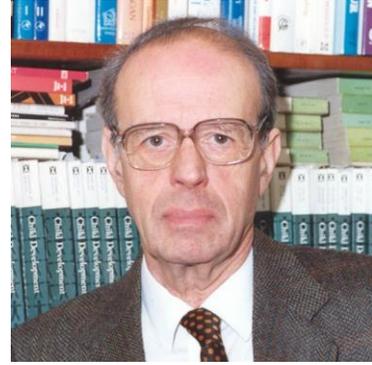
- University of Strathclyde, Department of Psychology – 1982-1991, Head of Department
- University of Strathclyde, Department of Psychology – 1991, Professor Emeritus

### **Major Areas of Work:**

- Attachment

### **SRCD Affiliation:**

- Editorial Board for Child Development (1968-74)



## **SRCD ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW**

### **Rudolph Schaffer**

Interviewed by: Harry McGurk  
At The Institute of Education of the University of London  
March 25, 1994

**McGurk: This is a recording of an interview of Professor Rudolph Schaffer of the Department of Psychology at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, Scotland. It is being conducted for the purposes of creating a record for the SRCD biography archive. The interview is being carried out by Professor McGurk of the Thomas Coram Unit at the Institute of Education of the University of London. And we are together in the office of the Director of the unit here at 27 Wolburn Square, London, WC1, on the morning of Friday, the 25<sup>th</sup> of March 1994. – exercises they've prepared — kind of your life, and times in developmental psychology for purposes of the SRCD archive. Can we start off right at the beginning and ask you where you were born?**

Shaffer: I was born in Berlin in 1926. I was part of a Jewish family, and that, in a sense, says all about my childhood, because it meant that – well, the first twelve years or so I spent in a hostile environment, at least from 1933 on. We had Hitler in power, and I emigrated in 1939.

**McGurk: Tell me then about your parents. What was their background?**

Shaffer: My father was an Austrian, born in Vienna. My mother was born in one of those parts of the world that seems to change hands every thirty-four years, Posen, it's now called Pozna, and when she was born at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century it was German. I think it's changed hands about three times since. My father was an engineer, and when I was born he was working for the Berlin Transport Organization, mainly on their underground system.

**McGurk: And your mother?**

Shaffer: My mother was a housewife. I mean those were the days where women did not normally work.

**McGurk: And I know it was a difficult time since that – what was it like in your childhood in Berlin at that time?**

Shaffer: Well, it wasn't really until the later 1930's that things got bad, and then things got very bad. And around, oh, 1938 in particular, Kristalnacht, November 1938 was one of the traumatic experiences of my childhood. My

father was taken away to concentration camp, he got back on that occasion, and I was thrown out of my school then. These are things that one – that stay with one. It's very difficult to say precisely what effects they've had on me as a person, but in terms of memories, well, the two days that I recall: One is Kristalnacht in 1938, and the other one is in May '39 when I left Germany without my parents, and that was the last time I saw them, and I was twelve then.

**McGurk: This actually is a trivial kind of question to ask. That must have a profound influence on you? Do you have any influence – moving away from home?**

Shaffer: This is so difficult too to determine. I really need an identical twin brother who didn't have that kind of experience, and maybe it's made me more introspective, insofar as I lost my parents at a pretty early age. It threw me back more on myself. But whether that played any part in me becoming a psychologist, oh goodness –

**McGurk: -- Did you ever -- not really becoming a psychologists, but a particular interest in development process, attachment theory?**

Shaffer: Well, I hate to say so, but me going into child psychology was purely a matter of chance. It was a matter of the sort of job that was available at that time, rather than a matter of free choice.

**McGurk: -- Moving on to the background history, if you can go back to it, you were thirteen when you went?**

Shaffer: I was twelve actually, I trust, before my thirteenth birthday.

**McGurk: -- So you – changing schools in Berlin?**

Shaffer: Yes.

**McGurk: What was school life like for you? Were you a natural academic? Was high school difficult?**

Shaffer: I recall my early school days with a certain amount of fondness and pleasure, and I always enjoyed lessons. I think I was scholastically oriented right from the beginning, rather than athletically so, I was never any use at sports at any time. In fact, another traumatic memory, although of the lesser scale, was coming to Britain and being introduced to cricket and having to field, having to catch a very hard ball, which made no sense to me at all, and never has done so. That was out as far as I was concerned.

**McGurk: Were you speaking English when you came to Britain?**

Shaffer: I thought I was until I got here. I had learned English in school, but it was really very inadequate. And within days of my arriving here I went to boarding school.

**McGurk: Where was that?**

Shaffer: In Yorkshire. I went to a Quaker boarding school. I had Quaker guardians assigned to me here, a doctor and his wife living in the countryside in Herelordshire here, very pleasant indeed. But, first of all – well, I arrived in this country, in Britain, in May 1939, and immediately went to this Quaker school and spent a term there, and only then went and saw these people in Herelordshire there. And well, I mean the first time, of course, was terribly difficult, leaving my parents and leaving all my past behind, and having to get used to a new language, new customs, new food. And for the first two or three months I lived almost entirely on chocolate, which my parents sent me. I was confronted with things that the British called sausages. And I came from a country of sausages, but my God their sausages were different from the sausages here. And their breakfast, I was confronted with some dreadful gray stuff called porridge. It was awful. But – well, I mean children, as we know from research these days are pretty adaptable and resilient, and one gets used to things, and I adapted.

**McGurk: So really you were a boy from a Jewish background, but was your family an orthodox family?**

Shaffer: Was my --?

**McGurk: Was your family an orthodox Jewish family?**

Shaffer: Not in the least bit. Not in the least bit. I didn't know we were Jewish until I was about eight or nine, or whatever. It meant nothing to me. And it wasn't until, oh, something like '37, '38 that I was taken to a synagogue, and in fact, afterwards I decided that I would have no religious affiliation at all, and I'm a firm atheist.

**McGurk: So being in a bigger school didn't --?**

Shaffer: Not really. I developed great respect for the Quakers, but not in terms of adopting any particular religious creed.

**McGurk: Now did you complete your schooling in Yorkshire or did you move to --?**

Shaffer: In Yorkshire, and I stayed there from the age of twelve to eighteen.

**McGurk: Right. In the boarding school?**

Shaffer: In the boarding school.

**McGurk: And then, after that, what?**

Shaffer: Well, after that I had no doubt that what I wanted to be in life was an architect, and that is the influence of my father. I mean I was used to seeing his desk covered in plans, and in drawing out things, and the idea of creating something, buildings and so on, appealed to me greatly, and I was quite sure that this is what I wanted to do.

So after school I went to Liverpool University, which certainly at that time had a very good reputation for architecture, their school of architecture is one of the best ones in the country. And it didn't take me very long to find out that I made the wrong choice. I simply wasn't any good at drawing and creating spatial things, and I became really very unhappy there about vocational aspects. I should have failed at the end of the first year, but they allowed me out of mistaken kindness to continue into the second year, and then I decided that this really was no good at all, and so at that point I withdrew from there. I had got a scholarship to take me to Liverpool University, but I had wasted it, and that was the end of that.

**McGurk: So what happened?**

Shaffer: Well, while I was at Liverpool University, I was helping out in a residential home for boys, for adolescent boys –

**McGurk: Was it attached to the university?**

Shaffer: No, it wasn't actually attached to the university, and it was independent. Most of the boys there were youngsters age, oh, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, who had run away from home. They'd gone to Liverpool thinking they would – Liverpool is a port, of course, and they thought they'd just go on a ship and sail the seven seas kind of thing, and lead an interesting life. Well, anyway, when they got there they found that it wasn't quite as simple as that and they were stranded, and this place catered for them. And I acted as a kind of official assistant warden. In fact, I lived in the place. And I really became very interested in the whole notion of these youngsters and how they got there and so on.

Indeed, I went to one or two, oh, more or less, popular lectures on psychology of adolescence. And as I was failing as an architect, I thought, well, I might try psychology. The only trouble was that I had to earn my living, and so I moved to London, partly because there at that time they had what was the only place where you could do part-time evening studies in psychology, namely at Birkbeck College, which is part of the University of London, and partly also because I had a cousin there who ran an export/import business, and he offered me a job. And fortunately it was just around the corner from where Birkbeck College was in those days. And so I spent three years -- four years, working – well, as a clerk, as a shipping clerk, and accountancy clerk and so on. And for the first year or so that was a terribly interesting experience, I mean I got around the City of London, I got down to the docks, I went to banks

and so on. It opened up a whole world to me, which otherwise would have been a closed book for me. After that it got a bit too routine for my liking, but fortunately I had my studies at Birkbeck, and that really kept me going.

**McGurk: And how long did you stay there at Birkbeck?**

Shaffer: I stayed there for four years. I could have completed in three years, but I decided to take an extra year on a full-time basis, and that gave me greater confidence in tackling my final examinations there.

**McGurk: And did you feel more comfortable in psychology, that you made the right decision --?**

Shaffer: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I had absolutely no doubt that that was the right thing for me, and I indeed went and got vocationally guided after I'd given up my architecture. I'd already made up my mind I wanted to do psychology, but the vocational guidance people told me that if I'd only come there in the first place they could have warned me off architecture, and yes, psychology was all right.

**McGurk: So in your undergraduate days at Birkbeck studying psychology, who were the people that were influencing your psychology thoughts at that time?**

Shaffer: The professor and head of the department was a man called Mace, who was originally a philosopher, and who was a very learned man in the old fashioned sense. He was a funny mixture in the sense that he was not only a very learned man with regard to the history of psychology and it's roots in philosophy, but he also did some very hard-nosed stuff at the same time, primarily in occupational psychology, and I learned about both sides of psychology. I must say it was the more tender-minded side of things, with particular reference to the history of things that interested me primarily. He was a great man for Stout. I don't think anyone talks of Stout these days, but Stout had written one or two textbooks of histories of psychology, back in -- was it the 1920's and so on. We also were taught an awful lot about William James and William McDougall, and I never regretted that kind of background. I was always interested in historical things. I mean even at school at one time I'd wondered about becoming an historian, and might have done if I'd seen career openings other than straight school teaching. But maybe it's that historical orientation that has also subsequently influenced my interest in developmental things, where do things come from?

**McGurk: So you've got an interest in psychology?**

Shaffer: Yes. I couldn't immediately get a job. This was in 1950. I was more certain that I wanted to go into research, but research opportunities were mighty few in those days, and for something like six months after graduating I couldn't get a job, so I went back into the business world. I went into a firm that imported French hands of all things, and again, it was just a way of earning some money. I'd met my wife at Birkbeck, she was doing psychology there too, and we wanted to get married, so I wanted -- I needed money. And I was applying for pretty much any research job that was advertised, and there were very few of them. And then one was advertised by someone I hadn't heard of before, John Bowlby, who was at a place called the Tavitock Clinic, of which I hadn't heard of either. And he -- this was in 1950, at the end of 1950, he was just about to publish a book called *Maternal Care and Mental Health*, which was his W.H.O report on the whole maternal deprivation business, and he was about to establish a research unit. And he had already appointed a senior research fellow called Mary Ainsworth. And he hired one or two other people working there, in particular, James Robertson, a psychiatric social worker, who was primarily interested in the more applied aspect of child development, in particular the affects of hospitalization on young children, went on to make some very influential films. And well, to cut a long story short, I got the job and I started there on the first of January 1951.

**McGurk: And on the first of January 1951, -- were you aware that you were now moving around pretty influential people in the world --?**

Shaffer: Oh, it took me a few months fully to appreciate that I couldn't have been appointed to a better place. It was a very excited time, partly because Bowlby had just completed his work on *Maternal Care and Mental Health*, and that really caught the public eye, there were all sorts of repercussions to that, primarily in the more applied fields, and partly because it was all so -- then within the next four or five years, which was the time that I stayed with Bowlby. And it was then that he moved into the attachment area, so I had the best of those two worlds.

**McGurk: And you knew you wanted into research, you got a job in research working with Bowlby – and what was it that was motivating you to go into research in child development specifically, or did that just happen to be where the research job turned up?**

Shaffer: That's where the research job had turned up. I mean if it turned up in research in perception or in memory, I might very well have stayed there for the rest of my life. So it really was a chance.

**McGurk: This is section to another chapter – back to it, you're involvement with adolescents?**

Shaffer: Yes.

**McGurk: -- and that moves you into psychology. And then you find yourself in a situation where just by chance you –**

Shaffer: Yes.

**McGurk: Some people would say it was more than chance – Could you then see how things were going to take shape? I don't mean – but did you have a sense --?**

Shaffer: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I mean I found that area very congenial. And I really had no doubt at that time I wanted to stick with it for the rest of my life in some way, partly because I was interested in the applied angle to all this academic research, partly, also, because I found the notion of working with children, and particularly working with children in context, very congenial.

**McGurk: So — contact with Ainsworth and the others -- and you'd be happy working in that?**

Shaffer: Yes. Yes.

**McGurk: --**

Shaffer: Well, I was obviously very influenced by Bowlby, and have been ever since. I mean he was the one figure who really shaped my interest, not necessarily in a very narrow, specific sense, in that I became a Bowlby follower, but much more, insofar as I felt that he was, roughly speaking, pointing in the right direction. And I developed a great admiration for Bowlby as a person, particularly because of his considerable intellectual integrity. He had a very tough time where he worked at the Tautock Clinic, because the Tautock Clinic in those days was a very orthodox psychoanalytic place. Now Bowlby was a psychoanalyst, and remained, in his opinion at least, a psychoanalyst all his life. But unlike some of his colleagues, he'd decided that psychoanalysis was not something that you could swallow, hook, line, and sinker, and stay with it in a very narrow sense, forever. But that orthodoxy really wasn't in the interest of child development science, and in particular he became interested in ethology. I'll always remember his discovering Lorenz's original paper, written in the mid 1930's in German, which I translated for him. And that talked primarily about primarily the printing phenomenon and the critical period notion. And Bowlby, who had been working all along on the notion of maternal deprivation, and believing that it was absolutely essential that children should be exposed to constant, consistent mothering for the first two and half years of life, otherwise, if they're deprived of that experience it would be too late. Bowlby firmly believed that what Lorenz talked about was really exactly the same sort of thing that he was interested in, and so he formed a link with ethology. And I remember Lorenz coming over to give a seminar in the Tautock Clinic, and Bowlby was very excited about all that. And I think initially, certainly, took it all very literally. I don't know whether he ever really moved away from that literal interpretation. He always talked, subsequently, in terms of those early experiences really having an absolutely essential formative influence on subsequent personality, and his whole notion of monotypism is really part of that.

**McGurk: You think that the — thinking to the ethology of – Bowlby's put into that, influenced you?**

Shaffer: Yes. One of the things that I've found very influential was the notion of doing things in the field as opposed to the laboratory. That appealed to me greatly. And that was still in the 1950's when the predominant

influence in psychology was learning theory; let's control everything, let's bring it into the laboratory, let's bury one condition at a time, that kind of thing; measurement is all important, quantification is what really matters. Ethology in general, Bowlby's approach, coming from a clinical background, went right against that, in a sense, and it was more the meaningfulness to the individual that mattered, and I found that certainly something that stayed with me.

**McGurk: At that time you were working the same location as Mary Ainsworth. Did you two come in contact much with each other?**

Shaffer: Oh, I mean we shared a room for several years, and Mary Ainsworth was a lovely person to work with, particularly for someone who was absolutely brand new to everything. I mean this was my first job, and we didn't have the American pattern, or for that matter, a pattern that exists now in this country too, where you first do your Ph.D. before you dare to tackle a proper job. It was until – when was it, in 1962, that I got a Ph.D., twelve years after my first degree. And Mary helped me, finding my feet, she taught me about research. After all that college, it was mainly a matter of reading books other than actually do things, we didn't have projects in those days. And the notion of getting my feet wet and doing things with real live subjects was something that I had to acquire at the Tavitock, so I was very much an apprentice. And I really stayed an apprentice right through my four and a half years at the Tavi.

**McGurk: It was at the Tavi then the interest in attachment really began. Do you see your research since then as being sort of continuously concerned with attachment? Have there been shifts? As you look back – is it seamless?**

Shaffer: It's seamless, but not in the sense that I have gone on with attachment. And I left the Tavi in 1955 and moved out to Glasgow, where I took a job in the Royal Hospital for Sick Children, ostensibly as a clinical psychologist, but, in fact, I spent something like seventy-five percent of my time on research there. And the research there was still part and parcel of the maternal deprivation, effects of separation, and an attachment kind of area. When I went up there, the whole business of the effects of hospitalization on children was a very controversial topic. A lot of the pediatricians, and even more the senior nursing staff were dead against the whole Bowlby idea, and it was still a time where parents were thought of as, oh, they just bring in germs and dirt, let's keep them away from our lovely clean hospital. And there were lots and lots of discussions then, in which I was involved, because it was known that I'd come from the Bowlby stable, well, about just the sheer practical aspects. And the professor of child health then made research money available to me to look into certain aspects of this, he left it to me what I wanted to look at. And at that time I was especially interested in infancy, not because I had done any, because Bowlby and Robertson and so on had worked primarily on children aged around two, three and so on. And I wanted to look at the beginnings of life. I wasn't too certain as to what it was, something to do with social behavior, but because of the pressure being put on me to look at, as it were, useful things, useful to the hospital, I decided to look at the affects of hospitalization of infants. And I started a project, the papers resulting from that were published around 1958 and 1959, and they were really my first research publications in that area at all. And they highlighted something that has certainly been with me, that's been an interest of mine ever since, namely that things happen somewhere around the beginning of the second half of the first year. Somewhere around seven or eight months, something happens, something very important, something very crucial happens, and I got on to it because there was no separation upset up to around seven months or whatever. After that, there was a kind of stepwise development, and you saw upset every bit as intense as you see in children aged two or three. And well, one might say ever since I've been puzzling as to what happens around seven, eight months, and I have tried to write about that and study it ever since.

**McGurk: You said a moment ago that it's seamless, but not —, yet it's easy now to --- questions arise because of what the changes – and the context of it?**

Shaffer: Yes, but I've taken on other things since then. I mean the attachment work as such – well, after the hospital study, the next study is the one, which people still remember me as being primarily associated with. It's the Schaffer and Emerson, 1964, SRCD monograph, that really followed up that first study, except that it looked at children at home in a longitudinal way. And really, very much to my surprise that hit the headlines in the mid 1960's and was quoted, oh, at no end for ten, twenty years subsequently, presumably because it made available certain empirical phenomena. It highlighted this seven months transition, it talked about fear of strangers, it brought

into question Bowlby's notion of monotypism, because I suggested that right from the beginning of that attachment period, children can form multiple relationships.

Subsequently, I did various things that went on looking at seven, eight months transition, but I took on other things. In particular in the early 1970's, I became much more interested in the micro-analytic approach to mother-child interaction. And that was a departure from the attachment literature, because it wasn't about attachment, it was about the way in which mothers and young babies manage in some way to interweave their responses in such a way that they establish – well, an interaction. How does it become possible for mothers and such very young beings to establish something that – well, to put it loosely, is a smooth relationship? And that resulted in a number of publications, but in particular, in an edited book published in 1977, *Studies in Mother-Infant Interaction*, which turned out – well, rather like the 1964 monograph, to be very timely. Again, it was quoted, many studies in that were quoted a great deal, because it was just the beginnings of that wave of interest in mother-infant interaction. And some of the things that – I had a research group then at that time at the University of Strathclyde, and to which I've gone in 1964 from the hospital, and a research group which looked at various aspects of that interweaving, things like focused turn-taking, things like establishing mutual focus of attention, visually speaking, development of gestures, and comprehension of other peoples gestures and so on. People like Glyn Collis, David Messer, and Kathy Murphy, subsequently Charles Crook and so on, also looked at this. And then that went on to looking at parental control and child compliance, again from the micro analytic point of view, it was that which I did with Charles Crook.

**McGurk: -- This begins the range of contributions, looking at the various avenues that were entered – some of them were -- What would you see as your main strengths and your accomplishments – what were they in terms of the -- knowledge that – What would you see as your strengths --?**

Shaffer: I don't claim to have made particular theoretical contributions in the Bowlby type of sense. I think my main contributions have been to point to particular phenomena that are important, and that are of interest, and to point out that there are phenomena of a perhaps rather complex nature, things like attachment, and reciprocity, and compliance and so on, which can -- thought under empirical control; in other words, that we can look at them empirically and objectively, and don't just have to speculate about them. Bowlby, in a sense, was just the opposite. Bowlby was very much a theoretician. Even during that period in the early 1950's, when he appreciated the need to look at these things empirically and established a research unit, even at that time he wasn't a researcher. As far as I'm aware he never went out and collected data. The kind of empirical data that he collected was in the clinical, in the consortium, but not in the field. I'm not too certain that he ever saw a deprived child, and this was left to other people, and that was certainly a role that I happily took on.

**McGurk: -- Is he – you said you don't see yourself – do you see that as any kind of weakness – just wasn't -- ?**

Shaffer: No. I quite specifically rejected going down that particular avenue. When I left the Tautock, soon after – well, a few years after, a strange situation got under way with a lot of theory attached to that, and I quite deliberately did not follow that notion. I became, in many respects, all unhappy about what was happening to that kind of research, and for quite a long time I was really rather discontented with what was happening to attachment research, generally, because it became dominated by what I felt to be a measure, which is unfortunately a tendency that we have in psychology. Someone discovers a measure, and research becomes measure driven, and certainly this strange situation has been used in a most mindless way, being applied to all sorts of different subjects just for the sake of it. And the notion of categorizing children in terms of, you know, A's and B's and C's, I thought became just as meaningless as assigning specific IQ's to them, and I turned my back on all that. And it's really only since the attachment literature has moved beyond infancy and has become much more dominated by things like representational working models, and so on, that I felt it's got a new lease of life. I'm not convinced, despite all the material on the claiming the validity of this strange situation, in terms of both antecedent and consequent conditions that it has really illuminated understanding as much as has been claimed, partly because I just cannot comprehend such a very brief sample of behavior, and remember, we're not just talking about the whole strange situation, which lasts twenty something minutes, we're talking about two reunion episodes lasting seconds, how this can possibly tell you what the child is going to be like in five, ten years, as has been claimed, and has been at last repeatedly demonstrated.

**McGurk: Are there any parts of your research that you look back on and you're less satisfied with than others?**

Shaffer: Well, as a matter of fact, I did my Ph.D. on something quite different. I did it on a purely clinical topic, namely the families of Cerebral Palsy children, the effects of a Cerebral Palsy child on family life. And I did that because of my clinical experience at the hospital, because it was something that interested me from a purely human point of view. I had quite a lot of contact with physically handicapped children, and I was always interested in children in the context of family life, and I decided to do my Ph.D. on that. Now that was – I mean looking back, certainly methodologically and in many other respects, that was a very poor research, and that was a dead end. I'm not sorry that I did that. I think that it was something that publicly has to be tackled, and has been since in a much better way. But having done it and having squeezed a Ph.D. out of it, God knows how, that was a dead end and I didn't pursue that any further.

**McGurk: Turning the question around, what do you feel most satisfied about? – I'd asked you what were the areas in which you were most satisfied?**

Shaffer: Well, I suppose inevitably my earlier work on attachment. I felt that I had opened up the attachment field to empirical studies. I had shown that this is a phenomenon that you can look at objectively, and it was very gratifying to see that a lot of people found that of interest, that – and, therefore, this got published in the late 1950's and early 1960's, primarily, I'm pleased with it.

I have moved on quite a lot since then to other things, and just jumping things a bit, again the work on micro-analytic studies of mother-infant interaction, as exemplified by the edited 1977 book, is something that pleases me. But there's also something else that pleases me. I have also all along felt very strongly about bridging the gap between the pure and the applied. After all the sort of topics that I've been involved in, as far as research is concerned, ought to speak to practitioners, and have throughout my career been in touch with practitioners; pediatricians, social workers, lawyers, etc. And what pleases me more and more is that those sorts of people are becoming increasingly aware of the contribution which psychology can make. In fact, the latest field that I'm in touch with are lawyers, I've acted as expert witness in courts on various issues, adoption and so on. And a few years ago I wrote a book called, *Making Decisions about Children*, in which I tried to show to practitioners just what the various areas of research are, and that can speak to their applied work. And this is something, again, that I'm glad to be involved with.

**McGurk: That's something you will continue to be involved with?**

Shaffer: Very much so. Very much so. I mean this happens to be the international year of the family, now in 1994, and I find I'm getting involved in various conferences. For example, in order to provide a certain amount of feedback about what has been found out by psychologists about the child and the family, transitions of family life and the implications for child development, and trying to talk about that sort of thing to applied audiences.

**McGurk: There are people who are expressing this objection – because the -- colleagues of ours, because we see the discipline being obliged in order to sustain itself in – what an applied – negative --?**

Shaffer: There is that danger. I have been on the other side of the fence, insofar as I was involved for a number of years in the late 1970's primarily with the Social Science Research Council here in Britain, and I was chairman of their psychology committee, as it then was, a member of council. And at that time I saw the transition from a primarily responsive mode of funding, in other words, it was the academics and so on who decided what they wanted to work on, to a much more centrally regulated type of mode of funding. And when this first started, we certainly had some very emotive discussions at SSRC, about how far we should go down this new road. And at the time I was all in favor of moving away from a purely responsive mode, because I saw there were great lacunae that ought to be tackled, and they were primarily of the applied nature. And again, I was concerned about the bandwagon effect, which so often distinguishes psychology research. What really concerns me is that I think we've gone much too far in that direction. It's almost as though we don't trust academics any more, there's, I think, too much central regulation. And the central regulation, inevitably, because the funds after all come from the government, inevitably – well, they're precious to look at inadvertent common, useful things. Now as a result of the

kinds of research areas I've tackled, I'm very much aware of the fact that the borderline between the pure and applied is often – almost invisible, but nevertheless, it's there.

**McGurk: In your view, what in applied science, -- any particular -- you've identified to the field, psychologists -- I don't mean the areas, I mean that actually getting in and working with other practitioners -- ?**

Shaffer: Well, we have the great difficulty of communication. I mean it's a well-known business of academics publishing for other academics. Again, at SSRC, I was involved in a number of working groups looking at particular areas where research ought to be done; one was children in care, another one was young people in society, primarily adolescents. And in both those areas I have a lot of contact with practitioners. We made a point of involving practitioners right at the beginning of research. I think one of the troubles has been that even though perhaps academics appreciate that they have to extend their work to practitioners once it's all finished, it isn't until then that they make contact. I think that's quite the wrong philosophy. I think there has to be a two and fro from the very beginning. The moment you start trying to formulate the research problem, is perhaps the most crucial point when you ought to have that kind of contact. And it's trying to get that point of view across that I think is still extremely difficult, primarily, I suppose, because research work has more often than not, certainly in psychology, work in universities, and -- well, universities are still lively towers.

**McGurk: You mentioned your work at SSRC, -- chairman of psychology -- If you were doing that work again, are there differences in how you'd do your job, other ways you would want to influence the directions of research funding? They could be inferences you had -- there were certain directions at the SSRC, -- and would you do it that way again?**

Shaffer: I hesitate because the answer is yes, and that sounds so smug, and I feel I ought to say no, there's considerable differences. With hindsight, obviously going down the initiative, the centrally regulated road was taking things to an extreme, and one out to have put more of a break on that. But, of course, in my sort of capacity I couldn't have done that anyway, there were much more powerful pressures working on one. I felt that at the time we were doing the right sort of things, we were making the right sort of funding decisions. We're going very much for quality, and working within the particular framework of each grant applicant, rather than saying we ought to try and get such and such topics going and get priority to particular kinds of topics, and I think that was the right decision.

**McGurk: But as you -- SSRC. Let's turn to -- child psychology -- and then in '64, was that a good move?**

Shaffer: Oh, it was an inevitable move for me. At the Royal Hospital for Sick Children, I was working in a basically clinical outfit in the department of child psychiatry. I got a great deal of support for being a researcher, but apart from research assistants who were all junior people, I was very much isolated. And I had no doubt after a while, that eventually I must move into a proper academic area. Partly also because I enjoy teaching, and teaching undergraduates in particular was something that I found an extremely satisfying experience.

**McGurk: Had you any teaching --?**

Shaffer: Oh, bits and pieces, and primarily audiences like nurses, health visitors, pediatricians in training and so on. I taught extramural courses, in fact, I did so even in London, at Toynbee Hall here. And I knew that I enjoyed teaching, and I thought I was reasonably good at it, and that I wanted to do more of it.

**McGurk: In 1964 -- new department. What was your agenda --?**

Shaffer: Well, I wanted to find other people with enthusiasm for the area. I fully appreciated that not everyone was going to want to do research, let alone research in my field, but I thought that psychology is on the up. Now in 1964, it -- certainly here in this country, it hadn't caught on in the way it has in recent years, I mean in terms of sizes of undergraduate classes and so on, and goodness me, they have increased enfold. But I felt that both with teaching and research I wanted to make a contribution in getting people oriented towards psychology, towards thinking about the possibility of studying human behavior in a scientific manner, that is, not just something that'd you speculate about, and that it's not just all clinical stuff, but that it -- these are areas that you can look at objectively, hopefully as

objectively as in the physical sciences, and yet in a meaningful manner, and that society as a whole needs that kind of thing.

**McGurk: Do you feel that you achieved what you wanted to achieve in psychology?**

Shaffer: Given that one single individual can only achieve a certain amount, yes, I'd like to think so, that I have achieved that. And I've had a lot of good students, and I have established good relationships with students, both while at the university and since. And I'd like to think that I have played some part in furthering the field, not only in a direct way, but also in an indirect way through passing on knowledge to others who then use it in some way.

**McGurk: Do you think that -- Strathclyde became, under your guidance, a recognized center for extremely important work in child development? And how would you evaluate it for, in essence a story of -- the history of recent developments of child development research? What's been sort of -- nationally and internationally?**

Shaffer: Well, at Strathclyde research -- Strathclyde became primarily equated with early development, studies in early development. And gradually, through students, post graduates and so on, leaving and going out from there, gradually got spread. And I think we stood for something. We stood for, particularly for the study of early social development. When I first started there, there were still very few individuals in Britain who were looking at early social development, it was primarily cognitive things. And social things, I suppose, are closer to applied aspects and, therefore, it was easier for us than the cognitive people to establish bridges to the applied area and, therefore, we became known not only in the academic area, but also in those applied fields as well.

**McGurk: The next area, did you enjoy teaching? Were there ever any tensions between your research interests and your teaching interests getting in the way of each other, or were they --?**

Shaffer: Well, I mean from time to time one curses the fact that one hasn't got man hours available for research, that one has to sit through some more tutorials with eighteen year olds who won't talk to you. I have actually never believed in what many people put forward, that there has to be a necessary connection between teaching and research, in the sense that you can only be a good teacher if you're also involved in research. Some people also put it the other way around, but that's not heard quite so frequently. I've never believed that. I think you can be a jolly good teacher and have never done any research. Indeed, I've never quite understood the rationale for this. Presumably it has to do with the enthusiasm that one has for the area as a researcher, and yet when all is said and done, the amount of time I devoted in a child development course to my own field was actually extremely limited.

I have a rather interesting experience just now actually. I'm writing a textbook on social development, which should be out in, well, presumably two years, three years from now, and this is, after all, about a field that I have taught throughout my university career, and I find I'm terribly ignorant about very large chunks of this field. And the reason is that, in a teaching course, one really has to be terribly selective, because one can't possibly cover the whole field, whereas in a textbook one ought not to be quite so selective, one ought to be fairly comprehensive. And I have this interesting experience now of going back to school kind of thing, and having to learn about all sorts of areas in social development, mainly the more recent developments, and about which I know, well, very little really, and I find that a most exciting and interesting thing going back to school.

**McGurk: You've not only been involved in teaching undergraduates, but you've also been involved in training post-graduates.**

Shaffer: Yes.

**McGurk: Has that been satisfying to you?**

Shaffer: Oh, yes, most satisfying. After all, there one does things in real depth, and I wish I could have done more of that sort of thing, but partly because of funding limitations there just hasn't been the flood of Ph.D.'s that one would like. But there -- well, at best one has a partnership with someone, and again, it's a learning experience. I mean I have a Ph.D. student just now, for example, who's looking at older parents of whom there are more and more now. Now this is a new area to me. I'm supposed to be supervising, but I'm also learning, and that's exciting.

**McGurk: Do you think we in Britain do training of researchers, academic researchers, in particular, very well, or do you have ways to do it better?**

Shaffer: Well, we've changed considerably here. I mean when I first started at the university it was still the tradition that you spend three years or so doing nothing but one particular topic for your Ph.D., that, although you got a certain amount of supervision, and the amount depended entirely on the supervisor, and some cases it was really minimal, you got absolutely no other kind of help or leg up, and after all, these were generally people who had absolutely no previous experience of research at all. Now we've changed, insofar as Ph.D. training is considerably broader now. There is more emphasis on actual training to do research before you go on the actual research itself, and, in fact, at Stathclyde, we pioneered a masters course on research methods, which was specifically for – well, it was geared to providing people with the kind of knowledge that they acquired in order then to go on to do independent research.

**McGurk: Let's change gears and look at your experience with SRCD, your involvement with the Society. When did you first – SRCD?**

Shaffer: Oh, I can remember that vividly, it was in 1963 when we had just finished writing the monographs, the Schaffer and Emerson monograph, and I wanted to get this published by someone. And I looked around, and it seemed to me in terms of its length and coverage and topic and so on, that the SRCD monograph series was the right one. And I vividly remember Bill Martin was the editor at that time, and so I sent it off to him, and eventually I got back a very enthusiastic response, in fact, rather unusually one of the reviewers wrote to me, identified herself and said, "Please can I have a copy of the manuscript before it gets published?" Only then it turned out that there was – apparently, I think I remember this correctly, that there was regulation that there was only members of SRCD that could get things published in the monograph series. So I hastily joined SRCD, and well, have been a member ever since. I've not had any specific contacts with SRCD, the officials and so on, the administrative structure. I have attended their meetings occasionally.

**McGurk: When was the first one?**

Shaffer: The first one was in 1971. At that time I was spending some months with Harriet Rheingold in North Carolina, she and I worked together, and it was in Minneapolis.

**McGurk: What kind of experience was that?**

Shaffer: Overwhelming.

**McGurk: The Society was quite small compared to what it is now isn't it?**

Shaffer: I was just going to say, I attended the last one a few months ago in New Orleans, and in comparison with the Minneapolis one, it is now just unbelievable.

**McGurk: Going back to the Minneapolis one, what was that like?**

Shaffer: Well, I suppose the most exciting thing was that you met an awful lot of people who were previously just names to you, so you could put faces to them, you could talk to them over cups of coffee, you could find out more about what they were doing. And, of course, the great thing about SRCD is, that it enables you to find out what people are working on, even though they haven't actually yet published the work. Indeed, if I may switch topics just briefly, a couple of years ago I began publishing a journal, *Social Development*, and one of the exciting things about being an editor is, that you see not only things that get into print eventually, but also an awful lot of things that perhaps will never reach print, and you get a much better overview of what's happening.

**McGurk: Yes. And you get that sense, of course, of what's in progress and what's coming –**

Shaffer: Precisely. Yes.

**McGurk: Have you been a frequent participant in the biannual meetings?**

Shaffer: No, not at all. Not at all. I'm not a great conference goer anyway.

**McGurk: So you went to Minneapolis, and I know you went to the New Orleans --?**

Shaffer: I don't think I attended any in between.

**McGurk: But you published in the monographs, what about *Child Development*?**

Shaffer: Well, I've published in *Child Development*, and in *Developmental Psychology* and so on.

**McGurk: The Journal –**

Shaffer: Yes. Yes. Oh, I've published several things in *Child Development*, and I was also, for quite a period, one of the consultants for *Child Development*.

**McGurk: Have you ever been involved in any – I know you said you haven't been involved in governments or committees, but worked with summer schools or those kinds of things?**

Shaffer: No, not those.

**McGurk: Well then, maybe this won't be a meaningful question, but you've been involved in the Society, sort of directly and indirectly since 1963, have you seen – about that – paper, have you seen any differences in the --? Have you seen ways in which the Society has changed in your views in terms of --?**

Shaffer: Well, I suppose, again the most obvious indication is quite apart from just sheer amount of stuff, it's involvement with the practical affairs of child development. After all, the Society is oriented towards what's happening at a federal level, as well as local government level, and this reflects in a very welcome way what's happening in child psychology generally.

**McGurk: Let's turn the environment to the field of development. During your own professional life, what have you seen as the main – what do you see as going to be the main developments?**

Shaffer: Well, bearing in mind that I got into the field in the early 1950's, at that time learning theories still held it's way. And I suppose one of the main things that's happened is that, well, for one thing, as I mentioned much earlier on in this interview, we have gone from the laboratory into the field, but we're quite prepared to go back into the laboratory from time to time and establish it to and fro here, between approaches. But we've also given up the notion of having these mega-theories, mega-theories like learning theory in particular, psychoanalysis too, perhaps Piagetian theory as well. And we now have mini-theories. I don't know if we'll ever get to mega-theories, but I think having mini-theories is certainly the right thing to do. I mean even something as influential as attachment theory doesn't pretend to cover everything. It's very much concerned with certain aspects of social behavior, nothing -- and proper. So that's certainly one aspect. And the other aspect, which again is part and parcel have to move away from learning theory, is that we've rediscovered mind. We've rediscovered that children have an inside as well as an outside. We're no longer concerned about looking at overt behavior only, and things like attributions and children's theory of mind and so on. It's just one indication of all that.

**McGurk: Of your own views of what's important, — what you have -- idea is that focus is very important in 1962, so --?**

Shaffer: Well, I was lucky, insofar as I started off in an orientation that was quite different from the prevalent one. I mean I started off in a clinical context, because when all is said and done, Bowlby worked in a clinical environment, and we talked about practical issues, and we talked about the child and the context of the family, and of society and so on. And I've held on to that kind of thing ever since, so from that point of view, no, I haven't changed. I can't claim credit for this. This was the way in which I was indoctrinated from the beginning, but it seemed the right sort of thing.

**McGurk: Looking to the future, what do you see as -- the things you can be optimistic about, and the things we should be concerned about?**

Shaffer: Well, favorably speaking I'm optimistic about the future, because there's some excitement and an interest, and there are pressures on us from society, which would suggest that we're going to go on developing, and development is partly a matter of sheer quantity of output. At the same time, size produces problems, and what worries me is that we may have specialization to such an extent that we have splits in the field, but we'll reach down into undergraduate days. So I'm a little concerned that we will have, not just developmental psychology courses, but students having to choose between particular kinds of development. And certainly the moment you get beyond the undergraduate day is when you really do have to specialize. And I just feel that we will become too microscopic in our orientation there, and focus too much on quite specific little bits and pieces. And despite all the developments in the technology of information, the whole business of obtaining an overview of what is going on in the field as a whole, is becoming a real problem. I think that's the kind of thing that bothers me. I mean we're seeing various developments just now. I think what's happening in behavior genetics is perhaps the most striking one, where a lot of highly specialized concepts and methods are coming in, which we're going to have to get to grips with. But just being able to get to grips with these things, especially at immediate post-graduate stages, is going to become quite a problem. Nevertheless, I remain optimistic about what's happening to the field as a whole.

**McGurk: I – last question -- what about other ways in which your – family life had some bearing on your scientific --?**

Shaffer: Well, it's really very difficult to know this. I'm married with two children. I have grand children now and I get a lot of satisfaction from family life, and just, you know, in terms of personal security and so on, it's a good thing. And I have always made a point of not doing a Piaget, and studying my own children. I've kept the psychology out of my family life. And I felt it almost unnatural to put them under a microscope. I couldn't have combined the two attitudes of father and psychologist. I have never been particularly introspective in the sense of wondering about the extent to which my views of child psychology, social development, family life and so on, have been shaped by my early experiences. And, as I've said, I got into this field by chance. It wasn't a matter of choice. I might argue, of course, the fact that I stuck with it was a matter of choice, because I could have moved away subsequently, but I found it congenial. And the whole notion of where do things come from, the developmental, the historical angle, why am I the kind of person that I am now kind of thing, must obviously have influenced that kind of choice.

**McGurk: -- Something I should have asked you earlier, but I – published very, very – academic theory, then the practitioner theory, -- looking at the – of your life, which of all of the things you've produced do you feel was the one that best reflects what you – your views, your position --?**

Shaffer: I find that difficult to answer in terms of having to select one thing which would reflect everything that has taken place over, I don't know, forty years or whatever, because things have changed, things have moved on during that time. I mean the temptation is to go back to that 1964 monograph, which was certainly timely and hit the headlines at that particular moment, but I felt reasonably satisfied with other things too. And, I mean even a thing like a little paperback that I wrote in 1977, called *Mothering*, which is still selling thousands per year, it's been translated into fourteen languages, just now it's being translated into Chinese. I feel a little embarrassed about this because, you know, things have moved on since 1977, but it's used as a textbook by the Open University still. Obviously I put things apparently in such a way in that little book that was meaningful and congenial to students, and this is perhaps more a matter of teaching, a teaching contribution rather than a research contribution, and I'd like to think that it's made that kind of contribution in the same way that the 1990 book, *Making Decisions About Children*, tries to make a completely different contribution, mainly to practitioners, and tell them what we have achieved in psychology.

**McGurk: Thank you very much.**

Shaffer: Thank you.