

Aletha Huston

- Born in Urbana, Illinois
- Spouse - John Wright
- B.A. in Psychology (1960) Stanford University, Ph.D. in Psychology and Child Development (1965) University of Minnesota



Major Employment:

- Center for Research on the Influence of Television on Children (CRITC) - 1978-1996 at University of Kansas, 1996-Present at University of Texas at Austin
- University of Texas at Austin - 1996-Present, Priscilla Pond Flawn Regents Professor of Child Development
- University of Texas at Austin - 2001-2006, Associate Director, Center for Population Research

Major Areas of Work:

- The effects of poverty on children and the impact of child care and income support policies on children's development

SRCD Affiliation:

- Past president

SRCD ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

Aletha Huston
University of Texas - Austin

Interviewed by Robert Crosnoe
At Dr. Huston's home in Austin, Texas
February 16, 2010

Crosnoe: Okay. This is the SRCD Oral History Project interview with Aletha Huston, who's the Priscilla Pond Flawn Regent Professor of Child Development in the Department of Human Ecology at--excuse me--the School of Human Ecology, Department of Human Development and Family Sciences at the University of Texas at Austin,

Huston: Yes.

Crosnoe: --and she is being interviewed by me, Rob Crosnoe, Professor of Sociology at the University of Texas and Chair of the SRCD Interdisciplinary Committee. We are at Aletha's house in Austin, Texas and it's February 16th, 2010. We are supposed to talk about our relationship before we get to the actual interview. We have been colleagues at the University of Texas for 10 years, a little bit less than 10 years, and Aletha was my advisor for my William T. Grant Faculty Scholars Award and we've been collaborators on various projects since then. We are also both affiliates of the Population Research Center here at the University of Texas, where Aletha was the Associate Director when I started my job.

What published or unpublished manuscripts best represent your thinking about child development? And I think it's--I want to kind of tweak that question a little bit and not necessarily say that it's about something that you have written [inaudible]. Are there things that in your research career--and you can pick one of these different areas if you want or. That's kind of a [inaudible].

Now we are going to turn to the actual interview starting with the general intellectual history. And so the first thing we wanted to talk about was Aletha's family background, including her child and

adolescent experiences, with particular interest on how they kind of got her where she ended up going. So Aletha, I know you grew up in Long Beach.

Huston: Well, I did, but I was born in Urbana, Illinois and lived there until I was eight years old. My parents were both from Illinois farms but had met at the University of Illinois and my father went first to--after graduating from college--went to graduate school in political science and then after getting a master's degree decided that being a college professor would be supremely boring and went to law school.

Crosnoe: More practical?

Huston: Well, he had very strong political and social values. He was the--but he did continue--this was the 1930s--he continued a day job at the University as a speech instructor and was coach of the University of Illinois debate team for quite a while and ran for Congress twice as a democrat in down-state Illinois.

Crosnoe: [Inaudible] He did not win?

Huston: He did not win. My parents had met in college as I said and my father then went to fight in the Second World War and didn't come home.

Crosnoe: Okay.

Huston: My mother went back to school, got a master's degree in School Psychology and took a job in Long Beach, California, which was 2,000 miles from home and from our whole extended family. She was a very brave woman. And we moved to California.

Crosnoe: When you were eight?

Huston: When I was eight, yes. My mother and my father were both role models in different ways for me. I never thought I'd be--my mother had been a teacher. I never thought I'd be a teacher. I wasn't going to be a psychologist either. But obviously neither of those things turned out to be correct. --

Crosnoe: --and your father would have thought that you had a boring job?

Huston: I don't know. He was a very active guy and I honestly think if he had lived it would have been great fun to be involved in politics. My parents were both very strong New Deal democrats. They really, really believed in the ideals of this country and, whether it was in political office or somehow ..., my father was a protégé of Paul Douglas, who was a senator from Illinois. He would have ended up in political life somehow and, frankly, I think it would have been marvelously exciting. But that didn't happen. In Long Beach I went to public schools and I went through a big, diverse high school. It was pretty economically diverse. It did have a fair number of Latinos in it, who were then called Mexicans, but almost no black students despite the fact that it had 3,300 students.

Crosnoe: Which would be big even today--

Both speaking at once

Huston: Well, that high school is now 4,000 some. But it was--I got a chance--Long Beach had pretty good schools and thank goodness they had some advanced sections of English and Social Studies so they actually took some of us who were pretty good students and put us together, which made it a whole lot of fun and we got some good teachers, but I also learned a lot about the rest of the world from being with students who didn't come from my background. But I always felt a little different. I worked very hard to be popular and to obscure the fact that I was smart. But one day something had been going on in the school auditorium and everybody was gone and I was sitting there talking to this girl I hardly

knew. She said something about--I don't know what the context was--but she said, "Aletha, you know, Shirley, Cooper, who was a friend of mine, is smart and you're smart. But you're an intellectual and she isn't." And I thought, My gosh, what does she mean and what has she identified about me that I sort of know--

Crosnoe: And is that good or bad?

Huston: --well I was very flattered. Obviously I remembered it and I thought it was great. But then I went to Stanford and suddenly there was an intellectual life there that just never had been.

Crosnoe: What about going to Stanford? Was that the norm of girls in your school at that time--

Huston: No.

Crosnoe: --that they went off to college and--

Huston: My peers, they went to college. Oh yes. I mean, the kids I knew, yes, definitely it was the thing to go to college. At that time Stanford had an official policy of admitting one fourth females and three fourths males, so I and one other--and a friend of mine were the only girls that I knew of from my school who were actually admitted. There were six boys from my school that went there and my friend didn't go unfortunately. But--

Crosnoe: So you were kind of alone? --

Huston: --oh, no. I made friends really fast. It was a great time. I felt that I flourished there because there was so much to offer in the academic life and there was a lot of social life. It was really fun.

Crosnoe: Well, I should note that I'm a Stanford graduate too. And so you finally started to have an understanding of what that girl had said to you and what that meant?

Huston: In some ways, although I would say most of my fellow students were not intellectuals either. I honestly don't think I met very many people who were real intellectuals until I went to graduate school, and then they weren't in psychology. They were in history along with my first husband.

Crosnoe: How would you define intellectual?

Huston: -to be really interested in ideas and not just sort of learning stuff--I think there's a difference. I learned an enormous amount at Stanford and certainly it was a very rich intellectual environment. But my friends didn't sit around talking about deep, intellectual topics. And the people who did I thought were sort of weird and so I didn't associate with them very much.

Crosnoe: At Stanford, didn't you start off studying the natural sciences?

Huston: Yes, I started out as a chemistry major.

Crosnoe: Okay. And how long did that last?

Huston: Until about the middle of my sophomore year.

Crosnoe: Okay. So it [inaudible]?

Huston: Well, yes. I liked chemistry all right except it was--it struck me that it was going to be very boring to go work in a lab somewhere unless I got a Ph.D. and I wasn't sure that's what I wanted to do. I don't know what I thought I was going to do with a bachelor's degree in psychology, but I think basically the idea of having interactions with people and so on began to appeal, and so I changed my

major. I was assigned quite by the luck of the draw to a young assistant professor as an advisor, who happened to be Albert Bandura.

Crosnoe: Quite a coup]--

Huston: Yes, yes.

Both speaking at once

Huston: He was certainly not known then. When I went in to talk to him at the end of my sophomore year he said, "You know, I'm looking at your record and you've got good grades. You ought to apply for the honor's program." So I did and that was really great, because it was a two year program of having a seminar with seven of us that met every quarter with one of their top Ph.D. students, so Elliot Aronson was our--

Crosnoe: Oh really?

Huston: --leader the junior year. John Wright was our leader the senior year. You also did research so I ended up doing a senior honor's thesis with Al Bandura, which was a wonderful experience. It was his first imitation study. I just happened to be in the right place at the right time and that got me started on my interest in observational learning and imitation, all that sort of thing, which--

Crosnoe: Did he want you to stay at Stanford to--when you started thinking about going to graduate school?

Huston: Well, they didn't actually accept their own undergraduates--

Crosnoe: Oh, they didn't? Okay.

Huston: --for graduate school, so it didn't come up. He did offer me a job to work during the summer after I graduated. I could have done the Bo-Bo doll experiment--

Both speaking at once

Huston: I had other things on my mind and I didn't do it.

Crosnoe: That would have been quite a starting publication.

Huston: Yes.

Inaudible comments

Huston: Well, the study I did was actually published too. But the Bo-Bo experiments took off from that--

Crosnoe: Yes.

Huston: --and of course, made his name or began to make his name.

Crosnoe: Which we still talk about in my classes--

Huston: Yes.

Inaudible comments

Crosnoe: Now how did you end up deciding? So you wanted to go into--so originally I know you wanted to be clinical--

Huston: Yes.

Crosnoe: --and you went into a PhD program at--

Huston: University of Minnesota--

Crosnoe: --Minnesota--

Huston: --in child clinical.

Crosnoe: --in child clinical?

Huston: Right, yes. Again, I really didn't imagine myself being a college professor. I thought I would be a clinician. And so I looked around for programs that might fit and everybody at Stanford would say, "Go to Minnesota," because something really exciting is happening there. Well, when I got to Minnesota I realized what was happening that was exciting was in the Institute of Child Development, because Harold Stevenson had just come as director the year before and it had been sort of moribund before then. But I was in psychology.

Crosnoe: Yes, so that--

Both speaking at once

Crosnoe: -- they're two separate entities, right.

Huston: Yes, they are. But John Wright went there as a faculty member at the same time and so after I'd been suffering in psychology for a while I went to him and said, "They don't want me to do any research and I want to do some research. Can I do some research with you?" And so I worked with him on research but I did stay in the clinical program, because I wanted that security.

Crosnoe: And so you actually graduated from the clinical program?

Huston: Yes, I did.

Crosnoe: I did not know that.

Huston: Yes, yes.

Crosnoe: I just assumed that you--

Both speaking at once

Huston: I got my first academic job because I had clinical training actually.

Crosnoe: Okay. Do you think that you--I mean, we're going to talk about this later, but that your interest in more applied research, you know, is traceable to that or you--

Huston: Oh yes, yes, I always had this very strong sense that I wanted to do something that made a difference.

Crosnoe: Yes.

Huston: I reached the point in my clinical internships where I really felt not only did I not know what I was doing, but neither did my supervisors. That didn't make me feel comfortable. So I moved in the direction of thinking maybe if I try to do some research I could help learn more about what kinds of things might matter, and also thinking that one-on-one therapy wasn't necessarily the best or the only way to go, especially with kids, and that changing their environments might, in fact, be more effective.

Crosnoe: Well, I know that you've told me before that, you know, you would be in these sessions with little children. You were I guess doing that internship and that you would feel that you had a sense sometimes of what am I doing--

Both speaking at once

Crosnoe: --to help this person--

Huston: Right.

Crosnoe: --I think that I have the answers. And I mean that's kind of--

Huston: But you weren't supposed to give them answers. The whole thing was to be non-directive and that was very frustrating sometimes to parents, for instance, when they said, "I want to know what to do," and you'd say, "Well, you know,"--

Crosnoe: Was it dissatisfying to you or--

Huston: --yes, at some times. I believe sometimes that just giving them an answer wasn't a good idea. But there were times when you just needed to say, "You might try this or you might try this." And behavior modification was just beginning to come in at that point. There was a guy, Ed Sulzer, at University of Minnesota Hospital, who was doing some of that. But the hospital was arranged in such a way that psychologists were not allowed to supervise therapy. It was only psychiatrists. And the psychiatrists there were--I guess I shouldn't say this on tape--but they really were not very good, the child psychiatrists. And their supervision was not at all useful to me, but they're long gone by now I'm sure.

Crosnoe: Yes, yes. I would think. And things have changed a lot.

Huston: Oh yes, --, I think that behavior therapy wasn't the only answer, but it was a whole new way of thinking about how to deal with kids' problems--adult problems too--but especially children's problems. And we just have learned a whole lot more now about ways of dealing with those kinds of problems that we didn't know then.

Crosnoe: Well, did you--I really think it's interesting that you said that at some point you started to realize that maybe it wasn't so much a one on one thing that would matter, but changing the environment--I mean, do you have any sense when that idea started bubbling up from or was it through your experience with these people or were there other people that you talked about this with?

Huston: Well, when I went to Cornell, which was my first job, they hired me because they had gotten a training grant in child psychopathology and they wanted somebody who could teach child psychopathology. --They didn't have a clinical program, but they needed someone who could supervise students who were doing research. As a part of that training program they started this very small preschool program for children with various kinds of problems. There were maybe five kids in this preschool program who had behavior problems or developmental delays. I don't even remember now. But it struck me that being there--and it was only a couple of hours a day three days a week or something like that-- that this was a much more effective way of dealing with these young children

than bringing them in one on one with an adult in play therapy. I think that was the beginning of thinking there are other ways to deal with problems that maybe are more effective, especially with kids.

Crosnoe: And do you think that--you know, it's interesting that you got into--you were hired because of your clinical background--

Huston: Right.

Crosnoe: --[in a department that had no clinical program.

Huston: Yes.

Crosnoe: And that-I assume had developmentalists in there. And do you think if you had gone because of your training, you had gone into a program that had a clinical--a strong clinical program, that your trajectory might have been different? Or were you always kind of veering towards this--

Huston: Well, I don't know obviously.

Crosnoe: Yes.

Huston: It might have. I mean, Ithaca is such a small town there aren't populations there that you can do research on psychopathology for one thing.

Crosnoe: Yes.

Huston: They had a hard time rounding up these five kids. Had I gone to a place like a big teaching hospital or someplace that had big populations and where there were interesting opportunities for research on psychopathology, I might very well have gone in that direction. But there weren't very good models for that at Minnesota either. Its clinicians all did work on the MMPI. They would come up with still another subscale of the MMPI. And so there really wasn't anything to--and in the Institute [of Child Development] there was clinical stuff in the institute, but there weren't people doing--oh, I don't know. Somebody did research on anxiety. But it wasn't what I would have considered something that I would really be interested in.

Crosnoe: Well, I think that's the one thing I wanted to ask--

Huston: Yes.

Crosnoe: --while we're still on the clinical thing--this'll be the last question about that--is--

Huston: No, it's okay.

Crosnoe: --at what point did you realize that you were following your mother--

Laughter and inaudible comments

Crosnoe: --after you had really decided you didn't want to be a teacher or a psychologist? And then so did--when did that occur to you?

Huston: Well, it must have been when I went into psychology obviously, that I was sort of doing what she had done.

Crosnoe: And what did she think about that? Did you talk to her about it?

Huston: Yes, I think she was fine with it. She wasn't either wildly elated or opposed to it. She wanted me to have a career.

Crosnoe: Yes, that was important to her?

Huston: Yes, I mean, having --the kind of experience that she had had, having been left at age 35 as a widow and having to pick up her life meant that she raised me differently at a time when girls were really not raised to expect to have careers. She raised me to expect to do that and she always used to say to me, "You need to have something that not only will earn you a living, but that will give you some real satisfaction." And I think that was her goal. She wouldn't have cared what it was as long as it was something that made a social contribution--and also that it was something that I could combine with family was very important to her for--

Crosnoe: Yes. It's nice that she covered all those bases and socializing. I mean--

Huston: Oh yes.

Crosnoe: --I mean, you could understand why that urge to--for that career as an insurance policy--

Huston: I know.

Crosnoe: --would be very strong with her--

Huston: Yes.

Crosnoe: --at the same time to--

Huston: Yes.

Crosnoe: --convey that it's also personally very important.

Huston: That's right. Yes. I think it was always true for my mother. I think she would have probably gone back and had a career even if my father hadn't died, because she was a very--ambitious is the wrong word--but in the good sense, person and she cared a lot about trying to do something with her life beyond just staying at home and being a housewife. But yes, she did. And you asked about whether going to college was common.

Crosnoe: Right.

Huston: Yes, going to college was common, but the common thing for girls was to go to college, maybe get a teaching credential so that you'll have that insurance policy, and get married and have kids and stay home. That was the expectation that most of the girls in my social circles were raised with. So yes, it was unusual for a girl to be encouraged to have a real career.--

Both speaking at once

Huston: I think my mother was pleased whatever I did as long as I was doing it well--and she also was glad I was doing something where I could get a job. To be perfectly frank, one of the reasons that I stayed in clinical was that you could get a job anywhere in clinical, and I had gotten married in graduate school to a fellow graduate student who was an American historian. Even in those days it was a little hard to get jobs in history. So we figured that if one of us had a job skill that was mobile it would be a good idea rather than trying to find two academic jobs. As it turned out we did find two academic jobs.

Crosnoe: At Cornell?

Huston: He went to Ithaca College--

Crosnoe: Okay.

Huston: --and I went to Cornell, right.

Crosnoe: Same small town.

Huston: Same small town, right. Yes.

Crosnoe: Well, so I think that one thing that we can do is still just talk about your basic professional trajectory--

Huston: Okay.

Crosnoe: --before we get talking about the substance of what you did.

Huston: Okay, all right.

Crosnoe: So you were at Cornell.

Huston: We were at Cornell--

Both speaking at once

Crosnoe: --and you don't last there very long and you move on from there after a few years.

Huston: That's true. I was there for three years and then we went to Penn State. My husband did get an offer at Penn State and I had--the College of Human Development had just been formed there, so we went there.

Crosnoe: So that was a new program at the time?

Huston: Well, it was a conversion of the old Home Ec Program, but it was expanding hugely. I was there for eight years during which time we got divorced. Then I went to the University of Kansas.

Crosnoe: Okay.

Huston: I was there for 20 years and then I came here [University of Texas] in 1996.

Crosnoe: Okay. So--

Huston: So that's the short version.

Crosnoe: --I remember that you--I know one of your former graduate students who said that she never thought you would leave Kansas and that you--that she was very surprised when you decided to do that.

Huston: --It upended her life to come there.

Crosnoe: So I wonder what--you know, I mean, you've had a--what kind of prompted that? Was it just a good offer or were--

Huston: Yes, UT came and recruited us and the professorship here was certainly very attractive.

Both speaking at once

Huston: The university--

Crosnoe: And by that point you were remarried--

Huston: --yes, I got remarried to John Wright when I went to Kansas.

Crosnoe: Yes.

Huston: And I used to laugh and say that when we moved to Texas it was the first time I'd ever taken a job for some reason other than a man. The university had a lot more to offer in the things we were interested in than KU did. I could talk more about the department [Human Development and Family Life] at KU. It was a very good environment in a lot of ways. But it was very narrowly behavioral and so we were always kind of in the sparring mode with a lot of people in the department. And I sort of got bored with that after a while. We had always thought we'd stay in Lawrence and when we retired we'd maybe travel in the winters. We would never have considered moving someplace that was not a place we thought we wanted to stay when we retired and Austin seemed like a good place to come. And I don't know...they just convinced us it was a good idea.

Crosnoe: And now, you know, inside knowledge, I know that you're considering actually retiring--

Huston: That's true.

Crosnoe: --or not considering that, but you will be in the next--

Huston: Yes--

Crosnoe: --couple of years.

Huston: --right.

Crosnoe: --to be determined later I suppose.

Huston: Yes, sort of.

Crosnoe: And so what's prompted that?

Huston: Well, I've been doing this for a long time, and I would like to have more time to spend with my kids and to be able to come and go when I feel like it. And I think I've just lost a little bit of my fire to keep doing what I've been doing for a long time. And I, frankly, would like to stop before other people think I should.

Crosnoe: -- gray line there.

Huston: I know of a few people where people are saying, "Yes, if they haven't retired they should have." You don't want to get to that point.

Crosnoe: Yes, [inaudible]. So are you--you're not going to be--I imagine that you're not going to be one of these retired in name only people? But you're probably not going to be one of these it's over and that you'll never see me again.

Huston: I think you're right on both counts.

Crosnoe: Yes.

Huston: It's hard to predict. I always thought I would follow--Eleanor Maccoby has been my role model forever, and Eleanor kept writing and doing research. Well, she's 92 now and she just stopped. I don't know if she's still writing. Her work, of course, is wonderful. I don't know. Maybe I'll keep doing--I'll certainly keep doing something. But how much will kind of depend on how inspired I feel. I don't know what to expect to tell you the truth.

Crosnoe: Yes, so you'll just figure it out as you go along.

Huston: I'll figure it out.

Crosnoe: That's probably the best way.

Huston: Yes.

Crosnoe: So let's kind of shift from thinking--instead of thinking about jobs to thinking about activities if you will, the substance of what you were doing.

Huston: Okay. Let me just comment on one other--

Crosnoe: All right.

Huston: --thing before you do, because there was a question on here about--

Crosnoe: Oh.

Huston: --political and social events that had been--

Crosnoe: Oh, have influenced your research, teaching and--

Huston: --yes, and the way I think. I think that because I cared my work has always been tuned in to what I thought might make some kind of contribution to society. That partly comes from the values that I mentioned from my parents. They were very, very strong civil libertarians, really believed in free speech and equality of opportunity. My father used to fight the battles to be sure that the black member of debate team he coached at the University of Illinois would be put up at the hotels when they traveled and things like that. But I grew up in the McCarthy era, and I could--my mother was really terrified by McCarthy and by what was happening. The people around her were losing their jobs, were being intimidated. I could see it in my teachers, and I could see it in the kind of curriculum that we had in the school. We had a textbook in American government that had discussion questions, "What's good about capitalism? What's wrong with communism?" and I told you I was in these classes with advanced students. We would just laugh at this stuff. One of the boys came in and waved a flag one day, and we all cracked up. But it really made an impression on me that society could be that distorted by that kind of fear and by that kind of persecution of a lot of people, many of whom had been quite idealistic and who'd been involved in left-wing activities or maybe even hadn't. So that was important. And then the civil rights movement started just about the time I graduated, and I actually met my first husband in a group called Students for Integration that had formed to do picketing of Woolworth's in Minneapolis in sympathy with the sit-ins in the south. We did a lot of stuff during graduate school in civil rights organizations in Minneapolis and watched the transition when the African Americans actually took them over, which was, of course, the right thing to happen. Out of that grew the women's movement and that had a big influence on my research, because it changed the whole way we thought about gender. So these political and social movements kind of, I think--

Inaudible comments

Huston: --yes, yes, and they have affected the way I think about what I do.

Crosnoe: And I know that you were studying poverty and child development long before welfare reform happened--

Huston: Oh yes.

Crosnoe: --that was the trigger of one of your large scale studies and another change of the way you did things.

Huston: Well, you asked me if my mother approved of what I did. What I used to do periodically is ask myself whether my father would approve or what he would think about what I was doing. And I'd always think, I'm not doing anything that's really having an impact out there in the real world. I had one of those moments, which coincided roughly with going to a lecture sometime in the mid '80s that Ed Zigler gave at APA. There had been a lot of media attention suddenly to the fact that poverty among children was prevalent in this country. It had always been there, but nobody had talked about it. Zigler talked about the fact that you could do research on policy. I had never thought of that. I'd always thought about poverty issues as my political concerns, but not something that would link with my research.

Crosnoe: As your career goal--

Huston: Yes, or that you could actually study it. That really was what set me off to studying poverty. One of the things that I did then was to--KU had a program called Intra-University Professorships, which were internal sabbaticals. You got a year off from teaching and committee work to study in another department within the university. I went to the political science department and studied public policy analysis for a year. It was fascinating. It taught me how different it is to think on a structural level than on an individual level and how policy makers approach issues so differently than people do in child development.

Crosnoe: What did that actually entail? When you say that you went and spent a year there, I mean, what did you actually do?

Huston: What did I do?

Crosnoe: How was that--I mean, if we were talking about structuring a learning opportunity for someone to come in, I mean, was there something special about what you did there or was it just in your interactions with the people--

Huston: Well--

Crosnoe: --around you?

Huston: --they gave me an office and I sat in on a couple of classes and did the reading. And then I just did a lot of reading and I had--over there I was away from everything. I couldn't stop doing some of what I was doing, because we had research going on and you have grants and you can't just leave it for a year. But I would allocate the times when I was over there [in political science], and I just read, and read and read about policy analysis. I talked to the faculty and got to know some of them and got to understand some of the way they thought about things. And the classes, especially the graduate seminar was very interesting.

Crosnoe: And so after that point you just--was there a reorienting of the way that you did research or--

Both speaking at once

Huston: Oh yes.

Crosnoe: --was that change gradual?

Huston: Yes. Because one of the things I did, SRCD actually used to have--they've kind of reinstated some version of this--they used to have something called study groups. You would apply and get a certain amount of money to get together eight or ten people to have a few days of conference or some kind of interaction. I wrote an application for one of these to SRCD about poverty, and I put together an interdisciplinary group that included Greg Duncan, Vonnie McLoyd, Deborah Phillips, Sarah McLanahan, Hank Levin, Loraine Klerman, and Lee Schorr. SRCD didn't fund it, but Deborah Phillips said, "Oh, this is a good proposal. I'll bet Ford would give you some money for it." So I got money from Ford Foundation and maybe somebody else--I've forgotten--and we did have it.

Crosnoe: Oh good.

Huston: Bringing together all those people from different disciplines was certainly the outcome of understanding how much this was an interdisciplinary kind of effort. And the book, *Children and Poverty*, then was --

Both speaking at once

Huston: Yes, that was basically an edited volume from those papers.

Crosnoe: And you've kind of been on that interdisciplinary track ever since.

Huston: Yes, yes, very much so. Yes. Well, the MacArthur Network then started in '94 and--

Crosnoe: And that was the Middle Childhood network?

Huston: --yes, but again, it drew people from a lot of different disciplines and, well, we can go back to that, but that's how I got into doing New Hope.

Crosnoe: Okay. And it was New Hope when you finally said, "My dad would really approve of this,"--

Huston: I don't know. I don't know if my father would have approved--he probably would have been pleased with whatever I did.

Crosnoe: Dads are like that.

Huston: Well, I just always thought that the real work out there was doing something in political life, which nobody else thinks but me, but yes.

Crosnoe: I think a lot of people think that and--

Huston: Yes.

Crosnoe: --yes, so--

Huston: Yes.

Crosnoe: So one of the last things about this was about turning points and I actually--

Huston: Yes.

Crosnoe: --think that is something that we're going to cover--

Huston: Yes.

Both speaking at once

Crosnoe: --in fact, when we talk about your research [inaudible]--

Huston: --research activities-

Crosnoe: -- and so the first question is what were your primary interests in child development at the beginning of your career and the second one is what continuities in your work are most significant. And I think that those two questions actually get at something really important, which is that you have had three kind of distinct phases of your career, one about gender and child development, one about media effects and television effects on children and one about this policy/poverty--poverty/policy thing--

Both speaking at once

Huston: Well, and you have that childcare interest, too.

Crosnoe: --yes, and the childcare and that you, you know, you--they're not mutually exclusive by any means.

Huston: Right.

Crosnoe: But you do have these kind of phases that if someone looks at your CV, for instance, you do see this trend--

Huston: Sure.

Crosnoe: --across topics. And what's really interesting is that a lot of people do that, but you're one of the few people that manages to kind of rise to the top of each of those fields. And I wonder first of all let's just start with the beginning, how you got--it seems like gender was the initial thing at the start of your career that really interested you--how you got into that and then how that led to these other things.

Huston: Well, as I said, I started working with Al Bandura on imitation and observational learning. At that time social learning theory had grown up very heavily influenced by Freud. Sears had done a social learning adaptation of Freud so the concepts were that children learned various kinds of self-processes through identification with parents, and those included imitating all kinds of things, but it also included learning gender roles. I guess that's how I first got interested in gender. I'm really not sure, because it actually started my last year of graduate school. A friend of mine and I decided that we wanted to try to cook up some research that we might continue once we left graduate school. We started getting interested in gender socialization. —Kagan [Jerome] had come out with a cognitive theory about gender-- not just that you're motivated to be male or female or masculine or feminine, but that you incorporate cognitions about what is appropriate for males and females and those then guide a lot of what you do. I found that intriguing, so I started working on how gender typing might influence kids' achievement. The whole idea that certain kinds of achievement are defined as masculine or feminine. I did some experiments to try to show that, in fact, that was the case, and not only was it the case, but it affected the way kids approached tasks if we could convince them that the tasks were masculine or feminine. And then I went to Penn State and I was trying to get some

additional funding to do that work, but somebody called me up one day from NIMH, John Murray, as a matter of fact, who was a young project officer on this grant program that they had going to study television and social behavior. The Surgeon General had had an advisory committee on television and social behavior. They'd had a media task force before that. Anyway, they [the Surgeon General's Advisory Committee] said that more research was needed and so NIMH was told to fund some research. They made this big funding program of about 20 some studies. John Murray called me and said, "We've got a lot of applications for this, but one thing that we'd really like to see that nobody has applied to do is to look at naturalistic effects of television. There were a lot of Bobo doll -type laboratory studies, but the question is how much does the same thing actually happen in the real world? And would you be interested in submitting a proposal?" I later thought, I suppose he must have called me because I had worked on imitation earlier, and Al must have suggested my name. Lynette Friedrich, who was my friend and colleague at the time, and I looked at each other and said, "Gee, that sounds like something interesting, and if somebody invites you to submit a grant you probably have a good chance of getting it." So we did it and that's literally how I got into doing TV research. We decided that we were not interested in just studying violence. She had a young child at that point who had been watching *Mr. Rogers*, and she had been quite interested in it. We decided we would also study how children can learn prosocial behavior from television, and we designed this nine-week study in summer nursery schools where we observed the kids, then we took them out to see different kinds of television programs and then we observed their behavior in the classroom. I think it was probably one of the better things I've ever done. Yes, and it kind of went from there. But it was partly because we didn't get funding to do the gender work and we did get funding to do the TV stuff. It seemed interesting, so we continued doing it. I did continue doing some gender work, particularly because that was when the women's movement was really--

Crosnoe: Yes.

Huston: --taking off and by then we were turning everything on its heel and saying that we don't think it's necessarily good for little girls to be feminine, and boys to be masculine. We're rethinking this whole area. I ended up writing a review for *Psychological Bulletin* with a graduate student, Peggy Bailey, who lives in the Dallas area. Then later on I wrote a review chapter for the Carmichael *Handbook of Child Psychology*.

Crosnoe: That was a very exciting time to be--

Huston: Yes.

Crosnoe: --discussing that topic just--

Huston: Yes, it was.

Crosnoe: --as studying media--

Huston: Yes.

Crosnoe: --in the '70s and '80s--

Huston: Right, yes.

Crosnoe: --was an exciting time--

Huston: So those two things were sort of going on in parallel for a long time.

Crosnoe: It's interesting that--I don't know if you've ever--I'm sure you've noticed this, but that, you know, your name changed--

Laughter and inaudible comments

Crosnoe: --[inaudible] and it--

Huston: Yes.

Crosnoe: --there's a kind of an interesting thing with your articles and your names kind of match up a little bit--

Both speaking at once

Crosnoe: --articles, you know, are very--are really concentrated towards the gender and--

Both speaking at once

Huston: That is interesting, yes.

Crosnoe: --you had a hybrid name for a period of time--

Huston: I did.

Crosnoe: --which didn't correspond to anything about the topics, but--

Huston: Well, when I decided to change my name back to Huston I decided to write with a hyphenated name for a few years just to make the transition.

Crosnoe: So people would know who the heck you are?

Huston: Yes, yes.

Crosnoe: Well, I'm not reading anything into that. I just think it's kind of an interesting thing when you look through--

Both speaking at once

Huston: Well, it corresponded to when I went to Kansas and married John Wright -

Crosnoe: --yes--

Huston: --that I changed my from my first husband's name back to my original name. I decided if I was going to take a man's name, it would be my father's. So--

Crosnoe: --and so did you pull John Wright into that kind of research?

Huston: Well, sort of.

Crosnoe: Or was he already doing that?

Huston: He wasn't really doing it at the time. He had had a couple of students who'd done some media stuff. But John was doing cognitive development. He was studying kids' attention patterns and their ways of processing information and so on. When we got married we didn't really plan to work together. It was actually about a year after I'd been at Kansas when we started talking about some joint research. He started saying, "You know, it'd be kind of interesting to think about studying attention to media."

Crosnoe: Same thing.

Huston: And so at that point I guess we were secure enough with each other that we could move into working together. And, of course, it was great, because he brought the whole theoretical base and knowledge about cognitive development that I didn't have and I brought a lot of knowledge about social development and also some of the media literature.

Crosnoe: I mean, that's actually two really complementary perspectives if you think about it that you came to it from a background of socialization and he--

Huston: Yes.

Crosnoe: --came at it from the cognitive side and so it's complementary if you think--

Huston: Yes.

Crosnoe: --about it.

Huston: Yes. One of the things that had been brewing in my mind that I started working on when I got to Kansas was what we ended up calling formal features of television. We'd done studies with Mr. Rogers and we'd done studies with cartoons. If you think about those it's not just the content of them that are different, but the whole ambience-- all of the pacing, and the noise, and the use of sound effects, and the use of visual effects and all kinds of things like that. I began to think, maybe, especially with cartoons, that it isn't just that they're violent, but they're hyped in the format sense. That then led us naturally into thinking about how those characteristics affect attention, and also how they affect learning as well, and maybe how they affect social behavior. The research began to come together rather nicely because of that. And we did a lot of work around that basic framework.

Crosnoe: What about--I mean, this was at a stage of your career where you kind of start getting pulled into a more--I don't want to say applied, but more public form of social science, you know, that you're starting to talk to people outside of academia and, you know, you're--I mean, it's sort of a nascent kind of pathway into a policy field. I mean--

Huston: Yes.

Crosnoe: --I know you were working with Sesame Street at the time or--

Huston: Not immediately, but yes, we did work with Sesame Street and we also then began to do--, the Federal Trade Commission had a research program. There was a very brief period when there were a bunch of activists on the Federal Trade Commission who wanted to do something about children's advertising. The 1970s was a time of really thinking about regulating kids' TV and so a lot of rules had been made about advertising to children. We actually did a couple of studies about advertising, one of them for the Federal Trade Commission. One of them was funded by somebody else. I don't remember now who. So we were getting into things that were going to have some more direct policy effects when you're doing something for a regulatory agency. The Federal Communications Commission didn't fund work, but they did a lot of pulling together of research. So yes, we began to feel like our research was being--

Crosnoe: Yes.

Huston: --, that it was getting attention from people who had some power, some limited power. Actually it turned out that the Federal Trade Commission got summarily told, "You are not to do that anymore," by some Senate committee that literally threatened to stop their funding unless they stopped doing activist rule making and research.

Crosnoe: And they stopped?

Huston: Yes, they stopped.

Crosnoe: But see, again, this is that timing issue. There was a small window where--

Huston: Yes.

Crosnoe: --did that and you just happened to hit it.

Huston: Yes, yes.

Crosnoe: Just kind of hit the sweet spot there.

Huston: Yes. Well, that was 1980 and I'd started this work in 1970, so it had been going on for a while. But yes--

Crosnoe: You were in a position to take advantage of the window--

Huston: --we were--

Crosnoe: --[inaudible].

Huston: --we were, yes. One of my friends says that, "Luck is a combination of preparation and opportunity."

Crosnoe: Yes.

Huston: He says it a little better than that, -but there's a lot of serendipity out there.

Crosnoe: Exactly.

Huston: So you do partly think that looks like something I might want to do and it's a possibility.

Crosnoe: And you're open to following--

Huston: Yes.

Crosnoe: --you know, because some people won't follow even if the opportunity's there, but you just were curious and--

Huston: Yes. -I don't know whether that's a good thing or bad, but that's certainly been true. Yes, a lot of things that I've done have been because some opportunity came along that I said, oh, maybe I'll try that.

Crosnoe: But then I mean it kind of goes into the fact and we've already kind of covered your transition into this third phase--

Huston: Yes.

Crosnoe: --but you know, you go to this talk, you're obviously already thinking about these things.

Huston: Yes.

Crosnoe: And it just kind of--it just sort of happened.

Huston: Yes. Well, the TV and the gender work kept going on. When I got to Kansas this graduate student named Jan Carpenter, who was in my office practically before I was there. She had ideas about studying differences between boys and girls in their dependence on adult structuring. We did a bunch of studies looking at the extent to which preschoolers and then grade school kids, first of all, sought out adults versus avoiding adults. The sex differences are really striking when you start looking at any kind free play situation, and then we asked how did that difference affect or at least have some relation to their behavior. That work went on for quite a while into the '80s. So I was kind of balancing two balls in the air and when I got into the poverty stuff that just was--I had to drop something.

Crosnoe: Yes, and that's--

Both speaking at once

Huston: --yes, that's kind of when that gender work ended. Jan went off to a job and it was really her thing, so--

Crosnoe: Yes, and the same time you're getting into this poverty/policy trajectory.

Huston: Right.

Crosnoe: That's when the early childcare studies started.

Huston: Yes. Well, that was another--

Both speaking at once

Crosnoe: --'89?

Huston: --piece of serendipity, because NICHD came out with an RFP or whatever it was then, and Marion O'Brien was a new faculty member in our department. She had been a research associate working for Frances Horowitz for five years doing infant work and before that she had been the director of our department's infant/toddler childcare center. I saw the RFP and I said, "Marion, this is perfect for you. It's infancy and it's childcare. You should apply." And she said, "Why don't we do it together?" It will--maybe we have a better chance of getting funding with your name on it, because you're known and I'm not." I didn't think it would take all that much to do--

Both speaking at once

Huston: --yes, so that's how I got into it. And--

Crosnoe: And that became a major--

Huston: --yes, that became--

Crosnoe: --thing [inaudible]--

Huston: --a major thing. Originally it was supposed to follow the kids to age three and then the study extended and extended and extended. And it became, just a wonderfully rich longitudinal study that I was very happy to be part of. But I got very interested in childcare, partly because the poverty/policy work ends up saying childcare is--

Crosnoe: Yes.

Huston: --a critical part of what happens to low income kids under many circumstances but certainly when their single mothers go to work--

Crosnoe: So when you look--when all--we have all these really four things, if someone just asked you, "So what do you do?" what--now, what do you say? Do you answer in the present or do you--

Huston: Yes.

Crosnoe: --try and--if--or someone--so not what you do, but if someone on a plane says, "So what, so what do [inaudible]?"--

Huston: I usually talk about the poverty/policy--

Crosnoe: --poverty thing? And that just--

Both speaking at once

Crosnoe: --is that because it's the most--

Huston: --and childcare.

Crosnoe: --immediate or it's because it's the most accessible to other people maybe or--

Huston: Well, because it's the most recent too. I will sometimes say, "I used to do media work," and then people always say I study TV violence. --

Crosnoe: [Inaudible]--

Huston: -- I never--after that first study I hardly ever did another study of violence. We did prosocial television, we did Sesame Street, we did what kids can learn, just endless amounts of stuff, and my colleagues would say, "Oh, Aletha studies television violence." People just have these fixed ideas about media. And somebody asked me what we learned after 20 years and I said, "We learned that it's the content that matters." Duh. Did it take us 20 years to demonstrate that? Well, I hope not.

Crosnoe: Well, with healthcare, I mean, good childcare is really important and--

Huston: I know--

Crosnoe: --bad childcare isn't very good. Sometimes we--you know, it's so important to answer those--

Huston: It is.

Crosnoe: --[inaudible] question--

Huston: It is, yes, and we did do more than that. You asked me about what unites my work other than the fact that I hope that it has some kind of applicability to society. When I was being considered for this job they asked me to write something about my research interests and my program. I thought, Well, what is it that ties all this together? One theme that ties it together is that I have always been interested in socialization influences beyond parents and beyond the family. And that seems to be what more or less unites these rather disparate areas of research. I started doing research in the early 1960s, Rob, and it would get awfully boring to keep doing the same thing for that long.

Crosnoe: And so that's what I was going to ask you for younger people or, you know, they often--we often get the advice that you have to have some sort of coherent--

Huston: Well, sure--

Crosnoe: --research program. Do you think that that is necessary or, you know, in some ways it's an unfair question to ask you to tie all those things together, because do they have to tie together? I mean--

Huston: No.

Crosnoe: --is that important?

Huston: Well, I told you that Eleanor Maccoby is my--is one of my major models and I think that would describe her career. If you look at what she did, she had different areas of study. Then she--at each one she did very well. So obviously you don't want people to just be flitting around from one thing to another. It won't probably be much of a contribution. I do think you're right, that some kind of a programmatic effort and something that really builds on itself is likely to be a lot more productive. But that doesn't mean you have to do the same thing for 40 years.

Crosnoe: Yes, that's probably not good for anybody.

Huston: No, I don't think it would be. And so--but some people I think have--they have more of a sense of I'm going to go from here to here to here to here to here within this general domain. That's another way I'm sure to make progress or make a contribution.

Crosnoe: Do you think that there's an underlying theoretical sort of perspective that you have even if it doesn't have an exact name for it, that you know, I often--

Huston: Yes.

Crosnoe: --I've seen--I know people, for instance, on the Early Childcare Network who have studied different things, but you can kind of sense this underlying attachment theory at work whatever they're studying. And do you have something like that or--

Huston: Well, I--for a long time I would have said yes, social learning theories.

Crosnoe: Yes.

Huston: though certainly not narrowly defined social learning theory. But once you go beyond kind of the individual level then that theory doesn't quite work. Everybody talks about Bronfenbrenner's model, but I don't think Bronfenbrenner's model is exactly a theory.

Crosnoe: No.

Huston: It's just a way of sort of organizing the different components that you might be thinking about. It doesn't tell you much about how to study them or--so I don't know. I think--

Both speaking at once

Huston: --try to get into conceptual models I guess--

Crosnoe: Yes.

Huston: --and it's always been helpful to me, for example, with the poverty work and the policy work to have a conceptual model and not just to say, "What does this policy do?" but, "What are the processes that we think might make whatever outcomes there are come about?" When we designed

New Hope we designed it with the idea that we would try to measure some of those processes. I don't know if that's a theory exactly, but it is a way of trying to understand the--

Crosnoe: And it is something that developmentalists would--that they have to contribute to--

Huston: Right.

Crosnoe: --that interest in the process--

Huston: Yes.

Crosnoe: --and the mechanism--

Both speaking at once

Crosnoe: --policy discussion.

Huston: That's right, yes.

Crosnoe: And then you said, you know, I don't--I'm not just interested in the effects of the policy, but in reality--

Huston: Right.

Crosnoe: --that's what most people seem to be interested in and--

Huston: I know, yes.

Crosnoe: --and they don't often connect the process part to--

Huston: Yes.

Crosnoe: --their ultimate goals. But you know that better than I. So we had--there was kind of one interesting question on here that I thought I would just ask verbatim that--what published or unpublished manuscripts best represent your thinking about child development? And I think it's--I want to kind of tweak that question a little bit and not necessarily say that it's something about--that you have written. You know, are there things that--you know, and you can pick one of these different areas if you want or--that's kind of a [inaudible] question [inaudible].

Huston: So what -reflects or has influenced my thinking?

Crosnoe: I think reflects. I mean, if you could say, you know, this is sort of the way that I think about child development, I mean, what would that be?

Huston: That's a hard question to answer.

Crosnoe: Can I--

Huston: Yes, I just--

Crosnoe: --give you an example that [inaudible]--

Huston: --yes.

Crosnoe: --so you wrote the end of your book--1991 book on *Poverty and Children*, the introduction you wrote for that where you talk about how it's okay to study family processes in terms of poverty and that you're not blaming anyone by doing that.

Huston: Yes.

Crosnoe: I have to say that that has always been--I--when I read that I said, "That is exactly--I wish I could have said that myself." You know? That that's the way that I think about things, but I never was able to articulate it. Have you had that experience or--

Huston: Of--

Both speaking at once

Crosnoe: --so I'm saying that you did that for me, so--

Huston: Oh, good.

Crosnoe: --so have you done that for--I mean, has that--have you had that or--

Huston: Well--

Crosnoe: --or have you written something yourself where you're like, yes, my daughter--if she wants to understand me this is what I want her to read?

Huston: Well, I've written things that I think represent a lot of what I think. I'm not so sure about child development per se.

Inaudible comments

Huston: Yes, I mean, the book that Greg Duncan and Tom Weisner and I wrote about New Hope was--

Crosnoe: Higher Ground.

Huston: --yes, was a way of trying to put together a lot of our thinking about not just New Hope, but the way families and kids function. Because Tom's an anthropologist who comes at it from a very idiographic point of view, and Greg's an economist who comes at it from a numbers point of view, and I'm somewhere in the middle it--the blend, to my mind, is really exciting. In that sense it's a reflection of a lot of what I think is interesting in one component of the field I guess. I think of the things that I've written, the review on sex typing that I wrote for the Carmichael *Handbook* is, if not the best thing I ever wrote, one of them. It was a new conceptualization. Carol Martin, who coauthored the chapter for the next edition, told me that she really didn't know what to do, because she thought the chapter said it all or something like that. It was very sweet of her. But I did feel that I had come to a new way of thinking about the field and put it all together in a way that was--

Crosnoe: And you were able to do that?

Huston: --yes. And I had fun doing it. It was before the days of computers, so I had gobs and gobs of eight by five cards sitting around on my desk. As I said, early on Jerry Kagan's cognitive theory was interesting. It always appealed to me a little more than Kohlberg's because it was less rigidly cognitive/developmental, but the whole idea that understanding how people think about whatever social content you're studying in combination with whatever the motivations are, -or incentives or however you'd like to put that--that putting those two things together is a really powerful way of understanding social behavior and maybe other kinds of behavior as well.

Crosnoe: Do you think that that's been your role, putting things together?

Huston: Sometimes.

Crosnoe: Yes?

Huston: Yes, that's my favorite--

Crosnoe: Because you've done that a lot.

Huston: --that's my favorite role. Yes.

Crosnoe: So one thing that--well, I think they really want us to cover SRCD, so--

Huston: Right, okay. All right.

Crosnoe: --[inaudible] and then we can talk on I think--ending on a personal note would be good.

Huston: All right.

Crosnoe: So--

Huston: You're not going to ask me to say what my weaknesses are? Good. We'll skip that part.

Crosnoe: No, no. [Inaudible] and I'm not going to ask you to talk about teaching child development right now.

Huston: Okay.

Crosnoe: But that's something that we can get to when we talk about the field [inaudible].

Huston: All right. We can talk about SRCD. We might want to go back a little bit to this institutional stuff]. Okay. SRCD--I went to my first SRCD meeting in 1965 in Minneapolis when I was in my last year of graduate school. There were approximately 500 people in attendance. We had a blizzard and a lot of people had trouble getting out in March. And I've been to every SRCD meeting since then except one.

Crosnoe: Okay. Why'd you skip that one?

Huston: You don't want to know, personal problems.

Crosnoe: Okay. So '65 to 2009--

Huston: Yes.

Crosnoe: --was--that's a lot of straight--

Huston: Oh, and I'll probably go to Montreal. And governance, I've been--John and I got our arms twisted to be co-chairs of the program committee for the 1989 meeting in Kansas City. He thought that was just thrilling. I just thought it was oh my gosh, I know what a horrible job that is, because at that time amateurs did everything. We saw that the people who had done it before us had just been overwhelmed with trying to literally put this program together by hand. People sent in these little cards and you'd spread the cards out on your living room floor and try to figure it all out. And so we said, "We will do it if you will fund a programmer. We want to get this programmed to do it by computer."

Crosnoe: So you were in the start of that?

Huston: We were, yes. And we had a programmer who worked for us at KU who was a good programmer, although he had a few quirks. But we hired him and we hired a woman who we knew to be the secretary of the whole thing. She was the one that did--because all the submissions, all the mailings, all everything was done there. We had to set up an office. So yes, we did get it programmed. It was primitive by later standards, but at least we started it.

Crosnoe: What a legacy.

Huston: It turned out to be fun in the end. The Kansas City meeting was a lot of fun, because everyone said, "Oh, Kansas City! What a horrible place to have a meeting," and we found out that they actually liked it. It was--so that was pleasing to us.

Crosnoe: And that was '89?

Huston: Yes. Then, because I was getting interested in social policy I started saying to whomever that I would love to be on the social policy committee. I got on a social policy committee and then finally Lonnie Sherrod and I were co-chairs of it. I don't remember the exact years, but mid '90s. then shortly after that I was elected to the Governing council. I was on governing council for six years and then I got elected president, so I was in the future president/president/past president role for another six years. Twelve years of Governing Council. While I was on Governing Council the Washington office of SRCD had been--we didn't really have a Washington office. We paid somebody in the APS office to do work for us. They decided that they didn't want to do that anymore and we weren't really very happy with that arrangement anyway, because SRCD kind of took second place. What are we going to do? And I talked them into, along with some other people, I remember running back and forth between the social policy committee and the governing council meetings, because they were going on at the same time, and just saying, "All right. You're paying APS--I don't know--80 thousand dollars a year. Why don't we hire our own person? Can we hire somebody for that?" So we started the Washington office and, of course, then it flourished, especially after Mary Ann McCabe came into the job a few years later. That was fun, because I think that's been a really good thing for SRCD.

Crosnoe: Yes.

Huston: Then when I was president elect Esther Thelen was the president and she tragically became quite ill with an illness that eventually was fatal. It turns out the president elect is the vice president, and I ended up taking over the presidency earlier than I would have otherwise. But Esther had started a process of strategic planning and she had actually found a planner to work with us. I thought, Oh, that's a good idea and we did a whole strategic plan, which was quite an undertaking. We came up with a bunch of goals and from those we started a new journal, *Child Development Perspectives*, we started a lot of activities to assist people with teaching that turned out to be extremely important to members, we started--I don't remember exactly, but maybe before my time--the Early Student and Early Career Network to try to build a cadre of students and young people in the field--

Crosnoe: And the Multidisciplinary Task Force came out of that too--

Huston: Yes, right. Yes, because the strategic plan ended up with five goals, which is probably too many. But three of them had to do with expanding into interdisciplinary multicultural, and international. We then had task forces for each one of those to say, "How are we going to do that? What things are we going to do?" And that's where the Interdisciplinary Task Force came from. I think we've actually been--we were really successful with international partly because it was kind of the thing anyway. And the interdisciplinary is gradually taking hold too, so that's exciting.

Crosnoe: Yes. So you feel like--do you feel like you left a mark?

Huston: Oh yes. Yes. I mean, it's always hard to tell, because you don't do these things individually--

Crosnoe: Yes, yes. Do you feel like--so is SRCD your home organization?

Huston: Oh yes, absolutely.

Crosnoe: [Inaudible]--

Huston: No, no, I enjoy going to other meetings sometimes, but yes, SRCD is where I got to see my friends and to feel like I belong; I think the meetings are amazingly high quality.

Crosnoe: Now, you were a--were you an associate editor for *Child Development* too?

Huston: No.

Crosnoe: You never did editing?

Huston: I've never been an editor.

Crosnoe: Okay.

Both speaking at once

Huston: I've never been an editor and I've never been a department chair.

Crosnoe: I thought for some reason that you were an associate editor [inaudible]. I guess I was wrong.

Huston: No, I was a guest editor along with Vonnie McLoyd and Cynthia Garcia Coll for the special issue on poverty.

Crosnoe: Yes, okay.

Huston: But that's it.

Crosnoe: So '65 to 2009 or 2010 or however we want to count that, what has been the big change besides just obviously the size? Or does it still feel the same?

Huston: No, it doesn't feel the same at all. The size goes along with so many other things. But certainly the range of content is much, much greater. We are more interdisciplinary. We always had some pediatricians and nurses and people from the medical/biological side. But very rarely did we have people from sociology or economics or other disciplines in the social sciences. We didn't have policy and I think the policy area was started in the late '80. It really grew out of the Black Caucus. The Black Caucus was formed-- a history of it--

Crosnoe: Yes.

Huston: -- was published as a *Child Development Monograph*.--It was formed in the '70s and they started demanding, "We want things on the program that have to do with social policy." In fact, it was almost too bad, because for a while people assumed that social policy was code for papers about race or about African American children or whatever. Obviously, social policy goes well beyond those issues. But they [the Black Caucus] were the ones that really pushed it at first. So it did finally happen and we got it onto the program. First there were pre-conferences on policy and then we said, "Well, it ought to be in the regular program," so that's one I'm particularly conscious of. But I think

it's--you know, we kept up with many things in the field. We have probably lost people who don't find enough in the program, because the field has become specialized. I have a friend, for example, at Kansas who's in language development and she doesn't go to SRCD anymore, because she said it just doesn't have enough of the things that are really of interest to her. I'm sure there are other people like that. It's maybe inevitable. I don't know. But--

Crosnoe: What--so this actually kind of is a segue--

Huston: Well, okay. Let me just say, the other thing obviously is that the administration of everything has centralized and professionalized, so that they [the office staff in Ann Arbor] now do all the journal submissions, they now do all the conference stuff, they now do a lot of things that amateurs used to do and it's much, much better.

Inaudible comments

Crosnoe: Yes. Well, so you mentioned this thing about the field. And my impression is that--and I've heard people tell me this before--that you're a developmental psychologist who's very interested in the environment and what might be--I've heard some say social child development.

Huston: Right.

Crosnoe: And my impression is that the prominence of that in developmental child developmental studies in general has waxed and waned--

Huston: Yes.

Crosnoe: --over the years or ebbed and flowed, especially--I won't say in tension with, but in conjunction with cognitive issues. Now neuroscience--

Huston: Right, and genetics--

Crosnoe: --and genetics. So can you just comment on that? Is that a fair assessment--

Huston: Yes.

Crosnoe: --do you think?

Huston: Yes.

Crosnoe: And what do you think--are there precipitating things or is it just that something's been up long enough, it's going to come down or--I mean, is it a natural progression?

Huston: I think it probably is. But you get action and reaction sometimes. The 1950s were a reaction to some heavy maturational views and biological determinism that were prevalent in the field in the '30s. But everybody realizes that the environmentalism of the '50s and '60s was only one side of the coin too and it was completely ignoring--for a long time, completely ignoring even that kids came pre-programmed for anything. Then Piaget came along and shook that one up and brought cognitive development back and brought back the idea that there is a biological substrate and a developmental substrate that is not just a function of response to the environment. So yes, I think as we've gone along there are these waxes and wanes. I don't know the--it seems to me--I could be wrong--that we may have finally reached the point that we are answering the question that Anne Anastasi asked in the 1950s, in her article, which you may or may not know about since you were nowhere near being born by then, but she wrote a very famous article. I think it was her APA presidential address, "Heredity and Environment and the Question How." The question of how was the whole theme of it. As we all know, that both are important. The question is how do they come together to affect development?

Well, I think we are now at the point where people are asking that question and we're not just arguing about, is it heredity or is it environment or what proportion of the variance goes with what. We have gotten beyond those questions in meaningful ways, even though everybody has always known that they were oversimplified. To actually figure out what's--some of the ways in which certain kinds of genetic characteristics may make you more susceptible to certain environments and all that kind of thing and to really pin it down is exciting.

Crosnoe: Now, do you think that that is the next thing--

Huston: Oh, it's happening--

Crosnoe: --that--

Huston: --with the ability to do micro genetic analyses now, to look at candidate genes and not just to look at behavior genetics it's opened up huge possibilities for that kind of work.

Crosnoe: Let me ask you--and maybe I'm going to be provocative here a little bit about the field--but you know, I know that there's been some discussion in economics that the rise of public policy schools where a lot of economists who had interests in interdisciplinary things or in nontraditional questions, feminist economics, for example, that those departments sort of siphoned out those--there was a selection process leaving behind in economics departments more traditionally oriented or conventionally oriented economists so that the creating of these public policy schools actually made departments of economics--

Huston: Interesting.

Crosnoe: --more narrow. Now, there are obviously a lot of people that would disagree with that. But I wonder do you think that the rise of human development schools and public policy schools could have a similar effect on--or has--that, you know, that, you know, you're in a human development department, a lot of the people that you work with are not in psychology departments--

Huston: That's right.

Crosnoe: --in fact, most of them are not.

Huston: That's right.

Crosnoe: They're in, you know, human development, or policy, or schools and education. Does that, you know, does that--do you think that that's a fair assessment or is that too pessimistic or--

Huston: I'm not sure that psychology departments in this country are any more conservative now than they ever were.

Crosnoe: Okay.

Huston: I think it's been the rare psychology department that was receptive to the kind of work that I do, for example, I wish we could say that we had had such--

Crosnoe: There was [inaudible]--

Huston: --power, but the--certainly the college, the schools like human development departments in colleges around the country have been real centers of not just interdisciplinary work on children, but nutrition and community and all sorts of things. And they have taken what in many cases was the original mission from home economics and translated it into modern terms. And they have I think done

some very exciting things and brought in very exciting people. But I don't know. If I'd gone to a psychology department--of course, I would have been in a clinical program. A lot of psychology departments are divided. The experimentalists and the clinicians are in different camps and some of them--they usually don't talk--well, they do talk to each other, but there are often some real divisions within psychology. They used to have a baseball game every year at Stanford where the experimentalists played the clinicians--

Crosnoe: Clinicians--

Huston: --for example, [INAUDIBLE]. But I don't think most psychology departments have provided the kind of environment that would really promote the interdisciplinary work that I've been doing for the last how many years.

Crosnoe: So I can say, you know, there are lots of younger people that are in your mold, right? And is that--and I know many of them who say, "Well, I could never get a job in the department of psychology even though I have a degree in psychology," or--and in some ways [inaudible] to look at that, this is a good development or a bad development.

Huston: Right.

Crosnoe: The good development being, thank goodness we have these strong departments out there--

Huston: Right--

Crosnoe: --really are kind of--

Huston: --right.

Crosnoe: --pushing the field forward. At the same time, it makes me a little sad that there are people out there who--

Huston: Right.

Crosnoe: --think that. So I just--I mean--

Huston: Yes.

Both speaking at once

Crosnoe: --in terms of, you know, one of the questions on here is about not only your hopes for the field but your fears--

Huston: But your fears--

Both speaking at once

Huston: --well, my fears have to do with the fact that funding for a lot of non-biological research is getting tighter and tighter--the major funders in NIH, for example. First NIMH moved away from funding normal child development altogether and they used to be major funders, and then NICHD is--I don't know quite what direction it's going right now--but with Duane Alexander leaving and it's kind of uncertain how much it will become more of a kind of medically oriented institute as well. People have been really concerned about lack of funding for anything that's basic child development research that isn't medical or biological in some respect, and that is going to make a big difference in whatever happens.

Crosnoe: Yes, exactly. Okay. Well, so you had mentioned that there was something about the institutional question--

Huston: Oh, there were some questions--

Both speaking at once

Huston: --in here about--

Extraneous comments

Huston: --institutional contributions --the universities and places that I've been in and what I thought their contributions were--I already mentioned going to Penn State. Cornell was a wonderful place to be. It was a great department and I learned a lot there from senior people. They had had a bunch of senior people around and then they suddenly had a spate of hiring new junior people, so we had several assistant professors, and a lot of very senior people. They [the senior people] were very good to us. But Penn State was--I was there during the time that the College of Human Development was flourishing. Paul Baltes came, John Nesselrode came. Then Warner Schaie came after I left, but--and it created this cadre of people who, frankly, were gathering around Paul and trying to take on the life span development mantle. And interestingly, Ted Huston and I both stayed outside that loop, although I did do a paper with Paul once. But it was interesting to learn -- that was a very interesting movement. It was quite influential in the field, especially gerontology, and the way people thought about research designs. The longitudinal research designs were classic contributions from those folks. But the department at Kansas was Human Development and Family Life, which had been a home economics department. Frances Horowitz had taken over as chair in the mid '60s and hired a bunch of people who had been the founders of behaviorism, of behavior analysis. They were at University of Washington, which was not being nice to them, so she went out and hired a whole bunch of them, Todd Risley, Don Baer, Jim Sherman, Mont Wolf, and some other people who were just marvelous people in that movement. They were really founders. So there was this strong theme of Skinnerian behaviorism that was very applied. If a kid has a problem you figure out what the reinforcing conditions are and you change them ---different things like that, which made a huge contribution. It can be oversimplified, but it was fun being around it. They also realized, because Don Baer and Frances were aware of the danger of becoming too narrow, Frances was not really a behavior analyst. At any rate, they knew they needed to have "traditional developmentalists," which I always found very amusing -- to be called a traditional developmentalist. That group was John and me and a few other people. So we had this department with a set of people who operated on quite different assumptions--and yet despite the fact we disagreed with one another on everything, it was an enormously supportive place.

Crosnoe: Yes, I kind of get the feeling that you all sort of arguing [inaudible]--

Both speaking at once

Huston: John loved to argue with them. He and Don Baer just loved to have these debates. Frankly, I got sort of bored with it after a while. But it was kind of like a family. Internally you can criticize each other, but you go out to the outer world and you rally the wagons and defend each other. So it was very supportive interestingly. Unfortunately, I think it's changed a lot.

Crosnoe: That department?

Huston: We don't need to go into too much of that. It's become very narrowly behavior analytic. Don Baer and the initial people knew a lot about the broader world of psychology and they also realized they needed a department that had varying points of view. That's changed.

Crosnoe: Yes.

Huston: It's all now behavior analysis.
This department that I'm now has really just started to take off. It's lots of fun --I'm not quite sure how it's going to be defined, but we've got lots of good young people on the faculty.

Crosnoe: It's been defined by you for--I mean, for--

Huston: Well, partly, but--

Crosnoe: --for a long time.

Huston: --well, by Ted Huston too--

Crosnoe: Yes, yes.

Huston: --yes. But I don't know that I can point to some major kind of theoretical tradition like life span or behavior analysis that characterized the other places I've been, which in some ways makes this more interesting.

Crosnoe: Yes. Well, it's still--I mean, it's emerging--

Huston: Yes.

Crosnoe: --obviously, or is--

Huston: Right, yes--

Crosnoe: --has potential to emerge.

Huston: --right.

Crosnoe: Yes, that's interesting. So you know, one of the big recurring themes that I don't know if you [inaudible] but it's obvious that there is a strong connection between your personal life and

Huston: Yes.

Crosnoe: --and your research life, even--you know, and I actually think that that's a sign of an intellectually curious and interesting person, that, you know, there is this back and forth beginning where you started with your parents and--

Huston: Right.

Crosnoe: --everything and now that I know that one of your closest collaborators was your husband--

Huston: Right.

Crosnoe: --even though that you didn't set out to do that and you haven't mentioned your children at all. But I can't imagine--

Huston: Right.

Crosnoe: --I mean, I know that just in our discussions about childcare you have always talked about Serena, your daughter--

Huston: Yes, yes.

Crosnoe: --and so I wonder if we could kind of close by talking about what impact your family has had on this or your personal experiences besides the ones we've already covered.

Huston: Well, it's hard to answer that question, of course. But when I was on an NIMH review committee--we now call them study sections, but that's what it was some years ago, and there was some emphasis at NIMH at that time about different aspects of family and family structure. So we were getting a lot of proposals about stepfamilies and this and that. It got to be sort of a standing joke that every kind of family innovation that you could think of --I was experiencing.

Laughter

Huston: I have four stepchildren whom I don't really consider stepchildren and they have kids. I watched my kids raise kids. One of my stepdaughters is a lesbian with a woman partner and they have children. I watched that whole thing. And I think it does affect the way I think about families and the way I think about--certainly when I read this literature on family structure --I like to take sociologists to task a little bit. My gripe with them is that it's always the mean or average patterns.

Crosnoe: The norm?

Huston: --yes, and I think that it's important to understand the variability within a lot of different kinds of families.

Crosnoe: [Inaudible].

Huston: Well, yes. We're interested in the moderators, that--you know, I used to think when I was a kid when I looked around at my friends I'm better off with my one parent than most of them are with their two. So yes, there were some drawbacks to having a single mother. But there were a lot of benefits to it too. And one of my stepdaughters talked about that, about having her parents be divorced. She said, "Yes, there were some horrible things about it, but there were some ways in which I learned things I wouldn't have learned otherwise."

Crosnoe: Like getting a stepmother who thinks--

Huston: Yes.

Crosnoe: --doesn't like to use the phrase step, I mean--

Huston: Yes, right, yes. She used to call me wicked.

Crosnoe: What about--did your kids--I guess that by the time you got to media studies your children were grown or were older, right? I mean--

Huston: No, Serena was born after--

Both speaking at once

Huston: --I started doing that work.

Crosnoe: So did you ever--how did that affect you as a mom? I mean--

Huston: Oh, I never let her watch anything bad. Well, it was easy when she was a preschooler, because she didn't know that other programs existed. And so we could watch *Sesame Street* and *Mr. Rogers* and a few other things and that was it. As time went on, of course, it gets less easy and the

thing you're supposed to do, you know, we'd tell parents to do is to, well, watch with your kids, and talk with your kids about what they're seeing and what your values are. So she and I were watching something one time when she was about eight or nine and I started going off about, "Oh, g** -look at the stereotypes of the woman and blah, blah, blah," and she looked at me and she said, "Mom, couldn't we just watch TV? Do I always have to analyze it?"

Crosnoe: But I was thinking probably, you know, that sometimes you're just get the television show and [inaudible]--

Huston: Yes--

Crosnoe: --an opportunity for discord.

Huston: --yes, yes. So yes, you try and you try, I certainly was very conscious of gender roles as well, and interestingly, you never know how that's going to play out, because everybody I know says, "I tried to get my kids to play with--or not play with sex typed toys," and so on and--

Crosnoe: It's a failure.

Huston: --yes, some of it was a failure. But Serena and interestingly my other kids have developed a kind of independence and career orientation -that says something about what they learned.

Crosnoe: And there are no--but there are no psychologists in the group, right?

Huston: No, my eldest granddaughter majored in psychology in college, but she wanted to be--she was either going to go into counseling or go to seminary and she's gone to seminary. She expects to do pastoral or whatever they call it counseling. But no, no psychologists.

Crosnoe: Well, so actually one final thing before--because something that we haven't covered but we probably should and it kind of goes with the children thing a little bit, which is your students and your legacy--

Huston: Yes.

Crosnoe: --as a mentor and a professor -you know, and here I'm thinking explicitly of your undergraduate students--

Both speaking at once

Huston: Yes, right.

Crosnoe: --what has been your philosophy about that? Or is it--did you have one? Because I feel personally people always ask me to say what my teaching philosophy is and I still can't really do it. But I know I--it's probably fairly consistent with how I do it. I just can't articulate it.

Huston: Well, the fun part I think of teaching all my life is working with graduate students. And I certainly am proud of what many of them have done. Between John and me, at CRITC (our Center for Research on the Influences of Television on Children) we trained just about everybody that was doing media work in the country. My philosophy is to try to guide them, but to be sure that they have a way of following their own interests. I did decide after a few years that I wasn't going to supervise people who wanted to do something that was far away from the stuff that I was working on or that I knew a lot about, because I ended up doing--somebody wrote a dissertation on personal attractiveness. It was a fine dissertation, but I didn't feel that well qualified to supervise it. So they need to be working on something that I feel I can contribute to. It's important to give them attention. I've been told by some people including Shannon [Cavanagh] that I spend a lot more time with my students than some

mentors do. And I feel that's important. What are they going to learn if they don't get a chance to bounce their ideas off of you and to have their work commented upon? I probably sometimes don't push them hard enough. But I figure if you're going to be a professional in this field you've got to be pretty self-motivated or else it isn't going to work. And if you're not, then you better find that out early. Some people have gone through and gone off to do other things. I think that's also inevitable. But some of my former students I'm still very close to and I value it a lot.

Crosnoe: You know, there are some people I know that think that the real legacy isn't counted in terms of the publications, but in--

Huston: Yes.

Crosnoe: --other descendents if you will--

Huston: Right, yes.

Crosnoe: --do you agree with that?

Huston: Oh yes. I got a mentoring award from the Society for Research in Human Development a few years ago. It is, I gather, from a vote, which I--

Crosnoe: Which I wrote a letter for.

Huston: --yes, and that was certainly one of the greatest honors of my life, because I really do feel excited when I see my former students doing interesting and exciting things. It just gives me a lot of pleasure.

Crosnoe: Do you think that there are people that don't equate--when they hear that word teaching, they don't equate that word with what you're doing, what you're saying? And--

Huston: They equate it with lecturing in the classroom.

Crosnoe: Exactly, yes.

Huston: Which has never been my favorite part of teaching. So I think you're right, yes. But that to me is teaching. And it was interesting when I first came here and maybe when you came, I don't remember, they still had this system of teaching load credits--

Crosnoe: They did.

Huston: --and you had to come up with a certain number of teaching load credits. You got a fair number of credits actually for individual work with graduate students. I thought that was wonderful, because it said this is a valuable part of your teaching contribution. Every place else I've ever heard of just expects you to do it on top of whatever it is they define as your official teaching load. We no longer have that system. It had its faults, but it did have that one virtue

Crosnoe: [Inaudible] symbolic in a way.

Huston: --yes, yes, yes, it did really give value to that part of one's teaching activities.

Crosnoe: Well, I think teaching is a good way of ending this. Is there anything more you want to say?

Huston: I think not. I think that's probably it.

Crosnoe: So we're going to put this into the vault at SRCD?

Huston: Right, yes.

Inaudible comments

End of Interview

Aletha Huston - Mentors, Colleagues, and Students

Mentors

Al Bandura
Harold Stevenson
Eleanor Maccoby

Colleagues

John Wright (also her husband)
Elliot Aronson
Ed Sulzer
Greg Duncan
Deborah Phillips
Sarah McLanahan
Hank Levin
Lee Schorr
Lynette Friedrich
Marion O'Brien
Greg Duncan
Tom Weisner
John Hagen
Lonnie Sherrod
Paul Baltus
John Nesselroad
Warner Schaie
Ted Huston
Frances Horowitz
Todd Risley
Don Baer
Jim Sherman
Mont Wolf

Students

Robert Crosnoe
Peggy Bailey
Jan Carpenter