

## James Youniss

- Born 12/20/1936 in Green Bay, Wisconsin
- B.S. (1959) Marquette University, M.A. (1960) Hollins College, Ph.D. (1962) The Catholic University of America

### Major Employment

- Director, Life Cycle Institute: 1988-1999
- Associate Professor/Professor of Psychology, Catholic University: 1965-present

### Major Areas of Work

- Cognitive development, moral/political development and community service

### SRCD Affiliation

- Associate Editor of *Monographs of the SRCD* (1972-76)



## SRCD ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

James Youniss

Interviewed by Jeff Arnett  
At Catholic University  
May 4, 2000

**Arnett:** This is an interview of Jim Youniss for the Oral History Project of the Society of Research in Child Development. I'm Jeff Arnett. The first section is general intellectual history. Before we start let me just say I'm going to follow the interview more or less, but I'm also going to feel free to follow up and clarify and so on. So first of all, can you describe your family background, along with any childhood and adolescent experiences that may be of interest?

**Youniss:** Okay. I was the last of five children of an immigrant family. My father came from Lebanon when he was a youngster, to the United States in 1912. And by the time that I got into school, my intellectual history, if you will, the other children (my older brothers and sisters) had set a pattern in which I was expected to follow suit, which meant being the best in the class and the President of the class, etc. And being the youngest child and wanting to emulate my siblings -- I had two brothers and two sisters -- I just simply thought it was normal to do that.

**Arnett:** Was that something your parents promoted, or was that something that just developed naturally among the kids?

**Youniss:** Partly (I'm mocking) because it was such a different situation, meaning my father was Middle-Eastern, Lebanese, and there wasn't much communication between us, so if he wanted me to do this I wouldn't know it. My mother was so busy in handling the family that I don't think that she pushed either, so it was just part of the assimilation of watching my brothers and sisters.

**Arnett:** I see. So when you say your father -- there wasn't that much communication between you and your father because he was Lebanese and you were more American, or just because he was so busy with work and -- ?

**Youniss:** No, he wasn't very busy. My father was rather wealthy and led an interesting life, but it was just not in style for men to deal with children.

**Arnett:** I see.

Youniss: It's peculiar. This is one example as from my adolescence that would characterize it. When I needed the car and my friends would come to the house, I would simply go ask my dad for the car. He would reach in his pocket and give me the keys, and then we would get outside, we met with my friends and we'd drive away. And they'd say, "He didn't ask where you were going! He didn't tell you what time to come in!" And he didn't, he just assumed -- everything was assumed that you were going to be a good kid, and you were going to do well and you weren't going to get into trouble. I don't know how to explain that into contemporary terms. So it wasn't that he didn't communicate, it was that he didn't have to say things.

**Arnett: Right. It was all indirectly communicated.**

Youniss: That's right.

**Arnett: A kind of ethos --**

Youniss: Yes.

**Arnett: -- existed in the family that he brought over from the old country?**

Youniss: I believe so. Yes. Yes. There was also a sharp distinction in our family, that is, in the community between males and females, so the males were assumed to be able to do whatever they wanted and they were going to do it right, and everything was no problem.

**Arnett: So what did he do for an occupation when he came over here, or was he wealthy enough by then he didn't need to work?**

Youniss: No. My father worked his way across the country in various jobs, and he would regale us when we were children with the stories about working for a dollar a day for the tire factories in Ohio, whatever it might be. But when he got to Wisconsin, where he met my mother, who was the daughter of immigrants, they moved to Green Bay, Wisconsin, where I was born and opened up a grocery store. It's a peculiar kind of background that I had in terms of family life. Our house was filled with people. There were the five children and there were my mother's sisters, who worked in the store, and then there were my fathers' nephews, and then anybody who happened to come to this country and wanted to get settled in. So we had a large store with lots of people working in it, see, and it was rather a kind of circus, so it was rather interesting.

**Arnett: Lots of people around all the time.**

Youniss: Right. And I thought this was normal.

**Arnett: Was your mother also Lebanese?**

Youniss: My mother was Lebanese. Yes.

**Arnett: And also had emigrated to the U.S., she wasn't -- ?**

Youniss: No. Her parents had emigrated.

**Arnett: Her parents --**

Youniss: She was born in the U.S., but they spoke Lebanese to one another. The adults in the home spoke Lebanese. And then this may be interesting because of their interest in having us assimilate. The rule was in our house that the adults were not to speak Lebanese to the children, so Arabic was spoken among the adults, and then to us they would have to speak in English, which, of course, was rather

impossible. So particularly the older the people the more likely they were to speak Lebanese to us. So we would --

**Arnett: So did you learn Arabic, or -- ?**

Youniss: Actually, not to speak it, but a spattering in it. And, of course, I could take orders and I knew what to do if the adults told me what to do.

**Arnett: So what about the rest of your schooling, you grew up in Green Bay then?**

Youniss: I grew up in Green Bay and I went to Catholic schools throughout my childhood and high school. Again, I just followed suit with my brothers. I enjoyed school a lot, particularly high school, which was an all boys' school.

**Arnett: Catholic school?**

Youniss: Catholic school. We were taught by priests and it was rather humorous. And I think that's where I probably got my first intellectual interest. In elementary school I never felt challenged, and I have some of my first conscious memories were getting good grades or getting praised and realizing that I had not done the work that would go behind it, so I would call it -- it was not a good education. But when I got to high school the priests didn't stand for that very much, so it was an interesting kind of high school where you had to take four years of Latin and you had to take science and math, and so it was pretty strict. And the group I hung around with, of course, worked hard and had fun doing it.

**Arnett: What year were you born? We should get that on here.**

Youniss: 1936, in the midst of the Depression.

**Arnett: But you didn't grow up in deprivation, it doesn't sound like. It sounds like your family was more or less solidly middleclass.**

Youniss: Yes. We were solidly middleclass, and my father always acted as if he was wealthy, so we never had the sense of deprivation. We probably weren't very wealthy, it's certainly hard to say, but when we would have lobster for dinner and -- my dad was extravagant. He had, besides having this marvelous business where tons of people worked, he also was a gambler and so gambled at least three or four days a week playing cards for money --

**Arnett: Really?**

Youniss: -- which is always interesting, and would always have wads of money in his pocket, which was impressive to us kids.

**Arnett: So he was good at it?**

Youniss: He was very good at it.

**Arnett: What about military experience? Did you serve in the military? You would have reached the age right around the time of the Korean War.**

Youniss: Right.

**Arnett: Maybe a little -- you would have been a little young for that, I guess.**

Youniss: Right. I was always a little bit young for whatever, so I went Marquette University in 1955. The Korean War was on at the time, but going to school it gave you a deferral. By the time I got out the War was virtually over.

**Arnett: What was your early work experience?**

Youniss: My early work experience? Well, the fun part was, like I said, I emulated and actually idolized my brothers and sisters, so I was always disappointed that I couldn't work in my father's store because I was too young. I was young by several years from my next closest sibling, so I remember one of my most exciting times was when I was 12 years old. When I was 12 I could go to work in my father's store.

**Arnett: And you were looking forward to it?**

Youniss: I was looking forward to it, and so it was fun to -- I don't know what people today know of a store like that, but to unload a box of 40 pounds of bananas or a couple hundred pounds of potatoes, you know, it was quite a feat for a young kid. I thought it was great.

**Arnett: Well, it's interesting that you discovered something that you looked forward to. I'm not sure that the typical adolescent today would necessarily see it that way. I mean some would, but if research on how they regard being asked to help around the house is any indication, most would probably not relish the experience the way you did.**

Youniss: No, but the context is an immigrant family.

**Arnett: Sure.**

Youniss: It's also an immigrant community, so several of the other families were also in private businesses, they had stores or restaurants or whatever it be, so all the kids worked for all of their parents.

**Arnett: It was just viewed as a way to raise your status in the community --**

Youniss: Precisely.

**Arnett: -- and in the family.**

Youniss: Right. So it was normal to do it, and everybody did it. It's great.

**Arnett: What early adult experiences were important to your intellectual development?**

Youniss: Intellectually? Well, I would say --

**Arnett: College, I guess.**

Youniss: Yes, college. Well, maybe -- but also, I remember the first course I had in social science was in high school, and an interesting priest at the time was interested in social issues, and the Apartheid had just started in South Africa. And I recall the first term paper I ever did in high school was on Apartheid, and this priest made us read as much as we could about it and then discuss it and write about it, giving me a kind of sensitivity that I think may be the first intellectual thing that I recall.

In college, it would have been my sophomore year, I took a course in experimental psychology. And for whatever reason two of us were selected to be teaching assistants; Marquette did not have a graduate program in those days. And so in my junior and senior year I was an assistant to the experimental psychology course, which meant setting up experiments and grading papers, which I think was probably seminal in getting me into psychology rather than some other field.

**Arnett: So you asked to do that?**

Youniss: Yes. Yes. The other fellow whose name is Allan Nash also got a PhD in psychology right after Marquette.

**Arnett: How did you get interested in child development after those early experiences in experimental psychology?**

Youniss: That's good. Child development, I went to Marquette, had a lot of fun while I was going to school, so I didn't get very high grades except in psychology, and I went to a small place, which at that time was a wonderful school, Hollins College, which had a master's program in psychology. And that was a -- what would you call it? -- a hotbed of behaviorism. It was the last of the learning theory days. It was a one-year master's program that I went through, and believe it or not, during that year at this place we had a series of visitors who would come for a week at a time and lecture with us and talk with us, etc. We had Skinner, Spence, Scriven -- Michael Scriven, the philosopher of science -- and several people whose names I'm blocking on now, but people that obviously turned your head and made you think, this is serious business that you're in.

The group of the young psychologists that were there, there were five of them at the time, all were high class researchers, very serious, they had no interest in developmental at all. But I did work for a man named Allen Calvin, currently the President of Pacific Graduate School of Psychology, and the one experiment that I recall working on during that year was the rearing of beagle puppies. And we were following the work of Scott in those days, I believe his name was John Paul Scott, and the idea there was to check out critical periods in the puppies.

**Arnett: Critical periods for intellectual development?**

Youniss: No, for social development.

**Arnett: Social development.**

Youniss: Yes, so they would -- it wasn't imprinting, I really don't recall the exact thing in those days, but it was becoming socially adapted to one another. So I participated in that experiment, I was kind of like the major runner of the dogs in those days. That got my first interest in developmental, first thing that I ever thought of was developmental process actually.

Then I came to Catholic University to finish for my PhD, actually I had been accepted at the University of Minnesota, but visited Catholic University where my brother -- I had an older brother who was on the faculty at Catholic University at the time, and --

**Arnett: Oh, really? Teaching what?**

Youniss: He was teaching clinical psychology.

**Arnett: Good. And this was Dick?**

Youniss: My brother Richard. And I met a young fellow who had just started, Richard Wunderlich, who had just got his degree at Johns Hopkins. And he was intrigued with -- again, it was a developmental issue, it was the rearing of monkeys, and had applied for a NIH grant, and convinced me that if I would come to Catholic University I could run this monkey study. These are rhesus monkeys. So I didn't go to Minnesota, I came to Washington, which I must say was partly because I was intrigued with the city. My wife and I -- I was married, we thought Washington was a great place, we came here --

**Arnett: What year was this?**

Youniss: This was 1960. I came to Washington, D.C. in September of 1960. John F. Kennedy was elected President in November of that year. Somewhere between September and December, roughly, I switched from monkeys to children because I met Hans Furth who became my mentor, and then later colleague, and got me interested in developmental psychology.

**Arnett: What was it about your relationship with him that caused you to change your interests?**

Youniss: Well, Hans Furth was a genuine character; he was an interesting fellow who was a Holocaust survivor. He would never have used the term. I know he would never have used the term. He, as a teenager, escaped Austria and had led a complicated life, which included becoming a Catholic and even becoming a Catholic monk for a while, worked his way in the United States, became a psychologist, and started as a PhD when he was 38 years old and was intrigued with one idea. His idea was that he was going to pin down the answer to the question of whether language was essential for thinking. And he did this by way of studying deaf children. And my introduction to this work was meeting Hans in the hall one day, he didn't know me, but said he needed someone desperately to go with him to the School for the Deaf in New York State. And I said, "What for? Why would you ever want to go to the School for the Deaf?" And he explained to me what his work was, and it sounded interesting to me. So I told my wife I was going away for the weekend and we went away for the weekend and probably saw about two dozen deaf children on some kind of a non-verbal test, and I was kind of hooked with this issue.

**Arnett: You found that human beings were much more interesting than --**

Youniss: More interesting than monkeys and dogs, absolutely.

**Arnett: Working way up the evolutionary --**

Youniss: Yes, I am.

**Arnett: Were there any political and social events that influenced your teaching and writing, either then or since?**

Youniss: Well, political/social are hard to say. The first would have been maybe to work with the deaf, which probably doesn't sound very political, but part of the work was related to changing the focus on deaf education. So, just briefly let me describe what deaf education was like or deafness was like in those days. Today when you see a deaf child, you're more or less seeing a child who has been taught from a young age to sign with his parents or her parents. In those days, the rule was that no deaf child should ever sign or be signed to, and so a speech pathologist who might be the first person that you would contact as a parent when you thought your child might be deaf or something was wrong with your child, would inform you that you had a choice if you wanted your child to speak and to be treated like a normal person, you would have to never sign or gesture, but only speak to. And so we thought this was not only wrong from the point of view of the child, from a developmental perspective it made no sense in terms of forming a parent-child relationship. It had terrible implications for education. For example, in those days before mainstreaming, deaf children were reared primarily in schools for the deaf, so at age five or so they were actually sent to a school for the deaf, or a residential place where they lived. And so when you went to the school and you went to the classroom you would see bored kids who didn't know what was going on, who would be screamed at through a microphone and have to scream back or mouth back sounds that they really didn't understand. And then you saw those same kids a half an hour later on the playground signing like mad and being normal kids, playing games, having fun, smiling and joking, whatever, so the disparity was very clear to us and one of our purposes early on in the work was to try to change and reform deaf education. And I don't want to take any credit for it; Hans Furth really deserves the credit. And Hans, I think, is one of the seminal people in the United States for having shifted the focus of deaf education around, and altering

the concept of who deaf people were, they were just simply normal people without the language function, the oral language.

**Arnett: Right.**

Youniss: So if that's a political event, I don't know. The next, if this is a political event, which was significant during the late '60s, Washington was a hotbed for political activism, as everybody remembers, so I spent many Saturdays downtown at rallies with faulty armbands on my arm. In those days it was requested that faculty from various universities in town would go downtown and try to diffuse any difficulties that were going on, and I was young enough and interested enough in these various rallies to participate. So a typical Saturday it would not be uncommon for 150,000 students to congregate in Washington. Many of them stayed at Catholic University because for, I think it was for two dollars, you could sleep in the gym and take a shower and at least be clean for one night and warm, whatever it might be. So I did that during the '60s quite a bit.

**Arnett: Were these anti-war protests?**

Youniss: Quite a bit. Quite a bit. But they were protesting many things. Truly after '68 the war of protest was very strong, but Nixon's presidency generated all kinds of objects for protest, and so this was an interesting thing. However, I had some sense of burnout, or whatever it might be, and had an opportunity to go on sabbatical in 1971, and did, and chose to go to Central America with my family. I had four children at the time, and my wife and I spent the year in Central America. And when I came back that experience had reformed my thinking. That was a serious political event.

**Arnett: In what way?**

Youniss: Well, prior to that time my work with the deaf was focused primarily on intellectual development because we could pin that down. The issue was, could deaf children think, and did they have an intellect without the language function? We refocused on intelligence, but it was hard to measure. This led us to investigations into what kind of theory would work, and so we discovered Piaget's theory. It was at the time the only theory that based knowledge, intelligence on action not on language, and would theoretically allow deaf children to be normal, which is what we discovered that they were. Our focus was on intellectual development, and then also on Piaget's theory. We had considered ourselves not only interested in Piaget, but advocates of the position. This probably in retrospect seems odd, but at the time you have to remember there was not much of a cognitive psychology in the United States. You had generations, literally generations of behavioristic thinking where you could not use the word 'thinking' or 'image' or 'language' in your writings, so people were desperate for theories of cognition, Piaget seemed like a plausible alternative to us, so we did that. So prior to going on sabbatical in Central America that was my interest, and, in fact, I had an NIH grant, special fellowship to study Costa Rican deaf children as well as children in Costa Rica who would have been not schooled beyond the couple elementary years, so I was using Piaget as that framework. But when I came back it was clear to me that something had to be done in terms of social development, so in that regard it was a political act.

**Arnett: That would be done with your social development with your research on the deaf children --?**

Youniss: On deaf children or in general.

**Arnett: -- or just general? I see.**

Youniss: It even expanded even beyond deaf children.

**Arnett: I see. So that drew your interest more for social development?**

Youniss: Absolutely. So I came back and that's what I worked on.

**Arnett: Well, you're very well known for your research on community service, and, of course, that's a kind of political area you might say. Was there anything political or any political or social events that led you to that interest? Or did that just --?**

Youniss: It wasn't chance. It wasn't chance. That came a couple decades later. Well, no, about 15 years later or so. That came about because I was interested in morality, which is part of my political interest, I think. I was working with Miranda Yates, who was a marvelous student at the time, more a colleague than a student. And Miranda and I did not want to study morality in terms of theory, that is, people's theories about morality. We didn't want to look at kids' responses to dilemmas, so we were trying to find real action, real actions that were moral in nature that would stimulate moral thinking. And by process of elimination we came to the idea that community service could be such an act, or it could be an act that would stimulate moral thinking. Does that make sense to you?

**Arnett: Very much. Would you characterize the development of your ideas as evolving in a rather straightforward fashion or in a way that involved sharp turns in theoretical research styling? I really think that's a question that should probably go later, but why don't you address it now?**

Youniss: Okay.

**Arnett: We'll probably flesh it out as we go along.**

Youniss: Well, there's no straight line whatsoever. There's probably continuity, but no straight line, and I could think of several things. The first would have been that sabbatical in Central America, which was radicalizing, I mean, so much so that when my wife and I came back to the United States we really felt uneasy, as many people do after a year in a unusual country, but we couldn't watch television, we cancelled our newspaper, we gave up at least half of the relationships we had with friends, life just simply couldn't be the same, and we saw things differently. That really altered my thinking.

**Arnett: Was it because of the depths of the poverty you saw, or just because it was so much different than --?**

Youniss: Oh, I would say poverty was part of it, but also the clear political implications of where Central America stood historically. For example, we were more or less adopted by an American Admiral who had retired in Costa Rica, and I was astounded to find out that he was actually loaning money to the Central Bank of Costa Rica, simply because there was no capital being invested in such a country and there was no way to get capital in such a country. And this -- I couldn't quite square what our government's policy, which at the time was favorable to Latin America, if you recall Kennedy's Organization of American States point of view, etc., but anyway that would have been part of it, the poverty, the lack of an investment policy.

At the time I was also influenced by a project. I spent a couple weeks in Guatemala as Robert Kline was doing a study down there for NIH on nutrition and early childhood development of Guatemalan children. These were really poor children in rural areas. And when one saw these children you had to ask the question of, "What was the relationship between psychological development and political economic decision-making by people who weren't even there," -- scope. This may sound naïve to you, but remember I was a young guy trying to understand what the world was about, so these were very radicalizing events. That would have been one event that turned my thinking.

Now just as an anecdote, and may be interesting, I came back in 1972, and in 1974 I was invited to participate in then what I thought was a very important symbolic event, which was the Minnesota Symposium on Child Development, and I was given an invitation along with Tom Trabasso. Tom Trabasso and I had appeared at several meetings prior to that time in the '70s. Well, anyways,



Trabasso and I were put on the symposia; he was an exponent of the new cognitivism information processing, I was the Piaget proponent of transitivity, and then we would argue a little bit. And when I was given the invitation to appear in the Minnesota Symposium, I noticed Trabasso was also going to be at the same symposium. There were five of us, he was -- So I said to myself, "I am not going to do this again," and apparently he said the same thing, so I shifted my orientation. I had a year to do it, and I shifted my orientation explicitly to social development and gave a talk, my very first public talk on friendship and the importance of friendship using Piaget's theory at the time, so I had totally deviated from the script.

**Arnett: So why was that? Why did you make that turn --?**

Youniss: Because, again, it had to do with my disenchantment with just the cognitive focus on life.

**Arnett: I see.**

Youniss: But also, it probably showed some kind of upset with the field for its embattlement. At the time I always thought that our goal should have been to try to figure out what would have been a reasonable approach to cognition rather than to fight one another.

**Arnett: So the Piagetians and the information practicing people were at odds?**

Youniss: They were pitted against one another, and I always thought that was kind of unusual and an unnecessary waste of a lot of energy that could have been put into more productive things. Anyway, that would have been another turn.

Perhaps two other turns that come to mind immediately, one was in 1973, having just returned from this Central American tour, Boystown from Nebraska was about to give a grant to Catholic University and to Stanford to develop something in the area of youth development, research centers in the area of youth development. And at the time the grant was very loose, it was just normal youth development. So Catholic University used the original funds to hire people from various disciplines who would study youths, sociologists, political scientists, social workers, etc., to come and join in the Center. And talk about a turn, having met these people, that is having to interact with them as colleagues was enough to turn me further away from the strict, narrow bounds of what I saw as psychology in those days.

**Arnett: Was that the beginning of the Life Cycle Institute?**

Youniss: That was the beginning. Boystown Center actually became the Life Cycle Institute, and still goes on. And then the final event, somewhere in the mid '70s, seems to be I can't get away from my Piaget days, I was invited to Germany, which at the time didn't have a developmental psychology to speak of. And the Volkswagen Foundation had a conscious effort underway at the time which was to develop developmental psychology in Germany. So Michael Chandler, who was a Piagetian, and I were invited to spend a week in Berlin giving a series of lectures and leading discussions of perhaps 30 young German scientists who might be interested in development. And that shifted my thinking, which -- that stayed with me for a long time; so many years have been spent going back and forth to Europe, mainly to Germany.

**Arnett: Yes. I hadn't realized your tie to Germany went back that far.**

Youniss: Yes, it does.

**Arnett: And you've maintained that ever since, I mean you've continued to do work --**

Youniss: That's right.

**Arnett:** -- and mentor German scholars ever since.

Youniss: Yes. A young German psychologist, who is now not young and very well known and very important, Rainer Silbereisen at the time had just begun his postdoctoral work and was the fellow who had to escort us around at that first meeting I recall.

**Arnett:** That's interesting. This next question you may have already covered, but I'll ask if there's anything you want to add. What were your primary interests in child development at the beginning of your career?

Youniss: Well, like I said, my original thing had to do with deafness and language and thinking. It then went into the Piaget area, which was how you think of development, and then after that social and now moral and political, so it's been kind of a -- maybe that's like going up the hierarchy, I'm not sure.

**Arnett:** Right. Some evolution there as well.

Youniss: Yes.

**Arnett:** So there were these various -- these other areas in what you did early in your career, and since about 1973-74 you've been in the area of social development?

Youniss: That's right.

**Arnett:** Youth development.

Youniss: Right.

**Arnett:** Since the time you were about 40, 39 --

Youniss: 36.

**Arnett:** 36 or 7?

Youniss: Yes. Something like that.

**Arnett:** All right. What continuities in your work are most significant, which shifts occurred, what events were responsible? Again, I think we've covered some of these things.

Youniss: Well, the continuity would be the epistemology of social construction that at first I wouldn't even pretend to understand the term 'epistemology,' the first five years I was just interested in publishing and ever so glad that I could publish in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, *Child Development*, whatever. But discovering Piaget's idea of construction, which I don't think is very well understood in psychology, was a seminal discovery because it kind of permeates all my work so that, for example, one of the papers, that some people cite still, Bill Damon and I did together was to try to argue that the epistemology, the basic construction process that Piaget talked about between a child interacting with an object and the object interacting with the child is very much like the child interacting with the friend and the friend interacting with the child, that they're really not two different kinds here, you're talking about the same fundamental processes, and that, I think, would be constant throughout my work. So I've always tried to view the individual as a social being, interacting on a social context and constructing reality while reality, or the social context, is constructing the person. That may sound like mumbo-jumbo, but it's very important knowing the kind of psychology I entered which was heavily behavioristic, strict Skinnerian and Hullian kind of psychology.

**Arnett:** Where the environment acts on the person --

Youniss: Precisely.

**Arnett: -- entirely, the direction affects us one way; the environment through the person is at the mercy of.**

Youniss: Yes. Now you know that many behaviorists would argue that that was never really the case, that there always was the constructing individual there. You know, I'll grant them if they want that, but it was not truly on a conscious kind of construction, and there was no such thing as a social construction in the sense of co-construction and cooperative construction, nothing like intersubjectivity or whatever in that system, so I think fundamentally it was different. So part of my life has been spent trying to move away from that, or move away from it in an intelligent manner and not get stuck in that model, in its various forms.

**Arnett: Well, it's interesting to me to hear this because you've been -- your career is long enough that you've been through these different phases, shall we say, of the field, where animal research had its heyday, and so that's what you did and that's what everybody was doing. Then behaviorism had its heyday and that's what everybody did, and you were influenced to go in that direction. Then the Piagetian movement, the cognitive revolution and the awareness of Piaget's ideas, you were one of the first people to recognize the importance of that, although -- and then the later modifications of that and application and other things, that's very interesting to hear because I missed out on some phases of that, and then other things that, of course, have happened since.**

Youniss: Yes, I know. I marvel sometimes at the fortune to have gone through these various phases, that is, to have lived through them. You know, people look at the behavioristic era with a negative tone. It wasn't negative, people thought they were creating a new world; this was their new world. As a young student, being steeped in that was somewhat interesting and all inspiring to be part of this movement, but you could quickly get away from it. If you recall, I shouldn't say, "If you recall," but in 1960, the National Science Foundation had sponsored a project called *Psychology, the Study of the Science*, and Sigmund Koch was the editor. He was a philosopher of science who had been chosen as the editor of this project. And it was supposed to be a project in which psychology, having achieved its scientific base, was going to document theorist-by-theorist what had been achieved since the dawn of behaviorism. The first two volumes, I believe, came out on time in 1960 and '61, and then I think the third one came out maybe in '63; there was supposed to be six planned. And then there was a lull and what happened was dramatic, that somewhere between 1960 and 1965 that paradigm just dissipated. I told you about my one year at Hollins College, for example, Michael Scriven led us through, if I recall correctly, the reading of Skinner's *Verbal Behavior*, which had just been published, and everybody now knows the famous critique of Chomsky, which came out right thereafter, so by the time I --

**Arnett: Skinner had been trying to explain language entirely in terms of behaviors.**

Youniss: Precisely. By the time I had landed in Washington a year later, that was passé. I mean, you -

**Arnett: Chomsky had destroyed the premise.**

Youniss: Right. And that was just part of the dynamics that was going on. So, yes, to have lived through those days was wonderful. And then to -- I mean, it was also a different kind of field back then, it was a small field, so that these were not names when one was not reading about figures, one actually interacted with them.

**Arnett: Right.**

Youniss: The Piaget group, for example, included Kohlberg, Harry Beilin, John Flavell, I mean these were all people who made huge names for themselves in the field, but we all interacted. We used to

meet in the alternate years through SRCD in the early '60s in some location and discuss Piaget's theory and try to understand what it was about and figure it out together, I mean that was an exciting moment to try and -- and I was always the youngster in the group, so I always felt privileged to be included, and it was great to tag along and to try to understand this, you know, what actually was happening, or to go to Clark University and meet Heinz Werner, I mean he was still alive and he was there, or whatever it might be, it was a great experience.

**Arnett: It was a much smaller community in size respect though.**

Youniss: Precisely. Yes, for what it's worth, how small, Robert Sears was the Editor of *Child Development*, *SRCD Monographs* in those days, and he had sent me two manuscripts to review on Piaget's work, and I reviewed them carefully, honestly, whatever the word is, and the next thing I knew is he asked me if I wanted to be the associate editor of the *Child Development Monographs*. I had never met Sears, I knew who he was, of course, but never had met him face to face. He never met me. He didn't know me. He didn't know my pedigree or anything like that, but it was a small field for one could easily do this --

**Arnett: That's a great example.**

Youniss: -- kind of exchange. Yes, it was great.

**Arnett: Please reflect on the strengths and weaknesses (with a question mark) of your research and theoretical contributions, the impact of your work and its current status.**

Youniss: Oh, my!

**Arnett: That's kind of a -- the big question of the whole interview I would say.**

Youniss: Yes. I don't know what the strengths of my work are. I think of my work as surely part of a larger movement. It's always been part of movements. I don't consider myself as a very creative theorist. I take advantage of what I see out there. The strengths would be that, if there was such a thing, is to be open to, and I'm still open to trying to understand what psychology's all about. That may be too big or abstract an answer, but I've been so fortunate to have colleagues in the field who have helped me understand this. I can recall, for example, my sociologist colleagues from the Life Cycle, from the old Boystown days, John McCarthy from Catholic University and John Meyer from Stanford, for example, we spent a year reading in the field of social history back in the early '70s. And I can recall back in those days how social history was new, the idea was to try to recapture the daily life of the ordinary people as they live, let's say in the 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> century, and try to understand what its implications were for our basic concepts about human existence. This played right into the hands of my inquisitive interest in those days, so, for example, you couldn't possibly look at this material, let's say on youth or on mother-child relationships or husband-wife relationships, and not ask the question, "What is the role of social structure, social and economic structure in the formation, the actual constitution of the psychology makeup of these relationships?" I mean infanticide was a very common event throughout most of western history. We're not talking about esoteric cultures here, we're talking about France, Germany, England, and we're not talking about, you know, crude kinds of infanticide, but various forms of infanticide in which various authors have pointed out -- or forms of birth control of whatever they might be. I recall reading Wrigley's work showing that the price of wheat was directly correlated with the number of infant deaths, indicating, implying that the first people not to get fed during hard times were the infants or the young children.

But anyway, if there's a strength, it's in being open to this idea that psychology is a constituted thing, not a constituting thing, although it can become constituting. But if I can just step back for a minute, psychology is an unusual profession. It's huge. It's large. It's so large compared to any other discipline, that it has its own audience, it has its own world, its own language, its own hierarchy, etc., and consequently, psychologists tend to be isolated from the world, the intellectual world at large, and

so a person can go through psychological education, a graduate education and even some years of their career and not know the basic questions that are being asked by your colleagues in other disciplines. It's odd, but that's the way it is because we are so self-contained. So part of my fortune has been to always have these colleagues around from other disciplines who ask me these questions, or want me to be engaged in these questions. So the question of, "Where does psychology fit in the larger picture?" It seems to me I could always fall back on the idea that I didn't know, and therefore I wanted to explore: What are its sociological roots? What are its political roots? What is the makeup of the individual due to economic circumstances, etc., and social history was just one way of getting me in there. But anyway, I think it's a strength in the sense that I'm still open to this and always have been, so my view of psychology's a little bit distinct from many of my colleagues in the field.

**Arnett:** So you were able to bring in perspectives from other disciplines --

Youniss: Yes.

**Arnett:** -- rather than being confined as strictly psychological perspective?

Youniss: Right. And, you know, maybe I'm not. One of my things I know is when I go to Europe people don't know which discipline I belong to. They're not sure whether I'm a sociologist or a psychologist, or what exact kind of social scientist I am, and I've always thought that was a good thing. Part of that probably is due to where I am. I spent my entire -- as opposed to most people and many people, I've been only at one place in my entire work life, which is Catholic University. I mean that doesn't mean I don't travel around to other places, but my official job. And Catholic University is interesting. It was, I think, the third psychological laboratory in the country to be set up. It's either third or fifth, I'm not sure exactly. The department was started by one of its students and it was modeled after Hopkins, and so it's right up there in terms of his history, but in terms of its centrality it's always been on the periphery, it's not a large department. It is Catholic, and psychology has this kind of abhorrence of religion so they're not quite sure what to make of it, so it's been a nice position to be in. It's been kind of a -- that is my own position, I feel like I'm in the field, I'm accepted by the field, but I'm on the periphery, that is, politically I don't have to participate in the goings on of the field if I don't want to, and somewhat tolerated by others, so from that perspective I could, in fact, toy around with these other ideas about -- and I didn't have to follow the party line, if you will, that psychological laws were embedded in biological evolution, etc. And they may be there but none of us know what they are. I've had these fortunate colleagues that have helped me see this: Hans Furth and Bruce Ross, especially.

**Arnett:** What about the question of the impact of your work, this kind of interdisciplinary -- the understanding that you had? Do you feel that you've been able to influence the field with that perspective, or is the more narrow paradigm too entrenched for that, or too dominant for that?

Youniss: Well, I don't know. I don't care too much about the field. I continually find people who I can learn from about this and who claim that they learn from me, so I can say this, that there are more and more people who are interested in this broader position who want to see psychology being integrated with these other disciplines. I really don't know where the field as a whole is going. I think politically the field has to stay somewhat biased towards its psychology orientation, I mean, that's the nature of the profession, but in terms of joining the intellectual world, I identify more with people from several disciplines who think this way. So for me I'm not disappointed that the field as a whole -- I'm happy -- a majority is going in one direction and we're going in another, but I'm happy that there are some people who are going in the direction I think is interesting and worthwhile.

**Arnett:** Is it a little bit frustrating that your way of looking at things is different than what dominates the field? Have you ever felt frustrated by that and annoyed by that? I ask that because I am frustrated and annoyed by that almost every day.

Youniss: I suppose I should be, but I'm not terribly, again, because I find so many people whom I can interact with. You know, just -- these are not names to throw out, but these are people who I have had honest intellectual engagements of various kinds, for example, Klaus Riegel who started the journal *Human Development*. Riegel was clearly interdisciplinary in character. One of his students Jack Meacham was a colleague of mine for a while. Then I met Jim Wertsch, who was a linguist by training, but Jim is a social constructionist, actually a Vygotskian, an interesting one at that, who I interacted with quite closely for several years. Bill Damon who is also kind of in between and neither this nor that, but open to these various things. These are people that I've had the chance to get to know quite well. And then there's a whole group of European colleagues that I worked with who -- I think they're way politically ahead of us in this regard, having lived through two horrendous wars in their very geographical space. Having to confront the reflections of what human life is really about and what whole political re-education can do has kind of grounded them in a way that we can't be grounded, or we're not grounded in in that sense. So by being able to interact with these people, in a sense, I've always had an audience and I've always had colleagues to learn from. So you take perhaps the top schools -- I noticed that sometimes, regularly the *American Psychologist* publishes lists of rankings of schools; they count publications and grant money and all that stuff. Again, being on the periphery, it doesn't make a big difference to me. Surely, having a school with 90 psychologists with lots of grants was going to get you a higher rating somewhere, but I don't define that as where the field is going. It's more like a historical record of where it might have been. The rest of us are moving along here, and I would say that I would be most happy if psychology could catch up with some of the big questions, you know, "Why did modernism, with all the wonder that science produced, get us to this position in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when there's so much crime, so much war, so much unhappiness?" Isn't that a question worth pursuing? Aren't those the questions we ought to be asking, rather than the limited kind of little issues?

**Arnett: I surely think so. What published or unpublished manuscripts best represent your thinking about child development? Which seem most significant and which most wrong-headed? Let's start with the one that best represents your thinking, which presumably would also be the most significant ones.**

Youniss: Well, I suppose my books, the books probably because they are kind of summaries of where you've been. My first book was *Parents and Peers and Social Development*, that's where I tried to argue that there was a thesis embedded in Piaget that was similar to the one embedded in Harry Stack Sullivan about the nature of knowledge as just social, and that the nature of morality was not respect for laws or respect for thinking, but respect for persons. Then that was followed by, a couple years later, a book on adolescent relations, which was an extension of that earlier work but to youth, and that opened me up to a whole new world. Then roughly a decade later came our first book on community service, which was *Community Service and Social Responsibility in Youth*. Those are probably the three markers, at least as I look back at them. There are other books, but those probably are markers of some kind. They were in the midst of that -- a couple articles that I've done on the creation of developmental psychology as a discipline, which I like. I'm not too sure many people have read them. I just shared them recently with one of the younger people that I think is just super, Martin Packer at Duquesne University. I did one I think in 1990. No, I'm not sure of the exact dates, but perhaps the late '80s, early '90s, one with Jim Wertsch on the construction of developmental psychology in the United States and in Russia. When you think about -- when you ask the question, "How did developmental psychology get started?" And you go back, let's say to 1880 in the United States, thereabouts, then look at G. Stanley Hall and then look at what follows after that, you begin to ask the question, "What kind of children were the concern of all these people? Why was this major concern with children?" And what you find out is that the concern was not with the white middle-class Protestant kids, it was with immigrant kids.

**Arnett: Immigrants. Right.**

Youniss: And it was a political concern from the start. Or ask yourself the question, "Why did intelligence testing catch on?" I mean anything could have caught on.

**Arnett: Right.**

Youniss: Why wasn't morality the first thing that psychologists were studying? Why were they so focused on education and intelligence? Well, part of it had to do with the schooling of these immigrant kids and getting them into the culture, etc. So anyway, Wertsch and I looked at that, and then I followed it up with another study, a little more careful study of that era, which was published in a book edited by Celia Fisher, and there I looked more at the Children's Aids Society in New York and the various movements that followed from that, where again, the focus was on religious conversion of these immigrant kids into a Protestant-American thinking. But I think in there somewhere is the history of developmental psychology, which then was picked up in the origins of *Child Development*, SRCD in a very interesting way.

There's a very good paper by Shep White and Alex Siegel on G. Stanley Hall's contribution to psychology and the reaction against it by Watson and Thorndike and others, and it really is lovely in the sense of pointing out that Hall, and the 'roots,' which sometimes he's called by Sears, for example, Hall's called the 'father of developmental psychology.'

**Arnett: That makes some sense. He's involved in the child study movement before he did the stuff on adolescence.**

Youniss: That's right. And Hall was really a creature of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, he was strictly Protestant and really --

**Arnett: Right.**

Youniss: -- and very religious, and mixed religion with patriotism, with racism, with all kinds of interesting things. And in the early '20s, in the 1920s when SRCD started to form under the guidance of Robert Woodworth who was an experimental psychologist at Columbia --

**Arnett: Let's take it from where we left off; you were talking about G. Stanley Hall and that history.**

Youniss: Yes, and Woodworth. Woodworth was the person who was called -- I forgot exactly what it was, something like this -- the National Academy of Sciences. He was going to shepherd the origins of SRCD and he started in the '20s with this. And throughout the formation of SRCD, which took several years, Woodworth consciously tried to exclude out of SRCD the very groups that Hall had included. Perhaps people don't know this, in 1909 and 1910 at Clark in Worcester, Hall had started something like SRCD. This was a meeting of people interested in child development. These would be recreation, school architects, psychologists, social workers, the whole batch. They came to Clark for those two conferences, which Hall published parts of in his seminary, I'm blocking on the name, but in his journal that he was publishing. And this was horrifying to the likes of Watson and Thorndike. And Woodworth who was less, what would you say, less vocal about it, just simply steered this new society, SRCD, away from that so that -- and he cited in a couple of the papers done historically, Harriet Rheingold, who just passed away, and Smutz, the historian from Michigan, they cite this -- Woodworth consciously stated, "We don't want a society that deals with parent education or with ideology, we want a society that deals with science, the science of the child." And in his paper I refer to by White and Siegel --

**Arnett: As if you could possibly do that -- implicitly addressing these other issues about the way things should be --**

Youniss: But in those days --

**Arnett: -- and underlying ideology.**

Youniss: Right. But in those days they thought they could, I guess.

**Arnett: A lot of people still think they can.**

Youniss: And there's a funny thing in the paper by White and Siegel, and it's a statement that was attributed to Thorndike in reviewing Hall's work, and it kind of summarizes it all up. Thorndike's response is, "Too much Jesus, too much masturbation," so --

**Arnett: He's got a point there, especially about the masturbation, there's some pretty weird sections in his adolescence textbook.**

Youniss: So what these guys wanted was a real science, hard nose science that was going to cover the basic laws of human development, that's what they were after. So anyway --

**Arnett: So that paper --**

Youniss: So the paper was kind of fun.

**Arnett: So your work -- those papers are significant, drawing together that history and providing that history to current developmental psychologists.**

Youniss: Yes. What's wrong-headed? I don't know what's wrong-headed. I'm sure a lot of it's wrong-headed. I don't know. Who knows!

**Arnett: Is there anything you've done that you wish you hadn't done, or any period that you spent working on something that you feel now was a dead end? Let me put it that way instead.**

Youniss: Yes. To tell you, my biggest concern is that development's a slow process and I wish I had matured intellectually at a more rapid pace. I mean that the illusion I carry around is that I'm still developing intellectually and that these insights I'm having these days are better than the insights I had previously. And I wish I had had them earlier. I mean, I wish I would have understood this earlier, and I probably wouldn't have wasted so much time doing things that, in retrospect, were not so exciting. But they weren't wrong --

**Arnett: The peripheral studies and the rhesus monkeys --**

Youniss: Whatever. But they were appropriate for the time.

**Arnett: Right.**

Youniss: So in my view it's pretty hard to make a mistake developmentally, that is, you do what's appropriate for the moment. In retrospect, it looks like it wasn't very wise, or the best thing to have done, but at the time it looked good and that was the best judgment that we made at that time.

**Arnett: And you may have learned things from it --**

Youniss: Precisely.

**Arnett: -- shaped your views now, even though those things seemed very far away from --**

Youniss: Right. But I feel like it's been great, I mean, when I think of *Friendship* for example, the first book on friendship in 1980, people probably don't know or think there was hardly any work on friendship done. John Gottman had done a little work on friendship. Bill Hartup had done significant work, but not a lot. There just wasn't a body of literature, and so having done this in 1980, I'm really glad I did it, and now there's a wealth of literature on it. It's great to feel that you were part of this



movement and fit somewhere in it. I mean I'd like to look at it that way rather than what's wrong with it.

**Arnett:** Please reflect on your experiences with the research funding apparatus over the years, comment on your participation in shaping the usage of funding policy implementation, securing support for your own work, etc., whatever is relevant to that.

Youniss: Well --

**Arnett:** This should be interesting.

Youniss: I must say it makes me sad in a way to think of how the field has changed. When I started, I think the second article I ever published was in the *Psych Bulletin*, which, you know, is a tough journal, but back in those days if you were alive and energetic you could publish in the best journals and you could get funded right away. So I was not unfunded. Let's see, my first grant was a predoctoral fellowship; the government was trying to generate psychology back in those days. Then my next -- the day I graduated, got my PhD, I had a grant from (in those days called) the Office of Vocation Rehabilitation, which was part of HHS. This was to continue the work on deafness, the publication of my dissertation in *Child Development*, the journal *Child Development*. My next grant I think I was granted for 10 consecutive years, maybe 12 consecutive years, probably 12 because they were three year things, with NICHD, which was new and was willing to take a risk on a young guy back then; very difficult to get funding from them now. Then, that was in the midst of that, I got my special fellowship to go to South America. I mean it's been a series of -- I mean I can't count the grants; I've just been fortunate. These days it's very difficult to get grants as everybody knows, and I feel for the young people who are every bit as bright as our generation was, but our generation, you know, our generation's called the 'in between generation,' we were not the World War II vets, so we were never the leaders of the field, we were never the big names, and we didn't have the prestige and credibility and power that the World War II vets had when they came back and got their PhD's and took over the field. We were that small generation that was the Depression kids, but we benefited from the path that the older generation laid out, I mean they were the ones that got NSF and NIH and the foundations interested in child development, and they did it, we took advantage of it. And then after us came the baby boomers and that's what we're facing now, with a lot of very bright people but not so many funds available to support them.

**Arnett:** Well, this is really surprising me to hear you say this, because I think of this as a time when there's just a ton of money, I mean NIH couldn't exist when you were a young scholar, and neither did a lot of these other foundations. I was surprised to hear that things were actually much easier.

Youniss: Oh, much easier.

**Arnett:** It sounds like you, I mean certainly you were a promising young scholar, but it sounds like you got the money pretty much for the asking. There were few enough scholars and enough money that everybody could get money pretty easily.

Youniss: Yes.

**Arnett:** But as you said, it's not really true now, I mean there is funding available but people have to fight and scrape for it.

Youniss: Right.

**Arnett:** And invest a lot of time, incidentally, into preparing grant proposals, which it doesn't sound like you had to do either.

Youniss: Well, you had to work at it, but not --

**Arnett: But not a 40 page, single spaced proposal that then had to be submitted, revised and resubmitted three times over two years like the way a lot of these things are now.**

Youniss: There was also a mentoring going on back then, I mean the NIH study sections, they were in existence, let's say NICHD, but I can recall, for example, Irving Sigel who was a generation ahead of me who was on the review panel, telling me how to write a research grant because he thought what I was doing was interesting and important. And so one night at some meeting or another, he spent an evening with me having dinner and explaining to me how to do this, and sure enough I got that grant. I mean it was a great experience, but again the field was smaller, less competitive. If this is, I hope this is correct, '64-'65 perhaps, the meeting of *Child Development*, SRCD was in Santa Monica, California, and from my recollection that almost the whole group met in a couple hotel rooms for the party, for the big party, I mean it didn't take a ballroom, a small hotel in Santa Monica.

**Arnett: That's amazing. That's 30 years after it started; it was still small enough to fit in just a couple of hotel rooms in Santa Monica.**

Youniss: Yes. It would have been --

**Arnett: But now it's hard to find a city that has enough hotel rooms and enough convention space to --**

Youniss: Right. I think in '61 it was held at Penn State, and my first one was '63, which was Minnesota at the University, and then came Santa Monica, I mean these were really tiny little places. And so, the point is, you knew everybody, so you could shake hands with whoever.

**Arnett: Sure.**

Youniss: They got to know you and they came -- and there weren't five competing sessions going on at any one time, there were perhaps two at the most.

**Arnett: Right. So everybody could get it all in.**

Youniss: Exactly. Everybody came. Exactly.

**Arnett: There was more, maybe more of a sense of shared knowledge of the field, whereas now there's so much produced and so many people it's difficult to keep up.**

Youniss: That's right. Wonderful. No, that's great. That's good.

**Arnett: Is that an accurate characterization of --**

Youniss: Yes, I think that's accurate. Yes.

**Arnett: -- and I would draw that from what you're saying.**

Youniss: Right. So again, if you were energetic and you had luck you would have been funded, and that was our career and, you know, it's fortunate. Obviously there's some luck involved.

**Arnett: That's true. In what institutions have you worked? We've sort of already covered that. You've been at Catholic University pretty much your whole professional career, and even as a grad student --**

Youniss: Right.

**Arnett: -- for, you're now in your 40 --?**

Youniss: I came as a grad student. I did my final two years at Catholic University as a grad student.

**Arnett: In 19 --?**

Youniss: Came in '60.

**Arnett: Came in '60, so you're now in your 40<sup>th</sup> year.**

Youniss: 40<sup>th</sup>.

**Arnett: You ought to have some kind of 40-year celebration.**

Youniss: Yes.

**Arnett: A cake at least.**

Youniss: But a lot of it is, a lot of time has been spent at other institutions.

**Arnett: Right. You got some regular sabbaticals and research students.**

Youniss: Sabbaticals and also invited to this and that. It's been fun, you know, and is fun.

**Arnett: Do any of those stand out? You mentioned Costa Rica, do any of your other sabbaticals or visits elsewhere stand out?**

Youniss: Well, Germany. Perhaps my times in Germany. I found the Germans were very important, partly because I have such a respect for what's been done in Germany, that is, it's been a self-conscious effort since 1945 to reshape a country, reshape a political system, reshape thinking, reshape the academic enterprise, and the people that I have been fortunate to know, I've met some wonderful people who are still very active scientists over there. So almost every trip to Germany has been an exciting trip, I've learned something new. You meet new investigators, you find out new issues, methodological issues and theoretical issues, and it may change as Germany has a larger constituency of development. It may change, but at the present time I find it to be very stimulating, has always been. So I get to go maybe every other year, every two years and spend some reasonable amount of time. I had a really wonderful year there in 1992-93. Through the agency of German colleagues, I received a Fellowship from the Humboldt Foundation, a Lifetime Award Research Prize, which gave me a year there where I didn't have any duties, I could just go and study with these colleagues and learn what was going on there, and I did get to about six different universities and spent significant time. And actually that was the fermentation for my work on community service.

**Arnett: Was it?**

Youniss: Very much so.

**Arnett: Why is that?**

Youniss: Oh, partly in thinking about what the needs of youth are, and for example, this may sound odd, but the Nazi Youth Movement, for example, the youth movements within that, the fascist regime. You have to ask yourself the question, "Why were youth captivated by this movement?"

**Arnett: Right.**

Youniss: It fit perfectly with the idea that youth are seeking transcendent meaning, they're seeking to become part of history, to be participants in something that has a deep history, which is, of course, in most cases the German history, however mythological that might be, and at the same time when adopting this history, to at the same time, to look toward the future in some idealistic way. Now in our view it's a distortion, it was a bad --

**Arnett: In their view too.**

Youniss: Right. But nevertheless it was a way about thinking about what youth are doing. In the United States the counterpart to that would be the civil rights movement where people participated in that, taking up the cause of social justice for the Blacks in the south, and again being part of this history of social justice, which has this future, this bright future of racial equality and freedom for the individual and respect for the dignity of the individual. So these two seemingly totally different things, Nazi youth movements and civil rights, are possibly versions of the same thing.

**Arnett: So you decided to look for similar kinds of issues and similar kind of appeal in youth, then?**

Youniss: Right. Exactly.

**Arnett: -- what would be serving that purpose for them?**

Youniss: That's right.

**Arnett: Or what could serve as a purpose for --?**

Youniss: Precisely. Which is service. So yes, I think my trips to Germany. There was also one trip in there to Japan, which was very moving. My wife and I spent three weeks as a -- I was a visiting scholar and went to several universities.

**Arnett: When was that?**

Youniss: In the '90s. Not that long ago, perhaps five years ago. But that was very seminal in also getting me to think about various aspect of development. There's a couple very good books out on Japanese self and identity, and here I don't want to sound too simplistic, but the idea that there's a public and a private self, a self that you can present in public and then one that is different in private, and the implications for this, for example, in nursery school education in Japan -- now the following, if children aren't brought up in the home where the self is kind of a free agent, able to express oneself, express the Japanese mother spoiling their little sons, in the public you have to learn how not to do that, you have to learn a different presentation of yourself in nursery school. And so the Japanese have a totally different kind of nursery school system than we do, which is where the children are encouraged to experience this public self. That would have been just one little thing, but various things, for example, seeing the demographic issues that are in Japan and how similar they are to Europe in terms of recalling that United States literally reconstructed the Japanese political system and the German political system after World War II, and organized them or shaped them into forms that we call the democratic welfare states, that at the time seemed to be the ideal systems. That was fine for the times when one envisioned we're going to have a certain fertility rate in women, a certain projected lifespan of people, certain kind of growth in the economy, continuous growth in the economy, etc., and now we know in the 1990s we can't sustain these kinds of societies and that things are a little bit different.

In Japan it's very evident that Japan is of the G7 countries, is the first one to hit -- Italy and Japan are the first two to hit this barrier where there is only two workers for every person over age 65 who's getting welfare payments or social security payments. There are questions in Japan about what to do about this and what to do about the healthcare system, Medicare, equivalent to Medicare, etc. And here you have a country that's very much depending on the family system to continue it. You have a

real conflict coming. It's got to be a thoughtful issue for those people who want to look at human development and how it's related to political and economic --

**Arnett: Right. Especially someone like you who looks at these larger issues that are more political and social in historical context.**

Youniss: So you really have something coming up here.

**Arnett: Yes. It's going to be -- we don't want to digress too much on that, but some other time, it's going to be quite the collision, I think. Well, what about as a teacher of child development research or scholars, future scholars, scientists, describe your experiences in that way; courses you taught as well as students you supervised in research and so on.**

Youniss: Well, I've been very fortunate. We've had a wealth of wonderful students at Catholic University. Many of these people are first generation graduates of college, so in a sense they're kind of a self-made group, whatever you want to call them, but the students I've had are marvelous. I would say about half of the students, PhD students, are still functioning in the field, doing research at reasonable institutions, good institutions. I've got good relationships with them and I'm very proud of what they've done. I feel like I haven't done very much for them. They've done most of it on their own, they were really great at that -- again, I really want to emphasize that generational thing where they were going to be the first ones to be professionals in their family. They did it and did well. They're very proud of what they've done and they've worked very hard. One of my students just called recently to remind me that he had been out 25 years and to thank me. It was a great experience to have that call and to realize that these guys are doing so well, and that I've been involved. Now I work closely with another former student, Jeff McLellan -- much brighter than I.

About teaching classes, I've got to say, I've always done something on, a course on development, it's becoming harder and harder to do it. I call it theories of development. I haven't taught it for a couple of years precisely because it's so hard to find this core that we talked about before, we kind of shared ideas what we had back in the '60s. I'm not there anymore, so I don't want to produce dysfunctional thinking in students, but when I do this course we start off with the concept of development as a kind of a classic concept and work our way through what's going on today. And I think they've come to realize how diffuse the concept has become.

**Arnett: And how it's changed.**

Youniss: It's changed dramatically. You know, I'm not calling for a return. We're not going to go back, but I would like some kind of a reconstruction of the concept if we could. I think the field could. But if I had the time, I just don't have the time, I'd love to write a book on the recapturing this idea of development, but again, reforming it for the present times.

Another course that I really enjoyed is my course -- I do a course on social history and developmental psychology, the social history of developmental concepts and we cover, again, early childhood and mother-child relations, marital relations, adolescence, the psychology of women, etc. I mean, there's a lot of good books by historians that if you present them to psychology students it does wake them up a little bit. It gets them thinking for the first time, apparently the first time, to see how embedded they are in their own world, that is, the things that they take for granted that they shouldn't be taking for granted, but they should try to understand our social constructions or our political constructions or economic constructions. So that would be the class from which I think I've always gotten the best papers, I mean marvelous papers from the students that are publishable, I mean they're thoughtful pieces ranging on the history of diseases, or treatment of diseases to polio -- I mean it's just marvelous, the social implications of polio.

One more surprise, or one course that has surprised me. A few years ago before Hans Furth died, but he had retired, he had said, "You know we haven't had a course on Piaget here for several years,

would you try to do it?" So I said, "Sure, I'll do a seminar," but really thought nobody would be interested and nobody would care. Well, first of all I had about 15 students sign up that I didn't even know where they came from. Several were not from Catholic University, they were from the consortium here in town that came from the other universities, but anyway, I don't think I ever had a response like that from students. I mean, from perhaps the third class on it was really exciting, I mean people would stand up in class and give testimonials about how this fit their views, you know, they thought this before but they had never been able to articulate it and here was an idea that was really exciting to them. No matter what it was, I mean very elemental things like concept of the object, that was just something that was so exciting for them. So anyway, I did that course one more time and had the same response, so I did it twice in the '90s. I even thought maybe that's the last class I'm going to teach when I retire, I'll do it one more time and see if I get -- but interestingly students have come from the second class also from other universities. Last time I had another large class; I couldn't believe how many I had. It's nothing I'm doing; it's just that what Piaget does for these people. And, of course, I presented in a straight-forward way, our interpretation of the -- 'ours' meaning the way we've done it at the Catholic University, which is a bit different than the normal kind of interpretation of Piaget. But those classes are the ones I enjoyed the most, enjoyed doing the most.

**Arnett: Do you feel any part of your research has been applied research or not? Or does this question not really apply to you?**

Youniss: I don't know, maybe the closest thing is right now this work on community service that I'm doing perhaps has applications of getting youth involved in society, but no, I'm not -- I don't really get that distinction here.

**Arnett: That isn't necessarily a part of your work.**

Youniss: Yes, right. Exactly.

**Arnett: Okay. When did you first join SRCD? We were talking about meetings in the early '60s that you went to.**

Youniss: Yes. I think the first was '63. I probably joined -- I did my PhD in '62 or so, '62-'63, published my dissertation in *Child Development* after that first meeting and then kept -- I think I've been to every *Child Development* meeting since that time.

**Arnett: Have you?**

Youniss: And enjoyed every one of them.

**Arnett: Who were your earliest contacts within this society? How did you know about it, or --?**

Youniss: Well, Hans Furth was very engaged in it. The first one I know that we had a symposium was John Flavell, who already by then had abandoned Piaget in a way, you know, I don't mean to be controversial, but John's version -- I always thought that his book, the '63 book I believe it is, *The Psychology of Jean Piaget* probably was the introduction to Piaget for many American psychologists who wouldn't read Piaget in the original, but read Flavell.

**Arnett: Definitely. Including for me.**

Youniss: Okay. My interpretation of that, and this is not to be critical, but John had a behavioral mind, a behavioristic mind, and John presented Piaget as a behaviorist would. So, for example, the second half of John's book is a research agenda, you know, what is the research, what should be done? And kind of a take-off of what his position is that he put a big emphasis of whether or not conservation could be learned rather than developed.

**Arnett: Rather than happen in maturation.**

Youniss: Precisely. And that kind of question is not even a question within the Piaget framework, it doesn't belong within the Piaget framework because the concept of learning is not applicable in the same sense that meant for a learning theorist. Of course there's going to be an environment, if you're talking about what feedback you get from the environment, obviously it's extremely important, and the kind of feedback you get is extremely important, if it isn't being meshed with your actions then --

So the very first meeting. I was at a symposium with John and I believe Harry Beilin, I'm not too sure who else, but these were well known Piaget scholars in those days. At that first meeting also I met a group that I stayed in touch with for some time, which was a young linguist that had been spawned by Chomsky's group, who were a little bit different than Chomsky since they really studied children. At the time, the two I remember first that I met and most enjoyed were Dan Slobin and Paula Menyuk, who I spent many *Child Developments* with, and who else? I don't know, you could meet, literally meet almost anybody at those first meetings. They were there and friendly and --

**Arnett: Just a small intimate group.**

Youniss: Right. And interactive, always interactive.

**Arnett: Right. Describe the history of your participation in the scientific meetings and publications of the Society.**

Youniss: Okay. Well, I was the Associate Editor of the *Monographs* somewhere in the '70s, probably '72 to '75, or something like that. I don't know, participation in the meetings, I'd go to all the meetings, I've always generated symposia. I've tried to present interesting things at those symposia, developments -- that are supposedly accepted, you know, they've always been a little bit off base. I remember one of my friends, one of my very good friends, always called me the Bob Dylan of SRCD for the kind of odd things that we did, you know, we always tried to get something like, for example, social construction or, when SRCD didn't have youth, put a symposium in on youth. Or in the last couple with the cooperation of Bill Damon and Connie Flanagan we've done a lot of community service and civic development, so I feel like we've done a lot of symposia, always kind of pushing the edge, pushing the envelope a little bit on things that are not ordinarily acceptable, and maybe that's why they were accepted.

**Arnett: Sure.**

Youniss: And the same thing with friendship, we did some other stuff on friendship that other people weren't doing, so it's been kind of fun. So, yes, I've been a participant in my little contribution by way of the *Monographs*, although that was a short period with Sears. When he ended his editorship I dropped out of that, but it's been a great Society for me. I've enjoyed the people and the whole thing.

**Arnett: Have you participated in the governance at all?**

Youniss: No. No, I'm not a political person, and I think that I enjoy my position kind of on the periphery and participated to the degree I wanted to. I'm a little bit, you know, if there's anything -- I don't want to get negative here, the Society's a great society, but I feel it's way too -- it's become way too focused on clinicalizing and clinic issues, and I don't want to get involved in that.

**Arnett: Problems in the -- of development.**

Youniss: That's right. Problems with development, and I don't care for that kind of thing.

**Arnett:** Well, we've already kind of addressed this, including the comment you just made, but what do you believe are the most important changes to occur in SRCD and specifically during your association?

Youniss: Well, most important? I think it's becoming broader in terms of who the constituents are, that is, as psychology remains the ballast, psychologists, traditional psychologists remain the ballast, there are more foreign scholars, there are more sociologists, there are more MDs, there are more people from different disciplines that are coming in. I think that's really been good, it gives the field some breadth and I hope it always stays that way. For example, linguists are -- you don't want to abandoned this or find it to be too psychological. But this is not a critique of psychology mind you, but again, it's this inherent problem we have in our discipline of being so large and creating these issues that become very narrow issues ultimately.

**Arnett:** Right.

Youniss: And we really need this input from these other people.

**Arnett:** All right. Please comment on the history of the field during the years you have participated in it.

Youniss: Oh, my God. The history of --

**Arnett:** The major continuities and discontinuities best related to these. We've covered a lot of this really.

Youniss: Yes. Sure.

**Arnett:** Have your views concerning the importance of various issues changed over the years?

Youniss: Oh, I don't know. You know I don't think of the field that way. I think of how many bright people there are in the field, there are just some wonderful scientists and scholars in the field, and the more that I've seen these people rise to the top the better I like it. So I'm thinking, for example, Bob Cairns, whose work I've admired for years. I've admired Bob as a person for years for various reasons, not just his own work, but how he's nurtured the younger people. For me to see people like Bob maintain strong scientific principles, but also at the same time be opened to new ideas that, I think, is what I see the field offer. That's what I like a lot. When I see that I say I'm in a good field, I have good colleagues.

Clearly, you know, people complain about the field becoming so diverse and so dispersed; there's nothing you can do about that, it's getting larger, psychology has lost its core, we never will again, I think, have a single kind of theory or even a set of theories, we're beyond that, I think. But I don't see that as necessarily bad, I think within this diversity the question is, is there a movement toward really becoming part of the intellectual world? Are we participating in the big and important questions? And for me I think the answer is yes, there is this group within this larger group that is participating, and, you know, maybe I just have a distorted view, but the people I've been working with I think they're dealing with this.

So right now, for example, this past year I've been on two independent groups that have been dealing with the problem of youth in globalization, the question of "How does globalization affect you? From what impact is it having in Africa and India and Asia and wherever?" And we need scholars from these countries, we need American scholars who are willing to address these questions seriously and right away, you're right in the midst of important political intellectual questions. You are not dealing with narrow issues that are published in an article that perhaps five people in the United States have read or can understand, but you're dealing with questions that pertain to everybody, but you're dealing with them in a way that is scientifically solid with scholars whom you can respect. So I mean I don't



like to -- I have no way of knowing where the field is going, or where it's headed or anything like that. But as long as I can see people within it who are headed in what I think are constructive directions, I'm very proud to be a part of that process. Does that make sense?

**Arnett:** Yes, it does. One of the things that you and I have talked about is dominance of quantitative methods and some of the consequences of that, which I see is negative in part, I mean again, you and I have talked about this. It's not that it's negative to quantify things, but the fact that so much is done and it's so much of a wealth as it is reductionist kind of dominance in the methods we use. Is that something that you see is a problem, or do you think that there's enough of the other? You can imply that there's enough of the other kind of thing that's not really a problem. Do you see that as a problem for the field?

**Youniss:** Well, in a way. I don't mean to pass it off quickly, but in a way it keeps people employed. This is the methodology they can use and they do it and it gets them moving along. I think another way to put it, is it getting us anywhere? Are the better or more sophisticated quantitative methods getting us somewhere? For example, now it's structural equation modeling, five years ago it was multiple regression, before that it was analysis of variance and once we tracked everybody backwards over time, but do we understand more about it? Not necessarily. So I think we've learned that methodology, per se, is not the answer; quantitative methods do not give us the answers that we want, we have to know -- everything still depends upon the type of question you're asking. And in my own view, I don't. I think that qualitative methods and quantitative methods are both valuable, both useful, but it all depends on how they're used. Either you can use qualitative methods poorly, just as poorly as you can use the others, it just -- I think the problem is the quantitative methods are deceptive, that is, they look like they've done something for you when they haven't done anything. It's hard to be deceptive with qualitative methods, the weaknesses in them pop up right at you, you can't hide them as easily as you can the others.

**Arnett:** Whereas with quantitative methods you do these structural equation models where it looks like something has happened --

**Youniss:** Right.

**Arnett:** -- whereas the questions that you're addressing are trivial or --

**Youniss:** Precisely.

**Arnett:** -- poorly formulated, then you're just wasting your time.

**Youniss:** Precisely. And I think you don't object. The other thing is when you're asked, when you start getting into the quantitative/qualitative question and then you're asking about putting them into real contexts like schools, "What have we done about helping schools? What have we done about helping teachers or teaching, or educational processes, etc.?" When you think of it that way, I mean, a lot of quantitative methods have dealt with education, we haven't gotten very far with that, and we've gotten almost better stuff out of the ethnographic method.

**Arnett:** Right.

**Youniss:** And I think the proof is in, where is it being used?

**Arnett:** Right.

**Youniss:** To what degree --

**Arnett:** What is it really telling?

Youniss: Exactly.

**Arnett: Which seems to be a question that you've always kept at the forefront, and it's easy for people to lose. And we see people all the time who long ago unfortunately stopped asking the question. That's my opinion. What are your hopes and fears for the future of the field?**

Youniss: Well, I mean, again I try not to look at the whole field, but my hopes are we find the right means to help younger people develop. I fear events that brighter people are going to shy away from this field, I mean they're being drained off into other fields that are more lucrative or -- I've had two discussions in the past week about what it's like to start off in the field. A friend of mine who teaches at a well-known university where it's very expensive to live, said that they can't recruit young people because they can't afford houses there, then he turned around and told me that his daughter who just graduated from Cornell is making a very high salary because she graduated in economic statistics. And when I heard the salary it threw me back because it's a bigger salary than we pay our PhD, our new PhDs, at least on the east coast in the Washington, D.C. area, so now we can project over the long run, "What are we going to do to get these good bright young people into psychology, in to study development?"

**Arnett: They're not going to do it for the money.**

Youniss: I know, but are we going to become like the old fashion -- is university work going to be for the wealthy people, only those who can afford it? How are we going to keep this thing generated? That's one problem. Another issue is the funding issue. How are we going to fund these bright young people all the time? I mean what kind of mechanisms are we going to use? Maybe old guys like me, I'm not that old, but still, I should not be given any funds, and maybe the funds I would be given should be given to younger people or something. I don't really know how to do this, but mechanisms have to be devised to give these young people the kind of support they need.

I think another thing is more group work has to be done rather -- psychology has been way too individualistic. When group work has been done, I'm thinking of, for example, when I started, I was not part of this group, but there was a young bunch that was given money by NIH to study infancy, and they literally spawned the new study on infancy in the 1960s. And this was not an individual thing, although there were individual investigators, they did this as a group, they cooperated, they collaborated or interacted together, and I suppose they competed with one another. I know they competed with one another. But nevertheless, this kind of group efforts I think would be very helpful that if NIH or NSF, or whoever does this would come up with initiatives and then fund 20 young people around the country to collaborate rather than to find this individual investigator and pile tons of money on them.

**Arnett: That's a very interesting idea.**

Youniss: And it's happening. It's happening in -- I think one good example is the Child Care study, which is, I think, a marvelous idea. It's not going to young people, but that's not really relevant in that case, but I mean I think those are my concerns, that we keep this intellectual thing alive by bringing in the best, not just more, but better people and then funding them properly so that they can do the same thing that we were able to do. That would be a really important thing. I think the others will work out. I think that the narrowness of psychology, when it gets in its narrow phase I think will just die out of its own accord. I mean, these people will study, the published journals will still be there, but people won't pay attention to it and it will be ignored. And the things that will be paid attention to are the more interdisciplinary, the broader things that have intellectual weight, so I'm not so worried about that, that will happen in time, I think. But anyway, I'd love to see this field continue to nurture its young in a good way.

**Arnett:** Please tell us something about your personal interests in your family, especially the ways in which they may have had a bearing on your scientific interests and contributions. You have four children, the youngest is 39?

Youniss: 36.

**Arnett:** 36. And then you have eight, soon to be nine, grandchildren, so you should have quite a bit to say about this.

Youniss: Well, one of the nice things, I live in Washington, D.C. and various psychologists and other social scientists have come to Washington to lobby for money or whatever it is they do here, or serve on study sections, so I've had wonderful people stay at our house. And one thing I've always been happy about is people -- while my children were growing up, people were always shocked at how nice my kids were. We did something right insofar as parents have an impact on their children's development. Everybody liked -- adolescence for example, the kids were very close in age and we had four adolescents at one time. I remember when a couple adolescent psychologists, or people who study adolescence have stayed here and couldn't believe that these kids got along and helped make breakfast and did all the things that normal kids do and still were nice kids. So how has that impacted me? Well, surely it's kept me honest about my psychology, I mean I haven't been able to be too abstract, and sometimes I would laugh when I'd go to meetings and people talk about children, and I ask myself the question, "Do these people really know children? Do they have children? Have they interacted with them on a day to day basis to see what's going on?" I've always had the opportunity to interact with my children, they've stayed close, so I've learned a lot from them. I'm learning a lot from grandchildren now. Part of my concern for the field is concern for that next generation too, you know, are we giving them a fair shake? So yes, my family has had a very important role to play. As they grew up it helped me understand development better, not that one studies their children, but they surely are a laboratory that you can't ignore. And now I'm getting the same benefit from grandchildren. While we're having this interview I've got four grandchildren sleeping upstairs at the present time making lots of noise in the background, that we're caring for while the parents are in Mexico. But it's a great experience to watch this and to get a sense of what it's like, so yes, the family influence has been somewhat important.

In terms of bearing on, this may be personal, but I think I would like to see our psychology or our science remain focused on real people, how they live their lives, and not become too abstract. It's our tendency to become very abstract and it's hard to do when you have children around, children in your midst, and that's too -- abstract science is not going to do us very good, it's an illusion and we have a real obligation, I think, particularly today with youth and children who've kind of shut out from society, we have to give them opportunities to develop properly.

**Arnett:** Well, I think that's it.

Youniss: All right. Well, thank you Jeff.