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Upon the Award of my Honorary Doctorate from University of Bucharest

I express my sincere thanks to everyone who has worked to arrange this incredible honor. I wish that I could name each of you individually, but I do not know everyone who made this happen. I know that I owe special thanks to Dr. Dragos Iliescu and Dr. Daniela Dumitru. In reviewing the list of previous recipients of honorary doctorates, I am humbled to be listed among these incredible luminaries.

Before I get into the substance of my remarks, let me mention my special connection to Romania.

This award is particularly meaningful to me because (as some of you may know), I am a daughter of Romania. Once a year or so, some family member would invite everyone over to eat Mamaliga, thus, based solely on the amount of Mamaliga that I consumed as a child, I should be allowed to claim Romanian heritage. In researching my Romanian ancestry, I culled

various records. Although, the dates I have are approximate, my father was born in Yash around 1908 to 1910 and left for American around 1914-1915. I have a copy of his oldest brother's birth certificate, and like all Jews, his birth was labelled illegitimate because the government did not recognize marriages performed by Rabbis, and, even though his father, my grandfather, fought in the Romanian army (I could not figure out what war that was), his military service did not change the fact that he like all Jews was a noncitizen, meaning he could not vote. They were citizens of no country. My father along with his brothers and his parents left Romania to escape the horrific pogroms, and, of course, no one could have imagined a future in which there were massive deaths of Romanian Jews during World War II. He surely would have perished.

It is against this history that this award is particularly meaningful. No one could have guessed that this daughter of Romania would one day be given this amazing honor. I will not pretend that antisemitism no longer exists: In fact acts of antisemitism are at an all-time record high in the United States. But there have been strides to recognize this dark period in history. A 2002 Romanian law criminalized Holocaust denial, and in 2018, the Romanian Parliament criminalized the dissemination of antisemitic ideas and symbols. For this, I am very grateful.

Now, I turn to the body of my response; I want to share with you

### **Some Things I Learned Along the Way**

I have never been to a service like this before, in fact I never heard the word “Laudatio,” so I needed some help. My first thought after learning about this incredible honor was, of course, “What will I wear?”

Fortunately, I get to wear this basic black robe, colorful cape, and stylish square hat accessorized with a gold tassel. With first important question answered, I then turned to the next one—what should I say? After all, I don’t want to make forgettable remarks. So, I did what countless other speakers have done—no I did not copy from the internet, and I did not ask ChatAI for help, although that would have been interesting. I did it the old-fashioned way--I turned to admired colleagues and friends to cull their collective wisdom. Surprisingly, the advice I received was unanimous. As one dear friend, who has given many speeches over a long lifetime advised me: It is important to have strong beginning (well I guess I already blew that) and a solid ending (there’s still hope for that), but the most important thing is to keep them close together. Thus, I prepared my remarks with brevity in mind.

1. The first lesson was learned during my growing-up years. Like most immigrant families, I grew up very poor in a family steeped in Eastern European traditions. The idea that I would attend college was a

nonstarter. My patriarchal father was quick to say that women don't need a college degree to care for babies, and besides where would the money for college come from? But I was a child of America at a time when feminism was just budding, and I was determined to get a higher education, somehow. And I did. I worked very hard and won a full scholarship to the University of Pennsylvania, a top ivy-league school. Although I prefer to be private about personal issues in my life, I believe that it is important to share these events to let people who are currently in similar situations know that they can change the course their projected future. The lesson that I learned from this is that sometimes, even when everything seems stacked against you, you can make it happen. Don't give up easily on a dream. (1) **Right now, is there something you really want, but believe that it can't happen? Well, maybe, just maybe, you can make it happen.**

2. My second lesson is more directly related to academia. In graduate school, all of my research was in visual perception. My dissertation was on the perception of subjective contours also known as illusory contours—contours created by the visual system that did not physically exist. My major advisor studied visual perception, and so did I. I never questioned this—he was a good mentor and I always did the next experiment—whatever followed from the outcome of the

previous one. Then I graduated and got out on my own, and I realized that there are topics in psychology that I really care about—far more than I cared about contour perception. These were topics that captured my imagination and that excited me; ones that I wanted to understand because they had the potential of influencing public policy—actually changing how public policies are crafted. I believed then, and I still do, that the social science research we perform in our laboratories can and should be used to address the many big problems facing our world—hate, hunger, environmental degradation, war, loneliness, and so many more than I could spend my entire time this afternoon naming them. My inspiration for these topics came from unexpected places. In one case, I was supposed to teach an 8 am class and not enough students signed up for it, so at the last minute, I was assigned to assist in a psychology of women class, a topic that I formerly had no interest in. I am a cognitive psychologist—we study how people think, learn, and remember. In my classes in psychology of women and cognitive psychology the topic of sex differences in cognitive abilities kept coming up, and I decided that I wanted to know what was true and what was myth, and thus started a career-long quest that included multiple editions of my textbook *Sex Differences in Cognitive Abilities* and multiple studies and published papers. Why are there fewer women studying physics and some fields of engineering and fewer men in areas such as clinical

psychology and teaching? The way we answer these questions has implications for the ways we raise our children, whether we create affirmative action programs, and so many more.

Another topic that fascinated me grew from a grant that had been received and spent before I started graduate school. At my graduate university, someone had funded a laboratory course in thinking. At the time, that was a completely novel idea. I was fascinated with the idea that we could actually improve how people think with specific types of instruction. What would that instruction look like, how would we know if we were successful, could we really create a better world by improving how well people think? This led to 6 editions of my textbook *Thought and Knowledge: An Introduction to Critical Thinking* the latest edition coauthored with my dear colleague, Dana Dunn, who is here today. (2) **When thinking about research topics, consider what questions you want answers for—what do you care about? Is there a research question you would like to understand better. –Go for it, even if you don’t know much about it!**

3. Not surprisingly, topics that you really want to understand tend to be controversial. Nothing that I learned in graduate school prepared me for the emotional mayhem of being at the center of a major

controversy in our academic discipline. Consider sex differences in cognitive abilities—no matter what I say, which data I present, no matter how cautious I am with my interpretations, you can be sure that I have offended many people. Many people do not like the idea that there are any between-group differences and others are equally certain that the cognitive differences between females and males are large and immutable. Many years ago, I wrote to a professor and explained that I planned to present as much relevant data as I could, stay close to the data in my interpretation, and that I would do this as free of bias as I possible could. His response, “lots of luck with that.” When I look over various reactions to my work in this area, which has spanned many decades, I see clear evidence of confirmation bias on all sides of the issues. It is exceedingly difficult to consider data that do not conform to your pre-existing beliefs. Of course, this bias is clearly seen in political antagonisms, but it occurs everywhere.

Consider the idea that thoughtful interventions designed to teach critical thinking skills in ways that transfer across domains are possible—if you are a strong nativist as concerns human intelligence—this is just not possible. But those of you who will be attending the Critical Thinking Conference, on Thursday will see that it definitely is possible, and we have many well-designed studies that

support this conclusion. (3). **This foray into unpopular research taught me that if you want to make a real contribution with your life's work, you cannot shrink from controversies.** We can help the students whom we mentor to prepare for controversies and not to avoid them despite the unpleasant emotions they evoke. We need our most dedicated and honest researchers to wade into the muddy waters of academic controversies.

4. I began to notice the harshest critics of me and my work. In my work in the area of human intelligence, I often addressed racial differences on IQ and other standardized tests. I guess that by now that should not surprise you, after all I have already said that I champion controversial research. Even if you are not familiar with the questions and perhaps you are not schooled in the topics of race differences in IQ, you can easily imagine that this is a hot topic, in turns of the heat it generates. Anyone who dares to research this topic can surely get burned. My biggest detractors—racist psychologists and racist people from a wide range of disciplines. In my not humble opinion, these people are vile. I am proud that these racist academics and others hate me. The people whose opinions I care about are always supportive. Of course, we do not always agree, if that ever happened it would mean that only one of us was thinking. If no one is critical of your work,



then you have not done anything very interesting or creative or brave.

**(4.) I learned to be as proud of those who criticized me as I was of those who praised me.** Think about the people in your own life who have been critical of your work or some other important decision that you have made or action that you have taken. Are these exactly the people you do not want to be associated with?

5. Whether we are talking about differences in how we approach and interpret research or political philosophies, we learn the most by listening (I mean really listening) to those with whom we disagree. Listening to someone who disagrees with you on some topic that is important to you can be painful, or at least just plain aversive. Do it anyway, because we all have much to learn from people whose views are disparate from our own. Treat those who think differently from you as friends: Friends respectfully listen to each other. They discuss points of disagreement and remain open to different ideas and interpretations of ideas. There is an uneasiness that comes from finding your views and opinion challenged by ones that you don't like or understand, but real learning means taking risks—being able to think about opinions you don't like, being able to speak out for an unpopular cause—being able to say you were wrong and change your mind because of something you learned. I was most proud of my

influence in getting people to talk with others who are different from them, when following a presentation I made on this topic, one of our most conservative economists invited a lesbian feminist English professor to lunch so that they could try to understand each other. (5).

**You cannot understand any complicated issue if you cannot articulate the position on the other side.** I invite everyone who is here today to reach out to someone with whom you disagree and plan to get together for coffee or a meal or some other interaction where you can get to know each other.

6. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, **celebrate the people you love, and along with that—love carefully and often.** No, I don't mean anything lascivious. Love your friends, your family, and the other special people you come across in your life. Humans are social animals and we suffer great pain and even illness, if we do not establish emotional bonds with the other members of our species. Whatever difficulties life has in store for you, they will be easier to bear if you have a friend by your side. You need them to laugh with you when life is at its grimmest and there is nothing to laugh about and to celebrate the good times, too. A friend will think you are a good egg even if you are a little cracked, and there is no greater gift than that that we can give each other. Become friends with at least one professor from a different department and thus reach across

disciplinary boundaries and one staff member and thus reach across campus hierarchies; these academic friendships can help you through the lows and highs of academic life and the life that waits for you beyond the university walls. For those of you lucky enough to have a loving family, hold tight to them even as you move away to become an independent adult. You won't outgrow your need for family.

I hope that you can use some of these lessons that I learned in the course of doing research and in the course of life. Once again, sincere thanks for this great honor.