



Remarks by Lorrie Shepard

Recipient of the **2024 Women in Measurement Leadership Award**

April 11, 2024

I want to offer an enormous thank you to **Women in Measurement**. Especially, I want to acknowledge the racially and ethnically diverse group of women who set out to lift up gender and racial equity in educational measurement leadership. By their very coming together, as exemplary leaders in our field, they embodied this goal. Susan Lyons, Fiona Hinds, Jennifer Dunn, Ellen Forte, Kadriye Ercikan, Jennifer Randall, Ye Tong, Tameka Payton

It is fitting that their idea emerged during Covid -- when we were all reminded of how much our personal and professional lives are entwined – and at a time when the repeated tragedies of black bodies murdered heightened the need to attend more explicitly to issues of racial justice, especially in our field.

It means a great deal to receive this recognition **as a woman** from this **organization of outstanding women** professionals.

Of course, I have stories to tell. For example, when I was applying for graduate school in 1969, the Director of Graduate Studies pointed to my pregnancy and said I should “stay home and take care of my baby.” But I also had exceptional male mentors; especially Gene Glass who recruited me into Research and Evaluation Methodology – when I was denied admission to the PhD program in Counseling – and later Bob Linn. I was born only 13 years after Ruth Bader Ginsburg but was thus the beneficiary of the Civil Rights movement and the beginning of affirmative action efforts. I want to note that this is likely why I was asked to serve in 1978 as the first female editor of the *Journal of Educational Measurement* (JEM), at a very early stage in my career.

Some of you in this room might sometimes feel that you too are granted opportunities that others similarly qualified might not have. This was surely something that I had to give a great deal of thought. I hope that you will do likewise, trust yourself, and push on. I was reasonably sure that the way I had been raised – to zealously **overdo** every task, not to prove myself to others but to meet my own standards and my parents’ expectations – had been instrumental in why I was given this opportunity. It was all of those excessive reviews I had done that kindly editor Dick Jaeger had shared with the Board. So, I poured myself into the work, a habit that has served me well all of these decades since.

The content of my career was shaped by my training in evaluation as well as in measurement. The 1970s saw the beginnings of the field of *program evaluation* in response to the social programs of President Johnson’s Great Society. Evaluation taught me to identify multiple stakeholders and to attend to program critics in addition to checking for intended outcomes.

I was also forced to learn more and more, because I never knew enough about what I was being asked to evaluate. In the late 1970s, for example, to address the “overidentification” of children



as learning disabled, I had to immerse myself in the world of special education placements – including efficacy of treatments, staffing protocols and costs, why this label carried less stigma, as well as myriad and redundant tests being administered. In the 1980s, I was invited into the community of state- and district-level early childhood coordinators trying to resolve the competing demands of some teachers in some schools who wanted extra-year kindergartens for so-called “unready children,” while at the same time some parents were protesting the shame of kindergarten retention. It helped in framing that debate that I was able to point out that some of the items on the *Gesell Readiness Test* came from old IQ tests. Thus, a test was keeping out of school children who most needed to be in school.

In the 1990s I learned from my Literacy and Math Education colleagues about rich instructional tasks and sense-making activities that could inform the development of performance assessments. In the 2000s, I learned from learning scientists the basis for discourse-based instructional practices (why we want to make thinking visible) and the bringing together of cognition, emotion, and identity development.

This entwining of the emotional and the intellectual is, of course, what we are affirming when we acknowledge our sisterhood as Women in Measurement. By the way, in coming together to claim *connection*, we are not carelessly reifying old stereotypes. Rather we are affirming and owning centuries old cultural practices that we value. We invite men to join us as nurturers, at the same time that we shed false and constraining attributions. Some traditions you keep and some you grow out of.

I can't claim that equity is what I set out to do, as Peggy Carr described so eloquently last year. But it is what I learned and became committed to after being immersed, -- especially it comes from what I saw as patterns that repeated when tests were used to deny rather than further opportunity.

I want to end again with gratitude. What a privilege it is to have jobs that can be part of our identity, to be rewarded for doing our work with care and a sense of purpose, that let us use our minds to serve others. This is what I hear in Maya Angelou's “*mission in life, not merely to survive, but to thrive; and do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor, and some style.*” If you don't love your job. Give this some thought. I recommend a 1998 book by my colleague Margaret Eisenhart and Lisa Finkle, called *Women's science: Learning and succeeding from the margins*. Eisenhart and Finkle tell the stories of successful women scientists who eschewed mainstream, white-lab-coat science and instead were attracted to doing science in socially relevant contexts, even if it meant lower status and lower pay.

My final words of advice, to all of us, are that we continue to learn from our critics and – in the world of testing – that we not over sell or over promise.

Many, many thanks.