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Prologue: A Dedication

Dear Mister Rector Magnificus, Dear Madame Dean, dear colleagues, dear friends and family - I am honoured to stand here, in this beautiful space, and share my thoughts with all of you.

Today's lecture is dedicated to my father, John Francis Taylor, who I lost on October 23 2023 at the too young age of 71.

My father was a proud man. His 6 children and his bride were his everything. He believed in the power of gentleman's handshake. He believed in hard work. He believed that the amount in one's bank account never dictated worth. He was a tradesman. He worked with his hands, and his hands showed these years – bruised, beaten, rough. And somehow, his bear-hug embrace was always warm, gentle, and reassuring. He believed in the power of education to open doors, the power of knowledge for change, and believed that being an informed citizen was one's obligation. He devoured newspapers every day and refused to retire. He wanted to work, to contribute, and use his mind.

As a first-generation college student, my acceptance into university was a point of pride for him. He never missed a single graduation or a single academic milestone. Always there in his dorky hat, flannel shirts, or University hoodies – cheering loudly. And he was supposed to be here today. A few weeks before he died, I picked up this custom-made toga. I hadn't planned to show it to him until today, but for some reason, I sent him a photo of me wearing it… feeling like he needed to see me in it. He responded, in his typical dad-style sarcastic fashion, "You look like you fell out of the Middle Ages". I found out later he showed everyone at work that photo and told them he was going to Amsterdam in the spring to hear me speak as a professor. I wish he could be here. This would have been such a moment for him. I miss him, and his physical absence today is palpable. So today, to honour him – to honour the smartest man I have ever known, I choose to dedicate my inaugural lecture to him. Dad: I hope I make you proud.

Where It All Began

I grew up in a lower-income household. Six kids shared two bedrooms. We had one family television with six television channels. We did not have much, but we did have a roof over our heads, food in our belly, and health insurance to cover our falls when one of us tried to channel our inner Superman from the stairs.

If one looked at my social-economic status alone, there is not a single statistical model that would suggest that I would be standing here today delivering my inaugural lecture as Professor of Communication in the Digital Society. Low-income status is consistently associated with poor access to nutrition, healthcare, education, and more. It is associated with poorer school performance; higher stress; and reduced future opportunities. So, how am I here?

I am here because I am not only a product of the socioeconomic status that shaped me; but I'm a product of parents who made me study every single night; who demonstrated tenacity and a strong work ethic; who gave me a library card, a pink bike, and opened the world of books to me. I am the daughter of a man who taught me math by reading the sports pages to me and teaching me (American) football. That same man made me cut coupons out of the local ads and calculate how much money we would save food-shopping. I am the daughter of a woman who made sure – by her very being - that I knew that my gender would never be a hindrance to possibilities.

I was the student of Anthony Matarazzo, a high school physics teacher who shepherded me through a difficult high school space to keep the doors of university open. I am the product of the City of Philadelphia, which offered me a scholarship for talented *first-generation* students in Philadelphia to study at the University of Pennsylvania. And I was fortunate to sit in the first row of Professor Amy Jordan's *Children and Media* course as she opened a world to me that I never knew existed. Yes, I grew up in a low-income environment; and yes, our statistical models might say that – on average – that factor should have mattered the most. But I think our models are increasingly getting it wrong. And in the field of communication science, it's becoming evident that these traditional models are being challenged by the rapid evolution and complexity of our digital society. In my view, our models and approaches need to better reflect this complexity, and to do this, means having all stakeholders – not just academics – on board. It means building in translation.

How do I arrive at this suggestion? Allow me to reflect on my research memory lane.

My Research Memory Lane

My early days of research were inspired by a love of children's television. I spent my childhood learning to read from Oscar the Grouch, Big Bird, and Cookie Monster. In fact, as a child, I was convinced these characters lived in the television – and as I sat in Amy Jordan's class – those characters came back to life for me in a new way. I suddenly realized the art and science behind my favourite show. The elegant dance between entertainment and education inspired me. I learned the so-called *Children's Television Workshop* approach where content creators and educators sat at the same table to identify what to create, why to create it, and how to create it, and then took it a step further and tested their ideas during and after production to see if it worked (Fisch & Truglio, 2001) ... and as I learned it, I became more inspired by the intersection between science and practice.

And so, I decided to pursue this route in graduate school - with the goal to find a position at a children's media company after my PhD. That's right, I never intended to end up in academia or on this stage. I loved the idea of creating a language-lesson via muppets or thinking of how Dora the Explorer could use her adventures to teach children problem-solving skills. And I jumped in with both feet. During my graduate studies, I took research positions with major children's media companies - working with teams to reflect on how to create effective educational television. In this space of media effects, I studied what features of educational television could lead to the greatest learning gains. I worked with American programmes such as *Dora the Explorer, Pinky Dinky Doo, Between the Lions* and more – studying whether putting print on-screen could support language learning (it does!); whether varied repetition of content in a show could support learning this content (also yes!); whether a character breaking the fourth wall could encourage young viewer's engagement with educational content (yes again!); and whether television shows could teach children health skills, story understanding, inclusion, and diversity (Linebarger & Piotrowski, 2008, 2009; Piotrowski, 2014b, 2014a, 2018; Piotrowski et al., 2009). Here too, with the right features, media was a winner. It was exciting. I used science to predict what media features might enhance effects, talked directly with developers to build this into the content, and then studied if it worked. This was what my research methods professor, Bob Hornik, would call translation (Hornik, 2003)**.**

It felt like my dream career was just a few steps away. So it was quite the shock when an executive vice president of one of these companies (who is now a dear friend of mine) said to me, "look, we'd love to have you but it's better for us if you stay in science – we need to have scientists like you *who understand* us to give us support and an unbiased check on how we are doing".

To be honest, at that moment, that message was difficult to hear. At this point, I had been teaching for several years during my graduate studies – and loved it. I was hoping to find an industry position where I could still give guest lectures at the local University. This was changing my plan, entirely. Could I find an

academic position that would also allow me to maintain a close connection between research and practice? That seemed far less likely.

Enter my postdoctoral work.

In my postdoctoral period, I joined a team who were tasked with developing a media campaign improve the obesity rates of at-risk youth. Developers were part of the equation from the start. Families too. The challenge was that we had to figure out WHAT the message should be. Through focus group and survey work, using Marty Fishbein's Integrated Model of Behavioural Prediction (Fishbein & Yzer, 2003), we slowly identified the behaviour to focus on – replacing sugary drinks with water.

We also learned that we needed to avoid fear language, which was very common in this space, and instead provide relatable facts and work on building efficacy. Parents needed to feel that they could do this. Working with this information, together with a team of creatives, a media campaign was created for Philadelphia with television, radio, and bus advertisements - providing parents facts about sugary drinks and encouraging them to switch these sugary drinks to water. And, in an exciting turn of events, our local campaign ultimately led to a nationwide campaign and, impressively, our data showed that the campaign was effective in reducing sugary beverage consumption among at-risk youth(Bleakley et al., 2018; Hennessy et al., 2015; Jordan et al., 2012). It was invigorating. I watched communication research inform practice. It was important and meaningful. It was, once again, translation.

But something bothered me.

At this point of my career, as a media effects scholars, I was trained in the "three Cs" approach to studying media effects: know the consumer, know the content, know the context. All three needed to be understood to fully grasp when media effects occurred. And yet, my work was primarily focusing on the content. I was not paying close attention to who was *not* impacted by the message; I was not asking holistically how context shaped situations.

Enter my journey at the University of Amsterdam.

One of the most attracting reasons to venture across the pond with a suitcase and hope was to join a new project, led by Patti Valkenburg, studying how individual differences shaped one's susceptibility to media effects. A new model, proposed by Patti Valkenburg and Jochen Peter, was on the horizon. It was an omnibus model that challenged scholars to think of how individual differences in personality, in development, and in context shaped what media youth choose AND how they were affected by it (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). It was forward thinking, and it gave me the space to put the three Cs idea into practice. And, in that 5-year period of our research, we learned *so* much. In my writing and in my practice, I moved from statistically controlling individual differences – in other words, holding all the uniqueness of people constant - to trying to understand how unique differences in young people shaped their media experiences.

In particular, I tried to find the so-called dandelion and orchid children. Think of a dandelion in your garden – those hardy flowers that you can step on, that can somehow survive Dutch weather, and still stay strong. Now consider an orchid – the beautiful but oh-so-delicate flowers that require specific conditions to bloom. I was looking for those differences – could I find the children that were hardy enough to thrive regardless of the condition (the dandelions) and the delicate youth (the orchids) that require specific nourishing conditions to bloom (Piotrowski & Valkenburg, 2015). Finding this out could make a meaningful difference in how we support young people. And in many cases, yes, it worked.

For example, together with the team, we studied the impact of media violence on aggression. Up to the point of our work, the field had taken a largely all or nothing stance – yes, there were media violence effects; or no, there were not (e.g., Bushman et al., 2010; Ferguson & Kilburn, 2010). Our work challenged this and showed the messy middle. For example, we showed that teens growing up in high conflict families were the most susceptible media violence (Fikkers et al., 2013). It was these young people that experienced more arousal when consuming violent content, and ultimately increased aggressive tendencies (Fikkers et al., 2016). We found similarly important nuance for youth with ADHD (Nikkelen et al., 2014, 2016, 2016).

But on the other hand, we also saw a lot of null – absolutely zero – effects.

In fact, at some points, it was frustrating. We had a validated measurement and a nuanced theoretical model - and we would find nothing. In fact, in follow-up field study, Karin Fikkers and I published a paper saying we found nothing (Fikkers & Piotrowski, 2019). It was transparent and honest and scientifically relevant. But I felt frustrated. I was closer than ever to the science but stuck.

And the world was becoming increasingly complex by the second. The media space was changing rapidly. Social media was quickly surpassing children's video game use, and it was diversifying even faster. Suddenly apps were a form of media to measure, and owning a smartphone was more common by the second. We were chasing the first adopters of new technologies – kids - trying to figure out what they were doing, and where, and with whom. We were trying to capture precision in a space of chaos.

In a first attempt to ground myself in this chaos, I decided to narrow the playing field. Rather than focus on *all of the* consumer characteristics and *all of the* potential media that young children were using, I opted for another combination – going back to my positive media effects roots and focusing on a new type of media: educational apps. I wanted to know "how do you make <u>an app</u> educational for youth?" Inspired by educational television research, our idea was to use constructive alignment. In other words, measure carefully what children (and their parents need) and then build an app that does just this. And, importantly, make sure the app was usable (Broekman et al., 2016, 2018). And it somewhat worked. We created a very crude vocabulary app designed to teach children the names of forgotten vegetables. Ultimately, and impressively, we were able to teach kids roughly five new words from using an app only one time (Piotrowski & Broekman, 2022). But there were some kinks in the cable.

Unexpectedly, being easier to use did *not* make it easier to learn from. The features we added to make the app easier did not work. We spent quite some time trying to figure out why this was happening. We eventually solicited feedback from a former children's media designer. This designer, in a near minute, highlighted what we did wrong – our "usable" version of the app was not more usable, after all. There was a small snag in our design and, where our scientist eye did not catch it, his designer eye did. It explained the unexpected findings, completely. And when this designer asked me, "why didn't you just ask me to help with the design?", I found myself once again thinking of one word: translation. If I had leaned into practice, if my team and I had leaned into the expertise that practice offers, we could have improved our science.

We were trying to do it all, but we did not have to. In fact, there is simply no way we could do it all. And in today's complex digital society, I am quite certain we cannot do it all.

Getting Our (My) Ducks in a Row
I began my academic journey when the digital world was still rather young, and I have watched as young people have become the first adopters of nearly every new technology – *if they can access it, they will use it*. And while historically every new media form has brought some panic at outset (Valkenburg &

Piotrowski, 2017), the digital society has brought a wave of concerns incomparable to the analogue generation (Piotrowski, 2024). We are dealing with a different beast.

First, there are legitimate concerns of an always-on-always-connected culture. While the analogue world heard us worry about 'screen time' amounts, such an indicator has far less value in a world that's always connected. Instead, we are now asking how we can make sure that young people experience the offline world too. How do we ensure that youth value a disconnected space, too (Valkenburg & Piotrowski, 2017)? What does digital wellbeing look like for them, and how we can help them achieve necessary solitude in a digitally connected world (Vanden Abeele, 2021)?

At the same time, how can we make sure that youth are protected in the digital world – from potential risks such as sexual predators or from filled social media feeds which encourage self-harm, eating disorders, bullying, and suicide (Valkenburg & Piotrowski, 2017)? This is an urgent societal problem. We also need to ask how we can protect young people from ethical and data privacy violations (Mascheroni & Siibak, 2021). We need to raise alarm bells about sharenting – in other words, when parents share photos of their children online (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2020). We need to repeatedly discuss how we can protect young people's image and identity. *Imagine if what you did during your time in university was available online, forever, for all future employers to see*. How can we ensure that youth have a right to a childhood where they can make mistakes and where their legal right to be forgotten is respected by digital developers (Bunn, 2019)?

And as we protect them, there are real questions about ensuring their right to participate is equally supported. The UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child, General Comment 25 (Livingstone, 2021; UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2021), makes clear that every child must be respected, protected, and fulfilled in the digital environment. This latter point is particularly important: we must do more than only protect children – we must ensure that youth are able to participate in this space. They have the right to access accurate digital information; they should be free to express themselves; they should be able to meet and enjoy spending time with their friends online; and they should know how to do this. In other words, they need the knowledge and skills to engage in the digital space – and we must ensure there is a *safe* digital space for them.

We cannot do this alone. The challenges of the digital society are simply too large (Piotrowski, 2024). I anchor my examples with youth, but this holds across the lifespan. University scholars cannot do this alone. Citizens cannot do this alone. Media creators cannot do this alone. Policy makers cannot do this alone. It's all hands-on deck. My starting point is that we cannot solve the challenges and experience the benefits of the digital society without making sure that multiple parties truly listen to one another; understand each other; and together build workable solutions. It's time for the ivory tower of academia to add a makerspace where we can truly learn together.

But how?

A few years ago, I was asked to speak to a Belgian TV company about what science knew about effective educational media for youth. A few of us of were invited from science; a few more from policy; youth were invited; parents too; and the media developers themselves across a range of expertise levels. With such a diverse audience, the day began with an icebreaker. Under each of our chairs were two bags of the Legos– each bag had the same Lego pieces in it. First, we were told to sit with our back to the person next to us. Then, we were given 5 minutes to build a duck. (My duck was awesome).

After our ducks were built, we had to (still with our backs together), describe how to build 'our duck' to the other person using the second bag of Legos. This would seem simple. There were just a few pieces involved, we not making complex art. After this, we had to turn back to one another and see how well

we did. Could we make each other's ducks? The answer: no. We had some close attempts, and some miserable attempts, but nearly no-one was able to identically replicate someone else's duck.

Why?

We did not know how to communicate. We did not know each other. We did not know how the other thought, or what the other understood. We had the same pieces, the same goal, but we got lost in translation. This was an important metaphor for the day, and one that stayed with me. If a solution to understanding the digital society is having everyone at the same table, this *also* requires that we be able to communicate *with* each other – not *at* each other. *We need to be able to build each other's ducks*. We need to be able to do the work of translation.

So, what does this concretely mean for addressing the challenges of the digital society? I offer four points for scholars to consider in their own work.

1. **Plan for boundary crossing**. We tend to use the words "interdisciplinarity", "collaboration", and "dissemination" rather easily. They are buzzwords for research financing. We write them down, we promise it, but how often do we do it? There is so much to learn from each other if we try.

   A few months ago, colleagues and I from different disciplines decided to apply for a grant together. To be efficient, we all took sections and decided to write them separately. The resulting draft was not good. It was awkward, it was forced, like puzzle pieces that we smashed together. And, as we discussed the issues, we all felt tension. Defensive of our ideas; pushing to cling to *our* way. Something had to change. So, we put the lead discipline writers together and said, "work it out - don't stop until you're done". We sat together for almost 9 hours – going over what amounted to about 2 pages of text. Discussing, debating, internalizing. We had to translate each other's fields. But then, as the translation became more fluid, we started to see it. And what followed was a grant proposal that was so integrative you could no longer identify who wrote what. It was a harmonized blend of ideas, of disciplines. Scholars call this process 'boundary crossing'(Akkerman & Bakker, 2011). And while we ultimately did not get that grant, we are now on the road to other opportunities; we appreciate our ideological differences (and similarities) more; we have become more flexible; and we have learned that you need to give time for this dialogue. You need to plan for it, you need to recognize the challenge, and you need prioritize solving it. That's where the beauty can be found.

2. **Meet at the Start Line.** And, as you do this, I argue that you need everyone together *during* the idea generation stage – at the starting line. When you decide to consider a new idea, start together. This means building relationships early. This is not always easy. Investing in partners takes time, and it depends on your personal scholarly journey *when* the right time is. But there are so many ways you can do this. At the University, this might mean attending lectures outside your discipline such as Research Priority Area workshops; invited lectures; and more. Find people who stretch your thinking. And, when it fits your trajectory, consider participating in outside academic spaces – such advisory boards, workgroups, attending a conference outside your expertise. Build your network in unexpected places. I recognize that, in a context where scholars battle work-pressure, this may seem unusual advice. But in my experience, these connections make my work better, not harder.

   And when you are at that starting line of a new idea, talk to your network. Be comfortable being raw, be open. My experience is that collaborative brainstorming makes ideas more resilient; more scalable; more impactful. It helps me see my blind spots. For example, my new project – Project EDGE – *Empowering the Digital Generation* – is in collaboration with Google. In this project, I slowly developed a relationship with Google, and in that time, we have learned to talk with one another. Through these dialogues, I have heard their thoughts about creating age-appropriate spaces for

young people; and they have heard my thoughts about using digital spaces to develop digital skills and knowledge. When an opportunity presented itself to apply for funding related to youth digital spaces, we sat down together from the outset to flesh out an idea that ultimately is *academically independent*, theoretically rich, practically relevant, and implementable. From the start, translation was part of EDGE.

3. **Give space for chaos**. Trained as a quantitative scholar, I am admittedly most comfortable with controlled experiments - altering variables to observe outcomes. And while there is surely a space for this scholarship, I have come to recognize the importance of embracing today's digital mess in my methodological approaches. Take, for instance, the work of one of my doctoral candidates – Danique Heemskerk. Together with an interdisciplinary team, she is aiming to improve teenagers' sleep health, as data has shown it has gotten significantly worse in the past decade as their bedroom smartphone use has increased (Adams et al., 2013; Garrison et al., 2011). Sleep health might sound simple, but it is not. Over the past few years, she has mapped out the dynamics of sleep health using causal loop diagrams (Heemskerk et al., 2024). This is a process whereby she has talked to youth, parents, and practitioners to ask them how they think sleep unfolds. Pooling insights from these voices, she has found an underlying pattern in this messy data and been able to identify key points for change. From this, she has spearheaded the re-development of a youth-centric sleep health program. Early testing of Charge Your Brainzzz 2.0 (*Charge Your Brainzzz*, n.d.) has yielded promising results, and is an excellent example of embracing the chaos of complicated problems.

4. **Cultivate resilience and persistence.** This process is not easy. You will be uncomfortable at times; you will be tired; you will be frustrated with the other party because you will feel unheard, misunderstood, or unseen. It is important that everyone at the table is prepared to encounter obstacles and setbacks. What rules can you set to help cultivate resilience and persistence? For me, I always try to remember the "human" element. We are all just people, trying our very best. Sometimes email communication loses that – pick up the phone or have a coffee together. Connect on a human level, practice empathy. From the get-go, create a space for conversation where you can explain your side and be able to say, "I think we are miscommunicating; can we go back a step?" From the beginning, build in opportunities where people can learn and reflect from each other. Move from agendas that only have updates to agendas with spaces for reflection and learning from each other. And celebrate the small milestones along the way. Don't wait for big final moment – celebrate the small victories of persistence.

Putting These Tips in My Practice (My Scholarly Agenda)
So, what does this precisely mean for me as a researcher and a teacher?

The digital society is going to keep challenging us. While technological innovation will have ebbs and flows, society will need to understand its potential and its risks. As Jochen Peter and colleagues noted recently (Peter et al., 2024), we are moving from a time where our biggest questions are no longer about whether we communicate *via* machines or *with* machines – but we are looking to a space where we may be asking about how machines communicate *with each other*. While sometimes these predictions seem to be a case of life imitating art, these predictions are on the horizon, and we cannot sit idly by. The reactive response that has plagued academia must be complemented with a proactive ideology where we take guesses; we take big leaps; and see where we land.

For my research, this means proactively studying the challenges of the digital society. This includes, for example, working with doctoral candidate Rebecca Wald to understand how emerging technology – namely, virtual assistants like Alexa – are making their footprint in children's homes (Wald, Piotrowski, Araujo, et al., 2023; Wald, Piotrowski, Oosten, et al., 2023). This topic was inspired from discussions

with media developers, who noted that they could not locate any research on virtual assistants in homes. They were right. Presently, we are taking some guesses and looking forward to seeing where we land. Thus far, we know that enjoyment is a key reason for parents to use this technology with their children, and that trust in technology seems to shape whether this tech is at home. Next, we are asking what happens once it is in the house - relying on a combination of survey methodology combined with data donation - with the aim of supporting families when they integrate new technology in their homes.

At the same time, it also involves studying – together with doctoral candidate Liza Keessen - whether we can support solitude in an always-connected space. This topic was inspired by students during the pandemic. As my colleagues and I spoke to our students during the lockdown, we heard how they used digital media to stay connected yet, at the same time, how they used digital media to disconnect and take a break. This line between using the digital space for solitude <u>and</u> to prevent loneliness intrigued us. Can the digital space provide opportunities for the critical solitude young people need for development? We do not know yet, but we are asking these questions right now so that we can better guide young people in this always-connected world (Keessen et al., 2022).

Underlying these questions, however, is a concept that has returned numerous times – digital competence. If I was going to pick my 'bread and butter' area of research, it is this. Digital competence is defined as the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in the digital society. It has – for too long in my opinion – been mis-understood, mis-measured, and yet highly relevant to the digital society. The fact of the matter is "that the digital society is a powerfully beneficial force for *some* individuals in *some contexts*. But these benefits are neither uniform nor equitable"(Piotrowski, 2024). Without the right skills, the pitfalls of the digital society risk becoming its hallmark.

Solving the problem requires translation at numerous societal levels – from working with schools to build this into the curriculum; to providing training to citizens who need it; to creating policies for support; to considering how digital spaces can be made with sensitivity to developing digital competence. Every level. All players. This is precisely a space where translation is needed. We need to know precisely what we mean by digital competence; we need to know precisely what skills and knowledge people have. Only then is it possible to investigate digital diversity: namely, *who* requires support; *what* type of support; and *how* best to offer it.

Through a collaboration with the Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, my team and I have been tackling this. As a first step, together with Dian de Vries and Claes de Vreese – we created the DigIQ®– a tool to assess digital competence. From the first day of its conceptualization, we involved numerous stakeholders in the creation process –sharing our messy ideas, hearing the feedback, asking questions – it was a journey. After nearly 2 years, we released our DigIQ – a tool to measure 9 domains of digital competence The tool measures one's ability to engage with others online; their ability to find information online; their ability to assess if content is 'true' and think critically about what they see and are doing; their ability to create content, to protect themselves and their devices, to problem-solve, to understand AI; to practice digital wellbeing; and to practice sustainable tech skills. The DigIQ works across the lifespan (De Vries et al., 2022), and it starts with the understanding that you can be a superstar in one area and need support in another. It represents the authentic mess of how digital competence is unfolding.

And, thanks to an ongoing connection with many partners, we have developed an online tool where you can test your own DigIQ and immediately receive advice about local resources to help you bolster your skills (Piotrowski et al., n.d.). And the exciting part – I'm happy to formally announce today that this work will be extended. Continuing our rich collaboration with the Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, over the next three years, my team and I (also now welcoming Annemarie van Oosten) will be working with partners across the Netherlands to dynamically monitor digital

competence nationally and to develop an open-access competency insight dashboard to provide all interested parties access to this information. It's exciting and allows us to elevate the concept of digital competence to the (inter)national agenda, providing a critical foundation for future dialogue on thriving in the digital society.

And to complement this work – I am also launching two new projects with colleagues here at the University of Amsterdam to investigate how we can build better digital spaces so that – when you have digital competence – that you apply this competence. The fact is we all need a nudge time-to-time. We can know the information, we can know how to do it, but simply not be motivated to apply it. *I know how to put my laundry away, but I'm usually not motivated to do so … so it sits in a laundry basket. But if I had a nudge – like my mother visiting from the USA – I'll put it away.* Digital competence is the same way – just because we have the skills and knowledge does not mean we will be motivated to apply it (also see Rozendaal & Buijzen, 2023). We sometimes need a nudge, youth especially. And digital spaces can nudge us, if designed to do so. So, in two upcoming projects, collaborating also with external developers, my team and I will be working to understand what makes an effective digital 'nudges'. What helps a young person, for example, apply their knowledge of AI so that the risks of sharing misinformation are less? What can encourage teens to take control of their social media feed so that they see content which is better for their health and well-being?

The work is proactive. It is integrative. It is interdisciplinary. It is messy. And, if we do it right – it has the real potential to impact the space we all live-in.

But here's the thing: as much as this excites me, as much I hope you feel my energy and passion in studying the digital society, I need take a moment to recognize that the advice I received to stay in academia (and not join the children's media industry) was the right advice for me.

Why?

Because in my heart and soul, I am a teacher first. While an inaugural lecture most often focuses on one's research space, and indeed I have tried to do that, I would be remiss if I did not give space for teaching. The classroom may be *the most powerful example of translation that we have*. In my classrooms – teaching topics such as Emerging Technology or Digital Media Lifestyles – I work to translate to students what they need to know about the digital society: from ethics, privacy, and law to human-centred design, theoretical challenges, and technological solutions to societal challenges. And at the same time, I learn from them. Their questions highlight what I do not know; they give me inspiration for future work; and they help me see what the next generation needs. Same goes for my mentoring work with PhDs – this is authentic translation.

Mentoring and teaching: it's a special part of academia. Yet, as academicians, we often – by our dialogue and by our actions – inadvertently place a priority on research. But the truth is, we are in the business of translating knowledge to the next generation. *That is our calling*. Education is so meaningful that, while the world shut down during the global pandemic, education was one of the critical sectors that had to stay open. And thanks in part to the global Covid 19 pandemic, we now see more recognition for education. I hope that the field continues to make clear that education is not less important than research. *And I'll start*: to every person who contributes to education – whether you mentor, deliver the lectures, train our teachers, or are one of the critical behind-the-scenes staff members that makes education possible – thank you. You are contributing to the one of the most important forms of translation we have.

Concluding Thoughts & Acknowledgements

Academia is complex, impressive, and impactful. And I believe that it best thrives when it is collaborative – when we do the work of translation.

As we look ahead to the challenges on the horizon, it is abundantly clear that we need researchers willing to connect their work to practice *and* to the classroom; we need practitioners willing to inspire and contribute to research *and* to the classroom. We also need students to help researchers and practitioners understand what they need for their future. None of us can do it all, but we all can do something. For me, I'll continue to model translation as I mentor the next generation of scholars; in how I study the digital society; and in how I teach.

And, for certainty, I recognize how lucky I am to sit in a space that allows me to do this.

I am particularly thankful to the Executive Board of the University of Amsterdam and to the Dean of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Science, Professor Agneta Fischer, for the trust they have placed in me as I engage in this work. I am thankful to work in a university that actively supports translation – whether it be via its creation of Research Priority Areas, the founding of the Teaching & Learning Centre network; the building of REC-Impact; or the creation of policies to support researcher's academic integrity while facilitating external collaboration. In that way, I am also quite thankful to be embedded in the Amsterdam School of Communication Research ASCoR - where such work is encouraged; and I'm honoured to serve in our teaching programme, as the director of the Graduate School of Communication, where translation is our starting point.

I am also thankful to sit in numerous spaces that allow me to practice translation, from the Netwerk Mediawijsheid; to the YouTube Kids Advisory Board; to the Management Board of ODISSEI, and more – these spaces provide such important outlets to allow translation to flourish.

And as I reflect on my journey to today - I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge Peter Neijens, Claes de Vreese, Patti Valkenburg, and Jochen Peter for inviting me to join UvA so many years ago, and to Hans Beentjes for his mentoring and guidance. I am also deeply thankful to serve on the Communication Science Management Team with Bas van den Putte, Julia van Weert, Theo Araujo, and Kris de Jong – working with you is a true pleasure.

To my Communication Science colleagues, I count myself lucky every day to work at a department where your faces bring a smile to my face. And to my Teaching & Learning Centre colleagues, thank you for reminding me every day how important education is. To my LOL (Leergang Onderwijskundig Leiderschap)-colleagues, my HFT (Human Factor in New Technologies) sector team, my RPA (Reearch Priority Area) Youth Digitality team, the FMG (Faculteit Maatschappij & Gedrag) support staff crew and more …thank you for the inspiration, support, and laughter. And, while the list is far too long to call out every person specifically (hugs Youth and Media programme group!), I want to take a moment to especially thank Karin Fikkers, Dian de Vries, Amber van der Wal, Sharon Klinkenberg, Nhu Trang, and Sindy Sumter for their friendship, support, and kindness. Thank you for being my persons.

I'm also thankful for the family that I have outside these University walls. For the family I formed while living here – my so-called #Amsterfam – you have enriched my life so much by sharing the true gift of friendship with me. From weekend brunches to evening cocktails, to holiday traditions, and random vent sessions – you have helped me find a home here.

For my American family – my mom, my siblings - Colleen, Michelle, Kevin, Tricia, Shannon, - my nephews and niece Billy, Jack, Gracie, Hank - thank you for your never-ending support, encouragement, love, and laughter. You keep me grounded. And for my dad, you were always my biggest cheerleader. I will forever love you, forever miss you, and will be forever thankful to have learned from you.

And lastly, for my partner, you continue to share and support my academic journey. Thank you for understanding all the moments where I put my energy into my work instead of cooking or unloading the dishwasher; and for understanding the many times that I fell asleep watching a movie – exhausted from another academic idea that I pursued with too much fervour. I cannot promise that will change, but I do promise to always realize that anything good I am comes from the people holding me up – especially you.

As I close today's talk, I can't help but laugh at the irony of my title. An American, working at a Dutch University, speaking about translation. The title was chosen during a marathon training run, as I listened to Taylor Swift. The irony I only recognized later. I kept it because it is who I am. Translation has been part of my academic DNA long before I entered this Dutch-speaking country as an English-speaking American, and it will remain a part of academic DNA. Through translation, I believe we can find our answers and affect change.

I invite you all to consider what route of translation you can adopt. Start small. Pick one route. Give it time, invest in it. It might not be easy, but just wait – difficult roads tend to lead to beautiful destinations, if you have the patience to get there.

Ik heb gezegd.

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