



The Power of Ethical Courage

2022 Distinguished Scholar Lecture

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Thank you. Before I get started, I want to thank everyone for this incredible honor. Since I was a graduate student, ITAA has been the organization that helped grow my career to what it is today. I learned from amazing scholars, worked with others in leadership roles, and built an international network of colleagues and friends. I am humbled to be among those who have come before me as ITAA's distinguished scholars.

Today I want to use the theme of courage to share examples of my own personal courage and how my experiences of courage built a lifetime of research and inspired me to help others to find their own pathways.

From Farm to Fashion

I grew up in Courtland, Kansas, a tiny town established in 1895. Legend says it was likely named after Courtland, Minnesota because the early settlement was mostly Swedes and Norwegians. Even to this day, there are more Lindblads, Lindbergs, Johnsons, Nelsons, and Jensens than any other family names. Indeed, during the holidays, lutfisk is still sold in the grocery stores. The town was built around the merger of the Atchison, Topeka and the Santa Fe railroads. A hub that was important for the transfer of agriculture products from the farms to the city centers. I am a first generation student and even though I was a straight A student, my high school guidance counselor told me I "wasn't college material". Regardless, after I graduated from High school, I headed to Kansas State University, not really knowing what was ahead of me. Campus seemed daunting, some classes were bigger than the population of my entire hometown, and professors had names that were not Swedish in origin. I didn't stay at K-State. I transferred to Fort Hays State University to be closer to the man I was going to marry. I earned my Bachelors in 2.5 years because I was determined to earn my degree before I got married. I remember one semester I took 24 credit hours, ran on the women's track team and worked 20 hours a week at the local fabric shop. A challenging semester that built my compassion for our students who are juggling jobs while they try to earn their degrees.

After thirteen years of marriage, I found myself in divorce proceedings. I packed my meager belongings, my two young sons and moved back to Fort Hays to renew my home ec teaching certificate that I had let

lapse. Let me pause here just a moment to tell you that my sons hate this picture, but it represents their ages of 6 & 7 at the time I was divorced. They grew into fine young men in happy marriages, and have given me three fabulous grandchildren.

During that semester at Fort Hays, the department chair of home ec recognized my potential and encouraged me to go to grad school. Dr. Lyman became a role model as I now scan our students to watch for their potential and encourage them to take a leap into the unknown. Dr. Lyman told me that her mother's house was empty, one block from Oklahoma State's campus and that she wanted me to live in her mother's house for free and start graduate school. That was the beginning of my life as an academic.

A Qualitative Path

It took courage to leave that small Kansas town, courage to get divorced and be a single mom, and courage to start graduate school with no money, no support system and honestly, no idea what graduate school was all about. When I walked into the department office at Oklahoma State, Dr. Lynn Sisler asked what I wanted to major in. I had not even thought about it. At the time, my self-worth was small and my confidence was even smaller. I decided on the spot that I would major in clothing and textiles, mostly based on the fact that I had owned a clothing boutique in Colby, Kansas when I was married. I remember my first assignment as at OSU was a paper on consumer behavior. I'm sure it was all that Dr. Linda Goode could do but keep from laughing, because the paper was less like a graduate paper and more like creative writing paper for high school English class. But Dr. Goode was patient with me and showed me what an academic paper was supposed to be like and I finally got the hang of it.

My master's thesis was a survey to understand rural retailers' planning practices. I had an open-ended question at the end of the survey and received really rich comments from my participants that, to me, were much more enlightening than the results of the survey. It was that project that led me to be committed to qualitative research for the rest of my career. When I went to University of Missouri to start my PhD, I was fortunate to work under Dr. Jean Hamilton, a dedicated qualitative researcher and deep thinker who taught me many ways to approach research questions using a variety of qualitative methods. I took every qual class on campus, mostly from anthropology and journalism. I decided to do a participant observation study for my data collection and received a grant to do a project with eider down that the indigenous people of Canada had collected. This meant that my boys and I were going to move to the Sanikiluaq Islands of the Hudson Bay. But for the first time on this journey, I got huge backlash from my sons and instead we moved to Jamesport, Missouri where I conducted a year-long participant observation study of the Old Order Amish and their business practices. That work built on my master's thesis of rural retailers and resulted in at least fifteen scholarly works and a multitude of invited talks on the Old Order Amish. I still get invited to talk about the Amish after all these years.

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When I think back to this period of my life, I remember needing to spend way too many pages on defending qualitative methods and responding to reviewers who wanted to know what my N was and campus IRB who did not know how to approve participant observation studies. Thankfully, we have come a long way since then and our reviewers are more apt to accept the methods used in qualitative inquiry.

My first job after earning my PhD was at Indiana University. My time at IU and the colleagues and friends I met are priceless. My oldest son, 6'7" tall and a junior in high school was on the Indiana State Basketball Championship team. I'm not sure if you are aware, but they make movies about Indiana High School Basketball. It's kind of a big deal. Adam sat behind two blue chip players and got little play time, even though people told us that he too was good enough to get a college basketball scholarship. Because I was still trying to recover from five years of graduate study as a single mom on a graduate stipend, I wasn't prepared to pay for my boys to go to college. We needed a big scholarship for him. In order to make sure he earned a scholarship, I left IU, moved to San Antonio, Texas where I had the support system from my sister and her family. I became a licensed real estate agent selling raw land in TEXAS Hill country. I sold a piece of property on my first day, then didn't sell anything for three weeks and was fired. This was a shock because I had been working since I was 13 years old and had never been unemployed or fired in my life. I picked up what courage I had left, waited tables to help pay my rent, and started looking for my next academic job.

Doing Meaningful Research

That's when I landed for the first time at University of North Texas. Once again, I started my tenure clock as an assistant professor. What I soon realized was that if I was going to love research, I needed it to be meaningful to me. I needed to do research on a topic that had social impact and helped answer some of our global challenges. When I was an undergrad, before there was much talk about climate change, I took a biology class called, "Can Man Survive." That class stayed with me after all these years. I began exploring the challenges and negative impact of our industry. Then when ITAA had its annual meeting in Cincinnati, I did the pre-conference tour to an apparel recycling company and I was committed to becoming the "rag researcher." At the time, there were only a few ITAA scholars that were doing work in textile recycling, including Drs. Divita, Koch, and Domina. My first work on the topic was published in 1999, with my most significant article, *Digging for Diamonds*, published in 2006. My work in textile recycling and sustainability has resulted in more than 65 scholarly contributions. This work also led to an invitation to serve on the board for the Council of Textile Recycling, be an expert witness on a law suit out of California, and named a Fellow for the Royal Geological Society. What I am particularly pleased about is that since my early work launched in the late 1990s, many ITAA scholars now do important work in sustainability. While I may have been one of the pioneers, you all are

carrying important work in sustainability forward while I have found myself moving on to the next phase of research: Artisanship and the paths that artisans take to the luxury and global markets. This new area of scholarship started with my 2006 Fulbright to India and continues to be informed by my world travels and my twelve years of volunteer work at the annual International Folk Art Market in Santa Fe New Mexico.

Folk Art's Path to Global and Luxury Markets

The Santa Fe International Folk Art Market has launched global success in luxury for several artisans. Take for sample Muhayo from Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Muhayo is the founder of Bibi Hanum, a socially responsible company that provides economic opportunities for women while at the same time preserves her cultural heritage. She partners with master ikat weaver, Rosuljon to create fabulous contemporary designs from the century-old techniques of hand-loomed ikat. Oscar de la Renta has discovered the works of Muhayo and Rosuljon and has become one of their best customers as you will often see him using Ikat in his couture pieces.

Another impressive success is Elhadji's story. Elhadhi, a Taureg nomad from Niger, has become a major force in traditional Taureg jewelry, now found in high-end stores all over the world. As a consummate artist and businessman, his success has resulted in being named a Sultan. His leadership and artistry has resulted in employment of 200 people in his village. He has helped build water wells and a permanent school building, instead of the goat-skin lean-to.

Folk art often ties back to the three legs of sustainability as artisans regularly use reclaimed materials to make their products, build social capital in their communities from proceeds, and negotiate prices that are at living wage or above. Take for example the Multicolores project in Guatemala. For years, the Mayan women did intricate backstrap loom weaving, but in 2011 when commodity cotton prices spiked, the women could not afford the cotton warp yarns for their weaving. With a small grant, each woman was given \$50 to buy t-shirts at the local *pacas*—similar to our Goodwill shops. The twenty original members were taught how to do latch hook rug making, yet were still encouraged to use their traditional icons and symbols in their work.

The rugs were juried into the International Folk Art Market and in two days of sales, they sold out and made more than \$60K. This is significant when you consider that the average annual income for women in Guatemala is \$4500. Multicolores was founded by a team of four women drawn together by the love of textile art and the passion to support women's economic development. Multicolores has now grown from the original 20 Mayan women to a group of 90 artists who earn an income that supports 280 total family members, develops leadership and entrepreneurship skills, and builds community projects such as the new "Health and Well-Being Program" launched in 2019. To date, the women have repurposed

more than 5,000 old t-shirts. The women are earning a living wage from rug sales that help them become the breadwinners of their family, and are able to contribute significantly to social justice initiatives.

My scholarly work in folk art has been a partnership with Mary Littrell and Judy Frater. We have fourteen contributions from this engaging work. But more importantly, for artisans in many remote areas of the world, the access to global markets created by efforts at the International Folk Art Market in Santa Fe has enabled economic and community development including building clean water systems, healthcare and well-being centers, and schools for girls.

New Models of Economics

My newest interest is an exploration of different economic models. This is difficult when I do not have an advanced background in economics. But I have been deeply inspired by the innovative work of Dr. Kate Raworth, an economist from England, who has written extensively on her doughnut model of economics. The doughnut model is based on a vision of what it means for humanity to thrive in today's world. Raworth challenges the traditional models of economics which are based on supply and demand, GDP and expectations of constant growth. I have spent many long hours in coffee shops and at water coolers with my friends from economics who are hard to convince that there might be better models beyond traditional economics that we could consider. Raworth's approach brings in alternative economic theories including ecological, feminist, institutional and behavioral economics. Her model consists of two concentric rings that provide social and planetary boundaries. It recognizes that the economy is embedded within and dependent upon society and the living environment and that we can all be nurtured to be cooperative and caring rather than competitive and individualist. It also notes that we live in a complex world that is best understood from a systems thinking perspective. She calls for what she sees as degenerative economies to be turned into regenerative ones and divisive economics must become distributive. I know this seems idealistic, but with my years of working on sustainability issues of the textile and apparel industry, I have come to embrace Doughnut Economic thinking as a way for us to improve issues of fast fashion, competitive consumption, failing retail businesses, over packaging, and general negative impact that clothing and textile manufacturing and consumption has on our environment. I ask, "How can we move from endless growth to thriving balance? I don't yet offer any solutions, but I can assure you that pondering the issues that Raworth makes as applied to our industry has kept my mind busy for several years now.

Teaching Ethical Courage to our Students

A common comment I hear from my Advancement board, consisting of C-suite executives, is that they want to be more sustainable in their business practices, but they don't know how to do it. They are

relying on their young employees to help them move the needle on sustainable practices for their companies. This is where the Power of Ethical Courage comes in. If, when we teach, we can provide our students with a solid foundation of knowledge and ethics that support people and the planet, then they are better equipped to have ethical courage to stand up to their supervisors and help companies make a difference. I want to share a couple of examples of how industry is already implementing the doughnut principles:

1. Embrace the 21st Century Goal: Aim to meet the needs of all people within the means of the planet
 - a. Patagonia and Eileen Fisher are two companies who have aligned their purpose, governance, and finance goals to contribute to support of the planet. I predict more and more companies will follow.

2. See the big picture: recognize the synergies among households, markets, the state, and ensure that money serves the work rather than drives it.

3. Nurture human nature: promote diversity, participation, collaboration and reciprocity. Strengthen community networks and work in the spirit of trust.
 - a. At the opening reception on Wednesday evening, I was wearing a jumpsuit from the British company, Lucy and Yak. This is a people-focused company that makes conscious clothing and is “Determined to show the world business can and should be done differently.” They have built a community of inspiring and creative young artists and designers to collaborate on designs that represent the Yak spirit.
Or
MUD Jeans. whose mission is circular design that uses only organic and recycled cotton. The founder, Bert van Son started his company after 30 years in the fashion industry where he witnessed life for factory workers, endless demands for material, and constant growth expansion that was ruining our planet. He wanted to do things different and started MUD jeans, an exemplary circular fashion company and one of the world’s first B Corps, Why jeans? Over 1 billion jeans are sold yearly with huge impact on water and toxic chemicals. And, if you noticed, both MUD and Lucy and Yak are Europe based businesses. I believe that the US is lagging on corporate sustainability.

4. Think in systems: Experiment, learn, adapt, evolve, and aim for continuous improvement.
 - a. Toyota Motor North America is located in Dallas and UNT has a strong partnership with them. Their mission is not only to make great cars, but also to work every day to apply and share their know-how in ways that benefit people, the community, and our planet. They use scrum thinking to build on their philosophy of respect for the environment and use collaborative thinking to constantly improve their products.

5. Be Distributive: Open to the spirit of open design and share the value created...giving kudos to all co-creators. Watch out for those who are power tripping, and redistribute to improve equity.
6. Be Regenerative: Aim to work with and within the cycles of the living world: Be a sharer, repairer, regenerator, steward.
 - a. More and more we are seeing fashion entrepreneurs develop sharing economy models (Rent-the-Runway or Threadup) or upcycled products like the company Looptworks who upcycles Southwest Airline's leather salvaged when they reupholstered their seats into leather handbags.
7. Aim to thrive rather than grow: Don't let growth be the only goal. Spread growth out rather than up.
8. Be strategic and practice: Balance openness and integrity, always ask whose voice is left out. Include them.

These companies are unique and are well ahead of the thousands of other companies who are lagging. If we all could commit to building knowledge for our students, based on scientific evidence, they will develop the Power of Ethical Courage and be able to help companies move toward sustainable practices.

My Proclivity toward Qualitative Inquiry

Finally, I want to muster some courage to share an observation I have made in recent years. As I said at the beginning of my talk as a qualitative researcher I have often had to spend significant time explaining WHY qualitative methods were used instead of statistics—to reviewers who obviously know nothing about the qualitative method. Frankly, I believe the methods you are using depends on the questions you are asking or the population you are exploring. Because I have a qualitative mindset, I often seek answers to questions that have not previously been explored. I think you would agree with me that if I had tried to use a survey to gather data on the Old Order Amish, I would have had no data. But a year of participant observation resulted in rich data from Amish teenagers, shopkeepers, health care providers, and church elders. My study allowed me to create informants and lifelong friendships whom I still keep in touch with after all these years. I am one of only a very small handful of researchers who lived among the Amish for an extended period of time. I find it amusing when someone who has visited an Amish community on a tourist stop thinks they fully understand the nuances of Amishness. That simply is not possible. It takes time to delve deep and really understand Amish culture.

Then there is my longtime data collection processes with a multitude of rag dealers in the recycling world. I regularly get phone calls from graduate students from around the world who are doing a project or startup companies seeking my advice on how to start a recycling company. While I no longer do projects on recycling, I have a wealth of contacts that I can always call on to guide me, offer updates, and clarify questions I have. For example, just last week I consulted with a new company in Los Angeles who connected with me because of my contacts in Australia.

And in my work with Folk Art, my Facebook space is loaded with artisan friends from all over the world that I have made over the past twelve years. Through social media, and my annual volunteer work in Santa Fe, I have been able to see the impact that folk art has made on the artists' communities and families. Qualitative methodologies have made my life rich and helped me find answers to my research questions. And as Jean Hamilton always reminded me, you have to gather the data, then "think hard."

An Observation

In my role as dean, with little time to do research any more, I am often struck by young scholars who become competitive with the statistical methods they are using...hoping to land a job by impressing the audience with structural equation modeling or econometrics. They deeply understand their variables, parameters, probabilities and p-values. But when asked "what difference does your research make?" or "how do your results make an impact on the real world," they often stumble in their response. I caution all of us to be able to answer the question, "what difference does my research make?" What difference to companies, what difference to education, what difference to society?"

Boldly Go—A Life of Awe and Wander

The cult classic Star Trek launched on Sept 8th, 1966. It had an enduring impact way beyond the world of television from the 60s when there were only 3 channels to choose from. When it premiered in 1966, it promised to, "Boldly go where no man has gone before." Recently, I have been reading William Shatner's new book, *Boldly Go: Reflections on a Life of Awe and Wonder*. Of course you probably know that Shatner, at age 90, was the oldest human to ever cross the official line into outer space on one of Jeff Bezo's Blue Origin rockets. But did you also know that Shatner, also known as Captain Kirk of Starship Enterprise, was so poor after the Star Trek series that he lost his home and had to live in his pickup truck? And he is a recording artist with 8 albums to his name? As Shatner tells stories in his book that have impacted his 91 years of life, he challenges us to Bigger our minds.

I say we must bigger not only our minds...but we must also:

- Bigger our impact

- Bigger our ethics
- Bigger our knowledge, and
- Bigger our courage.

Before I go, I want to give a shout out to some very important people in my life. I know this exercise can be dangerous, because I will inevitably leave out someone who is very important...but here goes anyway.

To our team in the College of Merchandising, Hospitality and Tourism at UNT. Each of you bring joy to not only my work life, but my personal life. You are an amazing bunch and I am humbled to serve as your dean.

To my former graduate students, for whom I give credit for much of my citations record—Michelle, Katie, and Sanjukta, in particular. Our work together on your graduate projects has had significant impact in a world where citations are valued.

To those of you who have asked me to mentor you as you find your career paths toward administration: Sonali, Young-A, Elena, Byuongho and others. You are truly remarkable people who have a bright future ahead and give me joy as we pondered the possibilities together.

And to all my ITAA colleagues. You know this organization means the world to me. We have bonded in many ways, including through collaborations, committee work, friendships, and shared glasses of wine.

And, to my beloved Jean Hamilton who is watching from above...you are my rock.