



Dear Rector Magnificus, dear Executive Board, dear Board for the Conferral of Doctoral Degrees, dear staff and students of Utrecht University --

I am extremely honored to receive this doctorate from Utrecht University.

This University is one of the leading universities in the world.

I know the tradition of the honorary doctorate at this University goes back to 1936 but reflects the cumulative scholarship of centuries before that year.

One of my mentors in the fields of public health and psychology – Susan Folkman – received an honorary doctorate here in the 1990s.

So I'm honored to join a long inter-generational line of mentored and mentoring scholars, who represent the best of arts, humanities and science in the service of humanity.

I am receiving this doctorate remotely because of the historic occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has affected countries around the world.

It has affected my country of the United States, and my city of New York, particularly severely. COVID-19 has revealed the deep inequities in our society. But these inequities are not limited to the United States, but occur in every country in the world.

In virtually all countries in the world, marginalized children and youth don't have the same chances to thrive as their counterparts.

In my field of education and human development, they benefit from fewer resources in their educational experiences, in child care centers, in schools, in their health and mental health services, and in higher education. Why? This is due to our unfortunate ability as humans to dehumanize others – through racism, discrimination against immigrants; discrimination against gender, religious and sexual minorities.

These inequities magnify the harm wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic on millions of children and youth's futures. Research has an important role to explicate these inequities – but more importantly, pose and evaluate science-based solutions in collaboration with governments and civil society worldwide.

Scholarship at Utrecht University and other universities has a critical role to play in rehumanizing the sectors of education, health and protection that

support the next generation of our societies. The ideas and solutions that come from higher education can ensure that as we come out of the current crises, we do not leave a more inequitable world.

As the great United States civil rights leader John Lewis wrote, "Freedom is not a state; it is an act. It is not some enchanted garden perched high on a distant plateau where we can finally sit down and rest. Freedom is the continuous action we all must take, and each generation must do its part to create an even more fair, more just society."

Let us live up to John Lewis's words and ensure that our learning, research and academic leadership serve these higher purposes now and for decades to come.

Thank you present today and all at Utrecht University from the bottom of my heart for this highest honor of academia.

Professor Hirokazu Yoshikawa