

REMARKS BY SCOTT KEETER AT THE AAPOR ANNUAL CONFERENCE MAY 14, 2016



I am thrilled and humbled to receive this award from AAPOR, my professional home for the past three decades.

AAPOR is and has been a stimulating and nurturing home since I joined in 1986. From my first conference to this one, I have benefited from the personal and professional relationships developed here.

I gravitated to the field out of an intellectual interest in public opinion and electoral behavior, but I stayed and flourished because survey research is a social profession – you can't do it alone. Over the years, my work has involved more than 50 collaborations and coauthors, most of them AAPORites and most of them here in this room tonight.

These collaborators made me a better researcher, taught me social skills and opened doors for me. I wish I had time to mention all of them.

I met Cliff Zukin in 1981 when I joined the faculty at Rutgers. He was directing the Eagleton Poll at the time, and we fell into a friendship and collaboration that led to articles and a book. More important, he showed me how to do survey research. Cliff is the Godfather of polling because he has connected so many people to the profession.

Cliff introduced me to Andy Kohut in the early 1990s at an AAPOR conference and persuaded him to look past his skepticism about academics and give me a shot at consulting work at the Times Mirror Center, as it was known at the time. That led, eventually, to a full time job in 2002. Andy taught me so much – how to listen to people, the importance of simplicity in question wording, how critical it was to maintain neutrality in studying public opinion. We lost Andy way too early, to leukemia. He was a towering giant in the field, and in his final years he became a close friend, and I miss him every day.

At the Pew Research Center I have had the great fortune to have excellent research support and many outstanding colleagues, a place where we work together to do what we do. I'll mention one – Courtney Kennedy joined us in 2004 as an intern out of the University of Michigan enrolling in the Joint Program in Survey Methodology. We were a bit uncertain about taking her... an undergrad might be a lot of work to supervise. Well, not so much. This youngster said we need to call cellphones. Huh? Well, that worked out well. I enjoyed our collaborations while she was with us and after she departed to get her Ph.D. and work with Abt SRBI. In January this year she became my successor as director of survey research at the center.

Here's the most important thing: We work in a noble profession. To study and chronicle the human condition is a very good thing indeed. For most of history ordinary people haven't had any power... leaders had no reason to pay attention. Public opinion research has allowed us to quantify what people feel and think, and that exerts a check on what leaders can claim and do. Whatever role you play in this profession, you are a part of the institution that serves as the picture and voice of the people, so be proud of it.

I am so grateful for this award, and to all of you who helped me along the way. I've been blessed to have great friends and colleagues all along the way. I'd like to offer my final thanks to Rosemary Jann, my wife, a retired English professor but a political junkie, who accepted my absences and supported my obsessions along the way, but never indulged me. Thank you Rosemary.

And thank you to AAPOR – I am grateful for the honor.

Scott Keeter