Episode 110: Susan Shaw

# KL: Katie Linder

# SS: Susan Shaw

# KL: You’re listening to “Research in Action”: episode one hundred and ten.

# [intro music]

# Segment 1:

# KL: Welcome to “Research in Action,” a weekly podcast where you can hear about topics and issues related to research in higher education from experts across a range of disciplines. I’m your host, Dr. Katie Linder, director of research at Oregon State University Ecampus. Along with every episode, we post show notes with links to resources mentioned in the episode, full transcript, and an instructor guide for incorporating the episode into your courses. Visit our website at ecampus.oregonstate.edu/podcast to find all of these resources.

On this episode, I am joined by Dr. Susan Shaw, Professor of Women, Gender, & Sexuality Studies at Oregon State University and the co-PI for OREGON STATE ADVANCE. Susan is the author of *Reflective Faith: A Theological Toolbox for Women* and *God Speaks to Us, Too: Southern Baptist Women on Church, Home, and Society* and the co-author with Mina Carson and Tisa Lewis of *Girls Rock! 50 Years of Women Making Music*. She also serves as the general editor of the 4-volume *Women’s Lives around the World: A Global Encyclopedia*. Susan is the co-author and editor with Janet Lee of a forthcoming new edition of *Gendered Lives, Feminist Visions: Classic and Contemporary Readings in Women and Gender Studies*. She is also the co-author with Grace Ji-Sun Kim of the forthcoming book *Intersectional Theology: An Introductory Guide, Fortress Press*. Susan formerly directed OSU’s School of Language, Culture, and Society, OSU’s Women Studies Program, and OSU’s Difference, Power, & Discrimination Program.

Thanks so much for joining me in the studio today, Susan!

**SS:** I’m glad tobe here!

**KL:** So long time listeners of the show may know that your disciplinary background in women and gender studies is my disciplinary background in women in gender studies, so it’s always fun to bring people into the show to talk about that perspective and I’m really excited to talk with you about some of your work on feminist studies in religion. So, what lead you to study religion through the context of feminist studies?

**SS:**It was actually the other way around, that – that I think that – I started off – I grew up Southern Baptist in the deep south and wanted to go to seminary, because I thought I’d spend my life serving Southern Baptist, and I went thinking I wanted to be a writer working at one of the denominational publishing houses. And I went to seminary in the early 1980’s when Southern Baptists were in the midst of a huge controversy – purportedly over the Bible, but in some of my later work got argued that it was really over women, because you have to remember it was the early 1980’s. We were on the sort of on that tail end of the second wave of the women’s movement. And amounts Southern Baptists, who are very conservative generally on the gender issues, women were beginning to say “if women can be CEOs, and women can be university presidents, and women can be all of these things, why can’t they be pastors?” Now I did not go to seminary to be a pastor. I’m not very good at Pastoral care, that’s not my strong suit so I didn’t want to be a pastor, but I thought I’d work for the denomination. And so after undergrad I went off the Baptist seminary and while I was there this controversy was going on where women were a central feature, and so often the women on campus were told, “You don’t belong here.” Not from the professors, they were all very supportive of women. And I had come out of a fundamentalist church so I had not thought women should pastor or have leadership either, but my first term there I heard a woman preach and she was fantastic and I thought, “Well why not?” And as I stayed there and was part of this controversy, I had my feminist awakening. I think it had always been there, because I remember being very upset with inequities at church for example – like one Wednesday night girls made boxes for missionaries and boys played basketball. Uh, guys could wear jeans to church, but we had to wear dresses. So – and you know, I was growing up in the 60’s and 70’s so I was singing “I Am Woman”, and I was watching Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs. And so all of that came to a head at seminary where I became an avowed feminist, and at that point began to shift my focus a little, so while I was still doing religious studies, um, I was becoming more feminist in my perspective – but I think those two really connected for me, because part of what my faith tradition had taught me is that we’re all equal. That we all deserve and respect, and so for me it was a faith that made feminism really compatible. And so I embraced that. And so I came out teaching religious studies, and so when I first taught I taught things like introduction to the Bible, and Baptist history, and all those sorts of things, but from feminist perspectives. But what I discovered is that conservative Christian colleges are not ready for young feminist teaching feminist things about the Bible and church history, and so I spent an comfortable eight years at a couple of conservative Christian colleges – and in the midst of that realized that the only way for me to move forward was to move into what we call women’s studies at the time, which we now call women gender and sexuality studies. And so when I came to OSU and started teaching here, I was able to bring some of that in and develop courses in feminist theologies, and I have a class now on women in the bible, or feminism in the Bible – and so have been able to blend those things as I teach a lot of the other stuff that you would expect to find in a women gender and sexuality program.

**KL:** Okay so this is a long and winding pathway. I’m curious how this has impacted some of the research questions that you focus on. What are some of the areas that you’ve really chosen for this method or this area of study?

**SS:** So despite having left Southern Baptists in terms of my church, I have not left them academically. I cannot leave them alone as a matter of fact. So one of my books was a series of interviews and focus groups with about 159 Southern Baptist and former Southern Baptist women, was published by the University of Kentucky and it’s called *God Speaks to Us, Too: Southern Baptist Women on Church, Home, and Society.* And so that was a social science research where I had actually just gone and talked to these women about, what does it mean to be Baptist and how does this effect you. Some really interesting things that I heard from this woman – these women across the whole spectrum of very fundamentalist to very progressive. And then my most recent published book was published by one of the Baptist publishing houses that came out of the controversy when more moderate Baptist left Southern Baptist, and it’s uh – it’s called *Reflective Faith: A Theological Toolbox for Women*, and it’s basically teaching people to do feminist biblical criticism, feminist church history, and feminist theology. And so it’s written for a lay audience, it even has a work book that comes along with it - and actually I used some of those exercises in my classes, because they seem to work well with students as well.

**KL:** So I’m curious what leads you into a new area of research, like how are you narrowing into these topics, what draws you to them?

**SS:** I think I have a short academic attention span, and so I’ll start in one area, cause I’ve also written like in rock n’ roll, and involved with and NSF ADVANCE project – and so it’s sort of what draws my attention at the moment, and it’s also what door opens. One of the things that characterizes my career is I say yes when doors open and so that’s, for example, getting involved with the national science foundation – It’s because a door open and I said ‘yes’, even though that’s not a primary area of research. But it is now! So a lot of it is that, a lot of it is, you know, the book on Southern Baptist women was me working through my own stuff. I think sometimes our research is that – it’s, “I got to figure out where I came from, and I got to make sense of this” and in doing that I’m hoping that as other people read that they sort of overhear the conversation I’m having with myself and my participants about these topics. And the reflective faith book came because so many times through the years I’ve had students and people in churches say, “Well why I didn’t know this. Why has nobody ever taught me this?” and I always felt like a theological education is really what everybody should have at a minimum. And so trying to make that accessible and available to lay people was just an important personal project for me. And then I’m working on a new book that we’ll probably come back to later, with Grace Ji-Sun Kim at Earlham School of Religion, where we’re developing a new theological method. I think that came because we just started having these conversations because we wanted to write a book together – “what can we do that hasn’t been done?” and so that’s where that came from.

**KL:** So you mentioned interviews and focus groups as to, kind of methods that you’ve used in this research. What are the other methods you’re using to answer the questions you’re looking at?

**SS:** So the new book that Grace and I are working on that should be out maybe by summer, we’re hoping, is using theological methods - in fact it’s developing a theological method. And so – so theology proceeds from using experience, sacred text, reason, tradition, and uses those to answer these questions of meaning. And so what Grace and I are adding to the mix is the notion of intersectionality, which has been in women gender and sexuality studies a really long time. Theology tends to move a bit more slowly in these areas, and so what Grace and I are trying to do is encourage theologians to put intersectionality at the center of every theological question, so these questions become about issues of identity with instructors of power. So what does it mean when we say ‘God’ in a particular way? What does it mean when we say the church is this particular thing? What are we doing when we say “redemption is this”? Because right now the way all of these things are constructed is generally through the whole mythical norm - so white male, able bodied, relatively economically stable, heterosexual. And so we’re offering a challenge to that by adding these new methods – this new method, and so the book has a series of questions we’ve developed to help people understand; here’s how you actually do what we’re calling intersectional theology.

**KL:** Okay, I’m going to put a pin in that. We’re going to come back, because I want to dig into that a lot more. But I’m curious also, how you’ve seen the field of feminist studies as it relates to religion, or maybe religious studies as it relates to feminism? How have you seen this change over time?

**SS:** So I think that – WGSS is an interesting place to do religion, because there is a whole subset of the discipline that is interested in that. In fact a lot of early work in women gender sexuality studies came out of religious disciplines – theological disciplines specifically, but I think in WGSS there’s also a whole lot of resistance at times, because religion has not always been a friend to women. And so people sometimes ask me, “how could you still be dealing with Baptists and doing Christian theology?” because I think the more public expressions of those faiths has been misogynist. And yet for me and all the folks that do Christian feminist theology, there’s a condition that it doesn’t have to be. That’s not necessarily in its core – it’s not inherent. You know, I know people like Mary Daily have argued that it is, and I appreciate her arguments and find them compelling, but at the end of the day I think, “No. It can be redeemed itself” and so I’ve tried to work on that.

**KL:** Okay. Well these are fascinating discussion that you’re taking part in within your discipline – within multiple disciplines it sounds like. We’re going to take a brief break, when we come back we’ll here a little bit more from Susan. Back in a moment.

As many of you know, I work as the Research Director at Oregon State University E-Campus, which produces the Research in Action Podcast. I’m excited to share with you that E-Campus has been ranked in the top ten in the nation for the fourth straight year by U.S. News & World Report. As leaders in online education, Oregon State provides students worldwide with access to innovative learning experiences to help them advance their careers and improve their lives. You can learn more by visiting ecampus.oregonstate.edu.

# Segment 2:

**KL:** So Susan, you’ve mentioned this idea of creatinga new method, and I think for a lot of us – for me and our listeners, people are thinking, “How do you even do that?” Um, that seems like a big task. It seems like, in some ways I think we think about research design and methods as, “don’t we know what all the methods are already?” or like the basic ones. So I’m wondering if you could talk about kind of the origin story of this method. How did you know that it was needed? How did you identify it?

**SS:** Well it took us a while to acknowledge that’s really what we were doing, because of this notion of, “Wow. What does it mean to acknowledge a new method?” because it’s certainly rooted in the older theological methods. So Grace and I began having conversations about - what do we want to do? Because we had had met, we had clicked, we wanted to write something together. And Grace is a theologian, so she’s written, particularly out of a Korean feminist perspective. In fact, we met because I was using her book, and so she came out to speak on campus. And so we started having these conversations about what’s missing in feminist theology – is sort of where we started, because we both identified as feminist theologians – and so we started thinking, “well we could do this, and we could do this.” At the time I was reading some of the new works on intersectionality that had come out with Vivian May, and Ann Marie Hancock, and Patricia Hill Collins, and Sirma Bilge, and so all of that was sort of in my head anyway, and so I started looking around and realized that no one had yet fully taken intersectionality and applied it to theology as a question. And so you have a lot of people who are doing work where – like womanist theology where they’re looking at intersections of race and gender in particular, and many have nor incorporated sexuality into that, and there’s always of course issues of social class and that. But it was coming out of this sort of womanist framework, which is intersectional, but a very specific kind of intersectionality. But then if you look at dominant theology, most of what’s written, and particularly classic theology, is written as if there is no social location to the writer. And of course feminist theologies, queer theologies, liberation theologies had challenged that, but what you often find is that for example, white feminist don’t write about race that much. I think that’s improved in recent years, but it can still happen. Uh, queer and Trans theologians are not necessarily writing about race. Straight people don’t write about sexuality. And so we were seeing that, and then you go back and read early Latin American liberation theologies – there’s very little gender in that. So what we realized is we looked at all of these liberation theologies is that they need an intersectional lens. And so what we thought we would do is take all of this brilliant work, primarily by black women, that had been done on intersectionality and apply it to theology itself as a discipline. And so we introduce intersectionality, what it is, it’s history in black feminism, how has it developed as its own sort of method within women gender and sexuality studies and other kinds of feminist studies, and then we recognized that because it’s situated in social location that it’s always going to be a narrative method as well. So in part of the book we actually tell our stories side by side, so you can see how my growing up as a white, working class, Southern Baptist, lesbian affected my theology in ways that are similar and yet different from the ways Grace growing up as a Korean, immigrant, Presbyterian, heterosexual woman affected hers in these very different ways. And so we end up writing about how we each came each to our own theologies of suffering, and Grace comes out of the Korean tradition of minjung theologies which focuses on this notion of Han, which is suffering is a result of injustice that has not been addressed. And then I come at it from a position of processed theology, which basically said God works in the world not as coercive power but as this persuasive love, but we arrived at those based on our own experiences of suffering and then found these larger communities. And then from that we moved into, what questions do we need to ask of theology to ensure its intersectional? Again, we really go back to the work of these black feminist to ask these questions of how – how do I pay attention to my own social location and how that affects how I do theology? How do I hear the voices of the people who are very different from me, in ways that don’t dismiss them, and don’t write them off as wrong as theologies can tend to do? How do we hold and mind these tensions? And so what we come to is that borrowing from - Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza who borrowed the phrase from someone else to talk about biblical interpretation as a hermeneutic of indeterminacy. So the idea is (That’s a mouth full!) – Yeah! – I always feel like my students are getting their money’s worth when I teach them these terms. But what that means is when we approach – in her case the biblical text does not define the one right answer, but it’s to find all of these competing narratives that arise from the same text based on the social locations of the reader. And so what we say is we’re developing is a theology of indeterminacy. And so, again we’re not trying to come up with the one right answer about who is God, but we’re trying to hear all these stories because they all add to that understanding of what’s ultimately ineffable, an unknowable. And so we encourage in our questions of theology thinking in these sorts of ways, and then we end up actually thinking about God, for example, and saying what if instead of thinking about God as a singular, coherent, consistent entity, we think about God as a multiplicity? We think about God as the one in whom contradiction and complexity dwell—that that is the characteristic of God, which would line up better with notions of intersectionality. And then we say, “What about the church? What if the church were to become truly intersectional? How would that change what the church does?” And so really for us the method is the series of questions that we’ve developed – rooted into this work of intersectionality by primarily black feminist. Although intersectionality’s grown so there’s certainly work out there by Latinas, and queer folk – so it’s growing and it’s growing, and I think that we’re moving it in a new way into a theological conversation.

**KL:** Okay so, when you think about developing a method, I’m wondering – you’ve kind of developed this series of questions and you’re kind of walking people through this series of steps – to what degree are you trying to put any types of boundaries around this method to say, you know, we’re defining it in a particular way, or it should be used in a particular way, or there’s a best practice here – like how do you kind of build that into the method?

**SS:** So that was built into Vivian May’s work, where she says that intersectionality is always biased toward justice. And so we embrace that, because that fits with our sort of theological framework, and so what we say is intersectionality is always biased toward justice. And we define justice in terms of the structuring of social systems in such a way that people have their needs met, their human dignity respected, they’re given opportunities. So it’s that sort of broad understanding that justice is not just what happens to people, but it’s about the structures in which people reside in relation to power – but I would say that’s it. It’s always rooted in this biased toward justice, which we just claim out right. This is not the status quo theology, this is the theology that’s going somewhere, and that has precedent in liberation theologies which embrace justice. I think our addition is putting intersectionality at the center, so it’s not justice that’s rooted in one identity, but in intersections of all of them with in structures of power.

**KL:** So I’m curious, what is the responsibility of developing a method in the sense of like – now you’re like ‘the people who have developed this method’, right? Like you’re kind of rooting it with in your experience, you’re rooting it within your disciplinary angles that you’re taking, and all of this other literature. Um but from here on out, you’re the creators of this. What is the responsibility of that moving forward as people start to use this method, or maybe even misuse this method? You know, like what do you think your role is in that?

**SS:** Well I think that it’s to recognize that this is not the be all and end all, its part of a conversation, and I would love for people to engage it, make it better, because the book title’s *Intersectional Theology: An Introductory Guide.* So right off the bat we’re recognizing that it’s limited but these are initial thoughts. And then Grace and I have conversations occasionally about maybe we should write a book on God next, and think I think, “What are we saying?” How dare we be so presumptuous that we think we can answer that question? And yet I think the answer to that question is simply asking more questions. And so I think we’re responsible to continue to engage in the conversation to hear the other voice, to do what we say in the book intersectionality is supposed to do. And so I see this as part of a conversation that’s rooted in a much longer history, which again why it was so important for us to go all the way back into its roots in black feminist thought, because it is part of a conversation - and we hope it will be disruptive, and we hope it will create conversation, and we’re sure it will make some people unhappy – because we say outright white theologians have to stop acting like they don’t have a social location, as if they could speak about God for everyone. So we kind of take this – and so I think we’re committed to staying engaged in the conversation once we put this out there. But I would welcome people taking in and going places. And the danger of misuse is always there, I mean that’s one of the things with intersectionality right now - that at the National Women’s Studies Association there were conversations in the keynotes about the ways people have come to understand intersectionality as only identities, and now everyone has intersectional identity. Which completely misses the point and waters down the impact, because if we all have a social identity then so what? Because in the popular use of the phrase it’s lost the second piece which is those identities are always rooted in structures of power. And so the reason intersectionality matters is it situates people differently in relation to social, economic, political – in the case of our book, religious power. And so I think part of the responsibility is to keep reminding people of that. To move only toward identities without talking about power is a misuse of this, and so I think that we have to keep emphasizing that point, that it always has to talk about power – because how do you do justice if you don’t talk about power?

**KL:** Alright, well we are linking to this book in the show notes for people who want to follow up. We’re going to take another brief break, when we come back we’re going to hear a little bit more from Susan about her experiences with academic blogging and public scholarship. Back in a moment.

# Segment 3:

**KL:** Susan, one of the ways that I have really enjoyed following your work is, you’re an academic blogger and you have frequently put out information into larger publications for um – kind of non-academic audiences to hear your ideas and to share out your work. What got you started in academic blogging? What drew you to that?

**SS:** Well I never set out to be a blogger – I had never tried it before. But Rena Lauer, who is in the School of History, Philosophy and Religion here had invited Paul Rauschenbusch to campus, and Paul’s great, great grandfather, I think it was, was Walter Rauschenbusch, who was a very famous Baptist theologian who sort of developed this social justice theology called the social gospel. And so she thought I would enjoy talking to him so invited me to dinner. At the time Paul was the Religion Editor for Huffington Post, and so he did a blog and gave a shout out to one of my books and that was great, and then I had written an opinion piece because of some things I was seeing called ‘Christian Fragility’ where I had taken the work that had been done on white fragility and applied it to some of the behaviors that I had been seeing among Christian folk who seemed to be acting in some of the same way that white folk were reacting – that that article defines. And I know what to do with it. And so I thought, “Well. Maybe I’ll see if Paul wants to run it on Huffington Post” and so I contacted him, I said “Hey I have this opinion piece, are you interested?” he said, “Why don’t I just set you up with your own blog site and then you can just blog for us whenever you want to.” And I was like “Oh okay!” (That’s a pretty nice deal!). Yeah! And again it was just one of those open doors that I had no intention of doing it on a regular basis, but the door opened so I said “Okay.” So participated in blogging for them for about a year and a half - two years, which was really interesting experience. It’s a different kind of writing, but I discovered that I really liked it. That there’s – I think something attracted to me in that discipline of writing a piece that’s only 700 – 1000 words, but you’re only trying to make one point and have an impact. And one of the things I thought I could contribute was to bring academic ways of thinking to these more public conversations, because unfortunately a lot of blogs, and I think this is why Huffington Post shut down the open blog, often make points but without supporting evidence without reference to scholarship without well-reasoned arguments, and I knew that’s not what I wanted to do. I wanted to write things that I could back up, I could bring the scholarship to bear, but that people in a general audience would read it and find it interesting, or compelling, or infuriating, or all of the sorts of things you get when you start to go public like that with your work – and it was amazing! I mean, more people would read one of those than had read anything academic that I had ever written to that point. I mean, it’s sort of amazing the sudden increase in outreach that you can have with social media, but for me it was always really important to be responsible with the way that I did that, so that it was clear that I was coming at it from a particular perspective that included scholarship and what I thought were well reasoned arguments anyway.

**KL:** Well I can imagine some of our listeners are – and we will link to some of these posts in the show notes so people can take a look if you haven’t seen these before, but they may be thinking, so you’re blogging about religion, and gender, and all of these other topics and they’re thinking, “I wouldn’t touch that with a ten foot pole.” Uh you know, like that seems inflammatory and you know – I’m wondering if you can talk to us about, what are some of the benefits that came out of this? Because it seems like it is taking quite a risk to put yourself out there in these ways. What came out of it that was positive for you?

**SS:** You know, I was surprised at the level of affirmation that I received. Now I got some emails that I just deleted, because if I get an email and it’s nasty I stop reading and just delete it. The power delete button for that stuff is just amazing. And I was fortunate not to get trolled, not to get a lot of that negative pushback, but the upside was so much better than that because I heard from people who said, “I thought this, thank you for saying this.” Particularly I heard from people who had similar backgrounds to mine who would say, “I’m so glad somebody expressed this, this touched me, and this helped me understand this better.” So all of the things a professor wants to hear, right? That people get something out of your writing. And again it was such a broader audience than most of my books would ever had touched, and so for me that was the upside – that I wrote things that seemed to be meaningful to people, and that meant a whole lot to me, and I found a lot of joy in that. That pretty well negated the negative feedback that I would get.

**KL:** So what sparks an idea for a blog post for you? You know, like how are you finding topics for this? What was it that was really making you move forward with a particular thing?

**SS**: So a lot of it was, you know, reading The New York Times and watching the news at night, and something would pop out that I had strong feelings about and then felt like I had something to contribute, because one of the things that I really tried hard, and hope I was successful at doing was saying something that hadn’t been said, or saying things in a different way, because I really wanted to contribute to the conversation and not just reiterate what other folks were saying. But a lot of it just came from the news every day, and there would be days were it was like, “okay which one of these ten things do I want to write about?” because I would find myself so frustrated. So it was things that sparked a passion for me, so it would be things like- when states were talking about banning transgender folks from using the bathrooms of their choice, or um there’s a lot about the presidential election cycle, um when religious - Christian religious people behaved badly, and so those are some of the things that I would just have this visceral reaction to. And so I had a passion when I was writing, but I tried to make sure that it’s a passion always informed by reason and evidence so that it wasn’t just ranting and raving. And so I guess there was some cathartic that came with it – back to the positive things - a bit.

**KL:** So Huffington Post has since shut this part down, in what they’re doing in this kind of blogging. How are you going to continue with this kind of genre of your writing?

**SS:** So I’m still sorting through that. I have done a blog for Ms. Magazine. I wrote about a fire that had happened in Guatemala in a girl’s shelter and a group of women who were really taking that on, and so I think that there’s still some possibilities there, I have some ideas possibly to continue occasionally with Ms. Huffington Post has created a way to blog where you propose articles now instead of being able to simply put them up, and so I may do that if something strikes me as particularly worth going through that effort and putting out there. And then who knows how things may present themselves – so another door may open and I’ll walk through that, but I do want to keep doing that as I can, because from the feedback I got it seemed to fill a niche and people were interested in it.

**KL:** So I’m curious for people who are maybe thinking about engaging in academic blogging, you know, you’ve kind of have come at it from an angle of what you have described of trying to fill a gap. Trying to really, you know, like help people to connect with information in a different way. Other people might be thinking of academic blogging as really about getting their name out there, getting their topics, you know, like really that kind of promotional piece. I’m wondering if you can speak to that. You know, like, what do you think the role of academic blogging is in terms of getting a more public understanding of your scholarship?

**SS:** So, you know, Oregon State is a land grant, and so in some sense we all have the responsibility to be public scholars and that’s one of the things that I love about being here. Though, I’ve always tried to write for a general audience, because as a feminist that’s really important to me that my work can be read by most people, and that it makes sense and it speaks to their lives. And so I think that the more, especially in this political climate, the more that academics can speak to a general audience, the better off us all are. When you think about all of the science denial – you think about what’s going on at the EPA, you think about the push back against making any changes that would address issues of Climate Change, so I think scientist being able to do this is incredibly important, so that people understand the science, they understand why it’s important that, you know, some little plankton in the Antarctic is dying out because of Climate Change and that effects the whole ecosystem that has impact, or why melting glaciers should matter to us. And I think the same thing that is important for social sciences to get their work out there as well to help people understand why do we do what we do, and how do we become more self-reflective about our behaviors, and how do we address these pressing issues of poverty, and gender discrimination? And so for example, you have the #MeToo movement which is so important, and we need that research that is showing us what’s going on, how do we make improvements, and how do we change the structures? Because of course, my fear for that is that we have this moment where everyone is talking about it, but if the structures don’t change sexual harassment continues. So I think that academics have so much to offer, and we’re in a political climate where I think we are perceived as some type of elite that are untouched and I think people don’t often understand the research we do and its impact for its lives. And so I think we have a responsibility to help people understand that, because I still want to believe that if people understand that they’ll align the ways that they behave in the world with these understandings. And I know research says that knowledge doesn’t always lead to better behavior, but I hope! I believe! I want academics to make a difference in the world, and I believe that’s what most academics want – is for their research to matter. And this is a good way to do it – to get our writings out there in public and accessible ways.

**KL:** Well Susan, thank you so much for coming in and sharing about your work, sharing about your experience with academic blogging, it has been a pleasure to talk with you.

**SS:** Oh, it’s been my pleasure. Thank you!

**KL:** Thanks also to our listeners for joining us on this week’s episode of Research in Action. I’m Katie Linder, and we’ll be back next week with a new episode.

# Show notes with links to resources mentioned in the episode, a full transcript, and an instructor’s guide for incorporating the episode into your courses, can be found at the show’s website at [ecampus.oregonstate.edu/podcast](http://www.ecampus.oregonstate.edu/podcast).

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# Bonus Clip:

In this bonus clip for episode 110 of the Research in Action Podcast, Dr. Susan Shaw Shares her definition of intersectionality, take a listen.

**KL:** Susan, so much of you work is rooted in the concept of intersectionality. Can you offer a definition for listeners who might not be familiar with that term?

**SS:** Sure. So intersectionality is for me composed of two separate, but always interrelated pieces. One is around social identities – so gender, race, class, sexual identity, religion, age, nation of origin, ability, all of those sorts of things and the ways that those come together so that people have different experiences based on those intersections. And so for example, a Latina will experience sexism differently than I will as a white woman. That leads to the second piece of this which is power, because those intersecting identities put us in particular relationships to social, economic, political, religious power. And so part of the reason that those experiences are different in very meaningful ways is because of access or lack of access to social power based on that. So it’s always those things together – the intersecting identities within these interlocking systems of power and privilege.

**KL:** So for intersectional identities, some people might think that this is really only applicable to people who are lower on the power scales. Can you speak to that? Does everyone have intersectional identities?

**SS:** I am so glad you brought that up, because it is absolutely essential that our dominant identities are as much a part of that understanding as our subordinate identities. One of the problems is, is that often people only want to embrace their subordinate identities, because then they’re not culpable for the sorts of power that they do hold. And so it would be really easy, I can be just a woman, and then all I have to deal with are the subordinations that I face on gender. But I’m a white woman, so I have a very different level of power and privilege. You can combine that then with my education – that puts me in a different place. Now, I’m lesbian, so that – so all of those things shift always all at the same time. and so Vivian May, who has written a brilliant book on intersectionality points out that it’s really important that we not have what she calls a ‘gender first’ or ‘race first’ approach. She says it’s always got to be all at the same time, and when we try to say, “Oh no, this is gender, but this is race” she calls these ‘slippages’, and so she says we have to be aware of the slippages, because when we fall into that kind of thinking, then we’re no longer being intersectional because it’s all of them all the time.

**KL:** We will make sure to link to her book in the show notes. Thanks for offering a definition!

You just heard a bonus clip from episode 110 of the Research in Action Podcast, with Dr. Susan Shaw sharing her definition of intersectionality. Thanks for listening!

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