Episode 49: Dr. Therese Huston

# KL: Katie Linder

# TH: Therese Huston KL: You’re listening to *Research in Action*: episode forty-nine.

# [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.

On this episode, I am joined by Dr. Therese Huston, who is looking to change how we see women as decision-makers.  The New York Times calls her book, "How Women Decide," “required reading on Wall Street.” Therese is a cognitive scientist at Seattle University, where she helps intelligent people make smart choices.  She’s written for the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Harvard Business Review* and *The Guardian*, and her work has been featured on NPR. In October 2016, Therese gave her first TEDx talk on women and decision-making.  Harvard University Press published Therese’s first book, *Teaching What You Don't Know*, which won a Book of the Year Award in Education from Foreword Literary Reviews.

Therese received her BA from Carleton College, a B.S. and PhD in Cognitive Psychology from Carnegie Mellon University, and completed a post-doctoral fellowship with the Center for the Neural Basis of Cognition at the University of Pittsburgh.  She founded the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at Seattle University. When she’s not writing, she loves to travel, play with numbers, spend time with her husband and dog, and bake amazing gluten-free chocolate cake.

Therese, thanks so much for joining me!

**TH:** Thank you so much – it’s a real treat to be here, Katie!

**KL:** Therese, I was so happy to have you on this show. I’ve followed your work for some time. You have a different book than the one we are going to talk about today, *Teaching What You Don’t Know*,which is one that I have recommended to faculty a ton, especially when I worked in faculty development. So I was so excited to see this new book you have coming out, or that’s already out actually, *How Women Decide*. I was especially intrigued when I started to see it getting picked up, you know not spur singly, by media and getting a review in the *New York Times* and some of these other really phenomenal things that all researchers I think dream about*.* I’m wondering if you can tell us a little bit about the book for folks who might not be familiar with it.

**TH:** So Katie, it has been an incredible year for conversations about gender with the political election. My book isn’t about politics at all, but I think one of the reasons it has received a lot of attention in the media is because we’re having a national conversation about gender right now. So, I have a question back for you. How would you guess most people think about women’s decisions? What do you think when somebody mentions women’s decisions what do you think the popular thought is?

**KL:** I would wager that people think women make decisions based on things like emotion.

**TH:** Exactly. And when I told people about the my book, that I’ve written a book about women’s decision making, people are like “hey, I know the answer! Wait women decide emotionally, right?”

[*laughs*]

And I hear this all the time from women, not just from men, but it’s interesting that that’s a very standard assumption, and it turns out misconception about women and decision making. And what I did in the book is that I actually explore in each chapter a different popular belief about women as decision makes and also men as decision makers: what do we think of women and men as problem solvers? So one chapter is looking at emotions and decision making. Another chapter is looking at risk taking because we have the assumption that men take a lot more risks and they make riskier decisions. Another chapter is about women’s intuition. So each chapter takes one of these popular beliefs, you might not have thought as women’s intuition as a first thing, but once you hear it you’re like “oh yeah!” You haven’t even heard the phase men’s intuition, right? It’s not even a thing! And then I look at the science behind it – is there any science to backup these popular beliefs. It’s been a lot of fun, and it gets me into some really fascinating conversations.

**KL:** I’m always really curious about what leads people to write the books they write. What was it that got you interested in this topic? It is pretty different I think than the other book of yours that I’m familiar with is *Teaching What You Don’t Know*. Can you talk a little bit about that? What was kind of the seed that was planted or the motivation that lead you to work on this topic.

**TH:** I love the popular decision making books that are out there, there are some great ones that some of your listeners might know. Daniel Kahneman has a huge book called *Thinking Fast and Slow*. There’s *Decisive* by Chip Heath and Dan Heath and *Predictably Irrational* by Dan Ariely. What you might notice from all those books is that they are all written by men; all three are written by a Dan or a Daniel!

[*laughs*]

Which is just a coincidence, but a thing that I noticed from the popular books about decision making is that they’re all written by men and when you look at them closely, they’re really written more about men’s decisions. They’ll feature NFL quarterbacks and the decisions they’re making, or an air force pilot and decisions that he’s making – jobs that are exclusively male or predominantly male or stock brokers. In any case, I began to be curious, like what would it look like to write a book about gender and decision making, because these books also don’t address that issue directly. Even thought they’re often talking about men, they don’t specifically say “oh and by the way, we are writing this book for men or we are writing this book about men’s decisions.” I think it’s gone under the radar. So I got that idea and then here is became exciting to figure out how do I write a book. I didn’t want to write a book about decisions only women make because all of a sudden that’s boring and narrow.

[*laughs*]

So that would be about reproductive decisions, for example. I wanted to write about perceptions of women and decision makers and that opened up a whole realm of opportunities.

**KL:** Well I think that the book is fascinating. I know other people agree – you’ve had some media response to this book as we’ve mentioned. In particular, I think you have this review in the *New York Times*, which I think a lot of us think that’s just impossible to get. We think of it as something that’s a little bit out of our reach. I’m wondering if you can talk a little about the media responses. As you mentioned, we’re in a little bit of an interesting political climate right now and there are definitely conversations about gender that are happening. Was this something that you expected, and if so were you kind of preparing yourself for it? Talk a little bit about that.

**TH:** Well you know what’s funny, Katie? I think all of us, like you said, hope for something like that, right? I was secretly harboring a hope that that might happen. You know, we all want to get on the Daily Show or Oprah, which she no longer has a show where she talks about books. But we all imagine that our book will have that kind of resonance with a popular audience. But I was surprised when we got the news. You get the news about a week before it appears evidently. I got an email indicating that they were going to review it for the *New York Times* and that was exciting but then there was the momentary panic of “oooo, who is going to review it?” They don’t tell you that!

[*laughs*]

So there was… My agent (I have a literary agent), she was trying to lower my expectations with the *New York Times* review. She said “okay, now they could assign this to a retired, wealthy, white guy who has never thought about these issues and we need to be ready for it to be a really scathing review.” It turned out that was not what happened at all – it ended up being a very positive review. And I was relieved by that, but it’s interesting you got to brace yourself for the worst because the whole point of why the *New York Times* is such an exciting place to be reviewed is that it’s not a given that it’s going to be a good review.

**KL:** I think that is one of the interesting things that we don’t always think about when we’re kind of hoping for more attention or a broader audience for our research is that there is this other side of it which is you get thrown into the spot light a little bit and it’s not always positive in terms of what you know people will say. And I thinkg you have to develop a little bit of a thick skin when you’re out there and your work is being discussed more broadly. I’m wondering if there was anything that surprised you about the media responses to the book?

**TH:** It’s funny, I was surprised simply having the *New York Times* cover it. That was a surprise. I got an NPR interview and that was also a surprise. It’s funny when I tell people about that they lean in and they say “oh, Terry Gross?!” Oh, no, John Hockenberry. It’s one of these funny things that then you feel like – oh I’m disappointing you, I was excited about NPR that alone was enough. There was some great publicity for the book. I also got invited to do a TEDx talk, which I did a couple of weeks ago. My favorite reaction – it’s funny that you brought up the gluten free life style because someone else read that in my bio and I was doing a radio show in Saint Louis and they asked me “we understand that you bake amazing gluten free chocolate cake.” This was such a departure from what we’ve been discussing so far that it took me by surprise. And so I said: “I do and where can I get good gluten free cake here in Saint Louis?”

[*laughs*]

Right? I’m like might as well, where do you take this?

**KL:** Yeah!

**TH:** You know? And the radio host didn’t know, he joked, “Well I guess the gluten free cake factory”. And then I got an email from a gluten free bakery, they said that the gauntlet had been thrown and they were going to bring me a gluten free cake. And I’m not kidding, they delivered it to my hotel, it was amazing.

[*laughs*]

It was enough cake for sixteen people, I wasn’t sure what to do with it. But, what a sweet thing. So it’s been a lot of fun and all these little unexpected perks that you imagine people are that kind, and when they turn out to be, it’s just delightful.

**KL:** Well that is a phenomenal perk. I’m wondering if you could talk about, because I think people who aren’t receiving media attention, maybe they’re not doing radio or they’re not getting their book reviewed in more secular publications outside of academia, and you mentioned that you have a literary agent, how are these opportunities coming across your plate? Is it something that your agent is helping you to do, is it something that you’re pursuing, is it something that people are just finding you and approaching you? Can you talk a little bit about the logistics of that?

**TH:** It’s interesting, my agent has been fabulous, and if, for anyone that’s thinking about doing a popular book, I highly recommend getting an agent. I know that there’s some people that think you no longer need an agent, and they’ve never met mine, because she’s amazing.

[*laughs*]

Her name is Lindsey Edgecomb, but there are lots of great agents out there. In terms of how I’ve gotten a lot of my publicity, it’s a great question, I actually hired a publicist. That’s something you can do in addition to the publisher doing some publicity for you, but they’re of course overwhelmed and incredibly busy and so I also hired an outside publicist to help me with. And she’s someone who contact radio shows and she contacted magazines and it was one of those things that’s expensive, to hire a publicist, that’s the downside of it, but you can shop around and find someone who is going to meet your budget and that’s what I did. And it was fabulous, because everyone contacted her, so I also would get one email with a couple different requests rather than seven different emails that I also had to filter through. So that really helped, and it’s nice to have a professional with these kinds of things, that can tell you like, “Here what you need to prepare.” We prepared sample interviews for instance, and sent them to people, which I would not have thought of, but makes perfect sense right? Gives them questions that they can ask you.

**KL:** Well I think like, with so many things working with someone who is a professional in a certain area, they just have more experience, and can kind of help you figure out what are the different kinds of fundamental things you need to know, especially if you’ve never gone through that before.

**TH:** Right, and there are things that I would not have thought of, never having been on TV right? And I did a couple of TV interviews. One of the things she suggested was sit on the edge of your seat, because she said, “All too often if people sit back in their seats they look as if they’re slouched.”

[*laughs*]

And it turns out, I’m a petite person, so indeed often chairs are too deep for me, so that was an important thing to kind of perch at the edge of my seat, but what a great tip right? Because all of the sudden I had better posture, I looked more alert, and I also felt on top of my game, so it was fabulous to work with someone who could coach me across the board. And you know, whether hiring a publicist doesn’t mean you’ll get on NPR or TV, but they just have a wealth of knowledge about how to navigate all of this.

**KL:** Well that is fascinating. We’re going to take a quick break, when we come back, we’ll talk more with Therese about her book *How Women Decide* and some of its relations to higher-ed specifically. Back in a moment.

[*music plays*]

# Segment 2:

**KL:** Therese, I’m really interested in how your book, *How Women Decide*, relates to a more higher education context more specifically, so I’m excited to talk with you about that. I’m wondering if there are particular components of the book that you think are especially applicable in higher education.

**TH:** It is fascinating to think about how this book could apply and does apply to teachers and researchers. So let’s say Katie that a friend confided in you that she is teaching a class where men talk a lot more than women. The men in the class are dominating the class, and she’s concerned about it, and she’s raising it to you, and she wants you to help figure out why. So what might be some of the explanations that the two of you might entertain?

**KL:** You know, that’s interesting because I have gotten that in the past. You know like as I have worked with faculty and faculty development, and some of the things that have come up are, I worked at a school that had a professional school, and it happened to have a lot of female students that came from China, and so we actually had this topic come up quite a bit. And so part of what was raised was cultural issues, there might be some culture issues, and we talked about things such as shyness, and we talked about things like confidence and how that look, and we also talked about introversion and extroversion. So I’m not sure if that’s along the lines of what you’re looking for there, but I would love to hear more.

[*laughs*]

About this topic.

**TH:** Well that’s fabulous, no. Exactly, and those are many of the dynamics that can explain why certain students are not participated, particularly in terms of, if you have a large Asian population, a particularly large number of Asian women, they might be less likely to participate. And you’ve identified a bunch of the dynamics at work there. In my book, I raise another one, and I don’t think that anyone, whenever I raise this question, it’s never an answer that people give, but the research suggests this is huge, and that is it has to do with risk-taking. So, I’m not saying it’s the only reason, but it’s usually a reason that people overlook. So the idea here is that in American culture and actually in most cultures, we associate men with risk-taking. And you can think of plenty of phrases right?

[*laughs*]

Like – are you a man or a mouse, or man-up, there are various phrases that suggest men are out there taking risks, and we don’t have any phrases like that for women. We have phrases like: Nervous Nellie, and shrinking Violet, the only phrases that relate to women suggest that women should be backing away from risk or that they do back away from risk. And there are a variety of research studies showing how parents encourage little boys to have risks, and they discourage little girls from taking risks, and I think it is really fascinating to take that lens and look at your classroom and think about how participating in class for a lot of students is risky, or at least it can feel risky. We’ve acculturated men to be more comfortable with taking risks, so that’s one of the things that I engage faculty in thinking about, is okay if that is the case what do you want to do? Do you want to reward risk taking, so it becomes more appealing to women in the room, so that it is explicitly rewarded. Or do you want to reduce the fact that it’s risky, make it safer to participate by perhaps having students write answers or you ask them to raise their hands, because then everyone has a chance to think about it or work with someone, and then you often get more women participating, because you’ve lowered the risk factor.

**KL:** That’s so fascinating, I mean I can think of so many different applications for higher ed when I think about the promotion and tenure process or seeking collaborators, or going for a larger grant versus a smaller grant, you know like where you decide to send your pieces, whether to that top journal or not, you know like, it seems like risk taking is a huge part of the faculty-professional experience. We may not think about it that way, but it seems directly applicable there too.

**TH:**  It is, and when you think about speaking up in a meeting where the provost is present.

[*laughs*]

When are you going to do that, and when are you going to sit on your hands and just vent about it with your colleagues in your department. That there’s huge risks, for at least some people to speak up in those meetings, particularly untenured faculty, sending things out to journals, absolutely. And it’s interesting because some people might view that as, go ahead, the worst thing they can do is say no, and some people might think like but, the rejection or the sense of who do I think I am that this report belongs in that journal, it is really fascinating to unpack this in terms of our faculty’s lives. The other piece of the research that I find fascinating related to higher ed, there are a bunch of pieces, but another one, there is some great research done by Katy Milkman, she’s at Wharton School of Business at University of Pennsylvania. She led this fascinating team or fascinating research study where she and her team emailed faculty, so she sent out real emails to over 6000 faculty across the United States, and this was across over 250 institutions, so very broad, many disciplines represented. It was a very short email, and the email said, “I’m a grad student, or I’m an undergrad who wants to start a grad program, I’m going to be on campus on Monday, I’m really interested in your research, would you have ten minutes to talk with me, because I’m thinking about applying to your program. So the email was identical across everyone, and then the thing that varied was the name at the bottom of the email. And some of them had names that were clearly women, or people would expect it to be women like you know Angie Smith.

[*laughs*]

Versus, Brad Smith, and then some of the names appeared African American, some appeared Hispanic etc. And they just measured who responded, who got replies. And it was very disturbing to see that basically white males got the highest response rate, not white faculty replying the most, but white students got the most replies back. And it was especially true actually for programs in education, there was a seventeen percent bias, meaning white males got seventeen percent more responses than other students of other identities. [**KL:** Wow!] Yes, right?! What was fascinating is this was true for women, faculty replies, they also favored white males. It wasn’t just the white male faculty in the college of education that did this. There was also a strong finding in business as well. Those were the two places that the bias was strongest, was in education and business. Which you wouldn’t normally want together. But for me it really speaks to this idea that we see men, particularly white men, as having more potentially, as being more worth our time, and I think it’s really something to think about as educators in terms of where we show our bias.

**KL:** So this is kind of connected to one of my favorite things about this book, which is at the end of each chapter you offer practical suggestions. Because I think some people could read about this issue and just be like – ok, so what do we do? Like, clearly this is an issue! So I’m wondering if there is anything that you think about, you know, within these practical suggestions that you’re offering. Is there one or two that are particularly helpful for people in higher education that you would really want to highlight?

**TH:**  Well in the risk taking issue, I think one of the strategies that is really helpful to think about is that when people are new to a topic, especially when you see a bias of men taking more risks, so how does that apply to education? Well if you’re teaching an intro class, where the topic is presumably new to everyone, you’re more likely to see men raise their hands and take risks than women. So that is something to think about, particularly in perhaps a senior seminar, you might see more equal participation across men and women. So it’s a good thing to think about that in your introductory classes, that’s a place – how can you lower the risk. That might be a really important place where students pair up before giving answers. You can’t do that for every question, but at least some of the time, you’re more likely to now hear for some people who weren’t comfortable participating.

**KL:** We’re going to take another brief break. When we come back, we’ll hear a little bit more from Therese about the complexities of looking at issues of gender. Back in a moment.

# Segment 3:

**KL:** Therese, of course, one of the things that really interested me about your book was this gender component, and my disciplinary background in women in gender studies. But I know that isn’t your disciplinary background, and I know that studying gender issues wasn’t really part of your work in grad school or in the first part of your academic career. So I’m really curious about what lead you to that and to kind of explore some of these things.

**TH:** And you’re right – I didn’t look at gender issues and I don’t think I took a gender studies class even in college. I didn’t take any in grad school. I would go to luncheons, I would sit in on workshops or when we have a guest scholar come to campus to the department and I would sit in on those fascinated, but I prided myself on doing the topics that I thought were the really hard topics. And for some reason, I didn’t think gender was a hard topic. That just shows my bias and my ignorance. But I was focused on neuroscience and computational modelling and often I was the only female in the room in our lab of seven people. Sometimes we had a woman post-doc in the room, but often it was just me as the only female grad student. I thought it was really gender to study gender. Most of the people that I knew that studied gender in my grad program were women. Most of the faculty were also women who led that research. So I steered clear of it. It’s really fascinating to me that when I look back on that that strange assumptions, but I think a fair number of people might share them, unfortunately. So I was reluctant to do it and I’ve been doing neuroscience and cognitive science for years now. And as I said earlier in the podcast, is as I was reading books on decision making, it really bothered me that none of them were talking about these gender issues. There would be entire chapters on the topic of intuition and about the science of intuition, and not a single mention on women’s intuition, which it’s one of those things that if you were to talk to a layperson about intuition, that that’s one of the ways they think about intuition is women’s intuition. So it’s fascinating that the researchers weren’t touching it with even a really long pole.

[*laughs*]

It was never being mentioned. Is it a really thing? So it was something I came at very reluctantly. It was something that was hard for me to approach as a topic to look at in terms of research.

**KL:** Well I think you’ve raised like one of the really interesting issues around studying gender, which is there is so much of it that is a construct. And so it can be very difficult to nail down things. And even when you talk about something like women’s intuition, some people say well that’s just a construct. That’s kind of a societal construction of what it means for women to have decision making. But then you have kind of science that you’re looking at as well, and it seems like that might be one of the complexities particularly in this most recent book, is you’re looking at the science, but you’re also having to deal with societal constructions of what gender means, which can be equally as powerful in terms of just how people view it and what preconceptions they might have.

**TH:** It is! It’s been interesting – I interviewed one women who is transgender and it’s been fascinating to hear, and she is a theoretical neuroscientist, which, even though I have a background in neuroscience, when she first told me that, I thought what does that mean? What do you do?

[*laughs*]

I think I understand theoretical physicists, but what would a theoretical neuroscientist do? In any case, it was fascinating to talk with her about how she’s writing the same algorithm, she’s developing the same technology as a women as she did as a man, but people treat her very differently and she’s getting different responses from funders. They’re more reluctant to fund her projects now that they see her as a woman. So it’s really fascinating to think about how we construct gender and we map it onto people, and it brings a whole bunch of baggage with it that we don’t even recognize.

**KL:** So, one of the things you implied is that it might be a little bit easier to talk about neuroscience than it is to talk about gender. I’m wondering if you indeed think that’s the case, and, if so, why?

**TH:** It’s a suprising thing. I really thought neuroscience was the hardest thing that I could do. It was one of the reasons it was attractive to me for a long time. It was like – if I can do neuroscience, I can do anything!

[*laughs*]

And it’s been fascinating to me to, when I moved into studying gender and for a while I was really focused on the gender and neuroscience intersections – what research was being done on the brain and gender differences and behavior. But the reason that it is harder to write and talk about gender than it is to write and talk about neuroscience, because people actually have real experiences with gender. So, if I were to say something about the fusiform face gyrus, which is an area of the brain that is right now understood to process faces, you find that interesting, you might write it down, but you don’t have any personal experience with your fusiform face gyrus to counter anything that I have to say, right? You might just be like “ooo, I hope I remember that later.” Whereas if I say something about how men and women respond to facial expressions or how women tend to be more expressive in their faces than men do, you know they tend to have bigger smiles or we tend to notice more if a woman looks frustrated than a man looks frustrated. You immediately have thoughts about that, right?

**KL:** Yeah! I’m like already filtering in my mind, like who are the people I know that I could test that theory on?

**TH:** Exactly! Right! And then you’re thinking about the presidential candidates and who got criticized for looking angry. There we see you immediately have ideas about this. And so it has been fascinating for me to write about gender because it’s one thing – I can sit over here in the corner and feel very content that I know what the research says, but if I want to have a conversation with people about what these things mean, that’s a lot riskier and it’s now dealing with all the experiences people have and trying to validate what you experienced but also help you understand how it fits with the research. And so it’s much much harder and it’s much more exciting! I have to say, I feel like I’ve really found my calling at least for right now in life because I’m good at translating research into something people can grapple with. And so it’s exciting to be tackling an issue people really care about. People care about neuroscience, they’re excited to learn about it. They feel smarter talking about neuroscience, but it doesn’t really impact your daily life and gender does.

**KL:** That’s so exciting that you found this. It also reminds me so much of how I hear about people talking about quantitative methodologies versus qualitative methodologies. And people who are trained in one side or the other always think the other side is a lot harder, or maybe they think their side is harder. We just don’t have a good sense of – I don’t know, maybe it’s like the grass is always greener. But I think about conversations I’ve had recently with a colleague who is more quantitatively trained and I’m more qualitatively trained, and I look at the quantitative stuff and I’m like I’m so intimidated by that and she looks at the qualitative and says I’m so intimidated by that. And I think that we have kind of these little boundaries that we set up for ourselves, that it’s so exciting when you can cross a boundary and look at a new area of your research from a new lens. So, that’s so interesting.

**TH:** It is! And I know that so many of us build our careers around – we find a problem that fascinates us and we find a methodology that is powerful and we stay on that track. We find different ways to explore the problem, we find different ways to apply the methodology. And so what I have done is now for everyone to make this leap. I used to be a very quantitative person and now I’ve moved to doing interviews and very qualitative work. But I can tell you that I can now see the benefits of both worlds and it is rich to hear – people love to tell stories. And I feel so privileged when I do interviews with people and they share their incites. I’ve really come to – even though I was trained and someone who only measured milliseconds in grad school – it is really satisfying now to sit with someone and I have a structured interview, but we also have time to do what you and I are doing right now which is to explore – what are the interesting peripheral issues that people want to talk about. We’re all story tells so to give people a chance to tell their story and to ask the questions so they get to share the juicy bits is really exciting.

**KL:** Well, Therese, this book of yours *How Women Decide* is so fascinating. We will definitely link to information about the book and different reviews for the book in the show notes. I want to thank you so much for taking time to come on the show, sharing about your experience in researching in this new area and also about some of the media attention you have received. Thanks so much!

**TH:** Thank you Katie, it has been a real pleasure to be here.

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

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# Bonus Clip 1:

**KL:** In this first bonus clip for episode 49 of the Research in Action podcast, Dr. Therese Huston discusses her experience finding and working with a literary agent. Take a listen.

**KL:** Therese, one of the things I know our listeners might be interested in is how you went about acquiring an agent. This is something that I think a lot of academics may not have necessarily thought about, especially if their books are more for an academic audience and not for a broader audience. So I’m wondering if you can share a little bit about that decision to find an agent, but also how did you go about doing that?

**TH:** I did a lot of research to find an agent, and the best tip I got in terms of finding a person who might be aligned with the topic you write about is to take your favorite books, go to the acknowledgments section and usually in the very first paragraph or maybe in the second paragraph, if that person had an agent, they will thank their agent. They will sing the glories of the person they worked with, and that’s a nice way to find, that’s how I started, I made a list from my favorite books on decision making and my favorite books on gender. I made a list of, okay who are people that are agents, and are there names that are coming across these books that are good to get in touch with. So that was my very first step, my next step was to ask around to my friends that had popular books, not that I had many, I think I had two.

[*laughs*]

But I contacted my two friends who had popular books and I asked them if they would recommend their agency, would they recommend their agent, because most literary agencies have a multiple people working for them, some of them just have one, but usually they have several at their agency. So a friend introduced me to someone at their agency and I also sent out proposals to… oh goodness, at least fifteen different literary agencies, and a book that I would highly recommend about that process, if you’re writing a proposal, if you’re writing a popular book the book I found really helpful is called, *The Essential Guide to Getting Your Book Published.*

**KL:** Mhm I love that one, I have it too.

**TH:** You know that one?

**KL:** I do, we’ll link to it in the show notes for folks yeah.

**TH:** It is, it’s effective, was it helpful for you in writing your book?

**KL:** It was, I mean not in the sense, I keep it around as a reference guide since I don’t write popular books at least right now. But I have found it to be very practical, and I like books that get really granular and practical, about like the logistics of things, and I thought that book was really good in that respect.

**TH:** That captures it perfectly, it’s a book, it’s not a book that you read cover to cover, you open it up, and it had a fabulous index and you look up the topic you want, you read those two pages, and then you get online and do those things. Right?

[*laughs*]

**KL:** Yes, exactly.

**TH:** It’s an incredible step by step guide to different stages of the process and that was helpful for my thinking through how to contact. You can also find literary agents just searching online, you know search literary agents, but it is helpful to find people who are already interested in your area because they’re going to have the connections with those editors, they’re going to know how to pitch your book and sell it to. I know it sounds like strange language, at least it was to me at first, but they’re selling your book idea to a publishing house. And you know, they’ll help you think about selling, as academics we don’t think about selling, we think that good science or good scholarship will stand up on their own, and what’s really nice is that you still get to think about the science or the scholarship and the ideas, but the agent is helping you think well, what’s the hook? What’s going to get peoples’ attention?

**KL:** You know, the more I work with people in the publishing industry, the more I think about those kinds of things. You know, I think about the conversations I’ve had with two different editors that I’ve worked with, with books that I have published and books that I am working on publishing, and they talk a lot about audience. And I think that that is something that we don’t always think about, that we probably should think about more than we do and that’s something that these editors always come back to. You know, what is it the reader is going to need, what is it the audience is going to want, and I really appreciate that, and I think to some degree an agent is thinking along those same lines.

**TH:** I agree, and it is, it’s surprising, when we get our students to think about audience, or we give them assignments where we want them to imagine that they are a parent writing to a school board, or whatever it might be, it’s interesting that we ask our students do this, but often when we’re thinking about our idea, we’re so close to the idea that that’s where our attention is focused not on who is going to receive this and how is it going to have an impact on their lives. Where everybody is busy, so for people to take time with your book, they’ve got to see why it matters.

**KL:** Mhm. So I have one last question about this agent relationship that you have and that is: so you and the agent helps you sell the book to a publisher but then what happens to that relationship? You know, how does that relationship continue, what are the other kinds of things that an agent would talk with you about?

**TH:** So some of the authors I know have described their relationship with their agent like having a realtor, a real estate agent. So they said basically the agent sold their book, just like a realtor would sell your house, and that was it. And they pretty much, they weren’t very involved after that, so that’s one possible relationship. I was very lucky, and usually the agent will help you with the revision of your proposal, so even though you’re submitting your proposal to the agent, they’re helping you think about what we just talked about Katy – audience, what is going to get the attention of the editors. But I was lucky, I didn’t have the realtor model, my agent has been with me every step of the way, in fact I’m going to have a conversation with her later today about how to negotiate some things. So she has been fabulous, let’s see what kind of things has she helped me with, she’s coached me on some of the harder talks that I gave right when this book came out, she and I talked through ideas. That NPR interview, we ran through that several times where she was trying different questions with me. So she’s really served as a coach and I think I’m incredibly lucky that way. She’s also helping me think about what kind of organizations would be interested in the book so that I can contact them, you know professional organizations often have special speakers come in, and would I be interested in doing that. You know, she’s really helping me not just think through this book we’ve already published, but, my platform is very jargony, but how are people going to hear this message?

**KL:** Mhm. Well thank you for sharing this experience of working with an agent.

**TH:** I feel… I recommend it to everybody, it’s just a fabulous experience.

You’ve just heard a bonus clip from Episode 49 of the Research in Action podcast with Dr. Therese Huston discussing her experience finding and working with a literary agent. Thanks for listening!

[*music plays*]

# Bonus Clip 2:

[*Music begins to play]*

In this second bonus clip of episode 49 of the Research in Action podcast, Dr. Therese Huston shares some benefits of setting trip wires in your personal life. Take a listen.

**TH:** So that would be one piece of advice, and the other one I think for your professional life is to set something called the trip wire. Have you ever heard of the trip wire, is that something…?

**KL:** I’ve heard it, but I don’t think in the context of what you’re saying, so tell me more.

**TH:** Sure, sure, it’s a military term right?

[*laughs*]

It’s to let people know you’re getting into a danger zone, and there’s a similar concept in decision making. So the idea is you set a trip wire, you’re making a decision and you set a future point, you have a plan to reevaluate. So often we think if we go with the plan, you just have to live with it, and with the trip wire the idea is you’re going to, if something happens in the future, it’s time to reevaluate the decision. So it might be like this: you’re frustrated in your job because you don’t have support for your research, and you’re really hoping to get a research assistant and the department controls that and they haven’t given you one. So you can make a decision, you can think, ok, I’m going to work with this system this year and if a year from now, I still don’t have an RA, you put on your calendar that date to come up on your calendar, if I don’t have an RA at this point, I need to reevaluate this role. So what’s nice about that is so often we think we need to make a decision now, or I’m stuck here, I need a different position, but instead you can say, I’m going to make the changes that I can, but I’m also going to make a plan to reevaluate, and if something hasn’t happened or something has happened, that’s the time where. Does that make sense?

**KL:** It makes total sense, and what it reminds me of actually, of something that I really like to do, is basically have conversations between my current self and my future self, to say, you know, a year from now, this is what am I hoping for. And sometimes I even think about this, you know if I really don’t want to do something, I’ll say, would my future self have given me a pass on this, or would they say I just need to buck up and do it. So there’s different ways of kind of thinking about that, but I love this idea of basically setting a time in the future and marking it for yourself and then you really don’t have to keep it in that front part of your brain, you can just rely on the fact that your calendar is going to trigger this time where you can say okay, I’m going to reevaluate and look at this again.

**TH:** Yes, and I find it so helpful, we so often, we are coming up on New Years, people are going to be working on New Year’s resolutions, but we very rarely go back and look at what we said that we were going to do. And I’m not suggesting that you should journal about this and keep these journals so that you can get them out again, but it is really helpful to set an appointment with yourself and evaluate have things improved or not. And it also takes away, it makes it easier to take some risks, I think for people, because if you’re thinking I want to, I’m going to raise this issue with my department chair, and six months from now I’m going to see if anything’s changed. Right? And so it makes it like ooh, I better raise that, if I really want things to change, I’ve got to raise that sooner than later.

**KL:** I love that idea, I love that advice, thank you so much. We’re going to….

**TH:** You’re welcome, my husband and I use it all the time now.

[*laughs*]

**KL:** I love that when you research a book, and write something and then you can use it in your actual life. It’s the best.

**TH:** Yes. It’s huge.

You’ve just heard a bonus clip from Episode 49 of the Research in Action podcast with Dr. Therese Huston sharing some benefits of setting trip wires in your professional life. Thanks for listening!

[*music plays*]