

# READER'S GUIDE

# HOW WOMEN DECIDE

BY THERESE HUSTON

1. Do you agree with the author that women's decisions are often scrutinized more than men's? Why or why not? Do you see certain kinds of choices being judged more harshly than others?
2. What decisions keep you up at night?
3. Think about three decisions that have been hard for you to make and three decisions that have been easier to reach. What patterns do you see?
4. Based on the quiz/questionnaire in Chapter 1 (pp. 32–33), do you think your decision-making style tends to be intuitive, analytical, or adaptive? Are you more intuitive in some areas of your life and more data-driven/analytical in others?
5. Before you read Chapter 1, what did the phrase, “women's intuition” mean to you? Did you consider it empowering? What do you think now?
6. There's a common belief that women take care, but men take charge. Have you seen that dynamic play out? Which is easier for you to do, to take care or take charge? Do you tend to like or dislike women who take charge? How about men who take care?
7. Have you ever felt pressure to prove that a group to which you belong is better than the stereotype? If it's happened to you, how do you think the anxiety changed your behavior?
8. There's been a growing debate about political correctness and the harm or good it does. How does the idea of stereotype threat add to that conversation?
9. In what areas of your life do you bring people in on your decisions and make choices more collaboratively, and in what areas do you decide independently, largely without other people's input?
10. *How Women Decide* claims that we encourage men to take more risks than women. Do you agree? Where in your life would you like to take more risks? Who supports you and who tries to talk you out of risk-taking?
11. According to the white-male effect, white men find the world safer than other people do. Has this been your personal experience? How might this explain events in the news?

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12. What did you think of Siren, the dating app described in Chapter 3? If you were dating, would such an app appeal to you or turn you off?
13. What did you think of the hand-raising seminars at Harvard Business School? Would you have benefited from such a program? Do you think participation should be mandatory or optional?
14. How do you respond when you hear women promote themselves? Do you tend to have the same reaction to men when they promote themselves? Are there times when you find it harder to talk about your accomplishments or show how much you know?
15. Huston draws upon Daniel Kahneman's work and defines confidence as "the ability to tell a coherent story." What did you think of that definition? When you look at the most confident people around you, does that explanation fit?
16. Has stress ever led you to make a decision that didn't work out well? How do you believe you would have decided differently if you hadn't been under so much pressure?
17. Have you run into the perception that women are emotional decision-makers or that they can't decide well under stress? Are there enclaves in society where this perception holds more sway?
18. Could you see yourself reframing anxiety as excitement? When might this strategy work and when might this be a stretch?
19. Who turns to you for help with their decisions and who doesn't (but you wish they would)? When do you feel equipped to offer advice to people?
20. Some people have a hard time seeing how the "positivity effect" applies to their parents or older relatives. Do your parents tend to focus on the positives in their own lives and their own decisions? Do they focus on the negatives in yours? Are you more focused on the positives or negatives of your life as you get older?
21. What do you think of the idea of raising a decision with an older relative when he or she is slightly distracted?

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22. Throughout the book, Huston observes that scrutinizing women's decisions isn't just a thing that men do – women also second-guess women. Are there places where you think women are particularly critical of other women's decisions?
23. At the end of most chapters, there's a list of "Things to Do." Pick one suggestion that intrigues you. Have you tried it? Where can you see trying it and how is it different from what you'd normally do? What would help you to remember to try this strategy?
24. Do you see the popular media reinforcing stereotypes about men and women as decision-makers? Do you think it's getting better or worse? Why?
25. *How Women Decide* explores a variety of scientific findings. Which findings raised the most questions for you? Did any findings make you feel validated or relieved?
26. One issue that isn't explored in this book is the issue of class. In your view, are the decisions of women in certain socioeconomic groups held to a different standard? Why or why not?
27. Therese Huston is looking to change the way we think and talk about women as decision-makers. Would you like to see the conversation change, and if so, what would be the first change you'd like to see?

## QUESTIONS FOR THE WORKPLACE:

1. What is the ratio of men to women in your organization? What's the ratio of men to women on the top leadership team? If the percentage of men is higher on the leadership team than it is in your group, why do you think that's the case? How would the top leaders explain that difference?
2. A number of research studies find that businesses with more women in top decision-making roles have a competitive edge over others. Why do you think that's the case? Could you see that making a difference in your organization?
3. Think about who announces the important decisions in your organization. Do they tend to be men or women, or is that responsibility shared? Do you see a "dogsled problem" or is that not an issue in your work?

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## QUESTIONS FOR THE WORKPLACE (CONT.):

4. Based on the survey in Chapter 2 (pp. 106–7), how many cues for stereotype threat are there in your workplace? Do you think this is typical for the kind of work that you do, or is your organization unusual?
5. How important is risk-taking in the work you do? To what degree is risk-taking rewarded or discouraged? Why might a decision that feels risky to a woman not feel as risky for a man?
6. Does your organization communicate that it expects people to negotiate their salaries? Compare a time when you did negotiate to a time when you didn't. What was different?
7. Think back on a decision that's been made in the past five years in your organization that's generally seen as a poor one. To what degree was overconfidence a problem for the decision-makers? If so, what changes have been made to ensure overconfidence doesn't cloud good judgment?
8. Huston proposes that women are often seen as "mother ducks" when it comes to making decisions, while men are seen as "secret agents." Do those analogies fit your organization? Why or why not?
9. Have you ever spent a lot of money on outside advice? What's hard about that situation? Are there areas of your organization that frequently hire consultants? What steps could be taken to assess the quality of that advice?
10. Which decisions does your organization face right now that could benefit from a premortem?