Feminist Resilience: Structures & Strategies for Troubled Times

Resilience is a fraught concept. Resilience Studies is in vogue in the academy, where resilience is promoted as a desirable attainment and positive value. But resilience is often used in ways that reinforce both racialized and gendered representations of the strength expected of marginalized communities and individuals. Ideologies that promote self-empowerment can distract us from identifying institutional harms and seeking structural solutions. This symposium challenges mainstream perceptions of resilience and offers a feminist critique of resilience narratives while helping us imagine varieties of alternative feminist responses to vulnerability.

Even as the current championing of resilience deserves scrutiny, women have long carried a disproportionate burden in moments of social crisis, and women have been on the front lines of strengthening community resilience in response to both chronic stresses and slowly emerging disruptions, including climate change, democratic instability, and crises of public health, in ways rarely attended to in Resilience Studies. We will look at how feminist social movements have modeled creative modes of leadership, and we will examine best practices for the expansion of feminist networks of resilience.

This interdisciplinary symposium will focus on the hidden premises, obfuscations, and ideological biases of Resilience Studies. Participants will consider how gender figures in thinking about resilience and how feminists engage social movements, digital spaces, and broader communities, noticing that women—often women of color—are consistently leaders in these spaces. Throughout the day, we will promote an active dialogue among scholars, activists, and community organizers in a broad discussion of both the limitations of resilience as a value and the contours of a feminist praxis of resilience.
Schedule & Panel Descriptions (Tentative)

Check-in & Breakfast
9:00-9:45 am

Welcome
9:45-10:00 am
Uta Poiger, Dean of the College of Social Sciences & Humanities, Northeastern University
Suzanna Walters, Director of Women’s, Gender, & Sexuality Studies, Northeastern University; Editor-in-Chief, Signs: Journal of Culture & Society
Jennie Stephens, Director of School of Public Policy & Urban Affairs, Dean’s Professor of Sustainability Science & Policy, and Co-Director of the Global Resilience Institute, Northeastern University

Panel 1 - Women’s Leadership on Climate, Energy, & Health
10:00 am – 12:00 pm
Moderator: Jennie Stephens, Northeastern University
Women’s leadership is fundamental to a just and sustainable future for humanity, yet too often women are figured as simply victims of cataclysmic events that require their resilience. Here, we will focus on the forms of feminist leadership that model a resistant resilience and highlight the intersectional feminism that has emerged in the wake of recent national and transnational social changes.

Shalanda Baker, Northeastern University
“The Green New Deal: Feminist Leadership, Energy Justice, and Anti-Resilience”

Stephanie DeCandia, Northeastern University/Boston Area Rape Crisis Center (BARCC)
“Reframing the Resilience Narrative for Sexual Violence Survivors”

Laura McTighe, Dartmouth College and Deon Haywood, Women With a Vision
“Coming Into Our Own: The Intersections and Interstices of Black Feminist Possibilities”

Tania Rosario-Mendez, Taller Salud
“Women Are the Backbone: Taller Salud’s Response and Healing Process after Hurricane Irma and María”

Lunch
12:00-1:00 pm

Panel 2 – Unpacking the Resilience of Patriarchy
1:00-2:30 pm
Moderator: Suzanna Walters, Northeastern University
In the general appreciation of the positive aspects of resilience, we too rarely attend to the more negative ways in which domination itself is resilient. What are the possibilities for feminist resistance to well- armored, toxic masculinity? This panel explores the vexing resilience of patriarchy both in its everyday manifestations and in large-scale and extreme traumas or events.

Moya Bailey, Northeastern University
“Resilient Reproach: From Minstrelsy to Misogynoir”

Jessica Valenti, Author
“Patriarchal Resilience Online: How the Internet Makes Misogyny Easier”
Break
2:30-2:45 pm

Panel 3 - Imagining (Real) Feminist Resilience
2:45-4:45 pm
Moderator: Lori Lefkovitz, Northeastern University
By co-opting and upending mainstream calls for resilience, this panel re-imagines a feminist resilience that acknowledges the cultural, institutional, and political dimensions of our misogynist society. We will think through what feminist resilience might look like in increasingly troubled times and ask what might constitute a feminist Resilience Studies.

DiDi Delgado, Black Lives Matter Global Network/The DiDi Delgado Experience, LLC
“The Violence of Resilience: Black Non-Men and the Expectation of Suffering”

Leigh Gilmore, Wellesley College
“Epistemic Injustice and Survivor Testimonial Resilience”

L.A. Kauffman, Grassroots Organizer
“Resistance & Persistence: Feminist Organizing Practices and Movement Resilience in the Age of Trump”