

Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Annual Symposium
March 15, 2019
Cabral Center, Northeastern University

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

Check-in & Breakfast

9:00-9:45 am

Welcome

9:45-10:00 am

Suzanna Walters, Director of Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies, Northeastern University; Editor-in-Chief, Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society

Uta Poiger, Dean of the College of Social Sciences & Humanities, Northeastern University

Jennie Stephens, Director of School of Public Policy & Urban Affairs; Dean's Professor of Sustainability Science & Policy; Director of Strategic Research Collaborations, 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”

The talk introduces the Green New Deal (GND) as an example of feminist leadership and explores the proposed GND principles through the rhetorical frameworks of energy justice and “anti-resilience”, an approach to energy development rooted in anti-racism, anti-oppression, and system transformation.

Stephanie DeCandia, Boston Area Rape Crisis Center (BARCC) and Northeastern University

“Reframing the Resilience Narrative for Sexual Violence Survivors”

Explorations on the resiliency of sexual violence survivors often focus exclusively on the individual level at the survivor's ability to successfully navigate their healing. This leads to the creation of a false dichotomy that a survivor either possesses resilience or doesn't - ignoring the tremendous impact of historical and systemic factors such as institutional and government structures and the impact of social inequality on a survivor's well-being and ability to access resources. This presentation will consider the concept of procedural justice in practice and how barriers inherent in traditional systems can be minimized.

The discussion will highlight the methods survivors utilize to challenge these systems and engage with them in meaningful ways, exercising the resilience they have to forge their own unique pathway to healing and justice.

Deon Haywood, Women With a Vision and Laura McTighe, Dartmouth College

“Coming Into Our Own: The Intersections and Interstices of Black Feminist Possibilities”

In 1989, Women With A Vision (WWAV) was just an idea thought up by eight Black women on a front porch in Central City New Orleans. Our foremothers envisioned a world in which women had the space and the support needed to come together to realize their hopes and dreams for themselves, their families, and their communities. And they set their hands to making that world a reality. What began as an all-volunteer street-based outreach project in the some of the darkest days of the AIDS epidemic has grown into an internationally-renowned Black feminist leader in movements for human rights, harm reduction, sex workers’ rights, reproductive justice, and ending mass incarceration. For thirty years, WWAV’s work has been guided by a single principle: women hold their *truths* in their stories; they also hold their *solutions*. In this presentation, Deon Haywood and Laura McTighe invite you to take a seat on WWAV’s front porch, to think with them about the landscape of climate injustice and health disparities in the Gulf Coast today, and to listen into the southern her-story through which WWAV is building the world otherwise.

Tania Rosario-Mendez, Taller Salud

“Women Are the Backbone: Taller Salud’s Response and Healing Process after Hurricane Irma and María”

Two major hurricanes impact Puerto Rico in a three-week period. Women and communities were the first responders to the emergency. This presentation seeks to share this context, weaving in the opportunity our women’s groups developed as they created protected spaces for relationship-building, grief, joy, healing, and shared leadership.

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”

Though misogynoir is a new term, it describes a long tradition of patriarchal toxic masculinity directed at Black women through visual culture. This talk discusses the

resilience of misogynoir in digital spaces and the viral spread of the term on the Internet as well as the resilience and recycling of patriarchal tropes, despite our best efforts create new representations.

Jessica Valenti, Author

“Patriarchal Resilience Online: How the Internet Makes Misogyny Easier”

This talk will focus on the resilience of misogyny/patriarchy in online spaces and how the Internet has facilitated an increasing backlash.

Break

2:30-2:45 pm

Panel 3: Imagining (Real) Feminist Resilience

2:45-4:45 pm

Moderator: Lori Lefkowitz, 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 and The DiDi Delgado Experience, LLC

“The Violence of Resilience: Black Non-Men and the Expectation of Suffering”

This talk discusses how tropes and expectations of resilience are often disempowering, and even, deadly, to Black women and non-men compared to our non-Black counterparts; how expressions and perceptions of femininity are denied to Black feminists; and why emotional and physical reparations to Black women and non-men are essential to true feminist resilience and equity.

Leigh Gilmore, Wellesley College

“Epistemic Injustice and Survivor Testimonial Resilience”

This talk examines how and whether the demand for resilience represents epistemic injustice in the form of an unfair standard victims are increasingly expected to meet. Survivor testimony is often marked by silence, doubt, and fragility-- affects and judgments that are considerably less positive than resilience. Under what conditions can survivor feminist testimony offer new understandings of resilience that do not repeat the demand that victims "tell their stories" in the absence of transparent processes, adequate witnesses, or access of justice?

L.A. Kauffman, Longtime Organizer & Author

“Resistance & Persistence: Feminist Organizing Practices and Movement Resilience in the Age of Trump”

This talk examines the structures, networks, and practices of the women-led grassroots resistance to Trump to explore the interplay between resilience, movement-building, and political success. Two years into the Trump presidency, what feminist organizing

practices have shaped the sprawling movement of movements that has arisen in opposition to the current administration, and how have the distinctive structures of grassroots mobilizing in our time fostered or hindered movement effectiveness?

Panelist & Moderator Biographies

Panel 1: Women's Leadership on Climate, Energy, & Health

Shalanda Baker, Northeastern University, joined the Northeastern faculty in 2017. She works closely with colleagues in Northeastern's Global Resilience Institute, linking it to the School of Law's [Center for Law, Innovation and Creativity](#) (CLIC). Professor Baker served as an Air Force officer prior to her honorable discharge under the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, and became a vocal advocate for repeal of the policy. Following her graduation from law school, she clerked for Justice Roderick Ireland of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court. Professor Baker completed a William H. Hastie Fellowship at the University of Wisconsin Law School, where she received her LLM. In 2016, she won a Fulbright award and spent a year in Mexico exploring energy reform, climate change and indigenous rights. Before joining Northeastern's faculty, Professor Baker was an associate professor of law at the William S. Richardson School of Law, University of Hawai'i, where she was the founding director of the Energy Justice Program.

Stephanie DeCandia, Boston Area Rape Crisis Center and Northeastern University, is the Director of Programs at the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center (BARCC) where she provides oversight and strategic direction for survivor services programs. Stephanie is a statewide leader and mentor in the victim-services field providing support to newer advocates through the Massachusetts Victim Assistance Academy. She co-wrote the Massachusetts curriculum on police investigations used at the state's training academy and has led numerous initiatives with campuses, researchers, legislators and others to advance survivors' rights and experiences when seeking healing and justice. Stephanie is a part-time lecturer in the Human Services Program at Northeastern University. She is a 2013 Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly Top Women of Law honoree. In 2008, the Massachusetts Office for Victim Assistance recognized her with its Community Advocate Award. Stephanie holds a Bachelor of Social Work degree from Providence College and a Juris Doctorate from Northeastern University School of Law. Prior to joining BARCC, she was the Victim Rights Law Center's Supervising Staff Attorney. Stephanie began her legal work as the Staff Attorney for Aid to Incarcerated Mothers.

Deon Haywood, Women With a Vision, has worked as a human rights defender and advocate for Black women, working class and low-income women, and LGBTQ communities in the South for more than twenty-five years. As the Executive Director of WWAV, she led the organization after Hurricane Katrina in successfully changing the "crime against nature" statute being used to criminalize street-based sex work, thereby securing the removal of more than 800 people from the Louisiana sex offender registry. Through her relentless advocacy, she has grown WWAV into a leading voice on Black women and criminalization. For this work, she has been honored with numerous awards by groups across the United States in recognition of her leadership at the intersection of HIV/AIDS, harm reduction, LGBTQ rights, reproductive justice, and ending mass

incarceration. In 2018, she was appointed to the New Orleans Human Relations Commission to advance this body's work on Human Rights and Equity.

Laura McTighe, Dartmouth College, is a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Society of Fellows at Dartmouth College and the Co-Founder and Associate Director of Front Porch Research Strategy in New Orleans. As an interdisciplinary scholar of religion, gender, race, and social movements, she studies the histories of struggle that fill our present and asks how practitioners use religion to organize and transform our world. Her research and teaching take shape through and are sustained by her twenty years of work in our nation's movements to end AIDS and prisons. Her first book project, *Fire Dreams*, is a collaborative ethnography of activist persistence undertaken in partnership with the Black feminist leaders of WWAV after the organization's headquarters were firebombed and destroyed in a still-uninvestigated arson attack. Her next project, "Moral Medicine," is a historical ethnography of gendered punishment, which traces the continuities between nineteenth-century carceral imaginaries and our current era of mass criminalization.

Tania Rosario-Mendez, Taller Salud, is an artist, educator, public health specialist and women and girls' rights activist, born and raised in Puerto Rico. She holds a B.A. in Humanities with a double major in Drama and History from the University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras Campus and a Master in Public Health from the UPR's Medical Sciences Campus. With over 15 years of experience in the nonprofit sector, she has a solid background integrating project management, cultural work, community organizing, popular education and human rights activism. She now leads the feminist organization Taller Salud as its Executive Director, focused on reducing health inequities, achieving gender equality, and preventing violence in the communities that suffer from greater social exclusion. Her goal is to build a Puerto Rico where there is health, peace, and economic development for all. Author of two books, several articles, and conference papers. Theatre director and teacher, community organizer, and cultural worker. Trained full-spectrum doula and a certified childbirth educator. Proud mother of a boy and a girl. She is immensely and fiercely happy to be alive.

Jennie C. Stephens, Northeastern University, is the Dean's Professor of Sustainability Science and Policy and director of Northeastern's School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs. She is also director of strategic research collaborations at the Global Resilience Institute and co-director of the MS in Environmental Science and Policy. Her research focuses on institutional and cultural innovation in the energy sector, including gender diversity and energy democracy, and technological optimism, and the "usability" of climate science in climate mitigation and adaptation. Professor Stephens is a 2015-2016 Leopold Leadership fellow, and her book *Smart Grid (R)Evolution: Electric Power Struggles* (Cambridge University Press, 2015) explores social and cultural debates about energy system change. Before Northeastern, Professor Stephens was on the faculty at the University of Vermont and Clark University. She earned her PhD at Caltech in environmental science & engineering and her BA at Harvard in environmental science & public policy.

Panel 2: Flipping the Script: Unpacking the Resilience of Patriarchy

Moya Bailey, Northeastern University, is an assistant professor in the department of Cultures, Societies, and Global Studies and the program in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Northeastern University. Her work focuses on marginalized groups' use of digital media to promote social justice as acts of self-affirmation and health promotion. She is interested in how race, gender, and sexuality are represented in media and medicine. She currently curates the #transformDH Tumblr initiative in Digital Humanities. She is also the digital alchemist for the Octavia E. Butler Legacy Network.

Jessica Valenti, Author, called one of the [Top 100 Inspiring Women](#) in the world, is a [columnist for Medium](#) and a feminist author. Her most recent book, *Sex Object: A Memoir*, was a New York Times bestseller. In 2004, Jessica founded the award winning blog [Feministing.com](#), which *Columbia Journalism Review* called “head and shoulders above almost any writing on women’s issues in mainstream media.” Jessica’s articles have topped the most-read lists at The New York Times, The Atlantic, the Guardian, and The Washington Post. She's also written for Salon, Bitch, Ms. Magazine and The Toast. Jessica has been interviewed on [The Colbert Report](#), profiled [in The New York Times magazine](#), and is a widely-sought after speaker. She has a Masters degree in Gender Studies from Rutgers University and lives in Brooklyn with her [husband](#) and daughter.

Suzanna Walters, Northeastern University, is professor and director of women’s, gender, and sexuality studies and professor of sociology at Northeastern University and is the editor-in-chief of *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society*. Her work centers on questions of gender, feminist theory and politics, sexuality, and popular culture and she is a frequent commentator on these issues for the media. She is the author of numerous books including, most recently, *The Tolerance Trap: How God, Genes, and Good Intentions are Sabotaging Gay Equality*. She is currently working on a book examining the state of both feminist theory and politics in an era of “call-out feminism” and intense social media attention. In 2004, Walters founded the first in the nation Ph.D. program in gender studies at Indiana University, where she was a professor of gender studies and held positions in sociology and communication and culture. Previously, Walters was professor of sociology and director of women’s studies at Georgetown University.

Panel 3: Imagining (Real) Feminist Resilience

DiDi Delgado, Black Lives Matter Global Network/The DiDi Delgado Experience, LLC, is a writer, activist, freelance journalist and poet. She is currently Head of Operations at S.O.U.P (The Society Of Urban Poetry), a collective of artists and musicians whose mission statement is to help shed light on the diversity amongst creative individuals and groups across gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, faith, ability, age, and aims to bridge the gaps between these intersectionalities. She facilitates writing workshops at the Haley House and the Dudley Café in Dudley Square. Currently an organizer of Black Lives Matter Cambridge, she has served on the leadership team for the ACLU's BCPA Committee, and the Boston Branch of the NAACP's Young Adult Committee. Most recently, she launched #DoneForDiDi- a community container for radical philanthropy. DiDi is constantly on the front lines blazing pathways, creating channels and fostering connections in support of other activists. She is the recipient of the 2015 Jack Powers Stone Soup Savor award, which is awarded annually to one poet that serves the Boston and Cambridge communities as a mentor while consistently providing distinguished contributions to the art of poetry. DiDi has participated in Michael Rothenberg's 100,000 Poets for Change, worked with Boston's Poet Laureate and others for the 2015 Mayor's Poetry and Prose program, and performed for various venues such as: Boston Center for Arts, Boston City Hall, Emerson College, and Boston City Councilor At Large Ayanna Pressley's Jump Into Peace initiative. Deeply passionate about both her local and global community, she believes that poetry and activism go hand in hand.

Leigh Gilmore, Wellesley College, is Distinguished Visiting Professor of Women's and Gender Studies at Wellesley College and the author of *Tainted Witness: Why We Doubt What Women Say About Their Lives* (Columbia 2017), *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (Cornell 2001), *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation* (Cornell 1994), and, with Elizabeth Marshall, co-author of *Witnessing Girlhood: Toward an Intersectional Tradition of Life Writing* (Fordham 2019). Her articles on autobiographical literature, testimony, and trauma appear in numerous scholarly journals and edited collections. She held the Dorothy Cruikshank Backstrand Chair of Women's and Gender Studies at Scripps College and was Professor of English at Ohio State University. She has held visiting appointments at UC Berkeley, UC Santa Cruz, Northeastern University, Harvard Divinity School, and Brown University. She writes for *The Conversation* and *Cognoscenti* and is currently writing a book on the #MeToo movement.

L.A. Kauffman, Longtime Organizer and Author, has been a grassroots organizer and movement journalist for more than 35 years. She was the mobilizing coordinator for some of the largest protests in U.S. history -- the massive Iraq antiwar protests of 2003 and 2004 -- and has played a leading role in a wide array of direct-action campaigns and movements. She is the author of *Direct Action: Protest and the Reinvention of American Radicalism* (Verso Books, 2017) and *How to Read a Protest: The Art of Organizing and Resistance* (University of California Press, 2018) and writes for *The Guardian*, *n+1*, *Waging Nonviolence*, and numerous other outlets. Most recently

she was the lead editor of the "UnPresided" future-fiction edition of *The Washington Post*, which predicts Donald Trump fleeing the White House after a multiracial, women-led nonviolent uprising.

Lori Hope Lefkowitz, Northeastern University, Ruderman Professor and Director of the Jewish Studies Program and Director of the Humanities Center, is the author of *In Scripture: The First Stories of Jewish Sexual Identity* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010), which was named a finalist for the National Jewish Book Award in the category of Women's Studies. Her awards include a Fulbright professorship at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, an academic fellowship at the Philadelphia Association for Psychoanalysis, a Woodrow Wilson dissertation fellowship in the Women's Studies Division, and a Golda Meir post-doctoral fellowship at Hebrew University. She was the founding director of Kolot, the Center for Jewish Women's and Gender Studies at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, and is the founding executive editor of the website ritualwell.org. Professor Lefkowitz holds a BA from Brandeis University and an MA and PhD from Brown University. Her books include: *Shaping Losses: Cultural Memory and the Holocaust* (with Julia Epstein), *Textual Bodies: Changing Boundaries of Literary Representation*, and *The Character of Beauty in the Victorian Novel*.