Resilient or Resistant Librarians?

An Exploration of "Resilience" Discourses In Contemporary Librarianship

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Two Initial Clarifications:

1) *not* intended as rebuke to conference theme or to efforts of peers on FIP organizing committee.

2) *not* intended as Ivory Tower criticism of library and information practitioners doing vital work in and for their communities.

Genealogies of resilience: From systems ecology to the political economy of crisis adaptation

Jeremy Walker
University of Technology, Sydney, Australia

Melinda Cooper
University of Sydney, NSW, Australia

Abstract

The concept of 'resilience' was first adopted within systems ecology in the 1970s, where it marked a move away from the homeostasis of Cold War resource management toward the far-from-equilibrium models of second-order cybernetics or complex systems theory. Resilience as an operational strategy of risk management has more recently been taken up in financial, urban and environmental security discourses, where it reflects a general consensus about the necessity of adaptation through endogenous crisis. The generalization of complex systems theory as a methodology of power has ambivalent sources. While the redefinition of the concept can be directly traced to the work of the ecologist Crawford S. Holling, the deployment of complex systems theory is perfectly in accord with the later philosophy of the Austrian neoliberal Friedrich Hayek. This ambivalence is reflected in the trajectory of complex systems theory itself, from critique to methodology of power.

Keywords
resilience, crisis, security, securitization, terror

Walker, Jeremy and Melinda Cooper. "Genealogies of Resilience: From Systems Ecology to the Political Economy of Crisis Adaptation." *Security Dialogue*, vol. 42, no. 2, 2011, pp. 143-160.

Karen Nicholson (is very cool)

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Information Into Action? Reflections On (Critical) Practice (Keynote Address, WILU 2018)

Karen Nicholson, *University of Guelph, University of Western Ontario*

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Abstract
In this keynote address, I consider the WILU 2018 conference theme "Information into Action" as representative of normative mainstream discourses of innovation, entrepreneurialism, vocation, and practicality in contemporary academic libraries.

Citation of this paper:
Nicholson, K. P. (2018, June 8). Information into action? Reflections on (critical) practice. Keynote address presented at the WILU 2018 Conference, University of Ottawa.

"resilient OR resilience OR resiliency"

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- "The Importance of Resiliency When Coping with Adversity"

- "Like a Child: Restoring the Awe, Wonder, Joy, and Resiliency of the Human Spirit"

- "Education and Building Capacity for Improving Resilience of Coastal Infrastructure"

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Resilience

"Resilience" or "resiliency" incorporates preparations for and rapid recovery from physical, social, and economic disruptions, including environmental disasters, terrorist attacks, or economic collapse. [1]

How It's Developing

Discussion of resilience has increased in the wake of several recent natural disasters, including Hurricane Katrina (2005) and Hurricane Sandy (2012). While these natural disasters have advanced the discussion, resilience is broadly applied as a strategy to help address climate change, natural disasters, and even terrorism.

Following Hurricane Sandy, government officials at the federal, state, and local levels began thinking about changes that might prevent a repetition of the widespread devastation Sandy had caused. [2] A 2012 report from the National Academies asserted "Developing a culture of resilience would bolster support for preparedness and response, and would also enable better anticipation of disasters and their consequences, enhancing the ability to recover more quickly and strongly. Resilient communities would plan and build in ways that would reduce disaster losses, rather than waiting for a disaster to occur and paying for it afterward." [3]

In 2013, the Rockefeller Foundation began working with thirty-two cities as the first cohort of a 100 Resilient Cities Initiative. According to the Foundation, resilience is "the capacity of individuals, communities, institutions, businesses, and systems within a city to survive, adapt, and grow no matter what kinds of chronic stresses and acute shocks they

Why It Matters

As city, state, and federal governments adopt resiliency as a strategy for addressing potential disasters, libraries may need to align their facilities, services, and programs to demonstrate a resilient strategy. Additionally, libraries may find themselves competing for funding with resilient programs or initiatives, especially in an increasingly limited pool of government spending. [7]

Resilience requires community involvement, such as encouraging individuals to make decisions that help prepare for and prevent the impact of disasters, providing resources and information to help them make informed decisions, and offering programs and services that allow individuals to respond to issues as they arise. [8] Libraries and information professionals may be ideal partners or providers in helping individuals adopt resilient practices in their communities.

Resilience may also align with library values of equity and access. Truly resilient communities would embrace distributed renewable energy, support diversified local agriculture, and foster social equity and inclusion – all ensuring that communities can adapt to disruptions and avoid situations where the greatest impacts are felt by the most vulnerable members of the community. [9]

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ALA's Center for the Future of Libraries' Resilience Trend

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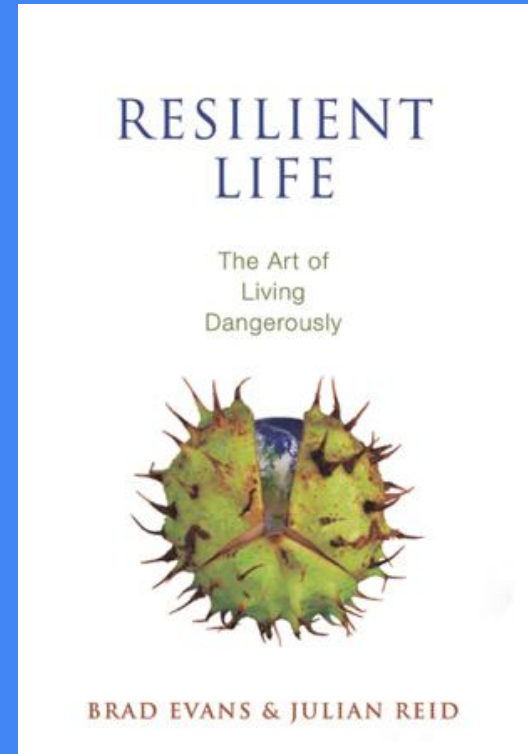
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1.

The resilient subject is not a political subject who on its own terms conceives of changing the world, its structure and conditions of possibility. The resilient subject is required to accept the dangerousness of the world it lives in as a condition for partaking of that world and accept the necessity of the injunction to change itself in correspondence with threats now presupposed as endemic and unavoidable.

[...]

Building resilient subjects involves the deliberate disabling of the political habits, tendencies and capacities of peoples and replacing them with adaptive ones. Resilient subjects ... have accepted the imperative not to resist or secure themselves from the dangers they face. Nor are they capable of viewing the world beyond the catastrophic. Instead, they adapt to their enabling conditions via the embrace of a neoliberal rationality that fosters a belief in the necessity of risk as a private good (Evans and Reid 42; emphasis added)
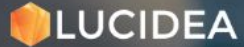
2.

Once the practice of freeing oneself from danger is rendered, as it has now become, a pathological disposition of humans who are not attuned to the dangerous realities of the times, the problem becomes not how to secure the human but how to enable it to outlive its proclivity for security. ***How to alter its disposition in relation with danger so that it construes danger not as something it might seek freedom from, but which it must live in exposure to in order to become more reasonably human. Resilient subjects embody these reasonable lives.*** They are subjects who have learnt the lesson of the dangers of the myth of lasting security, in order to live out a life of permanent exposure to dangers that are not only beyond their abilities to overcome, but necessary for the prosperity of their life. (Evans and Reid 58; emphasis added)

3.

Beyond showing how the discourse of resilience legitimates neoliberal systems of governance and institutions, it is necessary to attend to the forms of subjectivity it attempts to bring into being. The account of the world envisaged and constituted by development agencies concerned with building resilient subjects is one that presupposes the disastrousness of the world, and likewise one which interpellates ***a subject that is permanently called upon to bear the disaster – a subject for whom bearing the disaster is a required practice without which he or she cannot grow and prosper in the world.*** This is what we believe to be most at stake in the discourse of resilience. (Evans and Reid 72)

"Characteristics of a Change Resilient Librarian" by Ron Aspe (Lucidea)

Adapting to change requires reacting positively to change – even creating change – and ultimately ensuring that it works to a special library's advantage. Equally important, special librarians themselves can thrive, both personally and professionally, when they become change agents … **think "resilience," not resistance.**

Special librarians achieve sustainability by understanding that end user requirements and forces at work (e.g. new technologies, globalization and a mobile workforce) all demand change—and **by reacting positively. Libraries must cope with staff shortages, budget cuts, outdated technology, competition from unexpected sources, and even negative stereotypes. In the face of all these challenges, it can be powerful to develop those parts of yourself which make you "The Change Resilient Librarian."**

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, resilient means "able to … spring back into shape after bending, stretching or being compressed." That's with regard to an object. With regard to a person, it means "able to withstand or recover quickly from difficult conditions." … ***Combining those two definitions helps me think about what qualities define the Change Resilient Special Librarian: one who can bounce back from unexpected and uncontrollable change, and not simply recover from, but triumph over challenges—even creating positive change.*** […]

A resilient librarian is a change manager. Accepting the new, the different, the exciting, the inconvenient—***even the stressful***—and developing a strategy for managing it can be extremely empowering. Leaders who manage change both reassure and inspire their teams—and individual contributors who do so build a professional confidence that allows them to thrive ***even when they're stretched, compressed or facing difficult conditions.*** (Aspe; emphasis added)

Berg, Galvan, and Tewell

Resilience, Grit, and Other Lies

Academic Libraries and the Myth of Resiliency

Angela Galvan | @dropvase
Jacob Berg | @jacobsberg
Eamon Tewell | @eamontewell

ACRL 2017   #ResistingResilience   Slides: tinyurl.com/ACRLresilience

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Responding to and Reimagining Resilience

in Academic Libraries

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LAC Group, The Foreign Service Institute, United States Department of State

Angela Galvan

Brown University

Eamon Tewell

Long Island University Brooklyn

Abstract: This article briefly introduces library staff to the concept of resilience, beginning with its origins and how it came to academic libraries. The authors posit that the resilience narrative obscures structural issues, particularly those relating to socioeconomic status, and shifts responsibility to library workers who must then overcome barriers to success. The authors challenge the concept of resilience as used in library workplaces, offer potential responses to it from library workers and supervisors, and conclude that applying resilience in and to libraries causes more harm than good.

Keywords: *resilience; library workers; change management*

Reimagining Resilience

When appropriately applied, it is possible to reimagine how resilience might be helpful to the individual and organization.

- Resilience might allow libraries to plan for disasters and climate change events.

- Libraries could recognize the ways their staff are already resilient, especially people of color in a profession dominated by whiteness.

- Resilience could be applied in response to productive conversations about what services are maintained in the name of tradition and not because they address community needs.

- Libraries could reimagine resilience as taking on changes in responsibilities and duties that aren't masking untenable workloads for employees.

- Resilience could help us let go of unnecessary tasks, or embrace discomfort during re-skilling efforts. Resilience could help us accept "done" rather than perfection.

- Resilience could help distinguish between critiques of process and personal attacks, because we wouldn't derive our identities exclusively from work.

(Berg et al 4)

Farkas and Ettarh

in
practice
BY Meredith Farkas

So what exactly is "vocational awe?" Well simply put, it is the idea that libraries as institutions are inherently good. It assumes that some or all core aspects of the profession are beyond critique, and it, in turn, underpins many librarians' sense of identity and emotional investment in the profession. The

"I believe vocational awe and resilience narratives make library staffers feel less comfortable expressing dissatisfaction with their work and advocating for themselves. They paint workers who feel burned out or frustrated as failures who couldn't overcome adversity rather than as people who need support" (Farkas)

Any gesture to define "resilience" is a political act

- What is the contemporary "state of the world"?

- How inextricable are conditions of "danger" and "risk" from that world?

- How naturalized have conditions of "danger" and "risk" become?

- How "vulnerable" are subjects in that world?

- How much agency do we assume those subjects to have in that world?

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Nicholson, Karen. "Information Into Action? Reflections on (Critical) Practice" Information Into Action,
Workshop for Instruction in Library Use (WILU) Conference 2018, 8 June 2018, University of Ottawa,
Ottawa, ON. Keynote Address.

Thank-you!

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