



Failure Lab (Institute of Social Prevention and Resocialization, University of Warsaw),
Section of Social Anthropology and Warsaw Chapter of the Polish Sociological Association cordially invite to a
public lecture

Gertrude J. Fraser

University of Virginia

Storying Science, Storying Failure — Narratives of Women Scientists and Engineers

Discussants:

Adriana Mica, Failure Lab, University of Warsaw

Ewa Klekot, The School of Form, SWPS University

13 January 2023 at 17.00 CET

ONLINE (<https://uso6web.zoom.us/j/86515041978?pwd=emxoNGRELoxJTotFbjQydo04aStMQTog>)

Abstract:

Gertrude Fraser will explore themes of failure in interviews with senior faculty women in the science, engineering and social behavioral disciplines at an American research university. Failure is provisionally defined as circumstances when the expected does not come to fruition. However, the failure stories of these very successful women were surprisingly variant—from memories of the first bad grade on a math test, learning to accept grant rejections, experiments gone wrong multiple times, and poor teaching evaluations to the challenges of life in the academy where institutional failures helped to normalize gender inequities and hostile departmental cultures. Failure was also described as a generative source of intellectual discovery, a reason to risk, an access point into self-reflection and discernment, an approach to transformative leadership, and a bridge used to support and mentor students into their deep engagement in scientific research. From whatever perspective these interviewees reflected on failure, one major theme that surfaced was the degree to which failure was experienced as a solo project for which individuals created their own remedies and reflected on their own efforts to surmount and reframe the meaning and consequences of failure in their professional and personal lives. Rather than as institutional or disciplinary, failure emerged as a private phenomenon. This lecture explores whether failure may be useful as a heuristic to explore the relationship between STEM women's marginalized status in the academy and the delegitimization of their collective failure experiences.

Bios:

Gertrude Fraser earned her undergraduate degrees from Bryn Mawr College and her doctorate from The Johns Hopkins University, both in Anthropology. She is a tenured associate professor in the department of Anthropology at the University of Virginia. Within Anthropology her primary area of work has been on the culture of American medicine, with a specialization in reproduction, the ethnohistory of African American' encounter with the health care system with a book (Harvard University Press) about rural African American midwives in the early to mid-twentieth century. Beyond her appointment as a member of

the professorate, Dr. Fraser has served in leadership roles at her university as Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs and as a Program Officer in Higher Education at the Ford Foundation.

Gertrude Fraser's career has effectively combined scholarship on culture, medicine and African American communities, with action on behalf of strengthening opportunities for women, African Americans and other minorities in science, health care and in higher education. Her current research in collaboration with colleagues at the University of Virginia seeks to improve African American men's knowledge about prostate cancer and their screening and treatment options. She is P.I. and writer of a five-year 3M NSF grant to identify barriers to and improve recruitment and advancement of women faculty in the sciences, engineering mathematics and social sciences. Her current project explores failure narratives in the oral histories of women faculty.

Adriana Mica is a sociologist and an assistant professor (with Habilitation) at Institute of Social Prevention and Resocialization, University of Warsaw (IPSiR UW). She is the head of the Failure Lab, University of Warsaw. Adriana Mica's research focuses on the unintended consequences of public policies in Romania and Poland. She is interested in economic sociology, in particular the theory of possibility, ignorance and failure. In her monograph "Sociology as Analysis of the Unintended: From the Problem of Ignorance to the Discovery of the Possible" (Routledge 2018), she establishes a research agenda for these issues. She is also the author of "Ignorance and Change. Anticipatory Knowledge and the European Refugee Crisis" (Routledge, 2021) and the editor of "The Routledge International Handbook of Failure" (both together with Mikołaj Pawlak, Anna Horolets and Paweł Kubicki).

Ewa Klekot – cultural anthropologist, translator and curator. Currently assistant professor at the Design Institute of SWPS University, she lectures at the School of Form and the University of Warsaw. Graduated in archaeology and ethnology, and holds a PhD in art studies. She is interested in an interdisciplinary combination of liberal arts and social sciences with design and artistic projects, both in research as well as education. Her current area of research concerns the anthropology of manufacturing and related cognition modes: skills, embodied knowledge, materials and processes; manufacturing traditions versus intangible heritage. She is also practices anthropological reflection on art, especially the social construction of folk art, in addition to the materiality and of things recognised as art and/or design objects, heritagized as monuments and museum exhibits. Member of the City of Warsaw's Council of Intangible Heritage, as well as the Council of Monuments at the City's Historic Monuments Conservator. The exhibition on the role of women scholars in ethnology and anthropology that she has curated is currently on display at the Museum of Ethnography in Warsaw: <https://ethnomuseum.pl/wystawy/etnografki-antropozki-profesorki/>

Failure Lab explores critically the privilege, contingency and invisibility of failing in public policy. This is the first project to materialize the sociological field of the unintentional in the form of a research unit. The establishment of this unit also marks the presence of the Faculty of Applied Social Sciences and Resocialization of the University of Warsaw in this field. The Lab has been operating since 2018. For more information visit the Failure Lab site: <http://policy-failures.uw.edu.pl>

The lecture is a part of the „Inequalities of Failure: Developing a Global Think Tank of Failing and the Pandemic“ (2022-2023), project realized within *Action II.2.1 Tandems for Excellence: Visiting Researchers Programme*, IDUB Programme, University of Warsaw.