



## Article

# Feminizing Futures

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## Abstract

*This article responds to Ivana Milojević's *The Hesitant Feminist's Guide to the Future*, exploring how contemporary futurists define and practice feminism within their work. Drawing from the perspectives of eleven futurists, it explores the reasons behind their embrace of feminism, their critique of patriarchal systems, the implications of violence, and what they seek to achieve through feminist futures. The analysis underscores an evolving feminist thought that extends beyond gender issues to include holistic, systemic change, cultural recognition, and the dismantling of oppressive structures. Further, it examines the challenges faced by these futurists, addressing individual, societal, and systemic issues. Using Causal Layered Analysis, it identifies the associated systemic causes and explores the worldviews that perpetuate these challenges, drawing on metaphors to illustrate current realities and visions for transformative futures. The findings presented here mark a humble beginning to a dialogue between feminism and futures studies, with a view towards feminizing futures.*

## Keywords

Feminism, Feminizing Futures, Metaphors, Causal Layered Analysis

## Introduction

In *The Hesitant Feminist's Guide to the Future*, Ivana Milojević (2024) explores the complexities of feminist identities, questioning why some individuals hesitate to identify as feminists despite supporting its core principles. She attributes this reluctance to historical associations of feminism with terms like “man-hating”, “lack of femininity” or “lesbianism” (p. 13).

Milojević's work serves as a guide for my exploration on feminism and futures. I reached out to a select list of female futurists of diverse cultural and professional background for a 60-minute face-to-face interview, and 13 agreed to participate. The conversations circled around these questions “What does being a feminist mean to them? How does that influence their work? What metaphors would they use to describe their current realities and transformative futures?”

The analysis underscores an evolving feminist thought that extends beyond gender issues to include holistic, systemic change, cultural recognition, and the dismantling of oppressive structures. Further, it examines challenges faced by these futurists, addressing individual, societal, and systemic issues. Using Causal Layered Analysis, it identifies the associated systemic causes and explores the worldviews that perpetuate these challenges, drawing on metaphors to illustrate current realities and visions for transformative futures. The findings from a series of interviews with eleven futurists (with two opting to be excluded) builds on Milojević's discussion, examining how contemporary futurists define feminism and why they embrace it. It addresses key themes, including definitions of feminism, critiques of patriarchy, the implications of violence, and the aspirations of feminist futurists, advocating for a form of feminism that goes beyond gender, emphasising equity, cultural recognition, and intergenerational wisdom.

The article begins with a brief introduction to each participant. The discussion starts with exploring how futurists

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define feminism, revealing a range of evolving perspectives that challenge traditional notions. It then examines why these futurists embrace feminism, highlighting their critiques of patriarchy and the systemic inequalities it perpetuates. The next section outlines the challenges identified by the interviewees, broken down into individual, societal, and systemic issues. Using Causal Layered Analysis, the article further investigates the underlying systemic causes and worldviews that sustain these challenges, illustrated by metaphors describing both current realities and transformative futures. By the end, the article presents feminist futurists' commitment to reshaping futures work as a practice grounded in inclusivity, equity, and holistic thinking, aligning with Milojević's vision of a more connected and collaborative future.

## Participants

A brief introduction to each participant is provided below.

Wendy Schultz, director, Infinite Futures, with over 35 years of global foresight practice, conducts futures research for NGOs, governments, and businesses, and specialises in participatory futures workshops, was affiliated with the University of Houston where she taught Strategic Foresight Masters Program. She is based in Oxford, UK.

Doris Viljoen, senior futurist and lead consultant, is a lecturer and director at the Institute for Futures Research, Stellenbosch Business School, Cape Town, South Africa.

Donna Dupont is a Foresight and Design Strategist specialising in disaster risk management, focusing on emerging risks and using foresight and design methods to enhance community resilience. She is affiliated with professional networks including APF, IAEM, and CRHNet, and is based in Toronto, Canada.

Natalie Dian, Sweden-based consultant, focuses on foresight skills development and values articulation. She created the Foresight Styles Assessment, adopted by Tamkang University, and developed Framtidsbygget™ for futures skills training. A member and Fellow of the World Futures Studies Federation, she specialises in vision creation and leadership growth.

Jeanne Hoffman, Founder and Chief Futurist at Anticipating Futures, is an Adjunct Fellow at the University of the Sunshine Coast. Focused on empowering leaders through futures education and transformative change across industries, she is also a co-editor of World Futures Review. She is based in Australia

Diana Wu David, a former Financial Times executive, is now a strategic advisor and coach, and is recognised as a Top 50 Global Future of Work Thought Leader, the author of Future Proof, and a specialist in board governance and strategic foresight. David founded the Financial Times Board Director Programme in Asia, serving on various boards and contributing to major publications. She is based in Hong Kong.

Yelena Muzykina, based in Kazakhstan, leads the "Islam in Postnormal Times in the Middle East and Central Asia" project and is a Fellow at the Centre for Postnormal Policy and Futures Studies.

Marcelle Holdaway, based in Australia, is a 'pracademic' whose values focus on equity, empowerment, and healing. She has a career in social and environmental matters, a PhD in accountability and sustainability, and specialises as an accredited social auditor and accountant, associated with the Social Audit Network UK.

Freyja Van Den Boom is a Postdoc researcher specialising in transdisciplinary AI/Data governance and speculative legal design futures. She is a Research Fellow at CNRS, works independently, and is based in Singapore.

Tanja Hichert is a futures/foresight practitioner specialising in scenario planning, horizon scanning, systems thinking, and strategic conversations. She has over 15 years of strategy experience in large corporations and 16 years running a consulting firm, and works globally, particularly in Africa. Based in South Africa, Hichert teaches at Stellenbosch University, holds the UNESCO co-Chair in Complex Systems and Transformative African Futures, and co-founded the Foresight for Development platform.

Maree Conway, with a successful career in university management, founded Thinking Futures in 2007, later rebranded to Foresight Futures in 2016, and then to Foresight in the Present in 2022. She has extensive experience in the futures field.

## Definitions of Feminism in Futures Work

Milojević opens her monograph by exploring the diverse definitions of feminism and why the term can be contentious. This section explores how the select futurists who participated in the interviews define feminism in their own terms, revealing an evolving understanding that moves beyond simplistic or stereotypical notions.

Feminism in the field of futures work is evolving, encompassing a range of perspectives and practices. While some practitioners identify openly with feminist ideals, others take a more cautious approach, emphasising the importance of inclusivity, diverse voices, and systemic change. This shift reflects the ongoing evolution of feminist thought, extending beyond gender to address broader societal issues such as power dynamics, equity, and cultural recognition.

Some futurists explicitly identify as feminists, advocating for transformative research systems that are equitable and supportive of women, acknowledging the importance of creating participatory spaces for women's lived experiences of inequality in foresight discussions. One practitioner articulates this view by pointing to the need to create spaces for women's voices and perspectives, ensuring that research actively supports their participation.

"If this research system that we have in the Global South is transforming and changing... what are some of the future disruptors and enablers that might... help or hinder it?" [Tanja H.]

Others extend the definition of feminism beyond gender, suggesting that it encompasses a more connected and emotional approach to futures work, i.e. "bringing the softer side into decision making process, which is not limited to gender but rather represents a balanced way of thinking" [Doris V.]. This involves integrating acknowledgment of indigenous perspectives, cultural respect, and a connection to the land, thus moving beyond traditional feminist discourse to address broader participation.

"What we try to include at the beginning of our workshops is... recognition of the people who have taken care of the land for 1 million years or so... we just try to put a little bit of ourselves into it." [Jeanne H.]

There are views that underscore the incorporation of diverse voices, particularly those from non-Western and minority backgrounds, and the need to challenge our ways of knowing (Wildman & Inayatullah, 1996) This approach views feminism as crucial for challenging existing power structures and building bottom-up methods that champion diversity. Such a stance implies that feminism must go beyond gender alone, advocating for the dismantling of systemic inequalities across multiple dimensions.

"I'm interested in the voices that we are not hearing in the discourse, the perspectives that we are not seeing... It's important to understand who's making those decisions and whose interests they are serving. ... Who decides what kind of futures we want? Because we need to make decisions on how we are going to deal with AI... and at the moment, the people who have gotten us into this mess are also the people who are still in power." – [Freyja]

"If this research system that we have in the global South is transforming and changing... what are some of the future disruptors and enablers that might... help or hinder it?" – [Tanja H. ].

Some female futurists express hesitation in adopting the feminist label, acknowledging that the term can sometimes carry unintended connotations that may hinder its inclusive intentions, despite their commitment to breaking down barriers for women. They advocate for gender equality through high-quality work and support but worry that identifying explicitly as "feminist" might unintentionally perpetuate exclusion. For these practitioners, the essence of feminist action is not found in the label itself, but in tangible efforts toward equity and accessibility.

"I would not predominantly identify as a feminist because feminist feels as though it is, from my understanding, already exclusionary again... I also feel that by doing my work at the highest quality, I could break that barrier by being a female that does my work well rather than being a feminist. ... "If we now say feminist, what do we actually say? Are we just perpetuating what has happened? Because now..."

we are not nice to all the other genders.” [Doris V.]

A key aspect of the redefinition of feminism within futures work is the shared focus on increasing the representation of female voices in discussions about the future. This shift involves stepping away from dominant perspectives, particularly those rooted in traditional power structures, and fostering a more inclusive and diverse discourse. By including a wider range of female voices, feminist futurists seek to challenge power dynamics that often sideline women’s perspectives.

Collectively, these evolving views bring forth feminism’s role in transforming futures work to be more inclusive, holistic, and impactful, distancing it from historical stereotypes and misconceptions. Milojević notes that hesitation to identify with feminism often stems from its historical associations with radicalism and conflict. However, these futurists are redefining feminism as a practice centered on systemic change, inclusivity, and cultural respect, aligning with Milojević’s vision of a feminist framework that promotes a more connected and collaborative future.

**How Are Times Changing?**

Unlike historical stereotypes of feminism as "man-hating" or rejecting traditional gender norms, the respondents view it as a multifaceted, balanced, and inclusive approach. They advocate for collaboration, uplifting marginalised voices, and systemic change rather than opposing traditional norms or lifestyle choices. These perspectives (summarised in Table 1) align with recent findings that highlight modern feminism’s emphasis on intersectionality and collective participation, moving away from earlier, more divisive concepts.

**Table 1:** The Changing Times as articulated by respondents

<b>Futurist/Context</b>	<b>Experience/Focus</b>	<b>Key Insights</b>
Historical Context	Traditional view of feminism	Previously seen as antagonistic to traditional gender roles, but current futurists suggest redefining feminism to embrace rather than oppose different gender expressions.
Earlier Feminist Movements	Personal expressions of feminism	Focused on personal expressions related to appearance and lifestyle. Modern focus is on systemic change, inclusivity, diversity, and integration of marginalized voices in futures studies.
Contemporary Feminism	Collaborative and intersectional focus	Pew Research Center (2020) shows younger generations increasingly support collaborative, inclusive, and intersectional feminism. Futurists advocate empathy, listening, and inclusivity in futures work.
Wendy Schultz	Experience in female-led teams	Futures work is often easier with women due to less ego and more empathy. Advocates for an interconnected, systemic approach without rejecting masculinity or femininity.
	Feminist practice	Stresses an emphasis on listening rather than talking and practicing empathy in feminist futures.
Diana Wu	Finding balance through diverse voices	Incorporates more female voices in futures work, highlighting the need to include those who lack representation. Critiques the dominance of male perspectives.
Tanja Hichert	Research systems in the Global South	Calls for transformation in research systems in the Global South, exploring future disruptors and enablers that might impact this change.
Maree Conway	Reframing thinking in the present	Emphasizes the importance of present thinking and actions to influence systemic change, rather than focusing solely on the future.

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Donna Dupont	Introducing alternative thinking	Highlights the importance of introducing alternative, human-centric thinking in traditionally male-dominated fields to approach complex issues differently.
Freyja Van De Boom	Intersectional View, emphasising non-Western voices	emphasizes the inclusion of non-Western voices and critiques traditional power structures. Her stance illustrates a modern, intersectional view of feminism that aligns with contemporary attitudes toward inclusivity and systemic critique.
Marcelle Holdaway	Women’s Value	ageism and the societal perception of older women, suggesting a feminist critique of how women’s value is often linked to youthfulness. Her narrative indicates an embrace of diverse life stages as a part of feminist identity.
Yelena Muzykina	Femininity	being a caretaker and protector, highlighting traditionally "feminine" traits. Her approach to futures work is not framed as rejecting femininity but rather as incorporating it into a broader, systemic perspective.

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**Moving Beyond Stereotypes of Feminism**

Early stereotypes often depicted feminists as angry "man-haters" or rejecting traditional gender norms. However, insights from the interviews show that futurists move beyond these historical labels, embracing participation, systemic thinking, collaboration, and diverse perspectives in their work.

Wendy Schultz describes her experience in female-led teams, noting that futures work tends to be easier due to less ego and more empathy. Rather than rejecting masculinity or femininity, she advocates for a more interconnected, systemic approach. "Working in any project that involves teamwork is often easier with women, because there is frequently less ego and alpha anything."

Diana Wu focuses on finding balance by incorporating diverse voices, including women’s perspectives, without framing feminism as oppositional to men. She critiques the dominance of male voices in futures discussions: "My work is incorporating more female voices... because I believe in hearing the most different types of voices and including people who are not having a voice in futures."

Historically, feminism was seen as antagonistic to traditional gender roles, but these futurists suggest a redefinition that embraces rather than opposes traditional gender expressions.

Yelena Muzykina, for instance, views being a caretaker and protector—traits often labeled as "feminine"—as integral to her broader systemic perspective: "For me... being a feminist futurist means to bring my view as a woman..., it should be a synthesis and a very critical one of what we want to keep from our traditional humanity."

Doris Viljoen echoes this sentiment, preferring to break down barriers without strictly labelling herself as a feminist: "I would support other females trying to break through the barriers that there is without being a feminist. ... If that is defined as more feminine in kind of futures, then I'm all for it."

"Women bring... a different sensibility or sensitivity... I've spent a lot of time studying politics and business, and I do believe that some women bring a different sensibility." [Diana Wu]

**Focus on Systemic Issues Over Individual Pursuit**

Earlier feminist movements often centered on personal expressions related to appearance and lifestyle. In contrast, these respondents focus on systemic change, discussing inclusivity, diversity, and the integration of marginalised voices in futures studies. This shift aligns with contemporary surveys showing a move from individual expressions to broader systemic concerns, see for example, Latin American feminist activists inform women’s struggles for territories, material autonomy and their own bodies (Santana, n.d.).

There's a realisation for transformation in research systems in the Global South: "If this research system that we have in the Global South is transforming and changing... what are some of the future disruptors and enablers that might... help or hinder it?" [Tanja H.]

Similarly, Maree Conway stresses the importance of reframing our thinking in the present to influence systemic change, stating, "It's not the future that matters. You know, it's actually what we think and do in the present."

### **Collaborative and Inclusive Futures**

Pew Research Center (2020) and other surveys have shown that younger generations increasingly support collaborative, inclusive, and intersectional forms of feminism (pp.16-18). The respondents collectively call for collaboration, empathy, and the inclusion of multiple perspectives in futures work. This approach aligns with contemporary definitions of feminism that are less about opposition and more about creating a more inclusive, equitable society.

Futurists call for feminist practice that is inherently inclusive, community-focused and human-centric

"There's more emphasis on listening than talking and on empathy." [Wendy S.]

"It's about introducing alternative thinking, especially in traditionally male-dominated fields... to show that there are other ways to approach complex issues. ... I'm always trying to bring in the human side... trying to get people to think differently about the challenges." [Donna D.]

### **Why Futurists Embrace Feminism**

Feminist futurists embrace feminism as a tool for questioning power structures and amplifying diverse voices, aligning with Milojević's view that feminism involves challenging dominance and advocating for inclusivity. They see feminism not as a fixed identity but as a project of transformation. A key reason for their commitment is its capacity to elevate non-Western and minority perspectives. Freyja van den Boom highlights the importance of examining "who's making those decisions and whose interests they are serving," pointing to the need for more diverse decision-making in futures work.

Feminist futurists critique patriarchy by focusing on how it shapes societal narratives and decision-making. Diana Wu David criticises the dominance of Anglo-Saxon male voices in shaping futures, calling for a shift toward more balanced, inclusive discourse. Wendy Schultz also observes that teamwork often functions more smoothly with women due to "less ego and alpha anything." Abdullah, et al., (2024) critique the elitism in futures studies, particularly in the Global South, challenging the patriarchal structures that limit the field to academia and corporations, and argue for inclusivity through accessible education, support for local initiatives, and the integration of indigenous knowledge to empower diverse communities in shaping the future. The development of methodologies like Anticipatory Experimentation (Ramos, 2017) critiques the imposition of "official futures," challenging the hierarchical systems that shape solutions based on unquestioned worldviews and perspectives. This approach and critiques seek to dismantle the epistemological assumptions that often perpetuate exclusion and exacerbate existing problems, advocating for a more inclusive and diverse way of exploring future possibilities.

Their aspirations extend to nurturing future generations and sharing wisdom. Wendy Schultz describes older women as "the wise old women who are coming to talk to you about your futures." For them, mentoring is about creating spaces where young voices feel valued, echoing Marcelle Holdaway's sentiment: "Nurturing future generations isn't just about giving advice; it's about creating spaces where young women feel heard." This intergenerational approach to futures work reflects a form of feminism that values empathy, care, and community-building.

Feminist futurists advocate for systemic change that goes beyond surface-level modifications, aiming to transform research, policy, and societal systems. Tanja Hichert stresses the importance of addressing disruptors in the Global South's research systems to support women and other underrepresented groups. Their critique of patriarchy involves questioning who holds authority and whose interests are prioritised, as Freyja notes, "Who decides what kind of futures we want?" Diana Wu David also identifies the dominance of certain voices as a

challenge to inclusivity in futures work.

In their approach, feminist futurists centre on ethical practices, emphasising the need to consider the consequences of decisions on marginalised communities and the environment. Wendy Schultz captures this perspective: "There's that question of accountability and responsibility for those intended and unintended consequences... How do those impacts cascade out?" They aim to create futures work that is not only equitable but also responsive to the complexities of human experience, advocating for bottom-up approaches that prioritise collective well-being.

Ultimately, feminist futurists embody Milojević's vision of a transformative feminism that moves beyond gender, tackling issues of equity, power dynamics, cultural recognition, and intergenerational wisdom. They redefine feminism as a framework for creating a future that is more inclusive, holistic, and compassionate. Despite some hesitancy around the label "feminist," their work champions core feminist principles, critiquing existing power structures while actively fostering inclusive practices. This evolving perspective reinforces feminist thought as essential for navigating the complexities of the future, making it a key driver for transformative futures practice.

### **Causal Layered Analysis**

The findings from the interviews outline various challenges faced by the group of futurists, which can be broken down into individual, societal, and systemic issues. This analysis explores these challenges (the litany), their associated systemic causes, the worldviews that perpetuate them, and metaphors that describe the current realities and transformative futures. The summary of the discussion is presented in Table 2.

### **Litany of Challenges**

#### *Exclusion and Marginalisation in Futures Work*

Many respondents highlight the exclusion of women and other marginalised voices in futures discussions. This manifests as limited representation, tokenism, and the dominance of certain perspectives, particularly those of Western, male voices.

#### *Systemic Barriers and Gender Inequality*

Respondents point to systemic barriers that prevent women and minorities from participating fully in futures work. These include gender biases, ageism, and traditional power structures that limit the influence of diverse voices.

#### *Dominance of Traditional Perspectives*

There is a concern that futures work is dominated by Western-centric, often male-driven narratives, which limits the diversity of perspectives in shaping future scenarios. This dominance perpetuates a narrow view of what the future can be.

#### *Lack of Empathy and Emotional Connection*

Some respondents highlight the absence of a more emotional, empathetic approach in futures practice, arguing that the current focus on technical and economic models fails to capture the human dimension of future scenarios.

#### *Ethical Dilemmas and Accountability*

The respondents face ethical dilemmas in futures work, particularly around who has the right to shape futures and how to navigate collaborations with organisations that may have harmful practices. This includes the struggle to balance personal values with professional responsibilities.

### **Associated Systemic Causes**

#### *Patriarchy and Power Structures*

The exclusion and diminished presence of women in futures work are tied to patriarchal systems that privilege male voices and perspectives. These structures maintain control over decision-making processes, reinforcing gender inequality and limiting diverse participation. Patriarchy creates hierarchies that privilege certain identities over others, resulting in a lack of access and influence for women and minorities in futures practice.

*Western-Centric Narratives*

The dominance of Western-centric perspectives in futures work perpetuates the exclusion of non-Western and minority voices. This narrative control shapes the discourse around the future, often ignoring alternative ways of knowing and imagining it. Western narratives have historically framed progress and modernity in specific ways, pushing aside other cultural, indigenous, and gendered perspectives. This systemic bias restricts the diversity of futures thinking.

*Capitalist and Competitive Worldviews*

The reliance on economic and technological models in futures work is rooted in a capitalist worldview that values competition, profit, and growth. This perspective often neglects social, cultural, and emotional aspects, excluding more holistic approaches. By promoting efficiency and results above all else, it leaves little room for the emotional, relational, and empathetic practices needed to create more inclusive and compassionate futures.

*Hierarchical and Individualistic Mindsets*

The hierarchical nature of decision-making processes, often driven by individualistic goals, further entrenches power dynamics that exclude marginalised voices. This mindset values control and expertise over community collaboration and shared learning. Hierarchical worldviews hinder collective dialogue and reinforce the belief that only certain individuals or groups are suited to shape futures, thereby perpetuating exclusion.

**Worldviews Perpetuate the Issues***Patriarchal Dominance*

The belief in the superiority of male leadership and expertise continues to silence women's voices in futures work. This worldview upholds power structures that resist equitable participation and reinforce systemic barriers.

*Colonial and Western Hegemony*

The dominance of Western-centric views in defining progress and modernity sidelines non-Western perspectives and knowledge systems, limiting the diversity of voices in futures discourse.

*Capitalist Prioritisation*

A focus on economic and technological growth as the primary markers of progress leads to an undervaluing of emotional, relational, and cultural aspects of futures work. This worldview drives a practice that favours efficiency over inclusivity and empathy.

*Individualism and Hierarchy*

The belief in individual expertise and hierarchical control over decision-making supports exclusive practices in futures work. It promotes competition over collaboration and silences voices that do not fit within established power structures.



**Table 2:** Litany, Systemic Causes and Worldviews of Feminizing Futures

	<b>Current Realities</b>	<b>Transformative Futures</b>
<b>LITANY</b>	Exclusion and Marginalisation in Futures Work	Inclusion and diversity in Futures practice, amplifying marginalised voices
	Systemic Barriers and Gender Inequality	Nurturing & equitable Futures Community
	Dominance of Traditional Perspectives: Ageism	Intergenerational endeavour, one that involves passing down wisdom and supporting the development of future leaders.
	Lack of Empathy and Emotional Connection	futures work that is compassionate, holistic, and attuned to the complexities of human experience.
	Ethical Dilemmas and Accountability	futures work that is grounded in ethics and guided by a sense of responsibility toward others. They want futures work to consider the consequences of decisions, particularly on marginalized communities and the environment.
<b>SYSTEMIC CAUSES</b>	Patriarchy and Power Structures	Bring down the walls that confined the garden of knowledge; redefine success and power and embrace intersectionality
	Western-Centric Narratives	Allowing for diverse voices be heard at the table Recognition for indigenous and community-based knowledge
	Capitalist and Competitive Markets	Regenerative and wellbeing economy
	Mechanistic and Impersonal Organisations	Feminine epistemology: Nurturing, supporting, emphatic with feminist sensitivities
<b>WORLDVIEWS</b>	Patriarchal Dominance	Integrative and relational
	Colonial and Western Hegemony	Pluriversal and decolonial
	Capitalist Prioritisation	Ecocentric and post-materialism
	Individualism and Hierarchy Power	Feminine ontology

**Metaphors**

The metaphors that feminist futurists use to describe their feelings about current realities as well as their visions for how things can change illustrate the complex emotions, challenges, and aspirations within the field of futures work as tabulated in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Metaphors for Feminizing Futures

Current Realities	Transformative Metaphors
Echo Chamber of Dominant Voices Marginalised Communities as "Shadows"	Handing Over The Compass
The Walled Garden	Listening Wildflower Beds Wise Old Women as Demeter
Cohesion with Nature	Web of Life
Sea of Change	Seeds of Change

**Metaphors for Current Realities**

*Echo Chamber of Dominant Voices*

Reflects feelings that the futures field is dominated by a narrow set of perspectives, primarily those of powerful, historically privileged groups. It suggests a closed loop of familiar ideas, lacking diversity and alternative viewpoints.

*The Walled Garden*

Several practitioners use language that evokes imagery of barriers or walls to describe the limitations and challenges women face in participating equally in futures work. "Walled Gardens" are a metaphor for limiting perspectives and they underline the need for openness in futures work to foster growth and change. The metaphor captures the feeling of being blocked or constrained by entrenched power structures and societal norms.

"The problem with walled gardens is that they keep things in as much as they keep things out. You can't grow or change if you are constantly defending the walls. Walled gardens give the illusion of control, but they isolate you from the diverse inputs needed for real foresight. Futures work is about breaking down those walls, allowing ideas, perspectives, and voices to intermingle and grow." [WendyS]

*Cohesion with Nature*

Indicates the current disconnect between human activity and the natural world. Futurists describe how current realities have placed humans outside the natural order, leading to systemic imbalances. They call for a return to living "in cohesion and balance with Nature," implying that present practices are disruptive and unsustainable.

"It's not a fenced-off wild park... people live in cohesion and balance with Nature." – [DorisV].

*Sea of Change*

Conveys a sense of constant flux and uncertainty. It reflects the turbulent and often unpredictable nature of the present, where change is both an external force and a condition that futurists must navigate.

"We ourselves make changes as part of adapting to the sea of change." – [WendyS]

*Marginalised Communities as "Shadows"*

Reflects how marginalised voices are often overlooked, operating on the peripheries of mainstream futures work. It conveys a sense of invisibility or being in the "shadows" of more dominant narratives.

## Metaphors for How Things Can Change

### *Listening Wildflower Beds*

Suggests that feminism involves cultivating an environment where women's experiences are not only valued but also given multiple avenues to thrive and contribute. Just as a garden with diverse pathways invites exploration and growth, feminism works to design research structures that make room for women's varied perspectives, ensuring their participation is both supported and integrated. This metaphor suggests that change involves making room for diverse voices, ideas, and perspectives. "Creating spaces" is about cultivating environments where different viewpoints are not only welcomed but actively nurtured.

"Feminism is about creating space for women's experiences and ensuring that research structures actively support their participation." – [Tanja H. ]

### *Seeds of Change*

Encapsulates the idea of gradual, organic transformation. It implies that small actions, ideas, or interventions can grow into larger movements or systemic shifts over time. This metaphor conveys hope for future progress.

"Positive, hopeful images of the future are essential for societal survival." – [Wendy S.]

### *Handing Over the Compass*

Suggests that determining the direction of the future shouldn't be in the hands of a select few; instead, it requires a collective effort where everyone has a say in guiding the journey. Just as handing over the compass symbolises shared navigation and decision-making, questioning who decides our futures points to the need for inclusive, diverse participation in shaping the path ahead.

"Visionary feminism offers us hope for the future. By emphasising an ethics of mutuality and interdependency feminist thinking offers us a way to end domination while simultaneously changing the impact of inequity." (hooks, 2015, p.117)

### *Web of Life*

Represents interconnectedness and the idea that all actions are linked within a complex system. It suggests that change requires an awareness of these connections and a holistic approach to fostering balance and harmony.

"We are part of the web of life... our value add to the web of life quite frankly, is imagination." – [Wendy S.]

### *Wise Old Women as Demeter- the Goddess of Agriculture, Fertility, and the Nurturing of Life*

Feminist futurists use the metaphor of "wise old women" as guides to illustrate the importance of intergenerational wisdom and mentorship in fostering change. This conveys a sense of passing on knowledge and nurturing future generations to continue the work of creating equitable futures. Marcelle Holdaway references Demeter to symbolise the power and wisdom of older women, reflecting the nurturing aspect of guiding and mentoring future generations.

"We are the wise old women who are coming to talk to you about your futures." – [WendyS ]

## Discussion and Conclusion

The overarching message from this analysis is that feminist futurists are redefining what it means to engage in futures work by accentuating inclusivity, systemic change, and intergenerational wisdom. Moving beyond traditional feminist connotations, they strive to create spaces where diverse voices, especially those overlooked in dominant narratives, are not just heard but actively shape the future.

Feminism in this context is an evolving practice that extends beyond gender, targeting power dynamics, cultural recognition, and the ethics of decision-making. This shift involves breaking down barriers, questioning who guides our future, and ensuring that futures work supports not only women but all underrepresented perspectives.

Their approach is holistic, blending empathy, care, and ethical accountability with a critical view of existing structures that are often “burdened with male-centred bias and dominated by male viewpoints “ (Milojevic, 1996.). The metaphors used—such as "walled gardens" and "handing over the compass"—symbolise the need for openness, shared authority, and nurturing environments that encourage growth. Many feminist futurists do not see their work as a rejection of past norms but as an expansion, fostering a futures discourse that is more collaborative, empathetic, and equitable.

In an earlier discussion among 13 female futurists (Hurley, et al., 2008), Riane Eisler (p. 400) and Vuokko Jarva (p. 401) note that futures studies was "extremely male-centred". Although more women have since entered the field, the issue persists today. Debra Batemen (p. 400) advocates for equality and access to alternative futures for all. While valuing the unique 'softness' women bring to the field, she also engages with male perspectives to challenge her own views. She envisions a future where both genders embrace the discomfort that comes with differing perspectives, aiming for harmony in diversity. Diana Wu David and Doris Viljoen also reflect the idea of engaging with diverse perspectives, and valuing the 'softness' and 'sensitivity' women bring while also interacting with other viewpoints.

Elise Boulding (Hurley, 2008, p. 400) argues that women's imaginative and practical futures are often overlooked in the formal futures field, despite its significance. She claims that women, particularly those managing households, are inherently practicing futurists, as they constantly plan for the needs of those not well-served by society. Boulding critiques technological futures for its lack of a "long view" that encompasses the fragility of life, the importance of diversity, intuitive knowledge, solitude, and deep human connections. She calls for a more holistic approach that values frugality, recognises our shared existence on "earth farm," and fosters inner spiritual exploration and respect for one another. Wendy Schultz reflects on how traditional socialisation may have positioned women to excel in futures work because of their natural inclination towards listening and managing complex, evolving systems, similar to parenting. This idea supports a view that women might bring an innate understanding of complexity and adaptability to futures work.

Caroline Smith (Hurley, 2008, p. 402) argues that women's perspectives on preferred futures often differ significantly from men's, highlighting a need for research on how gender influences views on the future, including those of girls and boys. She notes that women tend to be more cautious and interested in ecological issues, while topics like technofutures and transhumanism often attract less female interest, even causing feelings of revulsion for some. Smith points out that female researchers often prefer qualitative methods that involve forming deep relationships and exploring people's hopes and fears through conversation, rather than quantitative approaches. She also observes that localist and low-tech futures, such as permaculture, are often dismissed as unrealistic in mainstream futures studies, despite attracting many women. She calls for a shift in the futures community to acknowledge these perspectives, especially in the context of current challenges like peak oil and climate change. Marcelle Holdaway advocates for "rewilding" and reconnecting with nature, aligning with Caroline Smith's emphasis on ecological issues and alternative, low-tech futures. Both envision futures that prioritize sustainability over high-tech advancements. Similarly, Wendy Schultz stresses "cohesion with nature" as vital for sustainable futures, critiquing the current disconnect between human activity and the natural world. Her perspective resonates with Smith's call for localist, ecological futures, advocating for an approach that respects the environment and addresses climate change.

This discussion further demands for feminizing futures, envisioning futures work as a transformative space where systemic inequalities are confronted, and diverse, interconnected paths are cultivated. As Milojević (1996) insists, incorporating a feminist perspective into the dominant knowledge paradigm is crucial, and futures research must be conscious of gender dynamics.

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## Notes

The names of participants appeared full in the texts and abbreviated in quotations.