

# CO-CREATING MATRIARCHAL DESIGN FUTURES

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*WORKSHOP ABSTRACT: What would happen if a matriarchal design pedagogy was considered, our patriarchal training was unlearned, and we abandoned solutionism for unknowing—replacing human-centered design (aka design for consumption) by genuinely designing for the pluriverse? What would happen if we smashed the podium and instead created a non-hierarchical, non-linear approach to learning? Might we see that the lonely ladder to the top—the competitive, elitist approach to design study and practice could be abandoned for something more caring and restorative? And if we begin this at the root—at the very beginning of our students' studies—can the field change from singular and privileged to more open, collaborative, and anti-exceptional? Can we make design school and the design field feel welcoming to all who desire to be there—not just those who already fit in? Is it even possible to de-couple design from whiteness, consumerism, capitalism, growth, and competition?*

*In this workshop, we share Matriarchal Design Futures—a non-capitalistic, non-hierarchical pedagogical framework that simultaneously prepares students for success in the workplace—centering the practices and values of caregiving and nurturing, which holds for all identities: for caregivers, mothers, those who are not mothers, women, men, and non-binary alike. Having previously conducted this workshop in higher ed (USA and Germany), we seek to expand awareness and collective contribution (including industry practitioners) by sharing our journey and co-facilitating with our open-source workbook, engaging participants in reflective prompts to imagine new futures together. All participants become contributors to the ongoing publication.*

*Keywords: Design Futures, Matriarchal, Anti-Exceptional, Engaged Pedagogy, Collective.*

## WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES AND BACKGROUND

\*Matriarchal: A way of being that centers the practices and values of caregiving and nurturing, which holds for everybody: for mothers and those who are not mothers, for women, men, and non-binary folks alike. Matriarchal opposes patriarchal traits of white supremacist, colonial, racist, homophobic, and xenophobic concepts; however, it does not mean being ruled by women in a place of power.

We begin with a question—if we center our values and principles as matriarchal\* instead of patriarchal, how does this change how we work, communicate, and think about the future of design in both educational and professional contexts? In this workshop, we share our proposal for creating matriarchal guiding principles—helping us lead, teach, learn, and continue examining the intersection of design education and industry through a matriarchal lens. Both a presentation of research and a collaborative working session to discuss and identify ways to move towards Matriarchal Design Futures, this non-capitalistic, non-hierarchical framework centers the practices and values of caregiving and joy while simultaneously preparing students for success in education and the workplace. Led by two women (also parents) who work as educators and industry practitioners, our perspectives span industrial design at an east coast art and design school and design futures at a large, private R1 university in the Midwest. Together, we wish to provide space for support, dialogue, learning, unlearning, and growth. The world needs everyone, whether one identifies as matriarchal or not, to co-create caring and restorative Matriarchal Design Futures by asking questions together. Using our recently published Matriarchal Design Futures: Workbook, we will continue to co-create an open-source collaborative publication with participants—a set of holistic guiding principles, hopes, and aspirations for a collective, matriarchal, anti-exceptional design future—one that exists for ourselves and our families, our students and their future.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES AND GOALS FOR PARTICIPANTS

- Interpret and explain the implications of centering matriarchal values in education (teaching/learning), work (industry), and futures-thinking.
- Apply Matriarchal Design Futures principles to educational and professional contexts.
- Critically evaluate the intersection of design education and the design industry through a matriarchal lens.
- Collaboratively co-create an open-source publication reflecting hopes, aspirations, and guiding principles for a matriarchal design future.

## WORKSHOP SEQUENCE AND ACTIVITIES

The workshop will consist of 3 main parts:

- An introductory presentation: we will share our backgrounds and the journey of how this work came to be. Then, we will dive into the background of Matriarchal Design Futures research and the Matriarchal Design Futures frameworks.
- A workshop: we will engage participants to reflect on their past and current experiences/practices and imagine alternative futures with the Matriarchal Design Futures framework— through a series of prompts. (see figure 1 for the past documentation of the workshop)
- A reflective group session: we will ask everyone to share their experience and newly formed ideas at the end of the session. We will collectively identify a set of guidelines and a few key steps we could take to move towards Matriarchal Design Futures in our fields together.

### **MATERIALS AND TECHNOLOGY REQUIRED TO CONDUCT THE WORKSHOP**

- A collection of Post-It notes in various colors
- A set of markers to write on Post-It notes
- A large surface(s) (horizontal or vertical) to place large format (25" x30" or larger) paper sheets
- A projector or a large TV, a connector between a projector and an Apple laptop (USB C), a white screen for projection

### **DOCUMENTATION OF THE WORKSHOP**

Matriarchal Design Futures research is always work-in-progress and open-sourced. To this nature, all workshop contents are documented and shared online (either through Miro/Figma or the MDF website) as an ongoing collective. Participants who wish to be credited as collaborative contributors to this research can share their information with us. In addition to the contents of this workshop, all past workshops, resources, and digital versions of our workbook are available online.

### **FACILITATORS' QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE**

Facilitators are educators and industry practitioners with perspectives that span industrial design at an east coast art and design school and design futures at a large private R1 university in the Midwest. Matriarchal Design Futures research began in the summer of 2020. Facilitators held two workshops: the AICAD (The Association of Independent Colleges of Art & Design) Symposium in February 2021 and the International Attending [to] Futures conference in November 2021. Since then, the Matriarchal Design Futures Workbook has been in the works as a small-run publication. Facilitators are scheduled to hold a panel discussion at HASTAC (Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Alliance and Collaboratory) Conference in June 2023. They are featured in a forthcoming book, *Feminist Designer* (MIT Press, 2023).

**Acknowledgment:**

We tread carefully and lightly in the spirit of our words, harkening back to those that paved the way before us. While we draw connections to the scholarly works of Matriarchal studies (Goettner-Abendroth), Feminist pedagogy (Shrewsbury), engaged pedagogy, and Black Feminism (hooks), our main inspirations are non-academic. We acknowledge and respect that matriarchal concepts date far back in indigenous cultures. Care-centered communities have always existed and are practiced by BIPOC women, LGBTQ folks, and marginalized lives as means of survival. We are not reinventing or claiming ownership of the idea; rather, we wish to provide space for support, dialogue, learning, unlearning, and growth.

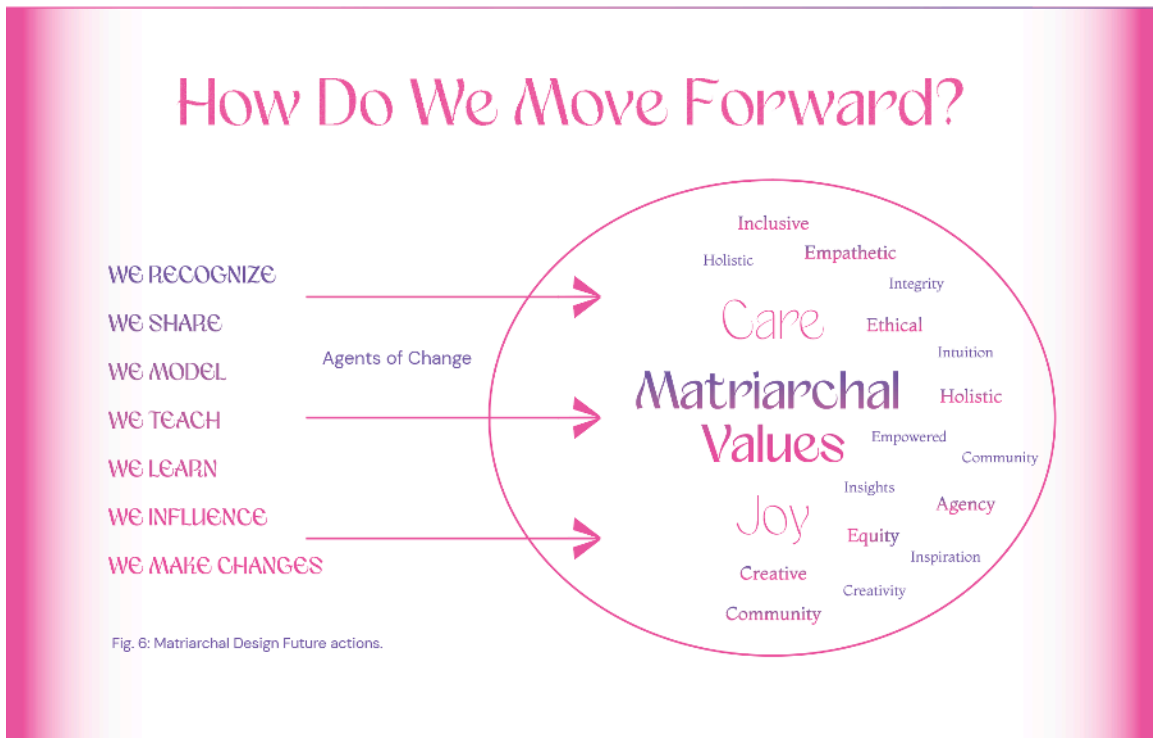


Figure 1. A diagram from the presentation

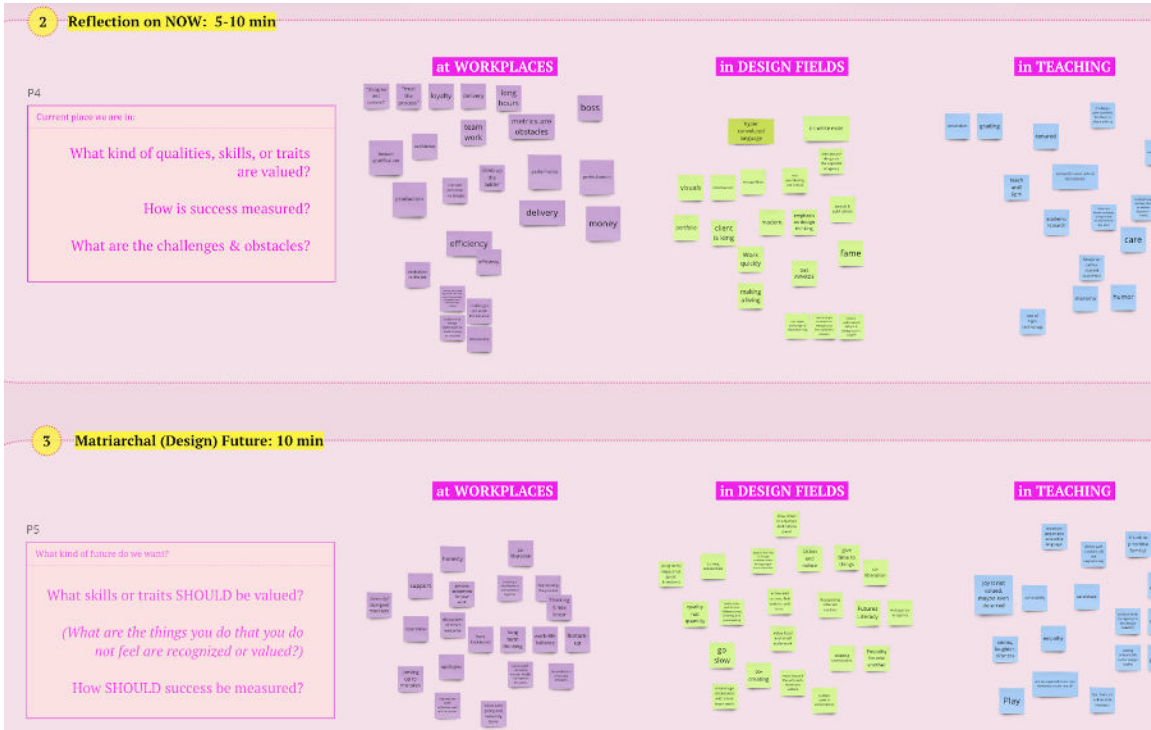


Figure 2. Screenshot of the Attending [to] futures conference workshop Miro board



Figure 3. Images of the Matriarchal Design Futures Workbook (2023)