

7 CONCLUSIONS: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

I am writing this conclusion in the midst of a global pandemic. The COVID-19 virus has laid bare many of our incorrect assumptions about human superiority over “nature.” It has illustrated that border walls and checkpoints do not match our globalized world. It is a world in which public health and environmental crises cannot be solved by uncoordinated action by inward-looking states. The pandemic has resulted in unprecedented economic upheaval and political uncertainty. For decades, environmental scholars have warned that true sustainability will require not only changes in human behavior, but fundamental shifts in our ways of thinking and speaking about environmental problems. Over the course of a few months, as country after country issued shelter-in-place or lockdown orders and worked to designate who and what was “essential” or not, debate about our future began. I can think of no better time to reflect on something as important as climate change and how it is understood and framed. Hopefully, what society takes from this COVID-19 crisis is a willingness to critically engage with our world and think through how we can effectively and justly address climate change.

The previous chapters underscore that a change in perception is needed in order for people to fully understand the importance of connections between gender and climate change. To this end, the preceding chapters have used a feminist constructivist approach to outline four complex, overlapping discourses specifically focused on women’s characteristics and roles in climate change. From depictions of how climate change will act on women’s bodies to a celebration of their essential expertise, the discourses show the

considerable variance in women's position in climate change. Participants reflected on their own experiences working in specific climate change spaces, such as industry conferences, meetings at their nonprofits, classrooms, and the halls of Congress. They also discussed the experiences of "women" as a general group that has been historically marginalized but has a great deal of capacity and ability. Taken together, these four discourses represent women as interested in and capable of contributing a great deal to our climate struggles. They portray women as active but often blocked. They point to them as vulnerable because of gendered marginalization but not weak or passive. The discourses describe a multitude of roles that women currently play and should play in the future. They also offer specific insight into interviewees' perspectives on both gender and climate change individually and together. Providing the perspectives of women who are currently working "in climate change," the interviews serve as a way to explore the dominant discourses that run through climate change spaces, something that is necessary to understand if scholars and practitioners hope to shift our discourses to be more inclusive and avoid essentialization.

WHAT DOES THIS BOOK SHOW US ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE?

Each of the discourses explored in this book features a particular understanding of climate change. These range from a phenomenon that exacerbates vulnerability and inequality to a scholarly specialty that showcases the passion and agency of women. Mary E. Pettenger (2007, 5) explains that this is not surprising.

Ask ten people how to define climate change, its causes and effects, and you will get ten different answers. The language used to discuss and describe climate change is often value-laden as the terms employed have different meanings depending on who is discussing the topic and why. What is clear is that the meaning of climate change is defined in social settings.

This socially constructed nature of climate change means that how we understand and refer to it is connected to our identity and context. For example,

participants spoke about debates and initiatives on “how to tackle climate change” as a global phenomenon. They asked whether we can change people’s minds “around the issue of climate change”—signaling the contested nature of climate change as a political and social issue. They reflected on people’s ability “to adapt to climate change or manage in a world with climate change.” And they expressed pride in or frustration about “climate change work.” Thinking about these various ways of talking about climate change is helpful for understanding why fierce debates about the concept continue across the international system when there is such a high degree of consensus among the scientific community regarding some of the most basic facts about it (Cook et al. 2016).

The book’s introduction featured some reflections on climate change and how it has become such a prevalent topic of scholarship and policy debate. I referred to a description of climate change as a “super wicked problem” to highlight some of the intense political challenges facing climate governance (Levin et al. 2012; Rittel and Webber 1973). Additionally, climate change is an immensely complex issue. Understanding and addressing it involves a variety of sectors, as well as many people doing different kinds of work. In the words of one participant, German nonprofit worker Eva, “What’s challenging but perhaps also enriching is that climate change . . . impacts too many different fields. You need to work with a lot of different people to actually make a change.” Yet those people may view paths forward differently due to their disciplinary backgrounds or because they have different climate change experiences.

Participants outlined several ways this climate change complexity can make action challenging. For instance, UK nonprofit worker Yvette mentioned her frustration that her work was such a small part of what the government is doing. While it dedicated a relatively small pool of money to climate change programs, the vast majority of funds went to sustaining and reinforcing our existing ways of doing things. She argued that there remains an unwillingness to confront the overall shifts in political, economic, and social structures necessary to effectively address the problem. All available evidence suggests that structural transformation is needed in order to avoid a climate crisis. Scholars have put forward various strategies for devising

alternative frameworks and governance approaches to get us past our climate gridlock (Mitchell and Carpenter 2019; Underdal 2017). Multiple interviewees similarly suggested that climate change requires fundamental shifts in society that are not yet occurring. Several argued that rethinking gender and climate change can perhaps encourage us to think more explicitly about the social components of climate change and that this will aid in grasping the scale and direction of necessary change.

Some participants also posited that a challenging aspect of their work is to get people in the global North to recognize climate change as a current, dire situation. This was expressed particularly often by interviewees from the nonprofit sector. An example comes from Marie, who works for a German environmental organization. For her, “One of the biggest challenges is that it remains for most of the people I’ve worked with, a somehow distant thing, phenomenon, and therefore it makes it hard to, to make it visible.” She further noted that this intangibility of climate change for many people makes effective climate messaging difficult. At the same time, what does it say about us that something has to be immediately, personally threatening or risky before we care about it? Could we get people to care about climate change even if they are not negatively impacted by it today?

Feminist environmental scholars, among others, have long argued that humanity needs to rethink our relationship with the environment, which necessitates rethinking our relationships with each other as well (Butler 2020; Sturgeon 2008). Rather than being solely concerned about climate change’s negative impact on each person, scholars and practitioners should ground our thinking in recognizing the intricate connections between people and the environment, as well as among different communities on the planet. Perhaps thinking in terms of groups of people might help in this endeavor. I argue that the women and climate change discourses outlined in this book enable us to think more critically about various lived experiences of climate change. While focusing on women as a category can potentially lead to essentialization if not approached carefully, it also encourages us to think of the many ways that human beings are similar. We can, for instance, use the discourses as a starting point to reflect on ways that patriarchy and capitalism influence the lives of people and the planet. They also allow us to realize how the positions and

lives of women are similar and how they differ. We can think through ways the climate change experiences of middle-class women in the global North, including me and most of my interviewees, diverge significantly from that of other communities (Arora-Jonsson 2011). This kind of critical engagement with human experiences of climate change requires the input of multiple voices from numerous backgrounds, geographic spaces, and lived and professional experiences (Green and Hale 2017; Javeline 2014; Keohane 2015). Accounting for different voices subsequently renders cross-disciplinary conversations about climate change as well as gender possible.

These kinds of conversation necessitate understanding the opportunities as well as obstacles within existing climate change frames. Sherilyn MacGregor (2010) argues that discourses such as ecological modernization, environmental security, green duty, and population control have had a significant influence in climate discussions within the global North. However, rather than provide a transformational, sustainable, and just path forward, these have often served to reinforce existing economic, political, and social structures. Likewise, Joanna Wilson and Eric Chu (2020, 1086), argue that a discourse of the “green economy,” which cast climate change “as a problem of science urgently requiring technological advancement and market fixes, means that solutions lie firmly in the domain of men and masculinist priorities.” Thinking of climate change as only a scientific problem leaves questions of power and discourse unexamined.

At the same time, how can we recognize the importance of scientific data along with climate change mitigation and adaptation technology while also reflecting on how exclusively paying attention to these may be detrimental to the goals of equity and sustainability? It is essential that we are open to critiques of the academic and advocacy spheres, while also recognizing their importance. We live in an era where climate skeptics and those with a motivated interest in fostering climate denial would love to use a critique of science to discredit all the good work done by climate scientists. For instance, some climate skeptic blogs have published about gender discrimination in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) seemingly in an attempt to shame the institution. It is not my wish to add fuel to that fire. However, it is also important to ask challenging questions so that we can

more directly assess the consequences of using a particular climate change discourse. Likewise, we need to reflect on the current state of participation by marginalized groups in climate spaces. In the case of my interviewees, many of them expressed pride in their fields (i.e., atmospheric science, climate change organization, and the like), but also noted how the fields could do a better job of fostering an environment that ensures multiple groups of people feel valued.

Along these lines, we must interrogate how our socially constructed views of science intersect with existing power dynamics across the international system. For instance, we might ask whether current approaches to expanding our idea of “science” always help alter views on women and scientific expertise. As noted by one of my interviewees, Kit, this may not be the case. She used her experience researching community-based environmental projects in Nepal to argue that attempts to draw more people into “science” and environmental sustainability approaches can sometimes unintentionally perpetuate existing power distributions within society.

[They] sort of served to reinforce [the women’s] ideas that the local elite, who are basically the men, they were the knowing ones. They were the powerful ones. “What do we know? We just serve the tea.” Because I was sort of looking at the way that it was all very embodied—very sort of situated experience that the women actually took part. And some old women particularly, they took part, but they really just brought the tea along and tied some ribbons to a tree. So, their experience of the projects was very different from the men who actually had the tape measures and were recording numbers. So, it’s that kind of embodied experiential nature of what they were doing that led them to have very different experiences. And I guess that maybe, that’s true of so many different community-based projects specifically around climate change.

Kit identified gendered tasks that reinforce assumptions about who is knowledgeable and who is a valid participant (i.e., those who did the measuring and recording) and who is not (i.e., those who served the tea). Women’s role as teamaker was not regarded as work that made the same kind of contribution to the project, even by the women themselves. Programs that are based on harnessing local knowledge or engaging communities in environmental management are typically motivated by the goal of widening our understanding of expertise and getting “buy in” from local people on conservation schemes.

However, what is not always incorporated into these projects is the fact that local knowledge, like all knowledge, is gendered. It is shaped by gendered expectations of the roles and responsibilities that people are supposed to fulfill. Thus, it is shaped by the same social, political, and economic structures that assign less value to characteristics associated with femininity (Enloe 1990). These reflections are supported by other academic work that points out the unintended consequences of some community-based environmental programs that fail to take power dynamics like gender, class, caste, and race into account (Agarwal 2009; Staddon, Nightingale, and Shrestha 2014). If we fail to reflect on these when strategizing about climate change action, women and other marginalized groups will continue to be constrained.

Likewise, the move from fossil fuels to clean energy technology appears to be following similar patterns of reinforcing ideas of who is knowledgeable. Added to this are the ranks of geoengineers working on new strategies of climate change mitigation. Relying on techno-fixes raises workers in some fields to the position of saviors. According to Sherilyn MacGregor (2017a, 19), “At the uppermost levels of global climate politics, white-Western-male geoengineers are celebrated as modern-day Baconian Supermen who can harness the powers of techno-science to control the very weather.” There is evidence to suggest that women are often skeptical that technical solutions such as carbon capture and storage or further development of biofuels are sufficient or preferable means to address climate change (Hemmati and Röhr 2009). These gendered patterns require more research, but they likely relate to larger trends of technology being associated with a “masculine” approach to problem-solving. Meg, a nonprofit worker in the United States, raised the idea of the hero trope and masculinity in her response to whether climate change is a masculine issue area:

I guess I can see in sort of our gender constructs of masculinity how maybe the thought is that men are more inclined to want to, I don't know, save the world, or like, you know, take on this big feat of climate change and do it themselves. . . . I think it's just historically the gender construct that we've created around men. . . . The first superheroes we really see—Batman, Spiderman—are all men. And we've always sort of perpetuated this idea in our society that men are the ones who take care of their women and, like, pay for their dinner, and carry them over puddles, and let them borrow their sweater.

Meg's reflections on our socially constructed notions of heroic behavior reiterate MacGregor's idea of men being cast (or casting themselves) as the saviors of our climate change tale.

Feminist environmental scholars have routinely been among those raising concerns about the reliance on technological fixes to environmental issues. One critique is that society is easily dazzled by the promise of these approaches without engaging in a thorough examination of the social processes that make them attractive. According to scholars like Val Plumwood (2002, 8), "Technofix solutions make no attempt to rethink human culture, dominant lifestyles and demands on nature, indeed they tend to assume that these are unchangeable. They aim rather to meet these demands more efficiently through smarter technology." One interviewee, Elane, referred to work that her US-based environmental organization has done on the potential perils of geoengineering. She claimed that these are "false solutions" to climate change because they don't necessitate making large-scale changes economic and political systems in order to address greenhouse gas emissions. She likened them to filling up a bathtub with a hole in it. This perspective finds some empirical support in the scholarly literature. For instance, Marijn H. C. Meijers and Bastiaan T. Rutjens (2014) find that when people are presented with frames that portray science as rapidly progressing, it has a negative effect on environmentally friendly behavior. They attribute this to the way that science reinforces an idea of the world as orderly, with threats to that order being addressed by an external actor. This means people feel less motivation to play a personal role in environmental protection since we expect "science" to handle it.

We must also consider the role that techno-solutions to climate change might have in reinforcing existing economic and social structures, or possibly even making things worse in terms of gender equity or social justice. The Center for International Environmental Law (2019) has argued that geoengineering approaches to climate change mitigation can reinforce the dominant position of the fossil fuel industry. Its 2019 report underscores the role of fossil fuel producers in developing, patenting, and promoting important geoengineering technologies in ways that result in prolonged reliance on fossil fuels. Despite these potentially negative aspects of techno-solutions,

they continue to be praised by international leaders. In 2019, German chancellor Angela Merkel mentioned “the role of technology and innovation, particularly in the field of energy, but also in the field of energy savings” as important elements in reaching climate goals. Likewise, British prime minister Boris Johnson described technological advances “making renewable energy ever cheaper, aiding our common struggle against climate change” (quoted in Bershidsky 2019). As long as techno-solutions are touted on the world stage as a great hope for avoiding a climate disaster, we should reflect on how these approaches might represent business as usual far more than we might think.

Likewise, cross-national studies illustrate that approaches to climate change that are rooted in existing development paradigms can exacerbate gender inequity rather than mitigate it.¹ A 2015 study from Nepal, for instance, finds that agricultural adaptation strategies can adversely affect women in a number of ways. Practices such as adopting high-yield cash crops privilege men and reinforce their position in the economy, often at the expense of women. What is particularly interesting about this case is that these patterns were reinforced by development nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that promoted cash crop skills training and technological advancements for men. In essence, existing assumptions about technology and masculinity determined expectations about who should be responsible for techno-solutions to climate change (Bhattarai, Beilin, and Ford 2015). Some NGOs choose to invest their resources in men because they assume that they will be the ones in charge. These gendered assumptions about environmental tasks are not new. In the mid-1980s, Petra Kelly, one of the founders of the German Green movement, warned that “we don’t want an ecological society where men build windmills and women silently listen, bake bread and weave rugs” (quoted in Mellor 1992). Examples like these highlight the necessity of thinking critically about connections between gender and climate change, as well as reflecting on power and climate change more broadly.

The women-as-agents discourse reminds us that climate change work is just that—work. It often mirrors the gendered patterns of employment and recognition in other areas of society. Several participants noted that their experiences in the climate change world was remarkably akin to the gendered patterns they witnessed when they worked in other fields. For

instance, while sectors such as the clean energy industry or other tech-based climate solutions are commonly touted as an important part of our low carbon transition, they tend to be dominated by the same kinds of people who have historically had a disproportionate say in our future. This is a byproduct of trying to address climate change within existing structures. If we try to “fix” climate change using the same approaches that led to the problem, the same kinds of people are likely to occupy positions at the top. As Elane, a US-based environmental lawyer, observed,

The proof we have that our climate is changing is science-based, and that science is male-dominated. There’s no question about that. But, when we talk about what our approach to addressing this crisis is—I don’t think that the framing for explaining the cause and explaining why we believe climate change is real, has to be the same frame for how are we gonna solve this problem? I do believe that a gender-based approach is a solution-based approach because you can’t solve a problem with the mindset you used to create it.

In her view, focusing exclusively on science and using those frames at the expense of people-centered approaches is detrimental. A gender-based approach to climate change necessitates posing different questions and unsettling taken-for-granted assumptions.

WHAT DOES THIS BOOK SHOW US ABOUT GENDER?

This book has described gender as a set of socially constructed expectations about behavior that influence the identity and actions of all actors. Gender works on us as individuals by encouraging us to fit our behavior into categories of “masculine” or “feminine.” It works on us when we consciously and unconsciously reject these labels, or when we reinforce them. It works on states, multinational corporations, NGOs, and communities in general by shaping their language, networks, and goals. It is a fluid, slippery concept that is nonetheless powerful while sometimes being difficult to spot or recognize. Feminist scholars have produced decades worth of research exploring the idea and are still finding new ways of asking “What is gender?” (Tidwell and Barclay 2019). This is because gender is complex and messy, things that are extremely

frustrating to policymakers. Gender works at multiple levels. For instance, on one level gender influences our understanding of what climate change knowledge is and can be. But at the same time, gender shapes the personal experiences of individuals who lack adaptive capacity in the face of climate change impacts. In these ways, gender is a tricky concept because it morphs from changing, often invisible or unacknowledged gendered concepts to the gendered bodies that we typically view as unchanging.

Part of the challenge with the concept of gender in the environmental sphere is that people often have different goals for their analyses. One goal is problematizing taken-for-granted assumptions and getting us to think critically about what gender is, how it works, whom it benefits, whom it marginalizes, and the implications of all these questions (and more). Another goal is to come up with strategies for removing barriers to participation, reducing vulnerability, and working toward sustainability. These are not mutually exclusive. This book is an example of a project that centers on both of these goals and discusses them as necessarily intertwined. We cannot understand why some people are invited to climate change panels and some are not or why some people are less likely than others to possess climate change adaptive capacity without taking gender into consideration.

The failure to connect these various gender goals might lead to unintended negative consequences (Arora-Jonsson and Sijapati 2018). For example, we have to confront the existence of “gender fatigue,” or the frustration people express when their attempts to address gender marginalization have failed, and they lack the interest to keep up these kinds of initiatives (Kelan 2009). Several spheres such as human rights, international security, and environmental politics, have adopted policies to “mainstream gender” or “take gender seriously” yet continue to have gendered forms of marginalization and discrimination. When this is pointed out, there may be confusion and frustration about how to move forward. Unintended side effects of this include gender becoming something organizations or institutions are required to “address” without critical reflection on what it is or how meaningful change might be attained. Gender becomes something that is divorced from their day-to-day operations, as organizations might have a one-off gender training session or delegate this work to a “gender person” (Ferguson 2015). Effectively taking

steps to minimize or eliminate gendered marginalization and discrimination is difficult and impossible without critical reflection. This is because gender works in ways that are often invisible (Humbert, Kelan, and van den Brink 2019). What happens when we get people to talk about gender, but they do not really care about it? It becomes a box to check. Given the number of gender initiatives instituted in the academic, policy, and nonprofit realms, we seem to understand that it is “important” across these spaces. However, this is a long way from saying we always achieve gender equity or root out the pernicious ways that gender norms sustain patterns of marginalization within these spaces. This book helps us bridge this gap between the messy world of asking questions and critically reflecting on gender and addressing practical problems around gender. This includes questions concerning viable strategies for how to have women’s agency and expertise recognized and valued, while also reducing women’s physical vulnerability to climate disasters or food insecurity.

For most of my interviewees, gender came down to descriptions of the roles, motivations, and characteristics of women. While all my questions were worded to ask about *gender* and climate change specifically, the vast majority of responses focused on cisgendered women. The ideas of masculinity and men showed up in many interviews, but typically as a contrast to the position of women. Additionally, most responses described gender as a binary (i.e., what fell on one side was excluded from the other side). There was only one reference to transgender women, for instance. This relatively narrow representation of gender is not very surprising, given the way we tend to debate the concept (or not) in common discourse. Many participants mentioned that they often discuss gender dynamics in their workplace, but not typically as part of their routine duties. There were exceptions to this, as some participants commented that their employer had grappled with gender across the organization. However, many more indicated they had not done this work.

The interviewees reflected on gender through both their personal experiences and broad understandings of “women” around the world. In terms of their personal experiences of gender, they mentioned their perception of ways that colleagues relate to them as a woman or how they were socialized to

be more receptive to some jobs over others. In many cases, however, their discussion of gender centered on general experiences of women, often characterized variously as nurturing, poor, marginalized, holistic in their thinking, underrepresented in politics, among many others. As argued in chapter 6, these rather simplistic portrayals of women are problematic, particularly as participants often used this broad view of gender to describe women in “developing countries” or “poorer countries” (i.e., the global South). Most representations of women from the global South portrayed them as a homogeneous group that is (1) uniquely susceptible to climate change effects, (2) made up of rural resource users with specific forms of environmental knowledge, and (3) responsible for care work in families. This portrayal of women from the global South illustrates how the various women and climate change discourses overlap. Interviewees tended to use the women-as-vulnerable, women-as-knowledgeable, and women-as-caregivers discourses to describe their position. While this representation of women from the “developing world” undoubtedly describes the lived experiences of many women, it is also far from representing the experiences of all women. Some interviewees were drawing on their research with specific, often rural, communities in the global South. However, most participants were referring to an ideal type that is all too familiar in the global North. This tendency to draw on essentialized portrayals is important because the interviewees are from states that tend to have an oversized role in shaping global discourse about climate change, as well as about gender. The global North has a disproportionately large presence in the academy as well as in global policymaking. If these are commonly used discourses in these states, then this influences climate change debates in important ways.

When gender gets “on the agenda,” it is often those in the global North who have determined what it looks like. Moreover, gender—both as a concept and as a policy tool—has a long history of being associated with debate and practice in the global North. María Lugones (2007, 2010), for instance, posits that the colonial project forced particular gendered assumptions and codes of conduct on the colonized. Within the colonial project, the dichotomous hierarchy between humans and nonhuman species became inseparable from the dichotomous hierarchy between men and women. These distinctions determined who was human, and what was civilization.

Only the civilized are men or women. Indigenous peoples of the Americas and enslaved Africans were classified as not human in species—as animals, uncontrollably sexual and wild. The European, bourgeois, colonial, modern man became a subject/agent, fit for rule, for public life and ruling, a being of civilization, heterosexual, Christian, a being of mind and reason. The European bourgeois woman was not understood as his complement, but as someone who reproduced race and capital through her sexual purity, passivity, and being home-bound in the service of the white, European, bourgeois man. The imposition of these dichotomous hierarchies became woven into the historicity of relations, including intimate relations. (Lugones 2010, 742)

Colonization necessitated transformation, including transformation of identity. Christianity was one powerful tool used for these purposes. It provided the normative rationale connecting gender and civilization and “became intent on erasing community, ecological practices, knowledge of planting, of weaving, of the cosmos” along with reproductive and sexual practices (Lugones 2010). While the formal process of colonization has ended, the meaning and understanding it enforced have lasting implications. These can include simplistic and paternalistic categorizations of people and practices, including flattening the experiences of women from the global South into a singular picture of their lack of agency or capacity.

At the same time, more recent debates about putting gender onto the global agenda requires asking who is primarily taking part in those debates and what does gender look like once there? As discussed in several chapters, institutions such as environmental organizations and the academy have considerable and growing participation by women, but their leadership continues to be male dominated. Likewise, white women are more likely to be represented in these organizations than women of color, particularly in top positions (American Council on Education 2017; Matthew 2016; Taylor 2014, 2018). This might go some way towards explaining the dominance of victimhood portrayals of women from the global South. While historic patterns of marginalization, exclusion, and discrimination have resulted in many women from the global South being acutely susceptible to climate change impacts, only focusing on these communities both erases the experiences of those who do not fit this picture and risks diminishing the agency and personhood of the women who do.

As discussed in each of the book's substantive chapters, looking across the discourses allows us to ask an essential feminist question: Where are the women? Cynthia Enloe (1990) challenged us to pose this question to understand both the presence and absence of women in multiple spaces, as well as the implications of these positions for the women themselves along with the structures they exist within. Taken together, the discourses call to mind multiple forms of women's agency as well as marginalization. Women in the global South were understood to be present in homes, family gardens, and other rural community spaces. They were largely absent from places that we associate with global climate change mitigation. By contrast, women in the global North were regarded as present not only in homes and communities, but also in lecture halls, labs, and conference rooms, where they are active contributors, albeit sometimes undervalued or underestimated.

By pointing out the problematic nature of homogenizing victimization narratives I am not criticizing the participants who utilized these kinds of storylines. I also find myself using them in my classes because students can quickly relate to them. What I am arguing is that it is necessary for us to think through the reasons for the continued use of these simplistic stories. Overall, the discourses used in this book clearly demonstrate that women are already playing numerous roles related to climate change, but that these roles often break down into an "us versus them" pattern.

A lack of critical engagement about gender and climate change connections within climate change spaces in general is apparent from the interviews I conducted. The majority mentioned that they had never really thought much about these connections before I contacted them about the project. And these are people who think a great deal about climate change most days of their lives. Some offered their thoughts as to why that might be so. They noted that it could be in part due to the way they were trained to think about climate change, as well as the mission of the organizations they work for. In the words of atmospheric scientist Victoria,

I think that's interesting I never really thought about [climate change] in that way [in connection with gender] at all. I think because I've almost been trained when you do scientific work it's always about the data. The data says this; the data says that. It actually wasn't until I went to this workshop where there were people who were truly experiencing it. I mean I get there's a people aspect but

that's not really what I'm doing, so it's almost like separating the human impact portion of the actual work versus the science that you do. So, I just look at the numbers, you know? But when I met those people it made it feel more real to me. I guess I will point out that I added a chapter to my dissertation or at least a couple of pages in my dissertation that focused on that people perspective which I probably would have never done before. So, I guess that's what made it more real.

Victoria argued that interacting with people who have a different perspective on climate change (i.e., people experiencing climate change effects now) caused her to think differently about it, and even change her research project. I regard this as a good example of how we might observe a change of perspective across multiple communities if we can develop discourses that center the experiences and challenges of women in climate change.

Victoria also attributed her lack of consideration of gender and climate change to her training as an atmospheric scientist. Some might argue that it is too much to require that people should know about all aspects of climate change, including gender. Why should atmospheric scientists have to know about gender and climate change when people outside their professions would not be expected to have their depth of knowledge about climate science? I understand where this argument comes from. However, I would still counter by positing that what I am asking for here is simply a reflection on the fact that the way we frame climate change matters. Currently, our lack of attention to gender and climate change connections means that these interviewees along with scores of others working in these spaces might be more likely to draw on essentialized discourses because that is what they have at hand. The discourses result from us not thinking systematically about gender. When pressed to do so, we have to rely on existing understandings of gender, which tend to be built on problematic, essentialized, and limiting ideas about what gender looks like (MacGregor 2017b). Our lack of deliberation about gender is matched by our lack of reflection about race, class, and other intersectional elements of environmental experience in most dominant spaces of the global North.

All of this is to say that thinking through gender and climate change connections requires walking a tricky path of identifying regularized patterns of behavior while avoiding essentialization. Participants focused mostly on

the agency of women in the global North because they were reflecting on their own experiences, or their friends or colleagues' experiences. When they mentioned women who are different from them, such as indigenous women, women in lower socioeconomic classes, and women in the global South, they were thinking of women "out there" rather than "in here." There are important implications to this, including reinforcing power divisions in the international system. This is why specifically incorporating the perspective of people in the global North is an essential complement to all of the work that focuses on people in the global South. We need to understand how we might be drawing on essentializing discourses in climate change debates, and what steps we might take to avoid doing so.

THINKING ABOUT GENDER AND CLIMATE CHANGE INTO THE FUTURE

When I was thinking about who might read this book, several communities came to mind, including people working in climate change spaces and academics working on questions of both climate change and gender justice. The book is premised on a normative commitment to both sustainability and justice. Thomas Princen (2002, 35) has argued that "*sustainability* is not the status quo environment but ecological integrity. [Its] orientation is long term, even very long term, that is, over many generations of key species, including humans. The scale is determined in the first instance by biophysical processes. From this view, human and natural systems may be separate, but the focus is on the intersection of the two systems. Perceived crises demand alternative forms of social organization, ones that make transformational, not marginal, change." This view of sustainability goes beyond a limited view of humanity's ability to continue to exploit nature for our gain. Rather, it captures necessary shifts in our relationships with ecosystems and with each other. At the same time, a basic understanding of gender justice involves seeking to achieve equality of experiences and opportunity. Alison Jaggar (2014, 10) explains that scholars concerned with global justice trace "the ways in which contemporary transnational institutions and recent global policies, most of them facially gender-neutral, have had systemically

disparate and often burdensome consequences for specific groups of women in both the global North and the global South.” Elsewhere I have argued that achieving gender justice requires reflecting on the sources of gendered disparities and vulnerability and offering fair ways to remove these (Detraz 2017b). In climate change debates, it involves considering the sources of climate change as well as the experiences of climate change, as well as thinking through any benefits to climate change action, and coming up with potential ways to achieve fair distributions of these benefits. While this is an admittedly limited idea of justice as largely focused on equity, I feel that this is a good starting point for larger reflections on gender and environmental issues since we do not even meet a very basic standard of equity in many areas of climate politics (Buck, Gammon, and Preston 2014; Buckingham 2020; Detraz 2017b).

Therefore, this conclusion reflects on how we might rethink each of the four women and climate change discourses discussed in the previous chapters with the goals of sustainability and justice in mind. I suggest ways that academics, policymakers, nonprofit workers, and others can learn from and build on the discourses by thinking about how best to wield these forms of representation in order to achieve sustainability and gender justice goals. This is akin to developing strategic frames, but it goes beyond this. Frames are “‘schemata of interpretation’ that enable individuals ‘to locate, perceive, identify, and label’ occurrences within their life space and the world at large” (Benford and Snow 2000, 614). Personal understanding is as an essential component of frames, and strategic framing has been essential for different types of social movements (Jinnah 2011).

What I am calling for are not *just* strategic frames, but rather a reorientation of our perspectives on women and climate change. The discursive shifts that I identify below follow from this reorientation and focus in on specific roles that connect women’s lives to climate change challenges. It is my hope that these discourses can also help bridge multiple communities who have compatible goals of sustainability and justice. Despite the fact that they often have compatible goals, global environmental politics (GEP) scholars and feminist international relations scholars often do not talk to each other. They tend to present at different conferences or at least on different panels, publish in different journals, and teach different courses. I hope that this book can

play a bridging role for conversations between those who have a normative commitment to sustainability and justice. They are not mutually exclusive, as they reflect our multifaceted experiences of climate change. We know from previous academic work that changes to environmental messaging can result in shifts in attitudes and even increased dedication to environmental protection (Lu and Schuldt 2016; Wolsko, Ariceaga, and Seiden 2016). The nonprofit sector is very aware of this fact, as they consistently work to find effective ways to communicate their climate change priorities. I argue that there are some important shifts that can be made to each of the discourses to make them more inclusive and highlight both agency and obstacles for women in climate change.

Women-as-Vulnerable

The majority of interviewees began their reflections on gender and climate change with a description of women's vulnerability to climate change impacts. While it is accurate that gender and environmental vulnerability have important conceptual and experiential elements (Demetriades and Espen 2010; Detraz and Peksen 2017; Enarson 2012) it is crucial that we are intentional in our descriptions of vulnerability. We must purposely decouple vulnerability from simplistic descriptions of victimhood. Instead, we must make vulnerability explicitly about marginalization and how we can overcome it. For instance, gender norms create expectations about who will perform specific tasks. The tasks typically deemed "women's work" are less valued (i.e., economically compensated or socially praised). There are typically fewer resources available to support gendered tasks such as caring for families when they become more difficult because of the effects of climate change. Women's adaptive capacity suffers because of the larger social structures that determine what gets prioritized in times of stress or crisis (Denton 2002). It is essential that descriptions of the unique challenges that women face are situated in larger discussions of marginalization and exclusion. As noted in chapter 3, this requires critical engagement with how gender works in a society, but also necessitates making explicit connections between gender, race, class, dis(ability), and place. Though many participants did make connections across forms of marginalization, this must be

the central characteristic of a women and climate vulnerability discourse so that we avoid characterizing women as victims.

One way of doing this is to stress that climate change is a phenomenon that is currently impacting the global North as well as the global South. Of course, we need to acknowledge that some communities currently feel the impacts of climate change more acutely than others. But we are past the point of treating climate change as a problem of the global South. Thinking through ways that vulnerability manifests differently in the global North and global South allows for more critical engagement with the forces that influence how we experience climate change, including gender, but also class, race, dis/ability, and so on. Moreover, it facilitates reflection on how we can effectively increase adaptive capacity and ensure human security and environmental sustainability. This reorientation assists us in determining the heightened levels of vulnerability experienced by many rural women in the global South as part of larger patterns that we can work to change. This would allow us to identify sources of vulnerability while ensuring that we avoid the weaponization of vulnerability or the redistribution of vulnerability. We see an example of this reorientation in the language used by a coalition of climate justice and women's rights organizations that came together in 2019 to discuss the Green New Deal concept being debated in the United States and beyond. The coalition was motivated by the idea that feminist analysis is essential to this project. According to its statement of principles,

To truly address the root causes, as well as the scope and scale of the climate crisis, the Green New Deal must be cross-cutting in its approach, steadfast in feminist principles, and strive to combat historical oppressions. It must advance a transformative feminist agenda that centers the leadership of women, and acknowledges and addresses the generational impacts of colonization and anti-Black racism. It must end oppression against and be led and articulated by frontline, impacted communities—especially women of color, Black women, Indigenous women, people with disabilities, LGBTQIAP+ people, people from the Global South, migrant and refugee communities, and youth. (Feminist Green New Deal 2019)

The steps necessary for achieving these goals include changing economic, political, and environmental systems to redress economic disparity, providing

accountability for US policy, and favoring “regenerative, sustainable, cooperative, and collective models” for action (Feminist Green New Deal 2019). This approach situates climate change vulnerability within the existing structures that worsen our climate crisis as well as our justice crisis and sees our future as requiring us to address both simultaneously. Like Stacy Alaimo’s (2009, 26) concept of “insurgent vulnerability” or “a recognition of our material interconnection with the wider environment that impels ethical and political responses,” a useful, revised climate vulnerability discourse is one that highlights the fact that all living things are vulnerable and identifies those processes that contribute to this vulnerability.

Women-as-Caregivers

The women-as-caregivers discourse underscores how a widely shared human experience, providing care to others, currently intersects with climate change and will do so into the future. This discourse can help shed light on lived experiences as well as underscore the potential for shifts in human-environment relationships. Several interviewees specifically mentioned how they felt personally connected to climate change through their identity as mothers. Linkages between climate change and parenting, which are typically left out of fields such as environmental politics (Princen 2009), are important topics for reflection. At the very least, these storylines offer insight into a potentially important facet of how some may feel a personal tie to climate change, even without any direct exposure to noticeable climate change impacts.

However, descriptions of caregiving roles should avoid homogenizing women as nurturing mothers and avoid homogenizing caregivers to mean only mothers with children. This simplistic portrayal sets unhelpful expectations about who should provide care by depicting women’s (and particularly cisgender women’s) care work as natural. Since we tend to view gender narrowly as a binary, what falls on one side is excluded from the other. Therefore, since caregiving is often seen as “natural” for women, it must not be for men or anyone outside of the rigid binary. We must recognize these significant pitfalls of uncritical associations between women and nurturing characteristics (Sandilands 1999). We must also recognize that while care narratives are gendered, they are also raced and classed. For instance, some groups of women can use care narratives more strategically than others. Michelle

Carreon and Valentine Moghadan (2015, 30) note that “the status of women within a given society—shaped by race, ethnicity, class, gender, economic status, religion, and sexuality—affects how women experience motherhood, as well as how they are either empowered by or excluded from certain citizenship rights.” The “wholesome mother” image is typically seeped in a set of assumptions about class (i.e., wealthy or middle-class) and race (i.e., white). We must be intentional about using a care discourse in ways that incorporate race, class, gender, and other forms of marginalization.

While maternalist frames have been critiqued as potentially reinforcing problematic gender norms (Douglas and Michaels 2005; Gentry 2009), I argue there is still potential in a caregiving discourse for rethinking our orientation to the environment. This would require a more specific focus on *people* as caregivers rather than women. There is a great deal of feminist thought on this topic to draw from (Bauhardt 2014; Di Chiro 2019; Tronto 2013). Some have argued that we are in a “crisis of care” that needs to be addressed as a component of our climate crisis (Bauhardt 2014). In the words of Giovanna Di Chiro (2019, 307), “To reduce our ecological footprint . . . we need to grow our care footprint. What needs to grow is not more green production and green consumption, but a more caring economy rooted in an earth-friendly caring democracy, one that truly ‘cares for communities, for future generations in a finite world, and for nature.’” This notion of care illustrates the close connections between sustainability and justice aims.

Several interviewees mentioned that some major transformations are necessary to prevent further climate change. They focused on economics and politics, but also on how we understand human-environmental connections. They questioned whether a new perspective might allow our thoughts and actions to connect to something outside ourselves. How can we get people to understand themselves as part of a whole and act accordingly? Rebecca, a nonprofit worker in the UK, addressed the question directly:

The best way . . . is to be an agent in a society that is about compassion, and is about care, and is about gratitude, and is about things that mean that we welcome each other and we reach out to each other in a society where people often feel quite insecure or feel quite alone. . . . And only once we connect as a community do we understand the value of being part of the world—our social

world. I think we're very good at engaging economically but not very good at environmentally or socially.

Saying that we need to teach people how to connect as a community, Rebecca went on to argue that we currently live in “a famine of compassion.” This echoes remarks made by other participants who commented on how gender norms affect whether and how men and women are expected to play care roles in society. Shea, an environmental attorney in the United States, likewise claimed that we need a reorientation in ways that we relate to the environment:

How do we actually change the way that people think about the environment? How do we make people feel about the environment, the way they feel about their own children? How do we bring that relationship temperament to the ground that they walk on?

Shea then argued that a “nurturing piece” that influences how we see the environment and climate change “is missing.” According to Rebecca and Shea, we need to get people to recognize connections between human communities in their everyday lives. This builds on the connections that society already expects of women but reorients our assumptions about what this role looks like and who plays it. This necessitates explicitly linking care to humanity rather than femininity.

Existing scholarly work on countries in the global North reveals that emotional connections to climate change are strong (Norgaard 2011) and often feature concern for children or future generations (Fischer et al. 2012). More specifically, research shows that the emotional connection to objects of care under threat from climate change can be a powerful motivator for supporting strong climate action (Wang et al. 2018). These objects of care can be children or future generations more broadly. But it can also be the planet itself. A revised climate change and care discourse would potentially harness this kind of motivation in order to foster a personal connection to climate change, especially among communities who do not consider themselves to be directly experiencing climate change at present. The existing work by parenthood- and motherhood-themed organizations illustrates the salience this frame has for many people since caregiving is such a widely shared human experience. While this is obviously not a salient perspective

for everyone and should therefore not be used exclusively, it might be an effective way for some people to view their own experiences as related to climate change.

Women-as-Knowledgeable

The women-as-knowledgeable discourse offers an important counter-perspective to women's victimhood storylines. The discourse furthers sustainability goals by focusing on multiple forms of climate change knowledge that are necessary for understanding of climate change as well as coming up with effective policies to address it. Its storylines contribute to equity goals by reinforcing the idea that women possess climate change expertise and participate in its dissemination in society as scholars, scientists, citizens, or caregivers. It stresses that women are just as capable as men to contributing to climate change understanding, and in some instances have unique climate change knowledge due to gendered divisions of labor in society or households.

In this way, the discourse acknowledges women's expertise in multiple forms. It confirms that women are already represented in roles associated with climate change knowledge, including as negotiators, researchers, and teachers. At the same time, it illustrates transformative potential in how we conceptualize knowledge in the context of climate change. For instance, some participants mentioned that the people who are perceived as climate change stars are those who dedicate an enormous amount of time to researching climate change and publicly exhibiting their knowledge. In one participant's view, "They dedicate day and night to reading articles and attending meetings. And I think as a culture, we idolize that, the people who know all the stuff are like gods." While we obviously need passionate, dedicated, and knowledgeable people working in climate change spaces, not everyone has the same chance to belong to this group. Chapter 6 explored the theme of using one's position as "superstar" to exclude others. One interviewee used the term "silverbacks" to refer to older white men in her field who are regarded (and view themselves) as the "heavy hitters" who should be included on conference panels. Another participant pointed out that some older white men in her atmospheric science department think of themselves as "the most important people in the department" because of their status in the field. These examples illustrate the potentially problematic nature of seeking to highlight women's position in existing structures

of knowledge production. These structures are gendered, raced, and classed in ways that perpetuate a perspective of knowledge that is centered in male-dominated institutions in the global North. Kavita Philip (2020) notes that dominant, northern understandings of knowledge have a long history of taking information and lived experiences from other places and representing them as their own accomplishment and expertise.

Medical pharmacopeias were written with the help of non-Western peoples; for example, Indigenous populations in European imperial contexts provided information about the use of plants. Astronomical and mathematical knowledge traveled from South Asia and the Middle East to Europe, whose “Renaissance” would not have been possible without it. So, in a sense what we call “the scientific method” and “objective” language is itself [*sic*] the product of an imagined autonomy of educated, Western men, who took the knowledge of the world and embedded it in their own claims to mastery. In the process they told a story about the legitimate subject of knowledge, suggesting that only certain kinds of people could be knowers, thinkers, intellectuals. Women, Indigenous people, and enslaved and colonized people lost even more than their individual lives and liberty—they lost, for over two centuries, the right to be considered knowledge producers. We still live in institutions that were created based on this assumption. (Causevic et al. 2020, 25)

The academy is notorious for funneling information through “proper” channels and rejecting that which is not “rigorous.” For many people doing this evaluating, a lack of rigor sometimes just means unfamiliar. Again, this does not suggest that we do not need accurate, scientifically grounded information about climate change. We need women doing the “fabulous science” that one participant mentioned in chapter 5. This is important, and their accomplishments should not be underestimated. But we also need other information in order to achieve sustainable and just climate policies. It is therefore important to frame the idea of women as knowledgeable with an expansive conceptualization of what constitutes expertise and how it is generated. This would require drawing on examples both inside and outside dominant academic as well as social structures.

We leave out valuable forms of knowledge if we limit ourselves to a narrow definition. I argue that inclusion must encompass expanding not only

on the range of perspectives that are physically present in climate change spaces, but also on conceptualizations of knowledge and expertise more broadly, as well as explicitly “centering knowledges from the margins” (Causevic et al. 2020). In climate change spaces, the margins include the global South, as knowledge about climate change (along with many other subjects) tends to be created in the global North about the global South (Blicharska et al. 2017). The margins also entail those spaces outside of our dominant frame of reference for expertise.

Along these lines, several interviewees brought up examples of women’s (and men’s) practical knowledge about climate change effects. This avoids painting women as knowledgeable only if they have a specific set of credentials. However, calling for an expansion of our view of knowledge does not mean treating women’s knowledge as simply an input into climate change understanding or engaging in “epistemic objectification.” Doing so reinforces problematic patterns of exploitation (Tuvel 2015). Rather, it means recognizing that “knowledge has multiple forms—both formal and lived. Knowledge is a process, not a product” (Causevic et al. 2020). This reorientation concerns those involved in the process as participants.

Interviewees frequently stressed the importance of knowledge that emerges from lived experiences. One example is women’s early awareness of climate change impacts because of difficulties in subsistence agriculture or rising food prices at markets. While calling attention to alternative ways of knowing about climate change is in itself positive, we should still avoid automatically associating local knowledge gained from gendered household tasks or resource use with women, and particularly women of the global South. This is in part because this knowledge can be exploited without them being incorporated as full partners in climate action (Dey, Singh, and Gupta 2018; Dove 2006; Federici 2009; Sapra 2009). There is a delicate balance between accurately portraying lived experiences and avoiding representing these as the only possibilities. We must strive to accept the climate change knowledge that comes from gendered tasks while recognizing that these roles are, in fact, gendered.

Women-as-Agents

The women-as-agents discourse highlights women's active participation in multiple areas related to the causes of climate change, along with attempts at climate change mitigation and adaptation. Many of the storylines in the discourse focus specifically on women's activity in the environmental movement, particularly due to the significant presence of women in environmental organizations. It sheds light on different ways women participate in climate change action and possible consequences of this participation. The discourse is also useful for reminding us of where there is more to be done to achieve increased gender equity in climate change work by highlighting where expertise is undermined and action is blocked or undervalued. It contributes to sustainability aims by calling attention to multiple sites of climate change action that can be enhanced in the future. It furthers justice goals by shining a light on the many women across the globe who are already climate change actors as well as the gendered resistance these women sometimes face.

Many participants used the women-as-agents discourse to describe women's many contributions to climate work. The discourse is therefore beneficial for countering an understanding of women as passive victims of climate change. However, we must be wary of using stereotypical representations of women's environmental action that reinforce expectations that environmentalism is an inherently feminine sphere. Some scholarly work raises the concern that these associations can serve to discourage some men from environmental action (Brough et al. 2016; Swim, Gillis, and Hamaty 2020). I argue that it is also problematic because it offers homogenizing assumptions about women. While it may be the case that some women are more likely to be drawn to environmental work because of gender socialization, this socialization piece of the story needs to be made clear. We must avoid depicting women's climate action as a byproduct of their inherently nurturing or giving "nature." There are gendered, raced, and placed implications of these associations, as women from the global North are often the ones assumed to be environmentally virtuous (Arora-Jonsson 2011). These depictions of certain environmental actions by women as "natural" mask the struggles that some environmental activists have encountered in getting their concerns taken seriously. For instance, environmental justice-oriented organizations,

many of which are led or heavily staffed by women of color, have historically been less funded and less connected to centers of power than more mainstream environmental organizations (Bullard and Smith 2005). Additionally, discussing women's environmental agency necessitates considering the potential risks or dangers that people can face when they engage in environmental protection activities—including criminalization or violence (Glazebrook and Opoku 2018; Tran et al. 2020). Agency is complicated by patterns of marginalization, and a women-as-agents discourse should reflect this.

The women-as-consumers storyline in the women-as-agents discourse is particularly useful for demonstrating that agency is complicated, because the storyline forces us to reflect on the economic processes that are inextricably tied to environmental change and how these intersect with gender (Dauvergne 2008, 2010). It also draws attention to women's participation in environmental damage because of their role as consumers. While consumption patterns are gendered, many women, particularly many women in the global North, are active participants in our current consumer culture. Hence, the women-as-consumers storyline calls attention to women's participation in multiple facets of environmental change, some good and some bad. It also allows for the consideration of consumption itself as an important source of environmental damage, one particularly associated with historic patterns of economic activity in the global North. This is important since the issue of population growth in the global South has historically attracted much more attention in environmental policymaking (Hartmann 2010).

Likewise, it is important to address the forms of exclusion that were identified by participants, as well as some forms that were not brought up in the interviews. Most interviewees focused on women's exclusion from or underestimation in multiple professional spheres. While there was some discussion of other forms of exclusion—race, ethnicity, class, and place in particular—these should all be central to a quest for climate solutions that are sustainable and just. One way of addressing these forms of exclusion is to recognize their intersectional nature. Some participants did so, for example, by reflecting on trends such as women of color being underrepresented in climate science or indigenous women in particular being absent from climate negotiations.

This kind of intersectional analysis ensures that calls for greater inclusion do not result in greater inclusion of only white women from the global North.

These transformations to achieve greater inclusion across multiple communities of marginalized peoples are part of the discursive shifts and social changes that will be essential for effective and just climate change approaches. Kate O'Neill, Jörg Balsiger, and Stacy VanDeveer (2004, 152) define social change as “a process by which the interaction between agents and structures creates new possibilities for collective action by changing norms and institutions, as well as the evolution of existing and emergent actors (and their interactions) who are both enabled and constrained in the pursuit of their goals.” Some participants, particularly from the scientific community, pointed out that their fields are witnessing a transformation as more women are rising through the ranks. Having more women in fields like this offers some transformative potential. Alternative voices and lived experiences will hopefully contribute to changing norms and possibly changing the institutions themselves. Although there is always the possibility that any given institution will remain the same while simply having different people in them, many interviewees were optimistic about the effects the increased levels of gender equity. Yet, they still argued for important changes to take place, including having more women, people of color, and others in high-level or leadership positions in the areas that significantly contribute to climate change action. Changing the discourses we use to describe and understand gender and climate change will be one major way to contribute to this movement. Luckily, we have decades' worth of feminist environmental scholarship to draw on in this quest. Sherilyn MacGregor (2006, 6), for instance, has argued in favor of a project of “feminist ecological citizenship,” arguing that bringing the concept of citizenship into environmental debates “provides an inclusive space for the public performances of political subjectivity that destabilize and resist dominant ideologies of gender.” This idea of feminist ecological citizenship represents an important type of transformational environmental agency that seeks not only to “add women,” but to fundamentally alter our way of thinking about power structures within society. Likewise, Anna Kaijser and Annica Kronsell (2014, 428) remind us of the necessity of

unraveling the multiple forms of power that shape not only our agency but also our understanding of global challenges such as climate change.

Intersections of power structure political, economic, and social institutions on all levels. It is therefore necessary, in an intersectional analysis, not only to look for the adverse impacts of climate change on “vulnerable” groups, but also to shed light on and problematise norms and underlying assumptions that are naturalised and regarded as common sense, but build on and reinforce social categorisations and structures of power, not least through institutional practices. We need to turn our gaze towards economic elites and the Western countries. . . . Using intersectionality in the study of climate issues makes it possible to reach a more complete and accurate understanding of the social and political conditions for climate governance.

This view is essential for reevaluating each of the four women and climate change discourses outlined in this book. While it is undoubtedly important to challenge essentializing discourses that paint the world’s women as victims of climate change, each of the discourses has space for revision in order to provide transformation necessary to enhance sustainability and justice.

ONWARD

I started this project because I was curious about the various ways gender and climate change intersect. I wanted to uncover how people working in climate change viewed these connections. Over the course of seventy-six interviews (and twenty survey responses), I found myself feeling hopeful. This hope stems from the knowledge that there are dedicated people working on climate change daily. It comes from their confidence that although we have a huge amount of work to do on both climate change and gender equity, there are bright spots and points of progress. This project’s discursive map and suggestions for discursive shifts should therefore be helpful for them and others who work on climate change. Additionally, the discourses uncovered in this book are useful for policymakers, the media, scholars, and everyday people. This is particularly true for youth activists who have a significant stake in what direction our future will take. Using discourses of women and climate

change that highlight agency and ways to address historical marginalization are essential for the next generation to break out of existing patterns of casting southern women as climate victims. We have seen that environmental organizations have at times struggled to break from their patriarchal past, but as discussed in chapter 5, some patterns of masculinity being rewarded appear in youth climate movements as well (Curnow and Chan 2016).² As the youth climate movement continues to struggle with ageist representation by the media and policymakers (Bergmann and Ossewaarde 2020; Kimball 2019; Mayes and Hartup 2021), a deeper understanding of gender and climate change is relevant for understanding what future paths of justice and sustainability might look like.

A central purpose of this book is to alter people's perceptions so that when they hear the phrase "gender and climate change," they do not see only images connected to women's physical climate change vulnerability. I want them to envision my interviewees and all of the important climate change work they are doing, along with all of the women across the global North and global South with whom I did not have the opportunity to talk. Women are connected to climate change through multiple roles and experiences. Ignoring this reduces women's agency and renders their contributions less visible.

The four discourses—women as vulnerable, caregivers, knowledgeable, and agents—provide ways of understanding women and climate change connections that are grounded in lived experiences. In addition, the discourses speak to broader trends and debates about climate change. Though they sometimes replicate stereotypical depictions of women as nurturing or marginalized, they challenge essentializing storylines by highlighting women's expertise in climate change or contribution to the causes of climate change through consumption. As discourses they represent ways of knowing and understanding climate change for the interviewees. They are the stories they, and often we, tell about climate change drawn from lived experiences, socialization, and available information. The women who spoke with me presented a picture of the lives of "women." Sometimes this included critical evaluations of gender and power or problematic essentialization about women in "poor countries" or proud declarations about the many contributions women have made to the field. They are stories, which are created and

alterable. I argue that there are some important alterations necessary to each discourse that would allow them to function as frames of representation to highlight the multifaceted roles of women in climate change. This is vital because representation matters. If we see or hear women discussed as victims, then we will have a hard time imagining them in global negotiation spaces, or atmospheric science conferences, or in board meetings of climate change organizations. These are spaces where women routinely exist and contribute. Most especially, representations of women from the global South matter, as they tend to be the ones associated with vulnerability and victimhood. It is crucial to unpack assumptions about agency and use discourses that emphasize women's participation as well as obstacles to their inclusion.

In sum, gender needs to be a central component of how we think about and act on climate change. We need to recognize that gender shapes climate change at multiple levels. This ranges from influencing people's individual experiences of climate change impacts (Dankelman 2010; Detraz and Peksen 2017) all the way up to shaping the mitigation and adaptation policies we adopt (Dankelman 2002; Demetriades and Esplen 2010). We need critical engagement with the roles and responsibilities assigned to "women" because many people are still surprised to see the variety of roles that women currently play in climate spaces. This indicates that we need more critical deliberation of gender and climate change connections across multiple sectors working on climate change. That has been the central goal of this project: to facilitate an evaluation of where women are currently playing roles, what these look like, and what the future brings.

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Women and Climate Change

Examining Discourses from the Global North

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