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Choosing, Connecting and Caring: Marginalised Users' Desired Social Media Platforms – A Feminist Futures Perspective

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Master's thesis

Author:
Emilia Rieger

Supervisor:
Akhgar Kaboli

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This thesis examines current experiences of people of marginalised genders on social media and their desired images of the future for social media platforms from a feminist futures perspective. Feminist futures are located in the sphere of critical futures studies and focus on the gendered aspects of questioning power relations. Social media presently acts as a double-edged sword for people of marginalised genders. While technological advancements and communication systems of the 21st century enable people of marginalised genders to connect, inform and mobilise, it has also become a source of fear and a place where many experience harm. As research suggests that social media can be particularly harmful for people of marginalised genders, this group was selected as the focus of this study.

In a participatory futures workshop approach, inspired by different existing futures workshop approaches, this thesis introduced the CCC Futures Workshop, focusing on a critical and collective process working with causal layered analysis to uncover deeper meanings behind the seemingly normal. The goal was not only to gather data but to empower the participants and create a feeling of being actors of change for them in line with feminist futures literature. Analysing the data with a combination of qualitative content analysis and causal layered analysis first led to an overview of the present experiences on social media and finally to the creation of desired images of the future.

The analysis of the data indicates that participants appreciate the aspects of connection, promotion and entertainment on social media while also criticising the amount of content, the irresponsibility of platforms and experiences of hate and threats. This is accompanied by issues such as online echo chambers and the curated nature of social media, which can hinder authentic connections. The desired images explored in this study are called We Choose, We Connect, We Care, We Count on and We Are Free. These findings align with feminist futures values such as power distribution, empathy and community-building. While the protection of marginalised genders was salient in the results, the desired futures, emphasized better lives, and better conditions for everyone, by working together, looking out for each other, and focusing on what matters to the participants in their offline lives.

Key words: desired images of the future, marginalised genders, social media, critical futures studies, feminist futures, participatory futures workshop

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CLA – Causal Layered Analysis

CCC – Critical Collective CLA Futures Workshop

FFRC – Finland Futures Research Centre

1 Introduction

What was once hailed as a vehicle for empowerment has, for millions of women and girls, become a source of fear. (Carmo 2025)

In this quote, Carmo, Social Media specialist at the United Nations, is talking about the internet and its recent development, revealing that in the age of AI, a new wave of digital abuse is occurring. The relationship between social media and marginalised gender realities has been investigated in feminist media studies, revealing time and time again that people of marginalised genders are one key target group when it comes to being hit by harm online (see, for example, Easter 2018; Megarry 2018; Gerrard 2020; Hokkanen 2023). Additionally, the mainstreaming of misogyny online poses an urgent threat to especially young people of marginalised genders (Park et al. 2023, 54). Some of the most used social media platforms, namely Mark Zuckerberg's Instagram and Facebook, Zhang Yiming's TikTok and Elon Musk's controversial X (former Twitter), are all in the hands of wealthy men (cf. Kemp 2025). At the moment of writing this thesis, Elon Musk is the richest person on earth, Mark Zuckerberg is in fifth place, and Zhang Yiming is in place 26 and also the richest person in China (Forbes 2026). This is not only worrying in the light of social media becoming a tool for discrimination against marginalised identities while others increase their wealth through the platforms, but also in questions such as the futures of democracy. The spheres where people currently connect, exchange and inform themselves are being controlled by the wealthiest men. Current political and media discourse suggests protection for social media users by introducing an age ban for the platforms, so that at least the youngest in our societies can be protected from harm online. But what about the other users who still experience harm on social media, such as people of marginalised genders? Why do users get banned from social media instead of the platforms getting changed instead?

It is time to reframe the issue at hand. Critical futurist Richard Slaughter (1996, 174) emphasised that the act of reframing is necessary in order to redirect human effort. Technologies are a hot topic within the futures studies field. However, little attention has been paid to the intersection of futures, feminism and technology. While media studies have considered the issue at hand, and the perspectives of gender are getting attention in fields such as gender studies and social sciences, the future perspective is often on the sidelines. In futures studies, feminist issues have gotten some attention, but they are still in the background (Feukeu 2024, 87). Feminist futurists advocate that the two disciplines can benefit a lot from each other (Gunnarsson-Östling et al. 2012, 921). In this thesis, people of marginalised genders get the floor and reveal how the social media platforms of today shape

their everyday lives as well as how they imagine their desired social media platforms to look in the future. This leads to the following research questions guiding this study:

- What desired images of the future do people of marginalised genders create about social media platforms when examined through a feminist futures perspective?
 - Which aspects and dynamics of social media platforms shape the everyday experiences and thus the images of the future of people of marginalised genders?

The aim of this research is not only to generate meaningful and new connections between research fields but to tackle an often top-down discussed topic from a bottom-up participatory perspective. Along the way, the aim is to encourage participants to explore their desired futures of social media and contribute to their feeling of being actors of change (Hurley et al. 2008, 389). This includes reclaiming online spaces and discourse about them, renewing social media as a vehicle of empowerment, and not accepting it as a source of fear. Additionally, this thesis aims to contribute to the overall purpose of futures studies, namely “to maintain or improve human well-being” (Bell 1997, 111), by addressing the well-being of marginalised genders online and questioning the power structures in the sphere of social media.

The goals and research questions of this thesis were approached through a futures workshop working with desired images of the future and analysed the gathered data with Causal Layered Analysis (CLA), which is a well-known tool in the sphere of critical futures studies designed by Inayatullah (1998). Critical futures studies, and the sub-sphere of feminist futures, build the theoretical framework of this thesis, which will be examined first. In the theoretical framework, feminism in general will be discussed, in order to avoid misunderstandings of the use of this ambivalent term. Connections between critical futures studies and feminist theory will be established. Moreover, the power of desired images of the future which build the bridge between feminism and futures thinking will be highlighted. Lastly in the theoretical framework academic literature about social media and gendered experiences on the platforms are discussed, as well as the possible potentials that social media has for feminist issues. In the subsequent chapter, the details of the methodology will be presented, and the ethical considerations and trustworthiness of this thesis will be assessed. Finally, the results will be presented and discussed in relation to the literature provided, followed by methodological considerations and suggestions for further research.

2 Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, the theoretical framework of this thesis is established, starting with an introduction on critical futures studies and CLA. Next, feminist theories will be discussed in order to lay a common ground to look into feminist futures, which is the niche in critical futures studies that this thesis is located in. Last but not least, state-of-the-art literature about social media and especially the significance of feminist futures in that sphere will be examined.

2.1 Critical Futures Studies and Causal Layered Analysis

This thesis can be located in the domain of critical futures studies. Starting from a broad view, critical futures studies include different methods and tools which look beneath the surface of what we as humans experience every day and perceive as reality (Slaughter 1989, 451–453). Critical futures studies question the status quo in place, and Slaughter connects it to the critical theory of Jürgen Habermas (Slaughter 1989, 450).

Critical theory by Habermas, according to Ogilvy (1996, 76), is a subtle mixture of Marxism, psychology and communication theory and follows the belief that freedom is not only shifting resources from the rich to the poor but to enable reflective choices for individuals and societies in a way that they serve humanity. This can be translated to the following: a society which is steered by economic or technological imperatives is not free. Both of these aspects are tightly related to social media, which is the contextual space of this study. For example, social media has become a place where products are being promoted and sold to people by a few clicks (Setiawan et al. 2025, 81). Also, as revealed in the introduction, social media platforms are controlled by powerful people who have considerable influence. A vivid example of a non-liberal society being steered by economic and technological imperatives is the donation of 1 million US dollars by Meta to US President Donald Trump's election campaign (McMahon 2024). Therefore, applying critical theory in the online space of social media platforms is a suitable match.

Returning to the critical theory adapted into futures studies, Slaughter argues that the industrial culture is the most greedy, individualistic and highly destructive towards humans and nature. He argues that even though the headline of the industrial world might be peace and prosperity, the current system creates a path to complete downfall. This system keeps on running due to maintaining status, power and control and therefore it is preferred to question these relationships and ask uncomfortable questions. This can be understood as one way in which critical theory approaches the idea of liberation. More specifically, critical futures studies, when successful, can reframe the issue at stake

and redirect human effort. (Slaughter 1996, 171–174.) A key proposition of critical futures studies is that discourse is not neutral and relies on tradition and communities, which are not objective, and thus, discourse is worth studying. Additionally, reflexivity is highly valued among critical futures researchers and enables looking beneath the surface of what first might seem normal/objective. (Slaughter 1989, 451–452.) This is exactly what the data analysis method of this thesis, CLA, aims at by studying underlying meanings, myths and metaphors. CLA is a qualitative method designed in the 1990s by Inayatullah (1998, 816), used for workshops and the data analysis of textual and visual data. The method will be discussed in more detail in the according section; however, it is closely related to critical futures studies (Inayatullah 1998, 816). With CLA, Inayatullah has contributed more than a tool to critical futures studies, as it unfolds and questions opinions and ideologies to create transformative changes. CLA is not about finding the truth but disturbing present power relations and demonstrating that what is seemingly normal and neutral is loaded with meaning and power. CLA asks which truths are privileged and which are not heard. (Shevellar 2011, 10–13.) By examining preferable rather than possible or probable futures, it enables to explore a diversity of voices, and decolonize dominant visions and create authentic, alternative futures (Inayatullah 1998, 825). This is relevant, as Slaughter (1989, 448) realised that in futures studies and in the general portrayal of futures, most commonly disastrous images are being portrayed, instead of positive and desired images. Acknowledging this, it stands to reason that humans become stuck and are not free in Habermas' sense, meaning free of power relationships and dependent on a domination-society (Ogilvy 1996, 78). Subsequently, critical futures studies try to offer alternatives. While critique can be part of critical futures studies, it is not be seen as a threat or solely as a tool for criticising (Slaughter 1996, 171). It addresses what there could be if people were free from the status quo and the business-as-usual futures mindset. CLA directly aims to do that. This can come across as unconventional and threatening to some, which might also be the reason why critical futures studies are still on the peripheral sides of futures studies, even after having been discussed for about 40 years (Feukeu 2024, 80).

Feukeu (2024, 80) argues that critical approaches should be central in futures studies, as futures studies at the moment are not for everyone. In her work, the field was redefined as “the quest for new meanings and reinventions of power systems”. She further argues that futures get to be for everyone when working with critical futures studies such as feminist, Afrofuturist, decolonial, or African futurity. (Feukeu 2024, 88.) This thesis focuses on feminist futures. Before discussing feminist futures studies, feminist theories in general will be addressed, as feminism has become an ambiguous term. Thus, the display of which understanding of feminism is applied in this thesis is needed.

2.2 Feminist Theories

In this chapter, the feminist theory, which is the backbone of feminism in futures studies as well as the backbone of this thesis, will be displayed. Uncountable definitions of feminism can be found; like futures, multiple feminisms exist simultaneously (Masini 1993, 8; Delap 2020, 26). Going through the theory of the different feminisms and their evolution would be beyond the scope of this thesis; following, aspects which are relevant and lead to feminist futures studies will be examined.

What can be retrieved from various feminist scholars and thinkers like bell hooks¹, Adichie, Delap and Milojević, is that feminism as a term has had a hard time and has often been associated with men-hating or *white*², liberal feminism. Both of these associations have led people to neglect it, either because they could not find a place in it, or they were afraid to be seen as “men-haters” (see, for example, Milojević 2024, 13). In contemporary feminist discourse, exclusion is considered a central problem that feminism deals with, while men-hating is just a misunderstanding of feminism (hooks 2015, 70). The goal is overcoming a system which harms numerous people and to bring positive change for all people, regardless of their gender (Milojević et al. 2008, 313–314; hooks 2015, 34). It is crucial here to mention that feminism, especially as a movement, often has and still does exclude and marginalise people who should theoretically benefit from it (Delap 2020, 5), like, for example, people whose gender (social) or sex (biological) do not fit into the categories of men and women are often not considered. This is also visible in feminist literature that only speaks about women and men (see, for example, Adichie 2014; hooks 2015; Delap 2020). However, a gender diverse understanding of the world has received acknowledgement by queer-feminist scholars (see, for example, Butler 1988; Muñoz 2019). Butler (1988, 519) has revealed that gender is rather an act and socially constructed rather than a given or fixed. Muñoz (2019, 1) sees queerness as an act of rejecting the status quo and work towards more promising futures, as “queerness is not yet here”. In this thesis, the term marginalised genders is used to include genderqueer people. It involves all people who do not identify as cis men³ and thus are predominantly affected by gender discrimination. Note that cis men can also suffer from the patriarchy but simultaneously profit from it most. Thus, they are not the focus of this thesis. In this research, the aim is to reveal the connections of marginalised realities with a focus on gender and display how feminist approaches connected with critical theory and futures studies can set a stone to imagine alternative societies online.

¹ bell hooks is Gloria Jean Watkins’ pen name and is always to be written in lower case letters

² *white* is written in italics (and not capitalised) to point out its socially constructed character without rendering it as equal to Black (cf. German Historical Institute London 2020, 4)

³ Cis men have been presumed to be male at birth and also identify as male (Cambridge University Press n.d.).

2.2.1 Feminism in This Thesis

Even though the term feminism has encountered rejection and critique, as has the feminist movement, various authors have demonstrated why it is crucial. For Adichie (2014, 48) a feminist is a person who says “yes, there’s a problem with gender as it is today and we must fix it, we must do better. All of us, women and men, must do better.” Delap (2020, 24) sees feminism as an invitation to think about the structure of society and why men have more power in the form of voice, authority and resources. bell hooks has an intersectional understanding of feminism and emphasises the importance of acknowledging various forms of oppression when speaking about feminism. She suggests seeing feminism as a movement to end sexist oppression rather than achieving equality to men. This viewpoint directs attention to systems of domination, like sexism, racism and classism. (hooks 2015, 16–18.) This reveals that feminism is tackling much bigger questions than just equality between men and women. Additionally, it confirms that feminism is linked to critical theory and critical futures studies, in terms of questioning power relations and also asking which voices are not heard. While feminism does focus on gender, which is also a focus in this thesis, the embeddedness of the patriarchal system in other systems of domination cannot be ignored, and thus feminism tackles critical questions about the status quo and alternative futures. In this thesis, I am applying the following definition of feminism: By acknowledging gender as a socially constructed issue, feminism as a theory and movement works towards a world in which societies are not organized by hierarchy and oppression, while also being aware that factors such as race, class, sexuality and bodily ability provide additional layers of discrimination, and need to be addressed in order for societies to be free. This definition highlights the significance of systems of domination and intersectionality which will be explored further next.

According to scholars like Eisler (1989, 17) and Slaughter (1996, 171), the general system of hierarchy and domination will lead to a dead-end street, as for example, nature will be exploited to extents where earth will not be habitable. Eisler (1989, 14–16) states that the history we get taught about Western civilisation is a narrative around war, men and brutality. Anything before that does not seem to have the same interest to be studied, portrayed or talked about, even though archaeologists had found out that before these domination-societies, more equal societies had existed (Eisler 1989, 15). Milojević (2012, 52) also emphasises that what stands in the way of fairer, more inclusive, and just futures is that some group always dominates others. While cis men do hold most power and prestige in the current world order, this warrants closer attention, as it is not just men. It is mostly *white*, wealthy, able-bodied men. This leads to the second aspect: intersectionality. There is no single experience which is shared by all people of marginalised genders. Class and race, for example, make

a relevant difference in areas such as quality of life and status and should be included in feminism. (hooks 2015, 16.) Overlooking this leads to what feminism has been doing repeatedly; it becomes part of the system of domination and builds hierarchies and paradoxically marginalises people (Delap 2020, 5). This points out the connection between intersectionality and systems of domination and reveals why critical theory and critical futures studies are applied in this study. They act holistically and question intertwined power dynamics, instead of focusing on an isolated aspect (Abdullah 2025, 36). In bell hooks' (2015, 37) words, they acknowledge that "one system cannot be eradicated while others remain intact". However, futures studies as a field, even though wanting to challenge the status quo and think outside the box, is still subject to a male bias and systems of domination, since men have been in charge of the future for a long time (Milojević & Inayatullah 1998, 37). That is why critical and feminist futures studies and participatory approaches are crucial to tackle the rigidity of the status quo and of the systems of domination like the patriarchy.

At this point, it is important to reflect on my position. I am a *white*, cis woman with an abled body, privileged in terms of higher education, as being able to write this thesis might already disclose. Following, my views and belief system are shaped by my experiences and socialisation within the patriarchy. By working participatorily and with literature provided by a diverse set of people, I tried to steer against this. However, this issue cannot be fully overcome, for once, because of the time and scope limits of this thesis, as well as the academic context, which is inherently occupied by highly educated people, and lastly, the past and present systems at play in our societies, which influence all people. While it might not be possible to overcome the rigidity of these systems in this thesis, it is essential to be aware of them. Ethical considerations are further discussed in chapter 3.3.

2.2.2 Rigidity of the Patriarchy and Status Quo

Critical futures studies, as well as feminism, question the status quo and ask what could be instead. Adichie (2014, 18) has mentioned in her work how much the world has evolved, but how surprisingly the ideas of gender have not evolved much. Also, Milojević et al. (2008, 313) come to the conclusion that regarding gender issues in futures studies, "the more things changed, the more things stayed the same". Similar to the future, gender seems to be colonised by our belief systems and leaves little room for change and is extremely persistent. Butler (1988, 528) argues that that as gender is subject to societal norms, implying that there are "rights" and "wrongs" its conventional understanding serves social control. Milojević (2024, 33) clearly states that as a social movement, feminism, which aims for social change, is inherently oriented towards the future, which is met with resistance by groups who want to maintain the status quo. Adichie (2014, 40) has nicely pointed out that thinking about

changing the status quo can be uncomfortable, which is why people are hesitant to talk about gender and connected issues. Therefore, often times also feminism is seen as uncalled-for, as there sometimes is a questionable consensus that the problem has been solved (Delap 2020, 6). That is also a reason why liberal feminism is accepted more broadly. Liberal feminism in this thesis means the idea of achieving gender equality by lifting (*white*) women on the same level as *white* men (hooks 2015, 9). Liberal feminism is less controversial, as it does not challenge the whole basis of how our societies are built, and liberal feminists seem to be satisfied faster in the current world. It is also to be emphasised that the more different something is from the status quo, the more resistance is to be expected, and therefore, resistance against change is weaker when change seems slow and organic (Milojević 2024, 38–43). However, change into a direction of societies free of oppression is not only slow at the present, but anti-feminist and misogynist rhetoric are on the rise and control parts of public discourse, especially online, which is where research context of this thesis is located (Hurley et al. 2008, 391; Delap 2020, 6). Therefore, not only intersectional feminism is under attack but even the liberal feminists' understanding of feminism (Delap 2020, 6). Milojević et al. (2008, 315) stated that the patriarchy is a resilient system working jointly with capitalism, colonialism and racism. The systems are able to renew themselves, transform, and quickly respond to changes in society. One way in which the patriarchy discredits women's and feminist priorities and desired futures is by calling them "utopian, naïve, irrelevant, bound to fail, outdated and unrealistic" (Milojević et al. 2008, 315). This is where futures studies and preferable futures become significant. They work along the premise that the weirder people look at you, the better and thinking outside the box is encouraged (Dator 2019, 4). Therefore, what stands in the way of liberation in Habermas' sense will be explored in the next section.

2.2.3 What Is Needed for Liberation?

For a society to be free in Habermas' critical theory sense, it needs to be acknowledged that theories only work to a specific point, and humans build their realities on the go. However, it also emphasised that both theory and practice are needed for change to take place. In critical theory, a necessity for liberation is the unconstrained exchange of ideas, which today is often called freedom of speech. (Ogilvy 1996, 76.) This is not a new idea, but in the context of social media and contemporary world order crucial to consider. It will be discussed more in chapter 2.4 about social media. In critical theory, it is used to underline that to liberate the oppressed, it is not enough to simply redistribute wealth from the rich to the poor, as Marxism is often simplified to suggest, but self-consciousness of the society and individuals are needed. An individual restricted by an obsession or compulsion, societies driven by economic or technological imperatives are not free societies. Choice does not equal freedom

if there is no room to deliberate about the question or decision. Ogilvy names the example of a society forbidding the exchange of ideas about a social goal like racial equality and compares this behaviour of following social rules to the behaviour of a compulsive and obsessed individual, remaining unfree. (Ogilvy 1996, 76–78.)

In this thesis's understanding of feminism, for full liberation, the binarity of gender and hierarchy between genders should be questioned and challenged in order to shackle the rigid system of domination (Butler, 520; hooks 2015, 31). The duality and hierarchy at play are also a reason why women currently go after presumptively male positions and characteristics, as they are usually at the top of the hierarchy (Milojević 2012, 60). Milojević (2012, 61) advocates for flatter hierarchies to achieve more diverse social arrangements and gender equality. According to critical theory, to be able to overcome systems of domination and for a free society to be established, an increasing amount of human self-consciousness is needed (Ogilvy 1996, 77). This aligns with what hooks (2015, 47) reveals: feminism does not only have a hard time to overcome sexist oppression because of people actively working against it, and supporting oppressive and dominating behaviour openly, but also because a feminist's assumptions and belief system were built within the systems of oppressions and thus can contribute to sexism and other forms of oppression. Additionally, bell hooks (2015, 70) advocates for moving in solidarity and not separately between genders. She explains that Black⁴ women and Black men have fought for their rights jointly before and thus might have a more inclusive stance on feminist struggles too. Whereas *white* women might not have such camaraderie experiences with fighting for their rights with *white* men, if they have not experienced different forms of discrimination. In order not to reproduce the status quo and system of domination, seeing each other as "comrades in struggle" and not reproducing the understanding of power of the patriarchy can be key tools (hooks 2015, 47). Based on the literature cited in this chapter, feminist liberation means standing in solidarity and being "comrades in struggle", because for all genders to be free, society has to be free. Being aware that sexism has not revealed women to be weak but revealed their strength and power is key (hooks 2015, 95). Additionally, steering towards more self-awareness and self-consciousness is needed in order to challenge the systems of domination. Achieving gender equality will be possible when all people are free, meaning they can develop their personal skills, make choices without being infected by stereotypes or rigid gender roles (Milojević 2012, 61). The organisation of our societies are currently a mix of highly technologized systems and a system of hierarchy and

⁴ Black is capitalized in line with established style guidelines on racial and ethnic identity that recognise Black as a historically and culturally constituted identity (see, for example, American Psychological Association 2025; National Association of Black Journalists 2020).

domination, which are posing a danger to life on this earth. Eisler (1989, 17) called it already unsurprising in the 80s that this is the time when people start questioning what used to be the normal and given. Additionally, Grosz (2010, 49) has more recently emphasised that it is about time that feminism takes a step into the future to create change and think about what could but does not yet exist. This leads to the next chapter of this thesis, where feminism and futures meet, and feminist literature in futures studies, visions of feminist futurists and why feminist, desired futures matter will be discussed.

2.3 Feminist Futures and Images of the Future

2.3.1 What Are Feminist Futures?

Based on the absence of a wide variety of literature, feminist approaches are still relatively rare in futures studies and can be considered something which mostly appears in special editions and is not mainstream. Abdullah (2025, 46) stated that even though women have entered the field, the issue of futures studies being male-centred and reproducing patriarchal structures persists today. In this chapter, the existing literature on the topic of feminist futures is examined, which will later act partly as the base of the discussion of this thesis.

The most current echo of what feminist futurists do and feminist futures aim at is not only supporting women but all underrepresented perspectives while questioning power structures and amplifying diverse voices in order to challenge dominance and advocating for inclusivity (Abdullah 2025, 45). This definition and perspective are used in this thesis as they also closely align with critical theory and an intersectional understanding of feminism. Feminist futurists implement what Grosz (2010, 49) has stressed about feminism needing to include a perspective of “what could be but does not exist yet”. It is to be emphasized that feminisms and futures and their combination are dynamic and pluralistic. Feminisms as well as futures studies will continue to change (Milojević 2024, 85). While evolving, feminist futurists claim that the futures field and feminism can benefit from each other by embracing feminist thought and engaging with futures theories and methodologies (Milojević et al. 2008, 317).

Even though feminist approaches are on the margins of the male-centred futures field, different scholars have occupied themselves with the connection between futures, futures studies and feminism: Boulding, Masini, Eisler, Huston, McHale, Choong, Jarva, Milojević, Inayatullah, Bhavnani, Foran, Hurley, Feukeu and Abdullah (see, for example, Boulding 1977; Masini 1987; Eisler 1989; Huston 1989; McHale & Choong 1989; Jarva 1996; Milojević & Inayatullah 1998;

Bhavnani & Foran 2008; Hurley et al. 2008; Milojević 2012; Feukeu 2024; Abdullah 2025). Discussing their work will reveal the evolution of the understanding of feminism among futurists, which in this thesis will be ultimately connected to the desired images of marginalised genders in this study.

Early on in the futures field, Masini (1987, 433) discussed how women have been put on the side lines in industrial societies and how it has enabled them to form their own sets of values and priorities, which make women more adaptable to change and also more able to be part of the change, which is crucial in futures studies. She also claimed that, as women were not the builders of the industrial society, they do not carry its values as deeply and thus may become builders of alternative societies (Masini 1987, 433). She argued that in the face of catastrophe and destruction, women can access different core values, including ideas and visions which are not solely based on rational thinking and ensure the continuation of humanity (Masini 2006, 1164). Masini's view supports the participant choice for this thesis, which is people of marginalised genders.

In 1989, a special issue of the FUTURES journal was published called Gender and Change. In the introduction of the issue, McHale illuminates how the darker face of technological advancement and dangers such as pollution and deforestation are forcing us to think about futures more creatively and realise that the outcomes of tomorrow are shaped by how people think, act and behave today. The issue also emphasises that power remains a significant aspect when it comes to prestige and our societies, and poses a problem to the issue of gender and change, as power has meant masculinity in many societies for the last 5000 years. (McHale 1989, 3.) In the special issue, McHale and Choong (1989, 91–93) emphasise that the world we are familiar with is based on “the image of man” and a “superior being”. Examples they name are that men in the past are responsible for having used metals and minerals from the ground, allocated resources and abused nature. They emphasise that metaphors facilitate to imagine futures which guide us towards action and propose a counter image to “the image of man” (McHale & Choong 1989, 91–93). This is relevant in this thesis, as social media is subject to the “image of men” as well, as chapter 2.4 will reveal. In the special issue, the question of why gender and change are related is addressed. McHale (1989, 4) points out that all of us are influenced by gendered values, perceptions and biases, and our subconscious is full of information and shape societies accordingly. She concludes that thinking about alternatives is a must because the way our minds have shaped our societies has brought humanity to a challenging and controlled presence (McHale 1989, 4). Huston (1989, 38) argues that “the male model of society is bankrupt” and has suffered under the pressure of capitalism and the free market in terms of responsible leadership and

care. She claims that for the survival of humanity, there is a need to live in harmony with nature and feminise societies. These societies value collaboration and care.

Jarva (1996, 598) was also an early voice in futures studies who discussed the patriarchy and feminist issues and described patriarchal societies as exploitative towards nature and other human beings, other than males and living by a strict division by gender regarding power and status. In line with bell hooks, she also detected that hierarchy is a key issue in society, not only by gender but also according to discrimination within genders. She studied the Nordic countries and the welfare state as the most gender equal societies known and emphasised that the then new, male-dominated information technology and general influence of the West for more hierarchical societies have been threatening these most gender equal societies. (Jarva 1998, 904–908.) This connection between technology and patriarchy is crucial for this thesis about social media and will be discussed in detail in chapter 2.4.3.

In 2008, another special issue of the *FUTURES* journal called *Feminist Futures* was published with various articles touching on a variety of themes. Milojević et al. (2008, 313–318) have introduced the work about the futures of feminism, by discussing the relationship between futures studies and feminism, emphasising that a shift is needed to what feminism actually is about and what it can offer to futures studies. In the same special volume, Hurley et al. (2008) have shared their voices about their thoughts on futures and feminism in a conversation paper. In it, Masini still advocated for building awareness of women's role as actors of change. Eisler emphasised that feminism is not only necessary for women but for the future of the world. Smith mentioned that women are particularly impacted by poverty and crimes stemming from a more globalised and connected world and a stronger divide between North and South. Milojević argued that even though men might be cooking at home and women will be working for the military, this does not change the patriarchal base of how our societies and economies work. (Hurley et al. 2008, 389–391.) Offering a strategy to address this, Muñoz (2019, 6–7) advocates for viewing queerness as a critique of the present rigid systems and orientation toward anticipating more promising futures. Queerness reveals that the present is restricted and insufficient and activates an urge for transformation (Muñoz 2019, 3–4).

Feukeu (2024, 87) has dealt with the margins of futures studies in terms of critical futures studies as discussed in the first chapter of this thesis and has written a designated section about feminist futures. She connects feminist futures to the influence of Black feminism. Feukeu emphasised that to feminist futurists, not only the material, tangible world matters, but also the immaterial. This means that a feminist futurist does not describe a high-tech future without thinking about the consequences in terms of environmental sustainability, workers' lives, wars and the impact on living beings, including

uneven distributions between gender, class and places on earth, which are all connected to said high-tech future. She emphasized that in dominant futures scenarios, such aspects are often silenced, and in contrast, in feminist futures, ethics and responsibility are essential. (Feukeu 2024, 87.)

Milojević has also dealt with futures and feminism more recently. Throughout all of her work it gets clear that she advocates for the re-making of gender identities in futures studies and broader society as essential to achieve more inclusive, equitable, ecologically sustainable and peaceful societies (see, for example, Milojević 2024). She also built gendered scenarios, which will be discussed in the next section on feminist futurists' visions and scenarios. Based on Milojević's work, Abdullah (2025) interviewed 13 female futurists on the topic of feminism and futures studies and was researching how contemporary futurists define feminism and why they embrace it. Her main finding is that feminist futurists' work towards practices which are aimed at inclusivity, equity and holistic thinking. What she found aligns with the discussed feminist theories. A shift is occurring, which puts feminism's focus beyond the issue of gender and addresses societal issues such as power dynamics and cultural recognition. Another key aspect of feminism in futures work is a shared idea of increasing the representation of female voices in discussions about the future, which this thesis directly aims at. Additionally, the futurists in her study emphasised that systemic change is needed that includes diversity and marginalised voices, rather than aiming for individual change. (Abdullah 2025, 37–39.) And the following quote describes quite well why futurists embrace feminism and how it is often understood and practised in the futures field today: "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." (Abdullah 2025, 40). This already reveals a sense of feminist futurists' visions and scenarios for the future, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

2.3.2 Feminist Future Visions and Scenarios

Most established feminist future scenarios found in futures literature are the Partnership Society by Eisler, the Gentle Society by Boulding and the Three Gendered Scenario model by Milojević (Boulding 1977; Eisler 1989; Milojević 2018). The desired images of the future created by the participants in this thesis will be ultimately discussed from these scenarios' perspectives.

Eisler advocates for a society based on partnership, which she argues was reality before there had been patriarchy. Archaeologists thought the societies 5000 years ago were inverted patriarchies in which women hold the position of the dominator. It later became clear that they were not inverted

patriarchies but rather Partnership Societies. (Eisler 1989, 15.) In a Partnership Society, there are no hierarchies, and the social organisation is done by “linking rather than ranking” (Eisler 1989, 16). In these societies, there are neither extreme differences in wealth nor status. These societies are peaceful and based on an equal partnership between genders in both private and public manners, and stereotypical feminine attributes are highly valued, such as care, creativity and harmony. (Eisler 1989, 15–16; Eisler 2002, 162–164.)

For Boulding (1977, 231), a society to strive for is called Gentle Society, which is a decentralised and demilitarised society. In this society, even though decentralised, connections and interdependence matter. She is envisioning an androgynous society without a gender binary. Whether that means there are no genders, only one gender or multiple genders is not clearly put in her visions. For her, it is not about whether men become more like women or women like men, but the ability to institutionalise opportunities for women to participate in society wholly on every level of decision-making and enable men to get access to the silent education women get about care work. The goal is to enhance the potential of everyone. To enable the Gentle Society, she presupposes a society based on androgynous trades, like being nurturing and self-reliant at the same time. (Boulding 1977, 231.)

Milojević (2018, 262) introduces the Three Gendered Scenarios which does not only portray the desired vision but three possible scenarios. The first one is named Traditional, which describes the business-as-usual path, where genders are understood predominantly as binary, and there is strict male/female polarity. She describes the value behind this scenario as man and masculinity being most valuable, and society is organised by hierarchy and oppression. The second scenario is called Androgyny, in which Milojević sees one gender or no gender. In it, everyone can be valued equally, but the stereotypically male norm is at play, and pressure to conform to that norm is present. The third scenario is called Multiple Gender Plurality and includes gender diversity, multiplicity and equal valuing of all genders. This society is arranged in an equalitarian, democratic, open, and fluid way. She also reflects that all these scenarios are at play in some areas and places in the present, with the first scenario still being the most common. (Milojević 2018, 262.) The second scenario is promoted by liberal feminists, as bell hooks (2015, 9) has described; they are not longing for a new societal order, but for women to be able to do and be the same as stereotypical men. The silver lining of the second scenario is that gender questions are not being discussed anymore in this future. The third scenario, which is Milojević’s preferred scenario, assumes multiple perspectives on the future based on experiences of the past, present, and both natural and cultural influences. In this scenario, the equal value of all genders, as well as learning from diverse perspectives, is essential. She also emphasises that supporters of this scenario see the celebration of gender fluidity as a prerequisite for a better

world, as one-dimensional gender identities stifle and limit the transformation and anticipation of better futures. (Milojević 2018, 262.)

Milojević (2024, 75) has written a chapter about what feminists and feminist futurists want. She summarised that feminist futurists acknowledge the role and influence of gender and the possibility that the future might be colonised by patriarchal images. Feminist futurists work towards decolonising futures and envisioning post-patriarchal futures. While visions are diverse and dynamic, Milojević (2024, 76) has listed core elements of feminist future visions:

- Gender fluidity
- Gender diversity
- Gender equality – in private and public spheres
- Equal opportunities for all genders
- Equal valuing of diverse genders and their perspectives/worldviews
- Freedom from gender-based stereotyping
- Freedom to construct one's own identity, gendered and otherwise
- Liberated bodies and minds
- Sexual freedom and choice
- Bodily autonomy
- More egalitarian societies overall
- More equitable and balanced distribution of power in general, and among genders in particular
- More peaceful societies overall
- Societies that take seriously and address all forms of violence, seeking to minimise them
- Freedom and equity for all social groups, especially those who were historically oppressed
- Empowerment of the most vulnerable

This list tackles a broad spectrum of feminist issues and indicates what lies in focus when feminism and futures studies engage. It reveals that feminist futurists' visions are aligned with intersectional feminist theory and work towards better futures for everyone, by remaking a system that tackles questions of power with a focus on gender.

Boulding (1977, 231), on the other hand, could be falsely understood as being on a more liberal, one-dimensional feminist side, as she advocates for women getting the same institutionalised opportunities as men. However, the name of her vision, the Gentle Society clearly points to a reorganisation of the world. Even though she does not advocate for diversity as Milojević and bell hooks do, she acknowledges the importance of valuing the stereotypically feminine traits, such as caring and nurturing and longs for a demilitarisation. However, in her preferred futures, it does not matter as much whether men become more like women or vice versa, she is longing for the third option androgyny (Boulding 1977, 231). It is relevant here to point out that Milojević's second scenario, Androgyny, interprets androgyny differently than Boulding. While Boulding associates androgyny with caring, nurturing and self-reliant traits, Milojević's Androgyny scenario values the stereotypically male still over the stereotypically female and aligns with liberal feminists' idea of lifting everyone to be and do what *white* men do (Milojević 2018, 262). They overlap in the belief that gender as a variable should be in the background, and human beings are in focus.

What Eisler (1989) and Milojević (2024) have portrayed in their visions aligns with intersectional feminist theory in a sense that in their preferred futures they are not only lifting women or all genders on the same level as the *white* man, but they strive for a new organization of society that questions power relationships and focuses more on connection, diversity and peace. bell hooks (2015, 16) underlines this by emphasising that all women and genders have individual experiences and feminism includes a wide range and diverse set of experiences and realities. She emphasises the importance of valuing each other's personal experiences without ranking them, similar to what Eisler longs for in the values of a Partnership Society. Also, Milojević (2024, 81) underlines this by stating that genders should value and learn from each other's perspectives. However, even though individually affected by the patriarchy, one ought not to be fighting for themselves, but for the greater good of everyone (hooks 2015, 62). This aligns greatly with the purpose of futures studies (cf. Bell 1997, 73) and Milojević's (2024, 73) understanding of feminist futures, as she writes, "The whole point has always been to change it for the better." Feminist futures are a tool to enable thinking about complex and responsible futures. It is not about individual choices or decisions or blaming anyone personally. It is about shifting from "death, power, competition and hierarchy-based glorification" to a society that values love, caring and equality. (Hurley et al. 2008, 406.) This hints towards the interest in the immateriality of things as Feukeu (2024, 87) has attributed to feminist futurists. What makes feminist futurists feminist is that they argue that to enable this loving, caring, equal society, one must look at the genderedness of our societies. One way to tackle this is to work with desired future visions, which often are labelled as "utopian, naïve, irrelevant, bound to fail, outdated and unrealistic" (Milojević et

al. 2008, 315). In the next chapter, the power of the combination of desired images of futures and participatory approaches will be discussed.

2.3.3 The Power of Desired Images of the Future and Feminist Visions

The purpose of feminist visioning is to break and transform the patriarchal structure of society and, with it, the alleged cultural habits. The goal is not perfection, but building spaces for speculation, critiquing, dreaming and resisting in order to move towards better futures for everyone. As the visions and ideas of desired futures and feminist societies are, often neglected or labelled as unrealistic, it is crucial to be aware that the trending dystopian images of the future can have negative effects. (Milojević & Inayatullah 1998, 41–43.) In futures studies, the goal is to explore the unthinkable and challenge what is known about today, as futures do not exist yet (Dator 2019, 3). Dator (2019, 4) takes it one step further by arguing that ideas about the future should be unconventional and seemingly ridiculous. This can be promising for feminists' desired futures. In order to anticipate change, desired visions for the future are essential. Especially because the past or the present, which shape the imagery accordingly, are not available. Due to the past being defined by a hierarchical society and systems of domination, people have a hard time overcoming this narrative in future visions. (Loye 1989, 19.) That might be why it seems easier to think about dystopian futures than desirable ones. Desirable images are needed in order to activate transformation and action and not become paralysed by the dystopian imagery and fall into the narrative of 'there is nothing we can do'. Masini (2006, 1162) agrees strongly with this, as she encourages futures studies to put greater focus on the desirables rather than just possibles and probables. The crucial difference is that the desirables convey the meaning of that something must be changed, whereas the possibles and probables might lead to thinking about aspects that have existed before or actions that have been taken in the past and project them to the future, which does not lead to change. Why visions, and especially desirable visions, are so powerful is because it enables the visionary to recognise that the "seeds of change", as Masini calls them, are in the past and the present, and by planting and nurturing them, people are able to manifest change. (Masini 2006, 1163.) That is why this thesis works with the term desired images rather than preferred images, as the term reveals the urge for change and the breaking and transforming of structures.

Additionally, by creating desirable visions for feminist futures, relevant feelings can get unlocked. The feelings of working on common issues, getting a sense of community and contributing to something valuable can create a sense of worth. Stepping into these feelings and building an awareness of the capabilities of change are some of the most powerful tools available for

transformation. (Hurley et al. 2008, 389–392.) In line with that, Bhavnani and Foran (2008, 325) advocate for love as an emotion supporting the feminist movements and feminist visions in order to free people's minds from the past and the present in order to thrive forward.

Because of the power of desirable visions and the need for community and awareness building, this thesis works with the method and concept of images of the future coined by Polak (1973). Images of the future are not bound to be only desirables, but he describes the concept in a sense that a society, groups of people or also an individual have a set of values and norms that form expectations about the future (Polak 1973, 10). If humans are enabled to understand their visions and the limiting and prospering parts of them, they can learn which parts of the images of the future to reject and which to accept (Polak 1973, 305). This understanding of images of the future is what desirable images and feminist visions are built upon. Boulding, who has also worked on feminist futures, has translated Polak's work and reviewed it. For her, the image of the future means that the dynamics of a culture are defined by its images of the future, and when the image is bright, the society behind it is resilient, and thriving towards a brighter future, while a culture driven by dark images is led by actions which result in a dim reality (Boulding 1962, 192). Images of the future can change. Boulding argues that one reason for image modification and the dystopian trend is disappointment. As images of the future usually never completely fulfil themselves, expectations might get adjusted, which might make people less likely to dare to think about the unthinkable and the desirables. However, these visions, even if not being an accurate picture of the future, are relevant and valuable in guiding humans towards different and better futures. (Boulding 1962, 193.)

It is relevant to highlight that images of the future are not understood as the single factor determining the future, as this would not show the complexity of futures and influences beyond human control, nor would it acknowledge the fact that some visions don't turn into realities (Bell 1997, 86). It is about recognising that images of the future are guiding human behaviour, which in turn shapes the future. Using this to detect a society's potential to shape futures by formulating and describing images of the future is a key to working towards alternative futures. (Bell & Mao 1971, 14–18.) Bell and Mao (1971, 21) have formulated a model of social change which incorporates that people's beliefs about the past and the present, as well as their values, influence their images of the future. These affect decision-making and can lead to individual or collective action, which then manifests in the future. Their model supports the power of images of the future (Bell & Mao 1971, 21). Images of the future are a naturally systemic collection of beliefs, opinions, ideas and assumptions and are "formed from knowledge and flavoured with imagination" (Rubin 2013, 40). This knowledge is based on the past and present experiences, social and cultural knowledge, combined with imagination according

to personal taste, values and norms. Images of the future concretely emerge as hopes, fears and expectations which shape humanity's decisions, with which people either work towards something they desire or work to prevent an undesirable or fearful future image. Images of the future can be characterised as often remaining hidden and unarticulated, because they are connected to actions, decisions and thus power. (Rubin 2013, 40–41.) Therefore, in this thesis, desired images of the future of people of marginalized genders are examined, in order to question power and decision-making structures. Kelly as a contributor in Hurley et al. (2008, 396) stated that offering more visions of what alternative, healthier partnership futures could look like is a must for feminist futurists but has shown to be challenging as the media is dominated by a few. The growing importance and popularity of social media since 2008 raises the question of whether this still holds true. This leads to the context of this study, in which the connection between social media, gender and technology will be explored.

2.4 Social Media, Gender and Technology

2.4.1 An Introduction to Social Media: The Double-Edged Sword

Social media has shown to be an especially fast-changing environment, which has grown rapidly all around the world in the last three decades, with people becoming more dependent on it. Social media has revolutionised how people communicate and interact. First, online social networks emerged in the 1990s, gaining more attention and popularity in the early 2000s with known sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Myspace emerging. These social networks were mostly used to befriend people, share diary-like entries or experiences. In 2010, Instagram was founded and focused on users sharing pictures. (Dhingra & Mudgal 2019, 3–6.) Years later, the transformation persists. While McIntyre (2014, 19–20) had speculated that the social media evolution will be defined by multiplication into niche platforms, it is visible today that at least the most-used platforms, such as Facebook, are still holding fort as monopolies. Moreover, but Facebook's mother concern, Meta, now owns Instagram, Facebook and the WhatsApp messenger, dominating the field next to Google's YouTube and ByteDance's TikTok (cf. Kemp 2025). The distinction between these platforms lessens (Bhandari & Bimo 2022, 10).

One of the most profound recent changes in the social media environment is that social media sites have transformed from being user-driven to being algorithm-driven. Users are not the main agents anymore, and the buttons for interaction next to the content which is presented to users are relatively small. (Bhandari & Bimo 2022, 2.) Gerbaudo (2024, 1023) even calls for a first generation of social networks in comparison to a second generation, which now focuses on social clustering rather than social networking. Additionally, a trend towards depersonalization, opacity in algorithms, and less

user control can be observed. Concretely, Gerbaudo (2024, 1023) explains that the platforms currently build social clusters by implicit signals, like how long one engages with certain content, and will match your profile with other users who seem to have a similar online behaviour. Following, users get assigned to certain corners of the internet without being aware of it, or actively making a decision about it, which can lead to social fragmentation (Gerbaudo 2024, 1031). On the contrary, in first-generation social media, grouping worked through active clicks by users like following, befriending, liking or clicking the “join group” button (Gerbaudo 2024, 1023).

TikTok has been the forerunner in second-generation social media. It has emerged from former Musical.ly, which started in 2014. It targeted especially young people and turned into TikTok in 2018, and is one of the biggest social media platforms today (cf. Kemp 2025). Moreover, many other major platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube have undergone “Tiktokification”, which hints towards the short video format used in all the apps (see, for example, Moore 2023; Gerbaudo 2024, 1020). Many social media platforms today use these “for you” pages where users encounter algorithmically based short videos recommended for them, and it is increasingly challenging to navigate around this dominant feature. Once on the “for you” page, it is made hard to leave, by features like auto-playing of videos and minimising action choices for users. (Gerbaudo 2024, 1027.) Additionally, social media has become a business space. This was salient during the literature search about social media for this thesis, and most search results were business-related. A business today cannot leave its social media presence unattended without experiencing disadvantages. Users may perceive this change as a shift towards a marketplace and an advertising machine, causing avoidance and irritation to users. (Niu et al. 2021, 7.)

For users, social media often acts as a double-edged sword and can be viewed from various perspectives. Studies have demonstrated that social media can have a positive impact in terms of being able to reach out for help and connect with like-minded people, seeing your struggles represented online, as well as in the aspect of free speech (Park et al. 2023, 40; Nayar et al. 2026, 4–5). Especially young people with minoritised identities can benefit from social media if their resources or support are limited in their offline contexts (Maheux et al. 2025, 451). However, social media also has another dimension: harmful experiences online are almost inevitable, which results from the sites failing to police content. Even though major platforms state that they have a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to extremist or harmful content, users still report encountering such content on a regular basis (Williams et al. 2025, 119–120). Additionally, the free speech aspect should be examined more closely. While social media can give everyone a voice, it also enables anyone to make any kind of information public, which results in misinformation and a threat to high-quality

journalism and consequently, a threat to an crucial tool in democracies (Crimley & Gillespie 2019, 175). Social media is a space in which especially people who are marginalised in some way experience harm (Maheux et al. 2025, 451). For marginalised genders, this can include forms of direct harassment or implicit harms like body dissatisfaction. The gendered aspect of social media is the focus of the next chapter.

2.4.2 Gendered Experiences on Social Media

The European Parliament has requested a report on the effects of social media on girls and women (Park et al. 2023). The findings clearly reveal that gender is significant on social media. It is particularly significant in terms of frequency of use, type of usage, experiencing harm and harassment, body image, mental health, algorithms and gender roles. The findings in general point towards social media having primarily gender-conservative effects rather than liberating society from restrictive gender identities and norms (Park et al. 2023, 32). As the report only briefly mentions diverse gender identities, additionally studies which include transgender and gender-diverse experiences on social media will be consulted subsequently.

Women use social media slightly more than men in all age groups. In Finland, the gap is higher compared to the European Union's average. 98 per cent of women in Finland between 16 and 24 use social media, while 88 per cent of men in the same age group use social media. Between 24 and 54 years old, social media use decreases generally, but the difference remains. 91 per cent of women use social media, whereas 81 per cent of men use social media. (Park et al. 2023, 13–14.) The report does not state numbers about other gender identities' percentage of usage, and no other study has provided answers to this. The type of usage differs as well between genders. While men tend to share their opinions on social media and spend time on platforms associated with news, politics and professional life, women seem to be generally more interested in preserving strong social ties online and self-portrayal, and use platforms accordingly (Park et al. 2023, 19–20). In general, a tendency that men are taking up most space online has been confirmed (Easter 2018, 683). The study ordered by the European Parliament revealed that from an early age, boys are more confident online, which leads them to engage in more risky behaviour online and be more resilient to derogatory experiences, while young girls seem to be more cautious online and also feel less safe than boys (Park et al. 2023, 19–20). Transgender and gender diverse people's use of social media is highlighted to be particularly in terms of using it for the sense of community, social support and being able to connect with other queer people and finding health-related information (Aldridge et al. 2024, 5–9; Nayar et al. 2026, 4–

5). 65 per cent of the participants in Nayar et al. (2026, 4–5) reported using at least one social media platform primarily for the purpose of interacting with other transgender or gender diverse people.

While the type of usage differs between genders, social media has negative mental health effects on all genders. However, girls are at a higher risk of mental health challenges like depression caused by social media in comparison to boys. Transgender and gender diverse youth are, in general, experience more mental health struggles in comparison to the general population and also experience hate and harm online more than cis men and cis women. (Russell & Fish 2016, 468; Aldridge et al. 2024, 2.) The European Parliament study revealed that mental health issues connected to social media were a result of online harassment, low self-esteem, negative body image and a lack of good sleep due to extensive social media use (Park et al. 2023, 24). Body image is a relevant theme, especially when speaking about girls and women who are more likely than boys and men to be affected by issues related to body image and eating disorders due to their social media use. After engaging with beauty and fitness content on social media, suggesting how a body ought to look, women often experience a disimproved mood and feelings of being unattractive. This can lead to a drive for thinness. Though it is to be kept in mind that other external factors, such as education, self-esteem, and socio-cultural beliefs, also influence whether girls and women suffer from negative body image. (Park et al. 2023, 26–27.) Another reason stated for mental health issues was online harassment. Girls and women encounter sexual and gender-based abuse on social media platforms more likely than boys and men (Park et al. 2023, 29). Transgender and gender diverse people experience harm and online harassment, for example, in forms of hate and transphobia, and almost 60 per cent of transgender and gender-diverse people reported being exposed to hate and transphobia on social media. Other issues experienced related to social media by transgender and gender-diverse people are self-consciousness and overuse. (Nayar et al. 2026, 4–5.)

The gender-based divergence on social media experiences can be somewhat explained by an interplay of gender roles and stereotypes (Park et al. 2023, 18). Factors contributing to this are the opaque algorithms of social media, which work based on different aspects of user behaviour and account settings as mentioned in the previous chapter (Bhandari & Bimo 2022, 2). Gender is one major determinant when it comes to recommender functions and targeted advertising on social media (Park et al. 2023, 21). With these algorithms, social media reinforces and sometimes even amplifies gender stereotypes rather than enabling users to express themselves more freely or experiment with their online identities (Park et al. 2023, 32). An extreme example of that is the phenomenon called the manosphere. The manosphere includes different groups of men who share the belief that the current world order favours women and disadvantages men (Park et al. 2023, 38). The manosphere consists

of men who support *white* supremacist ideologies and misuse social media to attack, threaten and harass women, queers and people of colour (Park et al. 2023, 38). According to Ging (2019, 645) the manosphere was able to flourish through social media due to aspects such as anonymity, fast pace and the lack of moderation, radically increasing the spread of antifeminist ideas. Not only in the manosphere but in general, men dominate the online space in fore and background and the deeper alliance between the patriarchy and technology should be disclosed. The next chapter will reveal this connection, and in the last chapter of the theoretical framework, the opportunities of social media for feminist issues will be displayed.

2.4.3 The Alliance Between the Patriarchy and Technology

As clarified in the previous chapter, men tend to take up the majority of space online. The term “digital manspreading” (Easter 2018, 677) captures this dynamic, and also includes, for example, men sharing misogynist views online. However, it contains a deeper layer by understanding technological spheres as man-made and misogynistic in general. (Easter 2018, 683.) In this section this connection between technology and patriarchal societies will be explored, first addressing technology in general and then social media platforms.

Above, the Partnership Societies, which supposedly existed 5000 years ago were mentioned. Eisler (2002, 166) writes in her work that the goal of technologies, which have obviously changed tremendously, was to create in order to sustain humanity. Although today anything from that time might not be considered technological, the argument is about the purpose and values behind the tools built and used. After the shift to more patriarchal societies, Eisler argues that humanity went from technologies used to create to technologies used to destroy. Technologies and tools are now being built and used to enable men to “dominate and conquer” (Eisler 2002, 166). Looking at modern and post-modern times, Gaede (2008, 360) comes to the conclusion that even though people have all the information about the consequences of our techno-economic focused decisions, the leaders of the world, do not seem to be able to attend to the basic needs of humanity adequately. She criticises the lack of compassion and empathy, and, importantly, the inability to foresee the consequences that technologies have on living beings (Gaede 2008, 374). This goes for people creating, economising, and weaponizing such technologies and, accordingly, decision makers and leaders. Concretely, this is visible in the fact that global arms trade, drugs, environmental destruction, wars, genocide and violence against the most vulnerable are all constructed by *white* men. It can be argued that these destructive realities are built on the exclusion of the female majority from decision-making. (Gaede 2008, 361.) At this point, it makes sense to reveal that the aim is not to deny the advantages and

cruciality of technological advancements in general but to criticise the shift from technologies helping sustain human life to destroying it.

Looking at social media as part of technological advancement, a similar alliance between patriarchal world views and the algorithms and workings of social media can be detected. While beginning as a tool to connect, communicate and enhance human life, it has also taken turns to be the double-edged sword, as I called it, often undermining women and other minorities and reinforcing a dominating society, as indicated in the quote in the very beginning of this thesis. Megarry (2018, 1073–1074) has stated that men have founded, own, and control most successful social media companies, and women are in the background in the daily operations of social media. Social media moderation is not neutral, and the workers are generally *white*, male, educated, liberal technicians who follow a technical paradigm. Social media operations are an especially discriminating work environment. In this work environment, the designs of algorithms and app design occur and result in the algorithms being discriminatory. (Gerrard 2020, 748–749.) Social media functions as a new weapon in terms of the patriarchal need to control women (Megarry 2018, 1077). However, one can detect feminist movements being active on social media. Some even call for the fourth wave of feminism, which was supposedly enabled through digital communication (Megarry 2018, 1074). In the next chapter, social media as an opportunity for feminism and feminist futures will be discussed.

2.4.4 Social Media as an Opportunity for Feminism?

Social media can be used to mobilise movements, such as feminism, and also provide support for minorities, reflecting its double-edged nature discussed above. However, the ability to mobilise and advocate for something on social media remains connected to algorithm conformity and resources such as time and money.

Already more than 30 years ago, technologies for communication were identified as a tool for emancipation by women. While women had been repressed and hidden for centuries, technology enabled them to communicate with each other and stop their isolation in their homes by being able to discuss news, achievements, hopes and values of each other, and most importantly, celebrate each other. (Huston 1989, 39.) Social media can offer a similar space, as women's experiences get heard and women can connect, feel seen and valued and bring attention to topics which would otherwise remain swept under the rug. Next, two examples of social media offering a voice to marginalised genders and communities will be presented.

The first one was studied by Miladi (2016) in Middle Eastern Studies. The study found that technological developments have been used as a tool for empowerment of marginalised communities, such as women and the youth. It enabled them to dismantle the present communication monopolies of those in power. It has opened up new ways for reporters and journalists as well as civil society in terms of free expression and social activism. It built a new sense of transnational public and has let marginalised communities connect and stand in solidarity with each other. (Miladi 2016, 36.) More specifically, in the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, online social networks allowed mass mobilisation online, which led to mass mobilisation offline in terms of protests (Miladi 2016, 39). The regimes had lost control over the amount of communication online and the disclosure of political corruption, human rights violations, and retractions of basic freedoms (Miladi 2016, 49). However, Miladi (2016, 50) reported that the rise of extremist groups like the al Qaida and ISIS a few years later can also be attributed to social media's mobilisation opportunity and an effective use of it, returning to the conclusion that social media acts as a double-edged sword.

This metaphor continues in the second example, which is the #MeToo movement, which started online in 2017. It was a hashtag and movement in which women shared their experiences of sexual harassment. It has mobilised many women and has led to mass participation, feelings of connectivity and more awareness. Additionally, it challenges normative gender and sexual power relations. (Park et al. 2023, 40.) Scholars agree that digital feminism has power and potential to transform individual lives as well as society as a whole, and #MeToo has certainly raised consciousness and attention (Mendes & Ringrose 2019, 47). However, in this example, the other side of the sword must also be considered. While participating in #MeToo or witnessing it was empowering for many, it was at the same time traumatic. Thinking about experiences of sexual harassment and rape and sharing these stories online does not come easy. (Mendes & Ringrose 2019, 45.) Especially in a context where the victims are often blamed and not believed. Mendes and Ringrose (2019, 45) shared in their study an example of a woman who asked her husband and brother whether the text she had written about her experiences was okay to share. This reveals that even though online, a movement and transformation were starting, the gender dynamics offline persisted, and approval by men was sought in order to feel safe posting (Mendes & Ringrose 2019, 45). Moreover, what happened with #MeToo is a good example of what bell hooks (2015, 28–30) has argued about *white* cisgender women seeking to lead the feminist movement. #MeToo was not necessarily a diverse movement, and even if gender-diverse people did share their experience under the hashtag, they received less support and were doubted about saying the truth more than the cisgender women, as their narratives might not fit into typical rape narratives (Mendes & Ringrose 2019, 43). The binary gender understanding, together with

patriarchy, has shown its rigidness and discriminatory forces even in a wave of feminist activism. This leads to the next section of this chapter which discusses whether the feminist movement can work and transform the present in a space full of distractions and power relations that contribute to the patriarchal world order.

Megarry (2018, 1072) directly addresses this question in her work by asking whether feminism can flourish on social media platforms, which are dominated by men who not only watch critically but also actively resist. She argues that one issue is already that an environment is created in which many seek male approval and thus are hesitant to join (Megarry 2018, 1080), similar to what Mendes and Ringrose (2019, 45) had shared about the #MeToo participant. It can be argued that algorithms are a significant concern for feminist activism online, as one cannot ensure that the content someone posts is seen by their target audience. The patriarchal worldviews are encoded in social media platforms. (Megarry 2018, 1074.) More generally speaking, the democratic potential of social media is looked at more critically recently (Megarry 2018, 1072). Especially, as resources are needed in forms of time and money in order to build social media campaigns that are seen. However, stopping advocating for a better world online, risks leaving the space to narratives that reproduce patriarchal, hierarchical, and techno-social structures, ultimately leading to destructive outcomes. That is why in this thesis, desired futures of social media of people of marginalised genders are explored.

Although this specific approach is novel, scholars have proposed different tools on social media to build online spaces which are safe for everyone. For example, Gerrard (2020, 749) demands more channels for complaints and greater transparency in terms of algorithms and the decisions behind what content stays online and which is taken down. Additionally, she advocates moving on from automation in these decisions in order to ensure more ethical decision-making. In the report commissioned for the European Parliament, the two points mentioned that could enhance social media experiences are social media literacy and stricter content moderation. Social media literacy should be taught to youth, which could mean learning about reality check comments, for example. Their study found that peers who find reality check comments under videos that might evoke negative feelings or the urge to comparison, feel better than participants who saw the same content without the reality check comments, missing the reflection that social media does not always portray reality. Content moderation should be stricter, and social media companies should use harsher sanctions in cases of violation. (Park et al. 2023, 27, 44.) Additionally, Cowart (2025, 12–13) recommends curating social media environments specifically labelled as safer spaces, places for acceptance, belonging, and exploration of oneself for gender diverse and transgender people. Visual displays, similar to the rainbow flag in restaurant windows, could be used to declare certain profiles, channels

and servers of social media platforms to be supportive and safe. In the next chapter, the methods and materials used to capture the desirable visions of the futures of social media of the participants in this study will be outlined.

3 Methodology

The research approach of this thesis is a qualitative heuristic approach based on Varho and Tapio's (2013, 622) model and in this thesis it is used to explore desired futures rather than possible ones. Qualitative means that the focus lies on an interpretive and meaning-making approach, with typical research materials being text and pictures. Heuristic refers to an explorative research method, in comparison to a formal one. A heuristic approach often reduces complexity, resulting in findings which cannot be taken as a guarantee. Working with heuristic approaches is useful in futures studies, as futures are never guaranteed, but ought to be explored. The methods of this thesis include a participatory futures workshop for data collection, CLA, including qualitative content analysis for data analysis and creating images of the future to represent the results. Firstly, I will display the origin of the futures workshop as a method in futures studies, followed by my workshop design of what I named a Critical Collective CLA Futures Workshop (CCC). In a next step, the data analysis process and the creation of the images of the future will be discussed. Lastly, ethical considerations and data handling will be displayed.

3.1 Data Collection: CCC Futures Workshop

A futures workshop, initially brought into futures studies by Jungk and Müllert, is used to democratize planning processes, think about the future, and encourage imaginative processes (Jungk & Müllert 1987, 5–6). 'The future concerns us all' is the name of the first chapter of their book, stressing the importance of everyday life perspectives in future matters, next to expert knowledge (Jungk & Müllert 1987, 7–13). Therefore, a democratic, bottom-up and participatory approach is encouraged. Typically, Jungk and Müllert's futures workshop can be divided into the preparatory phase and three workshop phases which include the critique phase, the fantasy phase, and the implementation phase (Jungk & Müllert 1987, 11–12). I chose a futures workshop as the data collection method because social media is currently a top-down environment, and control can be observed from platform holders, as demonstrated in the introduction. The aim was to reverse this dynamic and attend to users' voices. A participatory futures workshop synthesises well with critical futures studies and desired futures. Futures workshops and visionary processes can provide a space in a futures context in which substantial questions can be discussed (Slaughter 1996, 171). Additionally, according to Jungk and Müllert (1987, 4): "It is essential for people to know what they are fighting for, not just what they are fighting against." The workshop in this thesis focused on that notion by aiming to provide an inspiring and empowering experience for the workshop participants while collecting data for this research. The

purpose was not to transform a specific case or organisation from within, as the classical futures workshop often does (cf. Jungk and Müllert 1987, 71–73).

The futures workshop facilitated for this thesis was created based on different existing futures workshops reassembled into a new format. I named the workshop CCC Futures Workshop, short for Critical, Collective and CLA. In Table 1, the CCC workshop in relation to Jungk and Müllert's (1987) workshop phases is presented. The workshop addressed developing images of the future with people of marginalised genders about their desired social media platforms, with reflection on the present situation serving as a necessary foundation.

Before the workshop I shared the workshop invitation (see Appendix 2) through my networks via messenger apps and encouraged people to share it in theirs. Additionally, an email to all futures studies students was sent, and I personally invited people from the classes I was attending during the ongoing semester. Participants signed up through a Webropol survey, answering questions about their contact information, social media use, dietary restrictions and consent (see Appendix 3). Finding participants proved to be a bit challenging, especially as I was looking for marginalised people. However, as I could draw upon people from my personal network and their networks accordingly, the issue could be resolved. While this does not limit this study, as the participants belong to the target group, and were voluntarily willing to participate in the study, it is important to display it here transparently. Eight people had signed up for the workshop, and seven ended up participating, as one person cancelled in advance. The participants were between 23 and 36 years old, with most between 23 and 27 years old. They lived in Turku at the time of the workshop and are active social media users of different platforms, such as Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok and Facebook. Some participants had worked with futures tools before, others had not. Only people of marginalised genders attended the workshop, as I wanted to ensure a safer and empowering environment. This does not mean that the cis male perspective does not matter or that social media is only an issue for specific genders, but the literature review has revealed the overproportionate space that cis men take up online, and thus, they are not the focus of this research. To ensure a respectful atmosphere, I created safer space principles for the workshop, which I sent to the participants via email and also brought copies with me on the workshop day. The goal of a safer space and its principles is to take everyone's backgrounds into account and make participation easier and safer, especially for people who do not align with norms (Rauhankasvatusinstituutti 2023). The safer space principles for the workshop concerned themes such as confidentiality and responsibility, listening and learning, language, respect, how to deal with conflict and possible harm, collective responsibility and a reminder of the participants' right to withdraw participation (see Appendix 4).

The workshop started with an ice breaker exercise where everyone introduced themselves. For that purpose, I provided different random pictures and gadgets. Examples were postcards from idyllic vacation destinations, pictures of animals, flowers and landscapes, small toys such as a dragonfly or a wizard and a seashell. The participants chose one which aligned with how they were feeling in general that day. After introducing themselves, by saying their names and pronouns and why they attended the workshop, they shared why they had chosen their picture and how they were feeling. All participants used a picture; the gadgets were ultimately not included. Additionally, name tags were provided. This part still belongs to what Jungk and Müllert (1987, 49) call the preparatory phase. After the ice breaker, we started discussing the present situation and the role of social media in participants' lives and what they like and dislike about it. For that discussion, I had prepared question cards which were pulled from a card deck, one after another. Example questions were "What is the last thing that caused you happiness retrieved from social media?" and "Think about the last time you felt annoyed, sad or angry about or on social media why?" (see Appendix 5). Participants pulled a question, read it to everyone and shared their thoughts about it, after which others could add their insights to the same questions before moving on to the next one. Participants were free to skip questions at any time. This part of the workshop has been inspired by the innovation cards used in innovation projects in Lapland (Tunturi-Lapin Kehitys 2021). The present phase of the workshop is closest to the critique phase in Jungk and Müllert's (1987, 56) terms, even though it also captures positive aspects in this research. Therefore, I would call it a positioning or orientation phase as participants were actively encouraged to also share positive aspects and experiences. After this exercise, a break with coffee and snacks was held. The importance of providing snacks and refreshments in order to add to a pleasant atmosphere and ensure that the participants' bodily needs are met, was emphasised by various workshop facilitators throughout the Futures Workshop Facilitation course in 2025 at the University of Turku.

After the break, we travelled to the future by combining mental time travelling (Cuhls 2017) and the Utopian Lap-inspired meditative breathwork (FuturePod 2024). Participants were asked to envision an undefined point in the future to enable an open exploration of desired futures. If beneficial for them, they could situate their reflection within a specific timeframe, such as ten years from now. Arriving in the fantasy phase, the goal was to mentally create a blank space with plenty of room for imagination. The idea was that participants become attuned to the present moment, in order to be talking about the future, without distractions from their quotidian lives. Cuhls (2017, 120–122) has argued that deep relaxation can facilitate participants to access their imaginations and activate subconscious parts of their brains. In the workshop, this part was a starting exercise to get into futures

thinking and not the main part of the fantasy phase. I leaned on the Bold Visions for Beautiful Futures – Guided Visioning exercise from Andrews (2024) and adapted it to the topic of social media. In Appendix 6, the mental time travelling script used in the workshop is displayed. Once mentally situated in the future, the participants were asked to imagine their desired social media platforms, using questions about senses, feelings, practicalities and values to guide them through these futures. After the exercise, I handed out these questions which were included in the exercise to record some of the thoughts and ideas they had about social media during the visioning process (see Appendix 7). Once this deeply relaxed and future mood was set, and personal thoughts were noted down, two groups were formed. One group of three and one group of four were formed and in both groups, some participants had prior knowledge about futures studies, while others did not. The participants started working with Post-its and CLA. I had printed out the CLA layers, illustrated as different parts of an iceberg (see Appendix 8). This was inspired by Inayatullah (1998, 821) calling the surface layer of his framework “the tip of the iceberg”. The participants shared what they saw in their personal visioning process and were encouraged to categorize what they discussed as a group according to the CLA framework. The framework is built on four layers: litany, social causes/system, worldview/discourse, myth and metaphor (Inayatullah 1998, 820). The layers will be explained more precisely in section 3.2.2. However, it should be noted that the framework appeared to be more challenging than supportive for some participants at certain points. Following this phase was characterised by free discussion about their desired social media platforms.

Ultimately, the two groups presented results to each other, which can be seen as Jungk and Müllert’s (1987, 67) implementation phase. However, as previously noted the workshop in this thesis was not trying to transform a specific case or organisation. The focused lied on collecting data and providing an inspiring and empowering experience for participants. To end the workshop, we had a debriefing session, which worked as a check-in on how participants were feeling and what they would take away from the experience. It also worked as an opportunity to give feedback to me as a facilitator.

The workshop was recorded during the critique and orientation phase and during the CLA group exercise, as well as during the thematic debriefing. The introduction and the personal takeaways from the participants were not recorded in order to respect everyone’s privacy and to support the goal of building an empowering and safer space. This led to four recordings. The first one was one hour and four minutes long. Two recordings were 45 minutes long, and the debriefing recording was five minutes long. This resulted in 49 pages of revised, anonymized transcripts. I anonymised the transcripts by referring to the participants and myself with the letter S (social media user) and numbers 1–8, leading to S1–S8. Details about transcription and anonymisation will be discussed in chapter 3.3

where ethical considerations are examined. Additionally, the hand-written material created by the participants during the fantasy phase, namely the answers to the personal mental time travelling exercise, as well as the CLA group work, are object to analysis in this research.

Table 1. CCC Workshop

CCC Workshop Phase	Goal	Activities	Duration (mins)	Workshop Phase Jungk and Müllert (1987)
Introduction	Welcoming everyone and ensuring a comfortable workshop atmosphere	Icebreaker exercise including participants introducing themselves Going through the Safer Space principles	20	Preparatory Phase
Critique and Orientation Phase Discussing the Present Inspired by Tunturi-Lapin Kehitys (2021)	Participants can share their thoughts, feelings and experiences about the present	The participants went through card deck questions, answered them and discussed their answers with each other	60	Critique Phase
Break with coffee				
Collective Imagination Practices Inspired by Utopian Lab and The Collective Imagination Practices Toolkit (Andrews 2024)	Let go of the present and shift to futures thinking	Meditative mental time travelling exercise guided by the facilitator, first only in the participants minds followed by the option to take some notes	15	Fantasy Phase
CLA Group Exercise	Create desired futures for social media platforms and unlock deeper layers in order to work towards desired images of the future	Discussing each other's desires and working with the CLA framework in groups of 3-4	50	
Sharing and Debriefing (Implementation to be continued after workshop)	Sharing insights and takeaways, comparing results of the groups and making sure the participants are okay, participants can give feedback	Groups sharing their top insight Each participant sharing how they experienced the workshop	15	Implementation Phase

3.2 Data Analysis

3.2.1 Qualitative Content Analysis

This thesis works with qualitative content analysis. I analysed the workshop transcripts as well as the individual and group exercises written by the workshop participants. According to Graneheim and Lundman (2004, 106), in a qualitative content analysis, the researcher has to declare whether they focus on manifest or latent content. They differ in terms of how in-depth the interpretation of data is and how abstract the level of analysis is. With CLA being part of this content analysis, both manifest and latent content were crucial in the analysis however, an added dedication was set to the deeper layers of CLA such as discourse/worldview and myth/metaphor, which capture more abstract meanings. Therefore, this thesis focuses on latent content, while linking it to the manifest content of the upper layers. An abductive approach was adopted in the content analysis of this thesis, allowing for an iterative movement between data and the CLA framework. I used the layers of CLA as codes initially to analyse the data, and further built thematic categories based directly on the data. After the thematic inductive analysis, I went back to the deductive analysis with the CLA layers which is explained more precisely in the subsequent section.

3.2.2 Causal Layered Analysis

CLA is a qualitative, interpretive, critical and action-oriented method, designed in the 1990s by Inayatullah (1998). It is often used in workshops, and it can also be used to analyse data. In this thesis, CLA is used for both purposes. It aims to go beyond the conventional understandings of phenomena in order to open up the present and past to create alternative futures (Inayatullah 1998, 815). Compared to other futures methods, CLA mostly works with preferred futures rather than possible or probable futures and builds a space in which alternative, desirable futures can be imagined. The method and theory of CLA can be located in poststructuralism and critical futures studies. However, while post-structuralism mainly works with deconstructing reality and questioning given meanings, CLA also reconstructs realities and meaning by creating alternative, desired futures. (Inayatullah 2009, 11, 31). The connection to critical futures studies is evident from the theoretical background of this thesis and is revisited here: Critical futures studies include different methods and tools which look beneath the surface of what humans experience every day (Slaughter 1989, 451–453). They are about asking uncomfortable questions in order to tackle systems of status, power and control (Slaughter 1996, 171–172). Additionally, the participatory nature of CLA should be emphasised, as it contributes to a critical theory perspective through a bottom-up approach. By asking which truths

are privileged and which are not heard, CLA and critical futures studies counter the status quo of top-down futures (Shevellar 2011, 10).

Causal layered analysis works with different layers and their interrelatedness. The first layer is called litany, which corresponds to the surface layer. On the litany layer, commonly accepted statements are located. Inayatullah (1998, 820) describes it as things which one reads in the news or political environments. It is what seems obvious and easy to name and find. The second layer is called system and social causes and goes deeper than the surface level. It is to be found in editorial newspapers and not-so-academic journals, but not in tabloid headlines. It also includes discussions of aspects like economy, culture, politics and history and is what lies directly beneath the surface. The third layer, namely discourse and worldview, entangles ideologies and assumptions building the structure that legitimates the upper layers. The fourth layer, referred to as myths and metaphors, can be considered a particularly powerful component of the method. It examines stories, feelings, narratives and cultural beliefs and serves as a key underlying driver of our understanding of the world and our images of the future. (Inayatullah 1998, 820.) McHale and Choong (1989, 92) emphasise the power that comes when working with metaphors, as they have the ability to portray substantial meaning in simple language and to create images which can orient humans towards action. The content of this layer is less obvious and often works with imagery, storytelling, implicit meanings, and creativity. It can be considered the most transformative layer, but it is hard to reach (Riedy 2008, 6). Inayatullah (1998, 817) emphasises that movement between the layers up and down is crucial in order to work holistically and not be restricted by categorisation, returning to the analysis of the workshop material in this thesis.

After having transcribed the data and reading the material of the workshop carefully, I first coded the research material according to the four layers of CLA. The material consisted of transcripts of workshop recordings, CLA groups' work, and their personal notes after the mental time-travelling exercise. As in the analysis of the data, the researcher's bias plays a role, I focused on letting a distance emerge between me and the data now and then and going back to coding in other situations and mindsets. Additionally, I followed the advice of self-reflection through journaling during the thesis process (Kaboli, 2024).

During the data analysis, I leaned on De Simone's (2004) 'cookbook' approach for CLA. This is a step-by-step guide for the method. However, as he states himself, most CLA processes do not follow such a linear and strict approach, and CLA is more about having a general sense of its purpose, layers and key ideas (De Simone 2004, 491). In his 'cookbook' approach, the first step is called The Vertical

Gaze – Uncovering Causality. This step tries to find the reason behind an issue (De Simone 2004, 487). For the material's analysis, this meant examining the discussion about the present according to the layers. I leaned on De Simone's (2004, 487–488) helpful prompts for the layers, adapted to the perspective of this research:

- Litany layer:

Unquestioned assumptions, comments reflecting apathy and disconnected ideas and images.

Adapted into the research context of this thesis: What is on the surface of the social media platform? What do users see and do on the platform?

- System layer:

Describing how the issue arose as a result of a series of linked recent events and actions.

Describing the relationships involved and how a breakdown in these relationships has caused the issue to arise or worsen. Strong problem-solution orientation.

- Worldview layer:

Exposing the values and beliefs that go beyond the issue being analysed. Emotional commitment.

- Metaphor/Myth layer:

What is an image or phrase that encapsulates what has been uncovered by the above analysis?

Are there any myths that may constrain thinking or acting in relation to this issue? Not rationalised thinking but imagery/stories that express beliefs, works on gut level.

What I did next can be considered De Simone's (2004, 490) steps 3 and 4, Re-envisioning the Myth and Metaphor and Recasting the Issue/Problem and Defining Possible Solutions. In the thesis material, this corresponds to the analysis of the fantasy phase of the workshop. While this workshop did not focus on implementation, desired solutions were reflected in the participants' ideas and visions by tackling the previously explored reason for the issue at stake. The participants were imagining alternative futures and re-envisioning the myths and metaphors by working on their desired futures and thinking about which worldviews align with their desired futures. I analysed the individual answers from the visioning exercise, the CLA group work material and the recorded group discussions about the future according to the previously explained CLA layers with a focus on the deeper layers. In order to create images of the future, a thematic analysis was also needed, following I coded the data thematically. The codes were derived directly from the data, and then the codes were further categorised into themes such as transparency, privacy and agency. All codes used in the data

analysis can be found in Appendix 9. The next step was to create images of the future from the coded data.

3.2.3 Creating Images of the Future

As discussed in section 2.3.3, images of the future are a collection of beliefs, expectations, opinions, and ideas (Rubin 2013, 40). This thesis specifically explores images of desired futures, as the images of the future can influence decision-making, which can lead to action and transformation (Bell & Mao 1971, 21). According to Boulding (1962, 192), societies with bright images of the future are headed towards brighter futures too. In times of dystopian trending, it is thus valuable to create and share desirable images of the future. Masini (2006, 1159) strongly advocates this by arguing that futurists should think more about the desirables based on basic philosophical choices in futures studies and understand philosophy and principle as a base of working with futures. This also means understanding the plurality of desired images of the future, like the plurality of feminist futures and futures in general (Masini 1993, 8; Gunnarsson-Östling et al. 2012, 921).

To create the images of the future, I leaned on an illustration by Kaboli and Tapio which captures the process of image creation (2018, 37–39). With the coded data at hand, I identified most recurring themes and recognised five different foci of themes in the data, themes A-E. The data was then ordered into those by defining which code belongs to what theme and using NVivo to analyse the overlap of the code-groups with the codes of the layers of CLA. This process was done iteratively and close to the data. The image creation is illustrated in Figure 1, which is adapted from Kaboli and Tapio (2018, 39). A total of five images were created using the data from the workshop with seven participants. The number of images is not related to the number of participants but indicates the richness and diversity of the data and the ideas of the participants. The arrows in Figure 1 reveal the iterative nature of the process as well as the interrelations of the layers, and the importance of moving up and down between them. Created based on Figure 1, Table 2 in the results section 4.2, displays the content of each image, with the CLA layers on one axis and the different images from A-E on the other axis.

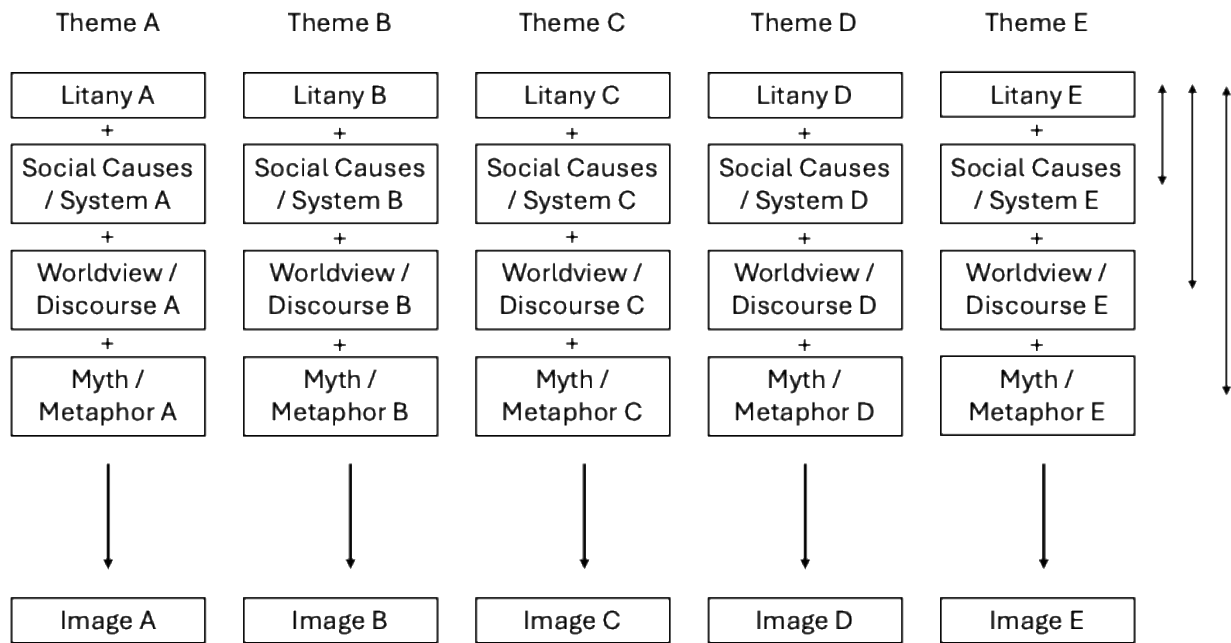


Figure 1. Own Adaptation of Images of the Future Creation (cf. Kaboli & Tapio 2018, 39)

3.3 Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness

Ethical considerations are key in research, especially when working with people who are marginalised in some or multiple ways. One of the most important aspects in conducting ethical research is to inform and get consent from the participants about the study. This is to be done in a way that participants get all the information they need, without providing them with external biases on the topic. (TENK 2019, 9–10.) In this study, the participants received the invitation, which can be found in Appendix 2. When they signed up for the workshop, they had to give their contact information and answer a few questions about their social media use in a Webropol survey (see Appendix 3). The survey included the consent form as an attachment, which emphasises the right to withdraw from the research at any time. The consent form was created based on the template of the University of Turku and aligns with TENK's (2019, 9–10) ethical principles. It discussed the purpose of the research, what participant involvement means, how data is handled and the contact information of the researcher. As described in the template, ticking the box for consent counts as a signature for the attached consent form (see Appendix 10).

The workshop was recorded with devices I could loan from the Finland Futures Research Centre (FFRC), and the recordings were then transcribed with the MAXQDA transcription function. I anonymised the transcripts by referring to the participants and myself with the letter S (social media user) and numbers leading to S1–S8. I also anonymised aspects such as country of residence and job

descriptions. The recordings have been deleted from the recording devices and are stored in the University of Turku's Seafile file sync and share software and will be deleted one-year post-workshop. The anonymised transcripts are stored locally by the researcher. Seafile, MAXQDA and Webropol are all GDPR conform, meaning they store data according to the General Data Protection Regulation of the European Union, which is crucial in order to protect participants' privacy. To maintain the participants' anonymity and present research results in a way that they cannot be recognised from it is one of my top priorities as a researcher.

Additionally, to enhance the trustworthiness of this research, I discuss the three criteria credibility, dependability and transferability in relation to this thesis. Graneheim and Lundman (2004, 109–110) have created a useful overview on how to assess trustworthiness for qualitative research projects, and state that the trustworthiness of the findings will increase when presented in a way that the reader can also look for other interpretations. This is especially relevant as I focused on working latently in the data analysis. Credibility means to look at the selected focus of the study, the context, and ask whether appropriate methods were used. Additionally, reflecting on the choice of participants, the amount of data and the coding process is encouraged. (Graneheim & Lundman 2004, 109–110.) For this thesis, I estimate that the focus of the study as well as the context have been chosen adequately and transparently, and the motivation behind the selection of theories and methods has been communicated. The method and theory synthesise and can be situated in the critical futures studies' philosophy. The participants of this study are well-suited to the target group of this thesis, namely marginalised genders and social media users. However, it should be reiterated that finding participants was challenging due to the sensitivity of the subject, and that a more diverse sample, including participants from independent networks, would have enhanced the study's credibility. The amount of data is adequate for the scope of this master's thesis, nevertheless, the research could have benefited from more data, as the workshop time was limited, and participants could have discussed further. By being transparent about the coding process, including categorisation and interpretation of direct quotations from the data, credibility can be enhanced which has been done in this thesis. It is to be remembered that this process is never neutral nor objective.

The next concept to discuss is dependability. It deals with the time frame of the data collection and analysis, and acknowledges that the environment can change between data collection units and also between collection and analysis (Graneheim & Lundman 2004, 109–110). In this thesis, all the data was collected in one afternoon, following the conditions has been the same for all the data, and the risk of inconsistency is small. After the workshop, I wrote down immediate reflections. However, the data transcription and analysis followed only after a few weeks' time. This could be seen as a threat

to consistency, however, it provided an opportunity to examine the data from a fresh perspective and to separate analysis and workshop clearly. The data was analysed within a six-week span, during which I gained new insights and applied them. I would not assess it as a weakness of this study, as looking at the data at different times and mental states can contribute to reflecting and rethinking the interpretation of the data.

Last but not least, transferability of the research is assessed to enhance trustworthiness (Graneheim & Lundman 2004, 109–110). The findings of this thesis may be transferable to some extent, as the results section will reveal. However, as the participant group was relatively small and purposefully only included people of marginalised genders, individual experiences hold a relatively high weight, and transferability is not a given. This does not make the research less trustworthy, as the characteristics of the study have been clearly communicated. Nonetheless, it is clear that this thesis cannot be generalised but can only produce clear statements for this specific research, while offering visions and explorations for a greater picture.

4 Results

In this chapter, the results of this thesis are presented. First, the aspects of social media platforms that most significantly shape the everyday experiences of the workshop participants will be displayed. This is further categorised into aspects participants appreciate about social media platforms and aspects that they view as problems of today's mainstream social media platforms. This is relevant to establish a sense of the present environment in order to facilitate participatory imagining of futures. It will provide preliminary insights into which aspects of social media platforms most significantly shape the everyday experiences of people of marginalised genders. In a second step, the desired images of the future retrieved from the futures workshop will be presented, addressing the research question on how people of marginalised genders imagine future social media platforms. The examination through a feminist perspective and a deeper understanding of the results will be attended in the discussion.

4.1 Today's Experiences on Social Media Platforms

The participants have positive experiences with social media platforms as well as negative ones. They agreed on the perception of having a "love-hate relationship" with social media. The critique and frustration seem to be more salient than the perceived positive aspects. This imbalance is also visible in the amount of material presented. It is important to add that in the workshop preparation, specific dedication was set to also capture positive experiences. A variety of positive aspects or aspects that have the potential to be positive have come to the surface. These will be displayed first. While the aspects had to be ordered and categorised to display results logically, they do not stand isolated, but connections between them exist, which will be revealed.

4.1.1 Connection, Entertainment and Promotion

The most mentioned positive aspect of social media platforms is that participants can maintain connections with friends, as well as colleagues and like-minded people they would not find if it were not for social media. This was, for example, expressed in the following quotes.

I'm always happy to see my friends who are doing good. (S2)

I'm more into seeing my friends. {...} And then I just feel like I am more connected. (S6)

I have mutuals there that I've known for like 12 years. We don't know each other. I only know their online personality. (S2)

I'm from sciences and for me, on LinkedIn, I only see very interesting posts about research and about the people that I work with. And it's our way also of showing what we are achieving. (S3)

Different kinds of connections that the participants appreciate become visible. One way is to keep in touch with friends that they know offline and to see their posts on social media, giving them the impression that their friends are doing well. Seeing their friends online can make the participants feel more connected to them. Another aspect of social media appreciated by participants in terms of connection is that they can meet people online, whom they would not have met offline. This was mentioned both for private use of social media as well as professional opportunities. With that comes the perk of being able to keep in touch with people from other parts of the world and keeping connections over greater distances. Some participants mentioned a special appreciation for LinkedIn for academic and work-related connections. It is a way for them to share interesting insights and get to know what other people in their field of interest are working on all around the world. This can lead to feelings of inspiration. However, other participants perceived LinkedIn as pressuring and orchestrated. These aspects will be discussed in the section about the more negative experiences participants had on social media platforms.

Another aspect that the participants like about social media platforms is the entertainment factor experienced through memes and cute animal videos. When asked about positive experiences or aspects that brought them joy on social media, a common answer was seeing animal content and memes, specifically sent by friends.

A friend of mine sent me a video of a baby cow. (..) That's literally the only thing that comes to mind right now. I like baby cows, so it made me smile for a second. (S5)

I think, always just animal memes. Always make me happy. (S3)

I would agree that memes are the only thing which make me happy. (S6)

Most of the participants shared this love for memes and seeing cute animal content. The participants also reflected on the transient nature of the happiness and joy they experienced connected to this content. On top of that, the participants agreed that realising the content bringing them joy might be AI-generated and not real, enhancing the brevity of this feeling. Additionally, the aspect of connection discussed before also seems to play a role in this, as participants reported receiving this kind of content from friends, showing their partner cute videos and discussing memes with their friends, which brings them joy. Other than that, one participant emphasised that following pages which share good news is delightful in times of so much “Trump news” (S3). News as a topic was discussed in more depth. The

participants reported to be unsatisfied with how news are being handled on social media platforms, which will be further addressed in the ‘dislike’ section.

Last but not least, the aspect of promotion was detected in the participants’ discussions about what they appreciate about social media. Promotion has different meanings, such as being able to spread their message online, promoting their own business and also promoting in order to mobilise for causes that are important to the participants. These were aspects that shape the participants’ lives in helpful ways. The following quotes that reflect that.

I feel like through TikTok and through Instagram you get to spread your message a lot. (S6)

A few weeks ago, my country has gone through a massive natural disaster. Because of social media actually, people get together and help others. Because of social media actually, they have done that. Otherwise, I don't think they could have done that in a massive scale. (S8)

I'm part of some anti-fascist movements, and we did a lot of content on Instagram and TikTok. (S5)

I agree with your point. TikTok is really good for businesses. (S8)

This appreciation of being able to promote messages, services and products that are important to the users was visible in all participants. However, it was personally tailored in what cases they found it useful and how they personally use these platforms. For participants who stated owning businesses themselves, social media platforms are a crucial way to spread their message and promote their work. Other areas mentioned were spreading information about research and political content for anti-fascist movements. Additionally, a participant shared that social media platforms enabled people to organise and help each other during times of natural disaster, and that only because of the social media platforms, the extent of support networks and community was enabled. Observing this was something that the participant had appreciated after seeing the horrible pictures about the natural disaster on social media. This indicates that when social media platforms have positive effects on the offline world and people’s everyday realities, the platform’s support is highly valued among participants. Being offline more, deleting social media platforms and taking measures to not overuse them were also discussed by the participants. They reported that some have left certain platforms, and others have taken complete breaks. These measures were discussed with an optimistic tone, leading to the paradoxical analysis that participants like social media, when they are not (over)using it. This already points towards a more critical and dissatisfied perception of social media platforms. These perspectives will be discussed in the following sections.

4.1.2 No Control and Overflow

The theme which emerged most when talking about unsatisfying experiences on social media was the feeling of not being in control, connected with the amount and variety of content and information visible during social media usage. It is also related to the pace of social media, and participants experiencing social media as a distraction. The following quotes reflect these experiences:

I just scroll and then in a few hours I realize, my brain is all kinds of messed up. And that is definitely the opposite of being in control. (S7)

We have too many ways of using social media right now. We have combined seeing the artists that we like, the music that we like, the news that we want to consume, the political debates that we are engaged in, the fashion that we want to see. And it all happens in one platform. And normally when I spend my free time on something, I would never spend it with everything I was ever interested in at the same time. But social media is exactly that, without me choosing to actively engage with this or that part right now. It just throws everything that's out there at me at the same time. (S5)

While the quotes engage in different aspects, they are tightly connected. The participants are concerned about not being in control and that things are forced upon them without consent. The first quote above points to the outer layer of not being in control of social media usage at all, meaning one might use it without actively choosing to use it. A common answer to the question of which social media platforms participants like to use was that it differs a lot whether they answer what they like or what they use. This points towards a divergence, revealing that the users do not feel like agents. However, once on the platform, not being in control seems to take off even more. In the first quote above, this can be seen in the example of scrolling aimlessly and realising after hours what just happened. Users are not in control of what they see and when they see it, as described in the second quote. Additionally, with AI, the participants voiced that not knowing whether something is AI-created or not is an issue for them. Under many posts, people discuss in the comments whether something is AI. Furthermore, the notion of mixing a variety of content in a considerably short time was reported in the second quote. The number of interests combined on social media in a short time is overwhelming for the participants. Other experiences included seeing horrible news, for example, children dying in a war, followed by seeing a friend's graduation post only 15 seconds later. Following, the participants agreed that social media is "a lot". They are worried about the mental health consequences this poses for them, but especially for teenagers on social media. They shared related feelings of anxiety and emotional distress. The participants said they get overwhelmed by this extreme variety of content, in terms of content which horrifies them and content which ought to bring them joy and not being prepared for what they might see next. Additionally, participants reported having tried curating their feeds to their liking and unfollowing certain pages. However, this had not

led to a stop from seeing the content at hand. What comes with these uncontrollable and fast-paced platforms is that participants reported feeling distracted by social media. While appreciating the entertainment factor as revealed above, they reported noticing the shortening of their attention spans and skipping content when it does not catch them after a few seconds. Connected to this, they also shared not remembering most of the things that they saw on social media, relating back to the transience of joy which they have experienced on social media. This directs attention to social media being a barrier for real connection, which will be discussed next.

4.1.3 Orchestrated Barrier for Real Connections

Another concern which was salient in the participants' experiences was that social media is orchestrated, fake, and does not portray real life. Thus, it builds a barrier for genuine connection, sometimes resulting in self-consciousness, self-doubt and feelings of competition. Terms other than orchestrated and fake used to describe this were "fabricated", "polished" and social media being a "sham". The participants also mentioned that social media has changed a lot since they started using it and connecting with people has become a lot harder. In the examples below, the frustration of the present situation gets captured.

I think I don't like it just because it feels very polished in a way. (S4)

Most of the videos that we see, it's the good parts. So even though there's already this: trying to connect with the other people that feel maybe a bit negative towards those videos, still the main thing is, that it's becoming this thing that we need to be perfect and we need to attain always this perfect life, perfect body. And I think that's been the most negative thing for me. (S3)

I think for me, social media's negative effect would be that it makes you question your own self. (S6)

Because I'm thinking of, like, people I used to go to school with like years ago, who I don't really see in real life, but I see their posts. And because it's like Instagram, everyone always posts the best part of your life. So, what that kind of creates is instead of having this lovely connection with your old friend, it becomes like a competition. (S7)

According to the participants, social media is polished and fake in many ways. Specifically mentioned were careers, life achievements, body and beauty, as well as news. In the first above quote, the participant talked about LinkedIn, and while two participants had different experiences on that platform, as described in the positive experiences with social media, five participants described it as polished. One participant even described it as exclusive, as it does not support all kinds of professions. However, the ones who appreciate LinkedIn also agreed that social media platforms are spaces in which people only show the best parts of their lives, as portrayed in the second quote above. The

participant described feeling self-conscious about their body after seeing more gym content on their feed, as they had started going to the gym. This feeling was reported to be new and coming directly from these videos. The participant described how there are people who counter this by connecting with each other and showing their bodies authentically and reminding each other that what they see on social media might look different in real life. However, the feeling of needing to perform and having a perfect life and perfect body was said to overshadow the connection to other social media users. It was even mentioned that it harms offline connections, respectively. Other participants also talked about how the beauty standards have become impossible due to social media and especially due to AI. The participants reported feeling insecure and self-conscious. This did not only apply to body and beauty, but aspects like career and what a good life looks like on social media more generally were also mentioned. In the last quote, the participant revealed that seeing posts, even by people they might know in real life, can lead to feelings of competition and influence one's confidence. The participant reflected on this by saying that they do see the best parts only. However, it has not always been enough to overcome the barrier which stands in the way of connection.

The participants concluded that social media does neither serve the connection with a friend, nor the connection with things they enjoy, like their hobbies. They reported to be especially worried about what this does to young people and kids. Growing up in these orchestrated, competition-fuelling spaces with these idealised ways of how a life ought to be seems to come with substantial pressure. They witnessed in their close circles how kids started acting certain ways in front of the camera, picking up on the performance pressure. A key factor contributing to this is the transformation of social media. Participants shared that social media used to be this space of friends, whereas now, with the algorithmic feed, when they post something, their friends might not even see it. They reported that when they are scrolling, they see mainly ads and posts from random people. Another aspect regarding connection that the participants discussed is that social media also suggests that people have to be connected all the time. This relates to the feeling of social media being fast-paced and urgent. So-called "stories" that are only available for 24 hours build an illusion of having to stay up to date on their friends' lives constantly. This translates into pressure to be on social media in order not to miss anything. This pressure will also be touched upon in the next section, where the unreliability of the platforms is being discussed.

4.1.4 Unreliability of Powerful Platforms

Social Media pressures the participants also in other ways than being up to date on what their friends are up to. Participants feel that it is hard to escape the monetisation on social media and that the

platforms they use are neither accountable nor reliable. This was reported in aspects such as algorithmic transparency, functionality of features, accountability of platforms when mistakes happen and the missing consequences for actions online. This is connected to the issue of profit-oriented platforms, which all mainstream platforms are, and with that, the power of platform owners, which is being questioned by the participants. The following quotes reveal these aspects with concrete examples. First, the quotes related to profit and power will be presented, and after describing them, the non-functional features and unreliability of the platforms in terms of community guidelines will be explored.

For 30 minutes, I scrolled. I saw 15 posts from my family and 81 posts that were advertisements, some random people or sites that were trying to get me on Temu and whatever else. (S2)

Especially nowadays, it's all so obvious how everything is just, like, built to make money. And it's it feels so hard to escape it. (S7)

We were talking about, how nowadays social media companies, because they're like privatized and there's so much ownership for one person. [...] Even if even if they were like a good person, it's still, I think, a big risk, like you said, to democracy, to have that much power in one person's hand who can just apparently shift it when money comes along. (S7)

The participants were frustrated about the extent of capitalisation that the platforms have taken on. They experienced this on multiple levels. First of all, by being flooded with advertisements. In the reported quote, the participant conducted an experiment and counted 5.4 times more advertisements than posts from people they know. While this might not be representative and only a snapshot, it portrays that social media is highly capitalised, much to the participants' dislike. Furthermore, other participants have reported seeing advertisements increasingly. This relates back to the feeling of not being in control, as discussed previously, and also poses a barrier for connection, when it is hard to keep track of friends' content because of the advertisement flood. In the second quote, the participant reported feeling like social media is built to generate money; however, they see no way out of it. Above all stands the worry that social media platforms pose a threat to democracy. The privatisation and clustering of power when it comes to the ownership of these impactful platforms has been described as scary. The example of Meta was discussed in the workshop, and how the platforms have shifted with politics and money, which worries the participants. Additionally, the participants criticised the platforms for their unaccountability and irresponsibility regarding functionality and moderation. The following quotes reflect that.

And when it comes to TikTok, I had a very bad experience with TikTok because I lost, over 120 videos that I drafted for my business. (S8)

I have never been on an app that has a functional block or mute. (S2)

And I think we don't have enough ways of doing something against that, because whenever I report that, Instagram or TikTok is just like, well, we didn't find any violation of our community guidelines. If someone said the same thing to me on the street, I could literally go to the police and there would be charges pressed against these people because that's serious. Threatening someone's life is serious in real life. (S5)

In these examples, different incidents which led participants to be frustrated with the platforms become evident, ranging from features that do not work properly, to losing hard work because of the platforms' malfunction, and ending with death threats which are not taken seriously by the platform. Starting with the first quote, it becomes visible that even for people who reported using social media to promote their own products and make money, social media is not user-friendly, and small businesses can also not rely on social media. Further on, the participants experienced that block features are not working. This means that when a participant has blocked a person for any reason, for example, receiving death threats from another account, they could not rely on it. Sometimes they ended up continuing to see content they did not want to see and being contacted by people they did not want to be contacted by. This is a significant concern for the participants, as they are repeatedly losing control, and in this case with more disturbing consequences. The extent of it is visible in the ultimate quote, where a participant reported receiving a death threat on TikTok and the platform not flagging it as a violation of the community guidelines. No measures were being taken, neither to set the aggressor straight nor to protect the threatened user. Participants stated that these threats are often related to their gender and include misogynistic and queerphobic attacks. Not being supported or protected by the platforms, while the attackers are able to hide behind their anonymity without facing any consequences, enraged the participants. Hate and threat are the focus of the next chapter, including the issue of echo-chambers and the invasion of supposedly safe spaces online.

4.1.5 Hate, Threats and Echo-Chambers

This section reveals in more depth what the results in the last section have implied and demonstrates the extent of threats and hate that people of marginalised genders experience on social media. Connected to this, the participants discussed politics and echo-chambers, and the notion of not wanting to see far-right posts which personally attack them. However, the awareness that living in social media bubbles, and only being in contact with like-minded people, also gives them a false impression of the reality of the world. The following quotes depict these issues.

The person who saw my comment saw that I'm outwardly queer and a trans guy, and immediately he started to threaten my life. [...] This is almost a weekly thing by just existing. It's not very great. (S2)

So, what happened was just like these hundreds and hundreds of hate messages every single day, and I just couldn't take it anymore. So, I deleted my TikTok completely. And still, sometimes I'm thinking that this is actually the most dangerous thing that can happen to our democracies. That everyone who's fighting for our democracies, for our freedom, for the rights of people, that they leave these platforms and that then like the right-wing people get a sense of that: This is like common sense, and everyone agrees with them.
(S5)

These quotes confirm that hate messages and death threats are part of some of the participants' everyday experiences on social media. As discussed in the previous chapter, these are often connected to their marginalised identities, and there are no protection or consequences. In the threat and hate cases reported in the workshop, the threats came from accounts supporting far-right ideologies, and they used, for example, sexism and queerphobia as a base for their hate and death threats. Other participants have also noticed the right-wing tendencies on social media, for example, witnessing prior friends drifting into far-right mindsets due to their social media consumption. This is, as the participant reported in the second quote, highly worrisome, as it reinforces the echo-chambers that social media algorithms build regardless. The algorithm builds these by showing users targeted content, also based on their gender. One example in the workshop was that the person realised that depending on the profiles' gender settings, they saw different comments under the same post. Logged in as a man, more hateful comments appeared to be top comments compared to when logged in as a woman, where more empathetic comments were most visible. Due to harmful experiences, participants might leave the platforms. However, at the same time, they are aware that the building of bubbles and echo-chambers is dangerous and can give a false impression of reality. The conversation of the participants gave the impression of either they stay in their safe bubble but get disconnected from reality or they engage with other ideologies but have to be ready to receive death threats. Participants said to be unsatisfied with both options. While this seems highly binary, fruitful, diverse and respectful discussion might also be accessible online, however, they did not seem to dominate the experiences that the participants recalled. The participants came to the agreement that people have lost their manners online. It is relevant to mention that outside influences also play a considerable role. These experiences are not only limited to online spaces, but the participants estimate the barrier of being violent online as smaller, due to possible anonymity. This has transformed on their desired social media platforms of the future, which will be presented next.

4.2 Desired Images of the Future

The desired images of the future extracted from the futures workshop are described in this chapter. The content of the images was created by the participants in the CCC Futures Workshop. Through the analysis of the content, the final images were designed. Table 2 provides an overview of the five images We Choose, We Connect, We Care, We Count on and We Are Free and the process of CLA. The images display collective desired images of the future of social media with different foci. They are not mutually exclusive and all images, except for We Are Free, received a similar amount of attention by the participants. We Are Free was rather peripheral and came up in remarks and formulation of values rather than explicitly being a main theme in participants' discussion. The images are described through a "we" perspective, to stress the point of agency of the participants, which has been salient throughout the whole workshop and all images. Each image description starts by displaying direct quotes from the workshop, which will then be entangled in the description of the image. Example quotes were chosen based on them including coherent formulation, capturing a strong sense of the image or a detailed description of a feature. However, other participants shared or had noted similar desires, which are described in the text. All aspects described are based on the content of the workshop, using the participants' examples and vocabulary when possible.

Table 2. Elements of the Images of the Future

	Image A	Image B
Name	We Choose	We Connect
Litany	We open the app and we can choose between categories: news, art, music, AI content, health, movement etc. Once we enter this app, we choose what we want to see, what kind of topic we feel like engaging with. The topics can be many, and we choose the ones we want to have on our main page. For each topic we can also add filters.	There is a manageable amount of posts. The feed is finite and videos do not auto-play. We see people who also exist offline. Predominantly people who are close to us like friends and family. As well as some (fellow) small business owners. There is one account per person, but the account can have different tabs for different purposes, like private, political or professional and we can choose roles such as baker, musician, journalist...
Social Causes / System	The app is community owned and organized as a very large cooperative where no single person has decision-making authority. This results in social media serving its users. It is a tool we can use to actively engage in topics we are interested in by actively choosing to see things. We can tailor it to our needs. This also means we can curate the algorithm to our own needs, resulting in intentional interactions with content, activities and people. The algorithm does not work based on any given categories such as gender for example.	Connections are being made based on real-life connections or an algorithm which suggests users to us that have the same interests. Not based on number of views/likes/followers. In order to be able to focus on the connections and personal interrelations, cooperative ads do not play a role, but small business owners or people who create things can promote products and services online. Other members of social media find these creators/sellers when they are looking for it, by their role tags they chose. Connections rely on reciprocating engagement. The platform maintains itself by voluntary fees and donations, often provided by the small business owners.
Worldview/ Discourse	agency, self-determination, equal power-sharing, consent, feeling of being in control, very organized, utility, non-profit	strong sense of community, support network, diverse, open-minded and deep connection, authenticity, inspiring each other, exchange of passion, feeling actual moments of happiness, love and kindness driven
Myths and Metaphors	users are seeking rather than being fed A cooperatively organized store with democratic structures and consensus-based decision-making, all gains go back into the project itself. See for example: La Louve (Paris) A large potluck buffet. Everyone brings something to the buffet in line with our resources and capabilities. The selection of food is large and diverse. Everyone can choose what to put on their plate.	A bridge to our friends Social media as a village with a very lively tavern

Table 2. Elements of the Images of the Future (continued)

	Image C	Image D	Image E
Name	We Care	We Count on	We Are Free
Litany	We see mainly fun usernames and are posting our art and everyday life as well as what is important to us. In all posts there are many buttons available to report issues, including a functional block-feature, possibility to report bullying and hate or other harmful actions. We see contact information where we can turn to for help. The platform moderation is effective.	We open the app and there is a tutorial we have to go through before starting. Then we see informative and creative posts and with sources always visible. No fake news. Good and bad news. We are asked in which style, language, depth we want to see the posts. We first see content regarding our region and later it is expanding up to a global scale.	We rarely use social media. Instead, we are on a nature walk with our friends and cute animals.
Social Causes / System	We can stay anonymous towards other users, however the platform holders can identify all accounts. Our data stays in the platform's hands only. There are legal consequences for actions online. The system recognizes harmful content and messages, and does not let users send them, asks to reformulate. If they still go through users can take following actions, which have repercussions. Customer service is efficient and supportive. The block feature gets us completely off the radar of possible aggressors. They cannot contact us in any way, do not see our posts, comments etc. This can be implemented by the users themselves.	There are independent expert fact checkers on social media, which review the posts and fake news get removed/flagged accordingly. Posts get labelled as facts/science versus opinion. In the opinions sections there are vivid discussions and counter-opinions. Additionally, to the tutorial that everyone has to go through, social media use and media literacy become a main focus in education, especially for teenagers. While an age-limit might be implemented for social media, the main goal is that children and teens are prepared for whenever they join the platforms. Social media could be (partially) publicly owned, or state funded.	Capitalism has been overcome. As the outside world becomes peaceful, social media is peaceful too. No one needs social media to make money. If we are on social media for entertainment, connection or information purposes, it does remind us to leave the platforms and leads us out of the app.
Worldview/ Discourse	Opportunity to express safely and grow for everyone, zero tolerance for hate and threats, interaction built on respect and empathy, moderation, accountability, protection, privacy, care structures, peaceful	social media literacy, well-informed societies, education, reliable, authentic news, balanced, transparency, democracy, globality, accessibility, non-western centric, intellectual, critical thinking	Anti-capitalism. Equity. Focus on well-being. Connections with nature, animals and people offline. The real life is what matters.
Myths and Metaphors	Safe Space; Retreat	The Enlightenment; A window to different parts of the world; Social media like safer sex. In terms of age-limit, education, responsibility, awareness of consequences.	Social media is a zoo, but we prefer to experience life in its natural environment; Dream World

4.2.1 We Choose

I think there should be consent, you know, from us and also like the feeling of being in control. (S7)

If I want to read news, I will read news. It's not like I open social media and then there is like a threatening news there when I didn't choose to see the news. (S6)

And it came to me at a time when I would actually look for it, and not when I'm trying to find news or something, and then I suddenly get cake thrown in my face. But I would find cake if I actually want cake. (S5)

The first image is called We Choose, and it derives from the strong desire to be in control and to be able to choose what to see on social media platforms. In this future, the social media platform asks us in the beginning what we are interested in at the moment. As users, we can choose, for example, between art, news, music, health, and friends as illustrated in Figure 2. The first thing we see when we open the app are the different boxes with different themes and genres we can click on. When we choose an option, we arrive in a feed focusing on that theme or genre. Now browsing in it, we can add filters such as “show AI-generated content”, “exclude AI-generated content”, “only content from people I follow” or also go more niche in the topic with filters like “indie pop music”, “queer art”, “good news” or “news on Russian war in Ukraine”. Relationships of any kind, like chatting and following, always require consent. We choose who we engage with and who engages with us. There is an algorithm which works within the chosen categories and filters. However, it is not based on any categories, such as gender, but on our personal interests that we have shared deliberately with the platform. In order to ensure these settings and make sure that users can find what they are looking for, our platform is community-owned and organised as a large cooperative driven by the principles of power-sharing, agency, self-determination and user utility. It is a non-profit organisation, and thus no profit pressure applies, and the interests of the users are secure, as we are all part of the ownership. It is like this cooperative and participatory supermarket in Paris called La Louve (La Louve, n.d.). It works with democratic structures and consensus-based decision-making. Plus, all gains go back into the project itself. For us, it is important that the store is well-organised, and we find what we need. Our social media is also like a potluck buffet, where everybody contributes to the overall buffet, and we can all benefit from it and contribute according to both our own needs and the needs of others. Everyone puts on their plate what they like. We are actively seeking rather than being fed by the platform.

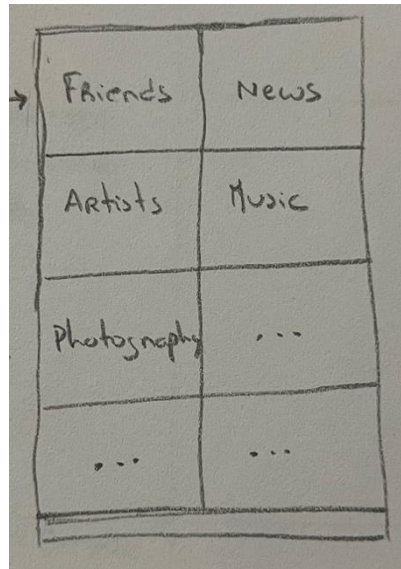


Figure 2. Participant's Illustration of Front Page of Social Media (S3)

4.2.2 We Connect

(...) how cool would it be if my algorithm would really just be based on my interest and it can connect me to a very, very small artist from southern New Zealand or whatever. Just because we like the same stuff, we are in the same sphere, and then we just get connected because the algorithm realises these two people are so similar with the kind of stuff that they like. So, let's suggest them to each other. (S5)

(S7): If you if you have like different interests, then that just means that you can, with that same profile, be active in like a music group or maybe politics or something. But it's the same profile for each of them. (S4): True. You have like these tabs or pages to your profile.

In this future, the social media platform is all about enhancing connections and acts as a bridge to our friends. When we start the app, there are a manageable number of posts visible, and they are from our friends, relatives and also some small business owners. The feed is finite, and videos do not auto-play. We all have only one account, even if we might use this platform for private and professional purposes. Our profile has different tabs so that we can choose our roles in each tab. We would, for example, have a private tab, a work-related tab, friends tab, family tab, political tab and choose our roles on social media such as baker, musician, politician, private person or activist. We make connections on social media based on real-life connections and use it to stay in touch with people who we might not see regularly. Additionally, we enjoy this connection-based algorithm which suggests users to us who like similar things we do or go through similar experiences like us, as explained in the first quote. This results in wonderful connections all around the globe based on our

values, interests and struggles. As small business owners, we advertise our services and products and also make use of the algorithm by inspiring each other and building networks in our area of business. However, our advertisements do not pop up on the non-business user's social media platform randomly, but they look for the posts, for example, by searching for the user category musician and the region, in order to find a musician to play at their festivities. Corporate ads do not exist on our social media, but the small, handmade, personal businesses are an integral part of this social media. The platform maintains itself through fees, which are voluntary. Often, the small business owners are donors as social media helps them promote their work. The atmosphere is kind, authentic and diverse. The connections and networks build a strong sense of community, which leads us to helping and supporting each other online and offline. Because this social media is focusing on relationships, we can feel actual moments of happiness on this platform with long-lasting positive effects on our well-being. It feels like being in an active village where most people know each other. There is this very lively tavern where people come together to discuss, share, promote, connect, laugh and just enjoy each other's company.

4.2.3 We Care

And I think one of the most important things would be to have a safe space and respectful... I don't know how, but that we could be able to not have hate in this app, which I know is very hard, but this is what we expect to have and what we wish to have. And I think that's one of the most important things for me. (S3)

Yeah, a functional block feature would be really good. I have never been on an app that has a functional block or mute. (...) A block filter that just deletes you from that person's, like, whole radar. (S2)

You could also focus on yourself and your emotions and, you know, trying to find some peace from the organisation and stuff like that. So, I think, it would be like this calm retreat. (S4)

On this platform, everyone is safe, especially people of marginalised identities. It is a place to express and explore ourselves and others. We share our art, personal lives, things that inspire us, and occupy our thoughts. The posts are well-equipped with moderation tools. Buttons to report issues or leave feedback are easily accessible. Content and comments are being effectively moderated, and the platform has a zero-tolerance policy for hate, bullying and discrimination, as described in the first quote. Accounts have fun names such as “sunflower27” (S5), so that we can protect our anonymity and express ourselves freely. However, the platform always identifies all users, and only one account per user is possible. Our data stays in the platform's hands only. This ensures that when issues or harm do occur, aggressors must face legal repercussions. Additionally, the platform can close

accounts that do not follow the zero-tolerance policy for harmful behaviour. In this case, a new account cannot be opened, or only after reaching certain criteria. In this future, actions and words online are being valued equally to actions and words offline. However, it is to be avoided that it comes to these incidents, as on this platform, the system detects when someone tries to post, comment, or message in a harmful way towards other users. By asking self-reflective questions, it will lead to the user reconsidering the content. If we receive threatening or inappropriate messages or comments, we can use the well-functioning block feature. The block feature gets us off the radar of possible aggressors, as emphasised in the second quote. They cannot contact us in any way, nor do they see our posts or comments. This is fairly easy and can also be done if we just do not want to see something, without it being harmful in general. The platform's customer service is well-equipped and supports our requests and gives insightful answers about their decisions to take something down or not, and they are open to hearing out the affected person's experiences. They care about their users' needs and feelings, and especially about their safety. Our peers online support us in these matters, and in general, the rules and moderation have led to a safer, comforting atmosphere where empathy and respect are valued. This provides an opportunity to express safely and grow. It feels like a peaceful, private retreat and safe space. It supports our well-being and personal development by focusing on protection and care services.

4.2.4 We Count on

(...) it could also be like, what kind of news, or how do I want it to be explained to me. Maybe it's in a very deep and analytical way, but what if I don't understand that kind of language? So maybe I can get like an easy access news channel. (S7)

I do think the kind of easy, accessible science or whatever you want to call it, is good, but it has to be fact checked and it has to be monitored by someone who doesn't have any money in it or doesn't have any other personal interests like political interests in it. (S7)

I know this is a bit crude, but is social media as sex? You have to have like this consent and understand what it means to be on social media and what could be the consequences and stuff like that. (S4)

In this future, we see a well-educated society and youth on social media. When we first open the app and start using it, we have to go through a tutorial where we learn how to use it. That is to ensure that we are aware of how to use it safely, both for ourselves and others. In addition, this helps us understand how to interpret the content we see, critically question it and make sure to check the sources of information. Once this onboarding is completed, we see creative and informative posts about news in the world, regionally, nationally and also globally, in that order. The news are diverse, non-Western-centric, and activate our intellectual skills. Every post must give a source for the

information provided, and if it includes solely thoughts and opinions, it has to be clearly labelled as such. It is always clear whether something is a scientific fact or an opinion. There are independent fact checkers working on this platform. They review the posts and news that are wrong, misleading or harming and flag and correct them accordingly. Following, there are no fake news standing without correction notes. News are discussed from diverse perspectives, and we see a balance between good and bad news. Additionally, we can always choose in which style we want to encounter the news, as expressed in the first quote. For example, we can choose to see it in easier language, a different language or ask for more details about it. Do we want it in text, video or audio format? It is all available, and we can count on reliable information reaching us through this platform accessible for all our needs. There is also space to discuss and share. Opinions are welcome and different perspectives on different issues, too, as long as the discussion is had respectfully and with dignity. We learn from each other and appreciate the fruitful exchanges with different people. To enable this space, teaching social media use and media literacy has become a key aspect in the curriculum of schools, from an early age, focusing especially on teens. An age limit for social media can make sense for us. However, the most important thing is that children and teenagers, and also adults, are prepared for whenever we join the platforms and are not expected to magically know our way around social media when we turn a certain age. This is similar to the importance of learning about safer sex, in terms of age questions, education, responsibility and awareness of consequences of our actions. We need to learn how to behave in front of other users, but also how to address information and sources, in order for social media to support our society and democracy. This social media might be (partially) publicly owned or state-funded. Transparency is a key aspect for us when using this platform. We know where information is coming from, who is presenting it to us and with which intentions. Thus, money from the public sphere is encouraged, however, without them being in the power of moderation and fact-checking. Additionally, the platform is transparent in the sense that we can find what we are looking for. It feels like the Enlightenment of the 21st century and serves as a window to different parts and events of the world.

4.2.5 We Are Free

In my ideal, ideal future, we have overcome capitalism, and this is all not a problem. (S5)

I think in order to create the perfect social media, we also would have to live in a perfect society, you know, so, it would be like amazing to think that nobody would be advertising anything and everyone would just like live happily in social media. (S7)

In a dream world, social media would, support society, rather than kind of crumble it. (S7)

In this world, social media plays a much smaller role. That is because the world around us has changed a lot. In this society, capitalism has been overcome, and people are not reliant on sales, views, or performance. People do not exploit other people, but the world is built on the principle of equity. The world is a peaceful place, and as the world slows down and becomes calmer, social media does too. We value real life a lot more than our time online and spend most of our leisure time in nature, surrounded by people who are close to us, like friends or family. We see ourselves laughing and enjoying ourselves. Additionally, we observe the animals and creatures around us rather than focusing on our screens. Sometimes, intentionally, we still use the platform for entertainment purposes, information and communication with our loved ones. The values present online and offline are authenticity, vulnerability and realness. However, the platform is built in a way that supports this new peaceful society, is easy to close, and gives us explicit reminders and prompts for inspiration that lead us out of this place into the real world. We are free from the urge to be online constantly, free from advertisements flooding our ways, free from comparison and competition and can focus on our well-being, real connections, real impressions, experience life in our bodies and through all of our senses. We used to be like animals in zoos, captivated, not knowing our ways in real life, constantly watched and under control, and now, finally get to experience life in our natural habitat. In this future, we feel more relaxed, forget about social media because we are busy playing with our dogs, meeting our friends, going on a walk with our family, exploring the world and especially nature around us. It feels like the dream world we always thought was out of reach finally came true.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this research have been presented above. The findings will be summarised here concisely and then discussed in relation to the literature on social media, critical and feminist futures studies and desired images of the future.

5.1 Summary of Results

The aspects of social media platforms which most significantly shape the everyday experiences of people of marginalised genders vary. Connection, entertainment, and promotion are aspects which participants appreciate, especially when they effectively translate into real-life connections and actions. Not being in control and being confronted with an overflow of content, on the other hand, shapes participants' lives to their dissatisfaction. The orchestrated nature of the platforms that participants experience makes connections harder and leads to feelings of self-consciousness and questioning themselves. The unreliability and profit-orientation of the platforms is something the participants criticise, especially as they are not getting any support from the platforms when issues arise. Additionally, participants are worried about far-right ideologies spreading online and the consequences it has on democracies as well as on people's well-being, as they have received disturbing threat messages from accounts supporting such ideologies.

In the articulated desired images of the futures, participants enhanced what they liked, minimised the things they disliked and envisioned alternatives to bring their experiences on social media closer to their needs and to the needs of societies. The focus of the first image was being in control and shifting power to the community. This includes a more organised social media, where users can choose what they see and when. Connection is key in the second desired future image and is being enhanced by algorithms that serve as bridges to other people online, resulting in a flourishing sense of community. In the third image, people care about each other a lot, and the platforms finally implement a zero-tolerance policy for hate and threats. Users now feel secure on social media. They can express themselves safely. The platforms are not only reliable in terms of moderation, but also in terms of trustworthiness of news, which became visible in the fourth image. Expert fact-checkers make sure fake news do not spread, and users are well educated in terms of social media use and media literacy. Last but not least, the participants showed a desire for a future where social media does not play such a major role and is rather a side character. They touched upon societies free from capitalism and the market economy. Thus, the advertising machine on social media has vanished. Social media serves them when they need it. They focus on the real life, the real world, which has become a peaceful, just place.

5.2 Discussion of Theory and Findings

5.2.1 Social Media Environment

The literature on social media discussed in chapter 2.4 aligns in many aspects with the experiences of users of marginalised genders in this study. Based on the literature, I described social media as a double-edged sword. The participants reported having a love-hate relationship with social media and thus are in line with existing research about the bigger picture of social media.

The evolution of social media that Dhingra and Mudgal (2019, 3–6) and also Bhandari and Bimo (2022, 2) explain in terms of it being a rapidly changing environment, differences between platforms lessening, and platforms going from user-driven to algorithm-driven platforms are also experienced by the participants. They have communicated that connecting has become harder and that they do not feel like they are in control, but the algorithms are. Additionally, the fast pace and overflow of social media platforms were criticised by the participants in this study. This aligns with (Gerbaudo 2024, 1023) who identified a trend towards depersonalization, opacity in algorithms and less user control. Concretely, this means that implicit signals that users might not be aware of, like the time one takes to look at something, define what they will see next. The participants want to be aware of what they choose and be able to decide whether they do want to see it. Like Gerrard (2020, 749) the participants desire more channels for complaint, greater transparency in algorithms and moderation, and long for ethical decision-making. While Gerrard (2020, 749) suggests staying away from automated moderation, participants do see automated moderation as an option if it will function ethically and is overseen by people. Gerbaudo (2024, 1027) also explained that the “Tiktokification” platforms have undergone, meaning that the platforms focus on short-video formats and the “for you” page, leading to challenges navigating around this feature and due to aspects such as auto-play, users’ agency is kept small. This is directly criticised by the participants in the study. They emphasised that they want choice and control, and also mentioned that they feel like every platform has become the same and everything happens on one platform. The pace of the platforms was also disapproved, because it creates pressure to be online regularly in order not to miss anything. Participants do not support this “Tiktokification” of the social media sphere. They did appreciate the beginnings of social media more, when it felt like it was about them and their friends, and envision social media tailored to their needs in desired futures.

The gendered experience described in the literature also partly aligns with the experiences of participants in this study. Park et al. (2023, 20) have demonstrated that women and girls are keen to maintain strong social ties online and use platforms for self-portrayal. In this study, the former holds

true for people of marginalized genders in forms of liking the connection possibility presently and desiring it in deeper forms in the future as well. Additionally, the participants appreciate the entertainment, sharing cute videos with their friends, and being able to spread their message online. These aspects were not mentioned in the literature for any gender. Self-portrayal, on the other hand, has not received much attention from the participants, except for being able to show academic achievements on LinkedIn. The absence of the focus of self-portrayal could in some cases be connected to feelings of body insecurities, self-consciousness, competition or experiencing online harassment, which were discussed in the workshop. The participants described what Park et al. (2023, 24) found to be true for the EU, namely that women and girls are affected by the beauty standards online and that social media can cause a negative body image. This thesis cannot confirm binary gender differences in this effect; however it is salient in some participants' experiences online, for example, when engaging with gym content. Park et al. (2023, 27–28) found that reality check comments help youth feel better about themselves, and social media literacy is crucial. The participants in this thesis also mentioned that it helped them to see reality check content, revealing that social media only shows the best parts. However, for them, it does not change the overall feeling of needing to achieve a perfect body and a perfect life due to the orchestrated structure of social media platforms. The participants were worried about the mental health consequences this has on especially young users, while personally reporting feelings of anxiety and emotional distress. This is in line with the literature stating that social media can lead to depression, especially in young girls and gender-diverse people (Russell & Fish 2016, 468; Park et al. 2023, 24). Therefore, the participants and the literature also discussed media and social media literacy to have a bigger role in the future (Park et al. 2023, 44).

Harmful experiences online are almost inevitable (Williams et al. 2025, 119–120). While the negative experiences on social media varied across participants, all of them had a story to share. What Williams et al. (2025, 119–120) emphasised is that this happens due to the lack of policing content on social media platforms. The participants shared this experience in their daily lives, in forms of receiving hate and threats, seeing inappropriate content, malfunctioning block features and the platforms losing users' draft content. All of this has been happening to the participants without support or repercussion for the people causing harm. This confirms that even though most platforms do technically have a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to extremist or harmful content, users still encounter this content regularly (Williams et al. 2025, 119–120). Harassment was particularly reported to be rooted in queerphobia and far-right misogynist attitudes in the participants' stories. This aligns with what Nayar et al. (2026, 4–5) revealed, meaning that almost 60 per cent of transgender and gender-diverse people

reported to be exposed to hate on social media. It also confirms that misogynist rhetoric is returning strongly, especially online (Hurley et al. 2008, 391; Delap 2020, 6). Additionally, Aldridge et al. (2024, 2) described that transgender and gender diverse people experience hate and harm online more than cisgender people, in frequency and manner. This study cannot confirm this statement directly, but as the hate and threats were rooted in queerphobia and misogyny, the findings point in the same direction. To address this issue, Cowart (2025, 12–13) recommends curating social media environments specifically labelled as safer spaces, places for acceptance, belonging, and self-exploration for gender diverse and transgender people. This aligns with the desired futures of social media in which participants envisioned social media in general as a safe space where everyone can express themselves safely. While the literature suggests these spaces within the platforms, the participants envisioned the whole platform to be a safe space.

Social media today supports traditional gender understandings by amplifying gender stereotypes (Easter 2018, 683; Ging 2019, 645; Park et al. 2023, 32). Especially through the emergence of the manosphere, antifeminist ideas are visible online, where men tend to take up more space anyway. Easter (2018, 677) called it “digital manspreading”. While the participants report about misogyny, queerphobia, and being confronted with traditional gender roles online, they have not explicitly talked about the manosphere or this digital manspreading. This can have different reasons, one being that the participants do not necessarily ascribe this behaviour to a gender online but connect it more to the accounts being far-right accounts. Gender and ideologies are not necessarily separate, but it indicates that the participants do not have a problem with certain genders, but with harmful attitudes and actions. This is relevant as bell hooks (2015, 70) advocates for moving in solidarity and not separately between genders. It also reveals that while the workshop did not include cis men, it did not reproduce the man-hating stance that Milojević et al. (2008, 313–314) have criticised about some people’s understanding of feminism. Another explanation as to why the manosphere or manspreading did not come up, is that the participants have not seen as much content from this genre as they are all people of marginalised genders. Studies have found that algorithms work based on gender and social clustering (Park et al. 2023, 21; Gerbaudo 2024, 1023), and manosphere content might be directed more towards cis men and people who engage with content that other accounts also engage with in the manosphere. This directly relates to the aspect of free speech discussed in social media discourse, as these echo-chambers interfere with democratic communication. It is one of the major strengths of social media that everyone can express their voice. The participants do experience this in their own lives in aspects like business promotion, mobilisation for help, sharing their message online and appreciate it a lot. They have shared that it is particularly valuable when online mobilisation impacts

the offline world, aligning with the literature (cf. Miladi 2016, 39). Especially participants who wanted to promote their business, perceive that participating in social media is non-negotiable in contemporary contexts, aligning with the literature (cf. Niu et al. 2021, 7). This discussion so far has demonstrated that free speech and spreading their message for the participants means communicating respectfully. Insulting people or spreading harmful opinions as supposedly factual without facing legal consequences is what the participants criticise about the free speech aspect of social media. Like Crilley and Gillespie (2019, 175), the participants also view social media as a threat to democracies and are worried about fake news and echo-chambers. This was also emphasised in the workshop in the sense that users do not see the posts of their friends and are flooded by advertisements and horrendous news all around. This is relevant when discussing that feminist movements have a hard time online, as one cannot ensure that posts reach the audience, and the patriarchal worldviews are encoded in social media platforms (Megarry 2018, 1074). The literature has revealed that even though movements like #MeToo show the potential of social media for marginalised realities, the embeddedness of it in patriarchy is undeniable and makes movements such as the manosphere more viable and the desired visions of marginalised genders harder to implement. That is why the participants in this study were encouraged to imagine their desired social media platforms in the future. Next, the created images will be related to the literature about critical and feminist futures studies.

5.2.2 Critical and Feminist Futures in the Desired Images

As presented at the beginning of this thesis, the theoretical foundation of this work is critical futures studies, which Slaughter (1989, 450) connected to Habermas' critical theory. Critical theory follows the belief that freedom does not mean only shifting resources from the rich to the poor, but to enable reflective choices for individuals and societies in a way that they serve humanity (Ogilvy 1996, 76). In Image A, *We Choose*, the participants follow this idea by centring the ability to choose on social media. This ranges from co-creating and having a say in the development of the platform to also being able to make choices on the platform without being distracted by an overflow of content. The potluck metaphor describes these bottom-up, co-created aspects in which everyone contributes according to their abilities, for the greater good. Participants also envision social media which serves societies, for example, intellectually, but also in connection-making. These aspects align with the aforementioned belief that critical theory follows. A crucial annotation at this point is that Habermas advocates for self-consciousness in a positive way and connects it to the ability to make reflective choices (Ogilvy 1996, 76). This kind of self-consciousness can be seen in the example of the zoo metaphor in the *We Are Free* image, which indicates that participants have a feeling of not having been free. This is not

to be mistaken for the self-consciousness that participants experience when feeling insecure about their bodies for example. Ogilvy (1996, 76–78) has stated that choice does not equal freedom if there is no room to reflect on decisions and that the exchange of ideas is critical in order to enable free choices. The participants seem to agree on this as they criticise the power of current social media platform owners and envision their desired social media as villages with lively taverns and open-minded, well-educated societies. These aspects are visible in the We Connect and We Count on image. The We Care image might seem to contradict this point, as it is rather restrictive and has many control tools for moderation built in. However, in the image, the importance of being able to express freely and safely has a top priority, as long as it does not include hate or threats. This points towards the rigidity of systems of oppression such as the patriarchy (cf. Milojević et al. 2008, 315). The participants hesitated to imagine a world where freedom was already achieved, and no people dominate over others, and thus they needed protection mechanisms for the marginalised. This reflects Muñoz' (2019, 1) perception that queerness is not fully realized in the present. In the We Are Free image, the environment has changed, and real freedom seems to be achieved, and society is not following any kind of compulsive or obsessed behaviour, as Ogilvy (1996, 77) called it. However, this image did not receive much attention from the participants and was only slightly touched, even though the prompt that a future without social media can be imagined as well was instructed in the workshop. This reveals how challenging it is to think about desired images of the future, as described by Boulding (1962, 193) and Loye (1989, 19) who argued that as images of the future usually do not completely fulfil themselves, people are less likely to think about the unthinkable and desirable. It is easier for humans to think about business-as usual or dystopian images, as they can be based on what has been learned in the past. This hesitancy also sheds light on other crucial aspects discussed in the theory. First, ideas or visions articulated by people of marginalised genders get labelled as unrealistic or naïve (cf. Milojević et al. 2008, 315). Second, it demonstrates that people are biased by their belief systems and the social gender norms, which were shaped by the systems of domination in which they live, making it hard to challenge the status quo (cf. Butler 1988, 528; hooks 2015, 47). Therefore, a significant principle of critical futures studies is reflection.

The reflection in critical futures studies practice becomes visible in CLA, which was used in the workshop and data analysis process to create the desired images. In the images, the participants question power relationships and aim to restructure their desired social media in bottom-up, community-focused projects, for example, in the We Choose and We Connect images. In them, participants envisioned cooperative organisation models and funding systems. The We Count on image reflects the importance of diversity of news and social media content not being Western-

centric, which points to the different systems of oppressions discussed by bell hooks (hooks 2015, 16). This is one way to steer towards liberation and away from a system which is on a path to complete downfall (Slaughter 1996, 171–172). The participants point this out in the *We Are Free* image, articulating that social media should support society rather than crumble it.

This leads to the relationship with feminist futures specifically. The participants challenge what Eisler (1989, 17) and Jarva (1998, 906–908) had criticised about patriarchal societies being a mix of highly technologized systems and a system of hierarchy and domination, which poses a danger to life on this earth and gender equal societies. In the *We Are Free* image, the technological tool social media has changed from a technology to destroy, dominate and conquer, into a technology to support creativity and harmony (Eisler 2002, 166). It is also visible in the *We Connect* image, where technology is being used to support connections and community building. In general, the images follow along values that feminist futurists have called out and tackle systemic changes rather than just individual change (cf. Abdullah 2025, 39). This is already visible in the “we” stance in the images, which focuses on collective transformation. Feukeu (2024, 87) pointed out that ethics and responsibility are essential in feminist futures. These are found in the *We Count on* and *We Care* image in terms of platform responsibility and ethical platform moderation, and news diversity and transparency. Huston (1989, 38) and Abdullah (2025, 40) emphasise the importance of collaboration, care and empathy. These aspects are inherent in the image *We Choose*, which is based on a cooperative, consensus-oriented organisation model and in the image, *We Care*, which emphasises caring about the users and makes social media a safer space for everyone by valuing empathy in their worldviews. These images also align with Bhavnani and Foran’s (2008, p. 325) principle of acting through the emotion of love, which underpins aspects such as collaboration, care, and empathy.

These values are incorporated in the feminist futurists’ scenarios and visions presented in chapter 2.3.2. They were the Gentle Society, the Partnership Society and Milojević’s Three Gendered Scenarios. The Gentle Society is based on androgyny in the sense that all genders can participate in society wholly and education about care is offered to everyone, especially for men (Boulding 1977, 231). In this study’s findings, there are two clear connections to that. The first one being that participants reject algorithms that work based on gender, which has an androgynous component. Gender should not matter, but everyone lives together in a nurturing society. The education aspect mentioned in the vision of the Gentle Society can be detected in the *We Count on* image, where education about social media use and media literacy is key, in order to rely on the platforms and each other, and compared to the importance of sex education. In the partnership future, the importance of community-building and shifting from societies based on ranking to societies based on linking is key

(Eisler 1989, 16). The We Connect image does capture this sense of linking and community building, also as key aspects of the desired social media platforms of the participants. The bridge metaphor that the participants came up with nicely portrays this linking rather than ranking structure on the social media platform. Additionally, the emotion of love has been described by feminist futurists to be essential in feminist futures. It is salient in the We Connect image, where relationships are essential, and the interactions are based on love and kindness. This also confirms that for the participants, not only the material but also the immaterial aspects matter a lot, aligning with feminist futures (cf. Feukeu 2024, 87). In Milojević's (2018, 262) three scenarios, she describes societies with traditional gender roles, androgynous societies, as well as gender-diverse societies, advocating for the diverse scenario. In the findings of this thesis, traditional gender roles still play a role presently on social media, and they also get translated into the desired futures to some extent. For example, in the We Care image, while based on feminist futures value of caring, it works based on the assumption of hate and threat being around and marginalised realities needing protection. A similar structure can be found in the We Count on image, as fact-checkers and well-functioning systems to monitor the content online are present. When thinking about the power of fake news, it can be seen as an instrument to maintain hierarchy and domination. Thus, participants are still fighting against these systems, but they have not been overcome. Milojević's (2018, 262) second scenario, Androgyny, where gender does not matter, but the male stereotype is the norm for all people, is rather absent in the desired images of the future in this study. The only shy connection found was that the participants feel a need to be in control, which seems to be a tool of patriarchal societies where one dominates the other. However, the control that participants in this study long for is rooted in self-determination and agency, not domination and exploitation. Last but not least, Milojević (2024, 76) advocated for diverse gender futures in which all genders are valued equally, gender diversity is celebrated, and learning from each other's perspectives is crucial. The learning part can be detected, for example, implicitly in the tavern metaphor, where people come to exchange ideas and learn from each other. In the We Count on image, vivid discussions online revealed different perspectives and opinions, and specifically non-Western-centric, diverse information is being valued. In the We Care image, it becomes clear that the voice of marginalised genders is supported but foremost protected. The celebratory aspects and specifically the gender-diverse aspect stay absent, however, diversity in general is being highly valued. While not focusing on feminism in a gender-diverse sense, the images focus on feminist issues in the sense of caring for all marginalised realities (cf. Abdullah 2025, 45). Milojević (2024, 76) described feminist futures, among other things, as including:

- More equitable and balanced distribution of power in general, and among genders in particular
- Freedom from gender-based stereotyping
- Equal valuing of diverse genders and their perspectives/worldviews
- Societies that take seriously and address all forms of violence, seeking to minimise them
- Freedom to construct one's own identity, gendered and otherwise
- More peaceful societies overall

It is noteworthy that these aspects are visible in the participants' desired images, without the workshop specifically telling participants to create feminist images, but just by imagining what they desire. For example, in the We Choose image, the attempt to distribute power more balanced as well as the wish for freedom from gender-based stereotyping by the algorithms, are emphasised. This aligns with Milojević (2012, 61) advocating for flatter hierarchies and reveals that the participants experience gender as socially normative and controlling, as described by Butler (1988, 528). While not explicitly mentioned, the equal valuing of different perspectives might also be assumed in a cooperatively working social media, in the option to have different roles and tabs to your profile and in ensuring that news and information are accessible for any kind of needs. However, the equal valuing of diverse genders was not as salient in the findings as in the literature. In the We Care image, participants imagine societies that take violence seriously and take measures to minimise it, in order to enable freedom to construct their self-identity safely. This includes ensuring anonymity in front of other users but mandatory identification in front of the platform. The We Are Free image directly emphasises a more peaceful world overall, connecting to the ultimate point on the above list. To conclude, the desired images of the future by the participants in this study align with feminist futures in most points. However, the images do not focus on gender to the same extent, but they focus on values, community and general diversity, and thus seem allied especially with Boulding's Gentle Society and Eisler's Partnership Societies. The implications can be met with a pinch of salt due to methodological considerations, which will be described next.

5.3 Methodological Considerations and Suggestions for Further Research

While this thesis has explored desired images of the future of social media platforms from people of marginalised genders and shed light on the research questions posed in the beginning, it is important to be aware of certain limitations of this study. First, it is to be emphasised that while futures work is highly valuable and the participants in this study were encouraged to challenge the status quo, it has

been shown to be challenging for people to do that (cf. Adichie 2014, 40). Phrases like “I don’t think that’s possible” and “I don’t know how this could work” indicate that the participants were being held back by the present, which is visible in the results to some extent. This could be addressed further in future workshops by introducing futures literacy. While I did encourage a setting where participants think outside their biases from the present, it is a hard task. Additionally, the workshop could have gained from more time or from having follow-up workshops. The engagement of the participants and the caring atmosphere in the workshop experienced by myself and feedbacked by the participants underlined the advantages and empowerment people of marginalised genders can get when envisioning futures together (Hurley et al. 2008, 389–392). While it was satisfying to see that the participants were so engaged and almost would not stop discussing this issue, this was a signal that the scene was not yet saturated. Due to the scope of this work being a master’s thesis and planning and time constraints, I decided to only use the one workshop as it was, because it already provided rich material suitable for the analysis for this thesis. However, the results are not to be understood as fixed and determined (as futures and feminisms never are) but rather have to be seen in the light of this explorative work.

Additionally, this thesis could have benefited from more diverse perspectives and more perspectives in general. It is to be kept in mind that the images reflect the desires of the seven people in this study. It must be considered that there is no one experience which all people of marginalised genders share. For example, class and race make a relevant difference in areas such as quality of life and status, and should be included in feminism (hooks 2015, 16). While the study focuses on marginalised genders, a stronger focus on intersectionality and non-cis social media users would have been welcomed. Due to the struggles of finding participants for a three-hour workshop, I had to activate my personal and academic network, resulting in leaving some voices outside. Nonetheless, the participants had a variety of perspectives and backgrounds, which is also reflected in the material. Therefore, it is crucial to be aware that the images do not reflect full agreement but are a combination of the ideas of all participants. Additionally, in the analysis and image creation process, the data was under the subjective bias of myself. This is inherent in a qualitative study like this thesis, and I was dedicated to repeatedly reflect, reconsider and transparently communicate this bias. Lastly, it is to be mentioned that for most participants and myself, the language of the workshop was not our mother tongue, possibly making it harder to communicate accurately.

Accordingly, I encourage further research about the futures of social media, focusing on non-cis gendered visions of desired futures, as well as focusing on intersectional marginalisation in participant search. This also includes centring the voice of youth in this kind of work, especially in

the light of the public discourse about social media bans for youth. The role or perspective of cis men in the building of desired social media environments could also be included, as bell hooks encouraged to move in solidarity and not separately between genders, in the hope of becoming comrades in struggle and not reproducing the status quo (hooks 2015, 89). A shift in perspective from marginalised users to marginalised influencers could also provide new insights. Additionally, it could be beneficial to study certain platforms more specifically. Although many platforms have become similar, alternatives which were not considered in this thesis were, for example, Communia or Mastodon, which are relatively new and do not fall into the mainstream social media platforms. They might already consider some of the participants' desires. Last but not least, I recommend connecting futures studies, feminism and technologies more and in different ways, as this thesis has demonstrated their interplay and the potential of collaboration of feminist ideologies and the feminist movement and futures thinking.

5.4 Conclusion

This thesis has embraced the intersection of the fields of futures studies, feminist theory and social media. The relevance of the chosen topic was demonstrated at the outset of this thesis, stating that the internet and social media have turned from a hope for emancipation for women and girls into a source of fear (Carmo 2025). This transformation is reflected in the workshop with marginalised genders, as well as the literature about social media. This thesis has revealed the struggles and frustration for people of marginalised genders on social media, in terms of platform evolution leading to opaque algorithmic driven feeds, a lack of platform moderation and gendered experiences on social media being accompanied by self-consciousness and serious harm. While the literature suggested “digital manspreading” as a significant issue, this study revealed that for users of marginalised genders, it is more about values and attitudes than gender per se. While the threatening of marginalised people and democratic values online might often come from men, the issues for the users are the far-right, misogynist and queerphobic ideologies spread, implying that reinforcing the association between masculinity and these attitudes should be avoided. However, to reframe the issue at stake as suggested by Slaughter (1996, 174), this thesis encouraged desired images of the future of social media from marginalised genders' perspectives. In the exploration of those, it became clear that while social media has a lot of negative impacts on the everyday experiences of participants, there are also aspects that they appreciate. This aligned with the literature, leading to the present state described as a double-edged sword and a love-hate relationship. In the desired futures, social media is built based on agency, connection, safer spaces, reliability and freedom, as demonstrated in the five images *We Choose, We Connect, We Care, We Count on and We Are Free*. The images showed the rigidity of the patriarchal

system but also revealed the potential of people of marginalised genders as actors of change, imagining a more peaceful world, a more balanced distribution of power and freedom from gender-based stereotypes. The aspect of “linking rather than ranking” and values such as empathy and care were salient. In the results, the issue of gender was crucial, but the bottom line was, like in feminist theory and futures studies, to bring positive change for all people, by centring underrepresented perspectives.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Declaration of the Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

In the creation of this thesis, I utilised generative artificial intelligence for two purposes. The tools, their purpose, and the verification measures are detailed below. I confirm that I have used all AI tools with the necessary care and caution, have fully disclosed their use in accordance with university policy, and take full responsibility for all content presented in this thesis.

1. Tool: OpenAI's ChatGPT (GPT-5.3)

- **Stage of Use:** Literature Search and Understanding Literature
- **Purpose of Use:** I used ChatGPT to find literature for aspects that I could not specifically find in my literature search on UTU Volter. Additionally, I sometimes asked for clarification of statements that I was not sure I understood.

- **Example Prompts**

(February 24, 2026): “what are the differences between desirable, desired and preferable and preferred futures in futures studies? and can you provide me academic literature about this question”

(January 21, 2026): “can you help me find a study that explains the uprise of tiktok?”

- **Verification:** The AI results suggested different articles discussing these topics and gave explanations for the topics. I checked the recommend literature carefully and was able to find it also in the data bank of the University. No text from the AI was used in the thesis itself; it only guided the search and education process.

2. Tool: Grammarly

- **Stage of Use:** Editing
- **Purpose of Use:** AI-based spelling corrections and language improvements were used throughout the writing of this paper to enhance readability.
- **Verification:** I carefully proofread all suggested changes to ensure that the original meaning of my arguments was not altered and that the academic content remained accurate. I ensured ultimate control over all of the text.

Appendix 2 Workshop Invitation

For my master's thesis, I am hosting a futures workshop about the **desired futures of social media**.

Futures are often imagined from dominant perspectives, leaving many voices out. Since social media now shapes how especially young people connect, organize, and remember, it's worth asking: whose futures are being built online?

This workshop builds a space to imagine social media and its futures more broadly through feminist and marginalised perspectives. Join my workshop on **12 December 2025, 13:00–16:00 in Turku** to discuss and imagine more just and creative futures of social media.

- Which **role** does social media play in your life? Which role do you play on social media?
- Which aspects of social media are most affective on users, **either in a good or bad way**?
- How does social media **make you feel**?
- Can you think of any **changes** you would like to see?
- How could social media be, if it would be indeed **social**?

These and many other questions can be addressed and discussed.

Let's imagine wonderful digital spaces that match our needs, are being used for good and are **safe spaces for everyone**

This futures workshop is targeted at **women, trans, non-binary, inter, agender and gender-diverse*** people, **between the ages 18 and 36**, who use social media and consent to being part of my study, in which the results will be anonymized.

I look forward to having you in my workshop!

Sign up here:

<https://link.webpolsurveys.com/S/2B543B0C7CEB04C7>

or by scanning the QR-code.

Do not hesitate to contact me if any questions arise.

[email address]



Appendix 3 Webropol Sign-Up Form Workshop



**UNIVERSITY
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Sign-Up and Consent Futures Workshop 12.12.2025 13-16 o'clock



Mandatory questions are marked with a star (*)

1. Contact

Name or Pseudonym (if you prefer not to use your real name for our communication and during the workshop) *

Email *

Phone number

2. Pronouns (or if preferred, gender identity can be written into the field "own answer" in your own words)

Note that this workshop is not targeted at cis male people. "Cis male" refers to someone who was assigned male at birth and also identifies as a man. *

she/her

they/them

none

he/him

Own answer/other:

3. Age Range *

18-22

23-27

28-32

32-36

4. I will participate in the workshop on the 12.12.2025 from 13:00-16:00 *

Yes

No

5. Which social media platforms do you use? You can include all platforms that come to mind and you understand as social media. *

6. How frequently do you use said platforms? (e.g. Instagram - hourly, Facebook - weekly, X -monthly, Tiktok - daily, ...) *

7. Snacks and Drinks during the workshop have to be:

vegetarian

vegan

glutenfree

Other: type here

Please read the [attached consent form](#).

I have been invited to participate in the above-mentioned research.

I have read and understood the purpose of this study and what participation involves. I understand that participating in the research is voluntary and that I can at any point withdraw from participating in the research without giving any reason or cancel my consent without any negative consequences.

8. I consent that the workshop can be audio recorded for research purposes, but it has to be modified in the research results and publications so that I cannot be recognised from it. *

Yes

No

9. Are you okay with being in pictures that might be taken during the workshop and later used for purposes like LinkedIn and blogposts? (not necessary to participate in the research) *

- Yes
- No

10. By ticking the box, I consent to participating in the research. (This counts as a signature for the [here attached consent form](#)) *

- Yes

Appendix 4 Workshop Safer Space Principles

To make sure that we all have a pleasant experience in this workshop, here are some principles to ensure a safer space:

The goal is to build a space in which we, **FINTA*s (females, inter, nonbinary, trans, agender, gender-diverse people)**, can respectfully and considerately share and discuss our experiences and desired futures. This space should be as free as possible from judgment and discrimination. To ensure this, please be aware of the following principles:

- **Confidentiality and Responsibility:** Every individual is responsible for their words and actions. Avoid making assumptions about others. Acknowledge your own position of power in relation to others and act accordingly. Respect others' right to privacy both during and after the workshop. Do not push anyone to answer questions, and do not share personal stories outside of the workshop.
- **Listen and Learn:** We listen to what the other participants say and create space for others to share, contribute and learn. That includes being aware of how much space we take up and making sure that everyone has the opportunity to contribute. Question your own judgements and be open to other perspectives. However, insults or any form of misanthropy are not opinions and are not accepted in this space!
- **Language:** We all have different language backgrounds. Please try to speak clearly and feel free to ask for clarification at any time. Making sure everyone can follow the discussion is part of creating an inclusive space.
- **Respect:** Everyone gets the opportunity to share their unique perspectives. However, deliberate offence towards anyone is unacceptable. Respect everyone's right to self-determination and handle issues with sensitivity and care.
 - o Respect each other's physical and emotional boundaries
 - o **Respect each other's identities and backgrounds, including pronouns and names**

Any form of racism, sexism, transphobia, homophobia, ableism, classism, fatphobia or other oppressive behaviour is not tolerated.

- **Conflict and Harm:** Conflicts may arise wherever people and diverse perspectives come together, including in this workshop. They are not inherently negative; rather, they reflect the diversity within our group and offer opportunities for learning and collective development. To make use of this potential, we aim to address conflicts in a respectful and constructive manner. If harm occurs, it should be acknowledged, and those affected should feel able to voice their concerns. You may bring such situations to my attention at any time or address them directly yourself if you feel comfortable doing so.
- **Collective Responsibility:** Creating a safer space is a shared effort. If you notice that someone is not following these principles, you are encouraged to intervene in a supportive way. You can always approach me directly if you feel uncomfortable addressing it yourself.
- **Right to Withdraw Participation** at any time: I remind you here that participation is voluntary and you can leave the workshop at any time. You are also welcome to take a break if you need it and rejoin the activity later.

I am also here to learn and am happy to make any changes or additions to the principles if you think something important is missing. I will try to implement and ensure these principles to my best ability. If you realise that a person is not following these guidelines, I encourage you to intervene.

Of course, you can always approach me directly before, during or after the workshop!

Appendix 5 Card Deck Questions for the Discussion of the Present

(the idea is to pull cards one by one, with the possibility to skip a question if not wanting to answer or not being in the mood, can be put back on the stack)

- What comes to your mind when you think about social media?
- Share a positive experience you have made on social media or connected to social media
- Share an experience you have made on social media or connected to social media which felt negative/problematic/concerning in anyway
- What is your favorite feature of social media and why?
- Think about the last time you felt annoyed, sad or angry about or on social media why?
- Do you feel like your experience on social media is shaped by your gender? In what way?
- Describe the following situation in as much detail as possible: You click on the social media app icon (choose whichever platform you want), then what happens, how do you feel? What do you see/hear/taste/smell etc.?
- What is the last thing that caused you happiness retrieved from social media?
 - o can be a small thing
 - o or a life changing thing
- Which platforms do you like? Why? Which platforms don't you like? Why?
- If you imagine social media as an animal which one would it be and why?
- If you had to give your relationship with social media a title what would it be?
- What is the first feeling that comes to your mind when you hear the word social media?
- How would you connect these two terms: control and social media?
- What do you do on social media? For what purpose do you use it?
- Give a short impromptu talk about the pros and cons of social media.
- How would you explain social media to an alien from another planet?
- Can you name three aspects of social media that you really like?
- How would you connect these two terms: inspiration and social media?

Appendix 6 Workshop Time-Travelling Script

I'm going to be guiding you through a short imagination journey. One that will help you feel into a vision for a future that you long for and want social media orient towards. If it helps you, you can think about a specific time span like 10-15 years however it is not required and I want to emphasise that your ideas and hope do not need to seem realistic in anyway or that time frame. But before we travel into the future, I'd like you to ground in the present. I'm going to invite you to put down anything you're holding and first just have a little stretch, perhaps a shake. Just give yourself a second to arrive here and move your body however feels good. And when you're ready, come to stillness, make yourself comfortable as much as possible. Allow your shoulders to soften, your face and jaw to relax.

Once you feel comfortable, perhaps close down your eyes or lower your gaze, and just take a second to observe how it feels to be here.

I want to mention here, that this process can be very pleasant for some while hard for others, listen to your body and yourself and engage with it in a way that is suitable for you. If in any moment you do not feel comfortable, feel free to stop joining the exercise

Take a moment to observe the quality of your breath. Just observing it for now, not changing it in any way. Notice its depth, its speed, perhaps any emotion behind it and then when you're ready slowly deepen the breath a little. And just let yourself feel into how it feels to be here right now in your body.

Where are you today? How does it feel for you to be here now and listening to my voice?

When you have a sense of that, I'd like you to explore where we are collectively at present. As a group here today but also as a society regarding social media, like we collectively discussed before the break.

When you have a sense of where we are, I am inviting you to consider where we are heading. We will take this moment to think about desirable futures and envision better, more fruitful futures.

Now imagine, you wake up on a beautiful, sunny day in the year X. And you are feeling great, you are feeling positive, hopeful and strong. And you start your day in your own perfect way. Imagine yourself going about your morning and getting ready for the day. Maybe this includes drinking, coffee or tea, maybe you listen to something or read or do something completely different. Whatever it is that you like in your mornings. You realize that today is a day where anything seems possible.

However, you access the daily news in the way that you like and whether this is by reading something physically or on a mobile device, or in audio or video form. You see many different news headlines, hopeful ones, funny ones, informative ones, serious ones, the media coverage is very diverse. You see this one article: "The New Social Media" and click on it, or hear the news about it on the radio/podcast whatever get informed of this new great social media which everyone seems to be using and it is described to be pleasant, connecting, benefiting you in many ways and finally a change to what we have seen so far. Think about whether you would download and open the social media. Whether you decided you went for it or not. Imagine now that you open it, if you personally did not want it, because you prefer no social media at all. You meet your friend who is as excited as the news depicted it and your friend shows you through this new online space which they love.

You can imagine a social media closely linked to what you know today if that is what you desire, but feel free to go beyond all limitations set and think about what desired social media looks like for you.

[Then I will guide through the different questions on the worksheet which the participants will get after the exercise]

You close the social media and are feeling pleasantly surprised and happy about this new space you just got to know, regardless if you think you will be using it or not.

You can now open your eyes and come back to this present moment 😊 (give participants a moment to arrive here again)

Appendix 7 Workshop Worksheet

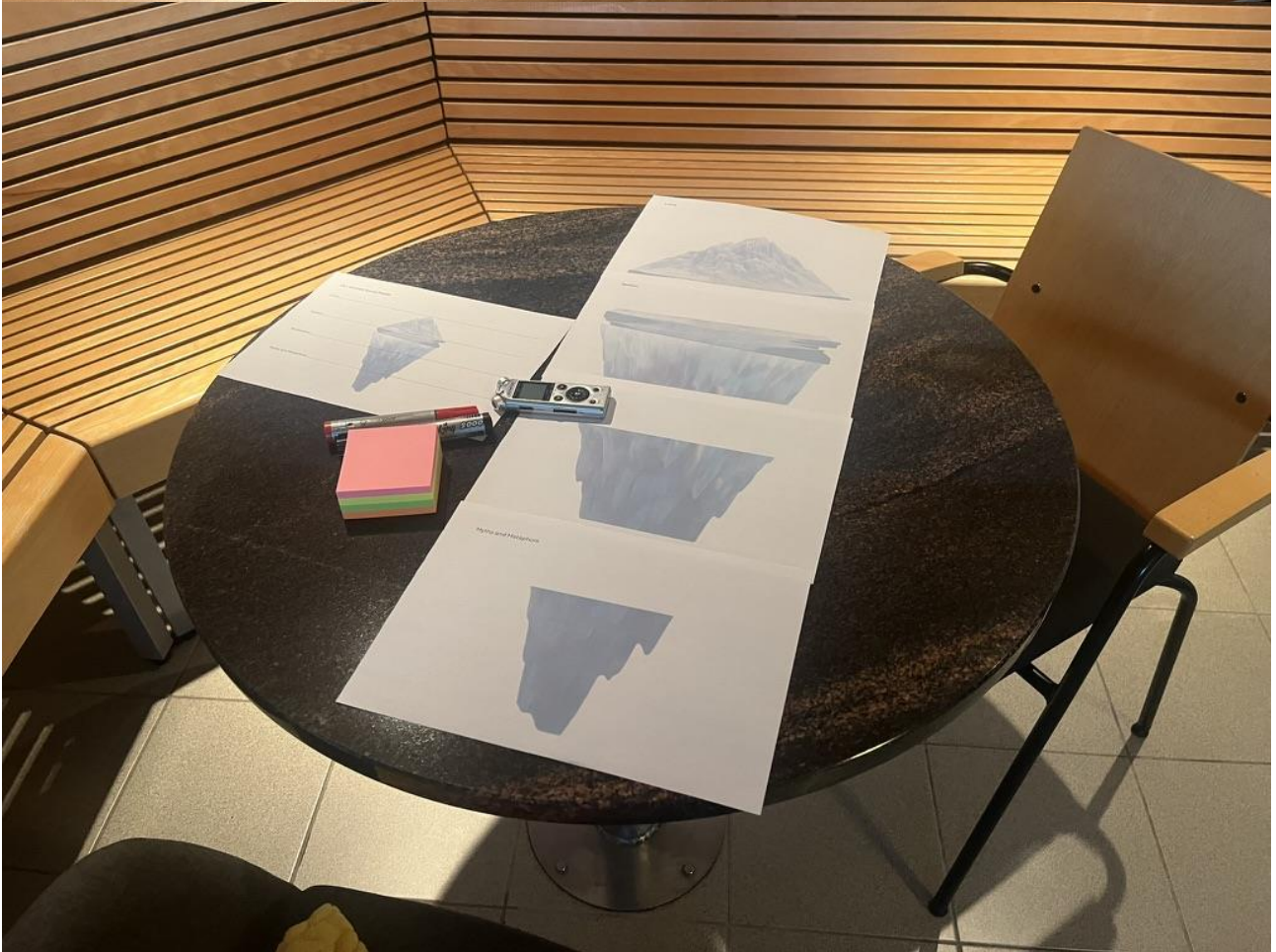
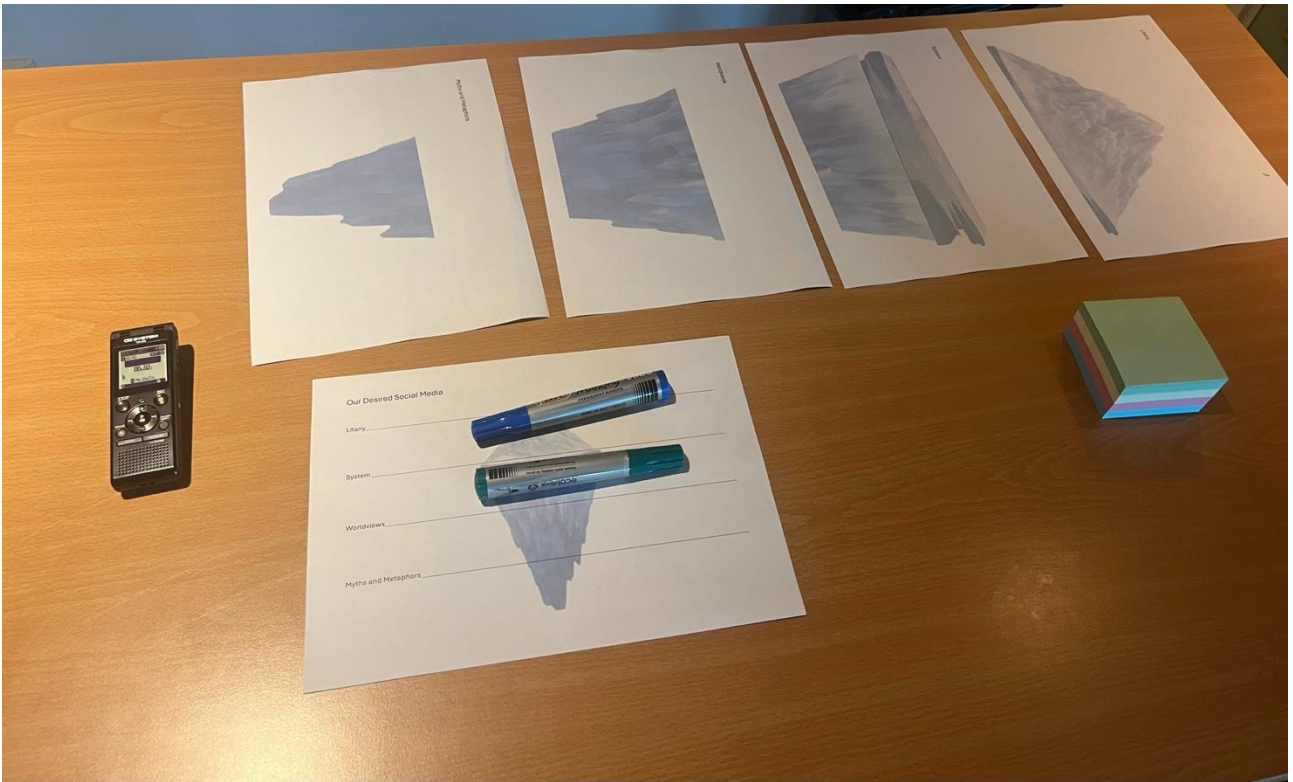
The name of my desired social media:

<p>What do you see when you start the social media?</p>	
<p>Vibe check: What's the overall vibe on your social media?</p>	
<p>What are you doing on social media? Are you just being, consuming, connecting, laughing, interacting, posting, reading, watching, listening? Something else?</p>	
<p>Who or what do you see in the content? Do you know these people or things? What do you share on social media if you do?</p>	
<p>Which senses and skills are you using? Your eyes, ears, emotional or intellectual skills?</p>	

<p>What is the purpose of this social media?</p>	
<p>Did you have to pay to be on there? Are you seeing ads? If so, for what?</p>	
<p>How do people connect on social media? Is there such thing as following each other? Or having to accept a mutual friendship? Maybe something completely different?</p>	
<p>Are there any news like information? What kind of news do you see? Imagine it.</p>	
<p>What are your favorite things about this social media?</p>	
<p>Is there something else that is important to you and your experience? What makes you feel safe and content about social media?</p>	
<p>You close the social media. Why did you close it? How much time have you spent on it? Hopefully you are feeling fine.</p>	

Space for additional notes and thoughts:

Appendix 8 Workshop CLA Setup



Appendix 9 NVivo Coding List

Codes\CLA Codes

Name	Sources	References
Discourse and Worldview	13	128
Litany	13	102
Myths and Metaphors	10	68
System and Social Causes	13	164

Codes\Thematic Codes

Name	Sources	References
desirable and what we like today	13	418
accessibility, user-friendly	1	3
organized	2	2
account specifications	4	14
ad-free social media	4	8
aesthetic	1	1
age-limit	3	12
agency and self-determination	13	51
restricting the use-taking control	4	7
AI being marked as such	2	5
algorithm which serves primarily user	4	5
authenticity	2	3
calm	4	9
consent	4	6
responsibility	2	3
trust and reliability	4	7
desired regarding news and information	10	39
ability to block, activate seeing news	3	5
accessibility of information	2	5

Name	Sources	References
content has sources	2	2
differentiation between facts-expertise and opinions	3	6
diverse informative posts	6	7
fact-checking	5	8
news categorization local, regional etc.	1	1
reliable news	2	3
seeing good news	1	2
diversity and variability of content	1	1
educating young people about social media	1	2
entertainment	5	12
cute animal content	2	6
Meme	2	3
feeling connected to the real life	6	8
financing-maintaining the platform	9	19
globality	2	6
country differences	1	3
western-bias---diversity of voices	2	3
inspiration	4	4
creativity	6	11
intellectual	5	5
kids making content for kids	1	1
legal consequences for online action	2	5
mental health supportive	5	5
mobilization for help and support	1	4
no corporate ads but people promote their own stuff	3	7
overcoming capitalism	1	1
personal feed curated to your needs and wishes	10	35

Name	Sources	References
privacy	6	18
anonymity	3	9
safe space- respect	7	20
slow-paced	1	1
social media leading you out of the app	1	1
social media literacy	5	15
social media serving people	3	6
social media supports relationships	9	36
a sense of community	3	5
connecting people	9	31
spread your message	5	12
the outside influences are desirable thus social media is a better place	2	4
transparency	6	17
well-functioning block feature	3	7
working moderation	3	10
undesirable, or what we don't like about today	7	219
a lot ads	3	4
algorithm issues	4	8
agressive algorithm	3	3
algorithm based on gender	3	4
algorithm monetization	1	1
bubbles-echo-chamber	3	3
change of social media in the past	3	6
distracting-numbness	1	5
fast paced	1	6
feeling insecure or self-conscious	2	15
hate and threats	3	16

Name	Sources	References
spaces get invaded	1	1
Issues related to news and information	4	14
fake news	3	5
not being able to control seeing news	4	7
power monopoly	2	2
mental health harms	3	9
not being in control	3	28
attention span	1	1
buying followers	1	2
orchestrated-fake-pretending	4	24
overflow	3	15
performance pressure on kids	1	4
pressure to be on social media	3	15
Problems of AI on SM	3	9
AI being used harmfully by people	1	1
AI making mistakes	2	2
not clear whether something is AI or not	2	6
profit oriented social media platforms	3	9
social media as a barrier for real connection	3	12
24-7 connection	1	2
social media excluding marginalised people	1	2
social media no serving connection	2	7
social media pushing right wing politics	4	8
unreliability of the platform	3	9

Appendix 10 Participant Consent Form



**UNIVERSITY
OF TURKU**

13.10.2025

1 (1)

Consent for participation in scientific research

Desired Futures of Social Media from a Young, Marginalized User Perspective
University of Turku, Master Thesis, Emilia Rieger

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this research is to create desired images of the future of social media from the user perspective of people of marginalized genders. In today's world where social media plays a big role in many young people's live and works as a space where interaction happens, it is worth asking, who is social media good for? And how can it become a beneficial and safe space for all? Especially, as the most used platforms are owned by white men, marginalized perspectives are not considered enough. By asking ourselves how social media could work, feel and be used in the future, in positive and safe ways, this research lays a possible ground stone for alternative and feminist pathways of social media platforms and their user experience in the future. In addition, this research aims to create an empowering experience for people of marginalized genders.

Participation Involvement

Participation in this study involves actively participating in a three-hour futures workshop, where we discuss the personal usage of social media and the desired futures of social media. Next to discussions, also noting down ideas and thoughts will be part of the workshop, as well as some short breath/awareness exercise, through which the researcher will guide you. Of course, it is important to only engage in the exercises which you are comfortable with.

Data Handling

The workshop will be recorded and transcribed. In the transcription everyone will be anonymized. The audio files will be destroyed within one year after the research and the anonymized transcription will be stored.

Consent

I have been invited to participate in the above-mentioned research.

I have read and understood the purpose of this study and what participation involves. I understand that participating in the research is voluntary and that I can at any point withdraw from participating in the research without giving any reason or cancel my consent without any negative consequences.

I have received sufficient information about the research and how my personal data is processed. I have had the opportunity to ask questions from the researchers. With my signature, I give consent for participating in the research.

I consent that the workshop can be audio recorded for research purposes, but it has to be modified in the research results and publications so that I cannot be recognised from it.

Yes No

Are you okay to be on pictures which might be taken during the workshop and later used for purposes like LinkedIn and Blogposts?

Yes No

Contact information for questions and concerns

