



Gendered Othering on Social Media

WP5 – D5.5 Gender in Societies - Deliverable



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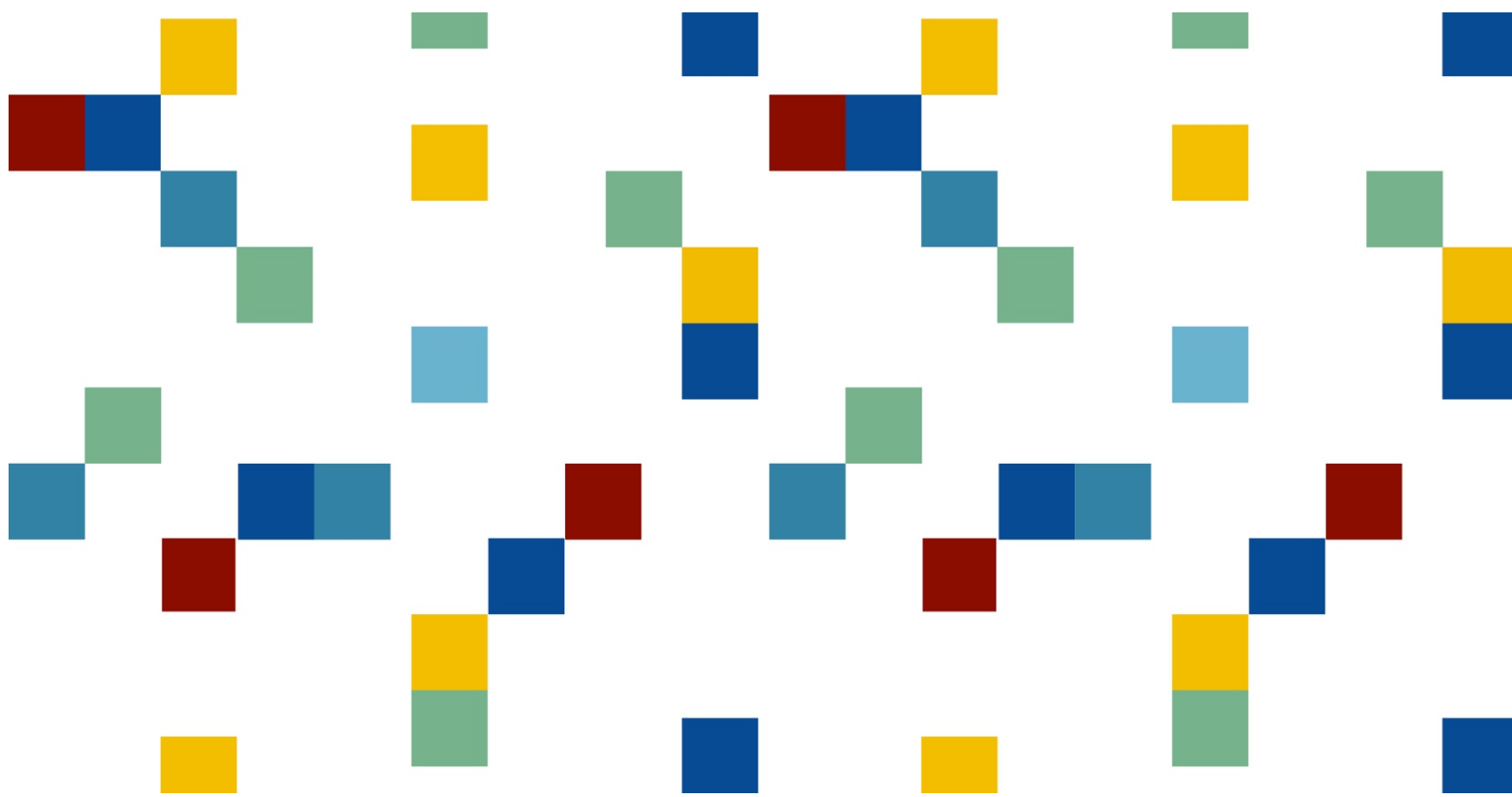


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1. Introduction

In order to understand gender injustice and combat gender discrimination on media platforms in Europe, we need to understand what gender injustice currently looks like and -importantly- what it *can* look like in the future. How can we imagine gender in Europe? We will use the conceptual frame of *gendered othering* to analyze gender in relation to social media platforms. To start, we dive deeper into theoretical reflections on gender. We explain what gender and sex and their differences are. This is done with an eye for intersectionality. We need to use the intersectional lens to then expand on the meaning of gendered othering. After having explained this concept, we consider the data from the EUMEPLAT project. We can see how different studies within the project have contributed to an understanding of gender in social media platforms. This allows us to understand the current situation with regards to gender, othering and social media. Now, we know what gender injustice currently looks like on social media. However, part of our research question remains; what can it look like in the future? For this, we have produced and gathered various possible future scenarios. We worked on the basis that grounded theory and data are conceptualised as a site of ideological negotiations and we looked for similar discourses and reoccurring arguments. After analyzing them from a discourse theoretical perspective (Foucault, 1975; Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008), we were able to identify three main themes. These themes show us in different ways what gender (in)justice (on social media) can look like in 20 or 30 years from now. Some of the future scenarios are more or less desirable. All of them show where we as a European society could end up being. Understanding future scenarios and possibilities in relation to gender is important because it entails what we have to do in the present to either prevent or encourage different future scenarios from happening.

2. Theoretical Reflection

We first explain some of the key concepts to understand gender and gender discrimination and injustices. We will discuss the difference between sex and gender and elaborate on the concept of gender identity. This conceptualisation is necessary to understand othering and the notion of otherness in relation to gender. We will use an intersectional lens to understand the discourses on gender and more precisely on gender identities. This lens offers a layered insight into the practice of identity constructions, discourses on gender identities and gender expressions. Intersectionality is the conceptual bridge between gender identities and othering in relation to stereotyping and gender exclusion or discrimination. The process of othering explains how discrimination takes place and can also be used to understand intragroup discrimination

2.1. Sex and Gender

Often sex is associated with biology and gender with culture. If we talk about sex, we talk about biological men, women and intersex people. Gender indeed is produced and maintained by culture and politics (Butler, 1999 [1990], p. 6). However, both are connected to culture. People's sex is assumed to be indicative of one's gender and comes with social expectations. Therefore, it is socially constructed as well (Butler, 1999 [1990], p. 10). Think for example about "gender reveal" parties and the connotations and expectations people have depending on the sex that becomes revealed. The body comes into being as a medium and - from the birth onwards- cultural meanings are inscribed to it (Butler, 1999 [1990], p. 12). In this way one "becomes," for example, a woman (de Beauvoir, 2019 [1949], p. 345). During one's lifetime, people get to know that they are differentiated from others due to their sex and assumed gender. They then become gendered (Butler, 1999 [1990]; de Beauvoir, 2019 [1949], p. 345).

2.2. Gender Identity

As Butler (1999 [1990], p. 10) explains "if gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way". This has an important consequence, namely that gender identity can be radically independent from sex and thus someone with for example a male body can have any possible gender identity or gender expression.

2.2.1. Intersectionality as Part of Gender Identity

When talking about gender, it is important to also take other aspects of identities into account, namely ethnicity, class, sexuality etc. Identities are not just the sum of these aspects.

Gender, race, class, religion etc. are compounds that together create distinct identities. These compounds are entangled and we cannot see, for example, a black woman as *being black* and *being a woman*, she is always a *black woman*. Therefore, her experiences need to be studied to understand her oppression; the injustices she faces as a black woman cannot be defined by solely studying the injustices against white women (Cohen, 1997; Crenshaw, 1991). Understanding intersectionality is important to have an idea of the feminist studies we need to take on to combat gender-related discrimination and injustice. However, looking at the history of feminism, we see that intersectionality was only really focused on in the later stage of feminism, the third wave.

The history of feminism is commonly divided into waves, more precisely into three waves. Movements that began in the 1990s correspond to the third-wave, highlighting the need to recognize multiple feminisms, thus replacing sex-based essentialism with the recognition of 'fluid gender identities' (Schuster, 2017, p. 168), including LGBTQIA+ issues, as well as issues concerning gender intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) with other domains of oppression, informed by privilege, such as race, class and religion, for example. This third wave followed in the wake of the second wave, which occurred during the 1960s and 1980s, focusing on the need to take collective action so as to politically tackle the specificity of women's problems (e.g. reproductive rights, access to education, equality in the labor market, symbolic issues of representation) as deriving from the 'patriarchal power structures in society' rather than 'individual circumstance' (Schuster, 2017, p. 168). This second wave was preceded by the first wave represented through the suffragist movement of the early twentieth century.

It is worth mentioning that this classification in waves is not consensual either among activists or among scholars (Evans, 2016; Gillis & Munford, 2004; Whelehan, 1995), and only serves as a roadmap to understand a movement as plural as the feminist one. Likewise, there is no consensus about the emergence of a fourth wave, which would correspond to feminism in the post-Web 2.0 digital era.

Despite the alleged plurality of the feminist movement, white, able-bodied, western ... feminism has tended to establish itself as the only legitimate feminism, seeing 'white', 'able-bodied', 'western' etc. as the norm and not something needed to be mentioned. Because of this, feminist discourse has often only been connected to the experiences of women falling under this norm. The focus of feminism is often invisible, making the experiences of others invisible (Amos & Parmar, 1984). The cyberfeminist perspective (see Haraway, 1985; Plant, 1997), which emerged in the midst of the third wave, offered a way out to the ongoing discussion about which experiences the feminist movement prioritized. It did this by exalting the disembodiment promoted by new technologies, resulting in multiple and innovative possibilities to rethink issues of identity, subjectivity and the (de)construction of the relationships established between women and technology. Taking into account that the body has been the site of heavily charged political struggle within feminist thought and activism, the

romanticized and incorporeal nature of cyberfeminist values have provoked feminist criticism (cf. Wajcman, 2004) that emphasizes the primordial role that the body assumes in producing discourses on knowledge, where the fields of science and technology are inserted.

2.3. Sex and Gender Exclusion

People are discriminated against because of their sex. This can be easily seen looking at medical research. The research that has often been invested in is based on biological men as the norm for patients. This results in medicines and medical procedures not taking into account how different bodies (biological women or intersex people) might respond (Valls-Llobet, 2017; Perez, 2019). Illnesses that occur more often amongst not biological men are then also often overlooked (Valls-Llobet, 2017). Here again, an intersectional perspective is necessary, as for example the study on the care for black women in medicine which shows how these people face injustices in the medical world because of their identity (Eke, Otugo, & Isom, 2021). Next, people can be discriminated against based on their sex because of the cultural roles and connotations associated with their sex. In the same way people can be discriminated based on their gender.

People who don't identify as cismen are discriminated against because of social and cultural connotations and stigmas in place. To give one example, they face inequalities at work because of being associated with or picking up reproductive work, because of being discriminated against due to their gender expression and/or identity, because of gender pay gaps etc. (Alkadry & Tower, 2006; Olivetti & Petrongolo, 2008; Grant et al., 2011, pp. 50-71). In short, if we want to fight injustice against all of those who are not cismen, our feminism must also represent them all.

2.4. Othering

2.4.1. What is Othering?

In order to have a better understanding of gender discrimination and exclusion, we explain the concept of 'othering'. As Foucault (1975) explains, norms are defined by what they are not. It is by both defining and excluding precisely what the norm is not, that the norm is created. Therefore, even though the norm becomes self-evident, it will always be dependent on and attached to the deviant (which often gets articulated as the abnormal). The abnormal is also called the Other and the process of defining and excluding everything that the norms isn't, is called othering (Brons, 2015). In relation to gender, this translates to the following structure. In short, the norm *cismen* is defined by excluding everything it is not: transmen, non-binary people, trans- and ciswomen etc. This puts these last groups in the category of the

Other; they are othered. We will first go deeper into the process of othering by discussing the work of Simone de Beauvoir (2019 [1949]), Iris Marion Young (1990), Maria Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman (1983). Then, we briefly explain how othering can also happen in the Other itself. Lastly, we argue why understanding othering -both between the norm and the abnormal and in the Other itself- is necessary for freedom and equality.

To start, there is a clear norm, the white able-bodied heterosexual cismen, and those who do not fit into this norm are defined as the Object, or the Other (de Beauvoir, 2019 [1949], p. 11; Young, 1990, p. 66). He is the Subject, the Absolute, and he is seen as essential. The Other is positioned against this as not essential (de Beauvoir, 2019 [1949], pp. 12-13). This distinction between the male Subject as absolute vs. the female Other as non-essential is emphasized in Lacanian psychoanalysis, which was influential for feminist theory, as a source of contestation and debate. For Lacan (1966), woman corresponds to a lack, due to the absence of a fixed signifier for the 'feminine' in the order of the symbolic, that of language. In this perspective, the subject enters the world of language through a radical rupture with the maternal body, which signifies the imaginary. The phallus thus signifies the potency of the law of the father, which symbolizes the institutional structures and laws existing within patriarchal culture. Because the feminine imaginary cannot express itself, in its particularity, in the domain of the symbolic, it cannot gain concrete form and is condemned to the function of permanent 'dislocation' vis à vis any fixed position that may be assumed by the masculine signifier. Different feminists such as Irigaray (1997) and Cixous (1981) have drawn on Lacan to capture essentialized femininity through an 'écriture féminine' that mirrors the bodily experience of women, refusing rationality, linearity and objectivity.

However, the relationship between the Subject and the Object can be reciprocal, meaning that the Object can be its own Subject and see the first Subject as its Object. However, when we're talking about e.g. women, we see that they are not just defined as the Other, but as *solely being the Other* (de Beauvoir, 2019 [1949], p. 14). This non-reciprocal movement from the Subject to the Other, is what we call (exclusive) othering (Canales, 2000). Importantly, in this othering is also an erasing, a not representing (i.e. symbolic annihilation). Whilst being othered, all people who differ from the norm are taken together. This results in the ignoring of all intersubjective differences (Lugones & Spelman, 1983, p. 573). In other words, the othering erases a diversity of different languages, cultures, religions, socio-economic backgrounds, histories etc. (Lugones & Spelman, 1983, p. 575). Next, once the different oppressed groups are together -without attention for intersubjective differences- defined as *solely the Other*, their perspectives and needs are disregarded and overlooked in favour of the dominant experiences and beliefs of the norm of society (Perez, 2019). Thus, people who are oppressed due to their gender, are people who have been defined as the Other, whose intersubjective differences have been erased, and who -as this Other- have been silenced and ignored.

2.4.2. Stereotypes

The erasure of the specificity of differences among groups that are regarded as not corresponding to the norm can also translate into stereotypes, or the reification of otherness to certain characteristics through which such groups are defined. Stereotypical images are frequently used in media to activate cognitive maps that naturalize particular representations of otherness, thus removing them from their situated contexts of social and ideological construction. In the process, difference is made easier to consume on the part of audiences. Gendered representations, for instance, have been frequently pointed out as articulating stereotypes, with women being traditionally associated with relational and communal social roles and men with agentic social roles (Eagly & Steffen, 1984). Within media studies, the current focusing on effects presupposes that social attitudes towards inequities may be influenced by exposure to stereotypical representations in media content (see Tuchman, 1978).

Pre-existing belief structures (Leudar & Nekvapil, 2000), held in common by a particular 'ingroup', are hence reinforced through stereotypes that promote a sense of unity among a communal 'we', that defines itself against its others. The objective of hate speech is precisely that of contributing to the reinforcement of group homogeneity by reinforcing its separation from those who do not comply with the group's parameters of self-definition, on the basis of value judgement (Ahmed, 2004). Expulsion of difference is performed within an economy of signs that are representative of stereotypical 'strangeness', serving the purpose of objectifying any particular 'outgroup' (see Sadowski, 2016).

2.4.3. Intragroup Discrimination

We should bear in mind that othering also happens within oppressed groups. With regards to gender, the process of othering does not only happen between cismen and transman/non-binary people/trans- and ciswomen/..., it also happens between the latter groups themselves. Throughout history, transgender and non-binary people have been seen as "too different" to be part of feminist movements or to be included in lesbian/gay¹ communities (Eisner, 2012; Gan, 2007, p. 133; Matzner, 2015, p. 2; Weiss, 2003). Ciswomen were seen as the Subject and transmen, non-binary people and transwomen were seen as being the "weird and fake" Other (Gan, 2007, p. 133). Today, Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists (TERFs) define *women* as only those who've grown up without any possibility of having male privilege, thus as *ciswomen*. This leads them to other trans people as "imitators"

¹ These communities also often excluded bisexual and other queer people, hence the reference to only gay and lesbian communities. Bisexual and transgender communities have often fought together because of this (Eisner, 2012; Weiss, 2003).

' and exclude trans people from their radical feminist movement (Gan, 2007, p. 133; Koyama, 2006, p. 699-700).

Thus, it is important to care about the injustice of non-reciprocal relationships between Subjects and Objects (e.g. the relationship between cismen and transman/non-binary people/trans- and ciswomen/..., or the relationship between ciswomen and transman/non-binary people/transwomen/...). As we can learn from Martin Luther King (1963, p. 2) and Simone de Beauvoir ((2004) [1944]; 2018 [1947], p. 79), if we are to be free and without injustice, we must want everyone to be free and without injustice. We cannot be truly free if the Other isn't, since injustices towards this Other also affect us indirectly (de Beauvoir, (2004) [1944]; de Beauvoir, 2018 [1947], p. 79; King, 1963, p. 2). Understanding the process of othering, enables us with knowledge to try to ensure that people are *not solely* defined as *the Other*.

Finally, this othering in relation to gender is reflected on social media platforms. Social media can both be and create safe and unsafe scenarios in relation to gender equality. In this report we focus on the representation of gender in social media posts in Europe.

3. What has the EUMEPLAT research added to these debates

3.1. Context

Despite differences in national juridical frameworks within Europe, all countries have signed the Istanbul Convention resulting in mandatory attention paid to gender issues at the legislative level (Björner, 2023; Doudaki & Hroch, 2023; Grassmuck & Thomass, 2023; Lagrange, Van Bauwel, & Biltereyst, 2023; Peschke et al., 2023). Bulgaria, for example, had to introduce the term 'gender' in its legal terminological system after 2001, subsequently to the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. Depending on the country, the legislative changes are sometimes progressive but other times fall short of the Convention's objectives, as reflected in legislations/laws relating to LGBTQIA+ rights and sexual violence.

With regards to LGBTQIA+ rights, same-sex marriage is either legal or forbidden, depending on the country. In Belgium, Germany, Portugal, Spain and Sweden it is legal to marry someone with the same sex (Björner, 2023; Grassmuck & Thomass, 2023; Lagrange et al., 2023) as opposed to Bulgaria, Greece, the Czech Republic, Italy and Turkey where it is illegal (Doudaki & Hroch, 2023; Peschke et al., 2023). These latter countries are also characterised by limited LGBTQIA+ rights in general and, in most of them, there is intense anti-LGBTQIA+ rhetoric in public and political debates. In some countries, like Italy and the Czech Republic, same-sex partnerships are allowed, but these do not grant the same rights as marriages do.

With regards to transgender rights, we also see a variety of legislations across the ten countries (Doudaki & Hroch, 2023). Some of them have started to reduce official restrictions to have an official name or gender change. Belgium is an example of this, although the possibilities there are also still limited. For instance, it is not possible to put anything but an M or F on passports (Lagrange et al., 2023). In other countries, like the Czech Republic and Greece, transgender people still have very limited rights (Doudaki & Hroch, 2023). Particularly, in the Czech Republic the law that acknowledges 'transsexuality' is based on the heteronormative, biological, and dualistic understanding of sex (Havelková, 2015, p. 1). Gradual but still limited steps have also been implemented in Greece.

In the Czech Republic same-sex couples cannot legally become co-parents, since they are entitled only to participate in registered partnerships, but not in marriage. Along the same lines in Greece, given that the legal system is based on the biological duality of man-woman, the same-sex marriage is an unrecognized citizens' right. These trends might not be surprising because in both countries the Gender Equality Index ranks lower than the European average (European Institute of Gender Equality, 2022).

Another example of the limiting rights of LGBTQIA+ people is Italy, where in the Fall of 2021 the Senate rejected an ad-hoc law proposal – known as ‘DdL Zan’ – that aimed to protect non-binary, transgender and fluid identities from discrimination (Carlo, 2021; Gusmeroli, 2023). The proposal was criticized by right-wing parties and Catholic groups (Ruiu & Gonano, 2020). Despite social movements and marches in support of LGBTQIA+ rights, the Bill is still much discussed and has not been proposed again (Spinelli, Togni & Viaggiani, 2022).

In terms of actions aimed at preventing gender discrimination and safeguarding gender equality, a more dynamic stance seems to have been adopted by countries such as Belgium (with antidiscrimination legislation in place, institutes managing gender equality and anti-discrimination laws), Portugal (with the Gender Equality Law having been implemented in 2014 and Portugal being one of the first countries in the world to legalize same-sex marriage (2010)), Spain (with parity law having been approved since 2006 and 2007 respectively) and Sweden (where multiple legal initiatives have been taken since 1987 such as the legal measure banning discrimination against homosexuals). At the other end of the spectrum in countries such as the Czech Republic and Greece (Papathanassopoulos et al., 2008, p. 6), despite the policies supporting gender equality, societies have not yet fully implemented nor assimilated the concepts of equality and non-discrimination.

Considering sexual violence, attention to this issue has been paid by all countries. Depending on the country, legislations are more or less extensive. However, public debate and online discourse about sexual violence is present in all countries. Femicide is often discussed since some countries (like Greece and Italy) have faced a rise in femicide cases. According to the latest data from the Ministry of the Interior of Italy, in 2022 there were 319 homicides in this country, of which 135 with female victims (about 40%). A total of 140 episodes took place in a domestic context and in these cases 103 of them affected women (nearly 74%). Italy issued a specific law (Law 69/2019) which introduces aggravating circumstances for domestic violence (Sorrentino et al, 2020).

Debates on topics like honour killings also take place in countries such as Turkey (Peschke et al., 2023). When looking at existing legislations, we notice that some countries (e.g., Belgium, Portugal and Spain, mentioned in Lagrange et al., 2023) have laws in place to prevent sexual violence and help victims. In Sweden, for example, it is also specified that conviction for rape does not presuppose the use of violence or threat on the part of the offender, reflecting a paradigm of a more progressive country with regards to sexual violence legislations (Björner, 2023). Even though sexual violence legislations still need a lot of work in all countries, some are more behind than others. For instance, the Czech Republic’s current laws regarding sexual violence state that there must be psychological or physical pressure in order for an action to be considered sexual violence. This leaves no room for acts of sexual violence where this isn’t the case but consent was still not given (Doudaki & Hroch, 2023).

Finally, some countries still don't act in accordance with the Istanbul Convention. For example, in Bulgaria one of the problems is the anti-LGBTQIA+ rhetoric of politicians that can be found in media publications on the subject of gender. Furthermore, Turkey went so far as to terminate the Istanbul Convention (Peschke et al., 2023). This has already demanded a lot from women and LGBTQIA+ rights.

3.2. Gender Discourses in Social Media Representations

Looking carefully at the concluding remarks of the national reports, we can identify the following observations with regards to social media representations occurring more frequently than others. Identity is largely mentioned as one of the most frequently mentioned representations (in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Portugal, Sweden and Turkey) (Björner, 2023; Doudaki & Hroch, 2023; Peschke et al., 2023), followed by People (Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany and Greece) and Values (Belgium, Italy, Spain and Turkey) and then by Public Sphere (Czech Republic, Sweden and Italy), Law (Belgium and Turkey) and Culture (Greece and Portugal) (Björner, 2023; Doudaki & Hroch, 2023; Grassmuck & Thomass, 2023; Lagrange et al., 2023; Peschke et al., 2023). Only in the case of Greece, the representation New Social Movements was found to be one of the most frequent ones (Papathanassopoulos, 2023, p. 8). This peculiarity can be partly attributed to an ongoing digital public discourse on the rise of the Greek Me Too Movement combined with the increasing cases of femicides.

Exceptions to the predominance of identity representation can be found in Germany, where it is the least occurring dimension (Grassmuck & Thomass, 2023, p. 6), and in Greece where identity lacks presence on social media platforms (Papathanassopoulos et al., 2023, pp. 8-9). Moreover, the case of Germany stands out in the prioritization of people's representation within a context of gender debates framed by loud far-right voices. The prominence of the people dimension indicates the direction of public debate towards safeguarding gender-related rights and ensuring their enforcement (Grassmuck & Thomass, 2023, pp. 7-8). On the other hand, the focus of Sweden and Italy on public sphere and identity dimensions can be partly attributed to the discussions about gender-related issues (abortion rights issues emerged in the USA, the threat faced by LGBTQIA+ people in Poland, men's violence against women), usually raised by non-political actors (Björner, 2023, pp. 5-6). These identity issues become subjects of the public sphere in various particular moments (e.g. the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women on November 25th). News on participation in marches and demonstrations has increased (particularly in Italy) the volume of social media representations of identity and public sphere dimensions.

Finally, it is observed that the vast majority of posts bear a neutral tone across all countries.

3.3. Comparison Europe/non-Europe in relation to the Representation of Gender on Social Media Posts

According to the relevant data, Europe-related posts focusing on gender issues fall short in number compared to non-Europe-related ones across different countries, such as the Czech Republic, Greece, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Germany (Björner, 2023; Doudaki & Hroch, 2023; Grassmuck & Thomass, 2023).

The Czech Republic and Sweden share similarities in terms of several representations which link to the notions of public sphere, identity, culture and new social movements, which appear more frequently in non-Europe-related content compared to the Europe-related one. In Greece non-Europe-related posts embrace mainly topics of new social movements and people (Papathanassopoulos et al., 2023, p. 13). In Sweden, Czech Republic and Germany the tendency of social media users' addressing aspects of gender debate from a national rather than a European perspective may have been influenced by the strongly electoral background of the period under scrutiny. Particularly, in Germany, even the Europe-related content is to a great extent characterized by a national, regional or local perspective on the country's gender-related issues (Grassmuck & Thomass, 2023, p. 11).

If we take a look at the Europe-related posts, it is obvious that most national reports mention the topic of law (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Sweden and Turkey) and refer to values (Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Portugal, Spain and Sweden) as the most occurring representations (Björner, 2023; Doudaki & Hroch, 2023; Grassmuck & Thomass, 2023; Lagrange et al., 2023; Peschke et al., 2023).

In the case of Sweden this trend appears in discussions regarding the right to abortion (in relation to US legislations). In the case of the Czech Republic the frequent appearance of law and values in Europe-oriented content may reflect the need of the country to respond more explicitly to the European values of gender equality, gender balance, neutrality, non-discrimination, as well as the need to comply with the European standards, policies and directives regarding gender (Doudaki & Hroch, 2023, p. 15). In the case of Germany, the value dimension is found in law-making and in civil society initiatives, in posts mentioning international days of commemoration or award ceremonies for the progress being made as well as in posts about gender-related values infringement (Grassmuck & Thomass, 2023, p. 11). In the case of Greece the topics law and values are found in Europe-oriented posts which raise the need for a number of initiatives (the removal of obstacles regarding the rights of LGBTQIA+ community, the inclusion of gender-based violence as a crime in the European legislation combined with the legal initiatives aimed at dealing with this type of violence, the necessary vigilance to effectively address femicide as a major social pathogenesis and the legal recognition of the relevant term) (Papathanassopoulos et al., 2023, p. 13). In the case of Italy, the representation of law can be found in Europe-oriented posts raising the public

strategy focusing on gender equality. In particular, it is mentioned in relation to the 'National Strategy for Gender Equality' approved in July 2021 and in comparison to the European parameters in terms of Gender Equality.

Social media representations with a focus on people (Belgium and Bulgaria) and more general the public sphere (Belgium and Italy) are mentioned twice in Europe-related posts, while references to culture (Portugal) and new social movements (Turkey) are only mentioned once (2023; Lagrange et al., 2023; Peschke et al., 2023).

3.4. Comparison Media/non-Media in relation to the Representation of Gender on Social Media Posts

In a lot of countries (Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, Bulgaria, Greece and Sweden) there seem to exist a lot fewer posts emanating from media organizations compared to those derived from non-media-related sources. Moreover, in several countries (Sweden, Czech Republic and Greece) the social media posts derived from non-media accounts incorporate on average more aspects of gender-related representations compared to media posts (Björner, 2023, p. 12, Papathanassopoulos et al., 2023, p. 20). Germany is an exception to this trend since there are on average the same number of representations included in media and non-media posts (Björner, 2023; Doudaki & Hroch, 2023; Grassmuck & Thomass, 2023; Lagrange et al., 2023).

In some cases, like Sweden and the Czech Republic, public sphere and identity appear more often in non-media posts on gender compared to media posts (Björner, 2023, p. 14). In the Czech Republic this is also the case for social media representations of new social movements (Doudaki & Hroch, 2023, p. 19). In Greece, the non-media posts often represent users criticizing policy failures or stereotypes afflicting Greek society (Papathanassopoulos et al., 2023, p. 20). Hence, topics like new social movements, people and culture frequently appear in non-media content. On the other hand, in the case of Germany people and political actors talk about gender-related laws in relation to these laws' enforcement and the values connected to them. This results in a high frequency of social media representations of law and values in non-media posts (Grassmuck & Thomass, 2023, p. 16). In Bulgaria, posts coming from media outlets can be defined as more *descriptive* and often lead to articles that have in-depth content. Conversely, non-media posts (such as from prominent public influencers or politicians) carry an evaluative or manipulative nature.

With regards to the media posts, in more than half of the national reports (Czech Republic, Greece, Italy, Spain, Sweden and Turkey) law is mentioned as one of the most frequent social media representations compared to non-media posts. Four of the reports mention culture (Czech Republic, Germany, Spain and Sweden), people (Czech Republic, Italy, Spain and Sweden) and values (Czech Republic, Greece, Spain and Turkey) and only two of them

mention the public sphere (Belgium and Spain), identity (Bulgaria and Spain) and new social movements (Germany and Turkey).

Some of the above-mentioned trends are directly related to the public debates unfolding within the national contexts. For instance, in the case of Italy the media posts on law focus on the decision of the Italian Senate against a law proposal on LGBTQIA+ rights. In Germany, posts about social movements often are related to gender activists expressing their cautious optimism about the coalition Treaty (Grassmuck & Thomass, 2023, p. 8). In Sweden, media posts often include social media representation, since many non-political actors participate in gender-related discussions and talk about people (Björner, 2023, p. 11). In the Czech Republic, media posts incorporate social media representations values and people more often than non-media posts (Doudaki & Hroch, 2023, p. 19) in a context in which hegemonic ideas and discourses are raised.

4. A Future Scenario Analysis

4.1. The Delphi+ Method and the Data Gathering

4.1.1. The Delphi+ Method

In order to gather and build future scenarios, we decided to use the Delphi+ method. This method can be seen as a 'controlled debate' (Carpentier & Hroch, 2023, p. 3; Gordon, 2009). Meaning, it is a debate between people who all contribute to find a solution to a complex debate. All ideas are valuable, but in order to find a consensus, the Delphi+ method structures the communication between all people (Carpentier & Hroch, 2023, p. 3; Landeta, 2006, p. 468). This controlled debate is often used to discuss possible future scenarios. These scenarios can be defined as possible, probable and sometimes preferable. By participating in the debate, people don't simply try to predict the future, they try to map various alternative futures to find desired futures and shape our present accordingly (Carpentier & Hroch, 2023, p. 3; Inayatullah, 2012, p. 37).

In the case of EUMEPLAT, we used the Delphi+ method to guide four-hour scenario-building workshops which took place in Prague, Malmo, Rome, Sofia. These workshops focused on five themes, one of which being 'Gender in Societies'. Each workshop consisted of two stages. The first being discussions in smaller groups with the aim to produce three future scenarios for all of the themes. Afterwards, the smaller groups came together and (some of) the scenarios were explained to everyone (Carpentier & Hroch, 2023, p. 4). This second part was necessary in order to come to a consensus about the desirability, likelihood etc. of the scenarios (Carpentier & Hroch, 2023, p. 5). The workshops had in total 29 participants, selected by the local EUMEPLAT research group, bringing their own valuable insights to the table (Carpentier & Hroch, 2023, p. 4). They came from different societal fields but all were imaginative and worked future-oriented (e.g. artists, experts, etc.). Despite the difference in their activities, all of their work was fundamentally related to Europe and digital media platforms (Carpentier & Hroch, 2023, p. 6).

After the four workshops, all scenarios were shared with the other EUMEPLAT members. For the scope of this report, we focus on the scenarios on the theme 'Gender in Societies'. Next to this, different EUMEPLAT members also worked on thinking out possible future scenarios. The ones about gender were also used in this analysis.

4.1.2. Data Gathering

To start, we made a list with the titles from all the scenarios.

Table 1. List of scenarios

SCEN 1 - ESSAY. What if differences in views on gender - and depictions of this in media – escalated, resulting in deepened polarization and alienation, further fuelling increased division between countries, cultures, and groups of people?	SCEN 12 - ESSAY. What if the 'new right' in Europe, in 20 years, were to increasingly use feminist discourse to discriminate against those who are not receptive to feminist values?	SCEN 23 - ESSAY. What if women ruled the world?
SCEN 2 - ESSAY. What if worldwide media organizations were mostly run by women and LGBTQIA+ people, positioned at top managerial posts? How would this condition impact the diversity of (journalistic) content?	SCEN 13 - ESSAY. What could have happened if countries were not affected by other countries' gender politics?	SCEN 24 - ESSAY. What if platforms produced irreversible narratives of gender identities?
SCEN 3 - ESSAY. What would happen if artificial intelligence helped us to design more integrated populations by applying feminist urbanism and promoting women in rural areas?	SCEN 14 - ESSAY. What if all positive discrimination and affirmative action --the measures to achieve effective parity between, and equal opportunities for, women and men-- were eliminated?	SCEN 25 - ESSAY. What if there were a social media platform that quantified the certainty of how people feel about their gender identity?
SCEN 4 - ESSAY. What if filters on social media allowed users to believably change their secondary sex characteristics in pictures and videos?	SCEN 15 - ESSAY. What if #MeToo would be turned into a social media platform?	SCEN 26 – DELPHI+ Rome. Hyper fragmentation of identity
SCEN 5 – DELPHI+ Rome. Reverse gender tradition	SCEN 16 – DELPHI+ Rome. Women take over all ICT	SCEN 27 – DELPHI+ Rome. Activism without platforms
SCEN 6 – DELPHI+ Rome. Running in circles (the rise of digital patriarchy)	SCEN 17 – DELPHI+ Rome. A society overconsumed by gender identities	SCEN 28 – DELPHI+ Rome. Dissolution of identities
SCEN 7 – DELPHI+ Rome. Rebirth and remix of subcultures	SCEN 18 – DELPHI+ Sofia. Cloned platforms	SCEN 29 – DELPHI+ Sofia. Diversity rose glasses

SCEN 8 – DELPHI+ Sofia. Human rights approach	SCEN 19 – DELPHI+ Sofia. Gen(der)less	SCEN 30 – DELPHI+ Sofia. Cyborg as a new gender
SCEN 9 – DELPHI+ Sofia. Disorientation	SCEN 20 – DELPHI+ Sofia. Platforms –gender intersectionality with youth	SCEN 31 – DELPHI+ Malmö. Platforms give people voice
SCEN 10 – DELPHI+ Malmö. New Values	SCEN 21 – DELPHI+ Malmö. Realism	SCEN 32 – DELPHI+ Malmö. Dealing with and counteracting hatred towards women, vulnerable groups, etc.
SCEN 11 – DELPHI+ Malmö. Pessimism	SCEN 22 – DELPHI+ Malmö. Kardashianisation	SCEN 33 – DELPHI+ Malmö. Avatars mating

Table: List of Future Scenarios on Gender

When gathering the data, we noticed that all gender scenarios could be analyzed by using two criteria. We looked at them from a *utopian-dystopian* perspective and from a view that analyzed whether they were *safe or unsafe*. This means that all scenarios were put on two axes. We first checked whether the authors described the scenarios as rather utopian or dystopian. Meaning, are the scenarios describing ideal conditions? Are they not necessarily practical or real, but idealistic? Furthermore, do they take intersectionality into account and are they thus truly and fully positive? If they are, that means they are utopian. However, some of the scenarios were described by the authors as rather dystopian, meaning not necessarily realistic, but negative, and with consequences that can spiral out of control. Afterwards, we analyzed whether the scenarios were seen as describing safe or unsafe situations with regards to gender. The scenarios were considered safe if they described narratives moving towards gender equality and freedom of gender identity and expression. Safe scenarios can include legal frameworks and describe situations far from physical and psychological danger. Moreover, they do not allow discrimination, injustice or exclusion. In opposition to this, scenarios were seen as unsafe when their narratives moved away from gender equality and freedom. Unsafe scenarios also had a lack of legal frameworks for the protection of gender equality. An important note in relation to these axes is that we analyzed the scenarios based on the way they were delivered to us. Meaning, we described scenarios as utopian/dystopian and safe/unsafe only if the authors of the scenarios viewed these possible futures in these ways.

Next, whilst analyzing the scenarios we also identified three themes: (1) *Gender over Time and Space: Fluidity, (Un)certainty and Change*; (2) *Doing Gender: Embodiment and Representation of Gender*; (3) *Gender and Collectivity: Resilience, Activism and Solidarity*. All scenarios fell under those three in some sense. Therefore, we decided to focus on these three themes to give a general idea of what the scenarios look like. We explain the themes by focusing on excerpts mainly from three examples of future scenarios. These three main examples were chosen because they can be seen as diverse in relation to the two axes utopian/dystopian and safe/unsafe. In this way, aside from illustrating the three general

themes, these three scenarios can give an idea of what might happen in utopian, dystopian, safe, unsafe, or rather neutral future worlds. Underneath you can see a graph with all the scenarios. The colors indicate different workshops, the green boxes refer to the scenarios suggested by EUMEPLAT members, and the three examples we mainly use are in blue.

Figure 1. Future scenarios

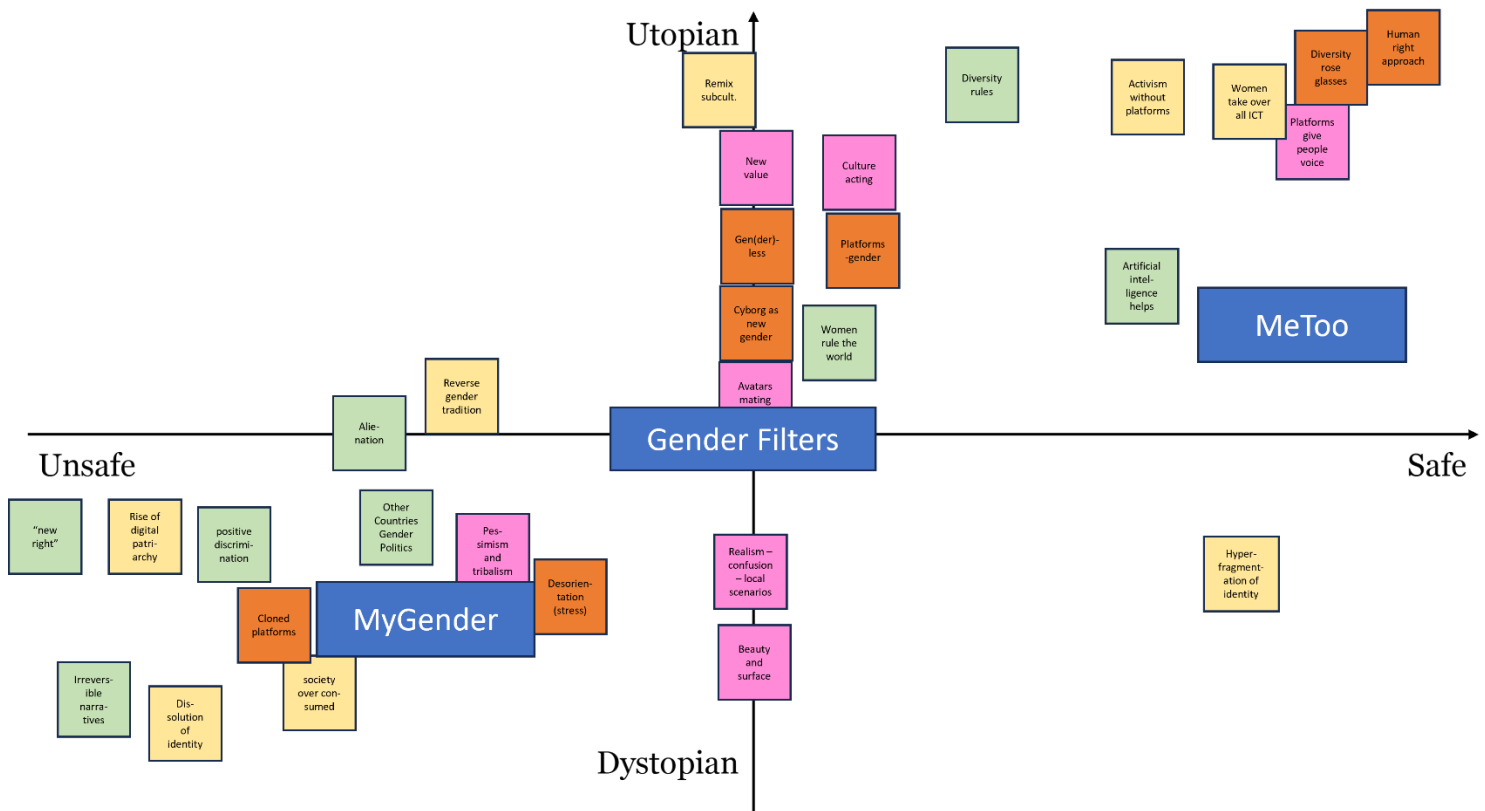


Figure: Graph of Future Scenarios on Gender

4.2. Analysis of the Future Scenarios: Three Themes

4.2.1. Gender over Time and Space: Fluidity, (Un)certainly and Change

The first theme has to do with the individual experiences of gender over time and space. Scenarios under this theme discuss the feelings, understandings and experiences of gender different people can have. They illustrate how ideas of gender can vary depending on the countries people live in or the communities they surround themselves with. Gender, in that

sense, is something cultural. The scenarios also show how gender identities and our perception of them can fluctuate over time. One of the scenarios for example imagines a future where there would be even more gender identities identified (SCEN 26 – DELPHI+ Rome). Our ways of addressing gender identities has and most probably will fluctuate over time. Moreover, not only is this non-fixedness of gender identities seen in relation to their conceptualisation, it can also be found when looking at the individual experiences of people. People's gender identities can fluctuate over their lifetime. Both gender identities and one's gender journey can be fluid and are not necessarily fixed. However, this is something that is not necessarily fully recognised by societies and their legislations today. The future scenarios could therefore enhance the idea that gender needs to be something fixed or could move away from this misconception (example of the latter: SCEN 19 – DELPHI+ Sofia). The future scenarios we received focused on these different topics, partly related to social media. These latter scenarios focused for example not only on future ideas of gender, but also on the way these ideas would be distributed and get a place on social media.

To illustrate this theme more in depth, we focus on one of the future scenarios. "What if there would be a social media platform that quantified the certainty of how people feel about their gender identity?" (SCEN 25 - ESSAY). This scenario imagines a world where expecting certainty of one's gender identity is taken even further than it is today. It is about a social media platform, *MyGender*, where people give information about their gender. However, it is also used as a surveillance app to decide whether people can take certain medical, legal ... steps in their transgender journey. It is written as a scenario that is unsafe and rather dystopian (SCEN 25 - ESSAY).

Societies today expect certainty from people about their gender identities. This is notable in the future scenario on *MyGender*. Moreover, the world is not built for the fluidity and changes that can be inherent when it comes to gender. This is reflected in the legislations various countries have in place in relation to for example transgender care. "When looking at legislations regarding transgender care, we see a variety of laws and legislations across European countries. Whereas some countries (e.g. Bulgaria, Albania, North Macedonia and Hungary) don't have any legislations regarding the recognition of transgender people, others do but with numerous conditions transgender people need to meet in order to be eligible (Transgender Infopunt, 2023)." (SCEN 25 - ESSAY). These required conditions are in place in order to have some sort of representation of the certainty with which transgender people experience their gender identity. This future scenario takes the idea of the necessity of certainty further by describing a future where everyone (starting from the moment one leaves kindergarten) needs to have an account on the surveillance social media app *MyGender*. The future scenarios describes the app and its use as follows:

"Every day, *MyGender* asks you to fill in a questionnaire. This questionnaire is made up of different questions aimed to understand one's current gender identity and expression.

For young kids questions are asked like “do you feel like a boy today?” or “which outfit do you prefer wearing?” together with five outfits ranging from very masculine to androgynous to very feminine presenting. The questions change with the users’ ages. ... Each day people’s answers are turned into percentages. These show how much you felt like a woman, a man, a non-binary person ... during that day. The percentages then get saved on your identity card. ... If transgender people want to start certain procedures in their trans journey (like hormone therapy), they have to receive green light from the specialists in question (like doctors). These specialists are legally obliged to consult the saved percentages on the identity cards. Only when during 10 years their patients have had a high enough percentage of the gender they say they are, specialists can start thinking about allowing the requested procedures. The exact percentages vary from 70 to 100% depending on the procedure.” (SCEN 25 - ESSAY).

This is an example of a scenario where the idea of certainty in relation to gender identity has been taken too far. The scenario is an illustration of how societies today and possible future societies don’t leave room for the very normal doubt transgender people can experience (since lack of representation etc. is the perfect fuel for doubt) and the fluidity that can be inherent to certain gender identities. In short, scenarios under this first theme talk about gender in relation to certainty-uncertainty, fluidity, and change over time and space.

4.2.2. Doing Gender: Embodiment and Representation of Gender

The second theme we identified covers scenarios addressing ways of doing gender. Again, these scenarios find themselves on an individual level. However, where the first theme considers the way people experience, feel and conceptualize gender, the second theme looks at gender’s representation and embodiment. Scenarios under this second theme talk about what representing one’s gender and gender identities can look like. Moreover, some of the scenarios under this theme also cover topics like believability (e.g. SCEN 4 - ESSAY and SCEN 24 - ESSAY). They discuss the relation of gender embodiment with being believed by others or not. Meaning, next to embodiment and representing, scenarios also talk about the perceiving of these representations and images. One of the scenarios does this by imagining a deep fake inspired future in relation to gender (SCEN 24 - ESSAY). Most of the scenarios also discuss these topics of representation, embodiment and perception in relation to social media. To illustrate this theme better we focus on a scenario that covers all aspects of the theme and brings these in relation to social media. “What if filters on social media would allow users to believably change their secondary sex characteristics in pictures and videos?” (SCEN 4 - ESSAY). This scenario talks about filters that are able to believably change one’s secondary sex characteristics in pictures and videos. This scenario is described by the author as having both dystopian and utopian, and safe and unsafe aspects (SCEN 4 - ESSAY).

The future scenario talks about authenticity online in relation to gender. It mentions how people on social media “try to show their most “authentic self” in order to be relatable and/or real to their followers (Banet-Weiser, 2021).” (SCEN 4 - ESSAY). However, as the scenario mentions: “this self is always influenced by culture and social norms (Banet-Weiser, 2021)” (SCEN 4 - ESSAY). Likewise, this self is influenced by cultural and social norms about gender representation. “When users try to show their most “authentic self” online, they can be confronted with online gender norms. These norms raise the question of what to do with one’s gender identity and expression online (Kondakciu, Souto, & Zayer, 2021). Can one’s gender identity and expression be shown and how? Is it safe for people to do so and are they inauthentic if they don’t? There is a tension between those two aspects.” (SCEN 4 - ESSAY). In this context, the scenario imagines that a certain kind of social media filter will be invented. These filters have the ability to believably change one’s secondary sex characteristics in pictures and videos online. By doing this, the filters allow users to represent their gender in a way that feels true to themselves. Alternatively, the filters can also be used by people who believe their voice might be taken more seriously if people imagined them to be another gender. Aside from the possible result in gender euphoria or rise in authority (depending on the reason for the usage of the filters), these filters can also have negative effects. Online euphoria could make people more dysphoric offline (using the filters could lead to a backlash if followers/friends/family would know about the usage and would call the users “fake”) and we could question whether true gender equality in relation to authority can be reached without any diverse gender representation (SCEN 4 - ESSAY). This scenario is thus rather neutral in relation to the two axes. It also illustrates both various ideas of gender embodiment and representation online and the relation of this with believability and perception by others.

4.2.3. Gender and Collectivity: Resilience, Activism and Solidarity

Lastly, we focus on the third theme. Topics under this theme are about gender in relation to collectivity. Meaning, these future scenarios talk about activism in relation to equal opportunities and gender rights. They mention for example topics like “what if women ruled the world” or they talk about situations where only women would run certain fields (for example ICT) (SCEN 16 – DELPHI+ Rome, SCEN 23 - ESSAY). They also discuss possible futures where gender equality is back to where it was several years ago (e.g. SCEN 14 - ESSAY). Some of the scenarios also bring these topics in relation to social media. One of them for example portrays a future where activism would be fully offline and not rely on online platforms (SCEN 27 – DELPHI+ Rome). The scenarios under this theme illustrate possible futures either with or without resilience towards gender inequality and with or without solidarity for victims of gender issues. We now go on to illustrate this theme by focusing on the following example: “What if #MeToo would be turned into a social media platform?” (SCEN 15 - ESSAY). This scenario imagines a future where there would be more safety in relation to gendered violence

due to the installation of a specific social media app, *MeToo*. The author of this scenario portrays this as safe and rather utopian. The scenario is also one of the examples that connects possible future ideas of activism with social media. Indeed, it situates a world where #MeToo is turned into a safety and informational social media app, *MeToo* (SCEN 15 - ESSAY).

“... this app is a positive future scenario as it extends the positive impact of #MeToo with regards to representation, recognition and knowledge of sexual violence. By posting their own experiences, people break the taboo around sexual violence and further the effect of #MeToo. By sharing information on sexual violence and help for victims, people create needed knowledge. This knowledge is being shared on a social media app, making it accessible for a very broad audience. Lastly, the map can be seen as an archive and a useful tool about safety and unsafety. People can consult the map to gain space and time specific information about sexual violence and (un)safety. Whereas some of the app’s features already exist in different forms today, in 20 years from now the app *MeToo* enriches the possibilities of these existing features by broadening them and bringing them together in one platform. To conclude, this app can be seen as a positive extension of the hashtag. The app breaks taboos and creates recognition, representation and acknowledgment of sexual violence and its impact.” (SCEN 15 - ESSAY).

The scenario, like others under this theme, starts by looking at current forms of activism. In this example: current forms of dealing with sexual violence such as #MeToo and Meldet (<https://meldet.org/>) (SCEN 15 - ESSAY). Scenarios of this third theme then continue to think about ways in which these forms of activism could be strengthened, held back or kept the same. This particular scenario looks at the first (SCEN 15 - ESSAY). More specifically, it is an illustration of a strengthening of current activism by using social media. The other scenarios from this third theme work in similar ways.

5. Conclusion

As people we are embedded in culture. Our sex comes with social and cultural expectations, which can result in sex-based discrimination. Our gender is produced and maintained by culture and politics, leaving it vulnerable for discriminatory connotations, associations and consequences. The process of othering explains how discrimination happens. It can also be used to understand intragroup discrimination. Othering and discrimination also takes place and gets represented on social media. Data from previous EUMEPLAT deliverables helped us understand both the contexts of some European countries in relation to gender, and the ways in which gender and gendered othering are represented on social media posts of these countries. All countries participating in the EUMEPLAT project signed the Istanbul Convention, although Turkey terminated its acceptance. This results in a diverse representation of gender in the legal systems of all countries. Just like there are national differences with regards to gender legislations, there are also national differences in relation to the representation of gender issues on social media.

Both the theoretical information and the provided data by EUMEPLAT give us an idea about the current situation in relation to gendered othering and social media. They also both fuel this deliverable with knowledge to think about how ideas, issues, representations etc. in relation to gender might change in 20 to 30 years from now. We've done this by analyzing different scenarios provided to us. In Delphi+ workshops, people got asked how they imagined possible futures. This deliverable looked at the participants' answers about gender. We also consulted different scenarios on gender thought out by members of the EUMEPLAT project. We analyzed all relevant scenarios and identified three different types.

1. Scenarios that talk about *feelings, ideas* and *conceptualisations* of gender.
2. Scenarios that talk about the *embodiment* of gender.
3. Scenarios that covered topics of *activism* and *collectivity*.

In all themes there were scenarios talking about gender and social media. For the scope of this deliverable, these takes were highlighted. The scenarios of these three themes were all also identifiable on two axes: utopian/dystopian and safe/unsafe. Analyzing the scenarios on these axes and under these themes allows us to grasp the various ideas people have about possible futures in relation to gender and gendered othering, particularly on social media. This can in turn fuel questions about what we as a society could do now. What can we do to respectively prevent and encourage dangerous and desirable possible future scenarios?

On the basis of the analysis of the future scenarios it became clear that there are different contexts in different European countries and that this context is important in the way the future scenarios in relation to gender are formulated and seen as rather utopian and dystopian or safe and unsafe. The legal framework is seen as an important contextual element and is also seen as an area - which in some cases (i.e countries) - there is still some work to

be done. A broader development of European values reflected in legislation is one of the arguments which seems to be present. Media and more in particular social media platforms are seen as an important material place and space where gender is performed and articulated. Especially the idea of fluidity of a gender identity is related to the material aspect of social media platforms and what these technologies can do. In the scenarios the idea that social media space needs to be a safe space especially in relation to express gender identities is prominent. Despite the general concern about the polarisation online, including the backlash in some European countries, media platforms are seen as a place of 'action' from the place for individual expressions of gender identities to a place of collectivity and gender activism.

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