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# Future-Oriented and Gender Aware Online Counselling Model

## Fostering Gender Awareness Amongst Social Service Students

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<p>The aim of this functional thesis was to develop a future-oriented online counselling model with a gender aware approach. The idea for the development emerged from one of the writer's priorly existing prototype within Metropolia University of Applied Sciences' own project called Creating Positive Future – FUTU project. As a request by FUTU, the thesis working life partner, the prototype was then transformed into the current version of the counselling model, presented in this paper.</p> <p>In addition to FUTU project, collaboration was done with social service students from Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, by organising individual interviews to delve into the topics of gender, gender awareness and future-oriented counselling. Furthermore, a group workshop was held to facilitate further discussion and reflection on the topic, as well as to gather feedback and developmental ideas for the counselling model.</p> <p>FUTU's target group are young people aged 16 to 29 who are in risk of social exclusion due to being absent from school and working life. While youth as a transitional phase brings about exciting changes, uncertainty and confusion are quite common when having to figure out a new adult identity. Moreover, youth surveys show increased worry and anxiety amongst youth towards their future.</p> <p>Gender norms and assumptions can determine a lot in an individual's life. For example, by restricting career choices and ways of self-expression. Furthermore, the guidance received throughout life from different authorities, shapes people's worldviews and guides their actions. Therefore, professionals with an open mindset as well as the tools for putting gender aware future-oriented counselling into practice, can be seen as a key aspect in supporting young people in creating trust in themselves and their future.</p> <p>The gender aware future-oriented counselling model works as a tool for professionals working with youth. It includes a set of exercises that concentrate on exploring the young person's understanding of self, while emphasising on building the young client's positive future image and finding their place in society. Moreover, the model includes pointers and additional links for increasing gender awareness for both, the professional and the client. The finalised counselling model will be published by FUTU project and will be available for everyone to utilise.</p>	
Keywords	gender awareness, youth counselling, future-oriented counselling, workshop, online counselling model

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<p>Toiminnallisen opinnäytetyön tavoitteena oli kehittää tulevaisuussuuntainen verkko-ohjausmalli sukupuolitietoisella otteella. Idea mallin kehittämiseen lähti toisen opinnäytetyöntekijän Metropolia Ammattikorkeakoulun FUTU – Creating positive future -projektille tekemästä ohjausmallin prototyypistä. Opinnäytetyön työelämäkumppani FUTU:n pyynnöstä lähdettiin prototyyppiä kehittämään sen nykyiseen muotoon. Verkko-ohjausmalli on esiteltynä opinnäytetyössä.</p> <p>FUTU-projektin yhteistyötä tehtiin sosionomiopiskelijoiden kanssa haastatteleamalla heitä. Haastatteluissa syvennyttiin sukupuoleen, sukupuolitietoisuuden ja tulevaisuussuuntaisen ohjauksen käsitteisiin. Aiheeseen liittyen järjestettiin myös ryhmätyöpaja opiskelijoille, jonka tarkoituksena oli edistää syvällisempää keskustelua ja pohdiskelua aiheesta, kuin myös kerätä palautetta ohjausmallista.</p> <p>FUTU:n kohderyhmä on 16–29-vuotiaat syrjäytymisvaarassa olevat nuoret, jotka ovat ilman töitä tai opiskelupaikkaa. Vaikka nuoruus elämänvaiheena tuo paljon jännittäviä muutoksia, ovat epävarmuus ja sekavuus melko yleisiä nuoren rakentaessa omaa aikuista identiteettiään. Myös nuorisobarometrit osoittavat nuorten huolestuneisuuden ja ahdistuneisuuden omasta tulevaisuudestaan lisääntyneen.</p> <p>Sukupuolinormit ja oletukset voivat määrittää monia asioita yksilön elämässä, esimerkiksi rajaten ammatinvalintaa tai itseilmausta. Samoin elämänvarrella saatu ohjaus eri tahoilta, muokkaa yksilön maailmankuvaa ohjaten hänen tekojaan. Tästä syystä, koemme nuorten tukemisen niin omaan itseen kuin omaan tulevaisuuteen luottamisessa, nojautuvan pitkälti ammattilaisten avarakatseisuuteen ja sukupuolitietoista työskentelytapaa tukeviin työkaluihin.</p> <p>Sukupuolitietoinen tulevaisuussuuntainen ohjausmalli toimii työkaluna nuorten kanssa työskenteleville ammattilaisille. Ohjausmalli sisältää harjoitteita, jotka keskittyvät tutkimaan nuoren ymmärrystä itsestään, korostaen nuoren positiivisen tulevaisuuskuvaan rakentamista ja paikkansa löytämistä yhteiskunnasta. Ohjausmallissa on myös vinkkejä ja linkkejä sukupuolitietoisuudesta niin ohjaajalle, kuin ohjattavalle. FUTU-projekti julkaisee viimeistelyn version ohjausmallista, joka on kaikkien saatavissa.</p>	
Avainsanat	sukupuolitietoisuus, nuorten ohjaus, tulevaisuussuuntainen ohjaus, työpaja, verkko-ohjausmalli

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# 1 Introduction

As future social service professionals, we must follow the key ethical principles of human dignity, human rights, and social justice in our work and promote equality while acknowledging the uniqueness of every individual (Talentia, 2019). Therefore, we deem it essential to understand the complexity around gender and gender identification to ensure equality by responding to the client's individual needs and decreasing negative discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation. This sort of working manner is also required of social field professionals according to the Finnish equality legislation (Finlex, 2022). Besides, as students and future graduates of Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, we intend to support the institution's sustainable development objectives by acting as responsible members of our community. Above all, we see our development task of promoting equality and diversity while supporting inclusion and justice in our society as two of Metropolia's sustainable development goals. (Metropolia, 2022).

The purpose of this thesis was to develop a future-oriented youth counselling model with a gender-aware approach. For reliability of the study, gathering background data on the students' familiarity and comprehension of the topics of gender, gender awareness, and future-oriented counselling helped us to clarify the need for our development task and to explain the standing point of the participants evaluating the model. Furthermore, in accordance with Metropolia's sustainable development goals, we wished to promote gender awareness among social services students through a group workshop. The workshop also functioned as a platform for gathering feedback from the participants on our counselling model, which served as highly appreciated data for developing a more functional and beneficial tool.

The idea for this functional thesis emerged from one of the writer's previously existing online counselling model prototype within a project called FUTU. Consequently, as a request by the FUTU project as the working life partner for this thesis, the prototype was then transformed into the current version of the counselling model that this paper represents. Due to common interests in working with youth and exploring gender awareness in social service practice, two students joined forces to work together on these topics and to produce a tool that future social service professionals could utilise.

FUTU's target group are young people between the ages of 16 and 29, who are at risk of social exclusion due to being absent from school and working life. While youth as a transitional phase brings about exciting changes, uncertainty and confusion are quite common when having to figure out a new adult identity. Gender is an important aspect of the identity construction process for a young individual, one that is the central theme in the FUTU project as well. Youth is certainly a phase where gender roles and assumptions can determine a lot in an individual's life. For example, young people's perceptions of gender-related social norms can restrict their career choices and create difficulties in expressing needs and emotions.

This paper begins with getting familiar with the working life partner FUTU and proceeds with describing future-oriented counselling. As a theoretical background that aids in comprehending the subject of gender awareness, this paper explores the construction of concepts like gender and sex along with social cognitive theory and the development of gender roles in Western society, as well as offers an overview of gender equality in Finland. Ultimately, gender awareness theory is combined with social youth work to emphasise the need for our study. Then we move onto the implementation plan and the implementation itself in the following order: conducting individual interviews, developing the counselling model, and carrying out the workshop. This is followed by presenting the conclusions and evaluation of the process and results, as well as a discussion of our learning outcomes and further development ideas.

## **2 Creating positive future – FUTU Project**

### **2.1 A continuation of Motive project**

Creating Positive Future – FUTU project is a continuation of the Motive – New Methods in Youth's Future Oriented Work. The FUTU project is a joint project between Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, Valo-Valmennusyhdistys ry organisation (*Light-Training Association*), Stadin AO's (*Helsinki Vocational College and Adult Institute*) youth workshops and Espoo Hirviportti's small family home. (Metropolia, 2022). The Motive Project, which ran from March 2017 to October 2019, was aimed at assisting youth in underserved labour markets in developing their overall perspective on their lives while improving their abilities to detect barriers to professional growth, bolster their strengths, and construct realistic professional goals. (Metropolia 2019)

## 2.2 Goals of FUTU

The FUTU Project's aims are to create future-oriented counselling and operating models developed in respect of the everyday life adaptability and the youth's own premises, while supporting the functionality and working capability of the youth. The project also intends to provide recommendations on future-oriented counselling models and practises for multidisciplinary work based on the practical evaluation information developed in the process of the project. (Metropolia, 2022)

The FUTU project emphasises a youth-based approach in which everyone is seen as an individual through constructive and positive encounters. The approach aims to help young people see their future as full of positive possibilities worth pursuing. The counselling centres around three founding questions: Who am I? What am I good at? What am I capable of? These questions lead to identity work, which is about understanding oneself, recognising and verbalising one's skills, as well as acknowledging one's own opportunities. The first question (who am I ?) focuses on individualization; the second (What am I good at?) on competence; and the third (What am I capable of?) on self-efficacy. The three questions are meant to support the counsellor's conceptual framework for guidance and are not dealt with in themselves "directly" with the young person. (Raatikainen, 2021).

## 2.3 Target group of FUTU

The target group of FUTU project and the end beneficiaries of our development task are youth between 16 and 29 years of age who are not working, doing an internship, or in education leading to employment and are therefore at risk of social exclusion. The FUTU project especially focuses on youth who are clients of family group homes, outreach youth work and youth workshops. The project also pays close attention to immigrant girls, young people who are poorly attached to services and youth participating in different workshops. (Metropolia, 2022)

### 3 Future-oriented youth counselling

#### 3.1 Youth as a transitional phase

According to the Youth Act (72/2006), young people are those who are under 29 years of age. Adolescence is a phase of transition from childhood to adulthood, and the experience is a play between biological, psychological, and social factors, all in complex interaction. While adolescence brings exciting changes, uncertainty and confusion are quite common when letting go of childhood and figuring out their new adult identity. (Beckett & Taylor, 2016, pp. 109–110). WHO (2022a) emphasises that in this phase, young people need opportunities for meaningful participation and involvement. Hence, increasing these opportunities corresponds with answering their needs and rights. As the target group of our working life partner are young adults between ages 16–29, we consider the challenges of adolescence to be of importance in our study.

#### 3.2 Youth issues with future planning

Change is an inevitable phenomenon in human life as well as in society that has been relevant since the dawn of time. Whereas the velocity of change was moderate and foreseeable a few decades ago, technological advancement and the 1990s development of the internet have accelerated the speed of change, complicating if not enabling future predictions.

Change does not centre solely on societal and technological change. The environment is changing, and the environmental crisis is one factor increasing youth's anxiety and causing hopelessness and possible physical symptoms such as exhaustion and sleeping issues (Räyhäntausta, Sillfors and Viukari, 2019). With the exaggerated financial crisis, a smooth path of emancipation and involvement in working life through appropriate education is not as guaranteed as it was before (Helne, T. and Hivirilammi, T., 2021, p.10). According to Nuorisbarometri (*Youth survey*) 2016 surveys, worry about one's own future employment has increased, especially in females, which in contrast to males, shows also higher anxiety about one's future coping capabilities at work (Valtion nuorisoneuvosto, 2016). In addition, many are concerned about whether they are studying in the right field. That would be questioning the possibility of working according to one's own values or any future responsibilities they might have as a professionals in the field (Vahti, 2018).

Nuorisobarometri also highlighted the dropping rate of the youth's trust in the increase of their own generation's financial state, from 46% in 2007 to 27% in 2016. Youth's trust in Finland's future has dropped 19% from 2008, and only 25% of the survey participants were optimistic about the future of the world. Whereas the trust and optimistic perspective on the future have decreased, Nuorisobarometri revealed the youth still cherish traditional dreams such as the possibility to work in a job of one's own interest (99%), have close friends (98%), be in good physical condition (93%), permanent employment (89%), permanent romantic relationship (83%), having a lot of time to use for one's hobbies (81%), along others (Valtion nuorisoneuvosto, 2016).

Although the youth's image of the future has become more pessimistic and is causing more anxiety and worry for the future, we still see positivity, as the youth still have dreams for the future. Whereas many issues causing anxiety, such as future financial development or the state of the environment, are more in the hands of societal changes (Helne, T. and Hivirilammi, T., 2021), professionals working with youth can be the key element in handling the feelings of anxiety and fear as well as building up a brighter future image.

### 3.3 Future-oriented youth counselling

From the Nuorisobarometri survey results, youth anxiety and pessimism towards their personal, societal, and global future are on the increase. This topic has also gained a lot of attention in the media, whether it be focusing on youth's climate anxiety (Räyhän-tausta, Sillfors and Viukari, 2019) or in general worries about the future world on topics such as education, safety, democracy, health care, civilization, and the actions of safety authorities (Yle, 2017).

As mentioned earlier, youth is a very transformative period of life where an individual is usually moving from their childhood to adulthood while constructing their own independent and individual adult being. The future, be it imagining, dreaming, or constructing it, is a central topic in adolescence and in the identity-developing process (Raatikainen, 2019, p.3). From the news and research results, we can detect worry and anxiety about the future, which is why there is a need for support in the reflection process. Future-oriented counselling aims at constructing that future image and identity in an active and aware manner (Raatikainen, 2019, p.3)

Future-oriented counselling originates from a combination of futurology and comprehensive counselling orientation. The core of the counselling method lies in the image of the future being open and full of different opportunities, which can be influenced by one's own actions. Future-oriented counselling supports individuals to identify all possible opportunities and construct an understanding of the matters that influence their choices and actions. (Tulevaisuusohjaus, 2019).

Another key element of future-oriented counselling is the focus on supporting the individual to idealise and craft their own future in a positive manner (Tulevaisuusohjaus, 2019; Raatikainen 2019, p.3). On the counsellor's behalf, Raatikainen highlights Onnimaan's observation on the importance of acknowledging the client's existing knowledge, skills, feelings, and reactions while paying attention to their own attitudes and prejudices. It is essential that the client feels that the counsellor is on their side as well as someone sensible and worthy of trust (Raatikainen, 2019, p.3).

## **4 Understanding gender awareness**

### **4.1 The construction of sex and gender**

As Zosuls and associates (2011) describe, there was a significant turning point in the research of gender development in the 1970's, which led scholars to become more critical when using the concepts of "sex" and "gender" in their studies. What is more, several research findings emphasised social factors such as cognitive developmental processes and the role of the social environment as being more influential than biological factors in the development of gender. (Zosuls et al., 2011.) While the 70's brought new influential insights into the discussion, there continues to be contrasting perspectives on the subject as some do not accept the distinction between sex and gender. We have chosen the following interpretations of sex and gender to illustrate the relationship between these two concepts while focusing more on the social aspect of gender in our study.

As Fenstermaker & West (2002) describe, sex is a mutually decided classification of people into male and female categories based on fundamental biological criteria. Sex refers to biological (Edgar & Sedgwick, 2008, p. 139) and physiological differences between male, female, and intersex people (WHO, 2022b). According to WHO (2022b), sex correlates with our chromosomes, hormones, and anatomy. There are two legal

sexes in Finland, man and woman, which supports the binary conception. However, some people cannot be interpreted as representing either binary sex based on biological criteria (THL, 2022) since these can contradict one another (Fenstermaker & West, 2002).

In feminist theory, sex is seen as destined by biology (Butler, 2002), while gender represents a more fluid conception as it concentrates on socially constructed characteristics (Edgar and Sedgwick, 2008, p. 139; Bandura, 1989) shaped by humans themselves in a variety of cultural contexts throughout time. These characteristics include sociocultural norms of behaviour and the roles of men and women, girls and boys (WHO, 2022b). Fenstermaker & West (2002) propose that gender alongside acceptable behaviour norms and attitudes are decided based on one's sex category, which supports the argument that gender, too, can be seen as somewhat predetermined by our bodily differences (Butler, 2002). However, Fenstermaker & West (2002) also claim that gender is not simply representing a person in terms of who they are, but above all, it is what the person does in continuous interaction with other people.

Another important discovery in the 70's regarded the concepts of masculine and feminine. Seeing these characteristics as opposites was challenged, and it was argued that a person can have both masculine and feminine qualities (Zosuls et al., 2011). Despite the breakthrough of the 1970's, still to this day, the concepts of masculinity and femininity can withhold assumptions that these characteristics belong either to male or female people. As several researchers agree, masculinity and femininity represent the previously explained social constructs (Edgar & Sedgwick, 2008, p. 139; Beckett & Taylor, 2016, p. 99) and oftentimes contain certain cultural assumptions about how one thinks, acts, and dresses, and even what one thinks and desires as a man or a woman (Burr, 1998, pp. 12-13.).

Masculinity describes those features and skills that are seen as manly and masculine and are typically inherent in a man according to sociocultural and historical norms, while femininity represents feminine characteristics typically seen in a woman. However, it should also be noted that feminine features do not necessarily represent only female sex and vice versa (THL, 2022a). Furthermore, it is stressed that the understanding of masculinity and femininity can differ greatly between societies. For instance, while in Western cultures, women are considered more emotionally expressive than men, these roles are reversed in Eastern societies, more specifically, Iran (Epstein, 1997, cited in Bussey, 2011, p. 613).

Masculinity and femininity are closely linked to gender stereotypes. Gender stereotypes are described by THL (2022a) as plain and oversimplified assumptions and expectations of personal attributes and traits of people who represent a certain gender, especially the binary gender of man and woman, boy and girl. Edgar and Sedgwick (2008, p. 336) add that gender stereotypes, being extremely rigid, contain negative prejudices as they are rooted in sexist and racist cultures and play a crucial role in forming attitudes. While stereotypes are seen as products of mass media such as drama, comedy, and news, they are also guiding individuals towards choices considered suitable for a certain stereotype in the areas of education, occupation, and physical activities (Edgar and Sedgwick, 2008, p. 336).

## 4.2 Cultural framework of gender awareness

It has been a general understanding that boys and girls, men and women act differently merely because they are born differently, and it is in their nature. There is evidence that biological differences influence our behaviour (Beckett and Taylor, 2016). However, as also discussed earlier, masculinity and femininity are greatly affected by our environment and gender roles are constructed and learnt through social interaction with each other.

### 4.2.1 Social cognitive theory

While various major theories go about explaining the concept of gender identity from different angles, focusing only on individual characteristics or social roles and structures, some suggesting that gender acquisition takes place in early childhood, others pinpointing it to adulthood, Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory comprehends them all. According to social cognitive theory, gender identity is generated not only from one's biological knowledge of self but also from the interaction of personal and social aspects. Additionally, gender identity, with its pervasive and persisting nature, is seen as having a great influence on an individual's perception of self and their whole life. Social interaction is often determined by gender, although its influence may differ between societies. Where the influence is bigger, people tend to build their aims and desires as well as adjust their behaviour according to their gender. (Bussey, 2011, p. 604).

#### 4.2.2 Gender roles in Western society

In the early days, the upbringing and education of boys and girls in Finland was based on shaping useful members to meet societal needs, supporting the traditional views of women being responsible for taking care of the home and the children while men worked to provide financial security for the family. Thus, sewing and other household skills were taught to girls, whereas handling tools and agriculture were kept for boys. Gender roles were seen as self-evident and inevitable, and girls and boys knew their expected roles before starting school as these were learned at home (Eskola & Holkko, 2020).

While our society has gone through changes towards dismantling our gender dichotomous world, many of those traditional expectations and assumptions are still guiding our actions. The pressure to fit into typical gender roles starts at a young age when boys are encouraged to play with machines and cars, whereas playing with dolls is positively reinforced with girls (Beckett & Taylor, 2016, pp. 98-99; Bandura, 1989). Additionally, colour codes in our culture direct children to gender-appropriate activities while parents tend to support certain behaviours such as dependency and aggression differently between boys and girls. Intriguingly, girl-appropriate behaviour and activities are more likely to be discouraged with boys than in the opposite case, and the pressure comes from parents as well as peers (Beckett & Taylor, 2016, p. 100).

Another lens is added when considering the influence of religious views on gender, as some claim that all religions support a patriarchal mentality and diminish the position of women (Furlan, 2011). To illustrate this, we have chosen to give a short description of some issues with the two dominating religions in the world. The world's largest religion is Christianity, covering about 32 percent of the world's population. Christianity is followed by Islam, with around 1.6 billion followers (Pew Research Center, 2012). While the most represented religion in Western society, including Finland, is Christianity, Islam plays a significant role in the discussion of gender roles as well. What is more, the subject of religion and its influence on gender roles is complex, and the following paragraph offers only a very limited overview of the topic due to the limited scope of our study.

Traditionally, in Christianity, the role of a woman has posed restrictions as men dominated in the leading roles as priests, popes, and bishops (Kerr, 2019, p. 202). Further-

more, through various interpretations of the Bible, women were seen as secondary, being created from the man and for the man (Furlan, 2011). In Islamic countries, there are multiple aspects that undermine a woman's position in society. An advocate for women's participation and a peace expert, Alaa Murabit (2015) puts an emphasis on the cultural aspect of religion. As for Muslims, the interpretation of God's word is fundamental (Kerr, 2019, p. 211); religious scripture is often used by men-dominated leadership to enforce their views on society in ways that limit women's rights (Murabit, 2015). Similarities are found from various angles, from scholars and women's rights activists, that claim that religious scriptures are misinterpreted and misused, and thus, it is the social construction rather than the religion itself that has led to the oppression of women (Furlan, 2011; Murabit, 2015).

#### 4.2.3 Gender equality in Finland

The Finnish Equality Act (Tasa-arvolaki, 609/1986) aims to support gender equality between men and women and prevent discrimination and exclusion based on gender, gender identity, or gender expression. The prohibition of direct and indirect discrimination is general as it applies to all areas of social activity and life. The law regulates discrimination in education and working life, amongst others. Promoting gender equality supports well-being by reducing health inequalities, reducing inequality in general, increasing participation and preventing gender-based violence and harassment (THL, 2022b). THL (2022a) adds that treatment which appears neutral in relation to sex, gender identity, or gender expression can in fact place individuals at a disadvantage and constitute indirect discrimination, which is prohibited by the Equality Act.

However, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (n.d.) notes that Finland is still having challenges considering gender stereotypes and gender segregation in education and working life. Gender segregation means a division of jobs, tasks, and educational fields into those for men or women, and THL (2022a), too, recognises a great segregation of the labour market and education in Finland. To alleviate gender segregation, the Board of Education (Opetushallitus, 2022) suggests using gender awareness in education and counselling. They explain that gender-sensitive education and counselling identifies social and cultural factors of gender, questions and disassembles them while promoting gender equality. Moreover, guiding students according to their individual choices relieves the division of study and career choices into male and female fields (Opetushallitus, 2022).

### 4.3 Gender awareness

Clearly, our views on gender bring about a variety of assumptions and expectations as well as negative prejudices, all of which can limit how an individual is seen and accepted. This means that a counsellor working with a young person might have their own prejudices and assumptions that affect how they work, whether they are conscious of them or not. Moreover, Varpu Punnonen (2008, pp. 521–522) explains that gender can severely narrow the individual's possibilities for self-discovery and self-realisation when we determine what is allowed for boys and girls. For example, if a boy would like to watch something different on television than fighting turtles or robots, he can be discouraged from doing so by his brothers or parents since it is seen as somehow undermining his masculinity and therefore, not acceptable. Additionally, expressing oneself through clothing, behavior, and hobbies is restricted by traditional views on gender as well. As a professional, one should aim to recognise these limitations that a young person might experience and address them through pondering about these subjects together.

Punnonen (2008, pp. 521–523) acknowledges the significance of perceptions, ideas, and thoughts in guiding our work practice and bringing our conceptions of men and women, boys and girls, to the surface for pondering and questioning. This is especially crucial in gender-sensitive and gender-aware work. According to THL (2022a), gender awareness is observing and being aware of one's own as well as society's assumptions, expectations, and prejudices concerning gender and noticing them in our behaviour and communication. Additionally, gender awareness involves using knowledge about gender diversity and the ability to recognise and critically analyse gender stereotypes. Similarly, Punnonen (2008, p. 521) explains gender awareness as recognising how gender affects the individual's life and their choices, as well as supporting diversity and offering more choices based on the acknowledgement of these cultural expectations. Furthermore, Honkasalo (2011) emphasises that gender sensitivity is not a clearly defined tool or template but must be adjusted according to context.

### 4.4 Gender awareness in social youth work

According to Punnonen (2008, p. 523), social youth work aims to support the inclusion of children and youth into a shared society and community. With its preventive nature, social youth work targets all youth, including youngsters in need of special support. All

activities in social youth work are based on seeking and supporting youth's positive resources while emphasising the importance of social interaction and social skills. (Linno-suo, 2004 in Punnonen, 2008, p. 523). Encountering every young person as an individual and seeing their life situation holistically is the onset, with seeking and finding youngsters in need of support and social empowerment being the central aspect (Punnonen, 2008, p. 524-525).

Punnonen (2008, p. 525–526) describes gender awareness in social youth work as observing and noticing youth at risk of exclusion, and therefore, in need of social empowerment. Moreover, gender-sensitive youth work intends to support inclusion by acknowledging how gender and views of gender affect the growth of youth and creating possibilities for being accepted and seen as a unique individual (Punnonen, 2008, p. 526). Social empowerment is seen as a preventive method, and its goal is to support life management and the development of positive gender identity. At the same time, social empowerment is also an aim of gender-sensitive youth work (Anttonen, 2006 in Punnonen, 2008, p. 526). Similarly, the Finnish Youth Act (72/2006) defines social empowerment as *"measures targeted at young people and geared to improve life management skills and to prevent exclusion"*.

## 5 Implementation plan

In this chapter, we will explain the ethical considerations for this study along with the planning process and the research methods. Whereas the following chapters describe the implementation of the study through individual interviews and a group workshop while concurrently developing the gender-aware future-oriented counselling model.

### 5.1 Ethical considerations

Jean W. Anastas has determined the following points in social work research as essential: beneficence, justice, and respect. Anastas explains beneficence, highlighting the importance of anticipating and detecting any risks caused to participants and planning actions in a way that decreases those risks. (Anastas, J.W., 2020) In our research, the participants' risks were linked to their handling of the topic of gender awareness and the perspective they had on it. Due to the sensibility of the topic, the major risk was connected to emotional insult and hurt. This required us, the interviewers, to have an

open, objective, and supportive approach as well as remind the participants of the confidentiality of the interview. In addition, since we decided to collect the feedback from the counselling model collectively from the participants, we had to ensure the safety of the space to express one's opinions by highlighting respect for others as well as confidentiality among the participants.

Beneficence also stresses the importance of the scientific credibility of the study and the results, as well as the possible benefit of the study in the future, either to them or to others like them. As our study focused on investigating the perspectives and understanding of gender awareness in youth counselling, we saw our research participants benefiting from the study as they got information on gender awareness and future-oriented youth counselling in the workshop, which also offered a safe space to reflect on their thoughts and prejudices about gender. Furthermore, they will be able to utilise the gender-aware and future-oriented youth counselling model in the future as professionals working with youth.

Anastas defines justice as fair treatment of both research participants and researchers. Anastas also highlights that social work research should promote social justice and equity in society, both in findings as well as in research activities. (Anastas, J.W., 2020) We aimed to secure fair treatment of our research participants by focusing on our objective, through open and respectful communication and interaction with the participants. We kindly asked for this sort of behaviour from our participants towards other participants as well as towards us. Encouraging and developing a gender-aware approach in youth counselling promotes objectivity and openness about gender, as well as free gender expression. The development of gender awareness in youth counselling aims to increase equal and just treatment of all genders and individuals. The goal of the research is to provide perspective on what gender awareness is and how it can be realised in youth counselling while providing a model and tools to be used for professionals in youth work to increase their competence in gender awareness and gender-aware counselling. We see the topic of gender awareness in youth counselling as essential in modern times to enhance open, candid, and equal communication.

Lastly, Anastas defines respect as ensuring the autonomy, privacy, and self-determination of the study participants. This highlights the importance of proper information about the research process and the possible risks involved, as well as receiving voluntary consent afterwards. Privacy aspects also enforce the importance of reasonable data collection, storage, and sharing of research data. (Anastas, J.W., 2020). This elevated

the necessity of creating a GDPR statement, which we combined with the consent forms that were filled out by all the participants in the study (see Appendix. 1). The necessity of the anonymous collection of the data due to the sensibility of the topic was also mentioned earlier, as it enhances the respect for the participants' privacy. We were cooperating in this study with the FUTU project as our working life partner. However, we did not share any individual interview results with FUTU but just the analytic summaries, as many of the workers in the FUTU project work as teachers of the participants as well.

## 5.2 Planning process

While planning the process and suitable methods for our development task, we were in close contact with our working life partner, FUTU. We held multiple online meetings to identify the needs and wishes of FUTU, which made sure our project corresponded with their aims. As mentioned earlier, the request to develop a future-oriented online counselling model with a gender-aware approach arose from our working life partner, as future-oriented counselling models that support active participation and building a positive future image are one of the outcomes of the FUTU project.

As a foundation for our development, we dove into the topics of gender and gender awareness by using various information resources for health care and social services both online and in physical form. Additionally, we deeply investigated the background theory and aims of the FUTU project. For the sake of efficiency, we divided the work between us by topics and agreed upon a time when the background research should be ready and reviewed. We were having an ongoing discussion on a messenger app while working on the paper individually to provide adequate support to each other throughout the process.

The build-up for this development task came together quite naturally, as our working life partner had clear wishes and instructions on how we should proceed. We jointly agreed that we should collaborate with our fellow social service students in Metropolia to gather data on their understanding of gender awareness and how the school supports this knowledge as well as foster gender awareness amongst them.

### 5.3 Gathering participants for the study

To get participants for conducting our study through interviews and a joint workshop, we first contacted the teachers who were involved with the FUTU project so they could inform students about the opportunity to take part in our study. For that, we made a poster with information about our thesis and a schedule for dates and times for the interviews and workshop. Since not too many students contacted us after sharing the information through the teachers, we decided to expand the search for participants by sharing the poster in other student groups as well.

We received four second- and third-year students from both the Finnish and degree programme sides, as well as from daily teaching and multimodal implementation programmes. We would have preferred to have more students participating in the study, but due to limited time resources, we had to proceed with conducting the study with the participants that we managed to find by that time.

### 5.4 Research methods

Semi-structured interviews are progressing in a similar order of topics and questions for all the participants. While the structure and order of the questions might change, similarly to theme interviews, the themes of the discussions stay unchanged in semi-structured interviews. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2006). We chose to collect the data through semi-structured interviews since we perceived it as the optimal choice to keep the discussions on topic while at the same time leaving some space for the participants to bring up issues they would like to discuss. Moreover, we wished to keep the conversation flowing more freely than in the case of a strict questionnaire.

As we considered gender to be a sensitive topic and wanted to create a trustworthy environment for having an open discussion, the interviews were held individually, between the researchers and the participants. The questions were built around the suggestions of the working life partner and were based on our understanding of the topic after gathering background theory. After coming up with a draft for the preliminary questions, we had a meeting with FUTU for revision.

Simultaneously with gathering data through individual interviews, we were working on developing a counselling model that works as a tool for applying gender awareness in future-oriented youth counselling. As described above, a prototype for the model was

already under construction by one of the writers, so we decided to continue altering and improving the previously existing model. Once again, we made use of the FUTU project's purpose and aimed to gather the exercises that benefit the youth at risk of exclusion as clients the most. Furthermore, when figuring out how to add gender awareness into the model, we utilised the theory of gender and gender awareness as well as future-oriented youth counselling and decided to create gender awareness bubbles along the model.

As previously discussed, working in ways that support social empowerment through gender awareness requires the professional to develop certain skills. This includes reflecting on their own gender views and assumptions, as well as broadening their knowledge of cultural gender assumptions and expectations. When the goal of social youth work is to support the development of positive identity and life management skills of individuals, not being aware of gender biases and gendered experiences of male and female clients might bring about additional negative encounters of oppression, shame, and exclusion for the clients. (Comstock et. al., 2003).

Supported by theory, we suggest that further pondering and reflection on topics of gender and gender awareness as a future professional is crucial to promoting equality and preventing discrimination. What is more, since young people at risk of social exclusion are the target group of the FUTU project and the end beneficiaries of our development task, we considered fostering gender awareness amongst social service students as a constructive method to achieve the goals of this thesis. Therefore, we decided to carry out the second part of our thesis implementation in the form of a workshop while offering the space for peer guidance and self-reflection with the aim of fostering gender awareness. Moreover, the workshop was designed to function as a platform for presenting our counselling model and gathering feedback on it for evaluation and further development.

We decided to do content analysis on our interview results due to the qualitative nature of our interviews. As the aim of the analysis of both individual and group interviews was to gather perspectives and feedback, we conducted the analysis in an inductive manner, materially oriented. Material-oriented analysis refers to the open approach to research data without prior analysis units. The inductive approach focuses on categorising single observations into more general concepts. The aim is not to test any existing hypothesis or theories. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2006). The interviews were collected in an audio file and, afterwards, transcribed by using Microsoft Word.

Next, we created simplified expressions from the participant's answers, which were further categorised into more general terms and topics. This is also referred to as theming (Sarajärvi and Tuomi 2017, 4.4 *Sisällönanalyysi*). Even though we approached our data inductively, we wanted to compare our study participants' answers to gender, gender awareness, and future-oriented counselling with the ways existing theories describe the terms. This was concluded to construct a stronger understanding of the participants' familiarity and accuracy with the study's main concepts.

## 6 Individual interviews

As aforementioned, we conducted the semi-structured interviews individually due to the sensitivity of the issue while also making sure we had the time and possibility to go more into depth on the given topic with the individual. Three of the interviews were held in Finnish, while one was in English. We conducted the interviews on two separate days in April 2022, having two interviewees on the same day. Each interview took about 30 to 45 minutes. Two of the interviews took place online due to the participant's request. The other two took place in Myllypuro campus in quiet co-working spaces that we had booked beforehand. Before starting with the interviews, we went over the consent forms with the participants and asked them to sign them. We then informed the participant that we were starting to record the interview.

### 6.1 Interview findings

#### 6.1.1 Participants' previous knowledge on the topics

As a part of the individual interviews, we discussed with the participants how familiar they were with the terms and how they had gotten familiar with them. When we were inspecting the participants' knowledge background, we focused more on gender and gender awareness as future-oriented counselling is a more specific framework, whereas knowledge of gender and gender awareness is apparent in all client work. We found that the participants were familiar with the term "gender," but gender awareness was a new term for most of the participants. It is worth mentioning that two of the participants had taken part in the FUTU project, which made them familiar with future-oriented counselling as a term as well as a counselling framework. One participant had not participated in the FUTU project, however, they were also familiar with it as they had done future-oriented counselling in their last internship.

The participants mentioned three avenues through which they gained knowledge and competence in gender and gender awareness: a degree program, independent study, and social interactions. When referring to the degree programme, participants mentioned different courses where the topics had been covered to varying degrees. Participants referred to self-familiarization on the topic as an independent study method, i.e., reading research papers. Social interactions include conversations with friends and acquaintances of people with differing gender identities.

Table 1. Study participants' knowledge sources on gender, gender awareness and future-oriented counselling

Simplified expressions	Sources
Individual growth and development course Saanko Olla (Can I be?) elective course Child protection course Visitor lecture in a course	Degree Programme
Self-familiarization on the topic Reading research papers	Independent studying
Interactions with people from different gender types, as well as non-binary Friends	Social interactions

### 6.1.2 Gender

In the individual interviews, the participants described gender through similar concepts used in different gender theories. The participants' answers fell into three main themes: social dimension, biology, and individuality. Social dimension was strongly discussed in the participants' answers, including gender-related phenomena in societies, such as gender inequality, roles, and prejudices.

Participants also brought up biological aspects. This might sound odd, but in Finnish, the term "sukupuoli" can be understood as both sex and gender. The biological aspect was referred to as one way to categorise gender (or sex, as our theory describes), and its origins in binary categorising, which some individuals still rely upon. Although, referral to the term's further complexity was always followed.

The third dimension the participants discussed in their answers was individuality. Participants highlighted the individualistic expression and experience of gender, while some linked it to individual identity as well.

Here are a few ways the participants described gender:

"It is sort of a method of communication, in my opinion. It is also a huge part of people's identity as well, which is also communication in a way."

"Gender is a social construct, but it's also being determined biologically. I feel like the emphasis on the concept is in how we understand it. What kind of, for instance, gender roles are attached to different roles or genders. And inequality maybe, that is attached to those roles for instance".

Table 2. Categorisation of the ways participants described gender

Simplified expressions	Categories	Dimensions
Biological gender (sex) Medical understanding Dichotomy between who can give birth	Biological dimension	Biological dimension
A way of communication A way of describing oneself to others  Gender inequality Gender roles Social construct	Communication tool  Gender related phenomena in societies	Social dimension
Part of identity or identity building process  Complexity in the determination of gender (beyond binary dichotomy) Freedom of self-determination Individual experience	Identity  Gender complexity	Individuality

### 6.1.3 Gender awareness

The participants' descriptions of gender awareness can be divided into three dimensions: awareness of individual thoughts and actions, related terms, and awareness of the topic. The degree of how acquainted the participants were with the term and concept varied. Some had heard of it before, and others had not. When describing what the term meant or what came to their minds from the term, the participants mentioned terms such as gender neutrality and gender sensibility.

Individual actions (i.e., avoiding gendering) and awareness of one's own thoughts (i.e., consideration of the use of expressions) were discussed by participants in the awareness of individual thoughts and actions. Participants mentioned awareness on the topic of gender as well in their interview replies. This included, for example, awareness of gender complexity and public discussions on the matter.

The participants pictured gender awareness, i.e., as follows:

"Firstly, terms such as gender neutrality and gender sensitivity come to mind. All this sort of awareness on these matters, which also have been in much more in societal discussion in last years".

"Well, now that you ask and you have studied about this, so I feel like that I don't know much about it. But then I know what gender and awareness means. So maybe it is just like being aware of this gender topic and diversity within that. Maybe that can also change your behaviour if you're gender aware, then it can change for instance, which pronouns you use or what do you think of somebody when you meet them or the expressions you use".

Table 3. How participants depicted gender awareness

Simplified expressions	Subcategories	Categories
Avoidance of pre-assumptions on individual's gender Avoiding gendering Avoiding the use gender stereotypes  Being aware of one's expressions Awareness of one's own thoughts of others when meeting for the first time	Actions    Awareness of one's own thoughts	Awareness on individual thoughts and actions
Gender neutrality Gender sensibility	Related terms	Related terms
Awareness of gender related topics Public discussions on the topic Awareness of gender complexity	Awareness on the topic	Awareness of the topic

#### 6.1.4 Future-oriented counselling

The participants linked future-oriented counselling into the principles of focus on the future and client orientation, while also talking about methods. In the focus on the future principal, the participants referred to the importance of setting focus on the future instead of the past, as well as supporting the client in thinking further into their future. Client orientation principals include, i.e., initial focus on the client's strengths, interests, and preferences, as well as flexibility from the counsellor on the used methods and tools.

A few citations on the way participants explained future-oriented counselling:

"I feel that it is really liberating in some ways. The focus is not on the past but on the future, and it is very optimistic as well. It is really interesting to

build different narratives, like what life could be like. And there are different kinds of alternatives to what it could be. "

"Well, there can be already a working method or tools to start with, but you should be ready to change them promptly or right at the beginning. Because for me, future-oriented counselling should always begin from or it should touch the things that are already in a client's life in some way, so that there is purpose found already in the work on the client's behalf".

Table 4. Table of the ways participants explained future-oriented counselling

Simplified expressions	Categories	Dimensions
Focus on future instead of the past Further thinking on one's own future	Focus on the future	Focus on the future
Initial focus on client's strengths, interests, and preferences Flexibility on used tools and methods Client oriented approach Client's capability to find significance on the process itself	Client oriented approach	Client orientation
Development through conversation Aidance in practical matters Provoking braver and further thinking through questions Support on further thinking Exploring future life options Constructing different narratives Optimism Inspection of one's own narration on their future	Methods	Methods

## 7 Developing a future-oriented counselling model with a gender aware approach

The future-oriented counselling model includes instructions, tips, and exercises for future social service professionals to apply future-oriented counselling with a gender-aware approach when working with youth. The finalised model is in Finnish as the target group of the FUTU project and the end users of this product are mostly Finnish speaking. The model focuses on exploring the young person's understanding of self, including strengths and support systems in their lives. As the model is future-oriented and follows FUTU project principals, it emphasises building the young client's positive future image and finding their place in society by promoting employment and life-management skills. Furthermore, the model is intended to help professionals who work with youth improve their understanding of gender and gender awareness, as well as develop a more gender-aware counselling approach.

The counselling model has been created on the Prezi platform and can be used in face-to-face and online counselling sessions, either in synchronous or asynchronous communication. There are purple gender awareness bubbles along the model that help the professional emphasise gender awareness in counselling. These bubbles are also to encourage reflection on the counsellor's own perceptions of gender and to recognise possible prejudices. The following image gives an overview of how the model looks at first glance.



Image 1. Opening view of the counselling model.

As it is visible in Image 1, the model consists of five themes or phases: "introduction"; "who am I"; "what am I good at"; "what I am capable of"; and "a look into the future". In addition to those five themes, the model offers a section containing links to sites through which the instructor can obtain more information about gender and gender-conscious guidance and a section titled "Services Online" which is designed to offer support and information to the young person outside the counselling sessions. This section contains links to numerous chat services and addresses a variety of gender and sexuality-related questions that the young person may not want to discuss in the counselling sessions.

The counselling model has a strong focus on giving the young person the tools to explore their own personality in the 'Who am I' section. Here, gender awareness is emphasised by asking about the young person's gender identification and stimulating discussion about the assumptions, pressures, etc. associated with it. Image 2 below represents an example of one exercise called "Life's Toolkit" where the young person can create their self-image through painting, crafting, or an online tool, as the example picture is made on the right side of the page. Next to the self-image, the client can gather their toolkit of life, which contains aspects that are important to them and support their well-being and resilience.

-- Tiesithän, että Canvaa voi käyttää ilmaiseksi ja sopii hyvin etäohjauksen luovantoiminnan toteuttamiseen. Oman alustan voi jakaa nuoren kanssa, joten ohjaaja ja nuori voivat työskennellä samalla alustalla toisensa tuotoksen nähden. --

### Elämän työkalupakki

Oman elämän työkalupakki - harjoitteessa ohjaaja ja nuori/nuoret luovat oman kuvansa, johon liittävät itseään kuvaavia taitoja ja adjektiiveja. Omakuvan viereen luodaan myös työkalupakki asioista, jotka ovat itselle tärkeitä ja tukevat oman arjen jaksamista ja hyvinvointia. Työkalupakkia ja minäkuvaa, on myös suositeltavaa täydentää myöhemmillä ohjauskerroilla, kun nuori oivaltaa itsestään uusia taitoja tai piirteitä.

Harjoitteen voi toteuttaa askartelemalla, piirtämällä, maalaamalla jne. tai Canvalla, kuten oheisessa kuvassa.

*Nuorta voi harjoitteessa ohjata piirtämään itsensä itseään kuvaavana asiana esim eläimenä, jos itsensä todennukainen piirtäminen tuntuu hankalalta. Nuorelta voi myös kysyä miksi päädyit kuvaamaan itseäsi juuri noin?*

Prezi

Image 2. Exercise 'Life's toolkit' from section 'Who am I?'

The "What am I good at?" section is designed to guide young people to identify their own skills and strengths. Realistic identification of one's own strengths and competencies strengthens one's self-image and increases self-confidence while evoking new

ideas and thoughts about the future and dreams. In this section, gender awareness is highlighted, for example, by discussing gender-related expectations concerning skills and competencies. The "What I am capable of" section focuses on identifying and developing the young person's resources and coping skills. The exercises are related to everyday life management and resilience support. At this stage, the gender awareness bubble encourages the counsellor to be observant of the young person's conditioning regarding coping and resilience, possibly linked to gender.

The last, but most certainly not the least, is the section "A look into the future." In this section, there are various exercises for making future dreams, hobbies, and possible career paths visible. As promoting participation and guiding young people towards creating a positive future image is a central goal of the FUTU project, this section facilitates this process. An example exercise called "My dream job" helps the young person to ponder about desired occupations through the characteristics of the work (see Image 3.). Here, the gender awareness bubble presents some questions to provoke the counsellor to be observant about possible gender-related limitations on dreaming. While doing this exercise, the counsellor can ponder on those hindrances.



Image 3. Exercise 'My dream job' under section's 'A look into the future' subsection 'Future career path'.

The purpose of this counselling model is to provide exercises to address the above questions and themes in a gender-conscious way, allowing the instructor to select exercises that are best suited to each guidance situation. Although the themes are closely

interlinked and the professional should work towards seeing the client's situation holistically, taking into consideration all factors that influence their lives, we still aimed to categorise the exercises into separate themes for the sake of making the model easier to use.

## **8 Gender awareness workshop**

### **8.1 The structure of the workshop**

The workshop took place at the beginning of May from 2pm to 4pm at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, Myllypuro campus. We reserved a conference room and prepared some snacks and soft drinks for our participants. The workshop was held in Finnish and the other half of the workshop was recorded for gathering data on the reflections as well as feedback.

We started our meeting by going over the build-up for our workshop. The first part of the workshop concentrated on presenting the central concepts as an introduction to the topic of gender awareness. For this, we had prepared the names of the concepts in Finnish and English to alleviate some possible confusion in understanding the concepts since in Finnish, the words gender and sex are represented with one word, and according to the theory in our study, we wished to explain the concepts separately. Additionally, we considered it beneficial for our participants to know these concepts in both languages, as it enables them to find more information about the topic in English as well. The concepts were presented on paper and pinned on the wall one by one, allowing them to be visible throughout the whole workshop.

After describing key concepts related to gender awareness, we demonstrated our counselling model as a tool for future social services professionals, assisting professionals with future-oriented youth counselling and applying gender awareness in practice. We shared the model on a widescreen display and showed some examples of exercises as well as explained the idea behind the gender awareness bubbles in the model. Through this presentation, the participants were able to get a glimpse of how this model works and how it could help them as future social service professionals. We went over the model at a rather fast pace and presented only a couple of exercises due to the limited time. However, we let the participants know that this model will be available for further examination and use as soon as it is released by the FUTU project.

We then moved on to a more interactive part of the workshop and utilised two case examples (See Appendix 4. Case examples) in the discussion about gender-aware youth counselling. Both cases consisted of two sequential parts, which were presented by us, leaving space for reflection and group discussion in the middle. These cases were built up in a way that the focus was on how they would act as a counsellor in those situations, not bringing up gender or gender awareness separately in the beginning. However, one could notice certain aspects in the descriptions that could direct the participants into considering one or the other typical gender.

This gave space for pondering on possible gender-related images and assumptions afterwards when we presented questions such as: What did you think when hearing the description of the youngster? Did you notice that this youngster represents a certain gender based on the description of their looks or the situation? Would you have looked at the situation and therefore acted differently if the person had represented another or no gender? After a fruitful discussion on thoughts that arose from case examples, we were ready for the feedback discussion.

## 8.2 Feedback from the participants

The follow-up feedback discussion took place right after the workshop as a form of a group discussion. Assisted by priorly constructed questions, we requested feedback on the counselling model in aspects of appearance, practicality, and ways of usage, as well as their ideas for further development. Furthermore, we received evaluations and observations on the whole workshop.

The model received an appraisal for the layout and realisation, referred to as neat and pleasant. Participants liked the Prezi platform and thought that the model would be duller and more challenging to use if transformed to, i.e., PDF form. One participant described the model as such:

"At least for me, it was very clear and if I worked with youth, this would benefit. That layout was really nice and hopefully you can keep it that way".

However, the participants also brought up some points for development. They would have liked to see more information on sex, gender, and gender awareness in the model. One participant hoped for more exercises and more gender awareness tips with

more concrete instruction on how to put gender awareness into practise in the exercises. Another participant suggested that it could be included by having a separate section as an introduction to the topics, including suggestions on which things to pay attention to. Two participants also wished that there would be a separate task or tasks for the counsellor, to test their own competency on the topic, as well as to analyse their own existing prejudices and assumptions:

"Could there be some small exercises for the counsellors in which they could revoke their own thinking?"

"Some sort of intro task for counsellors, like how gender aware are you, which would include claims and one could test how they relate"

However, even though additional information was requested, the participants also highlighted the importance of preserving the user-friendliness of the model. Another aspect that the participants mentioned approving was visuality. One participant mentioned visuality being important in delving into the topic due to different learning methods. Another participant would have liked more demonstrative pictures.

"If you could come up with some funny pictures of which you would be like, oh, this is present in that as well as this, we are not aware of it either."

Overall, participants saw the model as adequate for youth and could see themselves using it. One participant mentioned that they would like to have the model as a base where they could add themselves:

"Yes, I see that the model could be useful in my own counselling sessions. I immediately think of high school students as a target group, as I think the elements in the model are very topical in high school or vocational school. From youth, the target group of 15-to 20-year-olds, is the one gender awareness is good to take up with".

The workshop received positive feedback from the participants, who saw it as useful and something to use in their studies as well as to raise awareness of gender awareness and related topics. Participants also gave positive feedback on the case exam-

ples. We went through them and talked about how the case examples made them reflect on their own thinking and building of mental imaginaries, which they perceived would help them in the future to notice their own prejudices.

## **9 Conclusion, evaluation, and further development ideas**

### **9.1 Conclusion on the thesis process**

The goal of this functional thesis was to create a future-oriented youth online counselling model with a gender-aware approach. The development was supported by the findings from the individual interviews with social service students, which focused on gathering an understanding of the study participants' perceptions on gender, gender awareness, and future-oriented counselling. In addition, we organised a group workshop, first to gather feedback on the model but additionally to foster awareness of gender awareness among the participants through case examples and open dialogue.

We discussed our three main concepts in this report: gender, gender awareness, and future-oriented counselling, while referring to existing theory on these topics. As background information to support the need for our study, individual interviews were actualized as semi-structured thematic interviews, focusing on the main concepts of our thesis. After collecting the data, we conducted a content analysis on the data. To develop a structured image of the study participants' perspectives on the thesis main concepts, we created a simplified categorization table based on the data collected in the individual interviews. Due to the narrow sampling – consisting of only four participants – the categorization is succinct but gives a more structured perspective on the participants' outlooks on these concepts.

The second part of the data consisted of the feedback gathered from the group workshop. Due to the central role that the feedback on our counselling model had in our thesis goals, we decided not to categorise the feedback, as was done with the individual interviews. Instead, we chose to summarise the feedback into more complex feedback points and present it with citations from study participants to increase the reliability of the results.

## 9.2 Results of the discussions with students

### 9.2.1 Individual interviews

The individual interviews presented the well-aware perceptions the study participants had on the main concepts of our thesis—gender, gender awareness, and future-oriented counselling. The participants described gender through different dimensions—social, biological, and individualistic dimensions. Some scholars prefer to keep the terms sex and gender distinct in the English language, yet in Finnish, the term *sukupuoli* - refers to both sex and gender. Therefore, it is reasonable that the participants also discussed the biological dimension of gender, which is explained in our theory through the concept of "sex". Similarly, in the theory we provided earlier, sex was described as referring to the categorisation of male, female, and intersex people based on biological criteria, whereas social factors were emphasised in the development of gender.

Individuality and gender came up as the third dimension in the discussions with the students. Here, the individualistic expression and experience of gender were discussed while linking gender to individual identity. As we touched briefly on social cognitive theory, gender identity creation was explored as a mix of one's biological knowledge of self, combined with individual characteristics and social aspects (see more in Bussey, 2011, p. 604). As for gender awareness, the students seemed to comprehend the concept, even though they mentioned that they were not familiar with the term. According to the theory presented in this paper, gender awareness is described as observing and acknowledging one's own assumptions and prejudices related to gender, which were also mentioned in the participants' answers.

Future-oriented counselling, as its name refers to, focuses on the future. The students described it with the same principles (client approach, focus on the future, etc.) as the literacy on these topics (see i.e., Raatikainen 2019, pp 3–4). Also, the methods the participants mentioned, such as supporting further thinking, correspond with what we have discussed in theory as well as with what is represented in different literacy resources. This sort of complete understanding of this counselling framework was expected as two of the participants had taken part in the FUTU-project, and one had gotten acquainted with future-oriented counselling in their last internship.

To conclude, we can draw parallels between the theory presented in our paper and the understandings of these concepts by the students. We can see from the results of individual interviews that the participants had an adequate understanding of the main concepts of our thesis – gender, gender awareness, and future-oriented counselling. However, we still perceived there to be a need for support and additional information on the topics which our counselling model could provide. This was also confirmed by the participants in the group workshop.

### 9.2.2 Feedback on the online counselling model

Our counselling model received positive feedback on the layout and the used platform, as it was seen as pleasant and neat. The participants also described the counselling model as useful as well as adequate for working with youth. Although the participants thought they could see themselves using it, they also saw points of development in it. The main developmental points focused on the reflection possibilities the model could offer for the counsellor by, for example, presenting gender-related claims and requiring the counsellor to reflect their perspectives on gender-related topics. We acknowledge the worth of this sort of development, as reflection and ponderation on one's thoughts on gender-related topics is central, and something highlighted in gender awareness theories as well (see i.e., Punnonen).

Additionally, the participants would have liked more information on the model about the concepts of sex, gender, and gender awareness, with hands-on tips to be gender aware in real-life situations. Utilising knowledge about gender diversity and pondering on our conceptions of men, women, boys, and girls is emphasised in theory as well, which is why we acknowledge this as being another crucial developmental point. While we believe that the links which we have gathered in the counselling model are sufficient for giving information on these concepts, the model is lacking in concrete tips for applying gender awareness in practice. What is more, the participants saw development needs on visuality on gender awareness, such as including pictures that would provoke thinking on the topic of gender awareness. Including imagery that presents the lack of gender awareness in societies can not only be seen as helpful for learning but also helpful for understanding how the topic is being perceived by the public. Such imagery would include pictures, i.e., of binary divided signs on bathroom doors. This strongly corresponds with how Punnonen discusses gender awareness.

We estimated receiving developmental feedback on the model. We knew when presenting the model to the study participants that there would be a need for development, regarding more online resources on gender-related topics, and we informed the study participants of this as well. However, the suggestions on adding more reflective content for the counsellor were something we did not expect but thought was a good idea to include in the model.

Based on our experience as social services students at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, the social services studies do support the development of an overall open and aware approach towards clients. Therefore, we were not surprised by how well study participants explained the topics of gender and gender awareness. In addition, two of the four participants had taken part in the FUTU project, which is why we assumed good knowledge of that topic from them. However, it was nice to hear how the other two participants described future-oriented counselling clearly, mentioning the principals of the counselling framework.

### 9.3 Emphasis on reflection and informed practice in process evaluation

As soon to be graduates of Metropolia University of Applied Sciences Bachelor's Degree in Social Services, we acknowledge the importance of reflection in our practice. Although Charfe and Gardner (2019, p. 42) refer to the unpredictable nature of social work practise as well as the complex relationships with clients, we would like to draw parallels between the significance of reflection in social work as well as when conducting our final thesis. A borrowed quote from John Dewey (1859-1952) says, "we do not learn from experience but from reflecting on that experience" (Charfe & Gardner, 2019 p. 43). Storø (2013, pp. 43–44) agrees with this notion and adds that reflection should be oriented towards development, meaning that it should support evolving practise by trying to find alternative ways of working.

Throughout the process of our thesis, we were in constant communication to offer support to each other while having an open and trusting environment to reflect on our actions. While we did not create separate time for reflection, we gave each other feedback on how the different phases were going. However, looking back on the process, there could have been more discussions regarding the practical parts like conducting the individual interviews and carrying out the workshop for exchanging developmental ideas with each other right after the activities. Nevertheless, we believe that working together with a classmate on the final thesis was beneficial in terms of receiving peer

support and widening each other's perspectives. Additionally, we experienced that our communication and listening skills developed while working through a variety of issues along the road, such as having different opinions or struggling to find a balance between perfection and available resources.

Storø (2013, p. 40) emphasises informed practice, meaning that a social pedagogue's practise should be linked to theory. He continues by explaining that investigating theories regarding our actions allows us to become aware of the reasons behind our actions (Storø, 2013, p. 41). However, connecting our actions to theory was never easy. Although we did thorough groundwork on theory around gender, gender awareness, and future-oriented youth counselling, we realised that the methods we used to carry out our study and develop the model were somewhat based on prior experiences and gut feelings of what would serve the client best. This became especially clear when we started to analyse the data collected from interviews. When diving into analysis methods, we understood how they depend on research methods and philosophies. As the bachelor's thesis at the University of Applied Sciences is not so much research-based but more concentrating on the functional aspect, familiarising ourselves with research methods in earlier stages would have assisted us in constructing our report. Thus, we found ourselves searching for additional information to explain the reasons behind our actions in this study.

#### 9.4 On our own learning outcomes

In this chapter, we reflect on the process and the learning outcomes of this development task and explore how the insights we gained could be utilised in the future. As there were two students working on this development task, we combined our thoughts on learning outcomes and evaluated our work. Nevertheless, keep in mind that there might have been differences in our personal experiences and views on these topics.

A great learning outcome of this thesis is our own growth in gender awareness as we gained a lot more insight into this subject through gathering background theory for this thesis. However, as we were constantly reminded by the frustration while gathering fundamental theories on gender and gender awareness, these topics are intricate. Therefore, we acknowledge that further investigation into the subject is necessary to grasp the concepts better. Additionally, we acquired skills for conducting individual interviews as we had not done it previously. We noticed that it was somewhat difficult to get the conversation flowing outside of the questions that we had prepared, and we

wish that we would have dwelled more deeply on the topics with the participants. However, we succeeded in receiving significant material for our development project and gained valuable experience as well as confidence for possible future endeavours.

The increase in our gender awareness was also supported by the conversations we had with our peers. We were delighted to see that the students were boldly expressing their thoughts in the interactive part of the workshop, and the discussion moved nicely in our opinion. As intended, the case examples that we presented in the workshop worked exceptionally well for bringing up possible gender-related assumptions and encouraging a constructive discussion amongst the participants. However, we could have left more time for presenting the counselling model to the students, as we felt we had to rush through it. Although developing the model was the main goal of this development task, fostering gender awareness was another, and we thought that offering the space for discussion and making the workshop more interactive would benefit our fellow social service students most.

Ultimately, we learned how to plan and implement a functional thesis, as well as how to write a report to present our findings and learning outcomes. We feel this was accomplished through both: learning from the experience as well as combining it with theory to rationalise our actions. As students, writing a final thesis gives us an opportunity to demonstrate our ability to come up with a relevant development in our field, apply the key concepts and theoretical knowledge in practice, and critically investigate, evaluate, and develop our knowledge and skills (Roivas et al., 2019). We did not have any existing experience of conducting a study, not to mention developing online counselling models. Therefore, we have learned a lot, starting from the whole research execution process to interview techniques and analysis methods. If we happen to conduct another study in the future, we now have a better understanding of the process and methods. However, we are aware that further investigation of research methods and philosophies is necessary, especially if executing a master's or higher-level thesis. We also realised that conducting a study is very time-consuming and creating realistic schedules is essential. Most importantly, we appreciate the lessons learnt through this process and feel that this experience has given us opportunities to learn and grow both personally and professionally.

## 9.5 Discussion on the results of the development task

When reflecting on the results, one prominent issue to keep in mind is the language. Our thesis is in English, yet three of the individual interviews as well as the group workshop were conducted in Finnish. In addition, the online counselling model currently exists only in Finnish. Therefore, it is beneficial to assume that some meaning has been lost in translation, as English is not either of the researchers' native languages. Moreover, there is confusion about the concept of gender as the Finnish correspondent of gender (*sukupuoli*) refers to both sex and gender.

Another issue regarding the results that we see is the sampling of participants. Although all social services degree programmes' implementation forms were presented, the number of participants was exceedingly small compared to the hundreds of social services students solely in Metropolia UAS. In addition, two of the participants were already involved in the FUTU project and therefore aware of the concept of future-oriented counselling. Lastly, the model is aimed at anyone working with youth wishing to incorporate a more gender-aware and future-oriented approach to their counselling. Therefore, the small sample of students' perspectives on the model we have gathered does not give a thorough evaluation of the counselling model as it lacks feedback from professionals currently working in the field.

We interpret from the youth surveys that there is clearly anxiety and uncertainty about youth's future perceptions. Throughout recent years, uncertainty has increased in Finnish society and throughout the world due to the COVID-19 pandemic and war in Ukraine. Such uncertainty has the tendency to bring uncertainty, pessimism, and anxiety about how an individual sees their future. Hence, professionals working with youth need even more support on how to discuss the future with youth. On that account, we believe that our model can offer assistance and ideas for future-oriented counselling for professionals working with youth. Moreover, due to the pandemic and the rapid growth of technology, online counselling has become more prominent and will surely be more so in the future. Therefore, we wanted to create the model on an online platform and in a way that enables the pleasant and functional use of the model solely online.

## 9.6 Further development ideas

Even though the interview results lack a comprehensive perspective due to the narrow sample of participants, we surely have gotten points to focus on in future development. In addition to the earlier discussion on developmental ideas based on the students' feedback, we propose the following developmental ideas regarding the counselling model as the result of our own reflection. When presenting the model in the future, there could be an opportunity to try out the exercises between two people or a group, for example, as a roleplay between a counsellor and a client. The counselling model itself could be developed in many ways. Firstly, agreeing with the feedback from the participants, the model could offer practical advice on how to talk about gender awareness with the client. Additionally, the model could include instructions on how to plan, proceed with, and end the counselling sessions with the client.

Furthermore, to reach more students, professionals, and young people as clients, the counselling model could be translated into additional languages, for example, English. However, this might pose quite a big challenge, given that the exercises are also gathered in Finnish and are presented through links that guide the professional to the webpage where they are, which means that all the exercises should be translated as well. On top of that, the format of the model could have been agreed upon beforehand due to the difficulties we now face regarding publishing it in the best and most accessible form it currently is. Since in case it is moved out of Prezi, the appearance and practicality of it will be changed crucially. We recognise that the model offers a great number of exercises that a professional can choose from, maybe even too many. We realised while developing the model that we may have gotten too carried away with gathering exercises that assist professionals working with youth toward a brighter future. Besides, as we look at the final product, we admit that the layout with the sections and sub-sections can be somewhat confusing to the user of this product.

To follow social field ethical guidelines, social field professionals must be gender aware. We see that the general approach that social service students are taught, at least in Metropolia UAS, is to be open, aware, and reflective. However, based on our study participants' thoughts as well as our own opinion, gender-related topics could be covered more in depth in social services degree programmes in Metropolia. Thus, more awareness on these topics is required to increase gender awareness in the social field as well as in our society. We believe that by discussing these topics with our study

participants and developing a counselling model that offers tips and information on these topics, we supported raising awareness about these important issues.

As for looking toward possible future studies, we present the following ideas. In addition to the topics covered in individual interview findings, we discussed the participants' own counselling experiences as well as the sufficiency of the information amount that is included in the degree programme curriculum. However, we did not include these in the results as we chose to solely focus on the model and received feedback while only reporting participants' perspectives on the model's core themes. Hence, we do see potential for further investigation into the students' satisfactory and opinions on gender-related studies' sufficiency in Metropolia UAS degree programmes. Moreover, an additional study could be done on how the individual guidance experiences influence the development of the counsellor's own gender-related assumptions and prejudices, and in turn, how this affects their counselling manners, methods, and principals.

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## Consent from

### Tietosuojaseloste

Tutkimus noudattaa EU:n tietosuoja-asetusta. Tietosuojaseloste perustuu EU:n tietosuoja-asetuksen (2016/679, General Data Protection Regulation, "GDPR") rekisteröityjen informointivelvoitteeseen (GDPR:n artikkelit 12-14), GDPR:n artiklan 30 mukaiseen rekisterinpitäjän velvoitteeseen ylläpitää selostetta vastuullaan olevista käsittelytoimista sekä GDPR:ää täydentävän kansallisen tietosuojalain (1050/2018) velvoitteisiin. Kaikki haastateltavien henkilötiedot säilytetään ja käsitellään tietosuoja-asetuksen mukaisesti. Lisää tietoa henkilötietojen käsittelystä alla olevasta tutkimussuostumuslomakkeesta.

### Tutkimussuostumus

Minä \_\_\_\_\_ osallistun vapaaehtoisesti Lotta-Kaisa Lehtosen ja Elen Pukkin opinnäytetyön individuaalisen ensihaastattelun, ryhmätyöpajaan ja jälkihaastatteluun, joka toteutetaan ryhmähaastatteluna. Minulle on selitetty *Gender awareness in future oriented youth counselling – reflections on the counselling competence of Social Services students in FUTU project* -opinnäytetyön tarkoitus ja tavoitteet.

Annan luvan dokumentoida osallistumisen ja olen tietoinen siitä, että haastattelut nauhoitetaan puhelimella. Nauhoite pysyy tutkijan koneella, josta se siirretään tietokoneelle manuaalisesti ja tiedosto puhelimessa tuhoaan. Kaikki tieto tutkijoiden välillä siirtyy manuaalisesti USB-tikun välityksellä, jolla vältetään tutkimustietojen päätyminen nettiin. Henkilötietoja sisältävä tutkimussuostumuslomake säilytetään ainoastaan paperisena Lotta-Kaisa Lehtosen kotona, johon kukaan muu ei pääse käsiksi. Tiedostan, että tutkimussuostumuslomakkeet hävitetään tietoturvallisesti opinnäytetyön valmistuttua.

Olen tietoinen, että dokumentoitu materiaali (ääninauhoite ja transkriptio) säilytetään ainoastaan Lotta-Kaisa Lehtosen ja Elen Pukkin tietokoneilla, eikä niitä missään muodossa ladata pilveen tai lähetetä sähköisesti. Olen myös tietoinen siitä, että nauhoitettu materiaali päätyy vain haastattelijoiden kuunneltavaksi ja kaikki kerätty materiaali tuhoaan opinnäytetyön valmistuttua viimeistään syksyllä 2022.

Tiedän, että tutkijoita sitoo vaitiolo- ja salassapitovelvollisuus ja tutkimuksessa saatuja tietoja käsitellään luottamuksellisesti ammattikorkeakoulun eettisten periaatteiden mukaisesti. Ymmärrän, että nimettömyys varmistetaan kirjoituksessa peittämällä henkilöllisyyteni.

Ymmärrän, että opinnäytetyössä ja mahdollisissa myöhemmissä julkaisuissa voidaan lainata otteita osallistumisen aikana antamistani suullisista lausunnoista ja annan siihen luvan. Annan luvan myös ilmoittamani sukupuolen esiin tuomisen tuloksia käsiteltäessä, jos se on tutkimuksen kannalta merkittävää. Tiedän, että opinnäytetyön lopullinen tulos julkaistaan Theseus –sivulla. Olen myös tietoinen ja hyväksyn, että FUTU-hanke saattaa käyttää tutkimuksen tuloksia hankkeesta raportoidessaan.

Tiedostan oikeuteni kieltäytyä tutkimuksesta ja peruuttaa jo antamani suostumus jälkikäteen ilman perusteluja.

Haastateltavan allekirjoitus

Aika ja paikka

## **Interview themes and preliminary questions**

### **THEMES**

#### **What is gender awareness?**

- What do you think about gender? What does it mean to you?
- How is gender visible in your studies?
- How familiar is the term “gender awareness” to you?
- How do you understand gender awareness?
- How do you see gender awareness in the work of a Bachelor of Social Services?

Exploring the knowledge base that the interviewees have on gender awareness at this point. Gender expectations, assumptions etc.

#### **Own experiences of counselling (teachers, parents, counsellors etc.)**

- What kind of personal experiences you have from guidance/counselling?  
How have these experiences of guidance affected your life? Career choices, hobbies, difficult points in life etc.?
- Are these experiences supporting or undermining gender awareness in youth counselling?
- Were there gender expectations, assumptions?
- Guidance towards stereotypically accepted gender norms?
- How could this knowledge be used in gender aware counselling?

#### **Own education**

- Has there been enough information about it?
- Has the topic of gender awareness come up enough in your studies?  
(Human growth and development)
- In which courses was the topic reviewed?
- Would you have wanted more information on the subject? Suggestions on how it could have been included in the studies.
- Do the studies support gender aware working?

**Gender awareness in future-oriented youth counselling**

How would you describe future-oriented counselling?

Do you have any ideas how gender awareness could be applied in future-oriented youth counselling?

How do you consider gender and gender awareness when guiding/counselling young people?

## Case examples

### Esimerkkikeissi 1:

#### Osa 1

Olet töissä nuorisotalolla. Sinua lähestyy nuori, yllään nuhjuinen huppari ja löysät farkut. Farkut ovat polvista revenneet ja likaiset. Nuori selvästi yrittää piilotella rikkiäisiä housujaan. Nuori on uusi talolla ja kysyy miten voisi pelata pleikkaria. Lähdet ohjeistamaan nuorta. Miten toimisit tilanteessa?

#### Osa 2

Olet hetken nuoren kanssa ja selvästi huomaat, että nuori piilottelee jotain. Olet yrittänyt kysyä, onko nuorta satutettu, mutta nuori vaitonaisesti kieltää asian. Olet huolestunut nuoresta ja haluat saada asiaan selkoa. Lähdet kyselemään nuorelta, miten koulussa ja kotona sujuu. Huomaat, miten nuori muuttuu vaivalloiseksi koulusta puhuttaessa. Hetken keskustelun jälkeen käy ilmi, että nuori tulee huonosti juttuun parin samalla luokalla olevan pojan kanssa. Miten toimisit tilanteessa?

- Mitä aluksi ajattelit, kun kuudit nuoren kuvauksen?
- identifioitko nuoren johonkin sukupuoleen?
- Vaikuttiko identifiointi tapaan, jolla olisit toiminut tilanteessa?
- Olisitko toiminut toisin, jos nuori olisikin osoittautunut toisen sukupuolen edustajaksi tai ei-binääriseksi?
- Mitä ajattelit nuorelle sattuneen kuvailun perusteella?

### Esimerkki keissi 2:

#### Osa 1

Olet ohjaamassa lukiolaisista muodostuvaa nuorten ryhmää. Keskustelu keskittyy aluksi omien vaatevarastojen päivittämiseen kesää varten ja kesätrendeihin. Pikkuhiljaa alkaa keskustelussa tulla esiin ensi syksyn ensimmäiset ylioppilaskokeet, joista nuoret ovat selvästi stressaantuneet. Nuoret kokevat epävarmuutta aineista, jotka ovat kirjoittamassa. Moni kokee, ettei tiedä mitä haluaisi tehdä lukion jälkeen. Miten toimisit tilanteessa?

#### Osa 2

Yksi porukan nuorista vaitonaisesti sanoo, että haluaisi jatkaa ammattikoulussa lukion jälkeen. Samaan henkeen nuori kertoo, että vanhemmat haluaisivat hänen opiskelevan sairaanhoitajaksi ammattikorkeakoulussa. Miten toimit tilanteessa?

- Mitä aluksi ajattelit, kun kuudit tilannekuvauksen?
- Identifioitko nuoren tai nuoret johonkin sukupuoleen?
- Vaikuttiko identifiointi tapaan, jolla olisit toiminut tilanteessa?
- Olisitko toiminut toisin, jos nuori tai nuoret olisivat osoittautuneet toisen sukupuolen edustajaksi tai ei-binääriseksi?