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A Feminist Activist Research to mainstream awareness of gender-related violence in universities through photovoice

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Abstract

Sexual and gender-related violences (SeGReV) is more normalised in the university community than we might expect, even though there have been important changes in HIE politics and policies in this sense. Therefore, sensitisation is essential. In this paper, we present multidisciplinary international research that, implicating around 40 university teachers and 300 students, aimed to approach this necessity through the design and evaluation of an innovative pedagogical protocol. Our text serves two purposes: to reflect on the effectiveness of photovoice to increase the student's awareness of SeGReV; and to introduce and exemplify the specificity of Feminist Activist Research (FAR), a methodological approach that rises from the intersection of Action Research, Activist Research and Feminist epistemology. We will show how the applied approach of our project, the production of training materials, and other disseminative actions, proved to be a valuable practice for increasing the SeGReV awareness of university students. In this sense, becomes clear that photovoice can be an important ally, as it is an extremely useful technique both on a pedagogical level and as a research instrument. Last but not least, we exemplify the adequacy and peculiarity of FAR as research approach.

Graphical abstract



1. Introduction

The occurrence of sexual and gender-related violences¹ (SeGReV) in the university environment is relatively uniform across countries, with students being less affected overall but more at risk of physical and sexual violence than staff members (Humbert et al. 2023). The #MeToo and #meetoouniversity campaigns have helped make this problem visible. However, being permeated by the mainstream media's neoliberal logic, they also have the effect of normalising the situation, ignoring or erasing the power relations structuring the *marketplace of ideas* and reproducing discrimination towards non-hegemonic social groups (Phipps 2019). Many activists and researchers have called universities to acknowledge their responsibility for this problem (Ahmed 2016; Cagliero and Biglia 2019; Maito et al. 2019). At the same time, there is a growing commitment to creating a climate of respect and mutual support both within and outside the HEI (Brubaker 2019). This raises the question of how, we can encourage students, who will soon become professionals and practitioners, to acknowledge their responsibility to help create a safe environment (Anitha and Lewis 2018; Non una di meno 2017).

In recent decades, most interventions have focused on promoting specific training against SeGReV (Cooper-Levitan and Alldred 2022; Coll and San Martin 2022). Nonetheless, resistance to changes in gender relations within the university sphere is quite strong (Tildesley et al. 2020). This approach therefore needs to be paired with a general effort to sensitise higher education students to gender-related violences, by mainstreaming SeGReV work in common university courses. Working on this problem through the training of university students as agents of social transformation is key to eradicating it in all its forms in and beyond this context. However, in this process, we must be conscious that '[e]ducation for gender equality and against violence are sometimes divergent and fail to link abuse and violence relating to gender and sexual orientation to inequalities and cultural

¹ Even though violence is an uncountable noun in English and therefore should never be pluralised, we pluralise it to make explicit the different forms and types of violence it represents.

norms' (Cooper-Levitan and Alldred 2022, 535). Moreover, as shown by the Spanish case, the legal requirement to implement teaching with a gender perspective has not been accompanied by an equal practical commitment from university bodies (Verge et al. 2018). Lecturers' personal implication towards gender equality is a key factor in introducing gender issues into the curriculum, but these professionals frequently face difficulties when they try to implement it (Larrondo and Rivero 2019), lacking in specific training and examples (Verge 2021).

To overcome this limitation, we promoted an experience based on the interaction between two action research projects configured as Feminist Activist Research (FAR). The first aimed to understand the SeGReV within the university environment from an intersectional feminist perspective, while the second focused on the mainstreaming of gender-related violence awareness in HEI courses. Both projects, coordinated from Catalunya (Spain), also were intended to reinforce international collaboration between feminist scholars involved in the fight against gender-related violences. To achieve our goal, we used photovoice: a community-based participatory action research technique that, through the production of photographs and narratives, has contributed to denouncing the situations oppressed communities experience (Miranda et al. 2021) and recognising their epistemic value (Leivas et al. 2022). As detailed in section three, the extensive use of this technique in educational contexts has multiple pedagogical advantages; nonetheless, it is striking that its use to address SeGReV from a preventive or awareness-raising perspective has been limited (Bayard et al. 2022). It is noteworthy, however, that the few studies on this issue have signalled its effectiveness in fostering analysis of the cultural and social dimensions of this problem (Solano-Ruíz et al. 2021).

This article has two aims: to present a collective evaluation of this technique's potential to increase students' awareness of SeGReV, and to exemplify an implementation of FAR research, which we consider a very powerful approach for the educative research process.

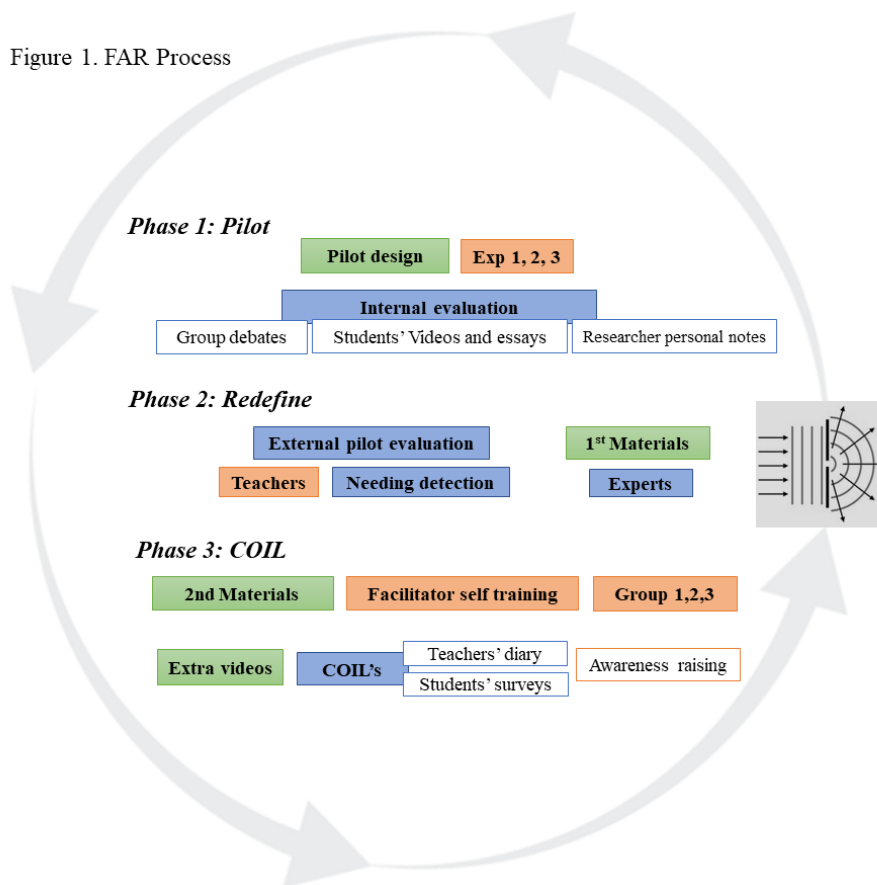
2. Our feminist activist research in a nutshell

The Feminist Activist Research (FAR) approach (Zavos and Biglia 2009) stems from the dialogue between action research (Coghlan 2023), activist research (Fine and Vanderslice 1992) and the situated knowledge feminist epistemology (Haraway 1991). FAR aims to contribute to transformation for social justice within the research process, assuming that the promotion of specific collectives' self-reflection can be considered a transformation in itself (Araiza and González 2017). While including the subject in the research is typical in both participatory and activist research, the latter 'allows more researcher-structured processes facing the challenge that participatory ideals are often compromised in practice' (Uldbjerg 2021, 34). In FAR, tensions and attention to the whole methodological (and pedagogical) practices are constant, and researchers must recognise their responsibility within the overall knowledge production process (Martínez et al. 2014). In accordance with feminist care and ethics, this includes the relational obligations (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017) to be addressed in the interdependence between theory and practice (Sánchez 2021), with an emphasis on the embodiment process and the ongoing constitutive dynamic between these two representations of reality. The power relations involved in the research (and educative) process will be acknowledged and questioned, rather than hidden, which frequently occurs with a view to appearing more 'horizontal' or 'critical'. More than following AR's typical spiral dynamics, FAR is driven by a fractal experience with multiple centres that change dimensions and positions in time and space, in what Jiménez presents as 'an organic machines that contain seeds of new and varied socio-cultural comprehensions that are neither hierarchical nor cisheterosexist' (Jiménez 2022, 81), whose nodes are activated in a non-linear way and whose movements assume different rhythms and directions.

As represented in Figure 1, the nodes of our FAR were: pedagogical implementation (orange), evaluative actions (blue) and, last but not least, pedagogical materials (green) accompanied by diffractive activities (grey). They were activated in three phases or moments: (1) an evaluated

pilot implementation experience, (2) a collective analytical reflection and process of designing new practices and (3) an international implementation and validation of the design proposed.

Colleagues from Australia and South Africa were invited to collaborate on the project based on their expertise in art-based pedagogies and photovoice. On the other hand, the participation of Latin American researchers, was the consequence of pre-existed research bonds on this particular topic.



A total of 58 students on 6 courses, enrolled in 3 countries, participated directly in the full educative experience, while approximately 250 took part in a single awareness-raising process (details in tables 1 and 2). Meanwhile, 18 university lecturers from 11 universities based in 4 countries were directly involved in many aspects of the educative and/or evaluative process (see Table 1, which also includes the initials used in the text), and 20 others were involved in the process of raising awareness and detecting needs.

Table 1. Teaching staff directly involved in the FAR.

	Int.	Full name	University (Country)	Departament
Spanish	BB	Barbara Biglia	URV (Spain)	Education and psychology
	AC	Aloe Cubero		
	SC	Sara Cagliero		
	IG	Inés García		Linguistics
	JB	Jordi Bonet i Martí	UB (Spain)	Sociology
	DP	Dolores Pulido		Arts
	EL	Esther Luna		Education
	EF	Elena Fraj		Arts
	RG	Rocío Garrido		US (Spain)
	MjR	María José Rubio	UCM (Spain)	Social Work
	MtB	Meritxell Bacardit	Ribalta High School	
	MA	Mila Amurrio	UPV/EHU (Spain)	Sociology
	AR	Apen Ruíz	UIC (Spain)	Archaeology
International	BS	Beatriz Soria	UNCuyo (Argentina)	Political Science
	JC	Josephine Cornell	UCT (South Africa)	
	AA	Alejandra Araiza	UAEH (Mexico)	Communication
	MB	Mindy Blaise	ECU (Australia)	Education
	JP	Joe Pollitt		
	EG	Emily Gray	RMIT (Australia)	

Source: Prepared by the authors

To briefly contextualise, we would like to mention that Spain is one of the European countries with more developed gender and feminist legislation, but we are also witnessing a resurgence of a visible antifeminist movement (Bonet et al. 2023; Cabezas 2022). Mexico and Argentina also developed laws on SeGReV in 2007 and 2009, but feminist movements are still denouncing femicides and questioning the lack of rule of law and women's political representation (Toledo 2014).

In the three countries, the HIE still struggle to acknowledge their responsibilities in this topic, adapting measures mostly for legal imperative, as in the case of Spain (Biglia and Cagliero 2019) or for the strong feminist activist pressure like in Mexico (Araiza and Cagliero 2023) and Argentina (Primante and Espeche 2021; Vazquez Laba and Rugna 2017).

In what follows, we will put forward a critical presentation of the different phases of our FAR.

3. Phase one: pilot experiences

Within the SeGReVUni project, we were interested in approaching students' understanding of gender-related violences while creating collective awareness about this problem in the specific university context.

Aware of the difficulties of stimulating students' interest in the neoliberal university, we decided to use and test the creative technique of photovoice. This practice was implemented with three aims in mind: to gather students' understandings of SeGReV, to raise awareness of this problem in the university community and to introduce an innovative technique as a teaching and research tool.

Photovoice is particularly coherent with the feminist pedagogical idea of 'starting from ourselves' and allows participants to immerse themselves in a critical self-reflection about their experience, just as other art-based methods 'serve postmodern attempts at subversion by disrupting certainty, opening up multiplicity in meaning-making instead of pushing authoritative claims' (Lipton and Crimmins 2019, 230). As a pedagogical tool, this technique has fostered students' critical awareness and disrupted the traditional roles and power dynamics between teachers and students, reducing hierarchies through the establishment of relationships based on co-learning and the enhancement of different positionalities and points of view (Cooper et al. 2017). In line with the feminist perspective (Foradada and Lopez 2023), it legitimises participants' experience as a valuable font of knowledge and facilitates significant learning (Leivas et al. 2022). It therefore promotes students' complex understanding of social problems by exploiting their creativity (Chio and Fandt 2007; Lichty et al. 2018).

3.1. Classroom implementation

In the academic year 2020–21, BB and AC designed a five-session experience to be implemented in three classes at Spanish universities (see Table 2), in a virtual format because of COVID-19.

Starting from the same basis, we implemented our practices through two paths.: Exp. 1&2 were configured as extracurricular, while Exp. 3 was directly embedded within the course.

Table 2. Pilot groups

	Exp. 1	Exp. 2	Exp. 3
University	U. Complutense de Madrid	U. of Barcelona	U. Rovira i Virgili
Year and degree	2 nd year, Social Work bachelor's degree	Master's degree in Social and Educational Intervention	1 st year of degree in Infant Education
Subject	Social research methods and techniques	Social intervention	Society, family and education
Age (mainly)	19–22	22 and older	18–21
Direct participants	12 female, 1 male	5 female, 1 male	15 female, 4 male
Full class	48	18	45

Source: Prepared by the authors

In Exp. 1 and 2, three small groups of 5–6 volunteer students were invited to express their understanding of gender-related violences through photonarratives by an expert in this technique (AC). The facilitator was always present, guiding the reflections and debates in all sessions and the teacher assisted as an observer or participant. This work aimed to enrich the understanding of SeGReV at universities from an intersectional perspective, through the students' points of view. The opening session was used to create a bond between participants and to shed light on the technique and the ethical considerations when using photography in research. The following three sessions were focused on sharing and debating students' production on a specific sub-topic introduced by the facilitator, and a participatory analysis in which students connected and deepened their relationships. For each working theme, which ranged from the general (relating to 'Types of sexual and gender-related violences') to the specific ('Intersectionality and power relations' and 'Spaces, violence and resistances'), students had to produce a specific photonarrative. The idea was that a processual immersion in the topic would give rise to a more nuanced understanding of the problem and create a mirroring experience between the participants. Finally, in the last session, students were invited to represent something important in relation to the topic that had not yet been covered. Moreover, they

collectively evaluated the experience and imagined political incidence strategies to disseminate the knowledge constructed.

Meanwhile, in Exp. 3, this activity was assigned to some student groups, while others used narrative creation techniques. The experience was linked to the subject being taught, but great emphasis was also placed on the processual aspects, as the methodological content was part of the course. The small groups of students (6–7 in each) were invited to decide on a SeGReV subtopic, on which they would base their photonarratives. The aim was to encourage self-reflection on their experience of violence, to sensitise them as future schoolteachers. The facilitator (BB) – their teacher – was an expert in gender-related violences and feminist methodologies, but not in this specific technique. In some parts of the sessions, each group worked in a different virtual space and the facilitator moved from one group to another to clear up any doubts or suggest procedural arrangements. Great importance was assigned to the debates, which started with the students' perspectives about their peers' creations, facilitated by the inquiries of the SHOWED method (Hergenrather and Rhodes 2008): 'What do you see in this photo? What is happening here *really*? How do you relate this to your life? Why do you think it is happening? What can we do about it?'. The guided categorisation analysis process, in which emerging categories were identified, was another crucial point in the educative practice. After that, students shared their results with the rest of the class through a video presentation (according to the flipped class process we were engaged in) and wrote a reflexive group essay about photovoice's potential in education research for their evaluation.

3.2. Internal evaluation

To evaluate this pilot experience, we conducted a content analysis of the students' perspectives, through a collective evaluation at the final session and the videos or essays produced to disseminate the experiences, as well as facilitators' reflective analysis, because we believe that '[t]he significance of our critical reflections speaks to the importance of researchers' experiences-as-data' (Simmons et

al. 2021, 246).

In general terms, we consider this experience to have been fascinating and powerful. We detected that students soon began to share personal experiences, as a safe and trusting atmosphere – not at all common in the classroom – was created, and that our presence was not an obstacle to sharing anger, frustration, or strategies to overcome the daily experience of violence. We found that their awareness of the topic increased as a result of the experience, leading them to elaborate and deepen their reflections and express a similar perception: ‘... it is good to talk about it ... to share the experiences that we have had and to say... [it] is terrible, and we must fix it, you know?’ (Exp. 3)².

The photonarratives’ quality and the depth of the reflections developed testify to the students’ engagement with the task. Starting from personal experiences enabled them to identify and debate specific types of violence, spaces and power relations:

Being a victim of sexual harassment at the University is a very strange situation. First, you never think that in such an institutional and ‘correct’ environment, things like this can happen. And, secondly, because the relationship you have with the aggressor puts you in a position of inferiority (Exp. 2).

However, in some cases, stereotypical views of violence and perpetrators/victims were represented. Indeed, while volunteer groups’ engagement was more homogeneous, in Exp. 3 we encountered some resistance in the only group with no volunteer cisgender men. These students chose a picture from the internet of a victimised woman instead of look with their own experience and hid behind a ‘common sense’ discourse on SeGReV in the debates that followed.

Notwithstanding, the participatory and innovative approach was particularly well evaluated in terms of promoting interest and engagement in the SeGReV problem:

² We mentioned direct quotes of students’ voices anonymously referring to the group or experience they have been participating in.

I was already tired of the subject because it is given a super banal approach and it's always repetitive, from the same point of view ... the importance of all this has come back to me (Exp. 1)

The technique has also been seen as a powerful tool for their future professional practice:

Using photovoice to conduct research in the school is very useful since the photographs speak of the concerns that we can find within the educational environment (Exp. 3).

Another positive element detected was that the process helps to create a bond between participants. As noted by BB, a clear indicator of this success was that first-year students, who had not been able to meet in person due to COVID-19 restrictions, were able to create a positive group relationship that helped them to grow collectively (Exp. 3). This leads to a strengthening of students support networks:

... we have learned, we have shared, and it seems to me like a support, that there are classmates who have gone through things that you have also gone through, so close and yet so far away because without these sessions I would not have known this part of you (Exp. 1).

In addition, sharing the different pedagogical practices among the researchers allowed us to identify criticisms and potentialities of each of them. By discussing and analysing a different set of photonarratives (Exp. 1 and 2), limited time was left for the participatory analysis and categorisation, but the development of clear progress through the sessions was allowed. In contrast, in Exp. 3, a 'longitudinal' analysis process facilitated deeper debates and collective construction of emergent categories, for which teacher supervision was undoubtedly crucial.

In general, the dissemination worked on small scales but not on larger ones. The production of final videos to share with classmates allowed participants to communicate in their own voices and raised awareness of the problem (e.g., Exp. 3). However, we had more difficulties getting students engaged in advocacy plans (e.g., Exp. 1 and 2), and the summer and new academic year resulted in decreased active engagement.

4. Phase two: systematising and designing a new experience.

Based on the satisfactory results of these pilot experiences, we realised the importance of systematising the knowledge gained and offering tools for future implementation. Therefore, we designed a new project, PhV_SeGReV (Biglia et al. 2023), to create internationally validated material to mainstream the work on SeGReV within university courses of different disciplines. One of its main goals was for the materials produced to allow university teaching staff with different backgrounds and levels of knowledge on the topic to increase their sensitivity and develop new teaching strategies. Our long-term aim was for this implementation to have a transformative impact on students' awareness, encouraging them to become agents of change in their contexts. In fact, 'many symbolic practices in higher education privilege and re-entrench the power of dominant groups. However, ... students can disrupt these instances of symbolic violence in various ways ... [and] photovoice, helped to an extent to facilitate this disruption' (Kessi, Cornell, and Ratele 2016, 115).

4.1 Collective professional evaluation

The first step in phase two was to carry out the peer-to-peer collective evaluation and improve the pilot experience. For this purpose, we developed two face-to-face debates with colleagues (AR, EF, DP, EL, IG and JM) from different disciplines to understand their needs when implementing similar pedagogical approaches in their classrooms. Furthermore, two training courses were implemented: one at the Universitat de Barcelona, with around ten pedagogy teachers (from the MideMe group), and the other at the Universidad de Sevilla, with a similar number of psychology faculty members. Both comprised two sessions (3–4 hours) of experiential learning that combined theory and practice, with clear guidelines for implementing our proposal in the classroom. Participants also reflected on potential methodological improvements based on the lessons learned, their expertise and teaching experience, and their pedagogical praxis needs.

The second step involved two online methodological exchange meetings (MEM), the first with the Mexican AA and the South African JC and the second with the Australian group Feminist Educators Against Sexism (FEAS) (MB, EG and JP). In this encounter, we presented our projects and collectively reflected on the potentialities and limits of arts-based pedagogies. Later, thanks to the input received, we completed our critical analysis and produced two video reflections about the pilot experiences ([Cubero](#) and [Biglia](#)) to share with FEAS experts, along with some specific inquiries.

In what follow, we sum up some of the criticality and doubts from the pilot experience and the solutions to them we propose after this three-step analysis.

1. What is the best way to promote students' reflection: Telling them to express what they feel and see openly (as in Exp. 1 and 2) or with a more guided approach based on specific questions (as in Exp. 3)?

It depends on the context, timing and the facilitator's presence and experience. Open debates can be extremely rich, but they require the presence of a facilitator with wider SeGReV experience. Questions allow more autonomous debates, thus preventing them from becoming superficial, but they reduce spontaneity.

2. What is the best way of dealing with possible resistance from cisgender men and at the same time to guarantee a safer and deeper experience?

Gender homogeneous groups allow women and gender non-conforming people to feel safer and it may encourage cisgender men to assume a self-reflexive approach. Gender heterogeneity can facilitate a much-needed dialogue, but it involves more complexity and requires facilitating skills to face the conflicts that may arise.

3. Would it be better to dedicate one group session to debating on the photonarratives and another one to analysing the data, or to mix the debate and analysis?

We suggested implementing it in two separate sessions to give enough time to (1) engage more directly with their feelings, (2) empathise with others and (3) elaborate categories after more in-depth reflections.

4. How could we improve the students' evaluation of the experience?

The qualitative evaluation debates proved extremely fruitful, however, its combination with a survey will allow them to express anonymously.

5. What is the best way to transfer the knowledge produced to the whole class?

Presentations in class are very useful both face to face and through videos. Nonetheless, we suggest clarifying with the students very carefully what aspects should be included in their presentation, as well as offering some planning questions to facilitate the debates.

This analysis allowed us to confirm the technique's usefulness in involving students from their own experience, sensitivity and emotionality relating to the SeGReV problem. We verified that using images and storytelling allowed a great connection with the young people to form (Parfitt 2019). The results were highly promising and showed the appropriateness, potentialities and limits of using photovoice to mainstream work on SeGReV in university courses.

4.2 New figures in the fractal experience

Nevertheless, to promote the wider use of this technique, the experiences needed to be systematised. The debates and analyses presented above were crucial to re-define our pedagogical proposal (see Table 1 in Biglia and Cubero 2022, 41-42). This was included in the first version of our guide, which was used as a basis for a new implementation of the practices (Biglia, and Cubero, 2022).

To adapt the guide for teachers without in-depth knowledge of the topic or the technique, this version was reviewed by our colleagues, AA, RG, EL and MA who also identified topics that needed further addressing. Therefore, we designed and recorded a set of short videos to train university teachers: an introduction to the technique (Cubero, and Garrido 2022); a feminist intersectional

understanding of the problem (Biglia, and Araiza 2022); an explanation of the usefulness of the techniques for working with these specific topics (Cubero, and Biglia 2022) and some ethical recommendations (Araiza, and Garrido 2022).

5. Phase three: Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL)

In this phase, we aimed to continue promoting sensitisation and empowerment of university students from different social disciplines; to evaluate the suitability and effectiveness of the proposed pedagogical pathway and to test the designed teaching materials. In order to focus on the structural element of SeGReV from an intersectional perspective, we decided to test the experience in culturally mixed groups and, therefore, to implement it in a COIL. However, most of our students couldn't discuss such a sensitive topic fluently in English, so we decided to mix up only students based in Latin American countries who could use Spanish as the lingua franca. To do so, we decided to involve teaching staff collaborators who had not previously facilitated this experience and to use teachers' and students' insights to make the final adjustments to the pedagogical guide and videos.

5.1 COIL implementation

The development of COIL resulted from coordinated and collaborative work carried out by different team members at the international level, which brought together students from different years, degrees and universities based in Spain, Argentina and Mexico.

Eight faculty members (AA, EL, BS, MA, SC, AR, JB and TB) trained themselves with our guide and the videos. Some decided to reflect on how to implement this technique in different disciplines in a video (Cagliero, Ruiz, and Bonet 2022), one (TB) applied it in her professional school (Bacardit 2022), while the others directly collaborated in the COIL.

The test of the pedagogical design was conducted in three groups with volunteer students (details in Table 3) based in different countries, to test the effectiveness of promoting intercultural exchanges, and was facilitated by a teacher that was not their own.

Table 3. COIL participants

Gr	N (male)	Ages	Year/Degree	Subjects	University	Country
1	4 (2)	21-24	4 th , Communication	Communication and Gender	UAEH	Mexico
	3		4 th , Sociology	Sociology of Gender	UPV/EHU	Spain
2	3 (1)	20-41	Master's. Social and Educational Intervention		UB	Spain
	3		(Various) Sociology and Social Work	none	UNCuyo	Argentina
3	5	20-31	Social Education		URV	Spain
	4		Community Action			

Source: Prepared by the authors

AC facilitated group one and supervised the implementation in the other groups led by AA (2) and EL and BS (3) respectively. As we went along, COIL 2 and 3 were accompanied by reflective meetings where the facilitators debated potential methodological improvements and adaptations based on the idiosyncrasies of each group, such as the participation of mature students in group two and Argentinian activists in groups two and three.

Once the process was completed, the students carried out awareness-raising activities in their classes (around 250 students were involved) in which the photovoice processes were framed. The time zone difference impeded the virtual presence of international students in the classroom dissemination activities, so each group prepared a joint video to share with the rest of their classmates at the end of the photovoice process. This allows to give visibility to the intercultural aspects of the experience. These disseminative actions took specific forms, for example, the Mexican students in group one 'briefly explained their sequence of introduction-climax-denouement and showed the images without the narratives. They encouraged group participation and tried to find out how the images challenged them [...] they debated on the picture. Afterwards, we watched the video which made everything much clearer' (AA, teacher notes). Basque students from the same

group started explaining personal impressions of the process and photovoice, and then they debated with the images as a basis, without showing the narratives (MA, teacher notes).

5.2 COILS evaluation

The evaluation of the COIL experience we present here is based on students' responses to two surveys (one for those who directly took part in the photonarrative practice and the other for those who attended the dissemination activities) and facilitators'/teachers' ethnographical notes.

The COIL participants mostly report that the experience was useful to 'reflect and exchange opinions' (86%) and to 'acquire new experiences and points of view' (67%). Not surprisingly, as this was a volunteer-based enrolment, much fewer (9.5%) considered that they had 'become aware of the problem' because of this process. All the sessions were scored highly, and their usefulness was rated between 9 and 9.6 out of 10 points, while the pedagogical element of the course was evaluated even more favourably. The potentiality of the technique was also widely recognised, especially for 'looking at our own experience in greater depth' (9.75/10), 'approaching a sensitive subject in an innovative way' (9.7/10) and 'putting yourself in someone else's shoes' (9.65/10). As MA (teacher notes) points out, Basque participants found the opportunity to reflect on experiences of gender and related violence with people from different socio-cultural backgrounds particularly gratifying.

Figure 2. Main lessons learned by the COIL students



As shown in Figure 2, the experience was perceived as useful in providing meaningful learning; in fact, the prominent words (*awareness*, *perspectives*, *intersectionality* and *feminism*) do not refer to specific knowledge but to the essential elements to tackle the issue holistically and to confront it.

Other important words seem to acknowledge the validity of the technique for facilitating interpersonal learning among students: these include *collaboration*, *empathy*, *listening*, and *voice*. In this vein, the male participants in group one mentioned, they were grateful to participate with women and expressed that even if sometimes ‘they felt ... out of place ... it was very useful, and they learned from listening to the experiences of their classmates’ (AA, teacher notes).

The evaluation of the dissemination session is more nuanced (Bonet, Biglia, and Cubero, 2023): the experience was particularly perceived as beneficial to ‘reflect and exchange opinions’ (61.9%), as well as valuable to ‘acquire new experiences and points of view’ and ‘improve my knowledge of the topic’ (42.8% each). Nevertheless, the intercultural exchange element was not easily transmitted in all groups: for example, in the Basque class, the debates were rather superficial, and some images were decontextualised, which caused some difficulties in understanding the

itself because we had already talked about the feminist movement and gender theories, situating them in the field of communication' (AA, teacher notes).

5.3 Material dissemination

Finally, we would like to mention that to expand the impact of our FAR fractal's evolution, pass through the elaboration of a [webpage](#) that also serves as a platform for a [virtual exhibition](#), implemented thanks to the artistic skills of DP and EF and the linguistic supervision of IG. Other crucial elements for the diffractive strategy were the sharing of the materials under Creative Commons licensing, to ensure reusability, and the production of the narrative in different formats (such as images, text, and videos) and by multiple agents (students, facilitators, researchers, art-pedagogy experts and policymakers), such as in the [final conference](#).

6. To conclude (or begin?)

In this paper, we presented a three-year experience in which the research has gradually evolved in response to the collective knowledge acquired and redefined. The processual and metamorphic process implemented was our way of recognising the FAR guideline principle of 'interdependence between theory and practice, with emphasis on the embodiment process and the ongoing constitutive dynamic between these two representations of reality' (Biglia 2007: 417). Our research was driven both by our personal commitment to the eradication of SeGReV and by our teachers' concern about the difficulties in foster in-depth understanding and commitment to tackling this problem with classical pedagogies. Following FAR principles, we were very attentive to power relations, both within the classroom setting and also between researchers. In the accounted experience, in order to question the roles and mixing up power relations, for example, the PhD candidate researcher acted as implementation coordinator of the second experience, and the classroom facilitator was not working with their own students. As we analysed in relation to others' research (Jiménez et al. 2016; Araiza et al., under evaluation) this does not eliminate the presence of power dynamics nor traces of

coloniality but it facilitates recognising and questioning them during and/or after the practices.

The international debates, on the other side, facilitated the understanding of the collective social and structural dimensions of the problem addressed, which call for a holistic intervention to transform the culture in which they are embedded, especially in the context of neoliberal universities' resistance to gender equality (Phipps 2020; Verge, Ferrer-Fons, and González 2018). The applied approach of our project and the production of training materials can be valuable tools to support teachers in this context. At the same time, it is important to highlight how this approach is keen to recognise "the capabilities of those that engage with us in the co-creation of knowledge" (Walker et al. 2022, 1) as shown by the great importance and dissemination given to the photonarratives produced, and disseminated [here](#). We hope that practices like this, in the future, will lead to considerable improvement in the quality of education processes, by questioning 'the reluctance that takes place in academic knowledge production spaces ... to provide tools that allow [feminist] perspectives and epistemological approaches to be incorporated into our work' (Barrios 2023, 14).

Our experience has proven that photovoice can be an ally in this sense, as it is an extremely useful technique both pedagogically, for approaching such a complex problem with the university population, and as a research instrument, for making students' experiences and understanding of SeGReV visible. Nonetheless, we must recognise a clear limit to the narrated practices: the low participation rate among male students, who rarely volunteer to take part. This probably relates to the backlash and resistance to feminist demands (Flood, Dragiewicz, and Pease 2021). As this male participant stated, we have been able to design a pedagogical approach that does not reinforce this resistance:

These spaces never subtract, they always add to the people who are participating... and it makes me very sad that there is little male participation in these spaces ... I feel very afraid of occupying a space that at some point I should not occupy or saying something that could be misunderstood ... but in the end, it has been the opposite, it has been all growth ... it has helped me to strengthen my knowledge ... and as a proposal for the future I would like to try to have

more male presence, not only in this space but in any space where we work with this methodology (Exp. 1).

The challenge now is to collectively re-imagine ways of overcoming male resistance to enrolling in this kind of encounter.

The expansive wave from the project may be a step in this direction, in fact: by creating images and stories from their own life experiences, students have promoted awareness and visibility, showed diverse realities, and therefore challenged everyday sexism in the university context (Gray, Knight, and Blaise 2018). The methodology employed allowed cultivating a participatory pedagogical environment coherent with a feminist pedagogical approach (Almansori 2020) and was useful in challenging HIEs' alleged mainstreamed neutrality (Busse et al. 2021). It was a 'way of fostering critical thinking, promoting student agency, enhancing understanding of complex social phenomena and expanding the ways in which both students and teachers think about their physical and social worlds' (Cooper et al. 2017, 465). The pedagogical practice designed promoted personal transformation, awareness, deconstruction of gender norms, and self- and collective empowerment (Cubero and Garrido 2023), as well as stimulating the exchange of these reflections with other groups of students. It also contributed towards establishing networks based on mutual support and building potential solutions (Moletsane 2022) that do not fall within a *marketplace of ideas* (Phipps 2019) and are, therefore, suitable for the essential recognition of the intersectional aspect of SeGReV (Colpitts 2022).

The importance of alliances and networking is a clear lesson learned from feminist movements and has been a crucial element in our FAR process.

For example, using Table 1 is a way of making explicit collective knowledge production, generally hidden in the academic research (Fontanari, Gaiaschi, and Borri 2019). Along the same line, the results of the dissemination activities, show the possibilities of the photovoice technique to increase awareness, knowledge and visibility of SeGReV, beyond the group directly participating in

the whole experience. The production of final videos to share with classmates proved to have multiple possibilities regarding communicating the students' voices and sensitisation about the problem (Banyard et al. 2022). While students' dissemination activity worked mainly on small scales, the strategy adopted by our FAR seems to offer wider progressive diffraction. For example, through their involvement in the project as facilitators or researchers or over specific training, around forty university teachers have been directly prepared to use this technique in their classrooms. The diffractive practices presented in this paper enable the organic machine (Jiménez 2022) to keep moving and foster broader and deeper impacts in the longer term, thus contributing to a change of culture in relation to sexualities, violences and power relations.

While the process is still active, we must end this specific narrative by highlighting that the *investigación vincular*, or 'linked research' (Mora 2023, 24), implemented in our FAR has proven to be extremely enriching; we hope we have been able to exemplify to which extent FAR can be a powerful approach for researching in educative settings.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Geolocation information

The data have been collected on-line. Participants are from universities located at: Tarragona (Spain); Barcelona (Spain), Madrid (Spain); Bilbao (Spain); Sevilla (Spain); Mendoza (Argentina); Pachuca (Mexico); Joondalup (Australia); Melbourne (Australia); Muckleneuk Ridge, Pretoria (South Africa).

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