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# **The Formative Value of the Discussion Group on Sexual and Gender Related Violence in Higher Education Institutions**

**Abstract:** This work is part of a broader research project whose objective was to construct, based on a feminist methodology, a questionnaire for the detection and visibility of sexual and gender related violence in the university through a collective process. Here we focus on the first phase of this process which are the discussion groups and specifically on their formative value. We conducted 11 discussion groups, 9 specific (with groups without representation in the literature on sexual and gender related violence) and 2 heterogeneous (with the entire university community: students, teaching and research staff, administration and services staff and subcontracted staff) with a total of 80 participants. We analysed and categorised the transcripts with Atlas.ti v7 software based on the literature review and previous questionnaires on sexual and gender related violence at the university, as well as the categories emerging from the discussion groups. The results went beyond what and how to ask about sexual and gender related violence, highlighting the formative value of the discussion groups and their characteristics. According to the literature, discussion groups promote critical reflection, situate participants as active subjects, and allow them to recognise the existence of a problem. However, our results show that discussion groups also generate networks of joint learning, mobilise collaborative action strategies, create a space for reconstruction and understanding, and stimulate well-being. We conclude by highlighting the formative value and pedagogical potential of discussion groups, which are often only considered as a data collection technique, and we frame the characteristics of this value in critical pedagogy and feminist epistemologies.

**Palabras clave/Keywords:** Formative value of Discussion Groups, Sexual and Gender Related Violence at university, Feminist Methodology

## **1. Introduction**

This work was carried out within the framework of the SeGREVUni project (number RT 12018- 093627- B10) co-funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities and the European Union. The main objective of this research was to give visibility to the complexity and nuances of sexual and gender related violence (hereinafter SGRV) in universities, contributing to committed and less discriminatory policies and interventions designed as responses to this problem. To this end, a questionnaire was created based on

feminist epistemologies and validated by experts through a collective process with different agents of the university community: administrative and service staff (PAS), teaching and research staff (PDI), subcontracted staff and students. The first phase of this collective process was the discussion groups (hereinafter DG) that we carried out with the university community to reflect on the best way to detect and act against this violence in the university context, and it is in this phase that we will highlight the formative potential of the DGs in this work.<sup>1</sup>

### **1.1. *Discussion Group***

According to Nyumba et al. (2018) DG is a technique for collecting information in research to obtain data from a deliberately selected group of people to understand social problems in depth. While these authors define DG as a face-to-face technique, McDermott (2013) considers the feasibility and appropriateness of conducting it virtually in terms of its benefits.

Among the different characteristics that define DG, interaction stands out. As pointed out in the research by Domínguez et al. (2012) on theoretical, epistemological, and methodological aspects, interaction is the aspect that differentiates discussion groups from focus groups. In other words, in the discussion groups, a group space is generated where information emerges from the participation and interaction between the participants. The researchers stimulate participation with undirected questions, and it is the participants who determine the information to be discussed. These collective dialogues make it possible to learn about the diversity of opinions, agreements and tensions regarding the topics or ideas being addressed (Mondragón, 2021). In turn, this interaction promotes a space of meaningful content that translates into a reflective space.

According to Mena and Méndez (2009), “this reflection provokes change by returning to the research subject their ability to ‘be a subject’ and ‘take the floor’, that is, to situate themselves in a research perspective where the recognition of the humanity of the other is present” (p. 7). Furthermore, and in line with Helyer (2015), reflection implies significant learning in terms of the meaning of what is being addressed; it develops a conscious awareness; it generates knowledge and allows lessons to be drawn from one’s own experiences. In turn, this idea is reinforced by Mondragón (2021) in that she considers that DGs generate the construction of collective knowledge based on the dialogue that takes place and

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1 For the full research, our questionnaire to SGRV and/or resources to address SGRV, please visit our website <http://www.segrevuni.eu/en/news/>.

involves a meeting of reflexivities. This author adds the importance of considering in this construction that both knowledge and those who enunciate it are situated, as well as the social, temporal, and spatial context in which they are found. In short, the reflection that takes place in DG promotes reflective thinking, as it involves “an active, intentional and purposeful process of exploration, discovery and learning” (Chang, 2019, p. 96).

## 1.2. Feminist Methodology

Therefore, considering all the contributions of the DG, it can be affirmed that it has great formative value in terms of meaningful learning, critical reflection, and generation of shared knowledge. This approach to DG as an information-gathering strategy with transformative potential is framed within the feminist research methodology which, according to Jiménez (2021):

It generates other ways of doing science (...) It addresses gender as a subject, therefore, the experience of gender and beyond gender (ethnicity, class...) is the constitutive core of the processes of scientific knowledge construction. Gender is not seen as an analytical category, but as a constitutive category of research practice. (p. 177)

This methodology is articulated from feminist epistemological critiques of the androcentric bias of traditional ways of knowing which, under the supposed “neutrality and asepsis” of the positive sciences (Hernández, 1999), have contributed to the reproduction and reification of gender. Revealing and counteracting these biases has led feminist research to undertake different strategies to legitimise knowledge.

In line with Jiménez (2021) and paraphrasing Sandra Harding (1987), the specificity of feminist research is no longer, or not exclusively, based on adding women and other minoritised social groups to social research in the face of their under-representation in the production of knowledge, as well as the problems that concern them. Instead, it is about “shifting the research task to the importance of the process of knowing, rather than to the cognitive subjects or the subjects of study” (Biglia, 2014, p. 26). In other words, in this framework, the aim is for research practice to be “consistent with feminist principles, and to be rethought and redesigned according to the specificities of the research, its context, its purpose and, of course, the feminist stance taken” (ibid.).

Among the epistemological proposals that inspire these other ways of doing science, it is worth highlighting, on the one hand, the valuing of “the cognitive styles and ways of knowing considered characteristic of women, denigrated or naturalised to such an extent that their specific qualification or competence is denied” (Martín Palomo, 2008 as cited in Martín Palomo & Muñoz, 2014, p. 37);

on the other hand, the problematisation of the gendered dichotomies (Harding, 1987) on which the dominant epistemologies are based (cognitive object/subject; objectivity/subjectivity, thought/feeling, etc.) insofar as they reflect power asymmetries that feminist research points out and criticises. And finally, reflexivity, a methodological tool that forces us to rethink and take responsibility for the implications that the place from which the research is carried out may have on the field and on the participants. According to Gandarías (2014), reflexivity “allows us to deconstruct power and co-create knowledge, taking into account how it operates throughout the research process” (p. 291).

The translation of these theoretical proposals into research praxis requires, among other things, a renewed use of the methods and methodological tools used so far (Harding, 1987). Thus, in the framework of feminist methodologies and epistemologies, DG is no longer a mere data collection device, but an instance in which “information is co-produced in the interaction between the researcher, the field and the people participating in the research” (Enguix, 2012, p. 59). In this sense, their contributions are understood as expert knowledge, recognising the condition of specific knowledge of their reflections and experiences of gender related violence in universities.

## 2. Method

The implementation of a participatory methodology that involves different agents of the university community is specifically framed within the feminist and intersectional perspective that has allowed us to recognise the diversity and complexity of the experiences and needs of the victims of SGRV, as well as the structural inequalities that sustain this type of violence. It is a process that raises awareness, knowledge, sensitisation, and visibility of the problem, and does not leave out the discomforts it generates.

Therefore, in this collective and participatory process we sought on the one hand, the collaboration of 9 *specific discussion groups* whose experiences and perceptions of SGRV have not usually been represented in the literature on gender related violence in universities and whose expert knowledge would allow us to address this violence in an intersectional manner (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Specific online discussion groups that have not been collected in the literature on SGRV at universities. Source: own elaboration.

| Discussion group                                    | Total number of participants |
|-----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Transgender and non-binary                          | 63                           |
| Various physical or mental capacities               | 5                            |
| Trainees                                            |                              |
| Racialised                                          | 5                            |
| Survivors of sexual and gender related violence     | 8                            |
| Subcontracted personnel                             | 2                            |
| Fieldworkers/interns                                | 8                            |
| People experienced as women in masculinised careers | 6                            |
| Experts at SGRV                                     | 13                           |

On the other hand, we also sought the participation of 2 *heterogeneous groups* (Table 2), that is, groups in which the entire university community participated, not only students and/or teaching staff, as was usual in research in this context (Bodelón et. al., 2012; Díaz-Aguado et. al., 2013; Ferrer-Pérez et. al., 2011; Valls, 2008), but including, in addition to the two previous groups, administrative and service staff and subcontracted staff (generally for the cleaning service). In this way, they could share the particularities of their different positions and experiences in the university in relation to the perception and experience of the SGRV in the university.

**Table 2.** Heterogeneous online discussion groups of the university community. Source: own elaboration.

| Heterogeneous discussion groups             | Total number of participants |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| PAS – Administrative and Service Staff      | 17                           |
| PDI – Teaching and Research Staff           |                              |
| Student body                                |                              |
| Subcontracted personnel (cleaning services) |                              |

From September to early November 2020 and through chain or “snowball” sampling, we began the search for key informants from the university community, and contacted organisations, associations, entities, collectives, and trade unions that could help us find people to participate in the specific discussion groups. We contacted all these people by email, specifying the objective of the project, the framework in which it was being developed, and what was required of the

participants. In addition to detailing the expected duration and the anonymisation of their identity, we also specified ethical aspects of feminist methodology: the emphasis on reflexivity, horizontality between researcher and participants, the recognition of agency in the research subjects and the co-creation of knowledge.

Between November 2020 and May 2021, we conducted the heterogeneous and targeted discussion groups, but, given the pandemic context, they had to be mostly virtual, with few participants in the groups of outsourced staff, people with psychological or psychiatric distress and trainees.

To carry out the analysis of the information co-produced in the DGs, we designed a basic categorical system (typologies of violence, spaces where this violence occurs, intersectionality in the experience of violence and university institutional culture with respect to SGRV), which was the product of the literature review and the theoretical background of the researchers, and, above all, open to incorporating emerging categories that emerged from the analysis. We carried out an in-depth cross-review of the analyses of the transcripts with the aim of extracting theoretical and emerging categories, taking as a reference the basic categorical system, and for the emerging categories, we tried to collect as faithfully as possible key words extracted from the discourses of the participants themselves.

In May 2022, after eliminating duplicate categories and refining all the theoretical and emerging categories by consensus among the researchers, we obtained the definitive categorical system with which we coded the information using Atlas.ti v7 (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Dimensions and categories of analysis

| Dimensions of analysis           | Categories of analysis           |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Typologies of violence           | Harassment                       |
|                                  | LGTBIQphobic violence            |
|                                  | Physical violence                |
|                                  | Psychological violence           |
|                                  | Sexual violence and sexual abuse |
|                                  | Technology-based SGRV            |
|                                  | Subtle/invisibilised violence    |
|                                  | Epistemological violence         |
| Resistances / Responses to SGRVs | –                                |

Table 3. Continued

| Dimensions of analysis                                                                                             | Categories of analysis                                                                                               |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Spaces in which violence occurs                                                                                    | Inside the University (classrooms, offices, corridors, cafeteria, courtyards/gardens)                                |
|                                                                                                                    | Off-campus (university parties, off-campus meetings)                                                                 |
|                                                                                                                    | Virtual space (virtual campus, digital teleconferencing/ videoconferencing platforms, social networks)               |
|                                                                                                                    | University administrative services                                                                                   |
| Relationship between aggressors and aggressed mentioned                                                            | Peer-to-peer (EST-EST, PDI-PDI, PAS-PAS)                                                                             |
|                                                                                                                    | Up-down (PDI-EST, PDI-PAS, PAS-EST, thesis supervisor-doctoral student; internship/company internship-student tutor) |
|                                                                                                                    | Down-up (EST-PDI, EST-PAS, PAS-PDI)                                                                                  |
|                                                                                                                    | Pupil-teacher-aggressor alliance                                                                                     |
|                                                                                                                    | SGRV to students by persons not linked to the University (partners or family members)                                |
|                                                                                                                    | Affective-sexual (any level)                                                                                         |
|                                                                                                                    | Friendly                                                                                                             |
| Institutional culture of violence                                                                                  | Unequal distributions of power / gendered relations                                                                  |
|                                                                                                                    | Institutional responsibility, recognition, and care for the LGTB+ community                                          |
|                                                                                                                    | Lack of institutional accountability in the face of violence                                                         |
|                                                                                                                    | Hierarchical, binary and capacitising constitution of the University                                                 |
| Intersectionalities mentioned (different categories were crossed in the same quote when the information was coded) | Disability intersection                                                                                              |
|                                                                                                                    | Social class intersection                                                                                            |
|                                                                                                                    | Gender intersection                                                                                                  |
|                                                                                                                    | Age intersection                                                                                                     |
|                                                                                                                    | Mental Health intersection                                                                                           |
|                                                                                                                    | Migrant intersection                                                                                                 |
|                                                                                                                    | Trans intersection                                                                                                   |
|                                                                                                                    | Cultural intersection                                                                                                |
| Opinions / perceptions on SGRV (University)                                                                        | Definitions of SGRV                                                                                                  |
|                                                                                                                    | Stereotypes/Social constructions around the profile of the aggressor and aggressed person.                           |

(Continued)

**Table 3.** Continued

| Dimensions of analysis                               | Categories of analysis                                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Short-term response emotions                         | Discomfort/Security                                                                                    |
|                                                      | Feeling of guilt                                                                                       |
|                                                      | Feelings of undervaluation                                                                             |
|                                                      | Fear of the consequences of whistleblowing                                                             |
|                                                      | Fear of discrimination (hijab, trans)                                                                  |
| Long-term effects                                    | Shame/fear stigmatisation for suffering from SGRV                                                      |
| Answers                                              | Good institutional practices / activists                                                               |
| Proposals for improvement                            | Proposals for improvement Protocol / Specialised services                                              |
|                                                      | Proposals for improvement teaching / staff / universities / students                                   |
|                                                      | Proposals for improvement in Guarantees in universities and/or alternative procedures to the protocol. |
| Specific recommendations regarding the questionnaire | Form-related                                                                                           |
|                                                      | Content-related                                                                                        |
|                                                      | Concerning its administration                                                                          |
| Power relations                                      | Male power                                                                                             |
|                                                      | Impunity by position                                                                                   |
| Protocols                                            | Lack of knowledge/lack of implementation                                                               |
|                                                      | Protocol failures                                                                                      |

We disaggregated the reports resulting from each coding into one report for each code. In total, 56 reports were generated, which were analysed individually by each researcher in a first step and agreed upon as a group in a second step.

These results were cross-referenced with those obtained from the analysis of questionnaires on SGRV previously carried out in other research to identify the final axes on which we would build our questionnaire to detect and make SGRV visible in universities, but our discussion groups, in addition to being an instrument for collecting data for our questionnaire, were revealed as a tool for training, visibility and reflection on these forms of violence in universities.

One of the indicators of the power of using the discussion groups as a tool for reflection on SGRV in the university context is that the “results” go beyond the instrument we intended to construct. Not only do they tell us what and how we should ask questions to detect and confront these forms of violence, but they also point out that we need to go beyond a punitive logic; that we need to create a climate adverse to sexual and gender related violence; that we need to transform

the way we produce and transmit knowledge; that we need to include digital male violence in university guidelines, including those that occur in off-campus virtual environments, but between people in the university community. They also illustrate the university's lack of institutional responsibility in that they train people who will intervene in other people's lives and do not sufficiently prevent or respond to SGRV; they talk about the effects of this violence, its typology, the spaces where it occurs and the people who are aggressed and those who are aggressors. And finally, they give us proposals for improvement in teaching, in protocols, and in how to resist this violence within the university and with alliances in the rest of society.

### 3. Results

As discussed above, DG has so far been considered only as a data collection technique. However, the analysis of DG provides significant results that underline the potential of DG as a tool with formative value. These contributions, in the light of the theoretical framework, relate to three main issues:

1. DGs promote critical reflection.
2. They situate the participants as active subjects who take the floor.
3. They allow the existence of a problem to be recognised collectively.

According to Chang (2019) on the critical reflection promoted by the DGs, it is identified in the participants how the DG allows them to *reflect collectively* on the topics that are addressed from the interaction generated by the same dynamic of the DGs as pointed out by Domínguez et al. (2012):

It seems to me, from what you say, X, Y, Z, and Q, that what is happening is that we have not normalised equality, right? it seems that this is where we have to work, right? That, instead of normalising violence, or gender stereotypes, what we must normalise are relations of equality, that men have to write the same as women, it is true that different things are demanded of us, that different things are expected of us, but also in terms of customs. E09\_FG1\_WomeninMasculinisedCareers

This collective reflection is significant in that it promotes the *development of critical awareness* (Mondragón, 2021). The participants, through the space for reflection generated by the DG, become aware of and realise the situations and experiences they have lived through, analysing them from the perspective of judgement, questioning and the place they occupy as participants:

“At the time she took it as: “oh well ok” and left, but it is true that she has told me again that he asks her a lot to see if she has a partner, to see where she lives, if she is from

Aragon and comes here every day... and now I have just realised that... it is harassment and with regard to gender violence" E05\_FG\_Racialised

"I wanted to say, now that you've commented, I was thinking that if there was a situation like this from student to teacher, I think there would be partly a power relationship between the quotes, because I think it would be from male student to female teacher, so I think the student would have that power by nature, let's say they've been given it, and I think there would be that power from the bottom up". EG\_StudentsOnInternship

This critical awareness is also evident as the participants *rethink issues* that are socially and culturally, among others, taken for granted. An example of this is the following participant's reflection on the stigma of the "working class" student:

"I think it's a totally invisible issue, uh, I think that working class students who suffer from, uh, cases of harassment or other types of violence are in a very vulnerable situation, because to begin with, the university has never taken them seriously, uh, they are not the profile that the faculty and other university staff see as a profile, uh, to progress within the university but people who are just passing through and who are not going to get anywhere and this stereotype weighs very heavily on these people when it comes to denouncing, when it comes to, and apart from that, they carry the stigma that obviously these things happen much more to working class people because they are more violent, less prepared, etc., etc." E02\_FG\_Experts

As Mena and Méndez (2009) point out, the results obtained also highlight the change that this reflection brings about in the DG participants, as they acquire an active role as subjects and take the floor, generating, in turn, recognition of their contributions:

"I think it would be interesting, once you have a first version designed, to be able to comment on concrete, I don't know if in a similar format as the one we are doing today, in which there can be an exchange" E01\_FG\_PersonasTrans

"... but what I would like to emphasise in this area is that in a way, when teaching, teachers have the discourse of science on their side, don't they, and on this point, certain discourses can be reproduced that can be violent for disabled people, don't they? for example, for example, without going any further, in the DSM, in the manual of mental disorders of the American Psychiatric Association, it is considered that being attracted to a disabled person is a paraphilia. So, from this point of view, from the point of view of the teachers who teach this content, which is obviously not, between the quotes, the fault of the teacher who is giving the class at that moment, but it is as if they are contributing to the reproduction of knowledge, which is reinforcing this idea of undesirability, isn't it, of the disabled body...". E03\_abcd\_FunctionalDiversity

In turn, this active role of the participants in the DGs, which stemming from the critical reflection that defines the interaction that is generated, allows them to collectively recognise the existence of a problem as a necessary first step to provide an adequate collective response. In this sense, collective recognition as

an indispensable prerequisite for collective action is in line with Mondragón's (2021) contribution of reflexivity, insofar as power is deconstructed and knowledge is co-created:

"So I think it is necessary to look for ways in which we can promote a social debate and somehow get out of the scheme of this affecting the person who has been assaulted and the person who has assaulted and we are still in this legal scheme where it seems that these two people have had things happen to them or have done things and the rest of the people have not. So, I think that this is where we should look for ways" E02\_FG\_Experts  
 "I think that also from the debates we can think of strategies that are less individual and more collective and also see how we continue, right? In that sense, because in the end it is, not alone, one feels more empowered. We are doing work that is worthwhile, very complicated, it is very difficult, they put a lot of obstacles in our way, but in the end, it makes sense what we are doing, not that it doesn't make sense, so I think this is also important. So, I thank you and take care of yourselves" E02\_FG\_Experts

On the other hand, the analysis of the results has also led to contributions that, although they were not contemplated in the literature review, we consider it essential to share them. In fact, these contributions are the added value of the research that add to the educational value of DG.

Among the different contributions, it is identified how the reflective exchange and interaction that takes place in DGs generates joint learning networks that allow for growth and a constant rethinking of actions and thoughts, among other things:

"But it's good to ask questions and then discuss them together because maybe one day or another we will come up with a solution that is at least acceptable. I don't put my chair too high, but... saying 'well, we're not doing so bad here either'" E01\_FG\_PersonasTrans  
 "X ... we explain that there have been, that we have received several complaints. And then we tell the dean's office that if there is no intervention, that the teacher in question should withdraw the material and apologise in class and we receive an apology from these students that there has indeed been an apology and that the material or the inappropriate content has been withdrawn, that, if this is not the case, the equality unit will activate the protocol. So, you say this and quickly there are results. It's working for us now.

- And OK, I'll write it down, I'll write it down.
- Z It is a way, yes, because really the entry protocol directly would not be either and neither would the students or aggravated students end up seeing this, but as everything is so slow, the term would be over and the teacher would disappear in a matter of time and there would have been no apology, no withdrawal and so on, so this is the more and it is more effective". FG\_Equality units

"I would like to thank you very much, because I have taken notes as in my best university days, that is, I am going to pass them on to the delegate, to everyone, from that: Look at

everything they say about everything we can do better. In other words, thank you very much because I have learned a lot today" FG\_Equality units

"The stories of the others also help me to recognise other things that I don't visualise and that your story helps me to identify, thank you very much". E05\_FG\_Racialised

From this perspective of collectivity and the shared knowledge construction, the DGs highlighted reflections on the importance of mobilising collaborative action strategies to respond to SGRV:

"I have the feeling that almost all the actions that have been achieved that have to do with diversity, have not been promoted by the institution, let's say the institution, but have come from activists, either individually or collectively or small groups that have organised themselves to achieve things. E01\_FG\_TransPeople

"I would have a lot of questions and I think it's actually easy so that we can debate a little bit in freedom, right? And learn from each other and see to, what could be certain kinds of strategies, right?" E02\_FG\_Experts

"It is very interesting how the social mobilisation of the youngest girls is what is achieving an impressive progress, without that all the, all the attempts of policies and actions that we have tried to do, always remained on paper, right? And on the other hand, as a result of this strong mobilisation of girls, not only instruments have been built, in other words protocols that did not exist in the, in the University, in other words, everything that has to do with eh, care centres, and even a coordination of gender equality was created in the NAME OF UNIVERSITY, and the issue, in other words, that civil servants have to take gender courses, is really, it is the revolutionary process that comes from below, let's say, from, from the mobilisation of a very, very strong feminist sensitivity since 2016" E11\_FG(feb)\_UniversityCommunity

"I'm delighted to hear from W, I don't know how to say sorry, X, Y, thank you very much for the invitations because we have a lot of things to do. So, let's see if we can network over there and do things later. Thank you." E05\_FG\_Racialised

At the same time, it also creates a space for reconstruction and understanding which, for example, makes it possible to identify SGRV practices that had not been identified as such until now, or even to identify how this violence should be asked about so that everyone can recognise it:

"Tell them (the young participants) that X, W and I have probably experienced situations that we did not conceptualise as harassment at the time, although they made us uncomfortable, or as violence because at that time they had not even been called by that name. That could be happening now, because this issue of violence is also a process of defining what violence is by sharing what it is." E10\_FG\_Fieldwork

"The story of the others also helps me to recognise other things that I don't visualise and that your story helps me to identify. Thank you very much." E05\_FG\_Racialised

"I think the same as them and that the questions should not always be the most obvious ones like 'they have sexually assaulted you'... they should also look for the other forms of violence that we have been talking about and that do not, that normally do not appear

in the questionnaires or psychological violence, that is already there, well no, they can be more precise, 'they have humiliated you,' 'they have separated you from your friends'... 'they have deceived you,' 'they have made you feel that you are worthless'... and also specify a little bit these little things that we know are all related. Because without this, they don't hit you it's... And the rest, the same thing they say" E06\_EG\_Survivors

Finally, and in line with the space for understanding and reconstruction that the DG generates, a sense of wellbeing is highlighted in the participants. In other words, the DG is seen as a space that stimulates well-being; a space in which to share and feel supported:

"Keep telling us about it because it's very interesting and it's very good for all of us. Thanks for organising this... It is also very interesting to participate, eh. I think we have all learned... And to talk, eh, I need to talk and share because it is very hard and very lonely, the issue of protocols, besides" E02\_FG\_Experts

"Thank you very much for the invitation. It was a pleasure to meet you... Thank you, it felt great. " E01\_FG\_TransPeople

"I also felt very comfortable because, whether you like it or not, it's sharing things and it helps you to let off steam a little bit from this world and thank you very much to everyone." E05\_FG\_Racialised

## 4. Conclusions

From the results obtained after the in-depth analysis of the 11 DGs, it is possible to identify (1) the formative value of the DG and (2) the characteristics that define this formative value.

As for the aspects that characterise the formative value of the DGs, we find, (a) it promotes critical reflection. DG is a tool for collective reflection that fosters the development of critical awareness and that questions and questions the facts, data and information obtained so far; (b) it allows participants to "be active subjects" and "take the floor"; (c) it makes it possible to collectively recognise the existence of a problem and cooperatively think of response strategies; (d) it creates collective learning networks; (d) it generates a space for reconstruction and understanding of social reality and (e) it stimulates wellbeing.

These characteristics, which define the formative value of the DG, fit within the framework of feminist research (Jiménez, 2021), which, inspired by the postulates of feminist epistemologies, starts from the problematisation of the subject-object dichotomy of study, recognising the contributions of participants as expert knowledge. But in addition, the critique of the verticality of relations in the processes of knowledge production obliges those of us who do research to recognise and review the place from which we do it and its possible implications

in terms of power relations. This epistemological approach encourages a renewed use of traditional ‘information gathering’ tools (Harding, 1987), transforming them into instances of co-production of information, in which research participants are recognised as agent subjects and learning is collectivised and redistributed between researchers and collaborators themselves.

In short, the pedagogical and collective reflection potential of DG is related to, but not limited to, these epistemological approaches, as it also draws on the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire (as cited in Lima-Jardilino & Soto-Arango, 2020). This author’s approach to teaching is based on questioning and challenging the domination, beliefs and practices that are generated to foster critical awareness. And in this sense, there is a coincidence between critical pedagogy and the formative value of DG, since both involve learning for the construction of shared knowledge and the deconstruction of acquired knowledge, based on constant critical reflection that involves collective action for change and social transformation.

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