Visual Culture, Gender Violence and Masculinities: Intersections and Pedagogical Possibilities

Cultura Visual, Violência de Gênero e Masculinidades: Entrecruzamentos e Possibilidades Pedagógicas

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This article explores the relations between visual culture, gender, and violence, focusing on visualities and their pedagogical roles. Considering the protagonism exercised by men in the practice of gendered violence, we present theoretical insights on the ways in which the social construct of the visual is implied in the problem, based on the approach of visual culture studies and gender studies. Corroborating with these reflections, we describe a pedagogical proposition developed with two groups of visual arts graduation students in the second semester of 2021, in which participants were invited to think about the construction of learning of gender and the violent practices that permeate this process, having as conductor of the discussion the elaboration of visual constellations. This methodological strategy was inspired by the studies of Aby Warburg (2000/2010) and Georges Didi-Huberman (2002/2013, 2011/2018) and sought to explore

the inherent potential of the act to confront images. This pedagogical activity was expected to promote shifts of the gaze and repositionings regarding the naturalization of the order of gender and the violent practices it upholds. During the construction of the visual panels and the discussions that moved the meetings, we realized that men have some difficulty comprehending or expressing their role in the problem, while women reported having closer experiences with violent situations. However, even though men did not expressively explore male conduct and complicity, they took advantage of the space to report how male socialization is marked by acts of violence practiced for the sake of gender. We conclude that the role played by visualities in the reproduction or subversion of norms and patterns can contribute to defying networks of meaning that are socially settled towards gender.

Keywords: visual culture, gender violence, education, masculinities, visualities

Cultura Visual, Violência de Gênero e Masculinidades: Entrecruzamentos e Possibilidades Pedagógicas

Este artigo explora as relações entre cultura visual, gênero e violência, com foco nas visualidades e em seus papéis pedagógicos. Considerando o protagonismo exercido pelos homens na prática de violências gendradas, são apresentadas algumas reflexões teóricas sobre os modos pelos quais a construção social do visual está implicada no problema, a partir de uma abordagem dos estudos da cultura visual e dos estudos de gênero. Para corroborar com as reflexões, descrevemos uma proposta pedagógica desenvolvida com duas turmas de estudantes universitários de artes visuais no segundo semestre de 2021, nas quais as pessoas participantes foram convidadas a pensar sobre a construção das aprendizagens de gênero e as violências que permeiam esse processo, tendo como dispositivo condutor das discussões a elaboração de constelações visuais. Essa estratégia metodológica foi inspirada nos estudos de Aby Warburg (2000/2010) e de Georges Didi-Huberman (2002/2013, 2011/2018) e buscou explorar o potencial inerente ao ato de confrontar imagens. A expectativa desta atividade pedagógica foi de promover deslocamentos do olhar e reposicionamentos a respeito da naturalização da ordem de gênero e das práticas violentas que ela sustenta. Durante a construção dos painéis visuais e das discussões que moveram os encontros, percebemos que os homens têm certa dificuldade em compreender ou expressar de que modo estão envolvidos no problema, enquanto as mulheres relataram experiências próximas com situações de violência. Entretanto, ainda que as condutas e a cumplicidade masculinas não tenham sido problematizadas de forma expressiva pelos homens, eles aproveitaram o espaço para relatar como a socialização masculina é marcada por violências praticadas em nome do gênero. Concluímos que o papel desempenhado pelas visualidades na reprodução ou subversão de normas e padrões pode contribuir para problematizar as redes de sentido estabelecidas socialmente em torno do gênero.

Palavras-chave: *cultura visual, violência de gênero, educação, masculinidades, visualidade*

Introduction

We understand the term "gender violence" as any form of aggression supported by socially constructed expectations about the foretold roles of "men" and "women", which, at the same time, both sanction certain attitudes and behaviors and prescribe punishments based on nonconformity to such roles. As Henry Ferguson et al. (2004/2005) explain, "much violence is 'gender-based' – both because it is perpetrated in the name of gender and the gender order, and because its targets are selected because of their gender" (p. 19).

In this article, we propose to reflect on the power of images and their sneaky manners of maintaining or questioning the discourses that impose ways of performing the genders from a binary referent, understanding that visualities actively participate in the processes in which we give meanings to what crosses us as political subjects.

The discussion about gender violence is urgent in the Brazilian context. According to the Brazilian Public Safety Forum (Bueno & Lima, 2022), in 2021, a woman was assaulted every 2 minutes, and every 7 minutes, a life was taken owing to femicide. Not even when giving birth to a child, women stop being vulnerable to violence, as evidenced by the case of the anesthesiologist accused of sexually abusing 30 parturients (Haidar et al., 2022). These accusations came to light after a doctor in Rio de Janeiro was arrested in flagrante delicto for raping a patient in the hospital delivery room[1] while the woman was still under anesthesia for a C-section procedure. The anesthesiologist's arrest was due to the action of a group of nurses, who were suspicious of his conduct and managed to film the act. If there was no video but only the professionals' denunciation, it is likely that the nurses would be accused of false testimony and would receive sanctions from the hospital. On the other hand, the media coverage of this case generated debates about how the reproduction of images in the news was a way to re-victimize the abused parturient[2]. Reports like these prove the naturalization of gender violence in Brazil, reaching alarming statistics[3]. Given the seriousness of the problem, initiatives are needed on several fronts to contribute to its confrontation.

Even though men are predominantly the perpetrators of gender violence, common sense, in a trivial way, attributes to women the responsibility of preventing or avoiding possible acts of violence, while the message that reaches men is that they do not need to worry about this issue (Katz, 2019).

In an interview conducted by *Nexo* magazine, feminist professor and researcher Debora Diniz (2022) mentioned that "the persistence of violence exists as a

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[1] For more information on the case, see Callegari et al. (2022).

[2] It caused profound popular resentment that a press channel did not protect the identity of a raped woman. For more information, see Padiglione (2022).

[3] Brazil is among the countries with the highest rate of female homicides, occupying the fifth position in a ranking of 83 countries, according to data from the latest edition of the Map of Violence dedicated to the topic (Waiselfisz, 2015). It is also important not to forget that Brazil is the country that kills the most LGBT+ people (Oliveira & Mott, 2022) and, in the specific case of the murder of trans people, has held this position for 13 years (Ker, 2022).

power regime of normative control over women's bodies" (para. 4). For her, there seems to exist a "perverse complicity" (para. 4) among men, who usually tolerate violent acts against women. Says Diniz (2022): "there is a silent pact to avoid scandal, which believes that some things can be solved with a conversation, which does not take seriously when other women raise a suspicion" (para. 8).

In the same vein, Henry Ferguson et al. (2004/2005) point out that "one reason that gender-based violence remains so tragically high is men's silence. Men are silent, and are silenced, about their participation in and their experience of gender-based violence" (p. 33). From this observation, the authors ponder:

> developing analytical frameworks for understanding gender and violence and policies that engage men are crucial. The central challenge concerns how to implement these in practice and engage men in ending men's violence. This has to mean not just the violent "bad men" but engaging all men. Distinct strategies are called for which to be effective need to be sensitive to the social location and degrees of accountability of boys and men to violence.
>
> (Ferguson et al., 2004/2005, p. 34)

The naturalization of violence is associated with the norms that aim to regulate bodies and minds based on different social expectations for men and women. Gender and sexuality are structuring elements of identities, whose meanings are performatively learned, "a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeals over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (Butler, 1990/2020, p. 69). This "epistemological imperialism" (Butler, 1990/2020, p. 37) imposes adopting a supposed naturalness to social practices, and it is precisely the process of naturalizing social roles that is why violent practices committed in the name of maintaining the gender order are trivialized.

Within this structure of control over bodies, visualities often fuel the maintenance of heteronormative discourses[4]. They support and legitimize the discourses of power, propagating and multiplying the narratives that conform to realities and keep updated the hegemonic patterns of gender and sexuality.

In view of the above, in this article, we adopt that the notions of masculinity and femininity are discursive constructions, performatively engendered, through cultural and social learning that takes place throughout life. This process is strongly influenced by visualities, from images of the artistic, pedagogical, scientific, or media universes.

Seeking to collaborate with the debate on gender violence and visual culture, we present some reflections on the relations between visualities and gender construc-

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[4]Heteronormativity is a concept created by Michael Warner (1991) that refers to the processes by which institutions and social structures reinforce the idea that all people are heterosexual. This idea results from the belief that only heterosexuality is coherent and that sexes (or genders) exist to complement each other. In this sense, heteronormativity not only implies a prejudice against those who do not fit into gender binarism but also identifies the set of social norms that exert pressure and serve to construct an idealized sexuality.

tions. To develop the reflections, we situate ourselves from a post-structuralist framework, from the contributions of visual culture studies (Mirzoeff, 2003, 2011/2016; Mitchell, 2005/2015; Sturken & Cartwright, 2017); from critical pedagogies thought from visual studies (Abreu, 2017; Hernández, 2005, 2007, 2011, 2013; Loponte, 2002, 2010; Martins, 2008); and from gender studies (Butler, 1990/2020), especially those focusing on masculinities and their relations to violence (Acosta et al., 2004; Connell, 2005; Ferguson et al., 2004/2005; Flood, 2019; Funk, 2006; Katz, 2019; Pease, 2019). To corroborate the discussion, we describe a pedagogical action that addressed the relationships between gender, masculinities, visualities, and violence with two classes of visual arts undergraduate students at the Federal University of Goiás. These events aimed to create discursive spaces to understand the complexities, contradictions, negotiations, and tensions that emerge from notions of gender and sexuality in social imaginaries.

Images were used to encourage debate, considering the role of visualities as mediators in the configuration of gender identities (Hernández, 2007, p. 74). The action addressed visual representations that mediate conceptions of gender and sexuality and the practices of meaning based on how we learn to see the world. With this, we intend to build a space for problematizing and overcoming the silence of male subjects, considering that the omission of men regarding gender violence contributes to the maintenance of the problem (Pease, 2019).

Since the social practices that shape notions of masculinity reflect the cultural prescriptions that define the codes regarding the meanings of being and acting as a man – including relationally producing patterns of femininities as a materialization of these same discourses –, we chose to carry out the pedagogical action with mixed groups, consisting of students who identify with plural masculinities and femininities. This strategy, as Michael Flood (2019) explains, creates "opportunities for dialogue between females and males regarding gender, sexuality, violence, and relationships" (p. 205), encouraging men both to speak out on these issues and to listen and learn from women. In this way, we start from the assumption that men and women can and need to join forces to confront gender violence (Funk, 2006).

In making this choice, we adopt the idea that gender violence is a structural problem and affects all individuals. As Raewyn Connell (2005, p. 203) highlighted in her referenced study on masculinities, the hegemony of the dominant model influences all people in socialization processes and occupies a structuring place in symbolic and social relations. Unveiling the epistemological paths through which hegemonic masculinity becomes a political and cultural imperative is important for this research because it collaborates in creating possibilities that help in the struggles for social justice in gender relations, in a sense proposed by Connell (2005):

> rather than attempting to define masculinity as an object (a natural character type, a behavioral average, a norm), we need to focus on the processes and relationships through which men and women

conduct gendered lives. "Masculinity", to the extent the term can be briefly defined at all, is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality, and culture.

(p. 71)

Since all people are undoubtedly inserted in this complex system of fixing identities and visual culture produces and disseminates expectations regarding social roles to be fulfilled by individuals, often from a heteronormative perspective, we propose in this article to reflect on the power of images and their relations with discourses that impose to perform gender from a binary logic. We seek to promote, working with images, breaks with norms that foster violent ideas and practices, promoting dialogues that favor "the understanding of how situations of violence are constructed in interpersonal relationships and reinforced in everyday life by the culture in which we live" (Acosta et al., 2004, p. 15).

What Do Visualities Have to Do With Gender Violence?

Visual culture studies focus not only on images but rather on the practices through which we elaborate experiences concerning vision. That is, they are concerned with understanding how the world is visually organized in function of power relations, trying to examine the effects of visualities in everyday life. The power structures, drawing from a common sense that attributes to vision a kind of proof of reality, appropriate the belief that "seeing is knowing" and, through the organization that they propose of the visible, they intend to institute what is normal, natural, and correct (Mirzoeff, 2011/2016). This positioning is one of the confrontations of visual culture studies, whose area of knowledge states that the act of seeing does not necessarily imply the credibility of what is seen nor its passive reception and acceptance (Mirzoeff, 2003).

Visual culture studies propose a distinction between vision (as the physical ability to see) and visualities, a concept that refers to "the ways in which vision is shaped through social context and interaction" (Sturken & Cartwright, 2017, p. 22). Visualities, therefore, include social codes that indicate what can be seen and who can see, who should be represented, and who should be left out of the spectrum of representations, creating visual structures that organize our practices of looking.

Nicholas Mirzoeff (2011/2016), an important reference within the field of visual studies, has examined the ways in which the visual is privileged in the exercise of power. For this author, vision is used to normalize and exert control within an intricate framework that he terms "visuality complexes". In examining these visual structures, Mirzoeff points out that from claims of the "right to

look", countervisualities emerge as ways to break with the normalized gaze and challenge the power of visualities. In this way, countervisualities make it possible to intervene in the politics of images and are used to denounce violence and fight against inequalities and social injustices.

Experiences with visualities involve a variety of media and visual artifacts, which institute networks of meanings to be learned and consumed. However, meanings are not fixed. Rather, they fluctuate depending on the sociocultural contexts in which ideologies, through a series of situated interactions and experiences, use visualities to defend viewpoints and disseminate the codes they wish to propagate. In this way, images play a decisive role in the discursive construction of everyday reality.

Regarding gender, even though the focuses of visualities are plural and addressed to certain audiences, visual representations usually present strongly stereotyped views of masculinity and femininity, and images that undermine socially legitimized discourses are a minority (Fixmer-Oraiz & Wood, 2019). The analysis of this visual pattern also forms part of the investigative efforts of visual culture studies, which are concerned with understanding how images participate and are incorporated into collective imaginaries, defining behaviors through which subjects position themselves in social groups, in a sense proposed by W. J. T. Mitchell (2005/2015) when he highlights that images

> are things that have been marked with all the stigmata of personhood and animation: they exhibit both physical and virtual bodies; they speak to us, sometimes literally, sometimes figuratively; or they look back at us silently across a "gulf unbridged by language." They present not just a surface but a face that faces the viewer.

> (p. 167)

It is known that visualities are used to propagate and assimilate ideas that contribute "to the construction and modeling of bodies, subjectivities, and stereotypes, and to the legitimation of binary and unequal power relations" (Belausteguigoitia & Lozano, 2019, p. 148). In cultures permeated by patriarchal logic, it is usual for men to be represented by impenetrable bodies associated with strength, toughness, competitiveness, control, authority, and violence. On the other hand, women are constructed as their opposite: receptive and permeable bodies, capable of assimilating hierarchies and even of being understanding and tolerant of male violence.

The systemic display of these visualities supports the notion that power relations and gendered differences are natural and reasonable. From this normalizing perspective, the exercise of violence against women becomes part of the defining characteristics of men, naturalized and maintained through social, political, legal, and institutional practices.

It must be emphasized, however, that not all images connive at the perpetuation of gender violence. As Ece Canlı and Nicoletta Mandolini (2022) point out,

"visual arts and media (...) significantly enhanced the creation of a feminist imaginary of gender-based violence, supported the practice of social denunciation and facilitated the actual (not only metaphorical) visibility of the phenomenon" (p. 3). Therefore, it can be seen that "the visual modality has always been crucial to the perpetuation of and resistance to the patriarchal symbolic order from which sexist violence originates" (p. 5).

One place where it is possible to verify the circulation of these discursive contradictions, explored in our work in order to deflagrate the educational activities, is the internet. Today, digital tools play central roles in our lives. Rapid technological development has enabled pragmatic changes in how we relate to images. Social networks, in particular, sites of new forms of interaction and exchanges between people, constitute powerful channels of socialization in which we attribute meanings, reproduce behaviors, and experience practices of individual and collective subjectification, which influence how we constitute ourselves and relate in the social groups (Abreu, 2014a).

Drawing on the power of the self-evidence of images and the difficulty faced by many individuals to critically interpret what they see, the discourses of patriarchy have found on the internet a free territory to propagate and update their ideals. From a gender perspective, it is notorious that many images circulating in digital media reproduce and multiply visualities that naturalize social patterns and roles, updating the discourses that propagate the idea that female bodies are meant to be used and abused. Moreover, it is common to use digital networks both for the dissemination of ideas and for the perpetration of sexist and misogynist attacks (Bertagnolli et al., 2020; Zanello, 2020).

On the other hand, with the digitalization of social practices, the internet has constituted heterogeneous territories of socialization, the digital social networks, in which conflicts and heated discussions are part of everyday life. These characteristics, along with the fluidity of the internet, have favored the visibility of more plural identities and made it possible to create opportunities for action and agglomeration, especially for subjects that have historically been poorly represented (or misrepresented) by the media (Abreu, 2014b).

Thus, certain images that circulate in digital media favor the confrontation of social practices that limit the development of identities and, alone or in groups, many women and LGBTQIA+ people make use of them to denounce violence and injustice, as well as to create and share ways of life and experiences that are insubordinate to social norms that intend to control and marginalize them.

When it comes to digital environments, they are simultaneously a stage for advances and fertile territories for the propagation of hegemonic masculinity and femininity ideals. Thus, their communication channels are places where conflicting narratives clash, making the dispute of the politics of the gaze even more complex.

Visual Culture and Education: Approaches to Promoting Gaze Shifting

The analytical and critical perspective of visual culture in teaching processes seeks to examine the effects of visualities on subjects, aiming to identify "the discourses that naturalize the gaze and conform subjectivities and spaces for action" (Hernández, 2013, p. 73). The belief that visual images are neutral and describe supposed realities wrapped in a kind of self-evidence hides the complex ways in which power structures use these artifacts to naturalize differences and normalize behaviors, as described by the teacher and researcher Alice Fátima Martins (2008):

> images, aesthetic conceptions, and works of art are not neutral and innocent, but integrate the networks of tensions inherent in the power relations of social structures in which they are performed, circulate, and articulate meanings. In this way, the election of certain images, aesthetic conceptions, and works of art to integrate the contents conveyed in school education results from the interaction of several factors, behind which prevail the most diverse interests, economic and political, among others.

> (p. 99)

The visual culture approach in education, especially in visual arts teaching, establishes a commitment to valuing diversity and differences. It is an epistemological perspective of work whose emphasis is on the experiences of the subjects and on the subjective meanings that each person constructs in the relationship with visualities. In this way, it is a perspective committed to "revealing the invisible operations of power that sustain the network of unequal privileges and rights through critical reflection and practices attentive to local specificities" (Abreu, 2017, p. 326). Although there are more and more teachers who operate from this approach,

> unfortunately, issues involving sexuality and gender are still on sandy ground, and, many times, teachers prefer not to show these visual references to avoid potential conflicts with students, parents, or the institution itself. By avoiding conflict, this behavior generates a kind of complicity with the conservative discourses that think of sex as a sin and non-heteronormative sexuality as a moral disorder.

> (Abreu, 2017, pp. 328–329)

Education thought from the perspective of visual culture is a way to deconfigure this context, which still faces many obstacles. Proposing to learn with the lived experiences and the constructions of meaning that configure the relationships with oneself, the other, and the social contexts contribute to the recognition that the visualities, as mediators of narratives and identity representations, are also powerful devices to problematize the ways we set values and behaviors.

The emphasis is on power games and social discourses that seek to normalize identities and bodies according to certain assumptions.

In this sense, the perspective of visual culture in learning contexts contributes to making visible the problem of gender violence, encouraging reflection, critical thinking, and the deconstruction of ideas that underlie them, since it is important not to forget that

> when we look at (and produce) the manifestations that are part of visual culture, we are not only looking at the world but at people and their representations and the consequences they have on their social positions, gender, class, race, sex, etc.

> (Hernández, 2005, p. 29)

Even if visual images are not the direct cause of violent acts[5], they can contribute to legitimizing and trivializing them, because visuality is a "discursive practice for rendering and regulating the real that has material effects" (Mirzoeff, 2011/2016, p. 748). Therefore, it refers not only to visual codes but also to the construction of realities through the shaping of ways of seeing and living.

Working on the issue of gender violence in education from a visual culture approach involves considering overlapping experiences, examining what is thought and said about what is seen, and the effects this produces within interpersonal relationships. That means observing how images and cultural artifacts construct a sense of reality and what positions are adopted through the knowledge created about what is looked at. It is about operationalizing a possible repositioning of the subjects so they can understand that pre-fixed identities, protected by the shield of demarcated differences, can be destabilized and questioned as promoters of prejudice, oppression, intolerance, and violence. As Fernando Hernández (2007) teaches us, educational works conducted from the perspective of visual culture use the strategy of "introducing suspicions", such as:

> what do these representations tell us about the construction of sub-jectivity (of gender, social class, ethnicity, subculture, the global and the particular, the family, etc.)? What do they tell us about ourselves and about our hegemonic or subordinated position?

> (p. 86)

It is evident that images "are continually, constantly, producing meanings (...), having direct effects on our everyday practices and, more specifically, on how we experience and perceive our own sexual and gender identities" (Loponte, 2010, p. 153). Given the fact that visual culture studies focus on understanding the effects of visualities on people's lives, it is important to consider that

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[5]In this regard, it is relevant to consider the writings of Marie-José Mondzain (2002/2009): "culpability and responsibility are terms that are only attributable to people, never to things. And images are things" (p. 11).

an educational proposition from the visual culture can help contextualize the effects of the gaze and, through critical (anti-colonizing) practices, explore the experiences (effects, relations) of how what we see shapes us, makes us be what others want us to be and be able to develop non-reproductive responses to the effect of these gazes.

(Hernández, 2011, p. 44)

Concerning discursive and representational practices, theorists from various fields of knowledge focusing on the expression of gender issues in images have already written effusively about the conventions that govern the ways of representing men and women and the attributions of meanings that are produced in these encounters. Analyzing gender issues in the visual arts, Diana Newall and Grant Pooke (2021) mention that the socially constructed binary oppositions between male/female influence artwork, which, historically, is why it is possible to note the representation of men as powerful and aggressive, and that of women as weak and submissive. Dealing with advertising, Anthony Cortese (2008) states that "masculine images are dominant, intimidating, and violent, while feminine images are subordinate, receptive, and passive" (p. 84).

For professor and researcher Luciana Gruppelli Loponte (2010), art and other cultural products play "a fundamental role in the creation and diffusion of some female stereotypes" (p. 156). The author proposes the concept of "visual pedagogy of the feminine" (Loponte, 2002) to address how women's bodies are usually represented in images, often positioned in the role of objects amenable to contemplation and available to the male gaze and consumption. At the core of the discussion proposed by Loponte (2002) is the power exerted by the discourses *of* and *on* images, whose reflections are evident in the ways of constructing, perceiving, controlling, and performing gender and sexuality. In this scenario, the author stresses the importance of questioning the "neutrality" of the images and the "naturalness" of the looks.

While the "visual pedagogy of the feminine", conceived by Loponte (2002), establishes prescriptions *for* and *about* women, it is also possible to perceive the existence of a "visual pedagogy of the masculine", which establishes specific roles to be played by men facing female bodies: observers, dominators, agents. The symbolic construction of "masculinity" reflects the cultural prescriptions that normalize what it means to be and act as a man, whose signs and commands engender forms of violence that externalize imaginaries that are also violent.

The pedagogical actions described below were part of the research project "Pedagogias de resistência: Gêneros e visualidades" (Pedagogies of resistance: Genders and visualities)[6], linked to the Federal University of Goiás. In this project, strategies that aim to promote more heterogeneous and inclusive relationships in the teaching and learning processes of visual arts are discussed and analyzed, with an emphasis on issues of gender and sexuality. For this purpose, the project

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[6]Research coordinated by Professor Carla Luzia de Abreu (Postgraduate Program in Arts and Visual Culture, Federal University of Goiás).

involves some subprojects, intending to establish new articulations and expand networks of research and discussions. In the case of the activities described in this article, they are integrated with the research project "Lutar contra certas imagens com a ajuda de outras imagens: Cultura visual e o enfrentamento à violência de gênero junto a um grupo de homens" (To fight against certain images with the aid of other images: Visual culture and confronting gender violence among a group of men)[7], developed in the context of the Postgraduate Program in Art and Visual Culture at the Federal University of Goiás, at the master's level.

In these activities, we were interested in developing epistemological processes that can break with the dominant rhetoric and create mediation spaces with the potential to build more expansive narratives about gender roles. That entailed adopting a position that recognizes people as knowledge-producing subjects with the capacity for self-determination and agency. In exploring visualities, our focus was to develop a mediation practice that created relational processes as a starting point for broader reflections on the effects of images on the production of meanings, in order to encourage considerations on "what would be a cultural gaze (visuality) and the processes of subjectivity (what it says about who looks and constructs the visual story) that are derived" (Hernández, 2013, p. 77).

The methodology adopted in the development of the actions was inspired by the metaphor of the constellation of images, formulated by Aby Warburg (2000/2010), whose ideas were expanded by the philosopher Georges Didi-Huberman (2002/2013, 2011/2018) through the concept of montage. The procedure presupposes gathering and contrasting multiple images that, when placed side by side, make it possible to perceive or imagine relationships and instigate thinking and taking a position.

From this approach, we invited young students to reflect on the different ways in which images interpellate and constitute identities, social structures, and perceptions about themselves and their social contexts. The proposal requested the cast of curious and critical looks upon the universe of visualities, an exercise that permeated the acts of gathering and contrasting images, enabling subjective displacements about gender norms and, especially, the violence that culminates from them.

Visual Culture As Praxis in Education

In the second semester of 2021, we invited undergraduate students enrolled in visual arts courses, respectively, "theories of image and visual culture" and "understanding and interpreting the image" — both offered by the Faculty of Visual Arts at the Federal University of Goiás —, to bring together and confront images that could contribute to thinking and discussing the constructions of

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[7]Research conducted by the student Jocy Meneses dos Santos Junior (Postgraduate Program in Arts and Visual Culture, Federal University of Goiás).

gender and the violence that they usually support.

The idea was to produce visual constellations that would help understand the role of images in the normalization or contestation of violent masculinities and femininities to be violated, intending to encourage reflective thinking about the social and visual construction of gender and how it is implicated in both the promotion and maintenance and the denunciation and subversion of ideas which culminate in violence.

Throughout the semester, within the planned content of the subjects, some possibilities of articulations between visual images and the issues of gender and sexuality were discussed, seeking to reflect on how visualities influence the elaboration of contemporary subjectivities.

The specific objective of the montage of the panels was to discuss how art and visual culture are implicated in the construction and deconstruction of ideas about gender, with a specific focus on the problematization of masculinities, aiming to denaturalize and combat social practices that idealize them based on harmful references, causing suffering and harm to men themselves and to the people who relate to them.

A total of 22 students (11 men and 11 women) from the visual arts bachelor program class participated in the activities, and 12 students (three men and nine women) from the visual arts graduate program class. This sample included a plural and heterogeneous scenario of cultural repertoires and gender identities, and sexual orientations. Before assembling the visual panels, we recalled some theoretical assumptions worked in previous classes that support the development of studies and research engaged in discussions of gender, art, and visual culture. The students were very interested in expanding the exchange of experiences and discussions through the composition of the visual assemblies.

In the collective elaboration of the visual constellations, we used the digital tool Padlet[8], which allows several people to access and participate simultaneously. We invited the students to share images that "unfolded", in several senses, the theme of gender violence. The initial orientation was that the images included by the participants could establish relations with others already posted, each image serving to stimulate memories and visual imaginaries, culminating in the inclusion of other images. The visualities were gradually added to the panels, coming from the universe of art, advertising, film or video clip frames, and social networks, collected mainly from searches in online search tools, being representative, therefore, of the multiple discourses that construct, deconstruct and reconstruct ideas about gender in circulation in digital media.

If underlooked, the montages produced by the groups may appear to be just con-glomerates of unconnected images. However, bringing together images awakened the possibility of perceiving or imagining non-apparent relationships between them, which gave rise to other looks and ideas. That made it possible to analyze

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[8]Available at https://padlet.com/.

the perspectives and positions emerging from the experimentation of a pedagogical practice interested in problematizing visual discourses. Our mediation sought to establish bridges to think about how visualities are related to gender constructions and how they infiltrate the system to amplify or dismantle the discourses that naturalize violence.

Images that depict "acceptable" social roles for men and women were gathered and tensioned, as well as others that destabilize traditional notions of gender and sexuality. In the visual constellations, the signs that marked hegemonic masculine or feminine ways of being created an exploration space to understand how violence — as discourse and social experience — is constituted. This way of thinking *with* and *from* the images allowed us to establish relationships and discuss the reductionist norms of identity and the longevity of violent practices in the constitution of gender relations.

Some of the ideas emerging from the relations made by the participants exposed how masculinities are tied to invulnerability, strength, power, violence, wars, and weapons. In others, the fragility of the assertion of masculinity appears, which is under constant risk of being challenged (because, in common sense, boys don't play with dolls, men don't wear pink, men don't cry, etc.). Many of the images provided deviated from the norms, especially those insubordinate to cisheteronormativity, but there were others that, despite being inscribed in the cultural codes of hegemonic masculinity, presented healthy ways of being a man, demonstrated through gestures of friendship, affection, love, and care.

Since gender is produced relationally, focusing on the construction of masculinities does not exclude the consideration of femininities. As far as the female representations are concerned, the images gathered proposed, above all, a reflection on the subordination of women. They showed how visual representations of female bodies built on patriarchalism cause suffering through objectification, jokes, harassment, and aggression implied in their construction and sharing. On the other hand, they also demonstrated the active resistance of women, who do not conform to being reduced to mere victims or objects, rejecting and subverting the impositions of culture and traditional gender norms.

Some Reflections Regarding the Activity

One of the main difficulties encountered in these meetings was to get the men of the groups to engage in the discussions that permeated the production and interpretation of the montages, especially in the initial moments. We identified some possible causes for this behavior, such as the discomfort before the theme of gender-related violence, the structural way in which the culture of silence among men is rooted in the collective subjectivities, and the effort to make a genuine introspective reflection about the privileges acquired simply by being men. It is worth noting that female participation from the very first moments did not seem to be hindered by any obstacles, making it all the more important

to reflect on what man's silence may say and seek ways to break through it.

Despite this difficulty, the experience of collectively constructing visual constellations can be considered successful not only due to the quantity of images included, or the quality of the relations established *among* and *from* them, but, above all, because of the debates that took place during and after the panels' elaboration process. From the moment the participants opened up to dialogue, the construction of the montages became more fluid, and the discussions deepened. The visual constellations have awakened in the groups of students the will to share lived experiences and express opinions about how gender norms trigger violence.

Discussions about the troubled relationships between men and artifacts, such as a pink t-shirt, a doll, a rainbow-colored toy, a unicorn-printed cup, or a unisex sandal produced by a brand traditionally recognized as female-oriented, were prominent. The comments revolved around how these visualities, for some people, disqualify "masculinity", based on the normalization that incites identification exclusively with the "appropriate" symbols for each gender according to a binary division.

Students also discussed the sociocultural practices that indicate "appropriate" uses of artifacts for each gender, determining which objects a "real" boy or man would never use, at the risk of appearing "effeminate", as if this condition were something that diminished him as a human being, leaving him vulnerable. Policing against any trace of "femininity" is coercive and violent and carries with it a dangerous lesson: that there is something inferior about those who perform femininity. This way of thinking supports illegitimate power hierarchies, which in turn also foster spurious violence.

Another important point is that everyone in the groups, especially women, expressed strong indignation at the images infused with gender-based violence. This reaction, predictable and desired, was channeled into establishing conversations in which the roles played by the images in maintaining and subverting this social problem were questioned: how do they contribute to the subjugation of female or feminized people? How do they prescribe the exercise of power, domination, and violence to men? How can we question, repudiate, and deconstruct these ideas?

Regarding the initial discomfort, demonstrated by the silence of the male participants and by the time they took to engage in the discussions, we conclude that the recognition of the "other" and the territory demarcated by differences becomes a challenge to deconstruct the socialized learning of masculinities throughout existence, something that demands the attention of those who wish to work on the issue of gender violence in educational contexts. Nevertheless, the inconsistencies that constantly revitalize the masculinity patterns surfaced and materialized in the selected images and the discussions that followed democratically among all the participants in the proposed activity.

Final Comments

We learned with the actions carried out that the participants realize how visualities tend to conform and naturalize the hegemonic discourses of masculinity and femininity, which reinforce verbal, gestural, and often physical violence against everything that does not fit the conventionalized norms of binary genders. However, the images of resistance to this situation included in the panels produced during the meetings with the groups shed light on how visualities have been claimed to question, denounce, and destabilize the norms that foment this violence.

We also noticed that the male participants have established, through their comments, relations with the behavior of other men, positioning themselves in a distanced way when facing the problem of violence. Even if they did not recognize themselves as violent or misogynist subjects, they did little to problematize the "perverse complicities" (Diniz, 2022, para. 8) and silence among men, which contribute to gender violence not being investigated or fought. Meanwhile, female students reported having had close experiences with harassment and violence, in which they or other women they knew were victims.

However, it is worth mentioning that many of the men's manifestations, especially those who dissent from heteronormativity, showed compellingly that the incorporation and the exercise of masculinity is an imposition, and how this coercion is exercised in violent ways by the family, peers, and by society in general. These reflections contribute greatly to making evident that the damages fomented by the rigid binary gender order also affect men, which can serve as a way to awaken their interest and encourage their engagement in discussions about the theme.

In the mediation carried out during the elaboration of the visual constellations, the standards that normalize gender and sexuality were emphatically problematized through the confrontations between the images that were gradually added to the panel. The discussions during the meetings showed that several forms of violence originate in the arbitrary and coercive establishment of norms about gender and sexuality. They also brought to light practices that resist these norms, claim new visibilities, and build other possibilities for being.

The proposal of this pedagogical action based on the assembly of visual constellations proved to be a strategy that encourages reflexivity and discussions toward dismantling gender norms and stereotypes that foment violence. This stimulus has the potential to provoke shifts in how we learn to look at ourselves and perceive the other, re-signifying practices and teachings that rank people based on their gender and sexuality in differentiated social levels. The suggestion of placing images in confrontation thus allowed the creation of spaces for dialogue that promoted thinking about "ruptures with negative social representations and stereotypes, creating opportunities for the elaboration of new meanings about what is seen" (Santos Junior & Abreu, 2022, p. 229).

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