


## FULL-LENGTH ARTICLES

# Towards an Anticolonial Photovoice: A Research Practice Guide to Theoretical and Methodological Considerations

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Photovoice researchers must avoid an ahistorical application of the method by critically examining the implementation and dissemination of photovoice projects. Recognizing that photovoice is not automatically empowering and that dismantling power dynamics is an ongoing struggle requiring constant vigilance to ethical, methodological, and representational issues, I propose an anticolonial framework for photovoice, drawing on the work of anticolonial scholars. This approach acknowledges the legacies of colonialism and racism within health and research systems, an imperative for researchers working with Indigenous and marginalized communities. I address multiple phases of a photovoice project, problematizing power relations in each phase and suggesting how to anticolonially adapt theoretical orientations and methodological processes. Areas under-addressed in the photovoice literature, such as epistemic justice, recruitment power relations, decolonized concepts of rigor, problematization of pseudonyms/anonymizing, and cross-language research and writing, are discussed, interweaving analyses with practical guidance from and outcomes of my photovoice research with Indigenous and mestizo communities in Ecuador.

## Photovoice Introduction

Photovoice is a participatory method “...by which people can identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique” (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 369). The method builds upon and extends previous uses of visual research, such as visual ethnography, visual sociology, documentary photography, and interpretive video analysis (Schnettler, 2013; Wang & Burris, 1994). In photovoice, co-researchers<sup>1</sup> receive cameras and brief training in basic photography. Co-researchers jointly discuss and decide upon themes relating to the research questions and then images of the community, relating to these themes, are made *by* co-researchers themselves. Detailed data on each theme are mined via individual and group photographic analyses and discussions.

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, as throughout my work, I refer to the people who worked with me during the Ecuador study referred to in this paper as co-researchers. They are traditionally called “participants” in U.S.- or Eurocentric views of research. However, in keeping with the CBPR and anticolonial lenses I use, and to reflect the actual relationships I came to have with each person, the use of the term co-researcher is intended to convey respect, mutuality, and an intentionality about decolonizing methodologies. This term is also noted in Seitz and Orsini (2022).

The use of photovoice allows for a first-person viewpoint, affirms local perspectives, generates a broad sample of images, illuminates complexity, and creates community discussion (Wang & Burris, 1997). Photovoice processes align with self-determined social action. They enable community-generated data to be applied by members themselves to improve or adjust grassroots health promotion, disease prevention, or community development efforts. Photovoice has been successfully used in health research in international settings and with marginalized populations (Delgado, 2015; PhotoVoice, n.d.).

In this article, my purposes are to: 1) encourage photovoice researchers to think even more critically about how they can move photovoice towards and suffuse its research phases with an anticolonial orientation when working with diverse communities and especially with Indigenous populations; 2) examine the intersecting reasons for doing so by adding an anticolonial framework to the usual feminist, emancipatory foundations discussed in the literature about photovoice; and 3) provide examples from research in Ecuador to illustrate theoretical and methodological practicalities of implementing anticolonial praxis throughout the photovoice research process.

### **Problem Statement: The Need to Make Photovoice Anticolonial**

As a community of researchers, those of us employing photovoice must assure that we avoid an ahistorical application of the method, thus perpetuating or reinforcing systemic oppressions. In this article, I propose one way to acknowledge and address the interconnected legacies of colonialism and racism within photovoice health research: by adopting an anticolonial stance in framing our research and throughout its research phases. As Smith (2020) notes, three pillars of ongoing oppression rest upon the paired foundations of genocide/colonialism, racism/slavery, and Orientalism/war. As such, almost all photovoice projects will intersect with historical and/or ongoing oppressions and could benefit from researcher familiarity with and application of an anticolonial framework. Evans-Agnew and colleagues (2022, pp. 211–212) describe this approach in terms of promoting emancipation and social justice “for those historically exploited in research” noting that such an endeavor “requires purposefully re-envisioning the fundamental social and power relationships that structure and animate the research process.” In this article, I will attempt one such re-envisioning using an anticolonial approach.

### **Foundational Considerations from Photovoice Literature**

Throughout the life cycle of a photovoice project, an anticolonial approach involves several inflection points, including whether photovoice is an appropriate method to employ, the role of the (academic) researcher, and recognizing and actively working to dismantle legacies and ongoing systems of colonialism and racism throughout the research phases. I will briefly introduce each of these below, recognizing the work of researchers who have addressed them, then move to examples from my research in Ecuador from 2017–2018. My goal is to bring photovoice methodology and scholarly work on anticoloniality into conversation in a way that may further increase photovoice

researchers' care in applying the method and decrease the harms which can arise from an application of photovoice that does not adequately adjust for colonialism and its intersecting oppressions.

### **Community Appropriateness of Photovoice as a Research Method**

Any photovoice project must begin with assessing whether photovoice is an appropriate method for engaging with the community (MacLean & Woodward, 2012; Woodgate et al., 2017). Many cultures recognize the healing power of working with images (Woodgate et al., 2017); at the same time, Switzer (2018, p. 193) notes that participatory visual methods research is often taken up and discussed in the research community in “over-celebratory” ways. Employing a visual method like photovoice can reinforce oppressions rather than emancipate if launched from a post-positivist paradigm (Evans-Agnew et al., 2022). We are not immune from the same “systems of oppression, institutional power, and structural forms of violence” which occur in other types of research, especially with those communities that have historically been (mis)represented by outsiders to fit within dominant constructions of race, gender, ability, and so forth (Switzer, 2018, pp. 190, 196).

### **Researcher-as-facilitator**

As a community-based participatory research (CBPR) method, photovoice begins with a “training” and proceeds through “outshoots,” facilitated small and large group discussions and participatory analysis, through to community decisions on the use of the photos and data generated from the method for their own identified purposes. The often-cited role of researcher-as-facilitator (Bryce, 2012; Gubrium et al., 2014; Lykes & Scheib, 2015; Pfister et al., 2014; Switzer, 2019; Wang & Burris, 1997; Warne et al., 2012) implies a need for examining one's positionality or social location before engaging with co-researchers, a topic that has been discussed extensively in the photovoice literature (Bryce, 2012; Coats & Austin, 2014; Hill, 2013; Mannay, 2009). This self-examination also intersects with issues of photovoice ethics, which have been debated extensively (Allen, 2012; Guishard et al., 2018; Harley, 2012; Murray & Nash, 2016; Switzer, 2018; Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001; Wiles et al., 2008).

### **Acknowledging and Dismantling Colonialism and Other Systems of Oppression**

Potential harm from photovoice research includes the continued reluctance of the health research fields to acknowledge the history of colonialism and racism on which it was based. Stories of colonization and exploitation exist in all parts of the world. With these stories came attempts to control narratives and visual representations aimed at maintaining the marginalization of colonized peoples; this often occurred through the circulation of images (Switzer, 2018). Higgins (2014, p. 209) asks us to remember that there are “many ways in which Eurocentrism and visibility intersect” and they often serve to deploy “stereotypical representations of Indigenous peoples” either romanticizing or pathologizing them to further the ends of settler-colonialism.

Such practices continue today with both Indigenous peoples and via “cyber-colonialism” in which digital images may be altered or manipulated to influence attempted testimony by oppressed peoples (Tawil-Souri & Aouragh, 2014). Many authors agree that naming historical research tendencies, previous harm from research, and the cooptation of visual images and other artifacts of significance when working with Indigenous communities is paramount (Brooks et al., 2008; Gentry & Metz, 2017; Sundbery & Latham, 2014; Wilkin & Liamputtong, 2010). We should also acknowledge that our use of photovoice is not inherently or automatically empowering—or participatory (Catalani & Minkler, 2010; Hergenrather et al., 2009)—but that breaking down power dynamics is an ongoing struggle requiring constant vigilance to ethical, methodological, and representational issues (Evans-Agnew & Rosemberg, 2016; Prins, 2010; Switzer, 2018). Despite these works, a specific focus on colonialism, as a historical and ongoing system of oppression, has remained under-addressed from theoretical and methodological standpoints within the photovoice literature.

### Colonialism-Related Terms and Definitions

Before moving to examples of an anticolonial application of photovoice from my collaborations in Ecuador, it is important to introduce and define terms around colonialism. Colonialism, as a historic oppression and an ongoing matrix of power (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018), was and is “legitimized by anthropological theories which... portrayed the peoples of the colonized world as inferior, childlike, or feminine, incapable of looking after themselves... and requiring paternal rule of the west for their own best interests” (Young, 2003, p. 2). These oppressive ways of thinking and power structures have been replicated in modern international development theory and practices of public health/hygiene which continue to present. Understanding various terms around colonialism and attempts to dismantle it is foundational to the work of making photovoice anticolonial. [Table 1](#) sets forth the terms and definitions which are important to understand throughout this article and to apply in emancipatory work.

In this article, I argue that an *anticolonial* stance is useful. Within an anticolonial framework, photovoice co-researchers can interrogate power differentials, question knowledge production and validation, and consider the options available in terms of agency, resistance, and refusal (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001). An anticolonial stance means continually “challenging colonial and neo-colonial legacies, relations and power dynamics” (Dei & Lordan, 2016, p. vii). This pushback against what counts as knowledge and who gets to assert their knowledge aligns well with the photovoice’s goal to allow co-researchers to deconstruct and reconstruct the intersubjectivities of their experiences (Brooks et al., 2008). An anticolonial stance contests “totalizing claims and the political-epistemic violence of modernity” (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 1). We can join in this contestation when we elevate ways of knowing and doing in public health and community development that

Table 1. Colonialism-Related Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition(s)	Source(s)
Colonialism	"a practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one people to another"	Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2017, para. 1
Postcolonialism	Challenging and critiquing the state of colonialism, primarily through sociocultural and political products, by giving expression to the colonized experience. Influenced by Orientalism, which described "a structured set of concepts, assumptions, and...practices that were used to produce, interpret, and evaluate knowledge about non-European peoples" and held up as justification for their oppression	Fanon, 1952, 1961 Mondal, 2014, p. 1 Said, 1978 Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2017, para. 30
Decolonization	The processes employed by newly independent colonies to claim their sovereignty and set up nation states; often replicated patterns of colonial power	Mignolo & Walsh, 2018
	Not a metaphor: a "too-easy adoption of decolonizing discourse (making decolonization a metaphor)...taps into pre-existing tropes that get in the way of more meaningful potential alliances;" decolonization is not performative and not for reconciling settler guilt and complicity	Tuck & Yang, 2012
Anticolonial (as a framework)	an "anti-colonial...framework allows for the effective theorizing of issues emerging from colonial and colonized relations by using Indigenous knowledge as an important standpoint."	Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001, p. 300
Anticolonial (as discourse and praxis)	a "type of pushing back against the politics of knowledge subversion"	Dei & Lordan, 2016, p. xiii

communities have reason to value—and which are based on their worldviews—thus resisting traditional U.S.- and Eurocentric community health and development discourses (Evans-Agnew et al., 2022; Fricas, 2019).

### **Contextualizing the Challenge: Moving Towards an Anticolonial Photovoice Using Examples from Ecuador Research**

As most authors in the field note, photovoice is a powerful method, but a complex one. There are multiple phases—and potential complications—to the design, implementation, analysis, and action/dissemination steps of a photovoice project. As such, there are multiple phases in which we can problematize the neocolonial power relations embedded within health and research systems, then adapt the photovoice method and our engagement using anticolonial orientations. In this main section of the paper, I will address these opportunities and provide at least one methodological example (though many more exist and need to be shared) from the research I facilitated in Ecuador. The specific anticolonial consideration(s) to be addressed, along with the examples from Ecuador which I will share, are displayed by the research phase in [Table 2](#).

### **Introduction to Ecuador Research**

My collaborative research in Ecuador combined photovoice with critical ethnographic methods such as participant observation, document review, and informal interviewing, which stretched over a series of three visits totaling five months between January 2017 and March 2018. The research questions were

Table 2. Opportunities, by Phase, to Insert Anticolonial Orientation into Photovoice Research with Examples from Ecuador Research

Research Phase	Anticolonial Methodological Considerations	Ecuador Research Applications
Framing Research Orientation	Seeding Right (Epistemological) Relationships	Orienting study around indigenous notion of <i>sumak kawsay</i> ( <i>buen vivir</i> )
Data Collection	Power Dynamics in Recruitment	Examining decision-making power and incorporating flexibility into recruitment
Data Analysis	Anticolonial Considerations of Rigor	Replacing notions of rigor concerning sampling, replicability, and generalizability with notions of rigor concerning epistemic justice, locality, collectivity, and power awareness
Dissemination	Problematising Pseudonyms and Anonymizing; Dealing with Issues of Translation	Allowing co-researcher choice in self-identification; identifying research location and partners; maintaining original languages of data

aimed at describing and understanding the way Andean indigenous notions of well-being—specifically the epistemology of *sumak kawsay* [Kichwa] or *buen vivir* [Spanish]—influenced community health and participatory development (Fricas, 2019). I collaborated with an Ecuadorian non-governmental organization (NGO)—*Fundación Cimas*—which has a 30-year history of working in a participatory way on community health and development issues in the parishes where our research took place. Prior to, during, and after our Ecuador research, I spent significant time reflecting on my own positionality relating to the research setting and the co-researchers. This included my Latino heritage and my Spanish language experiences from childhood, in which I grew up hearing Spanish in my household from my bilingual father, though informally; as my mother does not speak Spanish, a fully bilingual upbringing was not possible. Nevertheless, Spanish idioms, songs, and phrases peppered my weekly existence and I believe that contributed to my “ear” for Spanish and I went on to formally study it for more than six years. Once beginning my career as a public health nurse, my daily work with Spanish speakers and interpreters further cemented the language. A fully English–Spanish bilingual friend who studies linguistic self-esteem suggested that I float in an odd zone between first (L1) and second (L2) language acquisition: there are parts of Spanish that I have acquired (as an L1 speaker would) and many parts which I have consciously learned (as an L2 learner would) (Hulya, 2009). I employed a research assistant—Vicky—and worked within existing governmental and NGO leadership structures to plan, execute, and disseminate the results of the study.

### **Framing Orientations to Research—Seeding Right (Epistemological) Relationships**

The term “right relationship” has its roots in Quakerism and may also be aligned with the Eightfold Path in Buddhism. The Quaker idea refers to the belief that the well-being of humans “is connected with the well-being of others and with the earth” (American Friends Service Committee, 2012). The Buddhist notion of the Noble Eightfold Path includes right view, right thinking, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right diligence, right

mindfulness, and right concentration, many of which align with the creation of “right relationships” (Hanh, 1998, p. 49). Both sources coincide with various foundational concepts contained within myriad Indigenous worldviews.

Any anticolonial questioning, deconstruction, and boundary-pushing within photovoice must begin with an interrogation of how we frame knowledge. That is, as photovoice researchers we are not simply asking for a window into the lives of our co-researchers (and their explanations of them) but must also consider the diverse epistemological origins of those experiences and explanations. Epistemology encompasses the examination of how we know what we know, what we count as evidence, and what we consider authoritative knowledge and from whom. Epistemologies of the south (Santos, 2014) are systematically overlooked and excluded from our knowledge generation and sharing processes in the U.S. While photovoice has critical feminist epistemological roots (Wang & Burris, 1997), adding an anticolonial approach honors the relatedness required in collaborative work with Indigenous or marginalized communities. A stance of “relatedness as methodology” (Martin, 2008, as cited in Rogers, 2018, p. 4) opens space for epistemological diversity that enables co-researchers to allow their photovoice data to reflect myriad ways of being, knowing, and doing without pressure from preconceived epistemological orientations towards the issues under investigation brought by the academic researcher. Therefore, I argue photovoice studies must begin with an explicit commitment to epistemic justice—to leveraging our privilege as academic researchers in service of broadening the realm of knowledge we research, publish, and teach about by referencing the photographic and explanatory testimonies of our co-researchers as windows into diverse epistemologies (Fricker, 2007; see Petteway, 2019 for a recent example).

Given that my collaborative research in Ecuador concerned Indigenous notions of well-being, it necessarily began at the level of epistemological understandings. My first trip to Ecuador to build upon prior relationships for this project involved an introduction to *cosmovisión Andina*, or Andean worldview. *Cosmovisión Andina* is a view of the interrelationships that underlie the workings of the universe that contains ontological and epistemological orientations specific to the peoples who inhabit the Andean region of South America. To paraphrase Balarezo (2015), *cosmovisión Andina* can be described as a holistic and integrated way of viewing the world distinct from “western” logic and characterized by: 1) a symbolic and syncretic orientation, an organization based on the laws and structures of the Universe; 2) a preference for deductive reasoning; and 3) a centering on the inter-relatedness of all things. As Stadel (2001, p. 7) writes, “an important element of the Andean philosophy is the recognition that the human being and the human society are embedded in a network of relationships which represent the individual as well as for the communities a source of comfort and protection as well as strength.” Put another way, the world is seen as a “*totalidad viva*” (living totality or whole): each one of the beings that inhabit the world is equivalent to any other, each (whether a human, tree, or rock) being a complete and essential being with a

unique responsibility for harmony within the universe (Wanamey, 2016, para. 5, para. 15). Duality or dichotomy is generally rejected, including dichotomies stemming from the separation of time and space (Balarezo, 2015; Mendoza, 2013). According to Balarezo (2015, p. 90), “past and future are constructed mutually” in an “eternal elliptical movement” of time. Relatedly, the Andean worldview is considered syncretic (Balarezo, 2015) in that it incorporates beliefs and practices from pre-Incan, Incan, and colonial times, as well as animist aspects.

As one can see, *cosmovisión Andina* is quite different from the ontological and epistemological orientations we grow up with and are introduced to in educational and sociocultural systems in the U.S. My introduction to *cosmovisión Andina*, which was both academic and relational, challenged me to problematize the notions of well-being that had been ingrained in me throughout the decades-long processes of my U.S.-based health professions education. Only by so doing would I be ready to receive with humility a “new” (to me) conception of what well-being may contain, from the perspectives of my co-researchers, and what implications that broader conception held for the ways in which we engage with community health and development. During my five months in Ecuador, I lived with an Ecuadorian family whose matriarch was also a governmental leader at the *mancomunidad*<sup>2</sup> level. Through my day-to-day living and community experiences (e.g., attending meetings, accompanying family members to vote in a national election, meeting community members on the street while running errands), I was able to embody and internalize some of the functional meanings of the tenets of *cosmovisión Andina* about which I had learned. Anticolonial design begins at the level of epistemological self-examination and a readiness to self-situate within the epistemological orientations of one’s hosts and co-researchers. This requires humility of the academic researcher which is not often valued in our ethnocentric research training.

### During Data Collection—Power Dynamics in Recruitment

In most U.S.-based research doctorate programs, research sampling is covered in a way that appears authoritative, without noting the grounding of these practices in positivist paradigms and limited conceptions of rigor (see below). Thus, in my own study, although I was guided by both Western research ideals of sampling and culturally-appropriate recognition of local community members who played key roles in community and health development, I was compelled to write in my dissertation that “I used purposive sampling, primarily operational construct sampling as an organizing ideal...” for the section justifying recruitment methods (Fricas, 2019, p. 128). I went on to describe these specific sampling techniques and provide my

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2 Spanish terms from community context used in this paper include *mancomunidad* (association of rural parish governments), *cantón* (roughly equivalent, administratively, to a U.S. state), *parroquia* (parish, which in Ecuador functions as a third-level administrative unit), *GAD* (acronym for *gobierno autónomo descentralizado*, or decentralized autonomous government, at the parish and *cantón* levels), and *vocales* (an elected at-large representative of the *GAD parroquial*).



evidence for choosing them (Miles et al., 2014; Patton, 1990). However, the final description of a finished project's methodology belies its complexity in reality, as well as the "compromises" that a researcher must make to uphold an anticolonial orientation.

Primarily, it is important to attend to issues of representation and the power to shape narratives in critical ethnographic work and in visual methods. There are "power dimensions inherent to the participatory process, which affect whose voices are privileged and whose may be silenced" (Gubrium et al., 2014, p. 1610). Moreover, Tenorio (2020), a Santo Domingo Pueblo/Kewa Pueblo researcher, notes that there are certain Indigenous framings that can assist with what I am calling an anticolonial approach to recruitment. Among these are recruiting voices from all subpopulations, respecting and honoring contributions, taking a relational approach, making offerings, and staying in dialogue (Tenorio, 2020). Our Ecuador study, purporting to be about community meaning and interpretation of well-being and its relationships to development, needed to acknowledge these aspects while accounting for the community voices that may not hold official or unofficial power. With our Ecuador study, recruitment was accomplished in various ways, changed several times, and varied from community to community.

At the outset of the summer 2017 in-country period (the second study-associated visit to Ecuador), I met with the technical team of the *mancomunidad* in the *cantón* of the study to discuss various research logistics, including recruitment. At that meeting, I presented various criteria for possible co-researcher recruitment, informed by reading local development documents, thinking about Western and culturally-appropriate recruitment tenets, and discussions I had with *Fundación Cimas*. There was some debate within the technical team of the *mancomunidad* about how best to approach recruitment in each parish and which criteria could be applied relatively consistently across all four rural parishes. In the end, we decided to recruit co-researchers in a manner that mirrored the identification of key "priority groups" as outlined in numerous Ecuadorian development documents. As minors were excluded from the study, and the target number of co-researchers was between four and six per parish, we determined that in each parish, we would attempt to recruit one pregnant person or person of childbearing age, one young adult (aged 20–49), one adult (aged 50–64), and one older adult (greater than or equal to age 65).

In keeping with the anticolonial and collaborative nature of this study, Vicky (our community research facilitator and a member of the *mancomunidad*) and I met with the president of each local parish government (*GAD*), or his designee, to strategize about the best way to recruit the co-researchers. Indeed, defining the communities involved with research and knowing them is a critical piece of anticolonial recruitment (Rogers, 2018). In these meetings, in addition to sharing the criteria described above, we shared that, ideally, the co-researchers would represent a variety of different *comunidades* and *barrios* (rural communities and urban neighborhoods) within each parish and include

Table 3. Variation and Local Control of Co-Researcher Recruitment Process

Parish – Tupigachi	
Recruitment Process	Resulting Co-Researchers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>GAD parroquial</i> president consulted; convened meeting of community association presidents.</li> <li>• At meeting, presented recruitment criteria and timeline, suggested specific community leaders recruit one type of person from the criteria and others recruit different type of person from the criteria.</li> <li>• Community presidents disliked idea; indicated desire to each recruit one woman of childbearing age, one adult, one older adult. This meant total of nine co-researchers, instead of intended four to six. We discussed and agreed to this change.</li> <li>• After recruitment period by community presidents, went door to door to explain study and consent process to each potential co-researcher, with help of <i>GAD parroquial vocale</i>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nine co-researchers recruited; 8 participated (5 women, 3 men).</li> <li>• All attended the introductory photovoice workshop.</li> <li>• One pregnant woman left the study during round one after she unexpectedly gave birth ahead of her due date.</li> </ul>
Parish – Malchinguí	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Worked with the <i>GAD parroquial</i> president's delegate, the vice-president (VP).</li> <li>• Reviewed recruitment criteria and created list of possible co-researchers based on VP's suggestions.</li> <li>• VP explained formal letter of invitation to study was required for each co-researcher, signed by <i>GAD</i> President and me. Letters created using suggested co-researcher names and template procured from the <i>GAD</i> secretary.</li> <li>• VP hand-delivered these invitation letters with a brief explanation of the study.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Six co-researchers recruited; 5 participated (3 women, 2 men).</li> <li>• All attended the introductory photovoice workshop.</li> <li>• One older man who subsequently lost the camera decided to leave the study.</li> <li>• Exception: the woman of child-bearing age was recruited by me when I was seated next to her during a community celebration.</li> </ul>
Parish – La Esperanza	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>GAD parroquial</i> president assigned recruitment task to his secretary-treasurer, who used process like that of Malchinguí, but without formal invitation letters.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Five co-researchers recruited; 5 participated (4 women, 1 man).</li> <li>• All attended the introductory photovoice workshop and subsequently completed the entire project.</li> </ul>
Parish – Tocachi	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>GAD parroquial</i> president assigned recruitment task to one of his <i>vocales</i>, who seemed overwhelmed with other more pressing duties.</li> <li>• Despite attempts to follow-up on recruitment progress prior to introductory workshop/meeting, it was difficult to receive updates or influence the process.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Six co-researchers recruited; 6 participated (4 women, 2 men).</li> <li>• All attended the introductory photovoice workshop and subsequently completed the entire project.</li> <li>• Despite already having one woman of childbearing age, another pregnant woman came to the workshop.</li> <li>• Though I was unaware until after the workshop, the young adult and older adult whom the <i>vocale</i> recruited were both extended members of her family.</li> </ul>

both men and women. This was in keeping with the suggestions noted by MacLean and Woodward (2012, p. 102) that “researchers should question how to work with the community to ensure that participants are representative of the greater whole.” To share power among leaders in the community, after these meetings had taken place, I welcomed and respected that each parish conducted the recruitment process differently. See [Table 3](#) for a summary of the varying approaches.

Some academic researchers may be uncomfortable with relinquishing control over the recruitment process and the variety of paths by which co-researchers ultimately joined the study. However, in an anticolonial approach, one must recognize the history that community members and leaders have experienced—from assumptions of inferiority to infantilization to meaningless power delegation—and the insider/outsider dynamic that comes from an

academic researcher entering a space in which they are not experienced. In Ecuador, both the constitutional right to participation as well as the legacy of collaborative community development seeded by my hosting NGO dictated that meaningless power delegation would not only be ineffective but also immediately noted as disingenuous and the mark of an outsider with little knowledge of community processes. Building trust includes trusting in the decision-making abilities of those you have been referred to work with and following their lead to determine how much involvement you need to have in the process. The researchers should pay special attention to issues of representation during both the group discussions in which photos are analyzed by co-researchers, as well as in the action and dissemination processes.

### **During Data Analysis—Anticolonial Considerations of Rigor**

These issues of recruitment—also known in academic speak as “sampling”—intersect with issues of “research rigor,” which we turn to next. The criteria used to assess rigor are vastly different between quantitative and qualitative studies. Moreover, considerations of rigor in a qualitative, participatory, anticolonial study need to account for a balance between U.S.- and Eurocentric research conventions, English-language publication conventions, epistemologies of the south, and co-researcher expertise. Several authors have written about components or characteristics by which we can judge the validity, authenticity, or credibility of a qualitative study (e.g., Guba & Lincoln, 1982, 1989; Popay et al., 1998; Rogers, 2018; Sandelowski, 1993). These are the qualities to which photovoice researchers generally attend. However, the qualities do not always or completely align with an anticolonial orientation. Here I analyze Dei and Asgharzadeh’s (2001) description of an anticolonial discursive framework to extract the key characteristics by which we may evaluate other scholars’ suggestions for assessing qualitative rigor. In [Table 4](#), below, I have synthesized the components of qualitative study “rigor” found in the literature and cross-walked them with Dei and Asgharzadeh’s (2001) anticolonial framework. My goal here is to provide anticolonial-infused guidance for evaluating the qualitative rigor of a photovoice study. This approach is not intended to be an exhaustive list of such guidance, nor do I intend to imply that the original authors in the table meant for their criteria to be anticolonial. However, for those of us wishing to assure anticolonial inquiry through photovoice, is helpful to have a catalog of components by which to discuss and defend a study’s rigor and credibility.

The characteristics in the right-most column of [Table 4](#) map to Dei and Asgharzadeh’s (2001) anticolonial framework. When viewing them through the lens of a photovoice study, this means researchers should:

- Allow for flexible, fluid, transparent language and discussions (discursive);
- Avoid fixation on particular intellectual traditions (epistemic justice);
- Interrogate configurations of power/privilege and/or their structural underpinnings (power-aware);

Table 4. Aligning Methods for Evaluating Rigor, Credibility, and Authenticity in Photovoice Research with an Anticolonial Framework

Source(s) and Type	Documented Components for Evaluating Rigor	Anticolonial Alignment (uses shortened form definitions from below)
<b>Guba (1982)</b>  Credibility in naturalistic inquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prolonged engagement</li> <li>• Persistent observation</li> <li>• Peer debriefing</li> <li>• Triangulation</li> <li>• Referential adequacy materials</li> <li>• Member checks</li> </ul>	Discursive Power-aware Identity examination Locality Collectivity Self-awareness
<b>Guba and Lincoln (1989)</b>  Criteria for authenticity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fairness authenticity</li> <li>• Ontological authenticity</li> <li>• Educative authenticity</li> <li>• Catalytic authenticity</li> <li>• Tactical authenticity</li> </ul>	Discursive Epistemic justice Power-aware Identity examination Locality Collectivity Self-awareness
<b>Sandelowski (1993)</b>  The problem of rigor in qualitative research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Validity as trustworthiness</li> <li>• Artfulness of inquiry</li> <li>• Limitations of member checking – recognizes narrative has informational and discursive features, is time-bound, political/emotional. Analyses may be the abstracted aggregate of multiple co-researchers' data and thus not 'verifiable' by any one of them.</li> </ul>	Discursive Identity examination Locality
<b>Popay, Rogers, and Williams (1998)</b>  Standards for Systematic Review of Qualitative Health Sciences Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the research illuminate subjective meaning, actions, and context of the co-researchers?</li> <li>• Is there evidence of adaption and responsiveness of research design to circumstances and issues of real-life social settings of study?</li> <li>• Does sample produce knowledge necessary to understand the structures and processes of co-researchers' environment?</li> <li>• Is description [of results] detailed enough to allow reader to interpret meaning and context?</li> <li>• How are different sources of knowledge about the same issue compared/contrasted?</li> </ul>	Locality Identity examination Epistemic justice

- Examine (or allow for the examination of) indigeneity, agency, resistance, and/or politics of co-researchers (identity examination);
- Make space for local knowledge and practices, the particular (locality);
- Allow for representations of collective consciousness, not only the individual (collectivity);
- Encourage “intellectuals” [self and other academic researchers] to be aware of the history of the structures in which they operate (self-awareness).

I kept these criteria in mind when writing the results of our Ecuador study and the discussion section analyzing the results. Indeed, the primary marker suggested by Popay and colleagues (1998) for evaluating qualitative research is whether the data and written account privilege subjective meaning using an ontological reality appropriate to the study context and co-researchers. This was especially important to me given the grounding of the Ecuador study in Andean epistemology, which I tried to incorporate throughout the study while simultaneously acknowledging my own social location. Smith (2012, p. 58) writes that “research through imperial eyes describes an approach which assumes that Western ideas about the most fundamental things are the only

ideas possible to hold.” From a perspective of Indigenous knowledges, rigor may be thought of as a connectedness between knowing, doing, and believing (Dei, 2000). My immersion within the communities where my co-researchers lived was critical to my understanding of the data they produced. For example, corn was so important and such a common part of daily life among the co-researchers that it was discussed and photographed a total of 333 times in the study. My own understanding of corn as a sociocultural and food product was continually evolving; I took pages of notes trying to keep track of the various types of corn that were regularly served and discussed. The theme of embodied knowledge, which was one that arose from our study, was illustrated by corn: living alongside corn and interacting with it daily illustrated embodied cultural knowledge of the co-researchers, which I did not have, but which we privileged in the data due to its ability to illustrate the interconnectedness between knowing, doing, and believing.

### **During Dissemination—Writing About Others and Languages of Writing**

*Problematizing Pseudonyms and Anonymizing.* It is common practice in White, Western, and/or biomedical research paradigms to provide pseudonyms for research participants and to anonymize place names that could identify participants or other individuals or organizations involved in the research (Lahman et al., 2015; Tilley & Woodthorpe, 2011). These practices are normalized through research codes of ethics and institutional or ethical review boards and, as such, are often left unquestioned (Tilley & Woodthorpe, 2011). With photovoice, as a form of CBPR aligned with critical race and feminist theory, researchers must consider the implications of their power to rename participants and respect participant requests to have their research contributions associated with their real names (Lahman et al., 2015). From an anticolonial perspective, the use of pseudonyms and anonymization is ahistorical and acontextual—precisely what we are trying to avoid. Such decontextualizing turns people and places into “usable examples or illustrations of generalizing theoretical categories” in which they can be interchanged and stand in for other constructs in the mind of the reader (Nespor, 2000, p. 550). Nevertheless, a collaborative, relational discussion with co-researchers is critical to acknowledge and plan for possible unintentional effects of naming photographers, such as reinforcing stereotypes during exhibition/dissemination, reifying fleeting circumstances or moments, or when photos are distributed widely online and cannot be controlled or recontextualized after release (Carlberg-Racich, 2021; Teti & Myroniuk, 2022). In keeping with an anticolonial framework, questioning pseudonyms should not be done to circumvent difficult discussions and decisions about study safety, privacy, and co-researcher autonomy (Carlberg-Racich, 2021).

Another anticolonial consideration pertaining to pseudonyms, should they decide to be adopted, is the power of who is permitted to rename co-researchers. Typically, this control is afforded to the academic researcher. However, studies have shown that we assign characteristics such as gender,

race, age, and relationship status to others when we read their names (Lahman et al., 2015). Therefore, the application of pseudonyms serves to shape the narrative presented to readers of research in terms that the academic researcher influences. Likewise, place anonymizing transforms “concrete, historically, and politically contingent settings” into anonymous and apolitical locales, thus enabling the researcher to control the bounds of discourse about that space, including any possible contestation of their work (Nespor, 2000, p. 554). Both consequences are decidedly colonial, avoiding particularity and sequestering individual testimonies for the purposes of adherence to academic codes which do not typically have bearing on the living experiences of co-researchers.

Therefore, during the final meeting and celebration in each parish in Ecuador, Vicky and I explained the choice to use real names or pseudonyms to the co-researchers and discussed the possible implications of their decisions. To avoid group influence and to document decisions, I provided a slip of paper to each co-researcher for them to mark to indicate whether they wished to use their real name or a pseudonym and, if a pseudonym, what they wanted that false name to be.<sup>3</sup> The self-selection of pseudonyms is supported in the literature (Lahman et al., 2015). In the end, five (21%) co-researchers selected a pseudonym and 19 (79%) chose to have their work accompanied by their real name. Brooks and colleagues (2008, p. 203) report a similar outcome when discussing pseudonyms with their co-researchers, noting “the majority... of the participants... did not wish their pictures or their transcripts to remain anonymous and preferred to be credited openly for their contributions.” In my experience, the pseudonyms chosen by the co-researchers varied and demonstrated their agency, with one who was also a musician choosing a famous local musician’s name as their pseudonym and others choosing shortened versions of their real names.

Regarding not anonymizing the location of my research in Ecuador (neither at the *cantón* or *parroquial* levels), additional cross-cultural contextual factors were considered. Many of the people with whom I worked are public servants and, as such, were accustomed to having their names associated with community development work and research; in fact, Ecuadorian law requires such documentation (another reason for being well-versed in the local history and politics of a place). Moreover, all of them indicated to me at some point that they did not have a need to remain anonymous and in fact felt that their association with the project brought positive feelings, impressions, and outcomes to them and their communities. Likewise, the parish governments, the *mancomunidad*, and *Fundación Cimas* all reasoned they could benefit from the results of the publication of our collaboration and findings and to anonymize them without their consent would be to deny them these opportunities.

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3 As with all tasks involving writing during the study, for those co-researchers who did not read and/or write, Vicky and/or I would sit with them and converse about their choices, photo titles, or captions, and document these as dictated to us.

Of course, these decisions contain ethical considerations. These can be sorted into three categories, which correspond to an anticolonial framework:

- **Relationally:** when real names are used, the persons directly connected to the participants are also known;
- **Developmentally:** as time passes, will the participants wish they had used their name?;
- **Economically:** could there be unanticipated impacts on current and future work? (Lahman et al., 2015, pp. 450–451, emphasis added)

Thus, in discussions with co-researchers about pseudonyms and anonymity, I covered these possible risks and presented information intended to help them make a decision that included their own ethical assessments. Some academic writers (e.g., MacLean & Woodward, 2012) imply that co-researchers may not be aware of the implications of anonymization choices. I disagree with this stance in a critical, anticolonial research project. Discussion of possible consequences and careful consideration by all involved is crucial, but to believe or suspect that one's co-researchers are not capable of making their own decisions in this area is a form of paternalism that limits individual agency in a manner antithetical to an anticolonial approach.

*Maintaining Original Languages of Research and Issues of Translation.* Additional anticolonial considerations are inherent in the dissemination of cross-language research. Conducting research in a country different from one's own requires attention to insider/outsider dynamics, as well as issues of both cultural and linguistic ambiguity and interpretation: in short, to issues of context. In our Ecuador research, after the initial January 2017 visit, I maintained my intention to conduct the study using my own Spanish language skills.<sup>4</sup> However, knowing a language does not completely address issues of interpretation of meaning, with LeCompte and Preissle (1993, p. 94) noting that “in-depth understanding of culture requires near-native fluency in the language as well as extensive and intensive participant observation.” As I addressed earlier, continual self-examination of my own Spanish language fluency was critical to the translation and writing phases of the research project. Given the need to honor co-researchers who engage with us in cross-cultural, cross-linguistic photovoice research, more investigation of the experiences of researchers who occupy linguistic in-between spaces is needed.

Throughout my time in Ecuador, I made every effort to consult with local native speakers and to check interpretations/translations with co-researchers to assure fidelity to their intended meanings. Still, there were several times that the translation of co-researcher photo titles, captions, and interview transcripts

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<sup>4</sup> In all of Ecuador, it is estimated that approximately half a million people speak Kichwa; however, a growing number are Kichwa-Spanish bilingual regardless of rural-urban location and class (Howard, 2011). According to *Fundación Cimas*, nearly all potential participants in the study site are Spanish-Kichwa bilingual. I found this to be the case: all recruited co-researchers spoke fluent Spanish, whether or not they also spoke some Kichwa.

was challenging. This is because “translation is not a case of choosing words from dictionaries but is about making decisions on equivalence” (Temple et al., 2006, p. 14). Decisions about equivalence, in turn, are steeped in the researcher’s understanding of “the way language is tied to social realities, to literary forms and to changing identities” (Simon, 1996, p. 137, as quoted in Temple et al., 2006, p. 14). Words often have multiple meanings and, in many languages (like Spanish, and unlike English), understandings are highly context-dependent. It is the responsibility of the anticolonial academic writer to include a clear and specific description of the research context and culture and to “contextualize how photographs are being used for data generation and interpretation” (Plunkett et al., 2012, p. 162).

There was also the thorny issue of crossing back and forth between Spanish and English during the writing phase of the research. As Temple and colleagues note (2006, p. 16), researchers are “expected to produce easy-to-read English texts in which the process of production is not apparent.” To avoid challenges of “translate” (Spivak, 1993, p. 399) and “domestication” of co-researcher words and intentions (Venuti, 1998), whenever possible I tried to block multiple consecutive days to work on translation and writing, which minimized the start-up time of changing between Spanish and English, which I hoped would increase fidelity and decrease errors. This also afforded me time to reflect on the literal and analytical meanings of the data (photos and text) and their translations.

I made a conscious anticolonial decision to maintain the data in Spanish throughout the analysis and writing phases, only creating translations at the time of writing the manuscript. Lopez et al. (2008, p. 1736) note that while translating or transcribing interviews directly from recording into the target language of writing is faster and cheaper, “this method introduces an element of bias, which can greatly affect a study’s findings, especially in qualitative research.” One possible anticolonial solution is the use of a translation team. In our Ecuador research, I employed this method both in-country and later, while writing, by using a variety of Spanish–English translation resources and having a natively bilingual English–Spanish speaker check my translations of co-researcher data. Despite these actions, there are still often disagreements among fluent Spanish speakers about meanings associated with words and translation involves decisions and interpretations that are always at least partly individualized. This may be why some (e.g., Temple et al., 2006) posit that cross-language qualitative research should be considered secondary data analysis. Clearly, this is an area that needs more exploration if we are to make our cross-cultural, cross-language photovoice data dissemination processes anticolonial.

Having said all this, an overreliance on or worship of the written word is, according to Okun (2001), a characteristic of white supremacist culture. Within organizations, this often manifests as discounting the non-written ways in which information is shared; undervaluing or dismissing the emotion, tone, and relational consequences of communication; and over-relying on



documentation to verify, trust, and micromanage (Okun & the Centre for Community Organizations, 2001). Within research writing systems then, the challenge for anticolonial photovoice researchers is to faithfully represent the “expansive outcome [which results from] harnessing intuitive thought” in co-researcher discussions and analyses (Sundbery & Latham, 2014). Indeed, when working with Indigenous peoples, an emphasis on oral tradition, storytelling, or “yarning” (Rogers, 2018; Sundbery & Latham, 2014) is central. According to Geia and colleagues, yarning is a “fluid ongoing process, a moving dialogue interspersed with interjections, interpretations, and additions” (Geia et al., 2013, as cited in Rogers, 2018, p. 7) and thus can be difficult to encapsulate within a written text. Therefore, the skill of “deep listening” remains fundamental to an anticolonial approach to photovoice. Academic researchers must honor that “allowing each other to wander off-topic, in order to explore intuitive thoughts” forms the basis of the method and facilitates “talking to a solution” rather than “thinking to a solution” (Sundbery & Latham, 2014, p. 74). This critical methodological process point links to the effective dissemination of the photovoice work.

One way in which deep listening, talking to a solution, and data analysis intersect is when the academic researcher decides what sort of quoting style to employ in their writing or in photovoice exhibitions or publications. Malherbe and colleagues (2017, p. 169) note that photovoice research is often “documented in a manner that mediates participants’ voices and subsumes their narrative in self-serving ways.” To avoid this, verbatim and discursive quoting can be useful. Corden and Sainsbury (2006), in their study of qualitative researchers’ views of quotations, report that verbatim quoting is done for several pre-conceived reasons, including as evidence, as illustration, to deepen understanding, and to enhance readability. Moreover, the use of verbatim quoting was also found to facilitate the expression of co-researchers’ beliefs, feelings, and nuanced perspectives (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006). Finally, longer stretches of quoting—which may be discouraged by academic publishers—are vital to contextualize the conversation for readers; such context is an important anticolonial consideration of rigor that privileges the lives and explanations of co-researchers. In writing the results of our Ecuador study, I used verbatim quoting and maintained much, if not all, of the discursive nature of our discussion of photographs and their meanings.

### Practice Implications and Conclusions

In this paper, I have argued that an anticolonial discursive framework (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001) can serve as a vital tool to make our photovoice research processes, from project conception and framing through writing, anti-oppressive (and, we hope, emancipatory). Our Ecuador research afforded us an opportunity to learn how to apply photovoice in an anticolonial way and the lessons I learned from the leaders and co-researchers I worked with have formed the basis of this paper. Specifically, I witnessed the ability of co-researchers to illustrate *sumak kawsay* and demonstrate its changes over time and through the lens of their own experiences, individual and shared. They were able to

leverage their positions in time and space, both now and as they had been, to lend insight into changes in an embodied phenomenon. This ability is critical to centering Indigenous paradigms, as discussed by Evans-Agnew and colleagues (2022, p. 215), to “provide a different orientation to reality and [to] inform new directions in how photovoice is shaped.” Our Ecuador work also illustrated, through photographic and narrative evidence, how the links between the health of humans and the health of the environment is central to Indigenous notions of well-being. Not only is such an insight a critical “beginning point for inquiry” in an emancipatory photovoice approach but it is also required to center Indigenous frames of well-being in our community health and development work (Evans-Agnew et al., 2022, p. 215).

An anticolonial approach begins at the level of epistemology when we can acknowledge and elevate epistemologies of the south as the bases for our research questioning and study design, approaching the work as academic researchers with humility and from a relational standpoint. Moreover, non-Indigenous researchers must recognize that Indigenous approaches to research acknowledge that epistemology (worldview on knowledge) and research paradigms (with their processes and outcomes) are inseparable (non-dualistic) and allow this to guide the researchers’ work accordingly (Tenorio, 2020, p. 151). Throughout any photovoice research process, anticolonial actions must be chosen continuously, regardless of whether the co-researchers identify as Indigenous. During the process of recruiting (or “sampling”) co-researchers, this implies attention to representation as well as to community self-determination, which requires the academic researcher to work collaboratively and be willing to frame “sampling variations” more broadly than is traditionally expected in U.S.- and Eurocentric academic research practices. During the data analysis phase of photovoice research, evaluating rigor should shift to assessing authenticity and fidelity to those criteria which align with the characteristics of an anticolonial discursive framework: epistemic justice, identity examination, locality, collectivity, and self-awareness, among others. Finally, during the dissemination phase of a photovoice study, we should problematize our reflexive use of pseudonyms and anonymization, relinquishing control of the impulse to rename co-researchers or to evaluate risks on their behalf. We must not assume that the dissemination of images through exhibits or other means will necessarily produce benefits for the co-researchers or the issue(s) on which they are reporting (Teti & Myroniuk, 2022). I also reviewed numerous considerations for the writing of cross-language research, including oversimplifications of what we are doing during the work of translation and the need to center our writing on deep listening, carrying the careful contextualization of our co-researchers into the context-setting of our publications.

There are additional areas of photovoice research—many more than could be addressed here—that can be made anticolonial and many are delving into this work (Lykes & Scheib, 2015; Mark & Boulton, 2017; and Brooks & Poudrier, 2014, to name a few). Challenges will continue. In a recent review of

photovoice reviews by Seitz and Orsini (2022), the authors note some of these challenges in photovoice studies include inconsistent evaluation of outcomes and impacts, challenges in implementing photovoice with certain groups (which could lead to inequity in whose data and narratives are privileged), and varying reporting and adherence to ethical issues. Many of these challenges intersect with considerations centered by an anticolonial framework discussed in this paper (e.g., epistemic justice, power-awareness, collectivity). If community health and development researchers are to heed the increasing calls to make our research actively anticolonial and antiracist, we should continue to learn alongside Indigenous and marginalized communities who can show us how to do this work in a way that honors their lives and knowledges.

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