

Journal of Indigenous Research

Full Circle: Returning Native Research to the People

Volume 10 | Issue 2022

Article 8

October 2022

Assessing Community Needs and Feedback: Using Photovoice to Gather Community Perspective

Morgan Aiwohi Torris-Hedlund

Oregon Health Sciences University, torrishe@hawaii.edu

Adrienne Dillard

Kula no na Po'e Hawaii 'o Papakōlea, kula.papakolea@gmail.com

Sarah Momilani Marshall

Hawai'i Pacific University, momilani@gmail.com

Puni Kekauoha

Kula no na Po'e Hawaii, punikekauoha@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/kicjir>

Recommended Citation

Torris-Hedlund, Morgan Aiwohi; Dillard, Adrienne; Marshall, Sarah Momilani; and Kekauoha, Puni (2022)

"Assessing Community Needs and Feedback: Using Photovoice to Gather Community Perspective,"

Journal of Indigenous Research: Vol. 10: Iss. 2022, Article 8.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/kicjir/vol10/iss2022/8>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Indigenous Research by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usu.edu.



Assessing Community Needs and Feedback: Using Photovoice to Gather Community Perspective

Cover Page Footnote

The authors wish to acknowledge the community of Papakōlea.

Assessing Community Needs and Feedback: Using Photovoice to Gather Community Perspective

Introduction

Since its inception in the early 1990s, photovoice (PV) has been used in various settings to encourage community members to share their concerns with policymakers. The method has grown in popularity, recognized for its dynamic between researchers and participants. PV projects create opportunities for researchers and participants to collaboratively identify priorities to enhance the participants' communities (Wang & Burris, 1997). PV nurtures community development, building the capacity of individuals to amplify their voice using images that visually communicate their goals and supports dialogue within the community and among individuals or organizations that can facilitate change (Hergenrather et al., 2009; Higgins, 2014). PV relies on photo-elicitation, asking participants to respond to photos they take, explaining what the images mean in their own words. The method is known for its capacity to create change in communities by developing knowledge, giving voice to community concerns, and prompting community-driven demand for change (Benavides-Vaello et al., 2014, Wang & Burris, 1994). This paper provides the background of PV, describes how PV is conducted, and how it could be used in Native communities. The authors conclude that PV is highly adaptable, easy to use, and encourages existing strengths inherent in Native communities.

The Photovoice Method

Photovoice is rooted in community-based participatory research (CBPR) and Participatory Action Research (PAR). Guided by CBPR, PV fosters a dynamic where participants and researchers share responsibility throughout the research process. Participants

shape the research question, have access to all the data, can change the course of the project, provide feedback throughout the process, and participate in data interpretation and dissemination.

Foundation

PV builds on three theoretical frameworks: personal/community empowerment, feminist theory, and documentary photography (Wang & Burris, 1994). These components support the goal of initiating community change. At the individual level, PV focuses on nurturing self-worth through participation and shared responsibility. Community members contribute as equals with the researcher, sharing their perceptions while the researcher is expected to honor the participants' experience and point of view (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008; Wang & Burris, 1994, 1997). At the community level, issues in the physical and social environment are contextualized through the participants' eyes.

Wang, Burris, and Ping (1996) drew on feminist theory's emphasis on transforming thought processes and the need to acknowledge the role of marginalized community members who are historically silenced by sociocultural paradigms. Feminism's contribution to PV focuses on participants' lived experiences as a valid impetus for change based on the individual's or group's understanding of their lives (Kuratani & Lai, 2011; Wang & Burris, 1994; Wang Burris, & Ping 1996). Because community members share their views as insiders, most affected by the events they describe, the opportunity to capture contextual meaning is increased (Kuratani, & Lai, 2011; Wang & Burris, 1994, 1997).

Documentary photography allows vulnerable populations to express themselves and share images of their world (Kuratani & Lai, 2011). Photographs provide graphic authenticity to people's lived experiences, communicating the participant's life through their own eyes

(Kuratani, & Lai, 2011; Wang & Burris, 1994). As a whole, the process encourages participants to define what should be evaluated and participate in developing solutions (Wang, 1999).

Finally, the action taken in response to the community's concerns is driven by a collective decision to respond to the participant's assessment of their needs (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008; Wang & Burris, 1994, 1997).

Photovoice among Native Communities

An exploration of previous PV projects in Native Communities revealed six essential themes: (a) the importance of elders, (b) the value of culture, (c) the necessity of land, (d) the significance of relationships, (e) the use of Native language, and (f) the response to Western culture. The first five themes are intricately connected to and through one another, and in part, they collectively generate and fundamentally support participants' sense of identity (Brown, 2016; Castleden et al., 2008; Genuis et al., 2015; Harper et al., 2015; Helm et al., 2015; Holliday, Wynne, Katz, Ford, & Barbosa-Leiker, 2016; Markus, 2012; Moffitt & Vollman, 2009). Across demographic groups and research topics, these five aspects of participants' narratives ground the discussion, often serving as the contextual lens through which participants described their answers to research questions. Western culture was consistently described as a social force with which participants are conflicted, and community concerns were explained due to tension between cultural values.

Doing Photovoice

Conducting a PV project requires sequential steps adapted to the setting and participants. Critical to the process is taking photographs and sharing the images with other participants. Before this happens, participants determine a research question in collaboration with the researcher. Participants have an equal say in creating their research questions. The process is

adapted to fit the community's needs, allowing for as many meetings as the group feels necessary to refine their answers. The iterative process of discussing images is critical to the PV process because it nurtures the opportunity for the group to shape answers to research questions that are collectively determined through storytelling, conversation, and discussion. Participants are reminded that they will answer their research questions using photographs and discuss the meaning of their images with the group. Questions can be as broad as "what does your family mean to you?" "how do you express your culture?" "what challenges does your community face?" Alternatively, questions can seek to illuminate a specific topic or community resource, "how did the community center help you reach your goal?" In a recent study conducted on Oahu among Native Hawaiians, participants exploring the use of PV to assess disaster risk perception described the difference between work they could do in their community and efforts that had to come from policymakers and state entities. For example, in response to an image of yard debris and uncut trees, a participant stated, "This stuff isn't on us, I mean, we can't be the ones to do this work or haul some of this stuff away, we don't have the equipment for it" (Torriss-Hedlund, 2019).

Participants may need help understanding how they will use a photograph to answer their questions and often benefit from a conversation about using images. It is not uncommon for researchers to ask a photographer or other visual communicator to speak with participants about how pictures communicate ideas. The method of taking photographs should be discussed and agreed upon to ensure that all participants have an equal opportunity to create and share images. This aspect may be prescriptive, requiring everyone to use the same camera, or permissive, allowing team members to use the cameras in their phones. The most critical concern is assuring everyone can reliably create and share photos.

A schedule guides when participants share their images; they may be given a couple of days to gather images or only a few hours. First, participants share their photographs and explain how they answered the research question with the group. Next, they discuss the photos and explain their responses or perception of the image in a respectful way that acknowledges the intentions of the person who took the photo. This process can be repeated or can take place only once. The researcher should record the discussion around each image and keep a copy of the photos. The goal is to determine how each image answers the question from the participants' perspective. After this process, the group has identified the pictures that accurately reflect their answers to the research question. The number of images they use should be established beforehand and adhered to as much as possible; doing so encourages the group to be intentional about their choices.

Images

Photovoice literature is rooted in the belief that sharing images is a powerful way of expressing a point of view (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008; Wang & Burris, 1994, 1997). At the heart of PV is the images participants create to answer questions. Ideally, the images offer depth and nuance that would otherwise go unrevealed. These images, created by participants who are intimate with the issues being addressed and have a significant stake in the process, become part of the data. All participants examine and discuss the images, with the researcher acting as facilitator.

Methodological Fidelity

To adhere to the methodological foundation of PV, researchers have two crucially essential tasks. First, they have to share the process with community members, allowing participants to collaborate in formulating the research question, control the data, make

interpretive decisions, and decide how to disseminate findings (Catalani & Minker, 2009; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008; Munhall, 2012; Wang & Burris, 1994, 1997). Second, working in partnership, the researcher and the participants have to *take action*. They have to use the information they uncovered to create change in the community (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008; Wang & Burris, 1994). The final phase of the process is essential to the PV practice and is fundamental to maintaining PV's grounding in CBPR and PAR (2008; 1994). This may be as simple as reporting the findings to community leaders or an appropriate municipal entity. Other projects may demand further advocacy. What happens is not dogmatic; the participants determine what to do with their findings.

Limitations

Photovoice is not without limitations. When used among Native communities, there is always a risk for inequitable power dynamics between community members and outside researchers. Despite its grounding in CBPR and PAR, researchers may inadvertently minimize the voice of participants or misinterpret culturally significant aspects of the work (Higgins, 2014). Paying attention to the dynamics between participants and researchers, emphasizing the participants' capacity to change or stop the process, and building checks and balances to help avoid unbalanced influence on the researcher's part should be avoided. By remaining aware of the socio-cultural and historical dynamics between the researcher and the community participants, the consequences of historical inequalities can be mitigated (Higgins, 2016). Consistent with other qualitative methods, the results may not represent all community members. Findings may reveal only the participants' perspectives and may not reflect the experience of the entire community. Seeking an appropriate number of participants who can speak to the community's issues and concerns helps address this concern. Asking for guidance from

community leaders and seeking broad community input in the early stages of the process also mitigates this concern (Cheung, 2018; Mayan, 2009; Munhall, 2012). Because images are used to answer questions, answers are limited to what can be photographed and the participants' ability to explain the images. This limitation is mitigated by the instructions provided at the start of the process. Further, the discussion sessions and the researcher's efforts to facilitate conversations that nurture the participants' perspectives and intentions offer depth to the results (Castleden et al., 2008; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008; Wang & Burris, 1994, 1997).

Despite these concerns, PV provides a flexible tool. Its foundation in storytelling and emphasis on a shared, community-generated narrative aligns with community communications that are often already in place.

Suggestions

Community leaders and service providers can consider using PV to gather community member responses to projects and identify community concerns. Its ease of use, adaptability, and low cost make it an accessible, flexible tool. In addition, PV's versatility makes it an excellent choice for collecting data and eliciting community feedback on issues, including community initiatives, public health interventions, policy implementation, and program/project evaluations.

PV is particularly valuable among participants comfortable with storytelling and collaborative decision-making. Methodologically PV asks that participants engage in a deliberate, focused, ongoing discussion about the images they share. These conversations allow the researcher and the participants to ask questions about the pictures and their narratives. These discussions may feel familiar in many communities, mimicking conversational styles already present.

Conclusion

Photovoice is a proven effective research method among Native and Indigenous communities. True to its inception, PV is a helpful mechanism for amplifying the voices of communities to bring their concerns to leaders' attention to facilitate change. It is also used to record participants' feelings, serving as a record or narrative of recent experiences. Photovoice's accessibility and adaptability make it a handy tool for gathering and recording information in various settings.

References

- Benavides-Vaello, S., Katz, J. R., Peterson, J. C., Allen, C. B., Paul, R., Charette-Bluff, A. L., & Morris, P. (2014). Nursing and health sciences workforce diversity research using PhotoVoice: a college and high school student participatory project. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 53(4), 217-222. doi:10.3928/01484834-20130326-02
- Brown, D. L. (2016). Daughters of the drum. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 12(2), 109-123. doi:10.20507/AlterNative.2016.12.2.1
- Castleden, H., Garvin, T., & First Nation, H.-a.-a. (2008). Modifying Photovoice for community-based participatory Indigenous research. *Social Science & Medicine*, 66(6), 1393-1405. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2007.11.030
- Cheung, A. T. M. (2018). Including everyone but engaging no one? Partnership as a prerequisite for trustworthiness. *American Journal of Bioethics*, 18(4), 55-57. doi:10.1080/15265161.2018.1431711
- Harper, S. L., Edge, V. L., Ford, J., Willox, A. C., Wood, M., & McEwen, S. A. (2015). Climate-sensitive health priorities in Nunatsiavut, Canada. *BMC Public Health*, 15, 605. doi:10.1186/s12889-015-1874-3
- Helm, S., Lee, W., Hanakahi, V., Gleason, K., McCarthy, K., & Haumana. (2015). Using Photovoice with youth to develop a drug prevention program in a rural Hawaiian community. *American Indian Alaskan Native Mental Health Research*, 22(1), 1-26. doi:10.5820/aian.2201.2015.1

- Hergenrather, K. C., Rhodes, S. D., Cowan, C. A., Bardhoshi, G., & Pula, S. (2009). Photovoice as Community-Based Participatory Research: A Qualitative Review. *American Journal of Health Behavior*, 33(6), 686-698.
- Higgins, M. (2014). Rebraiding Photovoice: Methodological Métissage at the Cultural Interface. *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 43(2), 208-217.
- Higgins, M. (2016). Placing Photovoice under Erasure: A Critical and Complicit Engagement with What It Theoretically Is (Not). *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education (QSE)*, 29(5), 670-685.
- Holliday, C. E., Wynne, M., Katz, J., Ford, C., & Barbosa-Leiker, C. (2016). A CBPR approach to finding community strengths and challenges to prevent youth suicide and substance abuse. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing*, 29(1), 64-73. doi:10.1177/1043659616679234
- Kuratani, D. L., & Lai, E. (2011) Photovoice literature review. Los Angeles, CA; USC TYEAM Lab. Retrieved from [http://teamlab.usc.edu/Photovoice%20Literature%20Review%20\(FINAL\).pdf](http://teamlab.usc.edu/Photovoice%20Literature%20Review%20(FINAL).pdf)
- Markus, S. F. (2012). Photovoice for healthy relationships: Community-based participatory HIV prevention in a rural American Indian community. *American Indian Alaskan Native Mental Health Research*, 19(1), 102-123. doi:10.5820/aian.1901.2012.102
- Mayan, M. J. (2009). *Essentials of qualitative inquiry*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- Minkler, M., & Wallerstein, N. (2008). *Community-based participatory research for health: From process to outcomes* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass.
- Moffitt, P., & Vollman, A. R. (2004). Photovoice: picturing the health of Aboriginal women in a remote northern community. *Canadian Journal of Nursing Research*, 36(4), 189-201.

- Munhall, P. L. (2012). *Nursing research: A qualitative perspective*. Sudbury, MA: Jones & Bartlett Learning.
- Torris-Hedlund. (2019). Examining the Use of Photovoice to Explore Disaster Risk Perception Among Native Hawaiians Living on O'ahu: A Feasibility Study. *Hawai'i Journal of Health & Social Welfare*, 78(9), 287–292.
- Wang, C. C. (1999). Photovoice: a participatory action research strategy applied to women's health. *Journal of Women's Health*, 8(2), 185-192
- Wang, C., & Burris, M. A. (1994). Empowerment through Photo Novella: Portraits of Participation. *Health Education & Behavior*, 21(2), 171-186.
doi:10.1177/109019819402100204
- Wang, C., & Burris, M. A. (1997). Photovoice: concept, methodology, and use for participatory needs assessment. *Health Education Behavior*, 24(3), 369-387.
- Wang, C., Burris, M. A., & Ping X. Y. (1996). Chinese village women as visual anthropologists: A participatory approach to reaching policymakers. *Social Science Medicine*, 42(10), 1391-1400.