MAJOR DECISIONS: USING A PHOTOVOICE STUDY TO AID STUDENTS IN DECIDING ON AN AREA OF STUDY OR CAREER

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This dissertation sought to use PhotoVoice, an arts-based research method, as a way for pre-college and college students to decide on an area of study and career path. This study called upon the aid of student-participants to carry out the research and academic professionals to help in examining the research. Using a framework set in Strength Based Advising, students were asked to explore three guided subjects to identify their personal interest, their current study interests, and work/work environment interests through photography. Using the three guided subjects, students were asked to make connections between their pictures and examine possible careers and college majors congruent with their personal interests.

To examine the data, students were asked about their experience taking part in the PhotoVoice study, how they found success, and if the study helped cultivate new views or reinforce their old views. After the study concluded with the student-participants, I examined the data alongside four academic professionals to discuss how viable the PhotoVoice study can be as a tool for advising. Additionally, I examine my growth as a researcher through this dissertation process. As a novice researcher, it was important for me take a reflexive look at how I carried out the research and how my understanding of social justice and positionality as a white male grew during this process.

Though the use of the PhotoVoice study, several students were able to decide on an area of study and career path while others found the study useful in organizing their interests but were unable to make a declaration. The academic professionals found that the PhotoVoice study could be useful as a primary component to a class and as pre-advising tool. However, due to the large amount of time needed to conduct the PhotoVoice study, the academic professionals felt the scalability of the study would be difficult to administer in a standard advising setting. I conclude the study with future considerations for the PhotoVoice study and where the student-participants were in terms of their decisions at the conclusion of the research.