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

By

CRAIG JAMES DUNN

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
Department of Educational Leadership, Sport Studies and Educational/Counseling Psychology

MAY 2019

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To the Faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the dissertation of CRAIG JAMES DUNN find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation is dedicated to the many individuals in my life who made this dissertation possible. To my doctoral committee; Dr. John Lupinacci, Dr. Richard Saywer, and Dr. Francene Watson, thank you. As someone who struggled in traditional K-12 education, the thought of earning a doctorate was unthinkable. My appreciation for your hard work and dedication is impossible to put into words. Thanks to you, I was able to exceed all my expectations and achieve what I considered to be impossible when I first started college. I am forever grateful and feel incredibly lucky to have you as my committee. Thank you.

To Dr. Michael Smith and Dr. Andy Job at Portland State University. You two were my introduction into graduate school and helped lay the groundwork for what would eventually become my doctoral dissertation. At the time, taking graduate level classes was a frightening endeavor and you two eased my concerns. I always felt like an imposter in higher education but your support made me feel like I belonged and that I could accomplish anything. My graduating with a doctorate is testament to your hard work and dedication. Thank you for everything.

To Dr. Marlena Trujillo, Dr. Tyler Morgan Stewart, and (soon to be) Dr. Julie Swedin, I feel as though I hit the jackpot getting to go through the doctoral journey with you. Whether it was during our summers in Pullman, our late-night battles with classes like quantitative research, or working through assignments together, I am incredibly grateful for the time I was able to spend with you. I only wish we could have graduated together so we could raise our fists like John Bender at the end of the Breakfast Club. Thank you for all your support and memories that I will cherish for the rest of my life.

To my colleagues at Portland Community College who helped me set up and carry out the research for this dissertation, thank you. You’re encouragement and willingness to help me
find participants was instrumental in enabling this research. I’d also like to thank Joe Urbina for allowing to me volunteer in your classroom and hiring me to run the class labs. This job allowed me to get my foot in the door at the college level and enable the research to take place. Thank you for the opportunity which will play a role in my life for many years to come.

To the afterschool Sun School staff at Sitton, thank you. Molly Baum, Eddie Reyes, Lea Belton, Mila Buckland, Mary Cunningham, Jeff Staples, Rachel Dibble, Vega Black, Aaron Snyder, Carleigh Bristol, and Kate Dwyer, I could not have done this without you. Thank you for helping with my classes so I had time to work individually with students and develop my understanding of PhotoVoice. It’s hard to imagine my being here without your help and encouragement. Thank you.

To Peg Zander, I’ve thought over and over again about how I was going to write this, but no amount of words, in any order, are able express the amount gratitude I have for you and the role you played in my life. You took a chance on me as a 22-year-old kid and gave me a chance to start my career as an educator. I remember being placed with 1st graders and feeling like I failed after the first day. You told me “It’s okay, Rookie. Teaching is always tough at first. Keep at it, you’ll be alright.” You couldn’t have been more correct. I remember when I was in Pullman for the summer institute and I had just learned of PhotoVoice. I gave you a call and asked what your thoughts were on a class that used PhotoVoice. You said it sounded like a great idea and that I should write up a syllabus for the following fall. This was the first step on what would eventually be a key fixture in my dissertation. I only wish that you were here to see this through. You were more than a boss, you were a mentor, and know that your impact on me will echo throughout the course of my life. Here’s to you Peg, thank you for taking a chance on this rookie.

Peg Zander (1951-2016)
MAJOR DECISIONS: USING A PHOTOVOICE STUDY TO AID STUDENTS IN
DECIDING ON AN AREA OF STUDY AND/OR CAREER

Abstract

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May 2019

Co-Chairs: Richard Sawyer and John Lupinacci

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 Strengths-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.
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my amazing family. To my mother and father, Craig and Christy Dunn, thank you for supporting me all these years emotionally, financially, and educationally. It’s hard to believe that, at one time, I was considering not attending college but thanks to you, here I am with the doctorate I never thought I would achieve. To my brother and sister, Jesse Dunn and Casey Morandi, thank you for all the support and providing me with quality hangout time to destress from this crazy path I’ve been on. To my grandmother, Terri Stahlman, thank you for your willingness to read and edit my work as well as for your sage advice on the importance of perseverance. To my fiancée, Cynthia Navarro, thank you. You have been my rock through this whole process. Thank you for giving me encouragement and allowing me to bounce writing ideas off of you through this process. Having you by my side during this process has been nothing short of a blessing. I love you all.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

For many students, being unsure about a potential career path or college major is a common occurrence. An estimated 20 to 50 percent of new college students are undecided about their educational and career futures, and an estimated 75 percent of the general student population will change their majors at least once in their college careers (Gordon & Steele, 2003). Students who are undecided about their area of study in college are referred to as “undecided students” or “exploratory students” (Cuseo, J. 2005; Gordon & Steele, 2003; Schein & Laff, 1997). One of the values of college is having the opportunity to partake in self-discovery and learning about one’s personal interests. However, students who remain undecided about their areas of study and career goals for too long, tend to have a more difficult time completing college and students who remain undecided after their 2nd year of school tend to stay in college longer (in regards to a standard 4 year program). Thus, students can often be subjected to loss of credits and increased college spending (Cuseo, 2005). The problem of practice examined in this dissertation focuses on the experience of undecided students taking part in a PhotoVoice study to explore their interests and then selecting an area of study and career based on those interests.

Proposed Study, Research Method, and Research Questions

This next section will provide an overview of the proposed study, research methods, and the research questions found in this dissertation.

Proposed Study

My proposed study to this problem of practice is to implement a PhotoVoice project focused on helping students identify their personal interests and connecting those interests with possible career and college study options. This PhotoVoice study falls under the umbrella of
qualitative research. Qualitative research is a general term for researching ethnographic, naturalistic, anthropologic, and observational research using investigative methodologies. Detailed data is obtained through interviewing with open-ended questions to provide personal insight and direct quotes (Key, 1997). PhotoVoice, as an arts-based research methodology, focuses on participant voice and extends the idea that voice can be much more than just words or surveys (McNiff, 2006). PhotoVoice also allows for the participants to represent themselves and their everyday realities (Wang, 2006). In terms of this PhotoVoice study, the participants represent their own interests and values in order to examine college and career goals. PhotoVoice acts as a tool for students to gain agency over their own educational endeavors and invites them to be involved in their own educational decisions (Astin, 1999; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993).

From taking part in this study, students were able to better articulate their educational and career goals, as well as obtain tools which can be employed later should the student change their area of study again.

**Research Methodology**

To examine the effectiveness of this PhotoVoice study in helping students better articulate their professional and educational goals, I gathered volunteers from my classes at PCC (a community college) and conducted a pilot study. Currently, I teach in a pre-college, general education degree (GED) program, which consists largely of pre-college students ranging in ages from as young as 16 to as old as 45. The student participants taking part in this research consist of current and recently graduated students from my program who are unsure about their career and educational goals. The research consisted of three phases. Phase one: I conducted interviews with PCC academic advisors, Career Center advisors, and college guidance counselors to explore their thoughts about a PhotoVoice study and collaborate on the themes for the study. These
academic professionals were selected for their qualifications and experience in working with the student population taking part in the study. The two questions which drove the interviews with the academic professionals were 1) “What are your thoughts on the three themes the student participants are exploring?” and 2) “How should these themes be presented to the student participants?” The academic professionals provided me with a variety of ways to pose questions to the student participants. Phase two: I conducted a PhotoVoice study with undecided students examining their experience using PhotoVoice to select an area of study or career path congruent with their personal interests. Phase three: using In Vivo coding, I examined the interviews with the student participants. Specifically, I examined how the participants felt about using the PhotoVoice study as a method for helping them decide on an area of study and/or career path. In terms of future research, I also examined what I could have done differently during the PhotoVoice study.

**Research Questions**

This research set out to answer three primary questions: First, what was the experience of the student participants using the PhotoVoice study as a method for helping them decide on an area of study and/or career path? How have the students found success? Does the PhotoVoice study open new perspectives for the students or reinforce the old views? It should be noted that “success,” in the context of this study, is defined through three themes cultivated from “strengths-based advising.” These themes which define success are confidence/self-esteem, self-motivation, and acquisition of new knowledge/future options (Schreiner & Anderson, 2005). “Old views” in this study refers to the thoughts that the student participants had about what to study in college and what careers interested them (if any) prior to the PhotoVoice study. The second research question is: how viable is the PhotoVoice method as a tool that can be
incorporated into college academic advising? Third, how have I evolved during this dissertation process? What was my intellectual journey and what does it mean to me?

Overview of GED Program

This program offers students a chance to obtain a General Education Degree (GED) equivalent to that of a high school degree for those who never completed traditional high school. Many students enroll in a GED program for financial or promotional reasons, while others seek an alternative to high school for reasons including work, having and taking care of children, difficulties getting along with classmates or teachers, or even a desire to start college early (Gal, 2013; Rumberger, 1998; Ziegler, Ebert, & Cope, 2014). In our program, a majority of our students this past year (2017-2018) have been between the ages of 16 to 23. We also have a number of students who are in their 30s and 40s. Our GED program takes place on a community college campus and is directly associated with the college. After students graduate from our program, many continue on and attend their college courses. In addition to the GED students, many of those in our program are college students but require remedial help with either language arts or math.

Significance of Study

This study seeks to explore the experience of students taking part in a PhotoVoice study focusing on college major and career exploration. This study has the potential to create an additional method for students to select an area of study or career path congruent with their personal interests. The three phases described in the research methodology section above also provide a template for future PhotoVoice studies pertaining to this subject. The first phase allows the researcher to discuss the research with onsite experts; the second phase involves the
researcher carrying out the PhotoVoice study; and the third phase examines the research findings and what changes can be made for future studies.

**Information on Following Chapters**

The following is what the reader can expect to find in the latter chapters of this dissertation. Chapter two is the literature review which will cover pertinent research found in this dissertation, including academic advising, student population considerations, research methodologies, and PhotoVoice. Chapter three will focus on the justification for using qualitative research, as well as how the qualitative research will be carried out. Chapter four will introduce the participants, and chapter five will cover the findings of the study. Finally, chapter six will focus on the conclusion of the study, as well how the conclusion relates to the literature for this study. Chapter six will also discuss future research implications.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will explore current literature pertaining to this PhotoVoice project. The first element to this chapter will discuss the O’Banion advising model. The O’Banion model of advising plays a significant role in the development of this PhotoVoice study through its linear progression from evaluating student values to identifying a college major/area of study. Secondly, this chapter will explore the diversity of today’s college student population. This section also aims to provide context for why students might be undecided about a career and/or area of study upon starting college. Third, this chapter will explore the history of PhotoVoice, including notable figures in its cultivation and the PhotoVoice process itself. Understanding the history and original intent of PhotoVoice will also allow for the reader to better understand the critiques surrounding PhotoVoice research, which will be discussed later in this chapter. Beyond this, the literature review will also discuss the elements which make up the theoretical framework for this study. The PhotoVoice research will incorporate two primary research methodologies: feminist research methodology and arts based educational research, along with several sub themes to coincide with these methodologies.

The O’Banion Model

In 1972, Terri O’Banion devised a method for academic advising known as the “O’Banion model” (Habley, 1988). O’Banion’s advising model focuses on the idea that advising should be conducted considering everything from the student’s life goals to getting classes scheduled. The O’Banion model of academic advising focuses on a series of steps that follow a linear progression, starting with the exploration of life goals which trickles down to setting up classes. The five step process is as follows: 1) exploration of life goals, 2) exploration
of vocational goals, 3) exploration of program choice, 4) exploration of course choice, and 5) exploration of scheduling options (O’Banion, 1994).

The O’Banion method would ideally be conducted as such: the first two steps of the model (exploration of life and vocational goals) are to be addressed by professionally prepared counselors in a setting that is not normally associated with the formal academic advising, such as summer orientation, career and personal development classes, and counseling services sessions. After addressing the first two steps, the student will then enter the third step of exploring program choices, in which more traditional methods of academic advising are employed. Using what was discovered about the advisee in the first three steps, the advisor could now use their knowledge of the university to help the student select the academic program best suited for their life and career aspirations. After selecting a college program, the advisor shares knowledge of class content, course sequencing, and instructor specification. Finally, the advisor will help the student with scheduling options for their desired classes and help the student register if needed (Burton & Wellington, 1998).

**Student Considerations**

This section will discuss the measures which undecided students normally seek out and why many students are considered “undecided.” Additionally, this section will explore considerations for the growing student body attending college, both in numbers and diversity.

**Current Means of Aiding Undecided Students**

Typically, academic advising is the primary method used by colleges and universities in helping students select an area of study and is a major proponent among the student services department at many colleges and universities. Crockett (1978) states, “Academic advising, when properly delivered, can be a powerful influence on student growth and development. It can also
interpret, enhance, and enrich the educational development of any college or university” (p. 24). Academic advising has eight primary objectives:

1. Assisting students in self-understanding and self-acceptance, i.e. clarification of values and understanding of educational abilities.
2. Assisting students in consideration of life goals through making connections between skills, values and interests in work environments, and purpose in higher education.
3. Aiding students in developing educational plans in congruence with their goals in life and career objectives.
4. Assisting students with decision making in regards to career options and educational goals.
5. Providing students with information about institutional policies, procedures, resources, and programs.
6. Providing students with information to other institutional or community support services.
7. Assisting students with evaluating (or reevaluating) the college progress and establish new educational plans as needed.
8. Providing information about students to the institutions, colleges, and academic departments (Gordon, Habley, & Grites, 2008, pp. 40-41; Monroe Community College, 2017).

In addition, community college advisors also provide potential transfer students with information on four-year institutions (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). However, the increase in student population to colleges and universities in recent years has made effective advising more
problematic due to the sheer workloads of each academic advisor (The Center for Michigan, 2014).

Rise of Student Population, Number of Undecided Students, and Student-Advisor Ratios

Although academic advising is an immensely effective method with aiding students in articulating their career and educational goals, the massive growth of the student population in higher education over the last two decades has put a massive strain on academic advising departments. Student populations across the college landscape have been on a quick and steady rise since 1990 and show little signs of slowing down. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2012), enrollment in degree-granting institutions increased by 11 percent between 1990 and 2000, and the population continued to climb in the following decade by 37 percent between 2000 and 2010. Overall, from 2000 to 2010, the increase took the student population from 15.3 million to 21 million students. More specifically, the student population of “traditionally” aged college students (18-24) rose from 35 percent in 2000 to 41 percent by 2010. During this same time, there was an even larger increase (in terms of percentages) for “non-traditionally” aged students (over the age of 25) as well. From 2000-2010, the student population over the age of 25 increased by 42 percent (College Enrollment, 2012). This pattern of increased enrollment is expected to continue; from 2010-2020, the National Center for Education Statistics predicts that there will be an additional increase by 11 percent of traditionally aged college students and an increase of 20 percent of students over the age of 25 (College Enrollment, 2012).

As stated earlier, an estimated 20 to 50 percent of new college students are undecided about their educational and career futures, and an estimated 75 percent of the general student population will change their majors at least once in their college careers (Gordon & Steele, 2003). This is not a new phenomenon; over the course of a 25-year longitudinal study conducted
at Ohio State University, more than 19,000 students were undecided about a major or career at college entry. The study found that 22 percent of participating students were “completely undecided,” 31 percent said they were “tentatively decided,” and 43 percent had “several ideas but were not ready to decide” (Gordon & Steele, 2003). An example of this comes from the University of LaVerne (n.d), which states on their website, “On average 50% – 70% of students change their majors at least once and many of those students will change their major 3 or 4 times before they graduate.”

This increase in student population, particularly among undecided students, can become problematic for both the student population and the college’s academic advising department. As the student population rises, advisors need to advise more students. This can be difficult due to universities not being able to staff more advisors as a result of college budgets being cut (Karp, 2013; Swanson, 2006). The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) states that the minimum ratio of student to advisor should be 300:1 in order to effectively advise students on their educational needs (Hathaway & Wilkinson, 2012). Due to the increase of students enrolling in college, maintaining the 300:1 ratio has been a challenge. Examples of this 300:1 ratio being difficult to maintain appear at many colleges around the United States. Here are a few examples: At Northern Iowa University, 21.5% of their staff advisors are above the recommended 300:1 student to advisor ratio (Mupasiri & Coon, 2008). At Florida Atlantic University, the overall student to advisor ratio is 424:1 (Pratt, 2010). Finally, at Portland State University, the student to advisor ratio is approximately 600:1 (Seppalainen, 2015). These are just several examples of how a large influx of students can have a negative impact on colleges’ and universities’ advising departments. At community colleges, the student to advisor ratio can reach upwards of 1,500 students per full-time advisor (Gallaher, 2010). As funding for college programs continues to fall
behind with the increase in student enrollment, student to academic advisor ratios will continue to inflate.

**Student Populations**

For many students, particularly first year and first generation students, effective academic advising provides a support system in order to help them acclimate to the changes associated with attending college. As the student population has increased, so have the number of minority students who enter the college sphere (Smith, 2002). Other student populations to consider would be first generation students, older and returning students, foreign exchange students, and low socioeconomic status students (low S.E.S. students). One common trait, which minority students tend to possess, is a strong sense of displacement or the feeling that they do not belong in a college environment. This is an important consideration for teachers, professors, and administrators because many of these students feel as though they are imposters and they did not “earn” their way into college on their own merit. As a result, many minority students have a reduced level of confidence behind their studies and their educational decisions (Brookfield, 1999).

**Why Selecting a Major or Area of Study can be Hard**

As more students enter college, many of whom are undecided, it is important to understand why it might be hard to select a major or area of study. Berry F. Anderson (2002), an expert at Portland State University on the psychology of decision making states, “Decisions become hard when there are many values to think about at once and tradeoffs have to be made, or when there are many possible futures to think about at once, and uncertainty has to be weighed” (p. 1). For many college students, choosing a major is not too much different than
buying a car, a house, or choosing to move to a new location. All these endeavors involve an immense amount of time, money, energy, and a strong level of uncertainty.

When selecting a major or area of study, one of the growing difficulties which new college students face is the vast amount of majors to choose from. A New York Times article written by Cecilia Capuzzi Simon (2012), which regards the overwhelming amount of majors available, points out that the University of Michigan has 251 majors to choose from and Arizona State University has 250. Over the entirety of the United States, colleges and universities reported nearly 1,500 academic programs to the Department of Education in 2010. Of those 1,500 academic programs, 355 were added to the list over the previous 10 years. As our technological and cultural paradigms continue to evolve, colleges, in order to stay competitive and current, have adopted new disciplines like homeland security, cyber-forensics, and agro-ecology (Simon, 2012). As the list of possible areas of study continues to grow, students who are yet to pinpoint exactly what they want to study will only have a more difficult time as the possibility for “decision overload” continues to grow (Anderson, 2002). The other reason students have a difficult time selecting a major might be due to the lack of understanding personal values. The term “values” can be a confusing. Values are both positive and negative, meaning positive values are things which one strives for, while negative values are things which one strives to avoid (Anderson, 2002).

Methods of Academic Advising

In this section, I will discuss a number of ways academic advising is administered by advisors to students. Since the inception of academic advising, a number of pedagogical methods have emerged in relation to how academic advising is delivered to students. Three prominent methods are known as prescriptive advising, developmental advising, and strengths-based
advising (Schreiner & Anderson, 2005). Although other advising methods exist, this dissertation focuses on these three.

**Prescriptive Advising**

Prescriptive advising functions in a way similar to that of a medical doctor prescribing information to the patient (Crookston, 1972). In prescriptive advising, the advisor tells the student what actions they should take in regards to their education. In this method of advising, the student takes on a passive role and is asked to heed the advice provided to them by the advisor (Lawenstein, 2005). Prescriptive advising has received both critiques and praise for its simplistic, top-down nature. On one side, prescriptive advising is criticized as being authoritarian because the advisor holds all the information, advisors do not account for a student’s personal narrative, and its methods are more directive and logistical (Crookston, 1972; Fielstein, 1989). In reference to prescriptive advising, Crookston (2009) states “…the student cannot be merely a passive receptacle for knowledge, but must share equal responsibility with the teacher for the quality of the learning context, process and product” (p.78). Conversely, prescriptive advising is also praised as a useful method for many students of color, first generation students, and returning students. Brown and Rivas (2005) state “Many students of color see advisors as experts who have the right answers and know what students should do…Many students of color come from family situations where roles are well defined and expectations are clear” (p. 109).

**Developmental Advising**

Developmental advising is a prelogical model of advising in which the advisor takes on a teacher-like role (Lowenstein, 2005). Developmental advising focuses on developing the student as a person through their life experiences and not simply as a student with questions about college (Raushi, 1993). Crookston (2009), who is often credited with the advent of
developmental advising, states “Developmental counseling or advising is concerned not only with a specific personal or vocational decision but also with facilitating the student’s rational processes, environmental and interpersonal interactions, behavioral awareness, and problem-solving, decision-making, and evaluation skills” (p. 78). While prescriptive advising focuses largely on the academic elements of advising, such as class scheduling, selecting majors, and accessing college resources, developmental advising includes elements like addressing how the student experiences school, how the student can improve in certain areas, and what elements of school the student does and does not enjoy.

**Strength-Based Advising**

Strengths-based advising is a lens used by college advisors that focuses on a student’s natural talents as a method for building confidence and motivation to obtain the knowledge required for collegiate success (Schreiner & Anderson, 2005). Strengths-based advising is similar to developmental advising because both focus on the development of the student (Crookston, 1972; Schreiner & Anderson, 2005; Smith & Allen, 2006). However, strengths-based advising focuses on cultivating the students’ strengths, whereas developmental advising tends to focus on improving students’ deficits and weaknesses (Schreiner & Anderson, 2005). Schreinder and Anderson (2005) explain,

> Through a strengths-based approach, advisors frame tasks differently than they do when using developmental advising. Rather than asking the causes of a student’s difficulty in achieving academically, the advisor questions the student about the talents and situations that have enabled him or her to be successful in nonacademic arenas, such as athletics or music, and elicits conversations about the process that led to these accomplishments (p. 22).
Strengths-based advising is the method which this research uses as a basis for further research in this study.

**PhotoVoice**

PhotoVoice is the primary research method used in this dissertation to help students explore their personal, career, and educational interests. The following section covers a brief history of PhotoVoice and how this research method has been used in other studies.

**A Brief History of PhotoVoice**

For the past 40,000-60,000 years, human beings have used images to tell stories about themselves, their cultures, and what life is like for individuals at the time (Ghosh, 2014). Today, humans use images to create art, do research, and take pictures to document events in their lives. Even separated by thousands of years, modern humans and their ancestors alike use pictures to tell stories and share what their lives were like. Although the technology used to create pictures and images has advanced since the days of our cave-painting ancestors, the use of pictures and images to tell stories remains a present consistency across the ages.

As pictures and images tell stories, they also evoke an emotional response, more so than linguistics alone (Harper, 2002). According to Douglas Harper (2002), pictures have a physical basis. The reason the brain favors images over linguistics is because the parts of the brain which process visual information have developed more across the course of human evolution. The parts of the brain used to process images are older than the parts which process verbal information. As a result of the brain’s image bias, images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness, while words do so to a lesser extent; exchanges based on words alone utilize less of the brain’s capacity than do exchanges in which the brain is processing images as well as words (Harper,
As long as a person is capable of seeing, images can evoke an emotional response in one manner or another.

The power of images and the emotional responses they trigger can also be an advocate for great change and paradigm shifting thought. Some of the most iconic images from history in the last 70 years include “The Tank Man,” who stood in front of Chinese tanks and blocked their way, as a form of non-violent protest (Witty, 2009); Martin Luther King Jr. standing in front of 250,000 people on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, delivering his famous “I Have a Dream” speech (Getty Images, 2013); or the Pale Blue Dot picture taken on Voyager 1 from the edge of the solar system portraying the Earth, and all we know, as a tiny blue dot in the vastness of space (Nasa, n.d.). Images have the ability to carry with them the potential for paradigm shifting change by tapping into our emotional attachment to what we believe. The power which images carry has the ability to expand our understanding of the world around us and open our eyes to a variety of different ways in which life is experienced on this planet; this examination of life through imagery also carriers with it the opportunity to create change among society. For the past 24 years, a research methodology has been used to capture the ways in which people live and understand how to improve the communities where they reside (Wang & Burris, 1994). The aforementioned research methodology is known today as “PhotoVoice.”

**Notable Figures within PhotoVoice and How PhotoVoice Came to Be**

Before PhotoVoice went by its current name, it was initially called “Photo Novella” (Wang & Burris, 1994). The original producers of Photo Novella are Caroline Wang of the University of Michigan and Mary Ann Burris, a program officer for Women's Health at the Ford Foundation in Beijing, China (Kuratani & Lai, 2011). Much like the aforementioned goals of PhotoVoice, Wang and Burris (1994) state the following regarding the goal of Photo Novella:
“The goal of photo novella is to use people’s photographic documentation of their everyday lives as an educational tool to record and to reflect their needs, promote dialogue, encourage action, and inform policy” (pp. 171-172). Photo Novella is a “grassroots community project,” which means the project is spearheaded by those at the community level and by people who do not normally hold major political power (Merriam-Webster, 2016). In other words, Photo Novella aims at capturing the voices of those whom are normally left out of discussions regarding community change.

**What is PhotoVoice, How is PhotoVoice Conducted, and Who are the Participants?**

PhotoVoice is an active participation project centered on providing a platform for participants to have a digital narrative of change and understanding. PhotoVoice enables individuals to represent themselves and create tools for advocacy and communication (PhotoVoice, n.d.). PhotoVoice uses photography as a means of accessing other people’s perspectives of the world and making those perspectives accessible to others. PhotoVoice involves giving cameras to the participating people and using the pictures to depict their day-to-day experiences (Booth & Booth, 2003). PhotoVoice is considered a Community-Based Participatory Research project, commonly referred to as “CBPR,” and comes out of the action research methodology in which community members act as agents of change to improve aspects of their day-to-day lives (Wang & Burris, 1994, 1996; Holkup, Tripp-Reimer, Salois, & Weinert, 2004; Strack, Magill, & Mcdonagh, 2004). PhotoVoice is a form of **qualitative research**, due to its use of interviewing and emphasis on cultivating information based on stories provided by the participants. Qualitative research is a general term for researching ethnographic, naturalistic, anthropologic, and observational research using investigative methodologies. Qualitative research places emphasis on examining variables and the relationship between variables as they
exist in natural settings. Detailed data is obtained through interviewing with open-ended questions to provide personal insights and direct quotes (Key, 1997).

PhotoVoice is widely praised for its accurate ability in data collection through a variety of qualitative research methodologies (Graziano, 2004). PhotoVoice also falls under the umbrella of action research (also sometimes referred to as practitioner research). Action research is a practice used to provide opportunities to learn from one’s own practice, using a series of reflective activities that facilitate the development of progressive problem solving (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993). Furthermore, action researchers examine their own interactions and relationships in social settings and seek ways in which to improve their work places (Riel, 2010). With PhotoVoice, participants can create change in their day-to-day lives by becoming their own agents of change through the pictures they take.

The Participants

Participants in a PhotoVoice project can range from children to the elderly and consist of any ethnicity, religion, and/or gender. Participation in PhotoVoice projects is also voluntary. In a PhotoVoice project conducted by Garcia et. al. (2012), the examined participants were from several generations and were, therefore, referred to as an “Intergenerational PhotoVoice” project. In a different PhotoVoice project, Wang, Cash, and Powers (2000) examined homeless individuals in Ann Arbor, Michigan to better understand the struggles of those who live day-to-day out of homeless shelters. In another PhotoVoice study, Sands, Reed, Harper, and Shar (2009) examined fifth graders assessing a school gardening program.

How PhotoVoice is Conducted

The processes for conducting a PhotoVoice project can vary, but is widely used in the following way as described by Booth and Booth (2003): 1) Setting up the group; 2) Agreeing to
the theme(s) of the project as a group; 3) Taking the pictures; 4) Selecting which photographs to examine, either individually or as a group; 5) Contextualizing the image/telling the stories contained in the picture (interviews); 6) Coding the themes or messages linking the photographs - a group process of naming and acknowledging the collective experience to which the photos bear witness; 7) Finally, targeting an audience beyond the group, typically a group capable of enacting change. Other augmentations to this might include conducting group interviews in which the participants discuss each other’s pictures as well.

The example provided above by Booth and Booth (2003) is an over-arching example of how PhotoVoice is generally conducted; however, there are variations to the PhotoVoice process that can be tailored as needed by the researcher(s). For example, In Wang, Yi, Tao, and Carovano’s (1998) study which included a rural Chinese woman, an augmentation to the PhotoVoice process was to train the woman on camera use, the process of PhotoVoice, and ethical considerations. In all five of my PhotoVoice pilot projects, the process I followed was similar to what Booth and Booth (2003) described; First, I obtained participants by either creating a class for which the students could sign up or by asking my coworkers. Second, I created the themes I would have my participants explore. Third, I printed out the pictures and conducted two rounds of interviews; the first involved having the participants individually describe their own pictures, then as a group where participants could see what pictures their fellow participants took, then interviewed as a whole group. Finally, the students presented their pictures collectively to the school’s teachers and faculty. The afterschool teachers had their pictures and interviews formed into a qualitative research paper. The flexibility of PhotoVoice makes it a research methodology that can be very applicable to a wide variety of populations.
Interviewing

Interviewing, in relation to PhotoVoice, stems from pictures the participants take. A common term surrounding photo-based interviewing is “Photo Elicitation Interviews,” more commonly seen as its acronym, “PEI” (Collier & Collier, 1986; Harper, 2002). According to Harper (2002), the simple idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview provides a deeper, more robust interviewing experience than verbal-only methods of capturing perceptions or experiences (p. 13). Through interviewing the photographers about their photographs, sight and sound are combined, thus adding to sensory awareness and increasing the reflexive process (Harris & Guillemin, 2012). Photography allows researchers to gain insights that might not be accessible via verbal-only methods. The interview process for PhotoVoice involves the participant (or participants) examining the photographs taken and describing their meaning, as well as the intent as to why the picture was taken in congruence with a predetermined theme (Booth & Booth, 2003).

What Does PhotoVoice Aim To Achieve?

PhotoVoice has three primary goals: The first is to enable participants to record and reflect on various aspects about their communities, like community strengths and/or concerns. Second, PhotoVoice aims to promote and create dialogue and knowledge about issues important to the community through group discussions, both large and small. Third, PhotoVoice aims to reach policy makers whom are typically the authorities capable of creating the change requested by the participants (Wang & Burris, 1994, 1997; Wang, Burris, & Ping, 1996; Strack, Magill, & Mcdonagh, 2004). The participants create information in the PhotoVoice project through pictures and interviews that can better inform policy makers about the problems at hand within the community and work towards potential solutions.
PhotoVoice also carries inherent characteristics linked to social justice in providing a voice and means of communication to those whom do not normally have the opportunity to speak. Wang and Burris (1997) state, “PhotoVoice can affirm the ingenuity and perspective of society’s most vulnerable populations” (p. 372). Paulo Freire strongly believed in the voice of the people in making the necessary changes in the world. Freire (2000) stated “If it is in speaking their word that people…transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings, dialogue is thus an existential necessity” (p.88). In order for change to take place among those who need change the most, it is of upmost importance that their voices be heard.

**PhotoVoice as a Methodology in Educational Research**

PhotoVoice, as stated in the previous sections, generates data by capturing the perspectives of the participants in order to inform policy makers to create change within an environment (Booth & Booth, 2003; Wang & Burris; 1994, 1997, 1998; Wang, Burris, & Ping, 1996; Wang, Yi, Tao, & Carovano, 1998; Wang, Cash, & Powers, 2000). A PhotoVoice project is indiscriminate in who the participants can be and can vary greatly from many ages, genders, religions, sexualities, and cultures (Garcia et al. 2012; Wang, Cash, & Powers, 2000). More specifically, PhotoVoice tends to focus on capturing the voices of those who are marginalized or often overlooked by those in power. Wang and Burris (1997) state, “PhotoVoice can affirm the ingenuity and perspective of society’s most vulnerable populations” (p. 372). Paulo Freire (2000) stated “If it is in speaking their word that people…transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings, dialogue is thus an existential necessity” (p.88). When telling a story, images and words as a tandem are more impactful than
words alone because our brains are hardwired in such a way to respond to images rather than verbal signals alone (Harper, 2002).

PhotoVoice connects to education through its ability to be applicable to those in education, including teachers, administrators, staff, and even the students. PhotoVoice is considered a Community-Based Participatory Research project and emerged from action research methodology, where community members act as agents of change to improve aspects of their day-to-day lives (Holkup, Tripp-Reimer, Salois, & Weinert, 2004; Strack, Magill, & Mcdonagh, 2004). In the case of schools, a community can range from any number of places: the communities the schools reside in, the schools themselves, and classrooms as microcosm communities. For example, Strack, Magill, & Mcdonagh’s (2004) PhotoVoice study invited students of a low-income, urban school district to venture around the community and take pictures of their day-to-day lives. Similarly, a PhotoVoice project conducted by Catherine Sands, Lee Ellen Reed, Krista Harper, and Maggie Shar (2009) took place entirely within the school.

**Study Theoretical Framework and the Building Blocks of PhotoVoice**

This section will discuss the theoretical framework of the PhotoVoice study, as well as explain the different components within each framework. Below is a diagram representing this framework.
This PhotoVoice study has two different, but essential, components which make up the framework for this study: feminist research theory and arts-based educational research (also known as ABER). Both theories have components attached to them as well. Feminist research theory has student-centric learning, progressive education, and dominant cultures and unknown privilege attached, while ABER has PhotoVoice as a visual methodology and place-based education. Connections and explanations behind each of these will be explained in the next section.

**Feminist Research Theory**

Feminist research theory exists to combat the male-dominated perspective in research and the idea of men being the cultivators of culture (Maguire, 1987). When women become the subject of research inquiry, a common critique of the research designs is they unknowingly create women as the objects of other people’s actions rather than active participants in the world (Wang, Burris, & Ping, 1996). Feminist theory specifies that there is no one better to study and
understand issues in a group than those within the researched group; the theory also specifies that sharing experiences are the best way to promote shared experiences (Keller & Longino, 1996).

As feminist research theory is one of the cornerstones of this research, it is important for me as the researcher to remember that I act primarily as a reporter of the research questions and not to make assumptions about the observations made. Any connections among participants or observations made should be considered “additional” or “future” research to be visited at a later time when participants can explore these observations alongside the researcher. One of the chief principles of feminist research theory is for the participants to speak for themselves, not for the me as the researcher to speak for them. My positionality within the study will be discussed in the third chapter.

**Progressive Education**

Progressive education can be defined as the education of engaged citizens (Koliba, Page, Achilles, & Rabin, 2002; University of Vermont, 2002). Progressive education carries with it two primary elements: first, respect for diversity. Diversity, in terms of progressive education, means respecting and recognizing each person for his or her own strengths, abilities, interests, ideas, needs, and individual cultural identities. The second aspect to progressive education is the development of critically thinking, socially intelligent, and engaged citizens who are capable of participating effectively in the affairs of their communities and contributing to the common good of people. Under the umbrella of feminist research theory, progressive education comes into play through emphasizing diversity and allowing participants to represent themselves and their individual strengths.

These elements of progressive education are also known as a social reconstructionist approach to education (Koliba, Page, Achilles, & Rabin, 2002; University of Vermont, 2002).
Furthermore, in a classroom focused on progressive education, it is of the upmost importance to continue further analysis of the classroom and its social construction because identities of both the classroom and the individual are not permanently fixed (Maher, 2001). Other elements of progressive education are community and collaboration, which aim to foster cooperation among peers, as opposed to rigid competition. A deep understanding and the use of social justice to foster change and equality among others can create a well-rounded education from different perspectives, as opposed to simple memorization of facts (Kohn, 2008).

**Student-Centric Education**

Student-centric learning is a congruent concept alongside progressive education, under the umbrella of feminist research theory. Student-centric education and progressive education focus on the student, and result in the shifting of beliefs and assumptions about the role of the individual in the learning process (Hannafin, Hill, & Land, 1997). Student-centric learning is an educational model in which teachers regularly replace more traditional learning mechanisms, such as lecturing, with active learning, integrating self-paced learning programs, and/or cooperative group situations with the hopes of creating a sense of responsibility within the students for their own advances in education (Clasen & Bowman, 1974). In sum, the goal of student-centered learning, in respect to progressive education, is to foster within the students a confidence to do their own problem solving without the need to rely on instructors when a problem arises (Nanney, 2004). Student-centric learning promotes the enhancement of student confidence and ability to be self-reliant. Similarly, PhotoVoice aims at giving participants a method in which to tell a story about advocacy and change. Student-centric learning, when combined with a project such as PhotoVoice through a feminist research method lens, can have powerful implications for giving students avenues in which to orchestrate change within the
learning environment and lead to more student engagement/advocacy within the educational sphere.

**Dominant Cultures and Unknown Privilege**

A common cliché throughout history is “history is told by the victor.” In the case of social justice, the victor is commonly the most dominant culture; throughout American history, white males have largely set the tone for what society would consider the standard for “normal” (Houser, 1996). These standards for what is considered “normal” perpetuated a type of unknown privilege like white privilege, class privilege, and gender privilege. Many of these unknown privileges often go unnoticed by their obtainers because of their assumptions that their lives are lived in a similar fashion to those whom are silently oppressed (Case, 2007; Houser, 1996). White privilege refers to the commonly unknown advantages obtained by those perceived to have white skin (hooks, 1995, 2003; McIntosh, 1990; Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009). Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009) provides an example of white privilege through a story from one of her classmate:

One white woman shared a personal experience of going into a neighborhood supermarket, having items rung up by the cashier, and discovering that she did not have her checkbook. The cashier told her she could take her groceries and bring the check back later. When she related this story to an African American male friend, he told her that was an example of the white privilege she enjoyed because she was white. (p. 26)

The belief being that if Gloria’s classmate had been of a different race or displayed herself as an affiliate of a minority group or culture, the cashier may not have let her leave with the groceries.

In reference to feminist research theory and this PhotoVoice study as a whole, unknown privilege and dominance culture are concepts that are often carried by the researcher. A
researcher’s role is a position of power, meaning that the researcher has the power to guide the study and dictate the narrative of the research. This is a power that I need to be keenly aware of as both the researcher and as a white male, so that my reporting is on the participant’s experience and not my interpretation of the participant’s experience.

**Arts-Based Educational Research**

The second major lens to this research is arts-based educational research. Arts-based educational research (or ABER) is the systematic use of the artistic process to examine experiences by both researchers and the people producing the art (McNiff, 2006). As an example, ABER can be done as a story to depict a specific perspective. Narrative construction and storytelling are the processes of writing about one’s own personal experience or creating a metaphorical story to convey a feeling or idea. Other forms of ABER can be educational connoisseurship and educational criticism, which involve analyzing work one is knowledgeable about and pushing for different or alternative understandings (Barone & Eisner, N.D.).

Bagnoli (2009) points out, ABER “…plays an important role in modern day qualitative research because ABER expands upon the primary method of qualitative inquiry, which is the interview process” (p. 547). PhotoVoice, for its emphasis on enhancing the interview process with photography, is congruent with Bagnoli’s description of ABER. Bagnoli (2009) continues “…throughout our existence, we experience a variety of different sensations in a variety of different ways which include non-linguistic forms of experience and thus, ABER allows for a different representation of thinking or experience which cannot always be captured by an interview alone” (p. 547). Ideally, ABER research is in its ideal state when it generates multiple interpretations, more questions, and more reflection (Smithbell, 2010).
PhotoVoice as a Visual Methodology

PhotoVoice uses pictures in congruence with interviewing to capture the perspectives of the participants taking part in the project. As described earlier, in order to discover the holistic meaning behind the pictures taken by the participants, the researcher must grapple with the problem of gathering objective, subjective, and intersubjective perceptions (Tucker & Dempsey, 1991). “Photo Elicitation Interviews,” more commonly seen as its acronym “PEI,” is the process used when combining standard verbal interviewing with photography (Collier & Collier, 1986; Harper, 2002). The idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview provides a deeper, more robust interviewing experience than verbal-only methods of capturing perceptions or experiences (Harper, 2002). As described by Booth and Booth (2003), the interview process for PhotoVoice involves the participant (or participants) examining the photographs taken and explaining their meaning, as well as the intent for why the picture was taken in congruence with a predetermined theme. PhotoVoice studies have increased in popularity over the years because of their perceived effectiveness; 60% of PhotoVoice projects conducted have led to some sort of action as a result of the process taking place (Catalani & Minkler, 2010).

Unintended Consequences, Critiques, and Research Considerations for PhotoVoice

An unintended consequence of PhotoVoice is the possibility of the PhotoVoice process having a negative effect on the participants. PhotoVoice has proven to be an effective method of empowering participants and informing policy makers. However, the act of simply participating in a project such as PhotoVoice will not lead to complete empowerment of the participant; in fact, the possibility exists to have a negative outcome (Strack, Magill, & Mcdonagh, 2004). The participants’ hopes could be raised up too high, and the failure to achieve the desired outcome could prove to be a detriment the participants’ sense of empowerment and bring about feelings of
hopelessness (Strack, Magill, & Mcdonagh, 2004). A way to minimize this risk is for the researcher to focus heavily on early planning and take the necessary steps in gaining the support and interest of the community and those in change-making positions (Wang & Burris, 1994; Wang, Cash, et al., 2000). In this research, early planning took the form of meeting with academic professionals to discuss the themes which the participants examined. The goal was to minimize the risk of the participants becoming confused and possibly frustrated with the PhotoVoice project.

Critiques of PhotoVoice focus on the various inconsistencies associated with the research process. Hergenrater et al. (2009) conducted a review of 31 different PhotoVoice projects aimed at promoting individual and/or community change. In the review, Hergenrater and company point out the inconsistencies in the research process between the 31 PhotoVoice projects, specifically the inconsistencies regarding the roles taken on by both the researcher and participants. For instance, some researchers were in frequent contact with the participants, where others would only meet once or twice with participants (Hergenrater et al., 2009). This is echoed by Catalani and Minkler (2010) who, in their research, point out inconsistencies within PhotoVoice studies regarding the role participants play in the development of the PhotoVoice themes. The reason these inconsistencies exist between PhotoVoice projects is because PhotoVoice has been co-opted in so many different ways beyond its initial purposes (Catalani & Minkler, 2010). Because PhotoVoice is now used in so many different ways, there is very little consistency between projects in terms of recruiting, researcher/participant interaction, and the identification of potential limitations to the PhotoVoice studies. In regards to social justice, the major critique of PhotoVoice stems from it not having a more concrete methodology and has yet to result in much systemic change. Sanon, Evans-Agnew, and Boutain (2014) state,
Researchers have yet to embrace the full potential of PhotoVoice, and few studies as of yet have resulted in system-level change. If researchers identify a clear underlying methodology-method fit (guided by the goal of promoting social justice) and the social justice impact of their research studies using PhotoVoice, the original promise of this method to address social justice and inequality could be achieved. (p. 223)

Since PhotoVoice’s inception, the wide variety of its current use as a methodology has garnished both positive and critical reviews. One perspective praises PhotoVoice for its accurate ability in obtaining participant experiences through a variety of qualitative research methodologies (Wang & Burris, 1994, 1996; Booth & Booth, 2003; Holkup, Tripp-Reimer, Salois, & Weinert, 2004; Graziano, 2004; Strack, Magill, & Mcdonagh, 2004). Inversely, PhotoVoice is questionable as a research methodology due to the lack of cohesion between projects. As PhotoVoice appears in so many unique ways, almost no PhotoVoice project appears the same way twice, bringing its repeatability into question (Catalani & Minkler, 2010; Hergenrater et al., 2009; Sanon, Evans-Agnew, & Boutain, 2014).

Since PhotoVoice was first conceived in Wang and Burris’s study of rural Chinese woman in 1994, PhotoVoice has remained true to its original purpose of creating more awareness on community health and informing those in positions of power to create necessary changes. Over the years, the amount of ways in which PhotoVoice is used has grown. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, many PhotoVoice projects centered on capturing the perspectives of those from impoverished backgrounds; Wang and Burris (1994, 1996) examined the perspectives of rural Chinese woman. Wang, Cash, and Powers (2000) examined the perspectives of the homeless, and Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001) conducted a community needs assessment in a low-income community by examining perspectives of children and adults.
from communities in Flint, Michigan. Additionally, Killion and Wang (2000) examined the daily perspective of mothers in Africa. Larson, Mitchell, and Gilles (2001) examined youth perspectives of aboriginal people in Carnarvon, Western Australia. Hokup, Tripp-Reimer, Salois, and Weinert (2004) focused on working with an impoverished Native American community. These are a few examples of the PhotoVoice studies that took place in the first seven years of PhotoVoice’s existence, many of which focused largely on those stricken by poverty, all while holding up the feminist research theory ethos.

More recently, PhotoVoice has emerged in a wider variety of studies. These PhotoVoice projects include capturing the perspectives of those with disabilities (Booth & Booth, 2013), examining the perspectives of people who have contracted HIV/AIDS (Hergenrather, Rhodes, & Clark, 2006), examining experiences of those who live with mental illness (Thompson et al., 2008), and examining how African-American men experience racism (Ornelas et al., 2009). Even though these more recent PhotoVoice projects include a wider range of perspectives and research topics, all have stayed true to the original ethos of PhotoVoice, which is to bring different perspectives to the forefront of informing community leaders and those in positions of power.

In conclusion, the reason this dissertation is using PhotoVoice is due to the methodology’s ability to cultivate the experiences of the participants, as described by the participants. Although the critique of PhotoVoice’s lack of consistency among projects holds true, I would argue that, as long as the research aims to cultivate the perspectives of a population, that it is a valid research method. Furthermore, in order increase congruency among PhotoVoice studies, the sample size of PhotoVoice projects needs to increase – which this dissertation lends itself to. The one major difference between this PhotoVoice study on undecided college students
and others previously conducted is the audience for whom the PhotoVoice project is intended. In most other PhotoVoice studies (like the ones described above), the goal for the PhotoVoice projects is to use the perspectives of a (usually) marginalized population to inform those in positions of power to enact change. In the case of this study, the participants are examining themselves with the intent of pairing their personal interests with congruent areas of study in college and careers. This is an important consideration because, unlike most PhotoVoice projects which aim at informing those in positions of power of the life circumstances of marginalized populations, this PhotoVoice project aims to better inform students of their own life decisions. As a researcher, I am interested in the perspectives of the participants examining whether or not a PhotoVoice study is a viable option in helping them decide on a career path and/or area of study in college.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter will focus on the methods used to conduct the research for this dissertation. This chapter will cover the overview of the study, sampling population, research methods, data collection, time frame, limitations, trustworthiness, positionality, and ethical considerations.

Research Questions

This research sets out to answer three research questions: First, what was the experience of the student participants using the PhotoVoice study as a method for helping them decide on an area of study and/or career path? How have the students found success? Does the PhotoVoice study open new perspectives for the students or reinforce the old views? As a reminder, “success,” in the context of this study, is defined through three themes cultivated from “strengths-based advising.” These themes which define success are confidence/self-esteem, self-motivation, and acquisition of new knowledge/future options (Schreiner & Anderson, 2005). “Old views,” in this study, refers to the thoughts that the student participants had about what to study in college and what careers interest them (if any) prior to the PhotoVoice study. The second research question is: how viable is the PhotoVoice method as a tool that can be incorporated into college academic advising? Third, how have I evolved during this dissertation process? What was my intellectual journey and what does it mean to me?

Overview of Study

This study aims at exploring students’ experiences using a PhotoVoice study as a method for aiding them in deciding on a major/area of study and career. To address the first research question, I conducted a PhotoVoice study between September and December of 2017, which took place in three phases; Phase one: I conducted interviews with a PCC academic advisor,
Career Center advisor, and college guidance counselor to explore their thoughts about a PhotoVoice study aimed at helping undecided students decide on an area of study, as well as collaborate on themes for the PhotoVoice study. Phase two: I conducted the PhotoVoice study with undecided students. Phase three: I examined the PhotoVoice study through data mining, coding, and reflexive journaling in congruence with research questions. More specific descriptions of these concepts will be explained in the next section, which is titled “Research Methods.” To address the second research question, which explores the viability of the PhotoVoice method as an advising tool, I discussed the students’ experiences with academic professionals to gain their insight as professionals who frequently work with undecided students. This took place in January of 2018. In addressing the third research question, I used reflexive journaling to examine my personal growth in understanding my positionality as a researcher over the course of this dissertation.

To do the PhotoVoice study, five student participants were recruited for the PhotoVoice study. The research began with the first of five interviews. In this initial interview, I inquired about the participant’s educational background, what they were considering to study in college, and their thoughts on a potential career path. During interviews two through four, the participants took pictures for the following three themes: 1) Personal life interests – activities the participants enjoy doing for fun or a hobby, 2) Educational interests – ideas the students might be interested in studying, and 3) Professional environment interests – the types of environment and/or types of work the participant might enjoy. Each of these theme-based interviews (interviews two through four) took place one after another. For example, the participant took pictures for the first theme, sent them to me, and then was interviewed about the pictures they took. This was repeated for the second and third themes. I recommended the participant take three pictures per theme, but
could take more or less as needed. In previous PhotoVoice projects I have conducted, three pictures proved to be an adequate baseline to provide a variety of thought, but not so many that the participants get overwhelmed. The participants emailed their pictures to me, and I printed them out for the interviews. During interviews two through four, I conducted a series of semi-structured individual interviews in which the participant guided me through each of the pictures. Finally, I conducted a fifth interview where the participants explored the connections between the pictures taken from each theme and drew conclusions about possible areas of study and career paths. Also during this final interview, participants were asked about their experiences in the PhotoVoice study.

**Sampling Population for PhotoVoice Study**

The population taking part in this research was current and former students in the Adult Basic Education / General Education Degree (ABE/GED) program at PCC. The participants taking part in this research are either students who I taught at the time or who had recently graduated from my program over the course of the 2016-2017 school year. To take part in the study, participants needed to fit the following parameters: First, the students had to be over the age of 18 to no longer be considered a “vulnerable population,” as set forth by the International Research Board (Institutional Review Board, 2017). Second, participants needed to be enrolled at PCC in college classes or the Adult Basic Education / General Education Program. Third, students needed to be unsure about the area of study they would like to pursue in college. More specifically, students could not know exactly what they planned to study in college. Students taking part in the study could be between partially undecided (still debating between two or more areas to study) and completely undecided about area of study. Recruitment for this study took place in the form of convenient sampling. I sent out an email to students who might be interested
in the study, and spoke about the research during the beginning of classes at the start of the term. Students who volunteered to be participants came from professional references within the school (i.e. – professors in the ABE/GED program and/or Academic Advisors), as well as students I had taught at the time or had recently graduated.

**Research Methods**

The methods for examining the research were taking pictures, interviewing, data mining/coding, reflexive journaling, and member checks.

Pictures: The use of pictures is one of the key components of the PhotoVoice process and act as primary documentation for this research. In examining each of the three themes (hobbies/personal interests, college study interests, and work/work environment interests), participants took pictures to create a visual representation related to each theme. Pictures provide a layer of insight into the participants’ experiences that would not exist in verbal-only interviews (Booth & Booth, 2003).

Interviewing: The interviews in this research are the other key component (along with pictures) to the PhotoVoice research process. The interviews in this research were semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are a type of interview in which the researcher comes prepared with a set of pre-determined questions, but allow for the interview to act in a conversational fashion, allowing for undetermined follow-up questions based on the conversation (Longhurst, 2003). The pre-determined questions can be seen in Appendix B. I opted for semi-structured interviews to account for the unpredictable reasons behind a participant’s picture. At times, the participant would take a picture with a very straight-forward interpretation. For example, Kyle (one of the student participants) took a picture of a videogame because videogames are an interest of his. Inversely, Mel (another student participant) would
take pictures of something, but have it represented as something else. One of her pictures is of a stack of bagels, which represents her desire to see the work she accomplished. Follow-up questions exist in both these cases, but the specific follow-up questions can vary from case to case. At the end of each interview, I like to ask the participants: “If you could have taken an extra picture, what would you have taken a picture of?” I do this in the event a participant thinks of an idea for a picture after they have already turned in their pictures. In previous PhotoVoice studies I have conducted, participants would occasionally think of an idea for a picture they want to include well after they have turned their other pictures in. This would even happen as the interview is taking place. Students would think back and say, “I wish I took a picture of [insert picture here].” This hindsight can often be discouraging to participants because they feel as though they cannot include an idea for a picture they really like simply because it did not occur to them until that moment. As a remedy for this, I include a question about an “extra pictures,” which enables participants to describe a picture they would have included if they had thought about it earlier.

Data Mining and Coding: Examining the data in this research came in the form of In Vivo coding. In Vivo coding is a type of coding in which a word or short phrase is taken from each section of the transcription and is assigned to a label. The aim of In Vivo coding is to ensure that concepts stay as close as possible to the research participants’ own words or use their own terms, because they capture a major element of what is being described (King, 2008; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). In the case of this research, In Vivo coding was used to examine the student participants’ explanations for their photos. After I printed out the participants’ pictures, I conducted a semi-structured interview with each participant, in which they explained the reasoning behind the picture, how the picture pertains to a given theme, and how the picture
does (or does not) connect to other pictures in other themes. After all the interviews had been conducted, the audio recordings from the interviews were transcribed. With these transcriptions, I used In Vivo coding to organize the students’ stories and the academic professionals’ thoughts, using their own words, so that the reader can follow along with the events that transpired. In congruence with feminist theory in research, it is imperative that I, as the researcher, try to avoid augmenting the conversations, so that the participants are speaking for themselves rather than me speaking for them. This is expanded upon in the ethics section below.

Reflexive Journaling: The use of reflexivity allowed for a researcher to reflect on themself as a research instrument and on their individual positionality within the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reflexive journaling allowed for me to explore my own understanding of how my role as a researcher, a former undecided student, and a white male could impact the research and my participants’ perceptions of me. In the case of this research, I used reflexive journalling to explore the growth and understanding of myself as a new researcher.

Member Checks: Member checks allow for the researcher to have their work examined by fellow researchers to verify and extend interpretations and conclusions (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). As I am a white male conducting this research, it is important to consider how I go about checking my lens and subjectivity, and also to ensure that my positionality is not misconstruing the information provided by my participants. Member checks allow for the participants to examine the work I have compiled in order to ensure that their voice is being articulated correctly.

Data Collection

Collecting data happened in four ways: First, participants provided pictures evaluating the three PhotoVoice themes, based on their personal reflections and perspectives. Second,
participants provided interviews to give context to their pictures. Third, academic professionals, who regularly work with undecided students, provided interviews about the PhotoVoice study. Two interviews took place with the academic professionals: The first occurred before the research in order to collaborate about the PhotoVoice themes, their thoughts on the PhotoVoice study, and about working with undecided students in general. The second interview with the academic professionals, which took place after the PhotoVoice study had finished, examined their thoughts on the PhotoVoice study, how PhotoVoice can accompany academic/career advising, and possible future implications for this research. Fourth, I kept a reflexive journal to log my observations, feelings, and thoughts immediately following the interviews. In addition to reflexive journaling, I examined the transcribed interviews and data mine for underlying themes using In Vivo coding.

**Guided PhotoVoice Subjects**

The “Guided PhotoVoice Subjects” (also referred to as “Guided Subjects”) consists of three different personal aspects which the student participants explored using the PhotoVoice methodology to aid them in deciding on an area of study/major and career. This section will examine the three guided subjects that student participants explored, as well as go over the suggestions provided by the academic professionals on how the guided subjects should be presented to the students. Traditionally, these guided subjects are cultivated (at least in part) with the participants taking part in the PhotoVoice study. As this PhotoVoice study is related to academic advising, I felt it was important to include the academic professionals in the guided subject cultivation process, as they work with undecided students on a regular basis.
Guided Subject 1 – Personal Interests, Hobbies, and What Do You Do When Not Getting Paid

This guided subject aimed to help students examine aspects of their life that bring them joy. The goal behind this guided subject was to have students explore and reflect on their individual interests and values. When this guided subject was developed with the academic professionals, I was advised to phrase the question regarding students’ interests as: “What do you do when you’re not getting paid?” The reason behind this phrasing is to further separate this first theme from the concept of how one would make a living and to place emphasis on what one does for the sake of enjoyment.

Guided Subject 2 – Possible College Majors and Areas of Study

This guided subject aimed to help students examine possible college majors or areas of study which they would be interested in studying while in college. In the previous guided subject, participants examined their individual interests and personal hobbies. Based on the findings from the previous guided subject, the participants developed several ideas connecting their interests to possible areas of study. With these interests in mind, participants examined possible areas of study in college which were congruent with their individual interests. The academic professionals asked that I include the questions: “From your experience, which classes did you find yourself enjoying the most? What classes were you drawn to in the past?” This question provided an additional way for the participants to examine what they would like to study in college.

Guided Subject 3 – Work and Work Environment Interests

The final guided subject of the PhotoVoice study examined what types of employment and work environments interested the participants. When constructing the third guided subject, it
was important to recognize which work environments interested the participants, and not simply where they would like to work. The inclusion of work environments into the guided subject aimed at creating an additional layer of thought for the participants. Asking participants where they would like to work, as well as what their ideal work environment would be like, opens up additional avenues of thought for the participants to consider when examining a possible career (Gordon, Habley, & Grites, 2008). In regards to the student population taking part in the study, Marlo, the GED access specialist, instructed me to avoid using the word “career” when discussing this theme with the student participants. Marlo stated “I think the word ‘career’ is a little loaded and little intense for these students…Our students definitely have an aversion to these real concrete definitive terms.” Alternatively, Marlo suggested asking the participants “what they are curious about” and using phrases like “lines of work” or even “job,” which carry less weight than the word “career.” Although I used the word “job” while conducting the interviews, as suggested by Marlo, some of the participants used “job” and “career” interchangeably. In the writing of this dissertation, I used “career,” except when a participant was quoted saying “job.” The next section will discuss the student participants’ journeys through the PhotoVoice study.

The next section will explore the following research questions: “What was the experience of the student participants using the PhotoVoice study as a method for helping them decide on an area of study and/or career path? How have the students found success? Does the PhotoVoice study open new perspectives for the students or reinforce the old views? The first few sections will consist of the students explaining their pictures for each of the themes and will conclude with how they felt about the PhotoVoice study as a whole, which addresses the research question. The research questions will also be examined at the end of the chapter as well.
Timeframe

This section will discuss the timeframe in which the research for this dissertation took place. The first two research questions (examined in the phases below) took place from September in 2017 to January in 2018. The third research question, which examines my own growth in the dissertation process, began at the start of the research through the fall of 2018. The phase-to-phase breakdown for the first two research questions took place as such:

Phase One – Interviews with Academic Professionals

Phase One involved conducting interviews with a PCC academic advisor, career advisor, and college guidance counselor to discuss their thoughts about a PhotoVoice study and collaborate on the themes for the PhotoVoice study. These meetings acted as early planning to the study, with the goal of minimizing the risk of the participants becoming confused and possibly frustrated with the PhotoVoice study. Additionally, these meetings allowed for me to inquire about their experiences of working with undecided students.

Phase Two – PhotoVoice Study

Phase Two: Conduct the PhotoVoice study with undecided students. This phase took place in multiple parts.

Part I - Introduction interview: The initial interview’s purpose is twofold. The first element of the initial interview (which was not recorded for data analysis) was to go over the process of the PhotoVoice study. Participants also received their participation forms, which included information about the study and informed students of their rights as participants in the study (See Appendix A). Next, the participants and I discussed the use of technology that included instructions for taking pictures. Participants could take pictures with their phones or a camera. I offered to provide participants with a digital camera if needed. The participants and I
then discussed the process for turning in pictures. The second element of the initial interview (which was recorded for data analysis) was to gather background information on the participants. To establish a starting point, I inquired about the participants’ current educational goals and what career paths they were considering, or if the participants had considered these at all. I also inquired about the participants’ educational backgrounds. For information on the specific interview questions, please refer to Appendix B.

Part II - Theme 1, interview 2: Participants took pictures of the first theme (personal life interests) and were interviewed at a later time before starting theme 2.

Part III - Theme 2, interview 3: Participants took pictures of the second theme (possible areas of study/majors) and were interviewed at a later time before starting theme 3.

Part IV - Theme 3, interview 4: Participants took pictures of the third theme (possible careers and desired work environments) and were interviewed at a later time before scheduling their final interviews.

Part V – Interview 5: Participants examined all the pictures taken over the course of the PhotoVoice project and were asked about what connections may exist between the three themes. Discussions from the interviews focused on any self-discoveries and realizations made during the picture-taking process. Also during these final interviews, participants discussed their experiences with taking part in the PhotoVoice project. Feminist research theory specifies there is no one better to study and understand issues in a group than those within the researched group (Keller & Longino, 1996). With this concept in mind, these final interviews acted as an opportunity for participants to provide input on the research.

Part VI – Final interviews with academic professionals. Finally, one last interview was done with the academic professionals who were interviewed at the start of the study. The reason
for this final interview was to acquire feedback from the academic professionals on the PhotoVoice study about the use of PhotoVoice as a tool to accompany academic and career advising.

Part VII – Part seven was about what takes place after the PhotoVoice study. This part was unique compared to the other parts in this PhotoVoice study because, when I originally planned the study, I did not anticipate any additional events taking place after the final interview. However, some of the participants used what they discovered during the PhotoVoice study to further investigate possible areas of study and careers. It should be noted that, as these events were unplanned at the time of the PhotoVoice study, they were not recorded with the audio device.

Phase Three – Examining the Findings

This third phase was done in three parts: examining the data from the participants, examining my own growth through the dissertation process using my journaling, and (also through using journaling) examining what could be done differently in possible future PhotoVoice studies.

Part I: Using In Vivo coding, I examined the interviews with the student participants. Specifically, I examined how the participants felt in their own words about using the PhotoVoice study as a method for helping them decide on an area of study and/or career path. Upon completion, I used member checks as a method to ensure the participants’ words were not being misconstrued. To do this, I sent the participants the compiled data via email for them to examine and ensure that I, as the researcher, was not speaking for them.

Part II: Throughout the research process, I kept a reflexive journal to explore my own understanding of how my role as a researcher, as a former undecided student, and a white male
could impact the research and my participants’ perceptions of me. In the case of this research, I used reflexive journaling to explore the growth and understanding of myself as a new researcher.

Part III: In terms of future research, I also used my reflexive journal to examine what I could have done differently during the PhotoVoice study and, based on the feedback from the academic professionals, what future research implications may exist for PhotoVoice in advising.

**Research Examination Framework**

To give more direction and depth to the PhotoVoice study, the research questions were examined through the framework of “strength-based advising.” Strengths-based advising is a lens used by college advisors that focuses on a student’s natural talents as a method for building confidence and motivation in order to obtain the knowledge required for collegiate success (Schreiner & Anderson, 2005). Although similar to developmental advising in that both strengths-based and developmental advising focus on the development of the student (Crookston, 1972; Schreiner & Anderson, 2005; Smith & Allen, 2006), strength-based advising looks at advising through a different lens. Strengths-based advising focuses on cultivating the students’ strengths, whereas developmental advising tends to focus on student deficits and improving student weaknesses (Schreiner & Anderson, 2005). Much like strengths-based advising and its emphasis on cultivating positive outlooks using student strengths and talents, this PhotoVoice study aimed to help students construct plans for college and a career using their personal interests and activities they enjoy (hobbies) as a foundation. There are three themes associated with strengths-based advising that were used to examine the research associated with this PhotoVoice study; these themes are:

1. Confidence/self-esteem
2. Self-motivation
3. Acquisition of new knowledge / future major and career options

More specifically, “confidence and self-esteem” focuses on how the students feel about their outlook on college. Do the students feel good about their educational direction and choices? “Self-motivation,” in the context of this study, focuses on the student’s drive to push forward in their educational journey and their involvement in their major/career decision-making process. “Acquisition of new knowledge/future major & career options” examines what information the students have gained from the PhotoVoice study and how to potentially put this information to use. After the research concluded, a fourth theme emerged, listed as “Surfacing of Fears.” Surfacing of Fears refers to the acknowledgement of concerns students may be experiencing as a result of taking part in the PhotoVoice study. As participants are expected to examine themselves through their personal and educational backgrounds, the possibility exists for the students to experience discomfort and distress as a result of having to relive negative experiences through memory (Strack, Magill, & Mcdonagh, 2004). This is especially true if the student participants do not have many positive experiences with schooling, a commonality among the student participants in this study. Note that these themes focus on the first two research questions pertaining to the students’ experiences taking part in the PhotoVoice study and the potential application of this PhotoVoice study in a college setting.

Limitations

The limitations to this research are focused on time constraints and PhotoVoice as a relatively new research methodology. In terms of time, scheduling interviews with staff and students proved to be a challenge. For the college’s staff, their schedules are rigid and attempting to schedule multiple meetings, particularly at the beginning and the end of the college’s term was problematic. Similarly, with the student participants, schedules can include work, parenting, and
early and/or late-night classes, which made scheduling interviews difficult. In previous PhotoVoice projects I have conducted, all of the students were in the same program and meetings were not difficult to arrange. As college classes are not beholden to a standard 8-5 Monday through Friday timeframe, I had to be flexible in accommodating the participants’ schedules.

Limitations for PhotoVoice as a methodology appear in two primary ways: First, how new PhotoVoice is compared to other qualitative methodologies and second, how PhotoVoice themes are cultivated. PhotoVoice has only been around since 1994 (Wang & Burris, 1994). The use of PhotoVoice appears in so many unique ways that there is little repeated research with which to create a steady foundation for PhotoVoice to stand on as a methodology (Catalani & Minkler, 2010). Another limitation focuses on the cultivation of themes. Ideally, the cultivation of the PhotoVoice themes would happen with the aid of the participants. Providing the PhotoVoice participants with the opportunities to cultivate the themes for the project creates a higher sense of involvement for the participants (Astin, 1999; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993). In the case of this study, the participant involvement in the theme cultivation was less relevant because the academic professionals, who regularly work with undecided students, were able to provide input on the PhotoVoice themes.

**Trustworthiness of Study**

The three methods used to provide trustworthiness to this study were triangulation, member checks, and reflexive journaling. Triangulation refers to the practice of gathering sources in several different ways (Merriam, 2009). In the case of this study, triangulation appears in the form of interviews (with both the participants and the academic professionals), documents via PhotoVoice (pictures), and coding/data mining interview transcripts using In Vivo coding (King, 2008; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Member checks allow for the researcher to
have their work examined by fellow researchers to verify and extend interpretations and conclusions (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). In the case of this study, members were the student participants and the academic professionals. After the research had been compiled, I provided all participants with copies of the research for them to look over and ensure that their voices were being accurately depicted. Finally, the use of reflexivity allowed for me to reflect on myself as a researcher and my positionality within the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Positionality**

This next section will discuss my position as the researcher in this study. My positionality appears in three distinct ways: first, as a white-male; second, as the students’ current or former instructor; and third, as an “inside researcher.” Throughout the process of this dissertation, I have learned a tremendous amount about how being a white male could play a role in this research, particularly in ways that might not have been obvious to me. As a white male and as part of a dominant culture, I acknowledge that I carry a level of privilege with me that is not awarded to those of a different gender or race (Houser, 1996). In reference to this research, this privilege renders itself through the difficulty I experienced in attempting to identify if my being a white male played a role in how I constructed the research or in how I was perceived by the participants in the study. White privilege refers to the commonly unknown advantages obtained by those perceived to have white skin (hooks, 1995, 2003; McIntosh, 1990; Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009). My positionality as a white male conducting this research became much clearer through the lens of feminist research theory. Much of western history is told through the white male prospective, which includes co-opting the voices of and speaking for those other than white males (Houser, 1996). Feminist research theory and how it connects to my being a white male is depicted through my position conducting the research. A researcher’s role is a position of
power, meaning that the researcher has the power to guide the study and dictate the narrative of
the research. This is a power that I need to be keenly aware of as both the researcher and as a
white male, so that my reporting is on the participants’ experiences and not on my interpretation
of their experiences and words. The use of member checks can alleviate some of the concerns
associated with the researcher “speaking for” the participants taking part in the study.

My second position in the research appears as me being either the current or former
instructor of the student participants in the study. Although my being an instructor for these
students created an easy path for me to find participants, it needs to be acknowledged that these
students currently enrolled in my class gained no advantage in the class by being part of the
study. I can ensure this through the fact that there are no grades associated with taking a GED
class. Student scores for taking and passing the class are determined by how they perform on the
individual GED tests which are administered by the state. Students enroll and complete the
program upon completing standardized tests in math, science, language arts, and social studies. I,
as the instructor, only provide the information needed for students to pass these tests and thus,
there are no advantages students receive in the class by being a part of this study.

My third position in this study is as an “inside researcher.” When I began my college
career, I was an undecided student, much like the participants in this study. This commonality
places me in a unique position as an “inside” or “Insider Researcher.” An insider researcher is
the role in which the researcher is also a member of the population taking part in the study
(Kauhaua, 2000). This position comes with some considerations: Having a shared background
with my participants (as undecided students) creates a personal connection that can create a sense
of legitimacy of me as a researcher, thus opening the potential for the participants to be more
honest and vulnerable (Alder & Alder, 1987; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). However, being an insider
researcher can also be problematic. The possibility exists that either I or my participants made assumptions about the similarities of our schooling experiences, and thus failed to explain our schooling experiences fully because we assumed the other knew exactly what was meant with any given statement (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Furthermore, I remember how frustrating school can be as an undecided student, and I selected this topic to research because I wanted to find new ways to help these students decide on their areas of study. This desire to “help” the undecided students can create clouded perceptions, which can make it difficult for me as the researcher to separate the objective from the personal, which can affect my analysis of the data (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

**Ethical Considerations**

Each participant in the study, both PhotoVoice participants and the academic professionals, was told of both the purpose and objectives of the study. Before beginning the study, approval from the Institutional Research Board and Doctoral committee from Washington State University was obtained. Permission was also obtained by the necessary personnel at PCC, where the bulk of the research took place. All individuals participating signed an Informed Consent form that states their approval for being audio-taped during the interview process (see Appendix A).

To protect the identities of the participants, the students and academic professionals selected a nickname to represent them in the study. After the completion of each round of interviews, the voice data was transferred to the researcher’s password-protected laptop and was kept in my possession at all times. The data on the voice recorder was deleted (after being transferred to the laptop) after each round in order to make room for the next round of interviews. The pictures which the participants took were kept on the laptop as well. The printer
pictures were kept in the researcher’s possession at all times and were coded, so as to not link the pictures to any participants. Rev Transcriptions at Rev.com did the transcriptions. On their website, Rev states “We will never share your files or personal information with anyone outside of Rev. Files are only visible to the professionals who have signed strict confidentiality agreements” (Rev.com, 2017). These transcriptions will be kept in the home of the researcher for three years after the study has concluded, and will then be destroyed. The results from this study will be published in the researcher’s dissertation, in other scholarly publications, and presented at conferences.
CHAPTER FOUR

INTRODUCTION OF PARTICIPANTS

This chapter will focus on the participants who took part in the study. In all, I had four student participants in the study and four academic professionals who helped create the PhotoVoice themes and provide input on the study. What follows is background information on each of the individuals to provide context to their stories and experiences with the PhotoVoice study.

Academic Professionals

The first four participants were academic professionals who took part in the study. These individuals work at the college where the PhotoVoice study took place. These individuals are Rachel – the Career Center Coordinator, Lynda – an academic advising specialist, and Marlo – a student resource specialist.

Rachel – Career Center Coordinator

Rachel is the Career Center Coordinator at PCC and primarily works with students who are unsure about their career paths. Rachel works with students who sign up by appointment and sets them up with a variety of career and aptitude assessments. These assessments match students with potential careers based on their specific set of skills and personal interests. Using this information, Rachel provides students with information on job growth in emerging fields, as well as opportunities to take part in internships and volunteer work. Rachel oversees these operations and provides additional academic support when needed.

Rachel has been in her position at PCC for 15 years. When she went to graduate school, she knew she wanted to work in higher education, as she really enjoys the environment. After interning at a community college, she was excited to work with community college students.
Rachel loves the broad opportunities that community colleges offer to people, and her particular position appealed to her because of the many different aspects involved with running a center, which include supervising students, advising students, and teaching classes.

**Lynda – Academic Advising Specialist**

Lynda is an Academic Advising Specialist at PCC and works with students in a number of ways. As a general education adviser, Lynda’s primary role is helping students select classes based on their declared areas of study. General academic advisors, like Lynda, also help students select a major based on their interests/previous classes, get students signed up for classes, and guide students to other services based on the students’ needs. Lynda has been a general academic advising specialist at PCC for 12 years. She expressed interest in working with community colleges because of their open access policy. Lynda loves that community colleges exist to serve anyone who has a desire to better themselves.

**Marlo – Student Resource Specialist**

Marlo is the Student Resource Specialist for the General Education Degree Program (GED) at PCC. Marlo’s primary responsibility is to work with students who are ages 16-20. Three of the four participants taking part in the PhotoVoice study were students whom Marlo had advised directly. These students are Kyle, Kaleb, and Gabi. Marlo worked with these students in two phases: First though the GED programs, and then during their college transitions. During the first phase, Marlo worked with students on obtaining their General Education Degrees by helping them with logistics, such as finding transportation, signing up for the various GED tests, and forecasting for following terms. During the second phase, Marlo worked with students on transitioning to college by helping the students select classes and checking in with the students’ professors. Throughout the schooling process, Marlo had weekly check-in meetings
with her students. Students in the ABE/GED program frequently come from backgrounds with little to no home support and have a history of struggling with education. These weekly meetings serve as an opportunity for Marlo to check-in on students’ well-being, as well as their current educational standings. In addition to these tasks, Marlo taught a college guidance class that focused on study skills, resume-building, and test-taking techniques. A vast majority of the students whom Marlo has worked with are undecided about what they would like to study in college and what career path they would like to follow.

Marlo became interested in working with pre-college and early college students because she struggled during her early college years. Marlo was a first generation college student. Her mother moved here from another country, and her father never attended college. As a result, Marlo felt isolated. She did not have any knowledge of whom to turn to for advice on navigating the college environment. Marlo did not know whom to talk to about advising, financial aid, or other college resources designed to aid students. This was an impactful experience for Marlo, and she went on to work in a position where she provides information to students on how to navigate through their own college careers.

**Mark – GED Instructor and GED Intake Specialist**

Mark is a GED Instructor and GED Intake Specialist for PCC. As an instructor, Mark teaches the GED curriculum which prepares students for the four GED exams. As a GED Intake Specialist, Mark helps GED students transition both into and out of the GED program. Mark helps students set up their GED classes and plan for life after the GED program. Mark’s position as a GED Intake Specialist, at the time this dissertation was written, was still very new and his primary responsibilities were still being sorted out, but helping students enter the GED program and what to do after is what he did at the time.
Mark’s role in the PhotoVoice study was uniquely different than that of Rachel, Lynda, and Marlo in that Mark was not originally part of the research. In the beginning, Mark recommended some students from his classes that he thought would be interested in the PhotoVoice study. Mark was also never interviewed about the PhotoVoice study. However, Mark was instrumental in helping Gabi select an area of study and career based on her PhotoVoice experience (see Chapters five and six). Also, after seeing the results of the PhotoVoice study, Mark contributed some ideas as to how the PhotoVoice study could be implemented in a college environment.

**Student PhotoVoice Participants**

This next section will discuss the four student participants who took part in the PhotoVoice study. Two of the students (Kyle and Kaleb) have completed the GED and are taking college courses while the other two (Mel and Gabi) are in the process of completing their GED.

**Gabi**

Gabi was a GED student. At the time this dissertation was written, she has passed one of the four GED tests. Gabi found herself at PCC because traditional schooling was not a viable option for her. Gabi had a medical condition (chronic migraines) which has limited her ability to regularly attend her classes. She dropped out of high school as a sophomore and enrolled in an online learning academy. Although she found the online option more catering to her medical condition, she found it difficult to keep herself motivated throughout the process. Several years passed and she found herself at PCC in their GED program. Gabi said she would have entered a GED program sooner, but was unaware a GED would be an asset in getting a job or that a GED could be used to get into a four-year university.
Gabi was undecided about her area of study at the time this research was conducted. Gabi had a passion for makeup design and has considered attending beauty school. However, she viewed attending beauty school as a backup plan. Gabi is interested in taking part in this PhotoVoice project because it provided with her a chance to explore possible areas of study in college.

Mel

Mel was a GED student. She has passed one of the four GED tests at the time this research was conducted. Mel was homeschooled her whole life and stopped attending school in any form in 8th grade. She then spent the next several years working. She found out about PCC and the GED program through her husband, who attended the school.

Mel became interested in the PhotoVoice study for several reasons: First, she loved photography, so she viewed this as an opportunity to explore that passion. Second, although Mel knew she wanted a career that incorporated art and/or photography, the PhotoVoice study offered the chance to explore other options. At the time, Mel had considered careers in business or astronomy, but wants photography to be a key element.

Kyle

Kyle was a college student who graduated from the GED program. He was taking his first set of college classes during this research—math and writing. He also worked for the college’s food pantry. The college food pantry was operated by the student leadership council and provided basic needs (food, hygiene packs, clothes, etc.) to students in need. Kyle moved to Pacific Northwest from Nevada in the 6th grade, after his parents divorced. He came to PCC because he felt unsupported in his traditional high school environment and enrolled in the GED program.
Kyle enjoys being creative and has a drive to help others. Before the research, Kyle considered careers in nutrition, health (both mental and physical), and digital design. Kyle specifically referenced the desire to work in the video-game industry, but wanted to use the PhotoVoice study as a method for narrowing down his options and hopefully selecting a more specific career.

Kaleb

Kaleb was a college student and was taking his first set of college classes at the time of this study. The classes he was taking were math and Spanish. Kaleb moved to the Pacific Northwest from Georgia while in high school. As a sophomore (grade 10) in Georgia, he was placed in a large high school of approximately 5,000 students. This schooling environment was unable to meet his needs, and he dropped out. Kaleb tried online school but, much like the large high school, his educational needs were not met. In reference to the online school, Kaleb stated, “I had to be too self-disciplined and wanted to get out of the house.”

Kaleb and his family moved to the Pacific Northwest when he was 18. After a year and a half of no school, he enrolled in the GED program at PCC because he was tired of working minimum wage jobs. Kaleb took an interest in the PhotoVoice study because he was only somewhat sure about his career interests. He was leaning towards a trade of some sort but was still trying to sort out which one. The leading trade candidate was the position of an electrician because that was what his father did for a living. He also wanted to explore the option of staying on the more traditional college track with this studies. Kaleb also wanted to better explore his personal passions before venturing farther into his college career.
CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I will present the findings of the PhotoVoice study. This research set out to answer three research questions: First, what was the experience of the student participants using the PhotoVoice study as a method for helping them to decide on an area of study and/or career path? How have the students found success? Does the PhotoVoice study open new perspectives for the students or reinforce the old views? As a reminder, “success,” in the context of this study, is defined through three themes cultivated from “strengths-based advising.” These themes, which define success, are confidence/self-esteem, self-motivation, and acquisition of new knowledge/future options (Schreiner & Anderson, 2005). “Old views,” in this study, refers to the thoughts that the student participants had about what to study in college and what careers interested them (if any) prior to the PhotoVoice study. These old views were determined during the initial interview with each student participant and can be found in Chapter four, which introduced the participants and provided background information. The second research question is: How viable is the PhotoVoice method as a tool that can be incorporated into college academic advising? Third, how have I evolved during this dissertation process? What was my intellectual journey and what does it mean to me? Over the course of several months, I conducted the PhotoVoice study as described in Chapter three.

The format of this chapter will be as follows: First, I will discuss what transpired with each of the guided PhotoVoice subjects (also seen as “guided subject”), as the student participants ventured through the PhotoVoice process. I will be concluding this chapter with the participants’ thoughts on the PhotoVoice study, the academic professionals’ thoughts on the PhotoVoice study as an academic tool, and any emerging themes that presented themselves.
during the research process. The participants’ pictures will appear throughout the text. Finally, I will discuss my own growth as a researcher throughout this research process. Before discussing the participants’ PhotoVoice journey, here is a description of the guided PhotoVoice subjects that the participants explored.

Gabi

Guided Subject 1 - Personal Interests, Hobbies, What Do You Do When Not Getting Paid

In this first guided subject, Gabi took two pictures: a picture of dance uniform and a picture of her makeup kit. Note that Gabi took pictures of makeup more than once so they are labeled “Makeup (Guided Subject 1)” and “Makeup (Guided Subject 2).”

Dance Outfit

![Dance Outfit](image)

The picture of Gabi’s dance outfit was from a time when she was a competitive dancer. In addition to her enjoyment of dance as a craft, it was a way for Gabi to express herself and work through her emotions. She noted that if she had a rough day, she could “go dance and forget about everything.” Gabi admitted that she does not dance as much as she used to, but it was an initial way for her to express her emotions before moving onto other hobbies like makeup design.
The second picture Gabi presented was of her makeup kit. She explained that doing makeup was another form of self-expression. With the use of makeup, Gabi can do everything from traditional beauty techniques to having the ability to “transform yourself into looking completely different from who you actually are” (commonly referred to as “contour”). At some point, she would like to become skilled enough to do her own makeup tutorials on YouTube or other video/streaming websites. Doing makeup professionally is a career interest for Gabi, either as a beautician or a makeup instructor. Although Gabi enjoys doing makeup and the possibility of teaching others to do makeup, she has stated a number of times throughout the research that this option is “more of a backup plan.”

Extra Picture

To refresh, the “extra picture” is a picture which a participant would have taken had they had the opportunity. I ask the participants: “If you could have taken another picture, what would it be of?” In the past, I have found that some participants will think of an idea for a picture well after they have turned their pictures in. Asking this question gives participants the opportunity to go back and include a picture which they did not think of previously. Upon asking Gabi about a
possible extra picture, she said, “I would honestly say family and friends.” This theoretical picture represents how grateful she is for her family. Gabi discussed how, between health and school issues, her family was always there to support her. Gabi stated that “it is difficult to imagine my current predicament in life had my family not been there.”

**Picture Connections**

At the end of each interview, I like to ask the participant what (if any) similar characteristics permeate throughout their pictures. In the case of Gabi, she spoke about how she felt self-expression was a predominant characteristic in her first set of pictures. Gabi stated that she is “very into doing [her] own thing.” She attributes this mindset as a possible reason for why she is undecided about her area of study and what career field she would like to enter. She views most employment as “going to do the same job and doing the same thing every day.” Gabi desires to travel and take part in a variety of different work endeavors.

**Guided Subject 2 - Possible College Majors and Areas of Study**

Gabi took three pictures for the second guided subject: The first picture was of her cooking, the second picture was of her dog, and the third picture was of her makeup.

**Cooking**

The first picture is of Gabi’s process of cooking Thanksgiving dinner. This picture represents Gabi’s interest studying nutrition and entering the health profession. As a child, Gabi
struggled with weight issues. These experiences have compelled her to explore healthier eating options and share her healthy eating strategies with others. Gabi says she wants to “…help kids eat better, and have a healthier lifestyle, since obesity is an issue in the United States.” Cooking is also a form of self-expression, which is very important to Gabi. The combination of cooking as a form of self-expression, personal struggles with weight, and a desire to help others makes the study and profession of nutrition appealing to Gabi.

Dog

The second picture is of Gabi’s dog named Cabella. Gabi took this picture to represent two things: First, Gabi loves animals. Her love of animals led her to consider a career in the veterinary field or working at a shelter. This picture also represents her desire to work in a field that allows her to express her creativity. More specifically, Gabi is very interested in photography because it would allow her to travel, be creative, and express herself artistically. Gabi does not want a job where she is “…stepping in an office and doing the same thing every day.”
Gabi’s third picture is an extension of the first makeup picture in the first guided subject. Gabi enjoys doing makeup as a hobby, which also has her considering beauty school for her studies. Gabi says doing makeup or going to beauty school is a last resort in the event that “[traditional] school doesn’t work out…” Makeup allows Gabi to express her creative side because she “doesn’t have to be very cookie-cutter with it.” As stated before, Gabi values the opportunity to express herself as an individual in whatever line of work she enters. Makeup is one example of what she could study that would allow her to be creative and take part in a craft she enjoys.

**Extra Picture**

If given the opportunity, Gabi would have taken a fourth picture representing psychology. The human brain and the way it dictates our day-to-day emotions fascinates Gabi. Throughout her life, Gabi has dealt with anxiety. Entering a field where she could help others through their own battles with anxiety is of interest to Gabi. She states “Because I’ve also struggled with anxiety…I feel like it would be really cool to help people out that were in my position…Tell them what I’ve experienced and what I’ve learned and help get them past it.” However, because
Gabi has struggled as a student in the past, Gabi has concerns about her ability to study psychology and the amount of school required to enter a field like psychology.

**Picture Connections**

When asked about what connections Gabi sees in her pictures, Gabi pointed out her love of helping others. In her cooking picture, she referenced the desire to help others through finding healthier food options. In her dog picture, she referenced helping animals. In her extra picture (psychology), she referenced helping others deal with anxiety. During the first guided subject, Gabi also mentioned doing YouTube demonstration videos and wanting to teach others about how to do makeup. Additionally, Gabi mentions her desire to be artistic and her desire to cultivate her own identity. This is shown specifically in the dog picture, in which she mentions the possibility of exploring photography, and in the makeup picture, in which she explores the possibility of becoming a makeup artist.

**Guided Subject 3 - Work and Work Environment Interests**

For her third theme, Gabi took two pictures regarding work and work environment interests. The first picture she took was of her current place of employment, a coffee shop. The second picture was of the walkway outside of the coffee shop where she works.
Coffee Shop

The first picture of the coffee shop where Gabi works represents her love of the work environment: “I took this picture first and it is of my current job. The atmosphere is very high energy. We’re very into our customers’ lives.” Gabi has developed personal relationships with her regular customers over the course of her time working at the coffee shop. She explained,

When they come to the window, we ask them how their day is. If they’re having a hard day, you sit there and talk about it with them - if there isn’t a line anyway. You hook them up with a free drink if they’ve been having a rough day. I just think it’s really cool that you can be a part of your customers’ lives and have it not be a weird thing. It’s very normal in this atmosphere and that’s what I want to do with my job. I want to be able to connect with people and help them and this job is a good step towards that. It’s like dipping my toes in the water and building that customer base and that relationship with customers. 
At the time of this interview, Gabi has only been working at the coffee shop for eight months, but she feels the experience has already paid dividends in helping her cultivate an idea for what work environment she enjoys.

**Coffee Shop Walkway**

![Coffee Shop Walkway](image)

The second picture is of the walkway leading up to the coffee shop where Gabi works. This picture represents the coffee shop’s connection with the community and Gabi’s interest in finding an employment opportunity where she can give back to the community. “In my future, I want to be able to, one– have a job where I can connect with people, and two– I want to travel and be outside and not stuck in an office.” Gabi desires to be interactive with the environment, whether it is with people in the community or by working in an outside environment. To clarify, when Gabi mentions “travel,” she means traveling around the community, but is not opposed to traveling internationally if the opportunity presents itself.

**Extra Picture**

If Gabi had the opportunity to take an additional picture for the third guided subject, it would have been of her veterinarian’s office. “Like I’ve said in previous interviews, I think
working with animals would really interest me. The office we take our dog to is very small and family oriented.” Gabi continues, “The people at the front desk know all of my family and my dogs…I guess that goes back to my current job [and] having that ability to connect with your customers.” The idea behind Gabi’s extra picture is to represent her desire to work in a small, close-knit environment that provides the opportunity to cultivate meaningful relationships.

**Picture Connections**

When asked about what connections exist between her pictures, Gabi spoke of her desire to connect with others. Gabi mentioned the variety of charity events her coffee shop participants in: “We do a lot of charity stuff with our franchise. We set up our event trailer at a 5K race a few months ago and handed out hot chocolate and stuff for free.” Gabi goes on to discuss how one of the founders of the coffee shop died from ALS, and every summer the coffee shop takes part in a charity that donates to ALS research.

In sum, when considering Gabi’s ideal work environment, two key concepts stand out. First, the physical work environment Gabi is seeking is outside of the office environment. She likes the idea of being outside and working in a variety of locations. Second, Gabi is looking for an opportunity to develop relationships. In her current job, for example, she has developed relationships with her customer base. Additionally, Gabi is very passionate about giving back to the community and has a strong desire to improve the lives of others.

**Final Interview**

**Examination of Pictures**

After Gabi re-examined all of her pictures together, she looked to see if there were any characteristics that permeated throughout all of the pictures of the guided subjects. After examining her pictures, Gabi found two predominant connections: helping others and self-
expression. Gabi stated, “I feel like what I have noticed in my themes is that being able to help others and express myself is a really big deal.”

Gabi then reflected on instances in her life when she felt compelled to help others. As a child in elementary school, Gabi frequently made an effort to sit with kids (often kids with special needs) who were sitting alone, provide them with company, and stand up to bullies. Gabi noted,

When kids get bullied, I was always the one to tell [bullies] to knock it off. I guess that’s always been a very big part of my life, putting others first. I guess that’s what I want to have in a job.

The coffee company Gabi works for is an example of her desire to help others, as the coffee company frequently takes part in charity work, allowing Gabi to help others in that manner.

The second characteristic that stood out to Gabi in her pictures was “self-expression.” Gabi mentioned self-expression in all three of the themes as being an important element in finding what jobs and areas of study interest her. Gabi explained,

I feel like self-expression is important for everyone. You need to have an outlet that you can be yourself. There's been a lot of times where, like at dance competitions or at school, where I would feel like “This isn't me. I don't want to be doing this.” Being able to express yourself is, to me, one of the most important things. I don't want to pretend I'm someone else. I want people to see me for the real me.

Gabi then began to tie together both self-expression and her desire to help others, “I guess that the real me is helping people and putting others before myself.” Gabi then expressed her desire to help others who are often belittled or oppressed. Specifically, Gabi mentioned the transgender community as an example of individuals expressing themselves and often receiving criticism.
I don’t understand, [a transgendered individual] is not hurting you. Why upset them? Why bully them? Why do something to them just because they're finally realizing who they are and having the courage to come out and be who they are? It’s one big, huge step! How would you feel if they were picking on you for being yourself?

For Gabi, there is a strong connection between self-expression and the desire to help others. Gabi has a desire to help others achieve their best version of themselves.

The conversation then shifted towards her study interests and work interests post-PhotoVoice study. Gabi noted, “The last two interviews we did kind of made me realize what I want to take a step towards in doing. I feel like I would fit really good in with charity work or something similar to that.” Gaby had a major breakthrough moment when she said, “I know I want to work towards helping others and making a change in the world for the rest of my life. I don’t know 100% whether it’s going to be a special education teacher at a school or something.” This was considered a major breakthrough for Gabi because it demonstrates her growth in school and career considerations, compared to where she was in the beginning of the PhotoVoice study. At the start of the PhotoVoice study, Gabi only referenced beauty school as a school/career consideration, and only as a “backup plan.” Gabi then elaborated on other experiences she had helping others in an educational setting, “When I was in seventh grade, I was a peer tutor. It’s just another example of being able to, like I’ve said many times, help others.” Gabi had been considering working in special education during the PhotoVoice study, but felt it was unrealistic due to the amount of schooling required to become a teacher. She explained:

I'm on the fence [about becoming a special education teacher] because I'm not very good at school. I would be afraid that I would get myself into something like that and then I would be in school for many years or I would fail or something like that. What really
scares me is going to college because I sucked at high school. High school wasn't for me.

I never thought I was going to go to college until I got into [the GED] program. I guess
I’m more afraid of failing, so I’m scared to pursue actually going to a four-year college.

Gabi enjoys the idea of working as a special education teacher. However, the thought of going to
college for a number of years was a scary thought for her, particularly for an individual who has
had limited success in educational environments.

**Participant Thoughts on PhotoVoice Study**

After discussing what work and study interests resonated with Gabi, we discussed her
experience with the PhotoVoice study. Gabi said:

I loved it. It made me think about the next step of my life. I've always been the person to
put it off. Like when I was a freshman, I messed around in school a lot, went partying,
didn't care about my schooling. I was like, "Oh, I'm a freshman. It's okay." I think that
this [PhotoVoice study] really made me realize that, "Oh crap." I have to get my stuff
together. I have to figure out what I'm going to do for the rest of my life. I'm 18. I'm an
adult. I have a job. I have to live the rest of my life. I can't live at home forever. I think
this [PhotoVoice study] made me think about taking that next step in life.

The PhotoVoice study provided the opportunity for Gabi to examine her work and study goals.
As Gabi noted, she has a history of procrastinating and putting off important life decisions. Gabi
noted that, between her and her two sisters, she is the only one to not graduate from high school.
“I always felt like that bad kid, like the failure kid.” This acceptance as “the bad kid” or “the
failure kid” made college and finding a fulfilling career seem unobtainable. However, due to her
involvement in the GED program and the PhotoVoice study, her mindset has changed.
Coming to these [GED] classes and doing this study has made me realize that I'm not a failure. Some kids just aren't good at high school. It's too hard for them, and that was me. Really, I think that this study is a really cool thing to help kids because I never would have thought that doing something like this would help me figure out what I want to do with the rest of my life, but it did. It really affected me, so I like this a lot.

When Gabi first started the PhotoVoice Study, she said, “I had no clue” when asked what she wanted to study in college or wanted in a job. After taking part in the PhotoVoice study, Gabi has a much stronger idea for what her future holds. When asked which guided subject resonated with her the most, Gabi responded with the second and third guided subjects:

The second guided subject really made me think hard about one, all of the jobs that are out there, and two, what I wanted to do. Once I figured what I wanted in a job and what I was more aiming towards, the third one was super easy. I was like, “Okay, I want to work in this environment.” All the other themes, I had to sit and think about what I want to take a picture of, how it would represent what I was going to say in the interview. The third one was just like, “All right, I need a place where I can help people and develop relationships.” And that was it.

Gabi found having the option to articulate what aspects she wanted in a job to be easier than deciding on what job she wanted specifically. In sum, the PhotoVoice study was beneficial for Gabi in helping her pinpoint what aspects she was looking for in a job. Specifically, Gabi is interested in finding a career that enables her to help others achieve their goals. With this in mind, Gabi is considering a degree in special education to become a special education teacher.
Post-Interview

After the final PhotoVoice interview concluded, Gabi was excited to talk to Marlo (her GED advisor) and Mark (her GED instructor at the time) about the PhotoVoice study she just completed and the decisions she had made. At the time the final interview concluded, Gabi was planning to enter special education and become a special education teacher. She felt good about the choice in career but was concerned about the amount of time she would be spending in college to enter such a profession. Gabi retrieved Mark and Marlo and proceeded to show them her pictures and explain her thought process in order to gain their thoughts on what her next step should be. During this discussion, Mark mentioned to Gabi that PCC offers a two-year associate degree in paraeducation that would enable her to become an IA (Instructional Assistant) and work in self-contained, K-12 classrooms. Furthermore, after signing on with a school district, the school district will often provide funding to IAs who desire to go back to school and get additional certifications and advanced degrees. This was an empowering moment for Gabi because it created a goal which she felt was more obtainable for her at this point in her life.

An important consideration about this event is that I did not plan on it happening when this research was originally constructed, so the audio was not recorded. However, this conversation between Gabi, Mark, Marlo, and I was pivotal in helping Gabi learn about her college options and was an ideal example of a student seeking out further assistance in her decision-making after the PhotoVoice study concludes.
Mel

Guided Subject 1 - Personal Interests, Hobbies, What Do You Do When Not Getting Paid

Mel took five pictures for the first guided subject: The first is a hand waving at the moon, the second is a star lamp, the third is a sign that states “Question Everything,” the fourth is berries from a farmer’s market, and the fifth is a sign of the 7th Street Theater – a music venue.

Waving at Moon

The first picture Mel presented is of, as she describes it, “Me waving at the moon in monochrome with a lower lining of a skyline of trees silhouetted.” This picture represents her love of space and astronomy. Mel does not know when she became interested in astronomy, only that she has always gravitated towards the subject. The monochrome (black and white) colors of the picture were also intentional. Mel felt that the black and white colors elevated the mood of the picture in a way that colored pictures could not. Mel stated:

I felt like the mood of the picture would be amplified by the [black and white] rather than trying to do it in color. I feel like the mood is darker and more solemn than it would be with color. There’s not a bunch of color to distract from the essence of the photo.
Star Lamp

This picture is of a multicolored star lamp. Mel’s inspiration for this picture was to represent her “love for abstract art.” Ideally, the picture was to be of a person where the star acts as the head, and the body is of a normal human. The picture is from her room at home, with the lights turned off in order to bring out the individual colors of the lamp. Mel strives to be creative in all aspects of her life, including the photography in this research.

Question Everything Sign

Near Mel’s home is a park. She often takes walks in this park to, as she said it, “recharge my soul.” In this park is a sign with the words “Question Everything” written on it. For Mel, this picture represents a number of interests: first, her love of nature and a place where she can go to feel at peace; second, her interests in scientific exploration; and third, her “scientific nature to want to further humanity.” In addition to this, Mel used this picture to depict her love for natural photography and microphotography.
Berries

Mel loves food. This love for food includes both eating it and taking pictures of it. Mel took this picture at a farmer’s market in a neighboring town. In addition to the picture representing her love for food, this picture was taken in such a way that it resembles a picture one might find in a food catalog. Mel expressed that she sees herself working in a place where food is an integral part of the job. Specifically, Mel stated, “This picture represents my interest in food photography. Food is amazing and I don’t want to work at a job where there isn’t food for some reason, [the job] would seem boring to me.”

7th Street Sign

The 7th Street Theater is a bar/pub that plays live music. Mel took this picture to represent her “interest in music and music photography.” Mel mentioned that she would love the opportunity to “work with a music magazine or work events where I could go to concerts and
take photographs of the events.” Mel likes the idea of being able to take pictures at concerts and music festivals as a way of getting into using photography in advertisement.

**Picture Connections**

When asked about what characteristics connect the pictures she took, Mel said “The need to be creative and create art mostly, and express that in different ways. Not alone in just photography, but using photography to live through all my different passions.” Essentially, Mel would ideally like to use photography as a conduit to other life experiences or as a key fixture within a career. The desire to create art was very apparent in all of Mel’s pictures. Whether it was the black and white moon picture, the colors of the star lamp, the way the sun flares in the “Question Everything” picture, or the artistic angles used in the berries and theater pictures, there was artistic intention behind all of her pictures. In addition to this, Mel brought me her pictures in a physical form. Unlike the other participants who took digital pictures and emailed them for me to print out, Mel brought pictures that required development. The reason Mel brought me these pictures in a physical form is to further express her love and interest for photography as an art form.

**Guided Subject 2 - Possible College Majors and Areas of Study**

For the second guided subject, Mel took six pictures. The first picture was of a tree line at night with the moon in the sky. The second picture is of the tree line and sky during dusk. The third picture is of a light painting. The fourth picture is of a lake with houses in the reflection of the water. The fifth picture is of a videogame. The sixth and final picture is of a sunset from a plane. Generally, student participants are encouraged to take between three and five pictures, but Mel felt it was important to include a “wrap up” or “all encompassing” picture to go along with the others.
Tree Line at Night

This black and white picture is of a tree line in a park featuring the moon. For Mel, this picture represents her interest in studying astronomy. Mel is compelled to study astronomy because she views it as her way to “help propel the human race forward.” Ideally, Mel’s study of astronomy would lead to a career as a deep space astrophotographer, where she could use her skills as a photographer to help discover new regions of space.

Dusk Skyline

This picture takes place in same park as the tree line picture (the first picture from Guided Subject 1). In contrast to the black and white tree line picture, this picture is in full color. The tree line acts as a base for the multicolored clouds and dark blue sky. The picture represents Mel’s interest in meteorology. Mel stated that this picture “represent[s] my interest in meteorology, storms, and weather prediction, and such. I've always been interested in the sky, so
it would be cool to understand it more.” When asked about her inspiration for the photo, she replied, “Trying to find my passion mostly. I was just looking for what I was supposed to do, and it seemed to fit since I was always interested in the sky and such.” This picture adds to Mel’s interest in the sky, space, and science.

**Light Painting**

This picture features a photography technique called “light painting.” Mel explained that to achieve this effect, the photographer sets their camera to a prolonged exposure that allows the photographer to appear as if they are drawing or writing with light. To create this image, Mel set her camera to prolong the picture’s exposure while she spun Christmas lights in front of the lens. The inspiration for this photo was to express both Mel’s interest in science and her desire to become, as she joked, an “evil scientist” someday.
Lake

Mel took a picture of a lake where the houses in the background are mirrored perfectly in the water. The picture represents Mel’s love for photography and her desire to incorporate photography into whatever career she chooses. Mel feels so strongly about her love for photography that she stated, “I think [photography] should definitely be a major of mine.” Because photography has been a passion of Mel’s for so long, it is easy to understand why she would want to incorporate this passion into a career or her college studies.

Video Game

This picture is of a video game that Mel enjoys playing. The picture represents Mel’s possible interest in studying web and computer programming. Programming is an area of study which Mel feels can provide stability in her life from an economic standpoint. Mel stated, “It's always good to have something like [programming] to fall back on. It would be good to have
something I could do internationally, wherever I am. Like everybody needs websites and help coding and things.” Programming combines Mel’s love for science with the comfort of knowing the skills can provide many employment possibilities. Mel would someday like to live in Germany and she feels having knowledge of computer programming can help her find a job anywhere in the world. Mel admitted that coding, programming, and working with computers is a backup plan. She would prefer to study photography, astronomy, or meteorology, but felt that programming was worthy of consideration if the other areas of study fall short.

**Picture from Plane/ Picture Connections**

![Picture from Plane](image)

When asked about this picture, Mel said it represented a “wrap up picture” and was meant to show “just the overall of photography and the sky, meteorology, astronomy, kind of stuff.” While explaining the pictures to the second theme, Mel chose to present the pictures in the order in which they were taken. This is why Mel felt compelled to have a “wrap up picture.” Normally at the end of the interview, participants are asked about what connections can be made between the pictures they took. For Mel, this last picture was meant to represent the connections between the previous five pictures she took for this guided subject.

**Guided Subject 3 - Work and Work Environment Interests**

For this third guided subject, Mel took two pictures. The first picture was of the sun coming through some wind chimes (the black and white, swirling picture). The second picture is
of a pyramid of bagels. It should be noted that Mel initially had different pictures for this guided subject, but the external memory stick for her camera failed and, thus, the original pictures were lost. However, she was able to retake similar pictures.

**Black and White Wind Chimes**

![Image](image.jpg)

This picture, which uses a camera filter, is of the sun peeking through a set of wind chimes which Mel has outside of her home. The picture represents Mel’s desire to work in a creative environment and her life-long love of art. Mel said “my love for art goes back to when I was little. I was like four years old and I was like, man, I'm going to be an artist when I grow up.” Mel mentioned not having a lot of work experience at this point in her life so, by seeking out a creative work environment, she can maximize the likelihood of enjoying the line of work she enters. Mel said, “Expressing myself creatively is something I’ve held near to my heart. It’s important in a workplace because I want to love my job. Being able to express myself and use my art at work would be amazing.”
Pyramid of Bagels

This picture is of a pyramid of bagels Mel made at her current job in the bakery of a department store. Mel’s primary job responsibilities are organizing products in the store and packaging. What Mel enjoys about her work is the flow of the day-to-day tasks. The work is generally fast-paced, but not so fast-paced that the work can become stressful or problematic. Mel enjoys the pace of this work environment because “it makes the day go by a lot faster.” In addition to the pace, Mel enjoys having the opportunity to see the work she accomplishes. Mel gets a strong sense of satisfaction when she sees everything she has packaged and placed out in the store in an organized fashion. Mel explained, “I really do enjoy working hard. It feels good too, you know? I’ve done cashiering as well, and it gets slow and stuff at times, and it’s really not as satisfactory.” Mel continued:

Working hard to get my job done and constantly improving myself. My manager is constantly pushing me to be faster and it’s frustrating but…when I do get faster and improve, they’re like “hey, good job” and I’m like “yes, getting better!”
In sum, Mel enjoys the fast-paced work environment of her current place of employment, enjoys the satisfaction of seeing the work she has accomplished, and continues to improve herself at her craft.

**Extra Picture**

As stated earlier, Mel had taken different pictures which were lost due to a failure in the technology where the original pictures were stored. This demonstrates the importance in providing the participants the opportunity to talk about an extra picture they would have taken because, as shown in this situation, pictures can be lost or destroyed.

If Mel could have taken an additional picture, she would have taken it of something involving volunteer work. “I suppose something I've been interested in doing is like volunteer work…being able to go out there. I don't know, even like doing foresting or something. Being able to actually get in the community and help and stuff.” Mel likes the idea of being able to give back to the community and, ideally, do something out in the forest or in nature. Mel did note that this was the most difficult theme to work on because she “does not have much work experience.” Mel describes herself as an experiential learner and, because she does not have much work experience outside of a grocery store, it is difficult for her to imagine an ideal work environment.

**Picture Connections**

The interview concluded with Mel examining what characteristics connect the pictures she took. Mel said the pictures “seem like an introvert would pick these jobs.” I asked Mel if she considers herself an introvert and she replied with “Very much so, but surprisingly, I really do enjoy customer service. I enjoy helping customers and interacting with them and helping them find what they need.” Although Mel prefers “introverted” jobs, she is not opposed to social environments. Mel explained that she could work in an environment with many people if they
were out to accomplish one thing. However, Mel also explained that she would have a difficult
time in an environment with “lots of loud people with loud ideas.” As she is a soft-spoken
individual, she feels she would not be able to share her ideas or speak out.

**Final Interview**

**Examination of Pictures**

For Mel, the characteristics connecting all of her pictures together were “creativity and
art.” In all of the themes, Mel used her creative skills as a photographer to capture her thoughts
on each theme of the PhotoVoice study. Mel desires to seek out a line of work that enables her to
use her creative gift. Throughout the PhotoVoice study, Mel has suggested finding work in deep
space photography, travel photography, and using her photography to advertise products.

Mel compared where she was when she first started the study to where she is currently, “I
suppose when I started, I didn’t know all the elements that I wanted to study, but doing this made
me think more about what I wanted [to study].” Although the PhotoVoice study helped Mel
prioritize what she wants to study, Mel is still wary about selecting a college major. Mel
explained,

College seems like such a scary step, such a final step. I want to know 100% what I want
as a career. For example, I don’t have any experience with deep space photography or
astronomy whatsoever, so it’s hard to know that’s what I want to do.

Although Mel found the PhotoVoice study beneficial in examining what she would theoretically
like in a job, Mel needs practical experience in a job to determine if it would be enjoyable for
her. Mel stated,

I know I would love to work photographing stuff in deep space, but I don't know where I
would go to do that. I don't know the specific job title, or I don't know people that are in
that job title that express it [as] such. It’s hard to know how I would feel about it unless I tried it out.

For Mel, having the opportunity to experience a work environment is pivotal in making a career decision.

**Participant Thoughts on PhotoVoice Study**

As stated earlier, Mel found that the PhotoVoice study was useful in parceling out various aspects of jobs she would enjoy. “I suppose when I started [the PhotoVoice study], I didn’t know exactly all the elements that I wanted to study, but doing this made me think about what I wanted.” When asked what stood out to her about the PhotoVoice study, Mel replied with “[The PhotoVoice study] had me think about this stuff, made me research what I want to do, and makes me work towards it. I think that’s the best element of a project like this.”

In sum, Mel feels that the PhotoVoice study was useful in helping her organize her interests for what to study in college and what type of work she is interested in, without having the physical experience of doing these jobs. That said, Mel would still prefer to have some hands-on experience with a job before officially declaring a specific area of study or career. Overall, Mel said she has a “more solid standing now.” After the final interview concluded, Mel still had a few questions about different ways to obtain first-hand experiences to help her decide on a career. Remembering my conversation with Rachel (Career Center Coordinator) and how the center can help students obtain internships and job site visits, I recommended that Mel check in with the Career Center on campus. Mel took an interest in this information and will be going to the Career Center to explore internships and job visits for careers that interest her. Before taking these steps, Mel’s first priority is graduating with her GED.
Kyle

Guided Subject 1 - Personal Interests, Hobbies, What Do You Do When Not Getting Paid

Kyle took four pictures for this first guided subject. The first is of a videogame he enjoys. The second picture is of his couch with books and a painting on top. The third picture is of a PCC planner with the words “Be Yourself” on the front, and the final picture is of the college’s food pantry where he works.

Videogame Concept Art

The first picture Kyle presented was the concept art for one of his favorite video games. For as long as Kyle can remember, he has loved video games. This video game in particular is Kyle’s current favorite, so much so that Kyle “actively writes fan fiction about the game.” Kyle stated, “I really focus on this game a lot. I really, really enjoy it because it's a post-apocalyptic sci-fi fantasy. I really like fantasy and sci-fi.” Kyle enjoys writing fan fiction because “it's really healthy for my imagination and for building my understanding of how sci-fi works, how fantasy works.” Kyle has an interest in creating video games as a means of expressing himself creatively and as a potential line of work later in life, “I really, really enjoy video games and I want to make a career out of creating them, specifically writing and designing them.”
In this picture, the first element Kyle directed me to was the painting. Kyle stated, “I have just gotten into acrylic painting, and I really like it.” Kyle went on to say that acrylic painting is an activity which he and his girlfriend do together:

We just decided to mess around and all the sudden we just threw a bunch of paint together…I think it's really fun because this acrylic painting to me is so satisfying, and it's like, a very freeing kind of expression of art because it's like you just do whatever, whatever the hell you want, whatever is fun.

Kyle then directed my attention to the books in the picture. Two of the books were of the sci-fi genre and one was a life-style book by a Yoga master. Referring to the sci-fi books, Kyle discussed his love for the creative process behind the books and their unique takes on the genre in general, “[The first and third book] are part of a series called The Wheel of Time. They really showed that not all fantasy can be redundant. There's no orcs, no elves or anything, it's like its own scape of imagination. The characters are so complex.” Much like the video game concept art, Kyle discussed his enjoyment of science fiction books. He loves the imaginative nature of the genre and the creative ways in which his favorite authors implement twists in the plotlines. “The books are just so good on the emotional curve and how diverse the characters are. The world is just so realistic; it’s amazing. I really love the series; it’s had a huge impact on me.”
Kyle takes inspiration from these books and expresses interest in continuing to write his own science fiction across a variety of mediums. The second book in the picture is called *Inner Engineering: A Yogi’s Guide to Joy*. The author, Sadhguru, is someone Kyle considers his “personal guru.” Kyle explained that, through reading the book, his mind was opened to different interpretations of the human experience, like the relationship between humans and technology, as well as the lengths humans will go to in order to seek out enjoyment. He stated:

We have so many comforts and conveniences nowadays. Our technology, it's on its way to becoming exactly the way we want, but we are not the way we want…We are hard to please. Take a monkey, for example. He can eat an apple and then he'll be fine. Just joyful, no depression, nothing, eat an apple, have a mate, fine. No problem, just live and do whatever. And dogs, as long as they can eat, drink some water, go to the bathroom and then just lay down and sleep, no problems. But human, our consciousness is too expanded for us to just care about survival anymore. Survival is not good enough. We need God, we need art, and we need so many other things.

Kyle felt that this book helped lead him to a path of improved mental and physical health, even crediting this book as one of the foundations for his interest in nutritional and environmental health. This book inspired Kyle to try to view the world through a more naturalistic lens, which played a prominent role in how Kyle examined the later themes.
This picture is of a college planner with the words “be yourself” written on the front cover. The picture represents his current frustrations with education, both personally and in the way colleges educate their students. On a personal level, Kyle feels that if he were to “be himself,” as described by the words on the planner, he would focus on other aspects of his life other than school. Kyle said, “If I want to be myself, then I have to ditch these classes that I’m ditching, because my girlfriend needs my attention, the food pantry needs my attention. My life needs my attention, you know?” Kyle expresses his issues with how colleges educates their students, stating:

[College classes] are being taught in such an irrelevant way. You are being taught this so you can get a letter grade and so you can pass this one test…Then you have to go into this harder class and you have to pass that.

Kyle went on to say the college environment is an issue for him as well; pointing out the classroom environment is “bland.” “There are white walls, lots of gray, not much color. Then they give you a big think book full of problems, which you open up and stare at. Then you write, copy, and solve these in your head.” Kyle desires more integration of the arts in education, particularly in subjects like math and science. As he views himself as having an artistic mind, he feels the current way education is taught does not apply to him. Kyle even goes as far as to say
“what I want to do is create my own school. After I create my video games, I want to create my own school that is completely different from this educational system...there is no art [integration with math and science].”

**Food Pantry**

The fourth picture Kyle presented is of the college food pantry where he works. The food pantry is operated by the college’s student leadership and exists for the purpose of providing students with food and clothes for those who are in need. Kyle took this picture to represent his desire to incorporate more fresh and nutritional food to provide to students. Kyle’s critique of the food pantry is they provide too much processed food, like instant noodles and fried crackers. “There’s not much nutritional value to it at all, really. In fact, if you eat one of these things, you probably would be worse off other than the energy it gives you.” He wants students to be more health conscious and feels that the food pantry can improve by providing students with healthier food options. Kyle stated, “What I'm doing right now is making this food pantry focus on nutrition, because I know the importance of eating healthy. It enables so much more to you than the processed stuff.” More broadly, this picture represents Kyle's interest in nutrition and health through the use of natural foods.
Extra Picture

If Kyle took an additional picture, it would have been of nature. Kyle feels a special connection to nature and feels at peace when he is outside. Kyle stated that “If you’re depressed, go be in nature...[it is a] tremendous technique of healing yourself.” Kyle believes there is too much separation between humans and nature. With the picture of the planner, Kyle mentioned the “bland” appearance of some of the college’s classrooms and his wish for plants and other types of natural life inside classrooms. “I want more plants inside the classrooms, we could have bamboo plants and flowers...if you’re around a nature, you’re just happier.”

Picture Connections

The theme connecting Kyle’s pictures is “well-being, love, expression, and consciousness.” However, Kyle believes the connections made in his pictures are not obtainable in the current college format he is experiencing. He stated:

I want to learn about so many different things, but I’m being limited by taking classes I’m not interested in...I want to be artistic, and I want to be a joyful human being, but unfortunately the social systems that we've created for each other, they don't work.

He is frustrated because he wants to learn about a wide variety of topics and feels there is not a way he can learn them without having to abide by the college format (taking pre-requisites). Kyle also craves “intimacy and friendship” from his relationships, and does not feel as though he gets that from his professors. Kyle explained what he would like to see in an educational environment:

I think there should be more of an intimate connection between a teacher and a student. In fact, in my school that I want, one of my current visions is three teachers in the same classroom, and then smaller classes so it’s a healthier environment for intimacy to form.
In these [current] classrooms, there's not much intimacy at all. This [intimacy] is something that many people need right now, like right now. I want my teachers to understand what I'm going through, my experience and why I'm doing the things I'm doing, why I'm ditching these classes, and there are so many people who are ditching classes for so many different reasons.

Kyle feels that the current college system is not meant for him and feels a strong desire to change it or find another path for himself.

Guided Subject 2 - Possible College Majors and Areas of Study

Kyle took three pictures regarding what he would like to study in college. The first picture is of food from the college’s food pantry, the second picture is of water with the reflection of trees, and the third picture is of a computer.

Processed Food

This picture is of non-perishable food in the college’s food pantry. While working in the food pantry at the college, Kyle was taken aback by the lack of fresh food the college had to offer the students. “Why are we trying to support our students with that?” Kyle commented, referring to the processed food in his picture. Ideally, the college would offer fresh fruit options, such as apples and bananas that students can easily access. Kyle stated:
To be blunt, if you eat bad, then you’re going to feel bad…Why aren't supporting [the students] with free apples? So, I eventually want to get a basket of just apples, and maybe bananas and things, and then people can literally just grab them on the go. I've actually done that a couple of times. I bought three apples and I just put them on the table, and within five minutes they're gone.

The inspiration behind this picture was to represent Kyle’s desire to study food and nutrition in college. He stated, “I really want to start studying food in college…It’s something that really interests me.”

**Water with Tree Reflection**

This picture represents Kyle’s love of nature and the environment. He took the picture in a park near his girlfriend’s house while they were out on a walk. Kyle believes humans need to take it upon themselves to protect the environment. In our interviews, Kyle often spoke of his love for “Mother Earth,” stating, “I read about pollution, and an island made of plastic, an oil spill…I remember reading about these things and I felt this aching in my heart.” Through his own research and those he met at the food pantry, Kyle said he has learned about “concepts like environmental racism and sustainability. I just really want to start studying the environment and nature.”
This picture is a carryover from the video game picture Kyle took in the first guided subject. The picture of this computer represents Kyle’s interest in studying computer science and computer programming, because those are the skills required if he wants to create his own video games. He explained, “I want to make video games. And to make a video game you've got to program, and to program you got to get on a computer and you got to learn computer science and the programming languages. I just want to make video games because I just love them.” Kyle finds that video games provide a unique and interactive way to tell a story compared to other forms of media:

I think we've explored like less than 2% of the medium of video games, the potential it has for storytelling. I have a vision that you can truly make an engrossing game like ... just as engrossing as poetry, or music, or anything. It's something that can aid in your development as a human being, like your conscious development, your conscious evolution. Because, you know, books can do that, music can really do that. Movies can do that, poetry can do that.

Kyle is also frustrated with the genres of video games currently in vogue, saying “Unfortunately, video games right now are largely reduced to just shooting and family-friendly adventure games.” Kyle also mentioned during this interview how he would want his video games or video game company to be environmentally conscious. With the amount of online
gaming platforms available, Kyle said, “I don’t want hard copies of my video games, like plastic copies and discs, because it’s plastic. There is enough plastic in the world already.”

Extra Picture

If Kyle could have taken an extra picture, it would have been of a yoga book. Yoga has always interested Kyle in not just a health conscious way, but in a spiritual way as well. Kyle says that yoga is “about designing yourself into the ultimate version of yourself, and creating the ultimate possibility for yourself. It’s not just stretching and stuff.” More broadly, Kyle said he would like to study “how to make human beings better. I see too much needless suffering and other bad things.”

Picture Connections

Kyle said if his pictures had any connections that it would be “human well-being.” More specifically, Kyle expressed a desire to educate others on how to live healthier lifestyles and about environmental awareness. One way Kyle said he would like to contribute to human well-being is to take part in creating a school that focuses on human development through healthy lifestyles and environmental sustainability.

I want to make the world better in so many different little ways. The big way is, I want to participate in creating some kind of school where these kinds of things are taught. There are people who need this. If you're living in these kinds of unhealthy environments, the school can be a place you learn to de-stone yourself; you're not a stone anymore. You know, you actually make yourself vulnerable to the existence of things around you. You stop denying the existence of things because it doesn't serve you. The narrowness of your mind really begins expanding, and you just become more emotional. So many people are not prepared for how to handle that growth.
Even if he never gets the chance to create this school, he feels he can help improve human well-being by teaching others about living healthier lifestyles and promoting environmental sustainability. Even though Kyle has mentioned several different interests regarding what he would like to study, he is hesitant to declare a major at this point.

**Guided Subject 3 - Work and Work Environment Interests**

In this third guided subject regarding interests in careers or work environments, Kyle took three pictures. The first picture is of fresh fruit, some tea, and succulent plants. The second picture is a framed picture of a tree. The third picture is of Kyle’s computer on his bed.

**Fruit**

The first picture Kyle presented is of some fresh fruit, tea, and succulent plants. This picture represents Kyle’s desire to have elements of nature in his work environment. Kyle feels, “the closer we are to nature, the closer we are to our true selves.” Kyle has spoken about “bland” classrooms and offices in previous themes, and he feels that “bamboo plants, indoor flowers, [and] succulents…would be amazing to have around.” The fruit and tea in the picture represents his desire to eat healthier and provide others with healthy food options. Whether it is working at the college food pantry or in his future video game studio, nutrition is an important element in Kyle’s life which he would like to have available in his ideal work environment. Kyle stated, “I want to have really good food in my future work environment. I always want to have a bunch of
apples, bananas, grapes, and tea everywhere for people to snack on, and other things as well, like salads.”

**Framed Tree Picture**

The second picture Kyle presented for this theme is a framed tree picture which he bought at a local marketplace. This picture represents individuality in the workplace. Kyle feels that people would more enjoy their work environment if they could add their own personal influence to the environment, “I think it would be fun for people to put up their own photography…maybe put up a couple of paintings.” Kyle also mentioned wanting his work environment to have windows peering outside, “I also want to have windows in my future working space. Windows that look out, hopefully at some trees.” Kyle also wants to work around other creative individuals. He believes that giving others the opportunities to create their own spaces could inspire creativity. Kyle explained, “It’s going to be an artistic environment. I’m going to be surrounded by artistic people…I think it’s warming to look at the creativity around you.”
This is a picture of Kyle’s bed with his computer. This picture represents Kyle’s desire to have a homelike feel to his ideal work environment. Kyle, in reference to his future video game studio said, “I’m not going to imprison myself in my video game study, but I can see myself spending a night there. I feel like I should make it like a second home.” Kyle desires to have his video game studio be a communal environment for all those who work there. He explained, “I don’t want it to be just a video game studio. I want it to be kind of like a home first, and then a video game studio.”

Extra Picture

The extra picture Kyle would have taken for this guided subject is of the Technology Support Building at PCC. This place is of interest to Kyle because of the way in which the rooms inside the building are decorated. In the second picture of this theme (the tree picture), Kyle spoke about workers having the opportunity to add their own personal touches to the décor. Kyle described the rooms in the Technology Support Building as having origami birds hanging from the ceiling, Christmas lights hanging around the room, and video game character drawings and art hanging around the workspace. Kyle explained, “[The rooms] are very festive…That’s what I want to make my office look like as well. I want to make it like a party, in addition to having nature everywhere.”
Picture Connections

The major characteristic that permeates through all of Kyle’s pictures is the desire to make his work environment feel like a second home. He explained, “I’m not going to imprison myself in my video game studio, but I can totally see myself spending a night there. I feel like I should make it a second home…In many work environments, people are their titles or positions first and humans second. I don’t want that.” This personalization to the work environment creates a sense of comfort and peace for Kyle. Kyle mentioned, “Maybe I can have a cat or something that I can bring.” The idea for bringing a pet into his ideal workspace was inspired by a local bookstore that has a resident cat living inside.

Final Interview

Examination of Pictures

After re-examining his pictures, Kyle said the main connection between all his pictures was “authenticity.” Each of these pictures represents a part of Kyle’s journey to discovering what his passions are in life, his personal truths. Collectively, the pictures represent Kyle’s journey. When asked about what he was thinking of studying in college, Kyle listed a plethora of subjects, stating:

I want to learn about food. I want to do creative writing. I want to do computer science, and I also just want to learn about history. I am really interested in history. Then yoga, I want to learn about yoga.

For Kyle, learning about a variety of topics is congruent with his desire to seek out new personal truths. In using the PhotoVoice study for finding a career congruent with his values, Kyle stated:

I guess for a major it’d be computer science. That’s how you literally make video games, programming. Then the writing is the conceptual design….I can major in computer
programming or computer science, however you want to put it, and then minor in creative writing.

At this point in the interview, the conversation shifted towards how a student navigates through college degrees. After Kyle said “I can major in computer programming and…minor in creative writing.” I mentioned that he could also double major in these two subjects, to which Kyle responded with “Double major? Really?” Kyle then admitted,

I'm not too clear about major and minors. I've never heard any specifics. I know a major is your focus and then your minor is your secondary focus. Like what you major in during college is the direction you want to go in as a career...Electives would be your side classes?

Kyle was under the impression that once he selected an area of study, he would only be allowed to take classes based on that subject, with the exception of prerequisites. He was unaware about the role of elective classes or that he would be able to take any upon selecting a specific major and minor.

As stated earlier, Kyle has a plethora of interests which he would like to study, including computers science, nutrition, creative writing, history, and yoga. Kyle was happy to learn that he can still take classes in all of these subjects, even if he were to major or minor in something different. In addition to the PhotoVoice study providing Kyle with the opportunity to explore possible areas of study and careers, the PhotoVoice study also provided Kyle the opportunity to learn about how college degrees function; in this case, he learned about how majors, minors, and electives function.
Participant Thoughts on PhotoVoice Study

Kyle enjoyed the PhotoVoice study. When asked to compare where he was before the PhotoVoice study and where he was after, Kyle stated:

Before this…there’s been a lot of educational development for me. I’ve learned so many things that I want to inquire more about. These interviews have actually been super beneficial to me because this whole process allowed me to express something that I wouldn’t have been able to express unless I did this whole thing, like what kind of job do I want and what do I want in a future work environment?…When I think about [my future work environment], I sometimes talk about it with my girlfriend, but I never really fully flesh it out and express it 100%. I think I’ve done that here pretty much, and it’s really awesome…I thought it was excellent. This is an amazing process.”

Specifically, Kyle felt the PhotoVoice study was beneficial because the process focused on his thoughts, guiding him to his answers rather than giving him answers. He explained, “This whole process, it’s invigorating because you’re asking me, personally, what I’m curious about.”

The interviews provided Kyle with the opportunity to sort out his thoughts and express his feelings about his pictures. The interviews also provided Kyle with the opportunity to learn about college, specifically in regard to majors, minors, and electives. The journey through the PhotoVoice study was important in helping Kyle parcel out what his interests and values were in searching for a career. During Kyle’s time as a GED student, he was able to take some CG (college guidance) classes. “There are these classes called CG, which are like college preparation classes. This [PhotoVoice study] could be something like that. This would be a CG class I’d love to take.” Currently, Kyle is planning on majoring in computer science and minoring in creative
writing, but also might “double major in computer science and creative writing, with a just one minor.”
Kaleb

Guided Subject 1 - Personal Interests, Hobbies, What Do You Do When Not Getting Paid

Kaleb took four pictures for the first guided subject. The first picture is of his dog, the second picture is of a city skyline, the third picture is of a concert, and the fourth picture is of his sticker collection.

Dog

Kaleb took a picture of his dog to express his love for animals. “This is my dog, Lucy. I love animals in general, but Lucy is my best friend pretty much. I've taken care of her. I wanted to add this picture for an overall love of animals.” Kaleb said that she is “a four-year-old pitbull and blue fawn breed.” The breed is similar to a pitbull, but is generally considered its own classification.
This picture is of the Seattle Skyline. Kaleb said that he took the picture while he and his friends were in Seattle: “The skyline is of Seattle, taken from Gasworks Park.” Kaleb said, [Gasworks Park] is a really cool place to go. It has a huge hill in the middle of the park, and this is pretty much the view from it. It's really great at night. I mean, honestly, this picture doesn't even do it justice. When you're there in person, it's breathtaking.

This picture represents several things to Kaleb; First, this picture represents “city life and traveling” and that he “probably wants to live in an urban setting, and wants to visit a lot of places.” Second, Kaleb loves to travel and loves to experience how “different cities have different activities and cultures.” Kaleb used this picture of his trip to Seattle in congruence with his next picture of a concert.
This picture is from Kaleb’s trip to Seattle where he attended a concert. He explained, “This was at an ASAP Rocky show.” Kaleb loves music and enjoys going to concerts. This concert in particular is of a rap artist, but Kaleb states, “I have a very broad spectrum when it comes to music. Honestly, anything but country. I’m from Georgia, but I can’t stand country music.” Kaleb admits to spending more money than he probably should on concerts, and has been known to attend “two or three a month.” Kaleb does not play any instruments since he “stopped playing the cello in seventh grade,” but he enjoys music in other ways. Kaleb enjoys making electronic music on his computer and writing lyrics: “I write music sometimes. But I'm kind of self-conscious about it, or insecure about it. So, I don't know, I don't really show anybody or record it. But in my free time, I write stuff down.” Although Kaleb is self-conscious about the music he writes, he would like to get good enough at his craft to “eventually share it with
others.” Music for Kaleb, both attending concerts and writing his own, is a hobby and provides an outlet for stress relief.

**Stickers**

Kaleb has been collecting stickers for a number of years. When he finds a sticker he likes, he peels it and places it on the mirror in his room. Kaleb said:

This is a mirror that I have at home and it's totally covered. I ran out of room on the mirror, so me and my mom started making magnets out of stickers. This way I could stick the stickers on a magnet, cut it out, put it on the refrigerator, or whatever. And it's a really good idea, because stickers are kind of permanent. When you stick something on them, you're not going to tear it off. Turning it into a magnet makes it transferable.

Kaleb’s mother was an avid scrapbooker, and Kaleb believes this is a possible explanation as to why he enjoys collecting stickers. Kaleb said he has been collecting stickers he was “about 12 or 13 years old. About 6 years or so.” What draws Kaleb to a particular sticker is creativity. Stickers
which were drawn by artists and then made into stickers are his favorite. He is (usually) able to find stickers of this variety at local shops in the cities in which he travels.

Extra Picture

Kaleb does not believe he would have taken another picture.

Picture Connections

Music and travel are the two connections Kaleb made between his pictures, stating “Both these pictures [pictures 2 and 3] are both in Seattle. Traveling and music concerts overlap.” In general, Kaleb feels each of these pictures represent something in his life that brings him joy: “Honestly, they’re really just four things that keep me going.”

Guided Subject 2 - Possible College Majors and Areas of Study

Kaleb took two pictures for the guided subject of what he would like to study. The first picture is of a wire box and the second picture is of a music-recording program displayed on a computer screen.
This picture represents Kaleb’s interest in studying a trade. After experiencing “traditional” college classes, he feels increasingly compelled to follow his father’s example and enter trade school. Speaking on the picture, Kaleb said:

Yeah, the picture is just like electrical wiring and stuff. Like I said, trade school is something I’m leaning towards. I’m probably going to go to Swan Island [a trade school] next term. I’m not really sure what trade I want to do, but there are classes [at Swan Island] to show what they offer.

Kaleb’s father is an electrician and, although Kaleb is unsure about becoming an electrician, his interest in trade school continues to grow. He explained:

My dad's an electrician, so that's kind of a starting point, maybe. I might go into that, might go into something else, but I thought this picture was a good representation of the trade school type of things that I'm looking into.
Kaleb is also interested in trade school because of how quickly he can enter the workforce: “When I get an apprenticeship going out of trade school, I’m pretty much guaranteed a job around $20 an hour or so.”

**Music Recording Program**

This picture depicts a computer program used to record music. The user of the music program can also produce music by creating beats and incorporating a variety of sounds pre-programed into the software. This program is Kaleb’s preferred method for writing music or producing beats. Kaleb thinks music would be a fun subject to study in college. However, due to the difficult nature of making a living in the music industry, Kaleb feels as though studying music would not be practical for him. He explained, “Not everybody can be successful in art, or music, or whatever. It's very subjective. But, I enjoy it; it makes me happy.” Because Kaleb views music as more of a hobby than a potential line of work, his drive to enter a trade has increased, so he can create a stable living situation, enabling him to create and play music on the side. Kaleb stated, “I wanna have something serious. I’m not just gonna put all my chips into this bag and hope music works out.” Kaleb goes on to say,
[Music] is just not so concrete, it’s not guaranteed. When I get an apprenticeship, I can make like $20 an hour right out of school, or whatever. But [with music] you have to work every single day and just get lucky, make connections, and meeting people, and all that, in the music industry. It is kind of like a coin flip with music. But, once I have something to support myself in, build a career off of, I would love to turn that into something else if the opportunity presents itself [in music].

In sum, Kaleb loves music and would be interested in studying music in college. However, for the time being, he would prefer to keep music as a hobby until he is financially stable.

**Extra Picture**

If Kaleb took an additional picture of what he would like to study in college, it would have been something from the Spanish class which he is currently taking. Kaleb has an interest in learning about other cultures and likes the idea of someday becoming bilingual. Kaleb said being bilingual will increase his marketability in finding a job, but will also “open up a lot of opportunities to communicate, meet people, and travel.” Being able to speak an additional language is another example of Kaleb valuing travel. By learning an additional language, Kaleb increases the amount of destinations in which he can travel.

**Picture Connections**

For Kaleb, each picture is a part of his story: “The connection would probably be me, as a person and individual.” Other than his personal relationship with each picture, there is not a specific aspect that connects the pictures; rather, each picture is its own story.
Guided Subject 3 - Work and Work Environment Interests

Kaleb took three pictures for this theme. The first picture is of a computer in a music studio, the second picture is of a kitchen in a restaurant, and the third picture is of a large warehouse.

Music Studio

This picture is of a computer in a music studio. This picture is also an extension of the music recording program picture that Kaleb took for the second theme. Kaleb cares deeply about music and feels strongly about the stress relief which writing music provides. The way this picture differs from the music picture in the second theme is the setting. Kaleb took this picture at his cousin’s house that has a home studio. He explained, “It's a tight home set up that my cousin has in his house. Whenever I'm with him, I'll play around on because he has all the proper equipment and stuff.” Kaleb aspires to have a studio like this one someday. In regard to how this picture connects with “work” or “work environment,” Kaleb still views music as a hobby, but he would happily take up the opportunity to make music professionally. Kaleb stated, “Like I said in the last interview, music stuff really interested me, but I want to have a solid backup plan for a career. More or less, [music] is a hobby until I can make it into something else.”
Kitchen

This picture is of a kitchen where Kaleb used to work. He explained, “This is at a place I used to work at this last summer. It's called Aji Tram. It's kind of like an Asian, Vietnamese type place, more Americanized though.” In his experience, he has been a fry cook, sous chef, and head cook on occasion. He enjoys building relationships through interactions with the chefs, store employees, and customers. Kaleb noted, “Everybody gets hungry. I could take that into my everyday life, even if I don’t pursue culinary arts. Social interaction, learning how to cook, and just applying that to everyday life.” Kaleb currently works in a kitchen and, although he likes the work, he does not feel like it is where he wants to be long term. Kaleb views working in a kitchen as a “backup plan.” Kaleb pointed out:

I don't think the culinary field would be my first choice, but it's something I'm comfortable with and something I have a lot of experience with. I've worked in a kitchen for extended periods of time before. So, it's a good backup plan.

In sum, this picture represents Kaleb’s willingness to work in a kitchen as a job he can fall back on, if being a musician or practicing a trade does not work out.
Kaleb’s third picture is of a warehouse that acts as a distribution center. His father is an electrician and was the one responsible for wiring the complex. Kaleb explains:

This is actually an Amazon warehouse. It's a million square feet, or something insane. My dad, is an electrician and he actually wired most of this place, or, he headed the operation. He's a foreman on the job, and he pretty much oversees everybody. That's something I could maybe see myself doing. Going to that Swan Island Trade Center and learning how to do stuff like this. I'm not set in stone on becoming an electrician or anything, because they have many trades in the program, but that's definitely an option.

This picture represents Kyle’s desire to enter a trade. Kaleb does not know if he wants to work in warehouse, but stated, “I would like to work with my hands. I’m a technical person, and I like to put things together.”
Extra Picture

If Kaleb could have taken a final picture, it would be of his mother’s place of employment. Kaleb’s mother works with individuals whom require additional support in their day-to-day lives. Kaleb explains,

My mom hangs out with the people she helps all day, takes them around town, and does other stuff with them. I love working with people and the social interactions, helping people in need and all that. Maybe some sort of situation like a home where I can go and help out…Just helpful at heart. Getting that good feeling from helping somebody, that’s a great thing.

It is evident from the conversations with Kaleb that his parents play a major role in his life and he admires their individual work.

Picture Connections

Kaleb pointed out that the one major connection between his pictures is “social interactions.” Kaleb enjoys social interactions and finds the prospect of working with others in some capacity appealing: “I’m a very social person. When I moved elementary schools, my teacher told my parents that ‘you wouldn’t even know Kaleb is a new kid. He talks to everybody.’ I’m a social butterfly.” Regardless of which line of work Kaleb enters, he knows that he will be happy as long as he is able to work with and help others.

Final Interview

Examination of Pictures

After examining his pictures, Kaleb felt what connected all of his pictures was himself. “It’s like a spider-web. I’m at the center and these things are like the web around me.” For Kaleb, life is an adventure and he is “figuring it out as I go along.” As of now, Kaleb will be
attending a trade school starting next term (spring 2018). Although he is unsure as to which trade he will pursue, he knows a trade is the career direction he wants. The appeal of a trade school comes in the form of being promised a job right out of school. Kaleb stated, “I like the idea of being able to get a job right out of college…I’m not sure if I want to go to four-year university or anything. I just want to get a job, start working and making money.” Kaleb also acknowledges that he can return to college later on in life if he desires a career change: “I can always come back to take more classes, or pursue something else if I wanted to.” A trade also appeals to Kaleb because of his father’s influence as an electrician. He explained, “I just want to do something with the time I have now. My dad, he did not start becoming an electrician until he was 30 years old. Imagine if he started when he was 20.” Kaleb is very close with his family and he values his father’s input. This played a large role in Kaleb’s decision to attend trade school.

**Participant Thoughts on PhotoVoice Study**

Kaleb said he found the PhotoVoice study useful in that, “It helped me visualize all the things I want to do, what my options were. Even though I’m not set in stone [on a trade], it helped me push towards that direction.” Before the PhotoVoice project began, Kaleb admits he was already planning to attend trade school, but believes the PhotoVoice study could really benefit those who are unsure about an area of study or career. Kaleb stated, “I think [the PhotoVoice study] is good and it would be helpful for a lot of people. I have a few ideas and directions for me personally, but there are a lot of people who have no idea.” For Kaleb, the PhotoVoice study was useful in helping him organize and visualize his interests, studies, and job options. Even though Kaleb was already leaning towards trade school, the PhotoVoice study provided him with the confidence to push in that direction. Currently, Kaleb plans to attend trade school in the spring of 2018.
Staff Thoughts of PhotoVoice Study

After the final interviews with the student participants, I spoke with the academic professionals about the PhotoVoice study. The goal was to follow up with the same academic professionals who helped cultivate the guided subjects to the study and obtain their thoughts on what transpired. This section will address the second research question: “How viable is the PhotoVoice method as a tool that can be incorporated into college academic advising? Before each of the following interviews took place, I explained in detail what transpired with each of the student participants. Specifically, I explained the students’ backgrounds and their thoughts on a major/career before starting the PhotoVoice study. Then I explained the pictures the participants took regarding the guided subjects, and finally their current thoughts on a major/career after the PhotoVoice study.

Rachel

Rachel liked that the PhotoVoice study created a visual product which the students could look back on. Speaking about Gabi, Rachel said, “It coalesced in terms of the student being able to get a clear direction in what she wants to do in pretty timely steps.” Even for students like Kaleb, who might not arrive at a specific conclusion, Rachel said,

Even for the student who didn’t come to a resolution or a decision, I feel like this gives him a really great visual that he may look back on in three months or a year and may be ready at that point to interpret this information differently.

In regard to the use of this PhotoVoice study on a college campus, Rachel pointed out it could be useful in a number of ways:

Career counseling isn’t using anything like this right now. It could be an interesting idea to share with the folks in career counseling and other staff who teach career-planning
classes. This could be an interesting exercise or activity that they could do and incorporate it into the class.

The classes Rachel is referring to are the college guidance classes (often referred to as CG classes). CG classes can cover a variety of topics, including college study skills, resume building, and test-taking strategies, among others. Academic advisors, counselors, and other academic professionals often teach CG classes.

Rachel had one critique about the PhotoVoice study in the form of time commitment. Rachel explained,

I think the challenge with the Career Center model is [the PhotoVoice study] requires the student to make a time commitment, and to follow-up. I think they're much more inclined to do that in a classroom setting and/or with a counselor that they're seeing for a certain number of sessions. In the Career Center, the way it works here [at a community college], versus maybe a four-year university, students come in here once or twice for tools, resources, and information. It would be unlikely if we share this as an activity for them to do, that we would get to follow-up with them doing what this asks them to do. I see that more playing out in a class and in those counseling sessions.

This PhotoVoice study required five separate meetings with each of the participants. This time commitment is not practical for the Career Center. However, if a student were to do this PhotoVoice study in a class or with a counselor, they could take their findings to the Career Center for additional support. Rachel used Gabi’s story as an example:

She could come in here and say “hey, this is an area I'm thinking about.” Then we could work with her to do career research into those different directions. If she wanted to revisit, possibly, that track, we could look at those career options with her so she could
see, if I went this direction, here's what the job opportunities are looking like. This is the pay that I can expect to make, versus comparing that to the IA role, and what that looks like. Learning more in-depth, then, about these ideas that she's come up with would be something that we would work with.

The PhotoVoice study can be a useful tool for Career Center advisors to help further guide students to a career and area of study.

**Lynda**

After reviewing the findings of the PhotoVoice study, Lynda found the PhotoVoice study interesting as an additional method to help broaden undecided students’ career interests. In Lynda’s experience as an academic advisor, undecided students are often referred to the Career Center to make inquiries to help them decide on a career path. Lynda stated:

I see [PhotoVoice] working for those students for whom the standard approach of taking online inventories and assessments might not be ideal. Many students are referred from academic advising to the Career Center to do career exploration and to do these online inventories and to do some of the card sorts. In some cases, the students will come back and say, "You know, it just didn't feel like that experience changed anything for me, gave me any new ideas." In some cases, students come back and say, "It just reaffirmed what I've already been thinking, that I'm really interested in art, but I still don't have any new ideas about how to use that."

Lynda noted that the PhotoVoice study takes a more comprehensive approach to helping students decide on a career or area of study.

I think this approach [PhotoVoice] is one that could inspire students in a different way, you know? I think that maybe some of the approaches that we use now are a bit static,
and this is pretty kinetic in terms of helping students to think more broadly beyond just being in a classroom or going to college or getting a degree, more broadly in terms of what are the things in my life that make a difference to me right now? What do those things look like? How do they all fit together? And the photographic evidence of these things in their lives, I think this is a fantastic idea.

Lynda continued,

I wonder if there is something about the use of imagination and participating in this, so it's not just clicking the boxes on the computer, or you're sorting through the cards, or you're listening to a lecture. It's really using this tool, the camera, and imagining your life and taking pictures of things that you imagine your life could be or your career could be. There's energy in that, and there's a certain level of autonomy in that. It's very participatory in a way that some of the other things are not.

By the students immersing themselves in the PhotoVoice process, they begin to see themselves in the various careers they envision. Lynda also noted how the PhotoVoice study helped build student confidence in their decision-making, even if the PhotoVoice study led them to a conclusion they were already considering. In reference to Kaleb’s PhotoVoice study, Lynda noted,

When we send students to the Career Center, they sometimes return saying “oh, they told me something I already knew.” And then, there’s this sort of deflated feeling in many of these cases because “it didn’t help me.” I sense though, that your student [Kaleb] who participated in this who did have an idea of what he wanted to do was affirmed in the fact that this is the thing after all, but then did not walk away deflated by that. He walked away with confidence.
Although Kaleb is unsure about which trade he wants to enter, the PhotoVoice study helped to give him a “push in that direction.”

Similar to Rachel, Lynda has concerns about the “scalability” of the PhotoVoice study. As an academic advisor who only meets with students once or twice a term, the project size of the PhotoVoice study is not practical to complete. Lynda recommended the PhotoVoice study be offered as a CG course for undecided students or as an interdisciplinary project.

I can see this working as maybe a partnership between disciplines and the CG department, ideally, within a place like the Art Department. You know, there are digital photography classes on campus. Maybe there is an instructor of one of those digital photography classes or just photography classes in general that might be interested in working out of a curriculum specific to this population to this concern, you know?

In regards to other uses of the PhotoVoice study, Lynda suggested using the PhotoVoice study to discover perceptions of the student body. For example, Lynda pointed out that colleges, particularly community colleges, are looking very closely at completion rates:

Why aren’t more students completing certificates and degrees at the community college level? The data that exists are showing that there’s work to do around that. But where do you start? How do you discern what it is that would help students’ complete degrees and certificates?

In sum, Lynda feels the PhotoVoice study could be an additional tool used to help students decide on areas of study and careers. In addition, she feels PhotoVoice could be used in other ways to help the college answer critical questions about the perception of the student body.
Marlo

After seeing the findings to the PhotoVoice study, Marlo’s immediate observation was how the PhotoVoice study helped students form a series of steps in their educational and career goals. Marlo equated these steps to the students creating a checklist as they moved through the PhotoVoice study:

I thought the results of [the PhotoVoice study] were terrific…When I think about why it's difficult for students to identify a career or an area they want to go into because, when you identify the next step, then the step you are on becomes obsolete. You know? Like [when] you finish your GED, you can feel really good and think "I got that done, I'm a success." Then, as soon as you identify, "Okay this is what I'm going to move to next" the protective cloak of, "I finished my GED" is taken off and now you have a new goal. And for some of our students, it's been quite a while since they felt good about achieving something.

As stated earlier, Marlo works directly with three of the PhotoVoice student participants taking part in the study, specifically Gabi, Kyle, and Kaleb. A common thread among most GED students is the lack of success in educational settings which, thus, makes college appear unobtainable. The PhotoVoice study creates a sense of the tangibility of college for these GED students as they create educational goals for themselves. For GED students in particular, creating small, attainable goals and scaffolding these goals into larger achievements is important. Marlo explained that these smaller goals could be something small like showing up to class every day or passing a practice test, then one of the real GED tests, all four of their GED tests, and then taking one or two college classes and passing those. Marlo explained, “Each goal needs to be smaller because [GED students] are more successful if we can break goals down into smaller
units… The smaller these accomplishments, the sooner they can feel good about completing a goal, and that’s important.” In regard to the students that Marlo advises in the PhotoVoice study, Marlo said,

When I saw the end of your project, I was thrilled with Gabi and her decision to become an Instructional Assistant. I felt like Kaleb's also has a good match for him, especially after what Kaleb and I have talked about in our meetings. About the things that he wanted, like being in a profession where he can have a living wage, being able to move around the country if he needs to or wants to, being able to always have employment. For Kaleb and Gabi, the PhotoVoice study was important in creating a vision for their next set of goals to achieve; for Gabi, it was deciding to become an Instructional Assistant and enroll in the college’s two-year, para-education program once she graduates with her GED. For Kaleb, it was creating a clear vision for his goal of entering a trade school, and then selecting a trade for a career. Marlo continued, “I think [the PhotoVoice study] is a non-threatening, creative way to get students to start thinking about what is important to them, and I think this could get them to start thinking about college in a gentle way.”

A recommendation which Marlo put forth as a possible application for the PhotoVoice study is to incorporate it into the GED curriculum and use the PhotoVoice study during lab time. The GED classes are usually three hours per class, two to four times a week. Attached to each of these classes is an hour-long lab, either before or after the class. The labs offer students opportunities to catch up on work, prepare for upcoming classes, or take their practice exams. Marlo believes these labs could also be a good opportunity to conduct the PhotoVoice study with the students:
For our GED students, I think [the PhotoVoice study] would be a great project to do during lab time one day a week, and sort of have this PhotoVoice be something that they do over the course of the term, where you have them a little bit once a week to start pulling these things together [for what to do after the GED program].

Marlo also feels the PhotoVoice study would be well received as a CG class in college or in “high school or in the transitions from high school to college.” Essentially, this would involve having the PhotoVoice study act as a foundation for students to build their college careers.

**Research Question Review**

This next section is meant to break down what was learned between the three research questions. The three research questions were: First, what was the experience of the student participants using the PhotoVoice study as a method for helping them to decide on an area of study and/or career path? How have the students found success? Does the PhotoVoice study open new perspectives for the students or reinforce the old views? Second, how viable is the PhotoVoice method as a tool that can be incorporated into college academic advising? Third, how have I evolved during this dissertation process? What was my intellectual journey and what does it mean to me? I opted to explain these in a list-style fashion, as it helped keep my thoughts organized.

**What Was the Experience of the Student Participants using the PhotoVoice Study to Select an Area of Study and/or Career Path?**

This section will look at the first research question and examine two sub-questions: How have students found success? And does the PhotoVoice study open new perspectives for students or reinforce old views? As a reminder, “success,” in the context of this study, is defined through three themes cultivated from “strengths-based advising.” These themes which define success are
confidence/self-esteem, self-motivation, and acquisition of new knowledge/future options (Schreiner & Anderson, 2005). “Old views,” in this study, refers to the thoughts that the student participants had about what to study in college, and what careers interested them (if any) prior to the PhotoVoice study. These old views were determined during the initial interviews with each student participant.

**Student Participant Success**

Success for the student participants was examined using three themes found within strengths-based advising. These themes are confidence/self-esteem, self-motivation, and acquisition of new knowledge/future options (Schreiner & Anderson, 2005). These themes provide a lens to examine the student participant interviews and the varying levels of “success” they were able to find. While examining the student participant interviews, a fourth theme emerged, which was the “surfacing of fears.” At different points in the PhotoVoice process, participants reflect on their personal histories, which can create the chance of having to relive unpleasant experiences (Strack, Magill, & Mcdonagh, 2004).

**Confidence/Self-Esteem**

Confidence and self-esteem, in the context of this study, focuses on how positive the student feels about their outlook on college. Does the student feel good about their educational direction and choices? Did the PhotoVoice study instill any confidence within the student? All of the student participants who took part in this PhotoVoice study reported some level of increased confidence and self-esteem. Prior to taking part in the PhotoVoice study, Gabi’s confidence in her ability to be a student was minimal, even referring to herself as a “failure” or “the bad kid” because her sisters were succeeding in school. After the PhotoVoice study, Gabi reported that the
study made her feel like she was not a failure, but rather that the traditional K-12 path of high school to college just was not for her. Gabi stated,

"Coming to these [GED] classes and doing this study has made me realize that I'm not a failure. Some kids just aren't good at high school. It's too hard for them, and that was me. Really, I think that this study is a really cool thing to help kids because I never would have thought that doing something like this would help me figure out what I want to do with the rest of my life, but it did. It really affected me, so I like this a lot."

Mel found a boost in her confidence and self-esteem through the PhotoVoice study, as it helped her to organize her thoughts on possible areas of study and what type of work she is interested in. When comparing where Mel was when she first started the PhotoVoice study to where she is now, Mel stated,

"I suppose when I started [the PhotoVoice study] I didn't know exactly all of the elements that I wanted to study, but doing this made me think more about what I wanted. Where I am now, I believe I have a better idea."

Overall, Mel feels that she has a “more solid standing now,” compared to where she was prior to the PhotoVoice study.

For Kyle, having the opportunity to discuss his pictures at the end of each guided subject was also important to his self-esteem. Kyle stated, “This whole process, it’s invigorating because you’re asking me personally, what I’m curious about.” The PhotoVoice study provided an outlet for Kyle to express himself and organize what he values in his educational and career goals.

Kaleb said he found the PhotoVoice study useful in that, “It helped me visualize all the things I want to do, what my options were. Even though I’m not set in stone [on a trade], it helped me push towards that direction.” One of the concerns about this PhotoVoice study was
that it reinforces old views, rather than provide new ideas. Although this was the case with Kaleb, reinforcing his previous plan (his old views) was a positive. Kaleb felt the PhotoVoice study led him in the direction he was already going, and now can go in that direction with confidence. Although Kaleb admitted he was already planning to attend trade school, he believes that the PhotoVoice study could really benefit those who are unsure about an area of study or career. Kaleb stated, “I think [the PhotoVoice study] is good, and it would be helpful for a lot of people. I have a few ideas and directions for me personally, but there are a lot of people who have no idea.”

**Self-Motivation/Exploration of Next Steps**

Self-motivation, in the context of this study, focuses on the student’s drive to push forward in their educational journey and their involvement in their major/career decision-making process. All four participants who took part in this study found an increase in their motivation to explore their college and career options.

Gabi found the PhotoVoice study to be a remedy for her tendency to procrastinate. Speaking about the PhotoVoice study and how it motivated her to look at college majors and careers, Gabi stated,

> I loved it. It made me think about the next step of my life. I've always been the person to put it off. Like when I was a freshman, I messed around in school a lot, went partying, didn't care about my schooling. I was like, "Oh, I'm a freshman. It's okay." I think that this [PhotoVoice study] really made me realize that, "Oh crap." I have to get my stuff together. I have to figure out what I'm going to do for the rest of my life. I'm 18, I'm an adult. I have to live the rest of my life. I can't live at home forever. I think this [PhotoVoice study] made me think about taking that next step in life.
Mel noted that the PhotoVoice study motivated her to do her own research on college majors and careers, even noting that this was best part of the project for her. When asked what stood out to her about the PhotoVoice study, Mel replied with, “[The PhotoVoice study] had me think about this stuff [college majors and careers]. It made me research what I want to do, and makes me work towards it. I think that’s the best element of a project like this.”

For Kyle, he found motivation to examine his educational and career goals though the boost in confidence and self-esteem he received through taking part in the PhotoVoice study. While examining where he was prior to the PhotoVoice study and after, Kyle noted,

There’s been a lot of educational development for me. I’ve learned so many things that I want to inquire more about. These interviews have actually been super beneficial to me because this whole process allowed me to express something that I wouldn’t have been able to express unless I did this whole thing, like what kind of job do I want and what do I want in a future work environment…When I think about [future work environment], I sometimes talk about it with my girlfriend but I never really fully flesh it out and express it 100%. I think I’ve done that here and it’s really awesome…I thought it was excellent. This is an amazing process.

In much of the same way the Kyle found motivation through the confidence he gained using the PhotoVoice study, Kaleb found motivation to carry on with his original plan to enter trade school and (potentially) become an electrician through the boost in confidence and self-esteem he gained. Kaleb felt the PhotoVoice study “helped me push towards that direction.”

In each of these cases, the PhotoVoice student participants found that, by taking part in the study, they were motivated to examine their career and educational goals. It should be noted that these two themes (confidence/self-esteem and self-motivation/exploration of next steps) are
very closely connected and can be considered direct results of each other. As the student participants more closely examined their interests and how they connect to possible areas of study and careers, there was a boost in their confidence and self-esteem, which resulted in the participants feeling more motivated to explore areas of study and potential careers.

**Acquisition of New Knowledge/Future Major and Career Options**

Acquisition of new knowledge/future major and career options examines what information the student has gained from the PhotoVoice study and how to potentially put that information to use. Throughout this PhotoVoice study, students encountered new information in the forms of new career paths, college resources, and degree obtainment processes. This theme was present with three out of the four participants: Gabi, Mel, and Kyle.

Once Gabi completed the PhotoVoice study, she encountered new information about a degree and career that fit with her desire to work in special education. After Gabi and I finished her final interview, she was eager to show Mark and Marlo (two of the academic professionals) what she came away with from the PhotoVoice study. As Gabi explained her desire to study special education and eventually become a special education teacher, she noted her fears in the amount of school she would have to take to obtain a job in this field. Mark then asked Gabi if she would be interested in becoming an instructional assistant (also known as an IA). At the time, Gabi was unsure of what an IA was. After explaining to Gabi that an IA is an individual who works in a special educational classroom and provides support for the students and the teacher, she was very interested. Furthermore, Gabi was excited to learn that PCC offers a two-year, associate degree in special education. After discovering this information, Gabi’s confidence in her decision grew, as she could achieve her goal of working in special education without needing to attend four to six years of college right away. Additionally, Gabi was excited about the
prospect of returning to school after working as an IA for a few years, as many school districts often provide funds to help their employees obtain additional certifications and degrees. Sadly, as this took place after the PhotoVoice study concluded, I was unable to record the event. That said, this example is a depiction of what would ideally happen after a PhotoVoice study concludes, when the participant can take what they learned about themselves from the study and discuss their findings with an advisor or other college entity who can provide contextual information for the student on their next step in their college/career journey.

For Mel, she gained additional knowledge through the PhotoVoice study by learning about the Career Center. As stated previously, Mel believes the best way for her to determine what to study in college or what she wants in a career is to gain some hands-on experience before making a choice. With this in mind, Mel still had a few questions about different ways to obtain first-hand job experience after the final interview concluded. Like Gabi, this was not something I expected to happen and, thus, it was not recorded with my audio device. I told Mel about my experience with Rachel in the Career Center. Mel learned that the Career Center can provide her with a variety of internships and job site visits, so she can gain some hands-on job experience. Mel was encouraged by this information and plans on visiting the Career Center after graduating with her GED.

The third student who acquired new knowledge by taking part in the PhotoVoice study was Kyle. In his final interview for the PhotoVoice study, Kyle learned about the different avenues one can take on their journey to obtaining a degree. After Kyle said, “I can major in computer programming and…minor in creative writing,” I mentioned that he could also double major in these two subjects, to which Kyle responded with “Double major? Really?” Kyle then admitted,
I'm not too clear about major and minors. I've never heard any specifics. I know a major is your focus and then your minor is your secondary focus. Like what you major in during college is the direction you want to go in as a career...Electives would be your side classes?

Before the PhotoVoice study, Kyle believed that once he selected an area of study, he would only be allowed to take classes centered on that subject with the exception of prerequisites. He was unaware about the role of elective classes, or that he would be able to take any upon selecting a specific major and minor. As Kyle has a desire to take classes on a variety of subjects, he was pleased to find out that he would still have that opportunity, even after selecting a specific area of study.

**Surfacing of Fears**

“Surfacing of Fears” refers to acknowledging concerns the students participants may have experienced as a result of taking part in the PhotoVoice study. As participants are expected to examine themselves through their personal and educational backgrounds, the possibility exists for the students to experience discomfort and distress as a result of having to relive negative experiences through memory (Strack, Magill, & Mcdonagh, 2004).

In this PhotoVoice study, there were two instances of students expressing fears they have about their education. In Gabi’s case, she was concerned about attending college because of her negative experience as student in her past. Gabi noted,

I'm iffy about [college and graduate school] because I'm not very good at school. I would be afraid that I would get myself into something like [becoming a special education teacher] then I would be in school for a crap-ton of years or I would fail. It’s really scary thinking about the whole going to college thing because I sucked at high school. High
school wasn't for me. I never thought I was going to go to college until I got into this [GED] program. I guess I'm more afraid of failing, so I'm scared.

Mel is still wary about selecting a college major. Mel explains,

College seems like such a scary step, such a final step. I want to know 100% what I want as a career. For example, I don’t have any experience with deep space photography or astronomy whatsoever, so it’s hard to know that’s what I want to do.

Gabi’s and Mel’s fears surfaced while taking part in this PhotoVoice study because they were asked to examine their pasts, which in turn, can bring about anxiety for the future. As Gabi had negative experiences with school in her past, the thought of attending more school to reach her career goals was a scary thought. For Mel, her concerns of not knowing what to study in college are connected to her uncertainty around what job/career to pursue. Mel desires to have hands-on work experience to contribute to her school/career decision, which the PhotoVoice project was unable to provide.

**Does the PhotoVoice Study Provide New Perspectives or Reinforce Old Views?**

This question aims at examining a critique of the PhotoVoice process, which states that participants are at risk of feeling a “loss of empowerment” and can develop a sense of “hopelessness” if the PhotoVoice process does not bring about a level of understanding or change (Strack, Magill, & Mcdonagh, 2004). Gabi, Mel, and Kyle were exposed to new perspectives. For Gabi, she developed an interest in becoming a special education instructor. Gabi noted that, “When I was in middle school, I did peer tutoring. I like being able to, I’ve said this so many times, help others.” Although the PhotoVoice study provided Gabi with some new perspectives on how her values can connect with a career (helping others in special education), Gabi knows she would have to obtain, at minimum, a four-year degree in order to become a
special education teacher. For Gabi, the thought of obtaining a four-year degree is really daunting because she has not experienced much success in an educational setting. While the PhotoVoice study did provide Gabi with some new perspectives in terms of college and career choices, it also illuminated some concerns she has. Although Mel did not walk away from the PhotoVoice study with a decided area of study and career choice, she found that the PhotoVoice study placed her in a position to prioritize what she values. The PhotoVoice study allowed Mel to examine what she values in a work environment, and to look for possible work studies or internships that include her values. Kyle was exposed to new knowledge regarding the functionality of obtaining a college degree. Before the PhotoVoice study, Kyle was under the impression that once a major is selected, the student would only be allowed to take classes surrounding that major. As Kyle values having the ability to study a variety of subjects, Kyle was happy to learn that he would still be allowed to take electives throughout college, and even double major or minor in a different subject if he desired to. This new information gave Kyle a more positive outlook on college, and exposed him to an academic freedom he did not know existed prior to taking part in the PhotoVoice study.

Kaleb, however, went into the PhotoVoice study with a general sense of what his future plans were, but wanted to explore his options. To reiterate the second part of the research question: “Does the PhotoVoice study open new perspectives for the students or reinforce the old views?” Whereas Gabi, Kyle, and Mel were “exposed to new ideas,” Kaleb fell more into the category of “reinforced old views.” Reinforcing old views can either be positive or negative, depending on the student. Lynda, an academic advisor, stated, “When we send students to the Career Center, they sometimes return saying ‘oh, they told me something I already knew.’ And then, there’s this sort of deflated feeling in many of these cases.” In Kaleb’s case, however,
coming to the same conclusion after the PhotoVoice study gave him confidence moving forward, stating, “Even though I’m not set in stone [on a trade], [the PhotoVoice study] helped me push towards that direction.” This was also evident to Lynda:

I sense though, that your student [Kaleb] who participated in this who did have an idea of what he wanted to do was affirmed in the fact that this is the thing after all, but then did not walk away deflated by that. He walked away with confidence.

Kaleb found affirmation in his PhotoVoice journey with his decision to attend Swan Island and pursue a trade. Even though Kaleb’s old views were reinforced, he had a positive experience taking part in the PhotoVoice study.

**How Viable is the PhotoVoice Method as a Tool That Can be Incorporated into College Academic Advising?**

This question was explored with the academic professionals at PCC. The academic professionals really enjoyed what the PhotoVoice study was able to produce. Rachel liked the PhotoVoice study’s ability to provide students with “some academic direction” and “a visual item to look back on” if they were not ready to make a commitment to a major or career at the conclusion of the PhotoVoice study. Lynda appreciated the PhotoVoice study’s ability to “inspire students in a different way” and that,

Some of the approaches that we use now are bit static, and [the PhotoVoice study] is pretty kinetic in terms of helping students to think more broadly beyond just being in a classroom or going to college or getting a degree, more broadly in terms of what are the things in my life that make a difference to me right now? What do those things look like? How do they all fit together? And the photographic evidence of these things in their lives, I think this is a fantastic idea.
Marlo was excited about her students’ experiences with the PhotoVoice project:

I thought the results of [the PhotoVoice study] were terrific… When I saw the end of your project, I was thrilled with Gabi and her decision to become an Instructional Assistant. I felt like Kaleb's also has a good match for him [going into a trade].

Additionally, Marlo also felt that the PhotoVoice study is a “Non-threatening, creative way to get students to start thinking about what is important to them, and I think this could get them to start thinking about college in a gentle way.”

Although the academic professionals appreciate what the PhotoVoice study can do for students in terms of college major and career planning, applying it to academic or career advising can be difficult. The primary issue that was brought up by the academic professionals is the “scalability” of the PhotoVoice study. The PhotoVoice study, as currently constructed, requires five separate meetings with students over the course of a few weeks. For academic and Career Center advisors who only meet with students once or twice a term, it is unlikely a project of this scale could be done effectively. Rachel pointed out that, “This [PhotoVoice study] requires the student to make a time commitment and to follow up… [In the Career Center], students come in here once or twice for tools, resources, and information.” Rachel continued, “It would be unlikely if we share this as an activity for them to do, that we would get to follow-up with them doing what this asks them to do.” Marlo and Lynda feel that a project of this size would have to take place in an environment where the person running the project can meet with students a number of times throughout a term.

To incorporate the PhotoVoice study into a college environment, the academic professionals recommended several ideas. First, the PhotoVoice project could be the centerpiece to a college guidance (or CG) course. Rachel said “I see [the PhotoVoice study] playing out in a
class…This could be an interesting exercise or activity that [the students] could do and incorporate into the class.” In addition to working as a class in the CG department, Lynda noted that a project such as PhotoVoice could function as an interdisciplinary project as well:

I can see this working as maybe a partnership between disciplines and the CG department, ideally, within a place like the Art Department. You know, there are digital photography classes on campus. Maybe there an instructor of one of those digital photography classes or just photography classes in general that might be interested in working out of a curriculum specific to this population to this concern, you know?

Marlo felt the PhotoVoice project could be implemented as part of the GED class curriculum in a very similar fashion to how I conducted this study. Marlo noted,

For our GED students, I think [the PhotoVoice study] would be a great project to do during lab time one day a week, and sort of have this PhotoVoice be something that they do over the course of the term, where you have them a little bit once a week to start pulling these things together [for what to do after the GED program].

The creation of a class with the PhotoVoice study being the centerpiece was the prevailing idea behind its use on college campuses. There were a few other ideas as well.

Other ideas about using the PhotoVoice study on college campuses include having it be a tool for the college counseling departments and a method for working with students to examine questions the colleges might have about its students. Lynda mentioned the idea of discussing the PhotoVoice study with the College Counseling Department. It should be noted, the College Counseling Department is somewhat separate from the Academic/Career Center Department. Whereas the academic advisors and Career Center advisors work with the general student population and meet with students for about twenty to thirty minutes, the counselors have a
caseload of students they will meet with on a more regular basis, usually four to six times per term for up to an hour at a time. The counseling department focuses more on student well-being/mental health and helps students handle personal situations that may or may not be related to school. The counselors also handle career advising for students who need help beyond what is offered by academic advisors and Career Center advisors. The college counselors will often teach career guidance classes as well. Lynda pointed out that, in reference to students who have struggles outside of just school,

Some student might need to sit down with a counselor to do some more unpacking… We [academic advisors] are more practical. You come in and tell us, "I'm lost and I need help figuring out how to do X?" But for those students who come in and they're almost done [with school], and say, "I just don't know which way to go" and there's no clear answer for that student from an advisor, that student might require help evaluating how he's thinking [with a counselor]… There are so many different things that trigger that undecidedness. A student might say, "I wanted to go into engineering, but I'm taking these math classes, and I can't survive in math" or "My mom found out that I was taking all these art classes and they don't want to keep paying for me to go to school to take art classes, and now I have all these art classes. What do I do?" There's usually some kind of trigger or some other thing that's happening, some way of thinking that needs to be unpacked, and that's not what advisors really do. That's what the counselors do.

Because students meet several times a term with the college counselors, projects like the PhotoVoice study are better suited in these environments than in general advising. Rachel noted that, “Career counseling isn’t using anything like this right now. It could be an interesting idea to share with the folks in [general] counseling and other staff who teach career-planning classes.”
Lynda also suggested using the PhotoVoice study to discover perceptions of the student body. For example, Lynda pointed out that colleges, particularly community colleges, are looking very closely at completion rates:

Why aren’t more students completing certificates and degrees at the community college level? The data that exists are showing that there’s work to do around that. But where do you start? How do you discern what it is that would help students complete degrees and certificates?

Overall, using the PhotoVoice study on a college campus makes the most sense in a classroom setting, either in a CG class or in an interdisciplinary manner with another subject. Additionally, the PhotoVoice study could also be used by the college counseling department, as they work closely with a number of undecided students, and by the college to answer questions about the experiences their students are having.

**How Have I Evolved During this Dissertation Process? What was My Intellectual Journey and What Does it Mean to Me?**

When examining my personal growth throughout this dissertation process, my growth was most evident in understanding my positionality. The growth was apparent in not just my understanding of my positionality within the research, but also as a white male conducting the research. This realization of my own social identity and its role in the research has been continuous throughout this process – even as I write this. When I first started this journey, I struggled to understand how my being a white male was connected to this research, especially when there was not an obvious racial component. The only racial component I considered at the time was that the participants, both student and professional, are mostly of a different race and/or gender than I and, thus, they may experience the world differently. At the time, I did not
understand how my position as a white male conducting the research was connected to the research process, let alone the power I wielded while writing the dissertation using the participants’ voices. This was generally my mindset throughout the writing of my initial dissertation draft.

My perspective on my positionality shifted during the editing process of the dissertation. There were two events in particular that initiated this shift: My misunderstanding of “member checks,” which sparked a larger examination of my own understanding of participant voice, and examining the lens in which my participants saw me. The first shift happened when I misunderstood “member check.” Originally, I thought member checks were done with “fellow researchers” and, thus, my mind went to my classmates and doctoral committee. However, the “fellow researchers” in these member checks were my participants. Looking back on this now, I ask myself: “Why did I do this?” Why was I so quick to assume that the “member checks” were my classmates and professors and not my participants in the study? I believe the answer is centered on my lack of self-confidence as a student. Even though I have exceeded well beyond my scholarly expectations for myself when I first started college, I still have doubts about my capabilities as a student/researcher. These doubts harken back to my high school days when, like my student participants in the study, I did not experience a lot of success. When I think about my initial understanding of “member checks,” I assumed it was a way for my classmates and my professors to hold me accountable to make sure I was doing the research in the right way. Looking back on this event now, my lack of self-confidence as a student did play a role in how this research was carried out, which I critique in the sixth chapter as a consideration on how to improve on this research in future studies. Although I believe that my misunderstanding of whom the “members” were in a “member check” was a simple misunderstanding, it was this
misunderstanding that made me reevaluate my participants’ roles in the research and sparked a greater understanding of providing a voice to the participants.

The second event that initiated my understanding of my positionality was when I was asked by my committee to examine my student participants’ perspectives through their “lens.” By examining the research through my student participants’ lens, it enabled me to examine the research, and my positionality, in a way that I had not previously considered. The first example I discovered while examining myself was as an “insider researcher.” When I began my college career, I was an undecided student, much like the student participants in this study. This commonality places me in a unique position as an “inside” or “insider researcher.” An insider researcher is the role in which the researcher is also a member of the population taking part in the study (Kanuha, 2000). As great as it is to relate to my student participants, I had to acknowledge that this could also be problematic. The possibility exists that either I or my participants made assumptions about the similarities of our schooling experiences, and thus failed to explain our schooling experiences fully because we assumed the other knew exactly what the other meant with any given statement (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). By looking through the lens of my participants, I learned that each position I embodied within the research came with a coinciding duality.

Though a series of self-examinations and guidance from my doctoral committee, I began to examine how some of the philosophies I discussed, in relation to PhotoVoice, relate to me. Through this self-examination, I eventually came to the point where I had to more specifically examine myself as a white male.
CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS

In this final chapter, I present possible future research considerations, possible implementations, and the conclusion to this PhotoVoice study.

Future Research Considerations

The PhotoVoice study provided participants with the opportunities to reflect on their personal interests, study interests, and career/career environment interests with the intent of having the participants come to a declared area of study or career path. Over the course of the research, a number of critiques surfaced about this PhotoVoice study which should be accounted for. These critiques for the PhotoVoice study were: the order in which the guided subjects were administered, the lack of group interviews, the lack of clarity with the instructions given to the student participants, the lack of guidance provided during student participant interviews, the scalability of the PhotoVoice study, the lack of opportunities for student participants to gain hands-on experience, and the device used to record the interviews. These critiques appear here in the sixth chapter because I believe these critiques can be adjusted in future studies.

Switching the Second and Third Guided Subjects for Future PhotoVoice Studies

When creating the process for the PhotoVoice study, I thought of the participant inquiry process in a linear fashion: first, personal interests are developed; secondly, those interests are used to evaluate college study interests; finally, the research would conclude with an examination of career interests based on the two former guided subjects. While conducting the research for this PhotoVoice study, the participants frequently made connections to potential careers (teacher, electrician, photographer, etc.) or elements of a career (helping others, artistic expression, travel opportunities, etc.) well before the third guided subject was being examined.
This points to a thought process that differs from the original order of the guided subjects. For future research, it is recommended the second and third guided subjects be exchanged with one another in order to be more congruent with participant thought processes. Switching these two guided subjects would also be more congruent with the O’Banion advising model. The O’Banion advising model is a five step advising process: 1) exploration of life goals, 2) exploration of vocational goals, 3) exploration of program choice, 4) exploration of course choice, and 5) exploration of scheduling options (O’Banion, 1994). In O’Banion’s model, the second step examines vocational goals before the third step of exploring program choice. After conducting the PhotoVoice study, the students naturally gravitated towards exploring career options either before or while exploring possible areas of study. Therefore, in future studies involving this PhotoVoice study, it is recommended to exchange the second and third guided subjects.

**Group Interviews (If Possible)**

In future research, I would highly recommend including a group interview at the end of each of the guided subjects. These group interviews provide additional opportunities for the student participants to expand their views on their pictures through sharing with other student participants (if they desire to). In previous PhotoVoice studies I have conducted in elementary schools, these group interviews provided the participants a chance to share their pictures and gain different bits of information from their fellow participants. In the past, these group interviews have proven to be very successful. One of the limitations for the study in this dissertation was that it featured GED and early college students who were all on vastly different schedules, making group interviews difficult to coordinate and, thus, the inclusion of group interviews were left out of the research. Later in this chapter, I will present the thoughts of the participants on this PhotoVoice study being a central part of a college guidance class. In a
classroom environment where all the participants are taking the same class, group interviews will be much easier to coordinate.

**Inclusion of Racial, Age, and Gender Information**

When I first began this research, I did not include any explicit racial, age, or gender related information in the profiles of the participants. This was done for two reasons: first, I was concerned this information would reveal too much personal information about the participants as I wanted them to remain and anonymous as possible. Second, as this research didn’t have an explicit racial, age, or gender component, I didn’t find it necessary to include this information. I now believe the exclusion of this information was shortsighted on my part. Although including this information does reveal more about the participants, there isn’t enough to warrant concern over participants losing their anonymity. I believe I was being overly cautious. Additionally, the inclusion of this information can inform the participants decision making process throughout the research. Older students may take a different approach to this research than younger students and students who identify as male may take a different approach than participants who identify as female.

**Critiques of This PhotoVoice Study**

Throughout the course of this study, a number a critiques came to light which should be considered if this research were to be conducted again in the future. These critiques appear in two distinct ways: First, critiques about myself as the researcher and things I would change about myself as the instrument, and second, critiques that were brought forth by the participants in the study.
Critiques Concerning Myself as the Instrument

A common theme I noticed among the student participants in the PhotoVoice study was how fixated they were on the career aspect of the project. During the first two guided subjects, which focused on their interests/hobbies and study interests, students would often jump ahead and start examining careers. The issue of students jumping ahead to examine careers was not as prevalent in the first guided subject, but was very present while examining the second guided subject. This led to two thoughts: First, I question whether I explained to the students that when they examine a guided subject, to only focus on that subject. One of the primary goals of strengths-based advising is for the participants to examine their strengths, talents, and things they enjoy (Schreiner & Anderson, 2005). So if students are focusing on careers, I question whether or not they are examining their interests in general or only their interests as it pertains to a career. Second, it is possible that the student participants are examining the third guided subject (careers and career environment interests) while examining the second guided subject (college study interests) because there was a flaw in the way the study was constructed. As discussed earlier in this chapter, should the second and third guided subjects be exchanged with one another?

Thinking back on how I conducted the research for this study, I wonder if I was too careful while interviewing the participants. By this, I mean I should I have taken a larger role in guiding the participants to possible areas of study and possible careers, based on their interests, in a way a college advisor would have. As stated in Chapter five, while examining the third research question, my self-confidence as a student is fairly low. I feel this lack of self-confidence may have carried over into how I conducted this research. I was so concerned with accidentally interfering with the study and being a good student/researcher, that I perhaps missed opportunities to actually advise. In reference to the second research question which asked if the
PhotoVoice Study expanded students’ perspectives or reinforced old views, there were a number of opportunities where I could have provided input for the students and really aid in expanding their views, but did not do so out of fear of doing harm to the research by leading them to an answer. In future studies, I plan on being more forward with providing information that may help clarify findings to students.

**Critiques from Participants**

Throughout the research process, the participants brought to light several elements of the PhotoVoice study which require reexamining. These critiques are shown in the form of the scalability of the PhotoVoice study, the lack of options for obtaining practical experience, and the devices used to obtain data. In terms of scalability, the PhotoVoice study requires a lot of attention from both the participants and the ones conducting the study. Both Rachel and Lynda (the academic professionals) conveyed that a project the size of the PhotoVoice study was not practical for general career or academic advising because of how infrequently they meet with students. Rachel’s point exemplified this when she noted,

> I think the challenge with the Career Center model, is [the PhotoVoice study] requires the student to make a time commitment, and to follow-up. I think they’re much more inclined to do that in a classroom setting and/or with a counselor that they’re seeing for a certain number of sessions. In the Career Center, the way it works here [at a community college] versus maybe a four-year university, students come in here once or twice for tools, resources, and information. It would be unlikely, if we share this as an activity for them to do, that we would get to follow-up with them doing what this asks them to do. I see that more playing out in a class and in those counseling sessions.
As it was conducted in this study, the PhotoVoice study required five separate meetings with students over the course of a few weeks. There would be up to four additional meetings for each participant if group interviews were to be incorporated into the study. For academic and Career Center advisors who only meet with students once or twice a term, it is unlikely a project of this scale could be done effectively. Rachel pointed out that, “This [PhotoVoice study] requires the student to make a time commitment and to follow up… [In the Career Center], students come in here once or twice for tools, resources, and information.” Rachel continued, “It would be unlikely if we share this as an activity for them to do, that we would get to follow-up with them doing what this asks them to do.” The general consensus among the academic professionals was that a project such as this would be best utilized as a College Guidance class or interdisciplinary with another subject, like photography or art.

Mel brought up two very specific critiques: lack of options for obtaining practical experience, and the devices used to obtain data. Mel noted that she would only feel comfortable deciding on an area of study or a career after obtaining hands-on experience. Mel noted, “I want to know 100% what I want as a career. For example, I don’t have any experience with deep space photography or astronomy whatsoever, so it’s hard to know that’s what I want to do.” One of the issues which Mel brought to light was the PhotoVoice study’s limitations in providing practical experience for the participants. Although this might be a more “general” critique of the PhotoVoice study, I include it here in the future considerations chapter, as it might be possible to incorporate a section within this PhotoVoice study which would allow for students to obtain practical experience.

The second critique Mel pointed out was in reference to the device I used to record the interviews. While conducting the final interview with Mel, I asked her what she would have
done differently to improve the process for future research into the PhotoVoice study. Mel said she would have exchanged the recording device:

   It's just me and my anxiety. The recorder makes me feel on edge somehow. I feel like if you had a laptop or something that was able to record, it would make it less stressful. I don't know. That's just me personally.

Although Mel’s feeling of anxiety over the recording device was specific to her, she does make an excellent point regarding the importance of providing participants with options for how they would prefer to be recorded.

**PhotoVoice Implementation Recommendations**

Throughout the research process, there were a number of ways in which the PhotoVoice study can be used within the college environment as recommended by the academic professionals. Rachel, Lynda, Marlo, and Mark believe the PhotoVoice study could be implemented in a number of ways.

**Counselor Use of PhotoVoice Study**

Lynda and Rachel felt the college counseling department would be interested in the PhotoVoice study. The college counselors work with students on issues ranging from academic to personal, and the PhotoVoice study could provide counselors with the ability to see the students’ worlds through their eyes. Lynda pointed out there is a distinct difference between academic advisors and college counselors. Whereas academic advisors are for “more practical things,” such as helping students sign up for classes, organizing class schedules, and directing students to different resources, college counseling is “much more about unpacking, reflecting and considering all the myriad options of life, talking about the hopes of their lives.” In addition to providing aid to students for educational purposes, college counselors act as mental health
specialists and crisis counselors too. Rachel explained, “When somebody’s in crisis, something is going on in their lives that they immediately need to see a counselor…Being homeless, no food, etc.”

Advising sessions can range greatly between academic advisors and counselors. Lynda explained, “Academic advising sessions usually run about 20 minutes…Counseling sessions are 45 minutes to an hour.” The counseling sessions provide students with a better opportunity to unpack what is going on in their lives. Lynda then pointed out that these counseling sessions can provide students with the opportunities to explore what is “triggering their undecidedness.” The implementation of the PhotoVoice study comes in the form of providing counselors a view into the lives of the students they are assisting. Because there are many potential triggers as to why a student might be undecided, the PhotoVoice study can help examine what those triggers are on an individual basis, and provide counselors with more information on how to help the student.

**College Research into Student Perception**

According to Lynda, the PhotoVoice study can be used by the college to learn more about why students are attending community college and what their goals are. Lynda spoke of the interests community colleges have in discovering “why more students are not completing certificates and degrees at the community college level.” Lynda continued,

The data that are out there are shown that maybe there’s work to do around that, but where do you start? How do you discern what it is that would help students complete degrees and certificates? What does student success mean? It’s different for every student…And so, the sort of visual effects that happens with this project, I think is nicely connected to that. It might sound lofty, but I think it’s a piece that gets missed.
Essentially, if a student desires to complete a degree, what can the college do to help the student achieve their degree or certificate in a more effective way? Furthermore, community colleges could use the PhotoVoice study to help define what student success is for each student. Is a student still considered a success if they only attend college learn a specific skill (like a language), but do not receive a certificate or degree? Is a student still considered a success by the community college’s standard if a student transfers to a four-year university? Lynda believes the PhotoVoice study can provide insight into student success.

### PhotoVoice Study as Student Intake Exercise

During the winter break of 2017, I received a phone call from Mark (GED instructor and GED intake specialist) asking to meet and discuss the PhotoVoice study. Mark was a GED instructor for the college and recently accepted a new position as the GED program’s Intake Specialist. During our meeting, Mark spoke of the group conversation we had with Gabi over the findings of her PhotoVoice study. Mark was impressed with the way in which the PhotoVoice study aided Gabi in her decision for what to do after completing her GED. One of Mark’s responsibilities in his new position will be working with GED students concerning their plans upon graduating from the GED program. The primary reason for this responsibility is to help the newly graduated GED students transition into a college or trade program. Mark feels the PhotoVoice study could prove to be an integral tool to help students create a plan for their next steps after the GED program.

### PhotoVoice Study as a College Guidance Class

As stated earlier, college guidance classes offer a variety of topics including college study skills, test-taking skills, resume building, and stress management, among others. Introducing the PhotoVoice study as a college guidance class would provide students with the opportunity to
create their college and career plans while earning college credit. In the class format, each of the PhotoVoice themes could be conducted once per week or two. Additionally, the class format would allow the instructor to meet weekly or bi-weekly with each of the students to discuss their pictures. The instructor could also invite individuals from different professional fields to speak to the students based on the professional interests of the students.

Using the PhotoVoice study as a CG class was the most frequently mentioned method for implementation by both the student participants and the academic professionals. Lynda also spoke about implementing the PhotoVoice study in a co-curricular fashion with another discipline, specifically the art department:

I can see this working as maybe a partnership between disciplines and the CG department…Ideally, with the art department. You know, there are digital photography classes on campus. Maybe there is an instructor of one of those digital photography classes or just photography classes in general that might be interested in working out of a curriculum specific to this population to this concern, you know?

Introducing the PhotoVoice study as a standalone class or as an integrated class with a subject could provide students with the opportunity to explore possible college and career plans while earning college credit.

**Discussion**

In this section, I will discuss the more theoretical elements of the findings, as well as how the findings relate to the literature review. I will discuss each of the research questions individual, and then collectively.
Research Questions

The research questions in this dissertation focused on three different elements: First, the student participant’s experience with the PhotoVoice study; second, if the PhotoVoice study could be implemented into college advising; and third, how I have evolved over the course of this PhotoVoice study conducting the research. In this section, I will discuss each question individually as they relate to the findings, and then collectively.

The first research question was: “What was the experience of the student participants using the PhotoVoice study as a method for helping them decide on an area of study and/or career path? How have the students found success? Does the PhotoVoice study open new perspectives for the students or reinforce the old views? As stated earlier, “success,” in the context of this study, is defined through the student’s confidence/self-esteem, self-motivation, and acquisition of new knowledge/future options (Schreiner & Anderson, 2005), and “old views” refers to the thoughts the student participants had about what to study in college and what careers interested them (if any), prior to the PhotoVoice study. At face value, I was pleased with this question because it was open-ended enough to allow for the student participants to elaborate about their experiences, but provided enough parameters (finding success and new/old views) to provide direction and context. That said, I wish I would have been more explicit with what I asked of the student participants during the PhotoVoice process. I believe I was too vague in my description in regard to how students should go about examining each guided subject. This was particularly noticeable in the first two guided subjects, in which students examined their personal interests and study interests. In a similar way that strengths-based advising has students focus on activities that give them confidence (academically or not), I wanted the student participants to focus on their hobbies, personal interests, and study interests without feeling the need to connect
to a career or area of study. In theory, the students could have been too fixated on the selection of a career and, thus, let this fixation influence what they reported as hobbies and study interests. Ideally, each guided subject should inform the next. This question was set in place to gain an understanding of the PhotoVoice study from the perspectives of the participants. Additionally, this first question set out to see if the study was able help students generate ideas of which careers and college majors best fit congruently with their personal interests.

The second research question examined how viable it is the for PhotoVoice method to be used as a tool for college academic advising. This research question enlisted the aid of four academic professionals who regularly work with undecided students. The goal of this question was to have the academic professionals examine the research conducted by the students and provide feedback based on their professional experience. For the most part, I felt that this question met this goal. I very much enjoyed the conversations I had with the academic professionals about the PhotoVoice study, the results the study yielded, and how the PhotoVoice study (or something similar) could function within academic advising or college as a whole. Something I did not expect when I began my discussions with the academic professionals was how much I would learn about the functionality of departments. I was already familiar with academic advising and the role it plays in providing support for students, but I was fascinated to learn about the inner workings of college counseling, the Career Center, and other student support positions like Marlo’s role in the GED program. Before the PhotoVoice study, I had very little understanding of how a department, like the Career Center, worked with students on a day-to-day basis. Learning about these departments also gave me a better understanding of how a project like PhotoVoice could work congruently with many of the mechanisms that already exist within these departments.
Although I believe I found some success in conducting this study as a novice researcher, I cannot help but wonder what this study would have looked like in the hands of a seasoned professional. In theory, if I would have trained an academic professional on how to conduct the PhotoVoice study, what would they have done differently? What elements of their professional background would inform the way they would have conducted the study? Furthermore, how would the researchers have handled the interviews? When I conducted the interviews with the student participants, I took a much more “hands-off” approach, out of fear of influencing the research. I found the balance of acting as both a researcher and a college advisor to be difficult and a leaned towards the side of caution. I imagine that an academic professional would have had an easier time managing this balance.

The third and final research question was: “How have I evolved during this dissertation process? What was my intellectual journey and what does it mean to me”? As a novice researcher, this question was designed to examine both my growth as a researcher and my understanding of my positionality as a white male conducting the research. As I do not have a lot of experience as a researcher, I was happy to include this question because it forced me to examine myself in a way that I had not done before. As stated previously, I found it difficult to assess myself from a white male standpoint because the research did not have an explicit racial component. Examining myself from the perspective of my participants really helped me to develop a new view of myself as a researcher and understand how my experiences as a white male may have blinded me to things those of other genders and races may have experienced. This question was a late addition to the research, as my committee and I felt it was important for me, as a novice researcher, to examine my positionality. As this research question was a late addition to the research, I am curious if I would have carried out the research differently. Perhaps
I would have asked other questions in the interview, or I would have designed the study a little differently. What I also appreciated about this question was how it allowed for me to act as a participant in the research as well. Allowing me to participate in the research through a self-examination brought the research full circle with the other research questions and gave the research a cyclical element.

Looking at all three research questions together, I appreciate how the research questions were able to obtain data from different perspectives. Each of the three research questions examined three different types of participants: the undecided student, the academic professional, and the researcher. As I stated earlier, these three questions together created a cyclical element to the research. The research started with me (the researcher) making the connection between PhotoVoice and how it could be used as a tool to aid undecided students in declaring a career and/or area of study. Second, the student participants carried out the PhotoVoice study and discussed their experiences. Third, academic professionals examined the work of the student participants and discussed the use of the PhotoVoice study to aid undecided students in deciding on a career and/or area of study. Finally, the research circled back around to me as the researcher where I examined how I carried out the research, how it can be improved upon in the future, and what I learned about myself as a researcher in the process.

Another way to examine these research questions together is by looking at the ways in which each question informed the next. After the PhotoVoice study was cultivated, the student participants carried out the PhotoVoice study and explained what they discovered. The findings to the first research question then informed the second research question, and created a platform for the academic professionals to address the study. Finally, the information from the first two
research questions created a foundation for me to examine myself in the third research question, both in how to improve the study and to examine myself as a researcher.

The Research in Relation to the Literature Review

In this section, I will discuss how this study fits into the grander scope of educational research. Since 2004, when Strack, Magill, and Mcdonagh first used PhotoVoice in an educational setting, many more studies have been conducted on P-20 education with the use of PhotoVoice as a key element to the research. This PhotoVoice study contributes to this growing body of PhotoVoice research in education. This study is situated within the research surrounding strengths-based advising, the O’Banion advising model, and PhotoVoice, while drawing inspiration from progressive education, feminist research theory, arts-based educational research, and student-centric learning.

This PhotoVoice study contributes to educational research in a way that is more practical than theoretical. This study takes the concepts listed above and uses them to serve as an example of these concepts in action. For example, this research does not lend itself to further defining what arts-based educational research is. Rather, this research depicts an example of what arts-based educational research would look like when put into practice. That is to say, this PhotoVoice study is an example of strengths-based advising, the O’Banion advising model, PhotoVoice, progressive education, feminist research theory, arts-based educational research, and student-centric learning coming together as a mechanism for undecided students to use as a method to decide on an area of study and/or career, based on their own specific interests.

Broadly speaking, this study allows for educational practitioners to see these concepts in action and potentially use this research as a template for their own research, or as a way to enhance their own professional practice. As an example, this PhotoVoice study contributed to
research involving academic advising tools which can be deployed to provide academic aid to undecided students. Lynda, the academic advisor who reviewed this research, noted:

I think this approach [using PhotoVoice] is one that could inspire students in a different way…I think that maybe some of the approaches that we use now [in academic and career advising] are a bit static, and this is pretty kinetic in terms of helping students to think more broadly beyond just being in a classroom or going to college or getting a degree.

Additionally, research around academic advising frequently looks at different ways to advise non-traditional students. As pointed out in the literature reviews by both Brookfield (1999) and Smith (2002), the college population continues to grow in both numbers and diversity. What this means for academic advising is that new methods on how to advise a diverse population need to be examined to best meet the needs of all students. This PhotoVoice study, combined with the ideals of Strengths-Based Advising, contributes to the growing body of research which aims at providing unique and individualized aid to the growing student body population. Although this PhotoVoice study provides practical examples to a variety of theoretical concepts, it does contribute to the problematic issues on PhotoVoice as a research methodology.

One of the major critiques of PhotoVoice as a research methodology focuses on the various inconsistencies associated with the research process. As pointed out by Hergenrater et al. (2009) and Catalani and Minkler (2010), the quality of PhotoVoice as a research methodology is called into question because it lacks consistency between studies. In a review of PhotoVoice, Hergenrater et al. (2009) noticed inconsistencies in the research processes between 31 different PhotoVoice projects. The most noticeable inconsistency was in regard to the roles taken on by both the researcher and participants and how often they would meet. Some researchers were in
frequent contact with the participants, while others would only meet once or twice with participants (Hergenrater et al., 2009). Catalani and Minkler (2010) point out inconsistencies with the role that participants play in the development of the PhotoVoice themes (referred to as “guided subjects” in this dissertation). In some PhotoVoice studies, the participants would be involved in the cultivation of themes while, in others, the researcher would create the themes on their own (Catalani & Minkler, 2010). Because PhotoVoice has been used in so many different ways, there is very little consistency between projects in terms of recruiting, researcher/participant interaction, and the identification of potential limitations to the PhotoVoice process.

Both Hergenrater et al. (2009) and Catalani and Minkler (2010) note that the reason these inconsistencies exist between PhotoVoice studies is because the PhotoVoice process has been co-opted in so many different ways that go beyond its initial purpose. The PhotoVoice study conducted in this dissertation contributes to critiques of PhotoVoice as a methodology. The PhotoVoice study that was conducted here is unlike any that currently exist. Although the research for this dissertation is grounded in a variety of education theories, the actual methods which I used to conduct the PhotoVoice study were of my own fruition. As an example, this dissertation features two sets of participants with two distinctively different roles: the undecided students and the academic professionals. The students took on the more traditional role as the participants who took pictures and explained their meanings in the interviews. The academic professionals provided expert analysis of the PhotoVoice, study as well as the viability of the PhotoVoice study as an academic advising tool.

The way the guided subjects were constructed (often referred to as “themes” in other PhotoVoice studies) differed from previous PhotoVoice projects as well. Ideally, the guided
subjects would be co-constructed with the participants taking the pictures; however, this step is often left out, as pointed out by Hergenrater et al. (2009) and Catalani and Minkler (2010). In this PhotoVoice study, I created the guided subjects on my own, and then cross-referenced them with the academic professional participants. As the academic professionals regularly work with undecided students, they were able to provide me with information on how to best present the guided subjects to the participants. This method of cultivating the guided subjects (or themes in other studies) is also unique to this dissertation, and thus contributes to the inconsistencies of the PhotoVoice methodology.

Although these critiques about PhotoVoice’s integrity as a research method are valid, I would argue that the lack of consistency between studies is partially due to how new PhotoVoice is as a research method. The first PhotoVoice studies (then known as Photo Novella) were conducted by Wang and Burris in 1994, which was less than 25 years ago at the time this dissertation was written. In order increase congruency among PhotoVoice studies, the sample size of PhotoVoice projects needs to increase.

Although only theoretical, I want to address the potential for additional literature that this dissertation could yield. One key area in which this dissertation could yield future literature is on college guidance classes. In the interviews, both the student and academic professional participants expressed interest in idea of PhotoVoice being the central part of a college guidance class. College guidance classes (often referred to as CG classes) cover a variety of topics, including college study skills, resume building, and test-taking strategies, among others. If this PhotoVoice study were to be implemented into a CG class and researched, the findings could contribute to an underserved research area in college guidance classes.
Where Are They Now

To conclude this dissertation, I would like to provide an update on each of the participants since taking part in the PhotoVoice study.

Gabi

Since completing the PhotoVoice study, Gabi is finishing her GED and is attending class on a more regular basis. Currently, she is on track to graduate with her GED at the end of the 2018 winter term, or the early 2018 spring term. Gabi still plans to enroll in the college’s two-year paraeducation program.

Mel

Since the PhotoVoice study concluded, Mel is still enrolled in the college’s GED program. I have not spoken with Mel since completing the PhotoVoice study. She is on course to graduate with her GED in the spring of 2018.

Kyle

Since the PhotoVoice study, Kyle is doing well in his college classes. Marlo, his advisor, says he is regularly attending class and is sticking with the plan of majoring in computer science and minoring in creative writing, which he decided on during the PhotoVoice study.

Kaleb

Kaleb is currently finishing his last term at the college before starting trade school. Kaleb will be attending trade school starting in the spring of 2018. He is still unsure about which trade he will select. Since the PhotoVoice study, Kaleb is confident and excited about entering trade school.
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APPENDIX A

IRB/RESEARCH STUDY CONSENT FORM

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
Department of Education

Research Study Consent Form

Study Title: Major Decisions: Exploring the use of PhotoVoice as a Method in Deciding on a Major with Undecided College Students

Researchers: Dr. John Lupinacci, Professor, College of Education, 509-335-6838

What is this study about?

This research is being done to examine the personal and professional interests of undecided college students. The intent of this research is to inform both the student and college/career advising of possible areas of study the student can take in congruence with their personal and career interests.

You are being asked to take part because you have expressed interest in being a part of this study as a student who is undecided about your college major.

Taking part in the study will take about one to two months.

You cannot take part in this study if you are under the age of 18 or you already know exactly what you want to study in college. This study has been approved for human subject participation by Washington State University Institutional Review Board.

What will I be asked to do if I am in this study?

If you take part in the study, you will be asked to take pictures for each theme. There are three themes in total - 1) Personal life interests – activities the participant enjoys doing for fun or a hobby 2) Educational interests – ideas the student might be interested in studying 3) Professional environment interests – the type of environment the participant might enjoy working in. You will either print out or email your pictures to the researcher upon finishing. An interview will then take place covering the meaning behind each of the pictures. The picture taking process can be done over the course of a week, specific amount time is dependent upon the participant. The interviews can take anywhere from thirty minutes to an hour.

Information given by participants in this project center around personal interests (hobbies, activities, etc.) and work interests (possible work places and work environments).

Students have the right to not participate in the research if they do not desire to and are at no risk of punishment. Students are free to abstain from discussing any information they
deem sensitive or uncomfortable. The study will involve data collection in the form of the photos students provide and recorded interviews (audio only).

Are there any benefits to me if I am in this study?

The potential benefits to you for taking part in this study are being able to better articulate an area of study or college major. On a more grand scale, this research can lead to an additional method career/college advisors can use to better help undecided students decide on an area of study.

Are there any risks to me if I am in this study?

The potential risks from taking part in this study concerns time and hope. There is no guarantee this research will help a student better decided on an area of study which could lead to a sense of hopeless. Students will be frequently reminded that this research has the potential to help a lot of students in the future and that they are contributing to important research.

Will my information be kept private?

The data for this study will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by federal and state law. No published results will identify you, and your name will not be associated with the findings. Under certain circumstances, information that identifies you may be released for internal and external reviews of this project.

Students will be allowed to select a pseudonym at the start of the research which they’ll be referred to as throughout the project. The key linking the student to the research will be kept on the researcher or in the researchers home at all times. The researcher will only have access to the key, the audio recordings, or the pictures taken. The results of this study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but the identities of all research participants will remain anonymous.

The data for this study will be kept for three years before being destroyed.

Are there any costs or payments for being in this study?

There is no compensation associated with taking part in this research.

Who can I talk to if I have questions?

If you have questions about this study or the information in this form, please contact the researcher; C.J. Dunn at either craig.dunn@wsu.edu or at 503-449-7478. You can also contact Dr. John Lupinacci at john.lupinacci.wsu.edu or at 509-335-6838. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or would like to report a concern or complaint about this study, please contact the Washington State University Institutional Review Board at (509) 335-3668, or e-mail irb@wsu.edu, or regular mail at: Neil 427, PO Box 643143, Pullman, WA 99164-3143.
What are my rights as a research study volunteer?

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to be a part of this study. There will be no penalty to you if you choose not to take part. You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time.

What does my signature on this consent form mean?

Your signature on this form means that:

- You understand the information given to you in this form
- You have been able to ask the researcher questions and state any concerns
- The researcher has responded to your questions and concerns
- You believe you understand the research study and the potential benefits and risks that are involved.

Please place check on line if you consent to audio recordings during interviews. All interviews will be done on a one on one basis. No group interviews will take place.

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Statement of Consent

I give my voluntary consent to take part in this study. I will be given a copy of this consent document for my records.

______________________________  _______________________
Signature of Participant        Date

______________________________
Printed Name of Participant

WSU IRB #16296-001
Approved: 9/29/2017
Version Valid until 9/26/2018
Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect.

I certify that when this person signs this form, to the best of my knowledge, he or she understands the purpose, procedures, potential benefits, and potential risks of participation.

I also certify that he or she:

- Speaks the language used to explain this research
- Reads well enough to understand this form or, if not, this person is able to hear and understand when the form is read to him or her
- Does not have any problems that could make it hard to understand what it means to take part in this research.

______________________________________________  __________________________
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent            Date

______________________________________________  __________________________
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent         Role in the Research Study
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Student Participants

Interview Protocol – First Interview

1. Tell me your name and about yourself.

2. What was your experience with traditional K-12 education?

3. How did you find yourself in the G.E.D. program?

4A. What are you considering to major in when you enter college? What interests you?

4B. What are you currently majoring in college? What interests you?

5. What professions interest you currently?

Interview Protocol – Second, Third, and Fourth Interview

1. Take me through each of your pictures, what did you take a picture of and why?

2. Other than the theme of (insert theme here), what sort of connection do you feel connects these pictures?

3. If you had the opportunity, what else would you of taken a picture of and why? (Only asked if participant has less than five pictures)

Interview Protocol – Fifth Interview

1. Looking over your pictures from all the themes, what stands out? Are there any personal, overarching themes which permeate throughout the pictures?

2. After taking part in this research, what are you interested in studying in college or leaning towards professionally? Has this changed? Stayed the same?

3. How did you feel about the research process?

4. Did you come across any difficulties in the research you like to discuss?
5. Which themes, if any, resonated with you in particular?

6. Is there anything else you would like to include?

**Academic Professional Interview Protocol**

**Interview before PhotoVoice Study**

1. Tell me your name, what your role is at the college, and how long you’ve been in your current role?

2. What is your experience like working with undecided students?

3. (After themes have been explained to the academic professional) How would you phrase these themes to undecided students?

4. Is there a research method similar to this you are familiar with or have heard about? If so, how is it the same or how do they differ?

5. Do you have any additional questions? Concerns? Thoughts?

**Interview after PhotoVoice Study**

1. What are your thoughts on the findings?

2. Did any findings from one of the specific themes stand out to you?

3. Where could you see, if any, this sort of study being used in the college setting?