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# Science as Art: Axiology as a Central Component in Methodology and Evaluation of Arts-Based Research (ABR)

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**ABSTRACT:** This article introduces key terms and concepts in arts-based research (ABR) that are represented across different disciplines. In so doing, it presents four functions of art in research: *art as an adjunctive method in qualitative research*, *art as a primary method in qualitative research*, *art as its own methodology in research*, and *art as a radical event in research*. Ways of adhering to ABR as its own methodology are examined, emphasizing axiology, rather than epistemology, as a core consideration when designing, implementing, and evaluating ABR. Aesthetic concerns and ethical challenges, primary values in axiology, are considered when evaluating the rigor of research design and results. Finally, this article describes the author's own creative decision-making while developing an ABR study, illuminating issues of axiology while doing so.

## Introduction

This article, an introduction to arts-based research (ABR), is divided into three parts: Part one provides an overview of definitions and boundaries of ABR when viewed across the landscape of social science research. Part two explores the role that axiology plays as a vital component of ABR methodology, and examines how values of aesthetics and ethics might shape creative decisions during the research process. Part three expands upon that discussion with a presentation of the author's ABR study (Viega, 2013), focusing on design choices that reflect a creative worldview. Readers are able to access the results of this study through a video performance of *Rising from the Ashes*, a song cycle that explores the lived experiences of adolescents who have had adverse childhood experiences (see Supplementary Video File 1). Accompanying this performance is an artist's statement presenting information on the nature of the song cycle and its creation.

A perspective derived from aesthetics is central to ABR. Aesthetics is broadly defined as the philosophy, study, and critical reflection of beauty as revealed in works of art, culture, and nature (Hart, 1971). This expansive view of aesthetics is valued for its pluralistic qualities, where the nature and reality revealed within beauty emerge from each new encounter with an artistic medium. Within the context of ABR, aesthetics cannot be separated from the ethical, political, and

cultural situatedness of the people involved in the investigation (Denzin, 2000; Finley, 2014). Speaking about the role of aesthetics in research, Denzin (2000) notes that "There is not a separate aesthetic or epistemological realm regulated by transcendent ideals" (p. 258).

This article therefore focuses on the knowledge revealed within *aesthetic experiences* (Aigen, 2007), the processes and experience of engaging artistically with research data, and performing its results. In so doing, the purpose of the article is neither to minimize other forms of artistic and performative inquiry in qualitative research, nor to police ABR methods, but instead to explore how arts-based researchers in music therapy can discuss, implement, and evaluate aesthetic experience as a way of knowing. A glossary of key terms, provided at the end of this article, may be useful to readers less familiar with ABR concepts.

## Part One: Defining Arts-Based Research

### Historical Perspective

ABR developed as an extension of qualitative research in the 1980s, as researchers began to see the links between qualitative practice and artistic activities (Finley & Knowles, 1995). The earliest examples appear in social work research where common creative arts practice included poetry, drama and storytelling, visual art, and filmmaking (Foster, 2012). In 1981, Shaun McNiff, an art therapy educator, began calling for creative arts therapists to engage in the arts as a means of constructing knowledge (Viega & Forinash, in press), and in the 1990s, methods and perspectives in ABR began to expand into fields such as sociology, ethnography, arts education, and the creative arts therapies. In the early 2000s, online technology allowed for more opportunities for arts-based researchers to disseminate performative results in peer-reviewed journals such as the *Journal of Pedagogy, Pluralism, and Practice*, *Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy*, and *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies*. Researchers began to diversify in their understanding and use of ABR, with some beginning to view it as a distinctive methodology separate from but linked to qualitative research (Rolling, 2013). Most recently, the peer-reviewed journals *Cultural Studies* ↔ *Critical Methodologies* (Finley, 2014) and *UNESCO Observatory Multi-Disciplinary Journal in the Arts* (Harris, Hunter, & Hall, 2015) featured special editions on critical approaches to ABR.

Qualitative researchers in music therapy, such the pioneering writing of Carolyn Kenny (2006), have been advocating for the use of the arts in research as early as the 1980s. In the 1990s, Diane Austin conducted what is considered to be the first ABR study, titled *Grace Street*, which investigated the lived

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experience of people in Alcoholics Anonymous through a musical theater format<sup>1</sup> (Viega & Forinash, in press). Since that time, a modest amount of ABR research has been published in music therapy, investigating a variety of topics: music in an intensive care unit (Kondo, 2003); music with woman survivors of intimate partner violence (York, 2006); the exploration of consciousness during improvisation (Seabrook, 2007); the experiences of a music therapy cancer support group (Rykov, 2008); mentorship in music therapy (Vaillancourt, 2009, 2011); music therapists' relationship with their primary instrument (Schenstead, 2009, 2012); and adolescents who have experience trauma and identify with Hip Hop Culture (Viega, 2013). Interest in ABR within music therapy is growing as music therapists begin to grasp the unique challenges of utilizing music and art to reflect social and musical knowledge indigenous to its practice (Beer, 2015).

In the third edition of *Music Therapy Research* (Wheeler & Murphy, in press), Viega and Forinash (in press) have broadened the definition of ABR to include the variations found within an array of social science disciplines, stating that ABR is an "umbrella term that includes seeing it as a research method—where the art forms are primary in the research process—and as an overall methodology—where a creative worldview forms the philosophical foundation for an inquiry" (pp. x-x).

### Variations of Arts-Based Research

Crotty (1998), a philosopher and educator in qualitative research, suggested four elements of research, epistemology→theoretical perspective→methodology→methods, all of which inform one another to "ensure the soundness of our research and make its outcomes convincing" (p. 6). Crotty differentiates methodology from methods, an important distinction that will be explored in depth for this discussion. He defines method as "the techniques or procedures used to gather and analyze data related to some research question or hypothesis" (p. 3), and methodology as the "strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcome" (p. 3). As Crotty sees it, both of these are grounded in a theoretical stance and embedded within an overall epistemology. Crotty's definitions play a role in helping understand and differentiate variations in the role of art in research: that is, art used as a method in research versus art as a methodology.

ABR represents an umbrella of perspectives and disciplines and reflects a broad way of understanding the role(s) of art, performance, creative processes, and its artifacts. The most common viewpoint of ABR in music therapy is in terms of its methods; utilizing the arts as a means to reflect on, explore, and find connection(s) within other data sources (Austin & Forinash, 2005; Beer, 2015). Here, art is used either adjunctively to, or primarily within, other methodologies and research designs such as phenomenology, heuristic (first-person) research, ethnography, and action research. When viewed as a method, ABR can be traced back to theoretical perspectives and epistemology grounded in qualitative research. However, the role of art in research has been discussed in terms of its own sustained devotion to methodology as well, outside the frame

of quantitative and qualitative perspectives (Rolling, 2013). When viewed as a methodology, creative and artistic methods are justified within a theoretical philosophy steeped in aesthetics. Here, the subversive, transformative, and radicalized nature of social reconstructions through the arts is valued in challenging traditional praxis-based notions of research. In addition, when viewed as a methodology, the role of axiology moves into the forefront, valuing the role of ethics and aesthetics as the primary conduit for knowledge and change (Hiles, 2008; Mertens, 2007).

**Art as an adjunctive method in research.** Within this definition of ABR, artistic mediums are utilized as a *means* to collect and analyze data in conjunction with, and to enhance, other qualitative methods. This has also been referred to as arts-informed research (Knowles & Cole, 2008; Rolling, 2013). Creative processes and aesthetic design are not viewed as salient components toward constructing knowledge; instead, art is used as a reflexive means of analyzing already gathered qualitative data. Researchers here are often inspired by art or by an artist and use others' work as a springboard for knowledge, rather than engage in prolonged and direct creative encounters. Figure 1 is an example of how utilizing artistic methods in this model can be framed within a larger qualitative design. Ledger (2010), inspired by a synchronistic receptive music experience, used poetry to highlight emerging constructs and themes from her narrative inquiry that examined music therapists' experiences introducing music therapy in a healthcare setting. Though Ledger did not create music as a method of data collection or analysis, she used artistic process, specifically writing poetry, as an adjunctive means to ground and support emerging themes having to do with music therapy.

**Art as a primary method in research.** Within this definition of ABR, creative processes, artistic reconstruction of

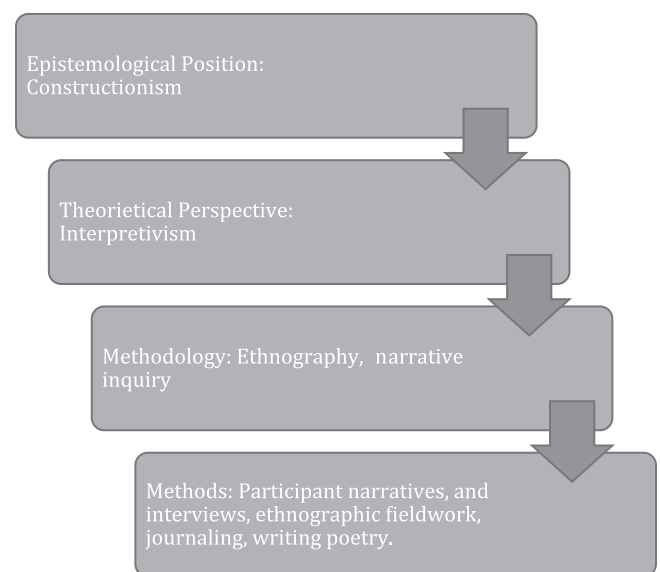


Figure 1. Example of art as an adjunctive method in ABR (Ledger, 2010).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Readers can access and experience a video performance of *Grace Street* and read about the author's creative process and the results of her study in this special edition on ABR.

<sup>2</sup> Crotty (1998) uses a similar flow chart to describe how the four elements, epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and methods, inform one another. The terms used in this flow chart represent those used by Crotty.

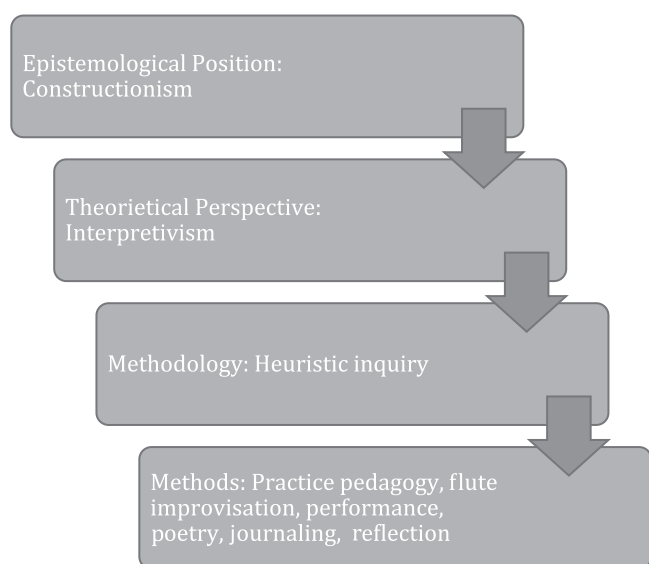


Figure 2. Example of art as a primary method in ABR (Schenstead, 2012).

social phenomenon, and performance become more salient, however the researcher frames the investigation within a qualitative framework. This type of ABR resembles the definition of ABR proposed by Austin and Forinash (2005), in which the arts “play a primary role in any or all of the steps of the research method” (p. 458). Though the role of the arts is valued within this model, the knowledge that arises from the creative process is seen as a means of constructing meaning out of a social phenomenon, rather than the inherent knowledge stemming from engagement with performance. Figure 2 is an example of this process, as reflected in Schenstead’s (2012) ABR study that explored her relationship with the flute, her primary instrument, to uncover its therapeutic value in music therapy. A qualitative framework, specifically heuristic processes, guided her study. Schenstead valued the role of the arts throughout each step of the research process, focusing primarily on artistic process as a way of analyzing emerging data, receptively exploring her own process by listening to her flute improvisations, and reflecting through poetry, journal, and creating a performance piece. Notice that the methods here are completely based in the arts, where the arts in Figure 1 were adjunctive to other methods of collecting data.

**Art as a methodology in research.** Here, research is approached from a worldview steeped in the creative and aesthetic process. From this viewpoint, methods, theoretical orientations, and epistemology can shift depending on the demand of one’s engagement and encounter with art. For instance, an artist-as-researcher might see the need to provide audiences with a rating scale—a post-positivistic framework—in helping hir<sup>3</sup> evaluate the artwork by justifying that it is common for art to be assessed like this in mainstream culture.

<sup>3</sup> Maintaining a philosophical positioning in critical approaches to research and the arts, this article utilizes gender-neutral pronouns. This article uses the construct of *hir* to replace the pronoun use of his/her.

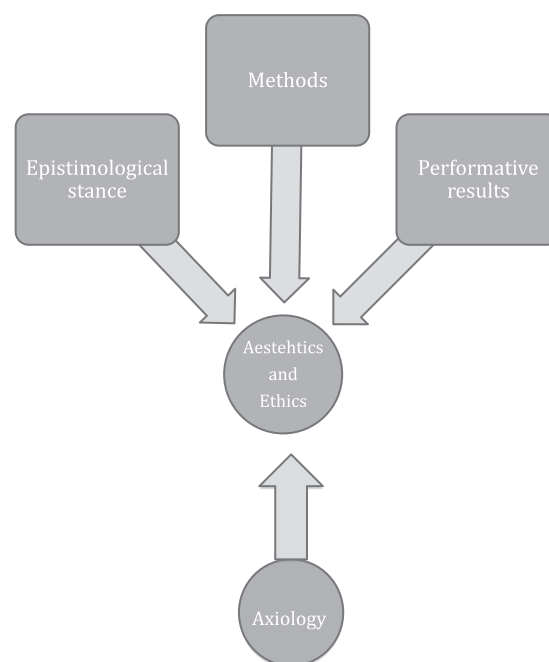


Figure 3. Example of art as a methodology in research.

Conversely, the artist-as-researcher might value audience affective and intuitive responses—a non-positivistic worldview—to gather and analyze data. Within these contrasting paradigms, the artist-as-researcher takes a pragmatic stance based in axiology; the aesthetic and ethical values inherent in the processes and performance of art. Viega and Forinash (in press) note that epistemology in this stance is fluid where “The way knowledge is understood (objectivism, constructivism, subjectivism) from art depends on the aesthetic sensibilities of the artist-as-researcher” (p. x).

Figure 3 notes the relationship between the essential elements of axiology and aesthetics, which informs other positions taken within the design of research. At its center, ABR as a methodology “requires a sustained adherence to a creative worldview wherein works of art are also works of research” (Rolling, 2013, p. 17); its pluralistic worldview is shaped by the artist-as-researcher’s aesthetic sensibilities, creative processes that unfold during the research, and the role of art to transform social consciousness. Shifting from epistemology to axiology, the value of knowledge in ABR moves away from traditional qualitative and quantitative design strategies, adhering to its own way of knowing within the artistic process.

**Art as a radical event in research.** Here, the boundaries between research and art are purposefully and subversively blurred. The research stands firmly in art as activism, provoking, challenging, and shocking audiences from their comfort zone and into a new way of knowing the world. This stance directly challenges praxis-oriented research—that is, what we learn and apply from research—to poiesis, in which knowledge is produced and experienced through creative encounters. Jagodzinski and Wallin (2013) state that “*poiesis* might more adequately be thought of as a *becoming* that dilates what *is* upon the virtual field of what might be” (p. 85).

Though this shares similarities with the previous category, art as a methodology in research, this stance views research design as non-essential. The peer-reviewed online journal *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies* contains audio and video essays and projects meant to present social issues in more immediate and visceral ways. For instance, Santano (2015) uses three video performances to explore issues of loss and identity formation that he has experienced as a gay man. Introducing the video performances, he discusses his systematic and reflexive methods of artistic creation and the purpose of the investigation: “Beyond catharsis for the artist, the videos become activist artifacts advocating queer representation, placing viewers in the center of storied queer experience and asking them to question their interpretations, their motives, their ease” (<http://liminalities.net/11-1/renderings.html>). To date, there have not been any music therapy studies that represent this model of ABR. Figure 4 is a visual representation of one’s axiology and values setting in motion social change through performance and art.

Researchers that utilize performance and artistic engagement within social science research often frame their use within methodologies linked to critical theory (Conquergood, 2002; Finley, 2013, 2014; Finley, Vonk, & Finley, 2014), ethnography and autoethnography (see Alvarez, 2013; Boylorn, 2013), quare/queer and feminist theory (see Dorwick, 2015; Johnson & Boylorn, 2015; manovski, 2014), and a host of other related research theories. Within a transformative paradigm, Mertens (2007) focuses on the role of axiology, specifically ethics, as an essential element when producing performative results in research. As a music therapist whose worldview is steeped within aesthetic knowledge as the primary form of understanding my clinical work, I too am interested in axiology. Part two of this article focuses on the challenges and rewards of conducting ABR, focusing on issues

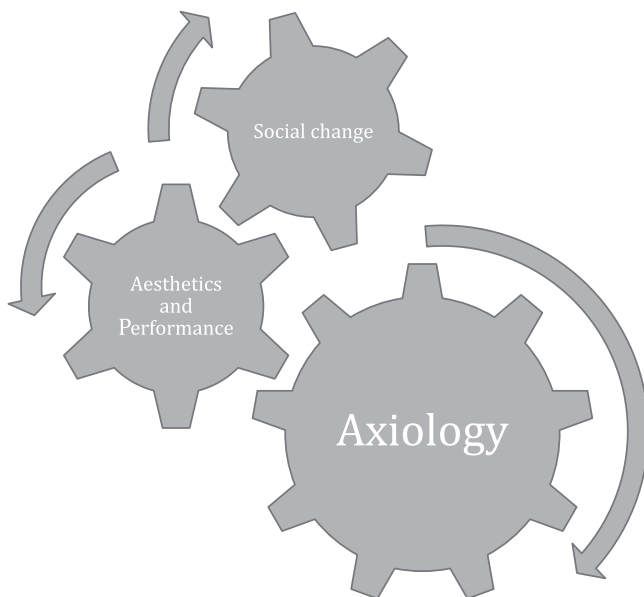


Figure 4. Example of art as a radical event in research.

of aesthetics that arise when sustaining an artistic worldview within an inquiry.

## Part Two: Arts-Based Research Methodology and Axiology

The study of axiology, whose epistemology is Greek—*axios*, or worth, and *logos*, or reason—is a theory of values, the essence of what makes human beings strive for an enhanced quality of existence. The quest for values is seen as the structure that propagates humans’ desire to understand the nature of reality through the study of ethics and aesthetics (Hart, 1971). Heidegger (2008[1950]), in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, notes that works of art are revealed not through an artist’s craftsmanship but instead within an innate knowing that brings forth Being in the world. Russell (1997[1935]) notes that value judgments of aesthetics and ethics lie within our feelings and desires; Hart (1971) expands upon this and notes that “I think what (Russell) really means is: ‘Wish everybody to desire this,’ or rather ‘Would that everybody desire this’” (p. 39). Therefore, it is within the context of our individual values that our *being in relationship with others* is revealed.

Hiles (2008) notes that axiology might be given priority in qualitative research over epistemology and ontology, a position that is primary in ABR methodology. However, it is easy to see how all epistemological, ontological, and theoretical worldviews benefit from a position within axiology in term of the transparent judgments during the research process, the aesthetic craft of the study’s design, and the benefit of the inquiry to the greater good of humanity. The search for truth in research through validity and trustworthiness can be seen as issues of values embedded in axiology.

Aesthetics and the experiences of beauty are the primary vehicle through which complexities are made known without the confinement imposed by belief and construed meaning. It is this way of knowing, steeped in axiology, that arts-based research methodology can offer truths regarding the social world around us. Within the arts, the concept of truth is seen through axiology, where even fiction reveals a reality that exists but might be unspoken in the social world.

## Evaluation

Given the salient nature of axiology in ABR as a methodology, issues of aesthetics are at the forefront of research design and evaluation. The primary evidence of ABR is unveiled within aesthetic encounters; that is, it is through the experience of beauty and artistic processes that different paths of truth are revealed. Truth within axiology appears within aesthetic experience as intuition, emotive expression, symbolic interaction, and our (shared) feelings and desires (Hart, 1971; Lewis, 1946). This understanding of truth is not limited to one epistemological stance: value can arise intrinsically through intuition and satisfaction (subjectivist), extrinsically materialized through felt engagement (constructionist), or placed on the qualities of the object itself (objectivist) (Viega & Forinash, in press; terminology from Crotty, 1998). Evaluation of ABR is a value judgment placed on the aesthetics of a study, both within the care the artist-as-researcher showed toward crafting the design and the ability of the arts to impact societal attitudes. Since evaluation is located within axiology, this allows the researcher and audience to travel across various ways of knowing (epistemology) as demanded by the aesthetic experience.

ABR design should demonstrate balance between scientific and artistic rigor, while consistently demonstrating ethical awareness of how the research will impact social consciousness. Scientific rigor means that the research methods, design, and results should be grounded in the purpose of inquiry. Concurrently, creative processes used in the investigation should also stay located within the central components of the investigation. The focus on scientific and artistic rigor does not mean that creativity is stifled for the artist-as-researcher. Instead, rigor provides a container through which the arts can flourish, move, and adjust as knowledge within the source of inquiry is revealed. All the while, the researcher/artist should demonstrate reflexivity regarding his aesthetic sensibility, as well as providing context of the participants' cultural grounding within the arts. Providing this context is vital toward the audience immersing himself within the artworks in a way that transparency is felt between the artistic intentions of the researcher/artist and the purpose of inquiry.

Evaluation of ABR occurs through artistic social reconstructions reflective of the research results. Since no two performances are ever the same, the underlying nature of ABR evaluation is cyclical, with new dimensions revealing themselves for both the artist-as-researcher and the audience through each engagement. The audience's understanding of truth shifts, deepens, and expands with each engagement, allowing the complex nature and subtle interactions of social phenomenon to become more illuminated with each performance. The question as to whether the results of an ABR study are inherent within the performance versus an audience needing other contextualized and external resources is dependent upon the axiological stance the artist-as-researcher takes regarding the role of art in research.

Performance and engagement with ABR should impact society by illuminating trials, tribulations, and beauty of the everyday lives of marginalized voices in society. Audiences' reactions can reveal a continuum of responses toward the topic, reflecting a greater understanding of complex social dynamics. Opportunities should be provided to engage in open and honest dialogue and social discourse, with artists-as-researchers accepting a pluralistic stance to allow for a diversity of ideas and solutions to emerge. However, there might be times when artists-as-researchers take a more radically and politically motivated subversive approach to performance, with the intention of using the arts to challenge social norms.

Barone and Eisner (2012) developed criteria for judging the quality of arts in research. They proposed six categories based in aesthetic engagement with the arts, summarized by Viega and Forinash (in press) below:

1. *Incisiveness* refers to the researcher's ability to get to the "heart of a social issue" without getting "swamped with details that have no inherent significance and do little to increase the cogency of the research itself" (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 148).
2. *Concision* refers to the minimal number of words needed to expand upon the artistic results, providing the research audience with a heuristic understanding through the arts.
3. *Generativity* pertains to the ability of the research to engage audience and encourage reflection and dialogue.

4. *Social significance* refers to how the results impact societal and cultural issues that are explored in the study. Audiences should not find the results trivial, but instead its significance should be made clear and be felt.
5. *Evocation and illumination* refers to the feelings evoked by the research audience when engaging with the results and how these feelings shed light on the topic and phenomenon studied in the research (p. xx).
6. *Coherence* reflects the ability of the researcher to take the various aesthetic elements and bring them together to make a unified artistic statement.

As inferred by these categories, the audience plays an important role in evaluating the performative results of ABR. Toward this end, ethical considerations should be noted when audience members encounter ABR performances and their reactions naturally become part of the cyclical nature of knowledge, as revealed through its aesthetics.

### The Ethics of Artistic Engagement in Arts-Based Research

Creative arts therapists understand through their training that artistic engagement can have a profound impact on people—sometimes in quite unexpected ways. Like creative arts therapists, artists-as-researchers have an ethical obligation to gain informed consent before disseminating ABR results through performance, and they must demonstrate competency in their methods before using them in research. Creative arts therapists are in a position to lead the way in developing an understanding of the ethical obligations of ABR, since they are utilizing the arts as a motivator for change within a therapeutic context.

Informed consent should be of the utmost concern before audiences encounter performative research. This requires the artist-as-researcher to inform audiences that the performance is based on the context of the research inquiry and that performance itself can be research where new artistic data emerge within each new encounter. This shifts the receptivity of an audience away from an expectation of being purely entertained toward an understanding that the performance might be provocative since it deals with social issues and needs. In that respect, it is advised that a space for reflection and dialogue always be provided after ABR performance so that audiences can share in their experiences.

Artists-as-researchers should demonstrate competency in both research and artistic methods. This means that artists-as-researchers should have training in understanding the impact of both research and their creative mediums; again, a position that many creative arts therapists find themselves at the forefront of in ABR. This competence can be demonstrated in practical ways, such as having approval of an ethics review board and being able to understand terminology and methods in more traditional research methods. More abstractly, artists-as-researchers need to be transparent about their craft, their creative limitations, and how that impacts their research. This involves a deep understanding and positioning within one's creative and aesthetic sensibilities and understanding how the dimensions of their craft impact the research process. For instance, as a songwriter, an artist-as-researcher might be aware of his fears of rejection from an audience that arise during performance. Therefore, the artist might attempt to mold the performance to please an audience to avoid rejection and hide the flaws that might be

of importance to an understanding of the research topic. Such considerations, unique to an artist's experience, must be considered and made transparent within an ABR context.

Finally, oppressed and marginalized voices represented in creative work must be protected. Privacy and confidentiality issues must be prioritized when representing participants' lives in artistic form. Although collaboration and challenging traditional hierarchical relationships are valued in ABR, the artist-as-researcher must stay vigilant in protecting vulnerable people ze might be working with in the research. Participants who witness their creative work as an audience member might have adverse reactions to having their lives objectified and portrayed in certain manners, even after they had been involved in the creative process. Therefore, artists-as-researchers should be willing to stop or adjust performances guided by the input of the people whose lives are being depicted in the performance.

### **Part Three: *Rising from the Ashes: The Creative Journey of ABR Methodology***

The third part of this article reveals specific aesthetic choices I made when designing, evaluating, and performing an ABR study. The intent here is to highlight my decision-making processes positioned within a sustained creative worldview as I moved through different phases of the study. There are two items that I want the reader to note: First, I am discussing only a very small portion of what is an extensive doctoral dissertation. A comprehensive examination of all of its components is not possible. I have chosen only those elements that relate to the discussion above and were indigenous to this study. Second, not all decisions I discuss relate to creating or performing music; the intention of this section is to illuminate how I viewed the entire research process as an aesthetic adventure, and decisions that were implemented were made with an artist's mind, even when no art was being made (the reader can obtain a full copy of this study at the following link: <http://digital.library.temple.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p245801coll10/id/214756>). In addition, a video performance of this study appears in an online format as part of this special edition of *Music Therapy Perspectives on Arts-Based Research* (see Supplementary Video File 1).

This study is called "Loving Me and My Butterfly Wings: A Study of Hip-Hop Songs Written by Adolescents in Music Therapy" and investigated the aesthetic components of songs written by adolescents who had experienced childhood trauma and identified with Hip Hop Culture. The purpose of the investigation was to understand the developmental and psychological processes of adolescents recovering from childhood trauma. I contend that the aesthetic knowledge garnered—cumulating in the creation of a concept album called *Rising from the Ashes*—is fundamental in disseminating the results of the study; it also served as the primary method of organizing, analyzing, and interpreting the data for subsequent interpretative analyses, to provide a developmental and psychological understanding of the songs created.

### **Stage One: The Aesthetics of Creating a Research Question**

My aesthetic sensibility played an important role in shaping my research, just as it does in how I approach creative processes as a music therapist. I began playing the guitar at age 14, and right away I started writing songs. For me, songwriting

was the medium in which I explored issues related to my identity and sense of self. This personal exploration through song was enhanced once I entered a recording studio. There, I could play with the technical elements of chorus, echo, distortion, reverb, compression, and a host of other sound effects. Like a painter choosing oils for my canvas, I was able to create an aural representation of my lived experience working with the raw elements of sound. The studio became an extension of the composition process, and not just the endpoint of creation. This aesthetic sensibility has stayed with me in both my music preferences and my listening practices as a music therapist.

As a music therapist, I have often utilized therapeutic songwriting working with adolescents in various clinical settings. From 2007 to 2012, I worked for the Arts and Quality of Life Research Center (AQLRC) at Temple University (Philadelphia, PA) using therapeutic songwriting in two programs, *Hear Our Voices* and *Singing for Tomorrow*.<sup>4</sup> Both therapeutic songwriting programs provided children and adolescents a space to express their adversities and creatively discover internal and external resources that promote individual and community health. Toward the end of my work with both these programs, I had hundreds of songs, each of which I had grown to develop a unique relationship with as a musical artifact of the therapeutic process. I found that many songs stood out to me as challenging and/or pleasing, and that my attachment to these artifacts was much more complex and had a life of its own separate from the process of creation. I wanted to investigate these songs and understand them more, and I knew that I did not want to take a conventional route by using inductive and deductive styles of music analysis common in qualitative methodologies.

Adolescents in a residential program, who had multiple traumatic childhood experiences and identified with Hip Hop Culture, wrote the songs analyzed in this study. All of the adolescents favored rap music, though each person was diverse in their specific preferences and backgrounds. Each was from Philadelphia, which has a unique and vibrant Hip Hop Culture with a network of local artists that speak directly to the everyday lives of people living in inner-city communities of the area. The ethos of the Hip Hop Culture in the area celebrates the arts as a medium to experience beauty and escape from everyday struggles. This was often overlooked due to the oppressed and marginalized conditions imposed on the inner-city communities of Philadelphia through the lack of government funding and programming, and a persistent devaluing of the culture within mainstream media, which has focused primarily on the crime-oriented elements in these communities.

I began to listen deeply to songs that I found both challenging and inspiring. I allowed myself to react naturally to the music while listening, which included moving to the music, singing along, and allowing imagery to arise as a basis of subsequent creative inspiration. I was open to whatever reactions arose, noting the songs that brought up the most intense reactions for further investigation. After listening to one particular song, I immediately felt the urge to create my own

<sup>4</sup> I would like to acknowledge Dr. Cheryl Dileo, Director of the Arts and Quality of Life Research Center (AQLRC), and Dr. Joke Bradt, former Assistant Director of AQLRC, for their dedication in bringing the arts to underrepresented communities of Philadelphia by developing programs like "Hear Our Voices." For more information, visit <http://www.temple.edu/boyer/community/aql.asp>.

composition based on content that arose for me. I piloted one composition, which involved reflecting and refining my creative process. From that, a focus and question began to emerge: *How does music composition, experienced through their various elements and as aesthetic wholes, reflect the experiences and lives of adolescents who have had adverse childhood experiences?*

Subsequent listening and creative encounters with the original songs helped illuminate sub-questions related to analyzing the songs' composition techniques, musical elements, affective-intuitive qualities, and the relationship between the music and lyrics.

Figure 5 represents my creative path toward developing a research topic and questions. The *source of the study* here was the songs written by adolescent songwriters in music therapy who had experienced trauma and identified with Hip Hop Culture. The *spark* was my creative urge to immerse myself in listening to the songs and reacting to them through composition, movement, imagery, art, and intuition. I creatively explored, reflected, and refined each creative encounter, which helped me focus on a topic and questions. However, there was no linear endpoint, for every time I engaged with the songs, the focus of the investigation felt more embodied and more immediate. The process was cyclical; even after I started creating the research design and implementing it, I would return to this process to reflect on the topic and questions that emerged. In summary, it was through my intuitive receptive engagement with the songs that I developed my research topic and research questions.

### Creative Choices That Occurred in Data Generation

I would like to focus on three significant events that guided me toward completion of these creative endeavors: 1) choosing the artistic medium to collect and analyze data, 2) creating a reflexive team to evaluate the aesthetic value of my artistic data, and 3) engaging in structural corroboration as a way to gather fragments of artistic data to create a compelling whole. These three tasks in my journey signaled important

shifts within my creative process, leading me toward a greater understanding of my research topic.

**Choosing the artistic mediums.** My first task was to choose the artistic devices I would utilize throughout the study, as informed by my design. As noted above, I wanted enough variety to allow freedom to follow my creative urges, while at the same time I wanted to remain consistent and contained within the core axiological components of the study. I started with finding a creative space, where I had access to instruments and equipment and had enough room to move around. I filled the space with a mixture of electronic instruments, recording equipment, and acoustic instruments appropriate for Hip Hop production. Studio equipment included:

- 1) Macbook Pro with GarageBand to record audio and iMovie to record video
- 2) Apogee Duet—an audio interface used with GarageBand to recording instruments and vocals
- 3) Korg (ESX-1) Electronic Sampler Production Station—includes a drum machine, synthesizer, and sampling capabilities

I chose this particular equipment for two reasons: Practically, the equipment was what I was most comfortable with and would be appropriate for the style of song creation I was endeavoring to explore. Second, I utilized this equipment with the songwriters who wrote the original songs. As such, I could indirectly experience the creative processes that the original songwriters experienced.

I created compositions that I called *remix compositions*, which were created by cutting and pasting elements of the original songs and recontextualizing them within my own creative process, a technique in Hip Hop known as sampling. Each song necessitated different techniques of sampling and recreation: sampling musical or vocal elements that I was affectively and intuitively drawn to; sampling the original lyrics and creating a new musical backdrop; and figuratively sampling a salient affective or atmospheric qualities of the original songs for further reflection. Other creative modalities

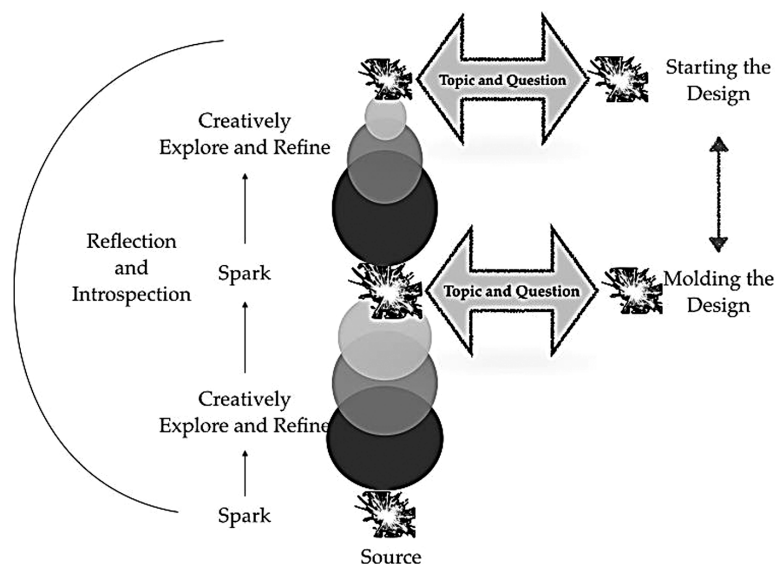


Figure 5. Creative Path Toward My Research Focus and Questions



were employed as needed in the song creation process to enhance and support my remix composition experience.

After completing my remix compositions, I would listen to them in various ways, subsequently reflecting on the aesthetic material. I allowed decisions to be informed by engaging with the performance data in this way. For instance, I would intuitively decide what original song I would analyze next while engaged in a listening experience of one of my remix compositions. This illuminated the inherent cyclical nature of ABR to me; that data collection and analysis are not separate events, but inform each other by revealing themselves within the aesthetic experience. The deeper I went into my creative process, the more that was revealed to me, and the more complex the topic became. I knew after creating a remix composition for six songs that I needed to break, allow my experiences to simmer, and seek a collaborative process as a way to evaluate my design before moving further into the investigation.

**Reflexive team.** Before moving further in my study, I wanted to consult with people from a variety of backgrounds and disciplines to help evaluate the soundness of my design, notably, listening to and evaluating my remix compositions. The reflexive team consisted of three members, who collectively covered the four focus areas of this study; therapeutic songwriting, adolescence, Hip Hop, and arts-based research. This included a music therapy researcher with an expertise in therapeutic songwriting methods, a psychologist who specialized in Hip and Hop and traumatized youth, and an arts-based researcher.<sup>5</sup> Each member of this team was sent an original song and its corresponding remix composition, along with some additional documents to provide further content. The primary task of my reflexive team was to listen to the original songs and my subsequent compositions, focusing on the following questions:

- 1) After examining all the materials, what connections do you notice between the two songs? In other words, in what ways is the content of the remix/composition grounded within or related to the content of the original product?
- 2) Does listening to the remix/composition give you any insight into the original piece that is not in the writeup I have provided? If so, please elaborate.

The role of the reflexive team was to substantiate my creative analyses, embedded within my remix compositions, and not to provide further data for analysis. Some team members responded to the remix compositions with their own images and affective and intuitive responses. It was clear that the listening experiences were pulling the reflexive team members into their own processes, which I found encouraging and inspiring. This information helped me understand that my design was working and to continue with the next round of creation.

**Structural corroboration.** While my first batch of remix compositions was with the reflexive team, I continued to listen and reflect on my songs as well. During one of these listening experiences, I noticed that some songs naturally flowed when placed in a particular order, and at that moment the idea of creating a concept album emerged.

A concept album, a music format that came to popularity in popular music during the 1960s, is a sequence of songs that convey musical cohesion and thematic unity, representing a unified expression of the artist(s). Concept albums have three components: 1) a narrative arc that explores a specific topic and theme, 2) a social concern and phenomenon that is addressed, and 3) an overall aesthetic that represents the values of the counterculture from which it springs. For me, the concept album, a creative act grounded in the primary components of my study, allowed me to gather up the various pieces of aesthetic evidence I was collecting (my remix compositions) and create a compelling whole; a process in ABR called structural corroboration (Barone & Eisner, 2012). Barone and Eisner explain that structural corroboration “deepens the conversation. It makes the analysis more sensitive; it yields an array of questions that will make more complex the analysis that was initially undertaken” (p. 162).

For me, my creation of a concept album had three functions related to structural corroboration: First, it provided me with a container to complete the final stages of my remix compositions. I could tell through the organization of the concept album what gaps needed to be filled and what was left to explore. Overall, there were 12 songs on the concept album, each representing a remix of the original songs. Second, the album allowed a narrative to unfold. Following Joseph Campbell’s Hero’s Journey (2008) structure, three primary sections emerge within the story structure: *protecting vulnerability*, *expressing abandonment*, and *emerging faith and love*. Its title, *Rising from the Ashes*, captured the overall concept based in the mythology of Icarus and related back to adolescent development. Third, organizing my remix compositions into narrative sections allowed for subsequent categories and themes to emerge; the original songs were grouped using the sections of the concept album, which allowed for further within- and between-group analyses of the original songs’ aesthetic components.

### Encountering the Result and Performance

The results of my study were written and disseminated through the publication of my doctoral dissertation. In chapter 8 of that study, “Results: *Rising from the Ashes*,” I provide audio links to the full concept album and individual songs. Within that chapter, I also provide a written summary of the concept album, using musical metaphors and storytelling that allow for a variety of listening experiences. From this perspective, the more immersed in the art a listener becomes, the more the results are revealed.

The concept album and Hero’s Journey narrative became an artifact of my research process. The aesthetic knowledge held within reveals a journey, through sound and song, into the lived experience of adolescents who have been victimized, abused, and traumatized throughout their childhoods. The concept album reveals the trials, tribulations, and eventual rewards garnered from traversing the various developmental stages represented in the study. The concept album I created can be seen as the closure of one stage of the journey, but due to the receptive nature of the album, people can listen to the songs contained within it and discover new connections with each listen.

Once I had completed the overall study, I knew that I wanted to revisit its results by performing the album live for various audiences who might have an interest in the primary

<sup>5</sup> Upon reflection, it would have been important to include a songwriter, preferably a Hip Hop artist, within this team.

components of the study. The purpose of this was twofold: First, *critical dialogue* of the artistic social recreations within ABR is an important value of the inherent benefit of audiences engaging with performance. Though audiences can listen to an MP3 of *Rising from the Ashes* through a link in my dissertation, it was not a forum for people to provide feedback and engage in conversation of how the album impacted their view of Hip Hop and adolescents who have had adverse childhood experiences. Second, the process of preparing for and performing *Rising from the Ashes* live revealed new data that continues to impact the art.<sup>6</sup> For instance, during a recent performance, I decided to sample socio-political commentary from rapper Tupac Shakur, from an MTV interview in the 1990s, at the start of the performance to help contextualize the lives of the adolescent songwriters within a larger social framework. The need for this addition arose from my aesthetic sensibilities being impacted by my growing awareness of societal issues involving race and oppression in the United States. Each performance of *Rising from the Ashes* forces me to confront and acknowledge my own privilege and power as a Caucasian male in academia in relationship with the adolescents whose culture and values might differ from my own. In the performance, I have added an element that speaks to an awareness of my own role in fighting for marginalized voices in society while also unintentionally supporting institutional oppression; it is through the arts that these complexities can be raised, experienced, and felt. In essence, ABR allows for the artist-as-researcher to be guided by their aesthetic sensibilities and ethos, allowing more intricacies to be revealed over time.

### Conclusion

The boon received from the knowledge garnered in ABR is recurrent with complex social phenomena being experienced within an interactive heuristic that occur through engagement in artistic performance. Instead of there being an endpoint to understanding (“knowing”) through cognitive construction, meaning-making, or statistical significance, ABR offers artists/researchers the opportunity to reveal complexities in a way that can be seen each time the artwork is experienced. From this, audiences can be inspired to act directly, create artwork, engage in dialogue, or allow once firmly held beliefs to be challenged.

Identifying as an arts-based researcher, I feel closely connected to the processes I experience clinically as a music therapist. As an arts-based researcher, I am continuously negotiating and integrating knowledge garnered from creative and didactic processes, which can be challenging; for instance, there were times when I felt lost within my creative endeavors and needed to step outside to do something more practical and grounded. Such experiences seem acutely relevant in understanding clinical practice. As a music therapist, I travel between immersive creative experiences and therapeutic relationships with the people I work with and more didactic worlds of treatment plans and making meaning for those searching for it outside the music experience. The worlds of ABR and clinical practice are intertwined in ways that can inform each other. The knowledge garnered from ABR can enlighten creative processes in music therapy, revealing the complexities within the processes of its

methods, and the creative interactions between music therapists and the people they work with.

Artists-as-researchers will witness the boons of knowledge with a research foundation steeped in axiology, valuing aesthetics and honoring ethos. From this position, artists-as-researchers are not bound by epistemological constraints and the limits of cognitive processes. This leaves new opportunities to explore the vastness and complexities of social phenomena in a way that values the beauty and truth within each individual, whose everyday lives hold untold stories of struggle, triumph, tragedy, and loss. It is within a shared experience of artistic engagement that we reveal a humanity that defines us all.

### Supplementary Materials

Supplementary video and audio materials can be found at: <http://mtp.oxfordjournals.org>. For members of AMTA, all journal articles, including video and audio materials, can be accessed by logging in to [www.musictherapy.org](http://www.musictherapy.org).

### Glossary of Terms

**Aesthetics:** The philosophy, study, and critical reflection of beauty as revealed in works of art, culture, and nature. This article reflects an expansive view of aesthetics where the value of beauty is pluralistic and determined by each new encounter with an artistic medium. It also focuses on the *aesthetic experiences* of ABR (Aigen, 2007); the processes and experience of engaging artistically with research data and performing its results.

**Arts-Based Research:** This article uses Viega and Forinash’s (in press) definition of arts-based research as “an umbrella term for the use of the arts as a research method—where the art forms are primary in the research process—and as an overall methodology—where a creative worldview forms the philosophical foundation for an inquiry.”

**Axiology:** The study and theory of values; understanding the nature of reality through the value of aesthetics and ethics (Hart, 1971). In qualitative and arts-based research, issues of axiology inform ethical and aesthetic decisions in each stage of research, as well as a guide to evaluate research design and results.

**Epistemology:** A philosophy and study of knowledge and justified belief. Crotty (1998) notes that issues of epistemology are the foundation that informs researchers’ philosophical worldview and subsequent decisions in designing research.

**Methodology:** This article uses Crotty’s (1998, p. 3) definition of methodology as a “strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcome.”

**Methods:** This article uses Crotty’s (1998, p. 3) definition of methods as “the techniques or procedures used to gather and analyze data related to some research question or hypothesis.”

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<sup>6</sup> For more on this performance, readers can see a video of *Rising from the Ashes* being performed and read my reflections on recreating this piece for an audience in the online supplementary materials in this journal.

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