

## Preface

Although I entered the sociology graduate program at Boston College intending to study substantive “topics” related to my social justice interests, I soon became captivated by the research process itself. Little did I realize at the time that deep engagement with methodological issues would become my path for pursuing my sociological concerns. Through my coursework, mentorship, and early research experiences, I developed a *holistic approach* to the research process that emphasizes the interconnections between epistemology, theory, and methods. For me, this approach to social research is consistent with my value system.

As graduate school was nearing completion and I was entering the world of “publish or perish” and scant funding opportunities, I soon realized that the disciplinary research demands experienced by those in many academic disciplines called for a far more limited view of research than I’d hoped. For instance, research published in top-tier sociology journals was largely quantitative and relied on the replication of research procedures and the like. Published qualitative research often followed strict disciplinary standards regarding methodological choices, at times seemingly judged against inappropriate positivist standards. Discussions of theory often appeared separate from discussions of method, failing to provide *holistic* accounts of the research endeavor. Innovative qualitative methods, such as autoethnography, were relegated to a lower or “experimental” status, thereby undercutting the effectiveness of the research. I was becoming disenchanted. What’s worse, my work had officially started *feeling like*

*work*. Joyless. I was not expressing what I wanted to or reaching people in a meaningful way. Indeed, I became aware that the very journal articles we all strove to publish were scarcely read. Furthermore, they would never reach anyone outside of the academy. The work was inaccessible in every way, which was reinforced to me when I tried to share my writings with relatives or friends, who would say things like “It looks impressive, but there’s too much jargon, I just don’t get it.” It became clear to me that I needed to find a different way engage in the research process.

Fortunately, at that time I was working on a couple of coedited projects on “emergent methods,” a term for innovative approaches to research methodology. As a result, I began to discover the world of arts-based research (ABR). I slowly began adapting these approaches to my own projects. Soon a new world had opened up.

## The Turn to the Arts

Like many, I intuitively understood the power of the arts from personal experience, long before I learned about the arts in any scholarly sense. As a child I would reread my favorite books until the pages were faded, freely surrender to new worlds at the movies, go from laughter to tears between acts one and two at the theater, and marvel at the grace of dancers moving through space.

As an adult, my love of the arts only increased from playing music first thing in the morning to regularly visiting museums and seeing films. It wasn’t until I became a mother and a professor that I started to realize the many ways arts could be harnessed to teach. For example, when my daughter, Madeline, was in elementary school and having trouble with geometry, I took her to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and we analyzed Cubist paintings, looking for shapes. Her geometry improved. Art taught her much more than *information*, though; it also taught her about *connection, empathy, feeling, resonance, and self-awareness*. One profound experience I had observing this was when I took her at the age of 7 to her first concert. Let’s face it, there are very few incredible first-time life experiences, and most of them don’t involve your mother. With that in mind, I wanted to take Madeline to her first concert, to share that experience with her. I will never forget the look on her face when the lights went out. She stood on her chair and instinctively flung her arms up and started screaming with everyone else. I spent most of the concert watching her, and I realized that

what she was experiencing was the connection she felt to everyone else there, a connection created through live music. She was a part of something. It was visceral, embodied, and powerful.

These lessons were echoed in my teaching. In my Sociology of Gender course, I lectured about patriarchy, violence, and sexual assault, and we read many articles on those topics. What really moved students, though, was when I would show a video of Tori Amos singing “Me and a Gun,” a haunting song inspired by the singer’s own rape. In my seminar Love, Intimacy, and Human Sexuality, we covered many topics that were challenging for students at the Catholic college, such as transgender identity. They were less compelled to think and see differently by nonfiction essays than they were by watching the film *Ma Vie en Rose*, about a child struggling with gender identity. The film prompted conversation, reflection, cultivation of empathy, and, at times, increased self- and social awareness.

The arts can uniquely educate, inspire, illuminate, resist, heal, and persuade. It is for these reasons and many others outlined in this book that innovative scholars across the disciplines have harnessed the power of the arts in their research endeavors. As a result, in recent decades a new paradigm has taken shape: arts-based research.

ABR practices have emerged out of the natural affinity between research practice and artistic practice, both of which can be viewed as crafts. *ABR practices are a set of methodological tools used by researchers across the disciplines during any or all phases of research, including data generation, analysis, interpretation, and representation.* These emerging tools adapt the tenets of the creative arts in order to address research questions in *holistic and engaged* ways in which *theory and practice are intertwined.* Arts-based practices draw on literary writing, music, dance, performance, visual art, film, and other mediums. Representational forms include but are not limited to short stories, novels, novellas, experimental writing forms, graphic novels, comics, poems, parables, collages, paintings, drawings, sculpture, 3-D art, quilts, needlework, performance scripts, theatrical performances, dances, films, songs, and musical scores.

I turned to ABR out of a desire to do work that was meaningful to me and had the potential to reach others. I saw ABR as a way of moving beyond the prohibitive jargon and limiting structures that characterize much traditional research practice. But the arts can do so much more—they can connect us with those who are similar and dissimilar, open up new ways of seeing and experiencing, and illuminate that which otherwise remains in darkness.

## Why This Book Is Needed

I wrote this book as an in-depth introduction to ABR. The book reviews all of the major genres of ABR, including narrative inquiry, fiction-based research, poetic inquiry, music, dance and movement, theatre, drama, film, and visual art. I aim to synthesize, chronicle, and document the work of arts-based researchers and provide some methodological instruction for those interested in this emerging paradigm. Because of my experiences with students and researchers at home and on the road since writing the first edition of *Method Meets Art*, I also hope to encourage and inspire others to try the approaches outlined in this book and to create new ones. Regardless of your disciplinary background and whether you have artistic training, I hope to show you that you can begin from where you are.

## Organization of This Book

This book pairs in-depth introductory chapters with research exemplars by leading ABR scholars. The pairing of the introductory review chapters with published research provides a context for understanding each arts-based practice as well as empirical examples of its use. In this third edition the introductory chapters are more uniformly structured and include an opening, background (with genre-specific subsections), methods section (with genre-specific subsections), special considerations, checklist of considerations, conclusion, and references. Each of the genre/methods chapters also includes discussion questions and activities, suggested readings, suggested websites and journals, and an exemplar. Several of the exemplars are printed in the book; however, the music and dance exemplars are available online (links are provided at the ends of those chapters; see also the box at the end of the table of contents). I felt it was important to move to online exemplars for those topics, as they cannot properly be represented via text. Other links to online exemplars are noted throughout the text. Please note that my intention is not that the exemplars be taken as the only ways that these methodological genres may be employed, but rather as standout examples from large genres with innumerable possibilities.

The organization of this book mirrors one way of conceptualizing the journey of ABR practices, as well as the interconnections between these approaches, by following a *word to image* arc. In this vein, the first genres covered, in Chapter 2, are narrative inquiry and fiction-based research. These approaches draw explicitly on the arts, but still

rely on “the word” as their main communication tool. Poetic inquiry merges “the word” with “lyrical invocation” and is reviewed in Chapter 3. Music as method is explored in Chapter 4, picking up on the lyrical nature of poetry, and comes into being via performance as the first of three chapters devoted to performative genres. Chapter 5 covers dance and movement, arguably the most abstract form reviewed in this book. Chapter 6 rounds out the performance-based chapters with discussions of theatre, drama, and film. The final artistic genre reviewed is visual art, the subject of Chapter 7, which completes the arc *from word to image*.

### New to the Third Edition

Since I wrote the first edition of this book, much has changed in my own life and in the field. I have met and developed relationships with many of the arts-based researchers whose work I had cited in the first edition, none of whom I knew personally when I wrote that book. Through speaking engagements and social media I have also become exposed to the work of many other practitioners and students, as well as their perceptions of the field. The academic landscape has shifted, and the publish-or-perish mantra that concerned me at the beginning of my career has shifted to a concern for going public. The increased attention to the *impact* of research, including impact beyond the academy, has aided in the development of ABR. Cumulatively, these experiences have changed and deepened my appreciation for the power and possibility of ABR as well as concerns about the skills needed to do this work and how it might be evaluated. As a result, there is new, updated, and reorganized content in the third edition:

1. Chapter 1 has been expanded and now includes a section on research design. This new section covers topic selection, literature reviews, research purpose statements, and research questions.
2. The genre/methods chapters cover additional research practices. Chapter 3, on poetic inquiry, now includes a section on concrete research poetry and coverage of slam poetry; Chapter 4, on music, now includes sections on musically enhanced narrative inquiry, community music projects, and musical spoken word and rap albums; Chapter 6, on theatre, now includes a section on scored transcripts; and Chapter 7, on the visual

arts, now includes sections on comics/graphic novels, wordless narrative research, and installation art.

3. The exemplars at the end of three of the genres/methods chapters are new. There are also new online exemplars noted throughout the text.
4. Chapter 8, on evaluation criteria, has been reorganized; ethics has been moved up in the chapter and greatly expanded to include a range of procedural and relational ethics; and the discussion of public scholarship has been expanded.
5. Chapter 9 has been rewritten and now includes a list of concrete tips for getting started with ABR, a section on collaborative ABR, and a section on the challenges of doing ABR and practical advice for meeting those challenges.
6. All chapters have been revised, including updated references and new research examples. However, I also have retained many of the former references and research examples for readers who are familiar with the original content.
7. Nonbinary pronouns are now used throughout the book.
8. I have paid much greater attention to public scholarship and issues of audience throughout the book.
9. The chapters are structured in a more uniform way, with bulleted guiding questions opening each new section.

### **Alternative Ways of Reading This Book**

Although this book can be read in order from beginning to end, it need not be. Each introductory chapter can be read on its own; so too can the research exemplars. Therefore, readers interested in particular methodological genres can read just those pertinent chapters. In addition, following the path from word to image was merely one way the book could be organized. Alternatively, some readers may view the “performance paradigm” as the major impetus for the call to the arts. For those readers, the separation of theatre and drama from dance/creative movement may be unnecessary, and they might begin with those chapters. Finally, this book can be read in conjunction with a literature review on any of the topics covered. So, for example, a researcher or student interested in visual arts-based approaches to research may read the introductory chapter as well as Chapter 7, on visual arts, alongside articles published in academic journals or on websites.

## Pedagogical Features and Resources

In addition to pairing in-depth introductory chapters with exemplars, numerous research examples are woven throughout each introductory chapter. Those chapters also note key terms and definitions, major research practices within each genre, and other key considerations. The six chapters addressing the various arts-based methodological genres also contain several special features. Each chapter ends with a checklist of considerations researchers should bear in mind as they contemplate using the particular methods reviewed. These checklists also provide guiding questions researchers can consider as they outline their own research design strategies. Researchers using this book will also find the annotated list of suggested readings, journals, and websites located at the end of each chapter helpful. The annotated list of suggested readings allows researchers to further explore particular methodological practices, while the annotated lists of journals and websites provide avenues for expanding literature reviews as well as possible publishing venues for those working with arts-based practices. Finally, I've included a pedagogical feature professors can use as they teach with this text: discussion questions and activities that can be worked on collaboratively in class or assigned as homework. Researchers new to ABR may also find these activities useful as they try these new approaches to research.

### Audience for This Book

This book is accessibly written for diverse audiences, including undergraduates, graduates, researchers, scholars, and practitioners interested in ABR or arts-based methodology. In terms of teaching, this book can be used in courses in anthropology, art, communications, creative arts therapy, cultural studies, education, expressive therapies, health studies, social work, sociology, psychology, theatre arts, and women's, gender, and sexuality studies. It can be used in methodology courses such as qualitative research, survey of research methods, ABR, emergent research practices, feminist research, narrative inquiry, and critical approaches to research.

Rest assured, this book is not intended only for those who already have training in the arts. I appreciate that sometimes, for all sorts of reasons, it can be scary to work with new approaches. I encourage you to go ahead and try anyway. When I wrote my first ABR novel, *Low-Fat Love*, I knew nothing about what I was doing. What I had was a desire

to try to do it—to get my insights and the stories of those I interviewed out in a new, more engaging, and accessible way. The rewards have been well beyond anything I could have imagined.

I hope this text encourages you to discover what other *shapes* your research might take, what *structures* you might build, and what new *audiences* you might speak to and with. Let the discovery begin!

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