arts-based research (ABR) in mental health studies:
an overview
roadmap

- Definition
- Theoretical & Social Influences
- Qualities of ABR
- Purpose of ABR
- Overview of MH Research
ABR incorporates artistic or aesthetic elements in data collection, analysis, interpretation, and/or representation in social science inquiry.
• The internet and other technologies, have nurtured a cost effective widespread dissemination of findings where data can remain in its original form.

• Criticism concerning validity and trustworthiness of ABR data mirrors qualitative researcher struggles.

• Conceptualizing knowledge as a process rather than a product is much more difficult (Eisner, 1997).
qualities of ABR

• Arts work through language of imagination-symbolism

• Intellect cannot grasp multiple, unconscious meanings at once (Jung, 1964)

• The practice of creating offers female participants the experience of being a creator, with agency, rather than powerless bystanders (Ellsworth, 1992; Margolin, 2009).
• They create new knowledge in the images of imaginary worlds on that bridge in between known and not yet known.
purposes of ABR (Leavy, 2009)

1. the arts guide both researcher and participant awareness toward process
2. the arts evoke emotional responsiveness—particularly valuable to social justice-oriented work
3. brings academic scholarship to a wider audience beyond academia
purposes of ABR (Leavy, 2009)

4. predicated upon evoking meanings rather than denoting them - makes an inductive design more plausible with less rigidly defined assumptions slipping into the process
   - arts assist in legitimizing the incubation phase of analysis where data perculates within the researcher until patterns emerge
     (Hunter, Lusardi Zucker, Jacelon, and Chandler 2002)

5. facilitate the discovery of multiple meanings, about which qualitative research already strives
review of arts-based mental health research

• Arts-based health research includes varied art modalities such as photography, theatre, film video, mural art, collage art, poetry, and dance

• We reviewed fifteen mental health studies that incorporated ABR. Eight of these studies used photography as a method to access participant experiences
rationale for photo methods

• people with long-term mental illness often struggle cognitively with articulating their experiences and study designs need to accommodate participants in a way that respects their integrity

• often marginalized, isolated and disempowered
rationale for photo methods

• Employing visual means empowers participants in various ways:
  – Here they are in control of the captured imagery, where they are generally not, then imagery utilized as relevant knowledge, making them experts of their own experience
  – Promotes empathy and dialogue among community members, service providers, and policy makers
lived experience

- Erdner, Anderson, Magnusson, & Lützén (2009) explored the life views of 8 people with long-term mental illness at three day centres.

- Findings:
  - photos enhanced participants’ capacity to reflect and converse about their views of life.
  - themes: 1. fear/anxiety regarding death and what happens after death 2. Distrust in Relationships with others; including God 3. Animals provide special meaning to life 4. Objects have symbolic value and can act as a bridge between self and others in the material world.
  - participants did not have people with which to discuss existential concerns.
• Erdner & Magnusson (2011) found that participants with mental illness tend to remain silent in interviews until concretely prompted by the interviewer.

• When the authors included photography and explained the purpose of the photos, enhanced dialogue and deepened relationships ensued.
meaning of hope

- Miller & Happell (2006): photography with individuals living with an enduring schizophrenic illness
- After recognizing that asking participants to converse about hope was too abstract a concept
- Findings:
  - employing photos allowed for a focus on the overarching meaning of hope in their lives compared to hope being described in discrete examples
  - sources of hope were revealed in the visual imagery
  - more actively involved, more comfort with researchers
• Clements (2012) utilized photovoice in a collaborative PAR project to facilitate discussion about the recovery process with 5 mental health consumers and 1 staff member.

• Photovoice incorporates text that accompanies the photos written by the participants.

• **Findings:** photovoice provided a means to voice their stories and create for themselves meanings of recovery.
fostering empathy

• Thompson, Hunter, Murray, Ninci, Rolfs, & Pallikkathayil (2008) worked with 7 participants diagnosed with bipolar, depressive, or anxiety disorders

• themes:
  – desire to stay occupied; feel invisible and unvalued; continually restoring damaged self-esteem; desire for control, safety, and mastery

• limitation: no report of empathy increase in professionals
inspiring equal care

- Fleming, Mahoney, Carlson, & Engebretson (2009) utilized an ethnographic approach to interpret a mental illness photovoice exhibit
- 15 artist-generated photos plus first-hand narratives of participants with enduring mental illness
- Findings:
  - engaging with photos and narratives contrasted participants’ daily experience where focus remained on individuals rather than illnesses
- Photovoice can break down stereotypes and engage the public about enduring mental illness
music methods

• Vander Kooij (2009), a music therapist: songs are extensions of narratives, where lyrics provide increased emotion in the context of music.

• 3 participants undergoing music therapy for 2-5 years wrote songs as part of treatment.

• Songs analyzed and discussed.

• Findings:
  – Illness experience was a journey between two destinations: health and illness.
  – Catalysts: identity (lost and restored); level of control; social engagement (connection vs. isolation); and hope (vs. hopelessness).
story-making method


• storymaking uses a fictional third-person view, which then acts as a metaphor for events in the storymaker’s life

• 49 clinicians employed the 6PSM with 25 service users
interview findings

• stories provided relevant metaphors for participants’ of their lives
• experienced therapeutic change
• felt accomplished after telling/discussing story
• 6PSM allowed for emotional distancing with exception of BDP
• Of the articles surveyed, Dent-Brown & Wang reported with the most detail in terms of number of participants, rationale for and practice of research method, and outcomes resulting directly from the ABR method utilized
film-making process

- Parr (2010): co-empowerment process
- purpose: how film-making can provide a text about the value of arts on mental health

- final document-30 min. piece entitled, *Recovering Lives: Mental health, gardening and the arts*. Twenty film-makers (academics and people with mental health problems) from LUNA (arts and mental health organization)
findings

• process was as important as the film product because:
  – required complex collaboration and effective in leveling the power between the two groups
  – process involved negotiation of meaning amongst group members, which infused life into the art

• this creative art form served as a source of self-esteem, purpose, and expression for both people with mental health issues and academics
summary

• arts-based literature we surveyed in mental health research yielded promise for capacity of the arts to access experience of mental illness, wellness, and recovery

• arts foster a more humane ethical methodological approach
summary

• artistic methods enable participants to drive the knowledge being constructed

• arts-based inquiry allows exploration of the marginalized, controversial, and disruptive perspectives that are often lost or silenced in more traditional research methodologies (Estrella & Forniash, 2007)
References


• Romano, D., McCay, E., & Boydell, K. (2012). The use of material objects in understanding the process of recovery from a first episode of schizophrenia. *Arts & Health, 4*(1), 70-82.

