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ARTfeeding the (un)born Baby

By Olga Gouni, PPC

Affiliations:

1. Cosmoanelixis, Prenatal & Life Sciences, Athens, Greece
2. National & Kapodistrian University (EKPA), Athens, Greece

Author's email: info@cosmoanelixis.gr

*"The most beautiful thing
we can experience
is the mysterious.
It is the source of all
true art and science."*

Albert Einstein

Abstract

Background: We know that maternal environment can directly influence the unborn child and that artwork can influence the human beings in the direction of helping them communicate with the un/subconscious world of theirs and unfold new aspects of theirs facilitating optimum experience for all. The aim of this paper is to share the findings of how art can support the wellbeing of the (un)born child and mother.

Data sources: Literature search and review was conducted to spot existing data. Then, a qualitative synthesis was conducted reviewing studies from a global perspective as concerns the influence of art on wellbeing of people. Review Method: Articles & publications were searched and analyzed.

Results: Art-feeding the baby -both prebirth and after birth- which is also art-feeding the maternal environment, can facilitate bonding, reduce stress, strengthen a sense of belonging, better bond with the material world and a

willingness to be born and give birth. All such factors are closely connected with depression levels for both parts and a better psychosomatic health after birth as well as better human relations.

Keywords

Fine Arts, aesthetics, stress, depression, healing, health, QOL, pregnancy, bonding, prenatal communication, primordial Health Promotion Program

Background

Our prenatal experience starting from before conception as well as our birth and the few years after that are of prime importance and define the life experience as children and adults on all levels. During pregnancy, mother and child share the same environment and whatever mother feels and experiences immediately influences the pre-nate. Years of studies in the field of prenatal psychology have shown the importance of providing for the pre-nate and how this care can transform our human experience. A healthy prenatal/ perinatal strategy should focus on removing all and any stressful information from the maternal environment on a micro, meso and macro level and reinforce optimal prenatal and perinatal bonding and attachment.

Among the things that need to be done in this direction are:

- Support the maternal environment to adopt positive, empowering attitudes and behaviors toward the self, the other, the baby coming and the world.
- Allow space for the emergence of co-operative relations between the child and the environment, family, society and the world.
- To connect the maternal environment as well as the (un)born baby with the beauty of the world so that the wish to be born and creatively participate in the world can be instilled in the unborn baby.
- To reduce, if not eliminate, the stress within the maternal environment so that the biochemical as well as other messages that reach the unborn are of the endorphin group.
- To reduce, if not eliminate, prenatal and post-partum depression for the mother and also minimize, if not eliminate, the possibility of depression in the antenatal life of the baby.
- To reduce, if not eliminate, carcinogenesis associated with adverse implantation conditions and early prenatal/ perinatal rejection stress, thus contributing to the wellbeing of the child born and growing up.
- To support Peace on the Earth and contribute to the creation of civilization.

Fine Arts can provide an excellent tool to achieve the above mentioned goals.

The Core Principles

When designing a Health Advancement Program on any level, as well as when a professional includes such a program in her/his service, this should respond and reflect the principles that are conducive to health. Consequently:

1. A healthy program should understand and aspire to offer the **optimal service to all**: mother, father, child, maternal environment in general.
2. A healthy program or practice should **achieve a good balance** of mind, body and spirit/soul/psyche, including the cultural aspect of it. It should reflect both the healthy aspects of the **past** (history) and also provide a healthy vision for the **future** of both the individual as well as the community promoting those **values of harmony, balance, creativity, care** and all good ones as both **a lived and living experience**.
3. A healthy program or practice should have common philosophical and organizational principles in congruency with the pregnant couple's and (un)born child's vision as well as the human evolutionary vision. All activities designed and offered on all levels should be optimally understood and supported as a learning journey into **personal as well as collective mastery** and should focus on performance improvement so that it facilitates all involved to embrace and embody the vision and the driving forces leading to **excellence**.
4. A healthy program should reflect the principles of aesthetics that is **Beauty, Symmetry, Truth and Simplicity**. Even if these principles are beyond personal experience as these values are outside empirical considerations. The aim is to support the individual or the group to approach and embrace such ideals.
5. A healthy program should reflect and empower the values and principles of Art in the meaning that Art and more accurately Fine Arts refer to those human creations of value that define Humanity ¹ and have the capacity to live on after the birth and lifetime of the creator and endure time in many cases for centuries even millennia, thus becoming **classical**.

Goals of the study

Considering the values and principles of Fine Arts and Aesthetics and the educative as well as evolutionary contribution of them to us, Humans, the hypothesis was that if we introduced Fine Arts in the form of painting, sculpture, architecture, music and poetry, with minor arts

¹ As mentioned in the Adams, Douglas, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.(2005)

including drama and dance plus modern additional forms of Fine Arts like film, photography, conceptual art, and printmaking as well as story-telling, myths and literature we could empower the development of a healthy human being as a whole, facilitate catharsis and contribute to better human relationships based on high ideals conducive to civilization and evolution. If we create such a Primordial Health Promotion Program working with pregnant couples and the maternal environment as well as the Unborn child feeding all of them with FINE ARTS we will support all involved in such a way that we will be able to enjoy the above mentioned outcomes.

The objective of this review is to see what evidence in this direction already exists as concerns the question “Can Fine Arts affect physical and/or psychospiritual health of both individuals and communities and contribute to the wellbeing adding value to the Quality of Life and peace?”

Method

The objective was to identify articles, papers, reviews in which the title suggested that the terms “arts, quality of life, relaxation, health, aesthetics, pregnancy, beauty, wellbeing” were discussed conceptually or in relation to how they are defined or measured. Articles and research papers were sought in which Fine Arts and aesthetics was specifically the focus of the study in relation to advancement of health, relaxation and wellbeing.

Selected material

The search engines Pubmed and Google Scholar, during the period of August 2013, produced 205 articles, papers, reviews, surveys, books the majority of an academic nature. A small minority consisting of reports by public sector agencies was also identified from a range of disciplines including architecture, psychotherapy, health, Fine Arts. These articles were also taken into account as they could provide insight into the research question. Of those 205 papers, 152² were selected as best meeting the inclusion criteria³. Some relevant books have also been included to better understand the topic under discussion.

Ethical Considerations

No ethical approval was needed as this work does not use data of any possibility of personal identification. However, all effort has been made to produce a dependable outcome.

² The Appendix of all selected material is included at the end for documentation (Marshall & Rossman, 1995)

³ The Inclusion Criteria of this work were: 1. English or Greek language, 2. Offering insight into how Fine Arts can influence Health, wellbeing and human relationships.

Data Analysis

A thematic content analysis was followed to spot recurring themes and at a later stage the group categories that were formed (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004) were presented to provide insight into the research question.

Findings

Thematic content analysis led to the identification of the following themes relevant to exploring the healing or evolutionary effects of Fine Arts.

1. Impact on Physical Health

According to the studies, Physical Health greatly improves under the influence of Art. More specifically all stress-related diseases are positively affected due to the anxiolytic effects of art on the human being.

Of prime importance is the reduction in the blood pressure as high blood pressure can be an issue of high risk during pregnancy especially in populations of high (pre)-eclampsia rates.

Other physiological measurements show changes that are closer to the health readings.

Furthermore, Art exposure can boost the hormonal outflow in a positive way and thus the immune system is boosted.

Finally, there is a significant shortening of the recuperative period in case of disease when arts are included in the recuperative environment.

2. Impact on Mental Health

Depression and anxiety are among the most easily-met conditions during pregnancy and after birth (post-partum depression) -speaking of the mother. Also, they are key challenges among the general population. As Richard Smith, ex-editor of the British Medical Journal, suggested: *'More and more of life's processes and difficulties – birth, death, is about adaptation, understanding and acceptance, then the arts may be more potent than anything medicine has to offer.'* (Smith, 2002).

Arts have a key role to play in response to increased prevalence of mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety (Philipp, 2002)

Fear of Death (met both during pregnancy and at birth) as well as experienced throughout life is connected with high levels of anxiety. Many a times, also, suicidal thoughts or attempts can bring about deaths at a very early age. Through arts there is a change in the way of looking at life and participating in it. The desire

to “sing the unique song of our own personality” is what “mobilizes the *self-healing and self-recuperative abilities of the individual*,” as Larry Le Shan⁴ says. The human being just wants to celebrate life and creatively participate in it.

Art making or Art exposure reduces the feelings of loneliness, associated with a number of mental challenges and alleviates suffering, as well.

Among clinical outcomes of arts in the sphere of mental health according to Staricoff's review is

- Improvement in behavior such as agitation
- Enhanced cognitive function
- Enhanced communication and expression
- Improved mood
- Enhanced self-esteem
- Preservation of emotional and functional motor activity
- Better adjustment to living in care settings

Arts are seen as contributing to sustainable supportive and healing environments. The three key issues of safety, comfort and control were identified as underlying perceptions and satisfaction with the health care environment.

3. Impact on Relaxation

Continuing the positive impact on body/mind health, arts can have a relaxing effect that can be of benefit to the whole population who has not presented any dysfunction. A relaxed state of being is beneficial for the good functioning of the nervous system and the heart, it promotes good functioning of the peptic system and is associated with better thinking and better relationships. In the field of childbirth, a relaxed state can also be very beneficial in cases conception is difficult and a stress-free maternal environment is the foundation for the optimal development of the (un)born baby.

Even “30 minutes of Art making would significantly reduce participants' state-related anxiety” DeLue (1999), who monitored heart rate in school-aged children during a 15-minute period of art making, found that drawing within a circle produced a physiologically measurable relaxation response.

In the material studied (Ulrich, 1992), there is a significant observation made concerning the elements in visual arts that are conducive to relaxing effects. Among them are:

⁴ Mentioned in “*The Mechanic and the Gardener.*” By Larry le Shan, Balantyne press, 1989

- Paintings and pictures from Nature (eg. Trees, plants, water) and daily life which are not complicated but rather soothing and comforting.
- Clear, light and friendly colors.
- Artworks that feature images that hold the attention and create a positive distraction from worries and invasive thoughts are of most benefit.
- Happy laughing or caring human faces
- Benign animals

What is also mentioned in the already studied research is the importance of gardens and the access to views of outside.

4. Impact on Emotional knowledge

Wood and Smith (2004) in their effort to understand human emotional response to live music performance using “observant listening” and “participant sensing” reached the conclusion that music can increase emotional knowledge and this “might change the way people think about, use, reproduce, regulate and modify the world”

5. Impact on Positive Thinking

Fine Arts and Aesthetics trigger positive thinking.

Michael Wilson, in his book “Health is for People”⁵ states that “medicine is both art and science and as an art we are helping patients and the community to see things in a new way- the worried mother comes to “see” her worries were out of proportion and the tired businessman gets a new way of looking at time off when he sees how proper relaxation can help him to reduce his blood pressure, temper his temper and improve his morale and happiness... Storytelling is a very successful way of imparting information without telling people what to do. Stories can approach problems and concepts from a lateral angle and speak to an individual at a much deeper intuitive level.

In the Withymoor report (No 135) it is mentioned that the simple playing a melodeon during the ante-natal clinic “changed the atmosphere and turned the session into more of a celebration” concluding that a simple musical instrument might be a more suitable “prescription” for some people”.

In many places, there is reference as to how music and involvement in aesthetics with the mathematical parameters of symmetry, rhythm, harmony, truth ... can influence the cognitive functions of a person and the Mozart effect plus the positive cognitive performance noticed in the babies born by singer parents in psychophonie are well known. The great pedagogue Joseph Chilton Pearce (1993)

⁵ Mentioned in No 135 of the selected material list

speaks about the positive relationship between language acquisition and the phonetics/sounds during pregnancy.

6. Impact on Awareness Raise

Coultier (2005) says that “pleasurable aesthetic experiences can raise patients’ awareness and responsiveness to health care environments, making them seem less clinical, diminishing anxiety and enhancing emotional well-being of patients and staff.

Also, visual and acoustic conditions may reduce risks of errors in some care setting and become contributors to individual health capital.

Arts can also reinforce way-finding and information gathering. That would be extremely helpful to enhance parental awareness and also professional awareness as to what is in the psyche of the parents.

7. Impact on Spiritual Values’ Empowerment

Fine Arts and aesthetics directly speak to the primary human need for harmony, balance and rhythm feeding these primordial human needs from the early beginning. It connects people with beauty and truth and goodness promoting spiritual growth and maturity. It enhances the sense of co-operation, communication, care and collectiveness, interest for participation in the creation. It further stimulates optimism, a sense of belonging and a wish to mutually offer as you benefit from what you get. All these are high spiritual values.

Art also helps human beings to participate into the mystery of life and experience this unique unity with the universe.

Art becomes the vehicle to strengthen the imagination and express the unspoken using forms, symbols and ideas with meanings that go deep and far beyond. That’s why it is part of the rituals, performances and dances or symbols of most cultures.

Art is a strong means of communication of emotions, moods and feelings among people.

Art is also an indicator of civilization, abundance and is clearly associated with historical eras of peace.

As it is mentioned in the selected material⁶ “a key benefit the arts bring is that they reveal and pronounce our spiritual values and our biological needs and limitations. They can be a barometer of a nation’s health and their messages at

⁶ Michael Wilson «Health is for People”

best proceed intuitively from the heart. Unlike clinical pathology, they can not cure disease but they can make our mortality acceptable - for comprehension of disease and death is central to any celebration of life". And elsewhere⁷, we read that "... factors which make for health are concerned with a sense of personal and social identity, human worth, communication, participation in the making of political decisions, celebration and responsibility... the language of science alone is insufficient to describe health. The languages of story, myth and poetry also disclose its truth. Any conference on health must be as widely representative of human genius as possible..."

Simply speaking, through Arts, we become better people.

8. Impact on the staff

Artistically designed Environments also affect staff in the following ways:

- The relationships between the staff and the patients improved as the professionals had gained in all above mentioned ways. So were the relationships among the staff professionals. There was enhanced communication and expression.
- As improvements in visual and acoustic conditions were introduced there was a reduction in risks of errors in some care settings, especially those in very stressful environments.
- The morale (and also the moral standards) of the staff professionals showed an increase.
- The staff professionals showed higher motivation.

All above factors are conducive to better health provision.

9. Impact on the Quality of Life

There is a direct impact of Arts and the Quality of Life as the element of satisfaction to which involvement in Fine Arts or exposure to Fine Arts experience is also a measurement that defines Quality of Life. The research by Michalos showed that satisfaction came out of gourmet cooking, embroidery, needlepoint, cross-stitching, going to the movies and buying works of art. It is associated with emotional well-being, personal confidence and self-esteem, self-determination as well as personal safety all of which being QOL indicators.

Furthermore, involvement in Arts is associated with inclusion and leads to social cohesion, strengthening and empowering communities, all of them being QOL indicators.

⁷ pp 59-60

10. Social Impact

Among the society benefitting from Fine Arts, we distinguish the following aspects (Calloway, 2006):

- Arts support better communication and expression among people
- Empower the sense of belonging leading to social cohesion and inclusion
- Storytelling, choirs, collective art making, etc. can provide a social event where people come together to listen and share and have an enjoyable time co-creating.
- They become a wealth capital for the community adding to material well-being and alleviating poverty
- They have an economic impact and provide employment opportunities.
- They increase personal responsibility for health
- They can empower autonomy
- The change in perspective can evolve the whole community, nation, world.
- They are a living indicator of civilization.

Limitations

During data collection and data analysis, what was obvious is the lack of such research in prenatal, Perinatal and postnatal contexts.

Most of the research already done was associated with the impact of Arts in the architectural design of health establishments like hospitals, or other population groups, such as adults, or third age. Such research in the maternal/child environment remains to be done.

Another theme that emerged was the distinction between people being involved in art as in therapeutic processes in the field of art-therapy in general, and people actually being in Fine Arts environments. As our involvement in art does not necessarily lead to creation of Fine Arts' artifacts, this distinction is very significant. And although good research has been made into the healing effects of art-making, more research is needed in the field of seeing the actual benefits of human evolution when in artistic environments of high aesthetics.

Discussion and suggestions

Despite the limitations of the research, it is very obvious that even little involvement with Fine Arts can add value to our life as individuals and as a society. Since, the most effective Health promotion programs are those that focus on the primordial human experience, it is important to look into it and design more prenatal/perinatal programs based on Fine Arts. In this direction, the program Welcome, designed by the writer aims to contribute.

Alongside with more Primordial Health Promotion Programs to be designed and offered to the communities, the following are also suggested:

Our maternity clinics, hospitals and birth centers should be redesigned to reflect the already well-known benefits.

“Creative Arts Corners” could be established in lobbies, maternity hospitals, etc. or in the lobbies of Midwives and Obstetricians to empower relaxation and personal and community well-being.

Scientists should consider working alongside with artists and philosophers so that people can benefit from this synergy.

Educational programs should also be revisited and modules on Arts and Aesthetics should be included in Midwifery, Medicine and Health Management/Promotion fields.

All of these can be done immediately as they just depend on a change of the thinking perspective of relevant decision makers.

Certainly, the artist involved in primordial health promotion programs involving pregnant couples and the unborn as well as babies antenatally should be particularly sensitive to the situation as such prenatal and ante-natal clinics are not about being ill but about welcoming and celebrating life.

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APPENDIX of SELECTED MATERIAL

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