

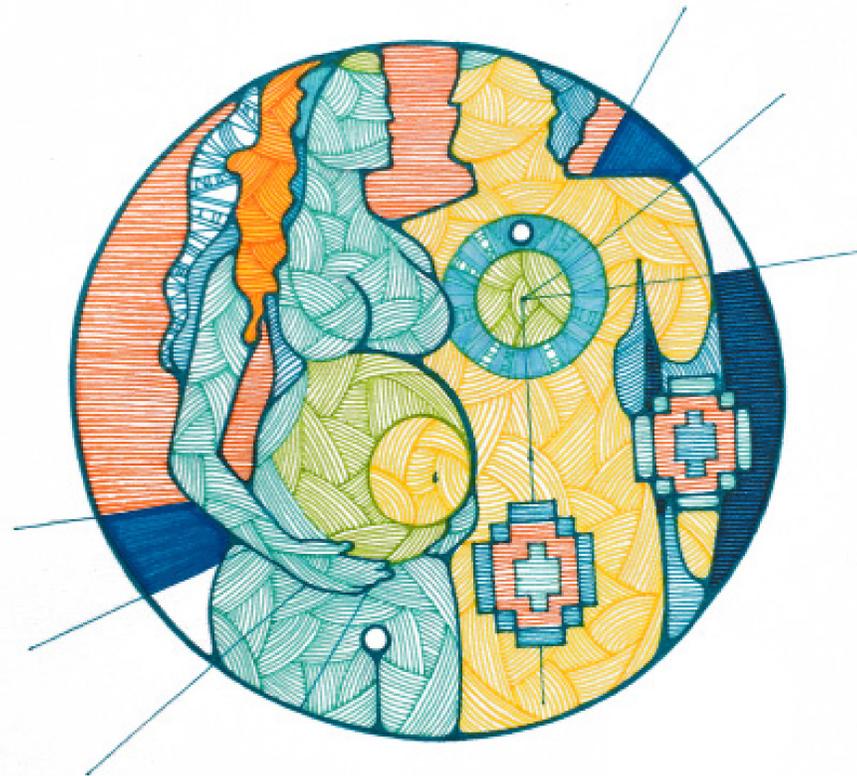
Implications of Art-making During Pregnancy and for Perinatal Care

Tracey Ariga Zavala | Candidate for Master of Arts in Art Therapy



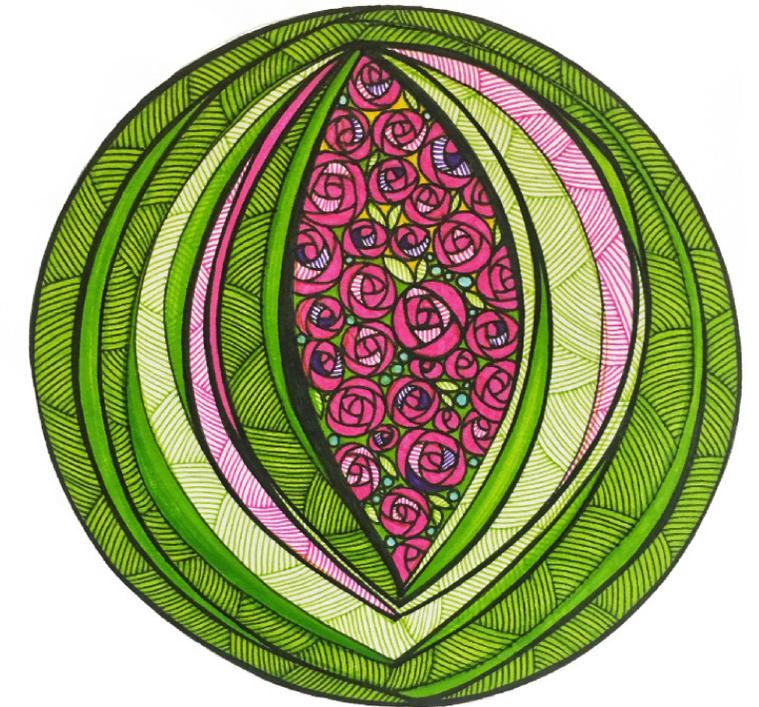
MIND-BODY AWARENESS

Data sample from first trimester, created an *imagined* representation of the embryo (March 2, 2017)



ATTUNEMENT (TO DEVELOPING CHILD IN-UTERO)

Data sample from third trimester, "I sense myself as a vessel, allowing something much larger than myself come through me." (August 3, 2017)



SUPPORT-ENHANCING RESOURCES

Data sample from fourth trimester "first glance", honoring the moment of crowning and representing the journey of pregnancy and birth (October 20, 2017)

Background

Pregnancy is a major transition in a woman's life, and yet standard practice in the United States does not often include mental health preventative care support for expectant mothers. More known is research pertaining to postpartum depression and the influence of a mother's attachment style on a child's development during early childhood. Less studied is the influence of attachment during pregnancy and its implications for improving maternal and childhood outcomes (Alhusen et al, 2013). The link between expectant mothers' mental health during pregnancy, maternal-fetal attachment, and fetal development is increasingly supported by a growing body of research based in attachment theory, neuroscience, and psychotherapy (Brandon et al, 2009).

Research Objective

Art therapy can provide an expressive and therapeutic opportunity to deepen the experience of pregnancy through artistic analysis (Hocking, 2007), mindfulness, exploration of personal emotions, prenatal bonding, and maternal identity (Swan-Foster, 1989).

Method

Research Design: Heuristic arts-based research study

Participant: Self, first-time expectant mother, art therapist in-training

Procedures: Qualitative data consisted of artwork and written journal responses created bi-weekly for length of the pregnancy using preferred art mediums, watercolor and ink.

Findings

Thematic analysis of artwork and written journal responses revealed three major themes which emerged during pregnancy:

mind-body awareness

Keywords: Physical changes, "growing belly", womb, "internal perception", meditation, connection

Art features: Watercolor, appearance of cellular division, small free form shapes

"The art becomes a meditation and I find myself trying to breathe out any feelings of anxiety or fear"

attunement to developing child in-utero

Keywords: Attuning, sacred, "safe space making", "body as vessel", love, energy, "inner wisdom"

Art features: Watercolor/ink, increased detail, controlled geometric linework

"Imagining an energetic exchange occurring brings me such happiness"

"My mind is blank... maybe the mandala will speak to me, where my own mind cannot"

support- enhancing resources

Keywords: Art, "nourishing growth", ultrasound, husband, generational trauma, "sacred space"

Art features: Ink/color pencil, controlled use, organic, inspired by nature/human anatomy

"I feel a need to ground myself in something that challenges my brain, not my heart.."

I am using this opportunity to bring me back into the other 'normal' world", one which is different from the "isolated yet incredibly magical (intuitive world) with my baby."

Implications

This heuristic study demonstrated the applicability of art therapy and personal art making for expectant mothers. The bi-weekly art making sessions became an anticipated time of reflection which appeared to decrease stress and anxiety, strengthen new maternal identity, and increase attunement to the developing child (Swan-Foster, 1989). Art therapy during pregnancy can facilitate exploration of mindfulness and emotions in a supportive and therapeutic manner.

These findings can serve as a foundation for developing *art therapy* for standard preventative care models for perinatal care, with a focus on increasing self awareness, strengthening maternal-fetal attachment during pregnancy, and lowering risk of perinatal and postpartum depression.

What is Art Therapy?

"Art therapy is an integrative mental health and human services profession that enriches the lives of individuals, families, and communities through active art-making, creative process, applied psychological theory, and human experience within a psychotherapeutic relationship" (AATA, 2017).

Learn more at the American Art Therapy Association | www.arttherapy.org

References

- Alhusen, J. A., Hayat, M. J., and Gross, D. (2013). A longitudinal study of maternal attachment and infant developmental outcomes. *Archives of Women's Mental Health*, 16(6), 521-9.
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Contact:

Tracey Ariga Zavala | GW Art Therapy Program 2019 | tariga@gwu.edu