

The Body and Mind Connection: Perspectives of an Expressive Therapist on Healthy Aging*

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I. Introduction

The purpose of this article was to investigate the contribution of the field of expressive therapies including dance/movement and art therapy where the human body and mind as a whole, for promoting healthy aging in older adults' life. By presenting and sharing these perspectives, the attention goes to the artists, expressive therapists, and human service related professionals to expand their knowledge and experiences to promote qualified facilitators and therapists using body-mind interacting art methods for preparing aging society with positive perspectives.

The life span is getting longer. Society is preparing for long-term care for the elderly. This does not only concern physical health, but also healthy aging with quality of life. There has been more attention and effort given to keeping mind, body, and spirit healthy at all stages of life. Older adults wish to continue living life independently in their home communities. Yet, they remain at great risk for decline of physical as well as psychological functioning. Adding to the biological risks are psychosocial stressors, including lack of financial resources, the high price of medical expenses, and increases in other living expenses. The elderly need a good support system to help them alleviate these burdens. Various physical problems, such as heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, arthritis, and cancer are most common but high-cost chronic conditions affecting older adults.¹⁾ However, the

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1) World Health Organization (2015).

elderly also have likely suffered multiple social losses due to deaths and illnesses, and often have fewer options for creating new social support networks. Therefore, they especially need a safe environment where they can express these experiences: to relieve suffering, to mine the rich spiritual potential in aging, and to liberate feelings of joy in life.

We consider, however, old age as a period of deceleration and diminishment in the energy of life. Many of the elderly feel that they have lost their worthiness and connection to the world. Various mental health disciplines, including psychotherapy, are used to relieve their stress and improve the quality of their lives.²⁾ Better yet, expressive arts, such as art, dance, and music can span time and space therapeutically, thereby targeting specific issues and needs of the elderly. The arts can connect us not only to our inner selves and self-worth, but also to other people, who can share time and space through the medium of the arts.³⁾

Weisberg & Wilder (2001)⁴⁾ reinforced the notion that expressive arts are concrete, living expressions of the lives, which would make connection for better future. Furthermore, group arts experiences enable empathic connections among elderly participants, creating social support from the same factors that outside the therapeutic environment expose individuals to isolation and pain.

Expressive arts are most powerful ways of producing many different kinds of emotions and experiences of life, and they contribute to mental development and social adjustment. According to Dewey (1958),⁵⁾ possibilities are embodied in works of arts and they can't be actualized any other way. The arts are so fundamental and rudimentary to human experience of volumes, figures, and direction of qualitative change. Some of the therapeutic benefits of arts are gaining a sense of connection between internal and external reality, feelings of mastery by giving form to and integrating conflicting feelings, and satisfying creative and expressive urges. Therefore, any form of arts function as both stimulation to and an expression of overall mental functioning, and it often bridges unseen cognition and outward physical evidence. Expressive arts help us sustain our lives, not only to achieve feelings of joy and fulfillment, but also to maintain our health on basic and necessary levels. All kinds of arts are important methods for developing a sense of connection to and understanding of our environment, including the people around us. All of these are true to in old age.⁶⁾

2) American Psychological Association (2017).

3) Malchiodi, C. A.(Ed.). (2005), *Expressive therapies* (New York, NY: The Guilford Press).

4) Weisberg, N. & Wilder, R. (2001), *Expressive arts with elders: A resource* (London, England: Jessica Kingsley Publisher).

5) Dewey, J. (1958. orig. 1934), *Art as experience* (New York, NY: Capricorn).

6) Kim, S. (2010a), A story of a healing relationship: The person-centered approach in expressive arts therapy, *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health* 5(1), pp.93-98.

II. Healthy Aging

Aging is a very important and popular theme due to the dramatic increase of the old population over the world. The 41.4 million first baby boomers turned 65 in 2011, and the older population is projected to grow to 72 million by 2030. It means that the 20% of the total U.S. population will be age 65 and over.⁷⁾ The society needs to pay close attention to the older population for their well-being in both physical and psychological perspectives.

The concept of healthy aging provides a vision of hope about growing old with a positive state of mind as well as minimizing and managing physical age-related declines.⁸⁾ Studies of mind-body connections reveal the interplay of experiences, emotions, behavior, and physical health⁹⁾ and contribute to a better understanding of inner feelings of mastery and control (Malchiodi, 2003),¹⁰⁾ which are important components of the healthy aging process. Cohen (2005)¹¹⁾ emphasizes the importance of a sense of control for older persons by presenting a research study that found positive emotions boost levels of beneficial immune system cells. He describes two types of cells, T cells and natural killer cells, which are large white blood cells that attack tumor cells and infected body cells. Both respond to positive feelings in the body.

Healthy aging is defined of health as physical, mental, and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (WHO, 2015)¹²⁾ expanded the definition of health as are source for everyday life, not the objective of living, and a positive concept emphasizing social and personal resources, as well as physical capacities.

The concept of successful aging developed by Rowe and Kahn (1998)¹³⁾ describes older people who experience little or no age-related declines into their 70s and 80s. They defined successful aging as growing older with low risk of disease and disease-related disabilities, high mental and physical functioning, and active engagement in life. It is meaningful to understand the concept of successful aging, but it may not reflect the nature of aging for most people in our society. There would not be many elderly who can describe their aging process as ‘successful aging’ based on the definition of Rowe and Kahn (1998) due to the impact of deteriorating physical and psychological processes on

7) United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2013), Cohen, G. (2005), *The mature mind: The positive power of the aging brain* (New York, NY: Basic Books).

8) Kim, S. K. (2013), A randomized, controlled study of the effects of art therapy on older Korean-Americans’ healthy aging, *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 40(1), pp.158–164.

9) Achterberg, J., Dossy, L., Gordon, J. S., Hegedus, C., Hermann, M. W., & Nelson, R. (1994), Hass-Cohen, N. (2003), Art therapy mind body approaches, *Progress: Family Systems Research and Therapy* 12, pp.24-38.

10) Malchiodi, C. A. (Ed.) (2003), *Handbook of art therapy* (New York, NY: The Guilford Press).

11) Cohen, G. (2005), *The mature mind: The positive power of the aging brain* (New York, NY: Basic Books).

12) World Health Organization (2015). The Ottawa Charter for health promotion (1986).

13) Rowe, J. W., & Kahn, R. L. (1998), *Successful aging* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books).

daily life. According to U.S. Centers for Disease Control (2003),¹⁴⁾ the elderly, both men and women over 70 years old, experience chronic conditions, such as hypertension (over 40%), diabetes (over 11%), arthritis (over 49%), heart disease (over 19%), or stroke (over 7%). Additionally, about 50% of the elderly experience more than one chronic condition and complications of symptoms. Most elderly individuals expect to experience the decline of physical and psychological functioning. Rowe and Kahn (1987)¹⁵⁾ differentiated normal aging or usual aging from the aging process that includes disease. The definition of successful aging is considered more focused on the ideal concept of aging, which aspires for high mental and physical functioning without disease. According to the American Psychological Association (2017),¹⁶⁾ the elderly with medical problems have higher rates of depression than those who are medically well. Fifty to 70% of all primary care medical visits are related to psychological factors such as anxiety, depression, and stress. About 15% of older adults become chronically depressed. The symptoms of depression often coexist with those of other serious illnesses, including heart disease, diabetes, cancer, and Parkinson's disease. Most of symptoms of depression are also often mistakenly viewed as part of the normal aging process or as a consequence of health problems and are left untreated.

Valliant (2002) explains, "Positive aging must always reflect vital reaction to change, to disease, and to environmental imbalance. Positive aging is not simply avoidance of physical decline and of death."¹⁷⁾ Positive aging includes natural parts of the aging process with declines, losses, and death of other people and oneself. The concept of positive aging presents the premise that people make choices and engage in coping even when experiencing age-related limitations physically and psychologically. When people seek happiness and well-being in later life, it is more related to the state of mind than their limitations in reality. Wister (2003)¹⁸⁾ emphasized that positive aging requires disciplined behavior, and that greater well-being and better adaptation in later life are results of this discipline. For example, heavy smoking is not compatible with positive aging, and controlling the smoking habit would take self-discipline.

Hill (2005)¹⁹⁾ stated that it is important to have positive aging perspectives, which are conceptualized in four characteristics. First, a person mobilizes resources to cope with age-related declines. Second, a person makes lifestyle choices to preserve well-being. Third, a person cultivates

14) U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2003), Trends in aging-United States and worldwide.

15) Rowe, J. W., & Kahn, R. L. (1987), Human aging: Usual and successful, *Science* 237, pp.143-149.

16) American Psychological Association (2017), Older adults' health and age-related changes: Reality versus myth.

17) Vaillant, G. (2002), *Aging well: Surprising guideposts to a happier life from the landmark Harvard study of adult development* (New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company), p.161.

18) Wister, A. V. (2003), It's never too late: Healthy lifestyles and aging, *Canadian Journal on Aging* 22, pp.149-15

19) Hill, R. D. (2005), *Positive aging: A guide for mental health professionals and consumers* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company).

flexibility across the life span. Fourth, a person focuses more on the positives than the problems and difficulties of growing old. In *Aging Well*, Valliant (2002) provides examples of individuals who made the independent choices to focus on the positive meaning of age-related declines. He pointed out the fact when the elderly cultivated positive mindsets for their aging processes; they experienced a sense of well-being and life satisfaction whether or not they were physically healthy. It can be powerful for the elderly to have a positive outlook towards their aging process that they achieve the sense of well-being and life satisfaction.

Most of the aging definitions investigated and researched by scholars over the world proclaim that it is crucial to keep both the body and mind in positive way of state to stay healthy in the aging processes.

III. Body and Mind Connection in Expressive Therapies

It is given tasks for us to explore how to achieve healthy aging with various arts forms because any form of arts are very essential and fundamental ways of human being stay connected in body, mind, and spirit healthy and true to the self even from the beginning of the human history. Expressive therapy, which is known as expressive or creative arts therapy, is to use the creative process as forms of psychotherapy.²⁰⁾ Expressive therapy is based on the belief that human being can examine the body, mind and spirit through creative expression and stimulating of the imagination.

The body and mind approaches originated from the medical field where there are patients bring medically unexplained symptoms in clinic. In *Diagnostic and Statistic manual for Mental Disorders*,²¹⁾ the medically unexplained symptoms are classified as Somatic Symptom and related Disorders (SSD). The major issue of SSD is related with more physical and bodily pain or symptoms than psychological problems in treatment. When it comes to the ‘undefined physical disease,’ it seems to be considered as ‘problems with mind,’ and there seems not many treatment plans or solutions for those patients with unexplained medical symptoms.

In the latest research, however, the groups of using The BodyMind Approach (TBMA), which facilitate the arts and mindfulness, implementing dance movement psychotherapy, were reported that the symptoms such as distress, anxiety, and depression has reduced, and there was improvement in activity levels with good coping strategies over 18 months period.²²⁾ It is practical and evidence-based research investigated the body-mind connections to treat both psychological well-being and the

20) Malchiodi, C. A. (Ed.) (2003), *Handbook of art therapy* (New York, NY: The Guilford Press).

21) American Psychiatric Association (2013), *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.) (Washington, DC: Author).

22) Payne, H. (2016), Clinical outcomes from the Bodyimnd Approach in the treatment of patients with medically unexplained symptoms in primary health care in England: practice-based evidence, *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 42, pp.19-21.

physical health. When the participants were required to access their bodily sensation with breathing exercises in treatment, they were able to explore their inner state of mind with images and conscious mind simultaneously. Most recent researches on body, movement and physical field of therapies and treatment clearly proclaim that the body is not just reflection of mind, rather, equally important parts of mind itself.²³⁾ Our body functions as a container of sensations, images, feelings, ideas, and thoughts, which are the function of mind. In expressive therapies, body and mind is considered as whole where the spiritual mind can unfold. Through various forms of arts, participants gain opportunities of problem-solving or meaning-making by experiencing connection between the body and mind, and it guides them to discover new possibilities of healthy daily life.

Dance is defined as a multisensory experience and expression of self through body in expressive arts and considered as more complete methods to explore and express the inner feelings and thoughts than verbal language, while reducing stress.²⁴⁾ Dance and body movement connect us to the creativity which enables human being to discover not only physical self but also new possibilities of staying healthy in psychologically. Neuroscientific perspectives by Porges, dance is defined as “neural exercises”, which can shift the state of mind to safe context. When the feeling of safety in mind has changed, it is reflected to the state of body. It explains the notion of the body and mind is connected in our physiological nature, the brain.²⁵⁾

Dance/Movement Therapy (DMT) is the therapeutic use of movement to further the emotional, cognitive, physical and social integration of the individual, based on the empirically supported premise that the body, mind and spirit are interconnected. In the latest research in dance therapy, non-goal-oriented movement in dance/movement therapy has specific effects in improving body self-efficacy, in decreasing stress, and in empowering the self to manage problems.²⁶⁾

In other hand, art-making process is always accompanied with various physical movements, such as bilateral arm and hand movement, balanced posture, seating still while drawing images or moving around for sculpting. Art is known to increase and sharpen cognitive and perceptual skills, in stimulating the body and mind senses, and in regenerating social interaction with others in expressive therapies. While the therapist usually plays a supportive role, psychotherapy may be in order as participants attempt to resolve problems while managing stress in physical and psychological aspects.

23) Sharma, M., Rush, S. (2014), Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction as a stress management intervention for healthy individuals: A systematic review, *Journal of Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, doi:10.1177/2156587214543143.

24) Hanna, J. I. (1995), The power of dance: Health and healing, *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* 1(4), pp.323-331.

25) Porges, S. (2013), Body, brain, behavior: How polyvagal theory expands our healing paradigm, NICABM Webinar Session, New Brain Science 2013 Webinar Series.

26) Wiedenhofer, S., Koch, S. C. (2017), Active factors in dance/movement therapy: Specifying the health effects of on-goal-orientation in movement, *The arts in psychotherapy* 52(1), pp.10-23.

One of the art therapy research finding revealed that the art therapy intervention was effective on reducing negative emotions, improving self-esteem, and decreasing anxiety in older adults.²⁷⁾

Art therapy is a body-mind intervention by creating images about his/her experiences, emotions, and responses especially to difficult life events to reframe them for well-being.²⁸⁾ To facilitate the arts as therapy process, the development of a positive and healing therapeutic relationship between the client and therapist is crucial.²⁹⁾ One of leading art therapists, expressive therapists, and psychologists, Natalie Rogers, offered person-centered approach without non-goal oriented art-making in art therapy; she was not interpretive of the clients' art images. Rather, she offered creative environment where the person can freely express him/herself to find right way within.

Natalie Rogers (1993) explained expressive arts can bring creativity, soul, and spirit by movement, sound, drawing, dancing, drama, music, and language with means of self-expression and personal growth. She emphasized the importance of applying different types of arts modalities in her therapy sessions, "By moving from art form to art form, we release the layers of inhibition that have covered our originality, discovering our uniqueness and special beauty."³⁰⁾ She applied non-conditional caring as an expressive therapist to her clients and their art, movement, sound, poetry, and/ or drama. She believed that person-centered expressive arts therapists maintain a positive and caring attitude towards clients, helping them to accept any negative feelings, including outrage, aggression, anger, and violence; yet, any aggressive and violent behaviors are not acceptable in the treatment.³¹⁾

Various forms of arts in expressive therapies are beneficial for the participants who feel stuck, overwhelmed, or non-verbal to guide them to promote self-understanding and exploration of inner self. The best way to approach our unconscious and subconscious is through creative arts forms where the body and mind work together. Any arts modalities inspire and stimulate all this process of discovery. Once the inner feelings are explored and expressed in various forms of arts, growth is accelerated. When human being uncovers unknown aspects through body-mind connection, we have opportunities to feel free and integrated. Our innate abilities in creative expression by means of dancing, painting and listening to or playing music, empower healing and recovery even from traumatic life experiences.

27) Kim, S. K. (2013), A randomized, controlled study of the effects of art therapy on older Korean-Americans' healthy aging, *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 40(1), pp.158-164.

28) Malchiodi, C. A.(Ed.) (2005), *Expressive therapies* (New York, NY: The Guilford Press).

29) Kim, S. (2010a), A story of a healing relationship: The person-centered approach in expressive arts therapy, *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health* 5(1), pp.93-98; Wadson, H. (1987), *The dynamics of art psychotherapy* (New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons).

30) Rogers, N. (1993), *The creative connection: Expressive arts as healing* (Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books), p.43.

31) Kim, S. (2010a), A story of a healing relationship: The person-centered approach in expressive arts therapy, *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health* 5(1), pp.93-98.

IV. Conclusion

This study investigated the field of expressive therapies including dance/movement and art therapy where the human body, mind, and spirit interact as a whole, for promoting healthy aging in older adults' life. Due to the rapid increase of older population globally, many attentions are given to the older adults and their well-being of life in many ways. From the expressive therapist's perspectives, the effort was made on how dance/movement and art therapy in the field of expressive therapies can contribute to the issues of growing old healthy with practical support. Some theoretical perspectives on aging were presented, such as healthy aging, successful aging, and positive aging. In terms of expressive therapies, using various arts modalities like art, dance, drama, music, and etc., Dance/Movement Therapy (DMT) and Art Therapy (AT) were briefly explored and introduced in the concept of body and mind connection approach with some recent research findings.

It is reported that so many old individuals withdraw into an aloneness that reflects a feeling of distance from others and as a result, many of them report symptoms of depression, helpless feelings, sadness, anxiety, chronic pain and difficulties sleeping at night. Anxiety and depression in the older adults can decrease emotional resources and make healthy aging difficult.³²⁾

The expressive arts can connect the older adults not only to his or her inner selves and self-worth, but also to other people, who can share time and space through the forms of various arts like art-making, dancing, and singing or playing musical instruments. The creative process with body movement to express inner feelings and ideas in expressive arts help every human to revive new energy and reawaken potential in their physical body and psychological state of mind, and it applies to the older adults to achieve healthy aging.

It has been informed for a long time that for older adults, the sensitive use of arts activities, can recall of forgotten or repressed memories.³³⁾ Over 40 years of studies of aging and recent research finding, however, have revealed the benefit of using various forms of arts modality enlightened with stimulating the body-mind connection in expressive arts and its application of therapies. There are a few quantitative research findings on expressive therapies and aging related subjects, and it seems prospecting and promising for the future to investigate further in the efficacy and effects on healthy aging and expressive therapies with evidence-based researches.

To promote healthy aging not only for the older adults but also for people suffering from physical and psychological problems, it is essential perspectives to use the body-mind connection via utilizing various arts modalities. The sensory awareness of the body in arts stimulate inner metaphor and images of self, and they can be expressed in drawing, dancing, painting, or sound-making with the support of professional therapists who know what works for the participants.

32) Blazer, D. G. (2003), Depression in late life: Review and commentary, *Journal of Gerontology: Medical Sciences* 58, pp.249-265.

33) Zeiger, B. (1976), Life review in art therapy with the aged, *American Journal of Art Therapy* 15, pp.47-50.

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The purpose of this article was to investigate the contribution of the field of expressive therapies including dance/movement and art therapy where the human body and mind as a whole, for promoting healthy aging in older adults' life. By presenting and sharing these perspectives, the attention was given to the artists, expressive therapists, and human service related professionals to expand their knowledge and experiences to promote qualified facilitators and therapists using body-mind interacting art methods for preparing aging society with positive perspectives. Some theoretical perspectives on aging were presented, such as healthy aging, successful aging, and positive aging. Our body functions as a container of sensations, images, feelings, ideas, and thoughts, which are the function of mind. In expressive therapies, body and mind is considered as whole where the spiritual mind can unfold. Dance/Movement Therapy (DMT) and Art Therapy (AT) were briefly explored and introduced in the concept of body and mind connection approach with some recent research findings.

Keywords: Body-Mind connection(몸-마음 연결), Expressive therapies(표현치료), Dance/Movement therapy(춤/움직임 치료), Art therapy(미술치료), Healthy aging(건강한 노화)