

Why do we need lullabies?

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In our consumeristic and technological culture we have forgotten the value of simple, yet powerful prenatal and perinatal practices like lullabies. Mothers have been singing lullabies to their babies for millennia. African indigenous women use songs and dances from before conception to connect with the soul of the child and continue to sing the same song throughout pregnancy, birth and beyond to create an element of continuum and familiarity which will be formative in the attachment process (Sansone, 2021). They do so also when the child is unwell as a healing remedy. Anthropological studies have revealed that lullabies have been one of the most universal ways of transmission of culture, values and stability through

generations since the beginning of our human history.

While it is common notion that lullabies are used to soothe and put the child to sleep, less known is that the 'song by the rocking cot' was originally used for the mother herself more than for the child, to have a private space in the house in which to release all her emotional and body tensions of the day. It was used as a self-calming or self-regulating remedy for the suffering consequent to romantic conflicts, tiredness from the daily chores, or poverty. It is this subjective reality of the mother that conveys the implicit bodily cues through the rocking and holding, and voice sounds and melody more than the song words themselves (Persico, 2002). This explains why lullabies are often associated with a maternal lament and scary words, especially in certain cultures. In line with the integrative psychophysiological model of Prof Vezio Ruggieri, (1997), which has influenced Persico's and my work, the rocking that usually accompanies the song is a modality of regulation of bodily tensions that structure the mother-child relationship through bidirectional sensorimotor interactions. The child ends up falling asleep not because of the words of the song but less apparent, more implicit processes of the mother-child relationship.

This subjective reality does not diminish the value of the lullaby or brings a negative element into it but is rather a fundamental connective tissue in the mother-child relationship and attachment formation and in shaping the future way of dealing with intimate relationships (attachment style). The English title of Persico's innovative Italian book 'Lullaby: From maternal holding to the psychophysiology of human relationship' condenses this complex reality of the 'rocking song'. The child's recognition of and bodily responses to songs or rhythms he/she was exposed to in-utero are evidence that these implicit reciprocal dialogic exchanges begin far prior-to birth (Sansone, 2021). Thus, singing lullabies from pregnancy and even before and during conception to welcome a child can facilitate the transition from the womb to the outside world, prenatal memory and secure attachment.

For fathers, this ancient practice can be a wonderful way to be involved in the pregnancy, childcare and influence the attachment relationship with his child. This simple universal practice is not just a hypnagogic (facilitating sleep) song but also a structural base on which the child learns to trust, feel empathy, regulate emotions, and body-self-awareness, which are fundamental to develop individuation and autonomy. The ritual song of the lullaby and associated rocking are a real emotional, dialogic and relational process between two musical bodies. While singing, both mother and child perceive and convey bodily cues that indicate tranquility and serenity or tension and anxiety. The messages of this 'silent' dialogue are transmitted through the muscular tension, way of holding, breathing, thus pauses during singing, eyes' activity and gestures, which both mother and baby use as means to access or inhibit the relationship, form a "protomusical" language and intimate connection (Persico, 2002). Persino's studies have found that some parents have difficulties in singing a lullaby and rocking their child and this may have roots in their own experience of the cot (whether rocked and sung with tensions or not rocked at all) or early trauma. Observing parents while rocking and singing a lullaby can reveal important cues in therapy sessions. Therefore, lullabies are an artistic expression but also a universal biological necessity in promoting co-regulation and calmness in both mother and child, just as human connection and love is, according to the Polyvagal Theory and related social engagement system (Porges, 2011).

This CD reveals the unknown of lullabies and is an invitation for parents, at any phase of their parenting, including pregnancy, to rediscover this wonderful ancient practice and way of being in the present-moment relationship with their child, which promotes human connectedness and wellbeing in both parent and child.