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The Religious and Moral Effects of an Inclination towards Art and Beauty in the Life Experiences of Artists Experiences

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to explore the religious and moral effects of fondness for art and beauty in the lived experiences of artists. It sought to understand how religious beliefs and values can be promoted and internalized through artistic engagement and aesthetic appreciation.

Methods: This qualitative, phenomenological study was conducted with 19 artists from different fields of art in Kerman, selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and analyzed with MAXQDA software (version 2021) following Colaizzi's seven-step method.

Results: The analysis yielded 44 codes related to the "religious and moral effects of fondness for art and beauty." These codes were organized into four major themes: (1) religious attitude, (2) religious behavior (practice), (3) moral attitude, and (4) moral behavior (practice). The findings showed that fondness for art and beauty is intertwined with religious beliefs such as the oneness of God, prophecy, belief in the afterlife, and self-improvement, which collectively shape moral and religious practices.

Conclusions: Fondness for art and aesthetics can strengthen religious and moral beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors, fostering qualities such as kindness, altruism, empathy, humility, patience, truthfulness, and generosity. Recognizing the impact of art and beauty on moral and spiritual development highlights the importance of incorporating aesthetics into both formal and informal education. Curriculum planning and teaching methods should therefore integrate principles of art and beauty to enhance moral and religious education.

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Introduction

Phenomenology explores how humans react to beauty and art, with different responses playing a key role in shaping individuals' religious and moral development. Research indicates that art and beauty can enhance human emotions, guide them towards deeper feelings, and promote inner growth and transformation (Osmanoğlu & Yilmaz, 2019; Karakaya Çataldaş, Kutlu & Eren, 2024; Ariannia, Naseri & Yeganeh, 2024, and Harel, 2024).

Art and beauty function as instrumentalities for the promotion of ethical standards, values, and humaneness, thereby facilitating the cultivation of a more profound religious and moral sensibility in individuals. As potent tools, beauty and art have the capacity to instill positive emotions like joy, serenity, and inspiration in individuals. (Shukla, Choudhari, Gaidhane, & Quazi Syed, 2022). The use of artistic language and subtleties in the teachings of the Holy Qur'an[1] highlights how art can creatively express truths. For instance, the analogy of charity to a wheat seed in (Verse 261 of Surah Baqarah[2]) beautifully illustrates this concept. By employing artistic methods, the Qur'an enriches the meaning and impact of its messages on the audience. While the Qur'an does not explicitly discuss art's value, its teachings resonate with human nature, establishing a profound connection between these concepts. Through verses describing beauty, harmony, and the wonders of creation, the Qur'an encourages reflection and learning from the world's artistic expressions (Khalfallah, 2023).

The hadiths[3] and discourses of esteemed religious figures are replete with intricate artistic and aesthetic nuances. One notable example is Imam Ali's[4] elucidation of his teachings in Nahj al-

[1] - Qur'an or Koran, is the central religious text of Islam, believed by Muslims to be a revelation from God.

[2] - Al-Baqarah is the second and longest chapter (surah) of the Quran. It consists of 286 verses (āyāt) which begin with the "muqatta'at" letters alif (ا), lām (ل), and mīm (م). is the longest single verse in the Quran. "*The example of those who spend their wealth in the Way of Allah is like that of a grain of corn that sprouts seven ears, and in every ear, there are a hundred grains. Thus Allah multiplies the action of whomsoever He wills. Allah is Munificent, All-Knowing*".

[3] - The words, actions, and the silent approval of the Islamic prophet Muhammad as transmitted through chains of narrators. For many, the authority of hadith is a source for religious and moral guidance known as Sunnah, which ranks second only to that of the Quran.

[4] -Ali ibn Abi Talib was the cousin and son-in-law of the Islamic prophet Muhammad, the fourth Rashidun caliph and the first Shia Imam, who ruled from 656 to 661. Born to Abu Talib ibn Abd al-Muttalib and Fatima bint Asad, a young Ali was raised by his elder cousin Muhammad and was among the first to accept his teachings.

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Balagha[5], characterized by unparalleled artistry that constructs vivid and imaginative tableaus, effectively transporting the reader into the depicted scenarios. These artistic renderings are so evocative that they resemble visual artworks more than mere textual descriptions. Such vibrant and indispensable portrayals serve a pivotal role in rekindling dormant emotions and stimulating creative faculties. Furthermore, the innovative application of illustrations and visual imagery serves to deeply resonate with the reader's psyche through the medium of words, leaving a lasting impression. (Tawfiq, 2021).

The foundation of Islamic education traces back to the revelation of the initial verses of the Holy Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)[6]. In Surah (Al-Alaq[7], Verses 1-5), God instructed His Messenger, emphasizing the importance of knowledge acquisition and spiritual elevation (Dehshiri, 2022). This divine guidance underscores the dual aspects of education: acquiring knowledge and uplifting the human spirit towards perfection. According to Delshad Tehrani (2003) the objective of Islamic religious education is to nurture and develop human capabilities through the purification of the soul, transformation of behaviors, and the flourishing of innate talentsIslamic scholar's state that moral education in Islam yields two outcomes: strengthening virtues - the foundation of good deeds, and eradicating vices - the root of unbecoming actions. Islamic moral education centers on nurturing virtues and steering clear of moral vices. (Faiz Kashani, 1987). Additionally, it places importance on realizing the innate talents in individuals. These talents encompass intellectual abilities (scientific inquiry and truth-seeking), moral virtues (ethical consciousness), religious aptitudes (sacredness awareness and worship), artistic and aesthetic dimensions, creativity, initiative, and innovation (Motahhari, 2008).

However, when art and beauty conflict with human, ethical, or religious values, they can potentially have negative impacts on the moral development and values of individuals. Factors like

[5] - Nahj al-balāgha is the best-known collection of sermons, letters, and sayings attributed to Ali ibn Abi Talib (d. 661). The compilation of the book is often credited to Sharif al-Radi (d. 1015), a prominent Shia scholar. Known for its moral aphorisms and eloquent content, Nahj al-balagha is widely studied in the Islamic world.

[6] - Muhammad was an Arab religious, social, and political leader and the founder of Islam. According to Islamic doctrine, he was a prophet divinely inspired to preach and confirm the monotheistic teachings of Adam, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and other prophets. He is believed to be the Seal of the Prophets within Islam, with the Quran as well as his teachings and practices forming the basis for Islamic religious belief.

[7] - Al-'Alaq (Arabic: العلق, al-'alaq, also known as "The Clinging Thing" or "The Embryo"), is the 96th chapter (sūrah) of the Qur'an. It is composed of 19 āyāt or verses. "*Recite in the Name of your Lord Who created man from a clot of congealed blood. Recite: and your Lord is Most Generous, who taught by the pen, and taught man what he did not know*".

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societal, economic, and psychological pressures, as well as a lack of understanding of values and spiritual goals, can lead certain artists astray. (Tyler, 2024).

Keles, McCrae, and Grealish (2020) indicate that artistic works addressing controversial subjects such as war and violence can have negative effects on viewers. Films depicting violence may lead to the normalization of such behaviors and undermine moral values. Additionally, musical genres like rap and hip-hop, which often explore themes of drug use and violence, can steer young people towards unethical behaviors. A study by Anderson (2004) demonstrated that violent video games may increase aggressive behaviors among youth and reinforce the normalization of violence in their minds.

Therefore, artists must concentrate on spiritual values and pure thoughts to effectively understand the emotions and experiences of others through stories, paintings, music, and various other forms of artistic expression. These emotional experiences cultivate empathy and foster a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by others. Artistic works can raise ethical questions and compel individuals to reflect on their values and moral principles. Furthermore, by engaging with diverse forms of art, individuals can recognize both shared values and cultural differences, ultimately strengthening social cohesion and promoting ethical conduct. Conversely, poor-quality art may fail to achieve this and could reinforce negative emotions (Samanta & Sarka, 2021). Additionally, art and beauty can sometimes hinder education, as certain artworks may contradict social principles and values, leading individuals to disregard or even reject those values (Habib & Soliman, 2015).Considering the significant role of art and aesthetics in shaping human character and their profound influence on individual and societal aspects, numerous researchers have recognized their importance in education, leading to extensive studies on the role of art and beauty in educational settings. John Dewey highlighted the importance of art in education, emphasizing its ability to enhance human abilities and foster personal and social growth. Dewey believed that art could strengthen cognitive faculties, emotional intelligence, and moral values, enabling individuals to express their deepest emotions through aesthetic experiences. He saw art as a powerful tool for expanding perspectives, deepening emotional understanding, and connecting individuals to the world around them, ultimately viewing art and beauty as essential for nurturing human capacities and facilitating education (Bacsó, 2018).

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John Dewey believes that learning should be based on real and meaningful experiences, and that art, as a sensory and emotional experience, can assist students in better understanding concepts and applying them in their lives. Dewey also stresses that emotions and thought should not be separated from one another, and that art can serve as a bridge to connect these two aspects. He regards art as a tool for social and moral development, asserting that it can help individuals comprehend ethical values and enhance empathy and social cohesion (Granger, 2016).

Since the 1970s, educational researchers have paid increasing attention to the role of art and aesthetics in the realization of educational goals. Some researchers e.g. Zeltner (1975); Alexander (1987); Garrison (1997); Jackson (1998); Shusterman (2000); Kupfer (2015); and Granger, (2016), Drawing inspiration from Dewey's aesthetic theory, they delve into how works of art can deeply impact individuals who create them or engage with them as readers, listeners, or viewers. They leverage the insights of various writers including music and art critics, poets, and philosophers to examine the profound transformative influence of art experiences.

Recently, many educational researchers have carried out empirical studies on the importance of art and aesthetics in education D'Olimpio (2021), initially critically engaged with two competing defenses of including the arts in the curriculum regarding the role of art in supporting self-expression, as well as a defense of the arts in relation to their role in supporting moral improvement. After explaining why these arguments fail to adequately defend aesthetic education, he turned to the defense based on aesthetic experience. Sajnani, and Tillberg-Webb (2020) extensively examined how the arts and creative aesthetics enhance openness and communication in the learning environment, as well as how they encourage flexibility, humor, and critical thinking through art. Ulvik (2020) discusses the inclusion of the aesthetic dimension in teaching as a means to enhance human growth and anticipates that students will find new and creative ways to solve their problems in the future by utilizing it. Caiman, and Jakobson (2019) showed that artistic practice is important for children's cognitive and aesthetic learning. The intertwining of science and art learning is significant in expanding and deepening children's learning. Additionally, children's imagination and creativity were an important part of their meaning-making when exploring complex phenomena. Giord, Twyman, and Wojciewicz (2010) demonstrated that experiences in education aided by art and aesthetics enhance deeper and more sustainable learning of scientific concepts. They also showed that students learn to see the world differently through

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transformative and aesthetic experiences, finding greater interest and excitement in the world outside of school. Nakamura (2009) believed that based on Dewey's aesthetics, art education emphasizes the realization of personal values, the development of intelligent visual literacy, and the enhancement of the quality of communication in the context of globalization. Uhrmacher (2009) using John Dewey's ideas of art as experience as a framework, employs aesthetic theory. He thoroughly explains that active engagement, sensory experience, perception, risk-taking, and imagination are outcomes of providing aesthetic learning experiences, which likely lead to student satisfaction, increased cognitive knowledge, retention of episodic memory, meaning-making, and creativity and innovation. Their research findings emphasized the importance of integrating art and beauty into the school curriculum. They concluded that art and beauty play a significant role in enhancing social relationships and fostering ethical development within society. Utilizing aesthetic strategies in the classroom and learning environment creates opportunities for the cultivation of moral virtues, openness, flexibility, humor, critical thinking, and improved interpersonal communication. Furthermore, incorporating the aesthetic dimension into education was found to promote human growth by encouraging students to apply their knowledge in innovative ways. Ultimately, integrating the aesthetic dimension into education may contribute to a fulfilling life.

Studies conducted by scholars such as Kou, Konrath, and Goldstein (2020), as well as Costa, Kangasjärvi, and Charise (2020), highlight the significance of art in moral education, demonstrating that art can act as a catalyst for advancing morals and human values. Art and beauty enable individuals to understand and empathize with situations and people beyond their own experiences. These research endeavors provide empirical evidence to support researchers, educators, and curriculum developers in enhancing the effectiveness of art lesson planning in schools. Additionally, they contribute to refining the content of art education, fostering a more comprehensive understanding of the subject.In the research conducted by Fujimura (2021), and Jakovljević, and Jakovljević (2021), art is portrayed as a profound communication medium that aids in deepening one's understanding and connection with God. By engaging in the creation of diverse art forms, individuals can articulate their emotions and reflections towards the Divine and draw inspiration from the wonders and complexities of God's creation. Various art forms including painting, music, poetry, and architecture can be harnessed to convey beliefs, religious sentiments,

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and establish a channel of communication with God. Consequently, art serves as a strategic tool to delve into and experience the presence of God on a deeper level (Hyslop, 2015; Trickett, & Gilhooly, 2021).

Education experts have examined the significance of incorporating art and aesthetics into educational systems and curricula, particularly in the realms of intellectual, emotional, and religious education (Lloyd, 2017; Tucker, 2017; Curry, 2018; Ulger, 2019; D'Olimpio, 2021). These researchers argue that the integration of art and aesthetics into curriculum design is crucial for enhancing the learning process, thereby serving as a key facilitator in teaching and learning methodologies (Irwin, 2018; Bowen & Kisida, 2019; Lemonchois, 2021). They have endeavored to establish theoretical frameworks and standards to advocate for the inclusion of artistic education in educational curricula and stress its importance. However, they contend that art and aesthetics have not yet been fully integrated into educational settings, despite evidence suggesting that art can play a pivotal role in achieving religious and moral educational objectives. Consequently, the emphasis on religious and moral education underscores the need for further comprehensive research on the efficacy of artistic and aesthetic approaches within religious and moral curricula. This study aims to explore the religious implications of artists' affinity for art and beauty, investigating moral inclinations toward art and beauty within artists' lived experiences.

Material and Methods

The current study employed a qualitative and phenomenological methodology. The research focused on artists representing diverse artistic disciplines. Through convenience sampling, a total of 19 artists (11 men and 8 women) were selected from various fields such as cinema and theater, music, painting, sculpture, calligraphy, poetry and literature, architecture, painting, and handicrafts. The criteria for selection involved obtaining participants' consent, confirming that they possessed over five years of experience in the arts, ensuring they could clearly express and narrate their experiences, and guaranteeing their complete awareness throughout the research process. Following Strauss and Corbin's (1998) sampling approach, data collection continued until saturation was reached with the participation of 19 respondents. Prior to conducting interviews, consent was obtained from the participants, and permission to record the interviews was also secured.

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Data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews with participants. The interview content was then transcribed verbatim and analyzed Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step method of coding and analysis. To ensure the validity of the findings, in addition to following Colaizzi's guidelines, Maxwell's (2008) descriptive and theoretical validation techniques, as well as Neuman's (2006) member-checking validation criteria, were implemented in the final step. Descriptive validity, as defined by Maxwell (2008), focuses on the factual accuracy of the qualitative researcher's account. This form of validity is established through data analysis and interpretation conducted by multiple researchers. In this study, data analysis involved the researcher, a supervisor, an advisor, and an external observer (as outlined in Table 1). Theoretical validity is achieved through a theoretical perspective that incorporates various theories and approaches to interpret and elucidate the data (Mohammadpour, 2014). To ensure theoretical validity, the extracted codes and categories were interpreted and explained in relation to existing literature.

Member validity, as outlined by Neuman (2006), is attained when researchers present the findings to participants for validation of their accuracy. Essentially, the credibility of the findings is strengthened when participants acknowledge and resonate with the researcher's descriptions in a manner that aligns with their own perspectives. In this study, the extracted categories were shared with multiple participants to assess the accuracy of the findings. Participants confirmed that the identified categories and themes accurately reflected their viewpoints, thereby confirming the validity of the findings. Data coding and analysis were conducted using MAXQDA-2021 software.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the panel of experts

Row	Field	Scientific Rank	Expert Panel	Number
1	Philosophy of Education	PhD	Professor	1
2	Philosophy of Education	PhD	Associate Professor	1
3	Educational Psychology	PhD	Associate Professor	1
4	Theology	PhD	Associate Professor	1
5	Philosophy of Education	PhD. Candidate	-	2

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Results

Following Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step content analysis approach, the recorded interviews were initially listened to multiple times, and the participants' statements were transcribed verbatim. The interview transcripts were then carefully reviewed to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' emotions and experiences. Subsequently, in the second stage, each participant's interview excerpts were saved as individual documents in MAXQDA software (version 2021), and key phrases were identified and coded. In the third step, significant statements were extracted to capture the underlying meaning of the participants' thoughts. The fourth step involved organizing the formulated meanings into clusters of themes that represented a coherent structure of each theme. As per Colaizzi (1987), once themes were categorized, they were grouped into single clusters, and a selection of these clusters representing a specific perspective was merged into a cohesive thematic structure. Table 2 displays the extracted themes pertaining to the religious and moral impacts of a passion for art and beauty.

Table 2. The extracted themes and categories

Formulated meanings (codes)	Categories (clusters)	Themes
God is the only eternal beauty. All beauties are mortal, only God is immortal. The ruling order of the world is not a coincidence. The ultimate goal of all particles of creation is to connect with the Holy Essence of God.	Belief in the oneness of God and his eternal power	Religious attitude
Man needs a guide to achieve happiness. God has sent guides to direct man. Prophets and imams are the guides of people.	Belief in prophecy	
Correspondence of revival of nature in spring with life after death. Death is resurrection. Death is the spring of endless life.	Belief in the afterlife	
Human beauty is revealed through self-refinement. The elimination of vices leads to the revelation. Contemplating the beauties of the world leads to the proximity to God.	Self-refinement	
Doing religious duties and abandoning prohibitions Praying and fasting Payment of khums and zakat Respect and love for the Prophet (PBUH) and his household	Religious behavior	Religious behavior (practice)
Fondness for beauty induces adherence to moral obligations Fondness for art and beauty softens human emotions Fondness for art and beauty leads to moral perfection	Attitude	Moral attitude
Polite and good-tempered Good-looking and good-natured Observance of social etiquette Peace-loving Social responsibility Altruist		

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The spirit of cooperation and collaboration Peaceful coexistence Commitment and conscience Benevolence Good manners Purity and cleanliness To be sweet-smelling Punctuality and planning Patient and trusting Nice-looking Humble and modest Generosity Avoiding backbiting and slander Avoiding arrogance, lies, and hypocrisy Avoiding envy, arrogance, and hypocrisy Truthfulness, honesty, and trustworthiness Modesty and chastity Supporting the oppressed Fulfillment of obligations	Moral behavior	Moral behavior (practice)

In the fifth step, in accordance with Colaizzi's (1987) guidance, a comprehensive description of the phenomenon under investigation was provided. Building upon the first through fourth steps and as illustrated in Table 2, the central theme was segmented into specific clusters or categories. An examination of artists' perspectives on the appreciation of art and beauty and its impact on religious and moral education revealed that these encounters could be classified into two distinct categories. The first group was the experiencers who described art and beauty from a spiritual and transcendental perspective, and the second group considered art and beauty to be the same as other sciences and believed that art, like other sciences, fulfills material needs and desires. To the latter group, art is earthly and material and is at the service of human desires and wishes, rather than being transcendental and immaterial. However, both groups believed in the undeniable influence of art on artists' attitudes and behaviors. Some participants express concerns about how certain art can have a harmful impact on society and individuals by promoting negative values. They believe that consuming art that propagates negative values can lead to increased violence, discrimination, and undesirable ideas within society. Additionally, certain artworks, through inappropriate images or concepts, may evoke feelings of despair, fear, or violence. Moreover, consuming destructive artistic content can lead to an increase in violence and negative phenomena in society.

An analysis of the participants' lived experiences showed that the fondness for art and beauty affects the character, personality, and behavior of artists in a formative manner. This process gradually reshapes the attitudes, beliefs, and opinions of the artists and then changes their behavior

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and performance. Some participants (3, 4, 8, 11, 12, 13, 16, 18, and 19) believed that "Art and beauty bring about fundamental and deep changes in habits, desires, tastes, attitude, speech, clothing, and appearance of the artist". A group of participants (4, 6, 9, 17, 18, and 19) also stated: "Art is breathed into the soul of the artist so that it affects the artist's speech, personality, character, desires, and aspirations and changes his/her view of the universe and the surrounding environment". Accordingly, it can be argued that the fondness for art and beauty affects the type of individual and social behavior of people and the type of their education. According to the participants, if education is enriched with the fondness for art and beauty it results in thoughtfulness, rationality, reflection, and experience. In other words, the power of inference is used with deliberation and reasoning to recognize the evil from the good. According to the Qur'an (Verse 78 of Nahal), "Allah has brought you forth from your mothers' wombs when you knew nothing, and then gave you hearing, and sight and thinking hearts so that you may give thanks". The content of this verse shows that a human being is free of any kind of knowledge and understanding at birth, and by gaining experience throughout their life, they gradually gain knowledge and awareness. According to the participating artists, the fondness for art and beauty gives the artist the ability to use knowledge more deeply and thoughtfully and gain insight into it. Moreover, from the perspective of philosophical schools such as romanticism, Gestalt psychology, mysticism, and post-positivism, aesthetics precedes epistemology. These schools believe that humans follow aesthetic values in dealing with the outside world. According to these schools, even aesthetics is a kind of cognitive activity that causes new and fresh perceptions of the truth (Wheater, 2004; Fayaz, 2007). Thus, new experiences in religious and moral education are acquired through the lens of fondness for art and beauty. The following section discusses the process of acquiring religious and moral knowledge and awareness according to the lived experiences of artists.

1. The effect of fondness for art and beauty on religious education

1.1 The effect of fondness for art and beauty on religious attitude

A. Belief in the oneness of God and His eternal power

According to the artists' lived experiences, all the order, symmetry, and beauty that is in nature did not happen by chance and no creature can create it. Rather, they are created by the divine essence. They believe in "contemplation and reasoning in the beauty of nature, looking at the

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morning dew that slides on the softness of a flower leaf, the revival of a tree that hears the sound of spring's footsteps, the freshness of rain that washes away pollution, the beauty of the night and the peace that flows in it, and all the beauty that we perceive have been produced by the absolute creator. Some participants (2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 10, and 13) stated that "all these beauties were created by an absolute beauty, He is the one who remains and is eternal, all beauties die many times and are mortal, but the only lasting beauty is the Merciful God". Another participant (14) believed that "God is the creator of beauty and order that governs the creation and all particles of existence have an unbreakable link with the Divine Essence".

The main goal of religious education from the perspective of the Holy Qur'an is God's proximity and belief in the oneness of God and worship; the Quran says: "I created jinn and humans only to worship me" (Adh-Dhariyat, Verse 56). Thus, the analysis of artists' lived experiences revealed that the fondness for art and beauty, deep thought, and wisdom in divine creations make the artist first seek its creator and then with enough knowledge come to the belief that it is only divine power that is absolute and admits to the existence of God to reach divine proximity and worships him in line with the purpose of creation. True servitude is also not achieved except with real understanding and knowledge, because according to the Qur'an, "From among His servants, it is only those who know that fear Allah. Verily Allah is Most Mighty, Most Forgiving" (Verse 28 of Surah Fatir).

B. Belief in prophecy and divine saints

One of the important goals of education for a Muslim is to accept the guardianship of God Almighty, His Messenger (PBUH), and the infallible imams. Accepting the guardianship of God and divine saints does not mean accepting force and unconditional submission to oppression, but this acceptance is based on insight, knowledge, reasoning, and criticism. The Holy Qur'an says in (verse 36 of Surah Al-Ahzab): "It is not for a believing man or woman—when Allah and His Messenger decree a matter—to have any other choice in that matter. Indeed, whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger has clearly gone far astray". A reflection on the content of this verse shows that "the main requirement for the realization of governorship is the highest level of knowledge and insight" (Zulelm, 2001Belief in the mission of the prophets was reflected in the participants' statements: A participant (1) reported, "It is never possible to imagine that the God who created man so meticulously and according to order would leave him alone and not have a plan to guide him. Man always needs a guide to reach happiness, and the Merciful God sent His

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prophets and imams so that the plan of human happiness does not fail". Another participant (5) said, "The philosophy of human creation is to reach the proximity to God, and God sent a guide for a man so that he does not miss his path and does not fall into error and misguidance to be guided to the path of happiness and success. These statements suggested that the fondness for art and beauty increases the insight and awareness of artists in understanding the philosophy of the prophets' mission and creates a deep and meaningful understanding in them.

C. Belief in the afterlife

According to Allameh Tabatabai, God, in the Holy Qur'an, has repeatedly invited man to use common sense and contemplation (Tabatabai, 1995: 73). For example, Verse 242 of Surah Al-Baqarah says, "Thus Allah makes His injunctions clear to you that you may understand". Moreover, many other verses have highlighted the connection between wisdom and resurrection, "Thus Allah brings the dead to life and shows you His Signs: Perchance ye may understand" (Al-Baqarah, Verse 73). These verses demonstrate the relationship between the essence of resurrection and rationality. They imply that thinking, rationalizing, and looking deeply into the changes in the surrounding environment, including the change of seasons, leads a person to acquire deep spiritual knowledge, including the knowledge of God and the Day of Resurrection. A participant (6) suggested, "The universe is like a mysterious painting in which we see death and rebirth many times with the change of seasons. Spring brings with it the growth of colorful flowers, and with the arrival of autumn, all these beauties are destroyed. Thinking about this process of life and death shows a person a clear example of resurrection and life after death. Other participants (8 and 13) stated that "God made autumn the death of all beauty and gives life to the earth in spring; One day, our worldly life will end in the hereafter". This group of artists referred to the Qur'anic verses that point to the revival of the dead earth in the spring and considered it a sign of the revival of man in the resurrection.

D. Self-refinement

According to religious teachings in Islam, the inner world of man, if nurtured correctly and according to his instinct, will contribute to achieving the highest goals of human happiness. Thus, man's interaction with themselves and inner knowledge and cultivation of their instinct help to build personality, interact with God and others, and the existence based on divine and human rules and laws (Fathali Khani, 2000; Rahimian & Rahbar, 2001; Elhaminia, 2006; Alizadeh, 2010).

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Allameh Majlesi (1992) stated in Bihar al-Anwar that "the essence of man is purity and cleanliness"; that is, the human race was created based on monotheistic nature, and its nature was born healthy and pure. Thus, the happiness and misery of each person depend on the type of self-cultivation. The participants in this study indicated that fondness for art and beauty helps people to improve themselves and eliminate vices if it is formed in line with pure and monotheistic nature. According to the participants, self-refinement is achieved through the fondness for art and beauty by thinking and looking deeply into divine blessings. They consider the fondness for art and beauty as a suitable means for self-refinement. A participant (2) stated that "Fondness for art helps man to come up with revelation by purifying vices and engrossing in the beauty of creation and make himself/herself close to the divine grace". Another participant (1) stated, "Man seeks to return to the divine nature, and the fondness for art and beauty has helped me to immerse myself in the deep sea of the creation, and I have enjoyed the beauty of creation for hours, and I am in tune with the whispers of the particles of the universe which is like a piece of music making my soul fly, I praise God. Can I think and behave indecently and sinisterly in front of all this goodness and beauty?"

Concerning people who engage in self-refinement, the Holy Qur'an says, "Indeed whosoever purifies himself shall achieve success" (Al-Ala Surah, Verse 14). The participants in this study reported that fondness for art and beauty leads to the elimination of vices and closeness to God if man cultivates the natural beauty that God has gifted in his nature and comes close to God through self-refinement. Otherwise, the tendency towards the negative aspects of art will even cause human error and misery. According to Verses 9 and 10 of Shams Surah of the Qur'an, "He who purifies it will prosper, and he who suppresses it will be ruined".

1.2 The effect of fondness for art and beauty on religious behavior (practice)

The analysis of the artists' lived experiences indicated that the fondness for art and beauty contributes to changing people's attitudes and beliefs about the performance of religious duties. One of the participants (1) suggested, "All beings are praising the Lord with a special order and harmony. The beautiful song of the birds at dawn is nothing but in praise of God. I blame myself that as God's successor shall not remain silent and not praise God while these birds, plants, and the whole universe are praising God with all their being". Participant 12 said: "When I see all this beauty in every single creature of God, I consider myself insignificant in front of God's grandeur and immediately bow before all this greatness and the prayer I am saying in that pleasant moment

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gives me a lot of pleasure". The findings also showed that artists who considered the nature of art to be transcendental and spiritual believed that the fondness for art and being immersed in the beauty of creation has led them to servitude and worship with pleasure. They also stated that they take care of themselves to please God and all their actions and behaviors are performed to please God. They suggested that prayer and fasting are a means of self-refinement and proximity to God and they performed religious duties and abandoned prohibitions to please God. Some participants (6, 8, 9, 11, 16, and 18) also stated, "The Prophet's household has a high position before God. Thus, they have considered the friendship and love of the Prophet's household as the reason for their salvation and followed their orders for a happy life". They obeyed God's orders and paid Khums[8] and Zakat[9] to please God and make a halal livelihood.

2. The effect of fondness for art and beauty on moral education

2.1 The effect of fondness for art and beauty on moral attitude

Consistent with human nature, fondness for art and beauty can pave the way for preserving human dignity and help the artist to engage in philanthropic actions by purifying his/her soul from vices, engaging in self-care, and paying attention to human dignity. Such a person has a strong will and great effort and understands such honor in himself/herself that he/she avoids moral vices and strives to please God. He/she also tries to avoid moral vices such as backbiting, slander, arrogance, lies, hypocrisy, and envy as reported by some participants (1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, and 18). Observing and perceiving the beauty makes a person think and draws his attention to the creator of all the glory and grandeur. One of the participants (1) stated, "Seeing all the beauty and glory in God's creations, I understood that this world was not created of any use, and God has set a goal and a mission for every particle that He created. The singing of birds, the movement of living beings, the cool breeze, and the rushing sound of water at dawn show that all the particles of existence are glorifying God. I see myself as a small thing against these beauties and with all my heart I would like to pray for the Creator together with them. Another participant (5) stated,

[8] - In Islam, khums (Arabic: خُمْس Arabic pronunciation: [xums], literally 'one fifth') refers to the required religious obligation of any Muslims to pay 20% of their acquired wealth from certain sources toward specified causes. It is treated differently in Shia and Sunni Islam. This tax is paid to the imam, caliph or sultan, representing the state of Islam, for distribution between the orphans, the needy, the [stranded] traveler, and the descendants of Islamic prophet Muhammad.

[9] - Zakat is a form of almsgiving, often collected by the Muslim Ummah. It is considered in Islam as a religious obligation, and by Quranic ranking, is next after prayer (salat) in importance.

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"The peak of creativity of the greatest artists is the smallest manifestation of God's existence". When an artist reaches his/her peak of creativity, he/she realizes that he has achieved only an insignificant part of all the greatness that exists in the world. Thus, the artist succumbs to God's will, fulfills his/her duties, avoids moral vices, and steps on the divine path and attaining perfection".

According to the participants in this study, only genuine art is consistent with human nature and can lead them to moral virtues. Some (6, 11, 14, and 19) believed, "Tendency to works of art in which people are invited to anger and violence, and they constantly encourage unjust and incorrect action, disturb the peace of individual and social life. A piece of art created with sensual and lustful motives does nothing other than encourage the artist to disobedience, lust, and vulgarity. Hence, only the fondness for art, which is in the service of divine accepted values, can lead a person to moral virtues and expand religious and moral values in the community with the help of artistic creations". Thus, according to the artists, fondness for art is desirable when it is based on high divine and human values. Data analysis in this study revealed two opposite models from the artists' perspective. In the first model, the fondness for art and beauty is based on the God-seeking nature of man, which has a spiritual and transcendental aspect. The second model of fondness for art and beauty is material and in the service of human needs. Each of these two models has its educational implications as detailed below:

2.2 The effect of fondness for art and beauty on moral behavior

The participants in this study showed that "art can push a person to vices, lust, and vulgarity, and it can also make him/her engage in worshiping God"; that is, art can have both a divine and a devilish aspect. If the fondness for art and beauty is in line with the God-seeking nature of man, it can positively affect the artist's ethical character, strengthening moral virtues such as humility, patience, self-respect, self-control, truthfulness, honesty, and good temperateness. However, if the fondness for art and beauty focuses on evils, it causes a person to become inclined towards moral vices such as aggression, arrogance, envy, self-conceit, and hard-heartedness as indicated by the participants (1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 12, 13, 15, and 18). Moreover, some participants (1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 11, 12, and 15) believed that "Fondness for art and beauty makes a person pay attention to his/her appearance. Thus, the artist always focuses on discipline and pays attention to the way he/she

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dresses and looks. Such a person is punctual, hardworking, and keeps his/her promises and he/she always arranges his/her affairs carefully and avoids laziness.

Ethical evaluation at a social scale is affected by the internal motives and intentions of each person. Those who seek to meet their material needs and achieve well-being tend to act differently than those who pursue social relations with the intention of spiritual evolution. Because, unlike the first group, the second group's approach is to actualize human virtues in society. Thus, people's intentions and internal motivations are determinants of their moral values (Mesbah Yazdi, 2012). The analysis of the artists' experiences in this study showed that the proximity of art to individual emotions and feelings is reflected in their emotional behaviors such as kindness, altruism, empathy, affection, love, sacrifice, and selflessness. That's why most of the artists are very good-tempered in social gatherings and are polite and well-mannered with others. Moral virtues such as benevolence for others, peacefulness, social responsibility, peaceful coexistence, spirit of cooperation and commitment, and conscience are some positive attributes as reflected in the lived experience of artists. For example, a participant (8) said: "The variety and color in the world of art makes me accept criticism. When you enter the Faculty of Arts you can see thousands of people who are at peace with different views, accept each other, and cooperate". "How can someone see the duties, but not think act beautifully? Someone who sees beauty, touches it, recognizes it, and deals with it, his/her emotions are reinforced, and his /her religious morality is perfected, and adheres to decency, kindness, calmness, and good treatment of others. Such a person develops positive characteristics such as modesty, humility, truthfulness, honesty, and trustworthiness. He/she adheres to religiously permitted behaviors and avoids religious prohibitions in all circumstances. Such a person is charitable, generous, and helpful to others; modesty and chastity and prominent in such a person; he/she keeps his/her promises, always helps the oppressed, and does not surrender to oppression" (1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, and 18).

In the sixth step, the detailed description of the studied phenomenon of the previous step is reduced to a basic structure. In fact, the main structure for the presented descriptions is identified and thus, a basic structure of the essence or essence of the experienced phenomenon is explained. (Colaizzi, 1978). This process is done after reviewing the comprehensive description to identify the key elements or main concepts, which led to the definition of the phenomenon, and is a reflection of

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the participants' description of their experiences (Suryani, Welch, & Cox, 2016). Results of the extracted fundamental structure of the nature are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 shows the tree diagram for the religious and moral effects of fondness for art and beauty:

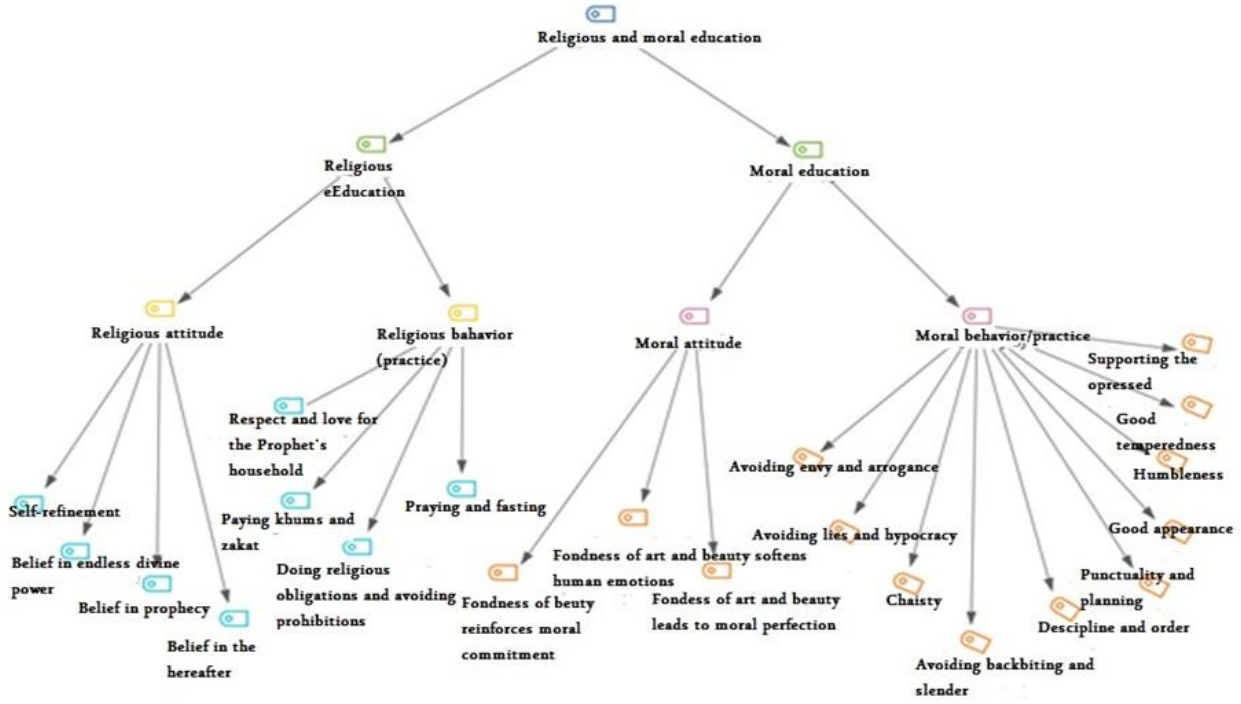


Fig. 1. The tree diagram for religious and moral effects of fondness for art and beauty

Ultimately, in line with the seventh step outlined in Colaizzi's (1987) methodology, the results were scrutinized and confirmed by the participants. Furthermore, the identified codes and themes underwent a thorough review and refinement by the researcher to ensure unanimity.

Discussion

The mission of all divine religions is to assist humanity in achieving moral perfection, and the prophets endured numerous hardships to attain this noble goal. Currently, the balanced development of individuals' personalities is one of the priorities for policymakers and educational stakeholders, as nurturing individuals to fulfill their personal and social duties and responsibilities with ethics in adulthood, while adhering to social norms, laws, and regulations, is of paramount

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importance. To achieve such an objective, it seems essential to provide a framework and vision for community members through which they can develop their opinions, beliefs, and insights. Artists, as intermediaries for conveying emotions, thoughts, and social values, are influenced by their religious and ethical beliefs. These influences can manifest in various aspects of artists' lives, including the creative process, subject matter selection, and execution methods. Artists typically engage with social and ethical issues through their works, employing art to critique and analyze human and social conditions. This approach not only contributes to the enhancement of social awareness but also enables artists to convey deeper messages to their audiences through beauty. In this regard, the findings of the present research indicate that an interest in art and beauty can foster such an attitude in individuals that allows them to attain happiness and moral perfection.The analysis of the data showed that through art and beauty, humanity helps people to understand the surrounding phenomena and by giving insight and deep awareness, it causes the process of understanding to change in relation to various issues. Get a better understanding of things. These findings are supported by a number of studies e.g., Shukla, Choudhari, Gaidhane and Quazi Syed (2022); Karakaya Çataldaş, Kutlu and Eren (2024); Ariannia, Naseri and Yeganeh (2024). Furthermore, the findings indicate that individuals who engage with art and beauty, as well as those who partake in deep contemplation and exploration of nature, typically exhibit a higher level of creative power. Many studies e.g., Ulvik (2020); Giord, Twyman and Wojciewicz (2010) have shown that people who have a greater affinity with art and beauty in understanding things tend to have better performance.

The findings of the present study implied that if the fondness for art and beauty is developed in line with the God-seeking nature of man, people can come up with a criterion for measuring individual and social values and can assess the values, norms, and regulations with their instinctive abilities and efficiently distinguish the good from the devil. These findings are in line with the results of previous research e.g., Sajnani and Tillberg-Webb (2020); Ulvik (2020); Cecilia, and Jakobson (2019) which consider the acquisition of artistic criteria to recognize phenomena as the main factor for deep understanding of people. The fondness for art and beauty in line with human instinct makes a person understand the divine beauty in all the creatures he/she observes and comes to the belief that all existence is under the control of divine power; this can lead him/her to engage in worshiping God in harmony with the particles of the universe and strive to please God. Such a

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person will believe that all beauties are mortal, only the Holy Essence of God is eternal and immortal, death is the inevitable fate of the whole existence, the Day of Judgment is the truth, and man determines his destiny in the hereafter by his actions in this world. Such beliefs tend to encourage people to achieve happiness and individual and social perfection in this world and the hereafter by purifying the soul from moral vices such as backbiting, slander, arrogance, lies, envy, conceit, and hypocrisy and instead strengthening moral virtues such as decency, kindness, calmness, good treatment with others, humility, truthfulness, honesty, and trustworthiness; performing religiously permitted actions and avoiding religious prohibitions, generosity, modesty, and chastity are among the merits of these beliefs. These results are in line with the findings reported in previous studies (Kou, Konrath, and Goldstein (2020); Costa, Kangasjarvi, and Charise (2020); Shusterman, (2000); Vlachou, and Panagopoulos (۲۰۲۳); Atai Ashtiani (2006); Lilian, Amirkhani, and Ansari (2009) that showed that the sense of aesthetics results in stimulating emotions for more understanding and knowledge and solving moral and value issues such as oppression, deviance, selfishness, aggression, and addiction. Furthermore, artistic functions that contribute to acquiring ethical ideas and the actualization of human talents pave the way for establishing social order and altruism and cause the emotional attraction of people toward each other.

Additionally, the findings indicated that certain participants highlighted the detrimental role of art and its impact on society and individuals. They expressed concerns that artistic content promoting negative values could contribute to heightened levels of violence, discrimination, and negative thoughts within society. Furthermore, they suggested that such content could evoke feelings of despair, fear, or aggression among individuals. The findings align with previous studies conducted by Habib and Soliman (2015); Samanta and Sarka (2021); and Tyler (2024).

The analysis of the current research findings revealed that the religious and moral impact of fascination with art and beauty can be categorized into 44 codes under four main categories: religious attitude, religious behavior, moral attitude, and moral action. Consequently, it can be argued that the interest in art and aesthetics influences individuals' religious and moral convictions and values, thereby manifesting in their religious and moral behaviors and actions.Drawing from the research findings, it can be argued that interest in art and aesthetics is rooted in religious

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convictions and values such as the belief in the unity and eternal power of God, faith in prophets and divine figures, conviction in the afterlife, self-improvement, and self-refinement.

These beliefs influence religious and moral conduct, promoting virtues like kindness, altruism, empathy, love, sacrifice, humility, patience, self-respect, self-discipline, honesty, good-naturedness, generosity, modesty, chastity, and commitment to promises. Therefore, it is essential to recognize the connection between art, beauty, and their impact on formal and informal education. Principles of aesthetics should be integrated into curriculum planning and teaching methodologies, particularly within educational settings.

— Based on the study's outcomes, artistic activities have the potential to captivate students' attention effectively. Hence, prioritizing art and aesthetics in curricula and educational programs fosters the development of creative, innovative individuals. In light of this, the following practical recommendations can be proposed:

- The primary school years are considered the optimal period for incorporating art and aesthetics into educational practices.
- Integrating art and beauty into education requires an understanding of artistic practices, their functions, and an awareness of children and adolescents' psychological, emotional, social, and intellectual characteristics. Educators must be knowledgeable in both areas.
- Artistic activities retain their educational significance when students are given the freedom to choose and pursue such activities. Imposing mandatory participation can diminish the artistic and creative value of these activities.
- Upholding the principle of accepting and respecting students' creative efforts is crucial. Coaches should refrain from interfering with students' work, as doing so may stifle their creativity.

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Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection, and analysis. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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