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Therapeutic filmmaking and autism spectrum disorder: A case study

¹Valeria Saladino, ²Anna Chiara Sabatino, ³Valeria Verrastro

¹University of Cassino and Southern Lazio, Italy

²University of Salerno, Italy

³Magna Graecia University of Catanzaro, Italy

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) concerns neurodevelopment and is characterized by three deficient areas: (a) alteration of the quality of social interaction; (b) alteration of the quality of communication; (c) limited, stereotyped and repetitive behavior and interests. This disorder commonly emerges in childhood, showing the first symptoms around the age of 2-3 and strikes mostly the male gender. Children with ASD show difficulties in social interaction, communication and “Theory of Mind”, capacity for understanding and awareness of the moods of others. These difficulties invalidate emotional relationships, as illustrated by recent research in the neuropsychological field, which highlighted deficits in the interpretation and processing of facial expressions among adolescents with ASD. Mostly compromised at all levels are the relational dynamics that are scarce and the flexibility, which leads ASD persons to prefer individual activities and to perform repetitive and obsessive actions. These aspects are characterized by the sameness (unchangeability). Techniques and audiovisual languages have been introduced in both therapeutic and educational support of the ASD. The integration of audiovisual tools within both approaches involves a significant change in “doing education” and “doing therapy”, which is based on a playful and creative component, and which acts on a behavioral, relational and identity level.

Therapeutic filmmaking is an example of audiovisual tool applied to ASD. This technique is useful in the educational and therapeutic field and can increase social and relational skills of children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorder.

Indeed, data from recent research on the topic show the effectiveness of audiovisual tools and arts therapies in managing dysfunctional behaviors in this category of people. In this contribute we will show a case report based on an experimental project which aims to promote the support of juveniles with ASD and their families. We will illustrate the use of therapeutic filmmaking in a couple of ASD adolescents and their main behavioral changes.

Importance of Research: The [clinical experience](#) described illustrates how the participatory tool of therapeutic filmmaking can be considered an expressive and educational medium for adolescents with autism spectrum disorder. The case study shows behavioral evidence based on the observation of specialists, before, after and during the project. Results are not currently generalizable, and the protocol needs further experimentations and implementations.

Furthermore, the therapeutic filmmaking process turned out to be a good mediator of educational as well as creative content. In fact, the two participants developed some [sociorelational skills](#) through discussion and mutual listening, using their differences to learn from each other.

Biography

Valeria Saladino, clinical psychologist, specializing in criminology, juridical psychology, and forensic science. PhD in Developmental Psychology and Post Doc in Clinical Psychology at the University of Cassino and Southern Lazio. She is interested in new addictions, sexual offending, and the use of new technologies in the field of treatment and she published articles and books on the topic. She works in University Mercatorum of Rome, and University “Dante Alighieri” of Reggio Calabria, as a professor and collaborates with University of Salerno and “Magna Graecia” University of Catanzaro. Also, she works in adults Italian Correctional Facilities as a psychologist.

valeriaverrastro@unicz.it