

AUTISTIC ADULTS IN IMPROV COMEDY: THE BENEFITS AND EXPERIENCE

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Introduction

In improv (comedy), participants create scenes or songs spontaneously without scripts, which offers various benefits, e.g., everyone seems to enhance their communication skills. I conducted a study to explore how autistic adults experience and perceive the advantages of engaging in improv comedy.

Methods

In Study 1, I recruited 20 adult participants through snowball sampling and conducted semi-structured interviews. These were analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to delve into the lived experiences of autistic individuals in improv, whether professionally or as a hobby. Qualitative content analysis (QCA) identified the benefits gained from participation.

In Study 2, 17 participants shared their experiences and perceived advantages of taking the improv course. Qualitative data were also analysed via QCA.

Additionally, I implemented a mixed-methods approach to study anxiety levels. To complement qualitative data, I administered anxiety measures, including the Tolerance of Uncertainty, Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale, and State-Trait Anxiety Inventory, both before and after the course (paired with focus groups and log forms).



Outcomes

The findings from both studies reveal that improv offers similar benefits to autistic adults, such as improved quality of life, mental health, acceptance, and a sense of flow. Participants recognized the value of their autistic skills in improv, and those with more experience noted its applicability in daily life. However, improv is not a “panacea,” as daily life can influence the benefits experienced and may contribute to persistent anxiety.

Implications

Improv allows autistic individuals to create scenes together, potentially benefiting participants by boosting quality of life, reducing anxiety, and fostering community.

