

## Self-Representation Through Creative Skills Amongst Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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*Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is usually discussed in terms of deficit-oriented models which focus on social and communicative impairments and do not pay enough attention to the importance of strengths and creativity in shaping a sense of self. The proposed qualitative research investigates the role of creative arts (particularly, visual art, music, and writing) in self-representing and identity development in a high-functioning child with ASD. The proposed study focuses on making a foreground based on the strengths-based and phenomenological approach and drawing upon the creative practices of autistic children as an expression of their lived experiences. The study used mixed qualitative design that comprised of direct observations on creative engagement and semi-structured interviews on parents to have data triangulation. The sample consisted of fifteen high-functioning children with ASD aged between 7 and 12 years who were recruited in urban learning and treatment facilities in Lahore, Pakistan. Thematic analysis framework by Braun and Clarke was used to analyze data and the methodological rigor was guaranteed by iterative coding, the triangulation of the investigator, and partial transcript double-coding. Three themes were identified: (a) creative involvement as a protective place of emotional exploration and regulation, (b) artistic expression as a place of forming the authentic self without social masking, and (c) special interests as one of the sources of creative benefits helping to create a good impression of the self and identity. The results support the idea that creative modalities help children with ASD to externalize complicated emotions, establish individuality, and translate clinically dictated narrow interests into a competence source and empowerment. The researchers conclude that creative arts are crucial in identity formation and emotional health of children with ASD. Focusing on the voices and abilities of autistic people, this study disputes a deficit-oriented perspective and presents culturally sensitive findings that have the potential to transform the inclusive methods of education, therapeutic approaches, and family-support systems.*

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## Introduction

Autism Spectrum Disorder can be described as a complicated neurodevelopmental disorder, which needs endure long-lasting impairment in social interaction and communication and limited and repetitive behavior (APA, 2013). A person with ASD is usually well-developed and broad in their cognitive skills and the way they learn; therefore, diverse pedagogical and therapeutic tools should be introduced to help such a person grow and become a part of society. Although the primary diagnostic features remain basically similar, the phenotype of an individual with ASD is diverse regarding the frequency of co-occurring diseases and intellectual abilities (Melogno et al., 2020). These difficulties do not end with cognitive performance and daily functionality and hinder significantly the formation of unified self-identity. It is also worth noting that children and adolescents with ASD do not tend to control emotions easily, and such a factor may also lead to additional negative outcomes around adaptive functioning and self-concept.

The qualitative aspect of the study is to introduce the multifaceted nature of the experience of such children particularly the way in which engagement in the creative arts contributes to the development of self and identity. An analysis on their participation in creative work, and the research tries to establish the way the creative processes contribute to the emotional regulation and provide this population with a more powerful sense of self (Kauts et al., 2025; Ahmed et al., 2023). Additionally, some of the objectives are to incorporate the perspective of the child, which is a component that is usually sidelined in the examination of children with autism and is founded predominantly on observing their parents or practitioners (Mullally et al. 2024). As a result, a multi-modal approach is taken in this research, and it employs both direct observation and semi-structured interview with parents to come up with a comprehensive and triangulation concept of these creative pathways.

Visual arts have also been recognized to assist children with ASD in expressing their feelings and emotions, giving them a non-verbal avenue to express the complicated inner world. These financial modalities also facilitate financial computation of social and emotional knowing and provide a patterned but flexible environment for people to diminish their perception. (Gaiha et al., 2021).

Creative expression that involves the development of imaginative play has been linked to neural maturity and superior executive brain development and thus argues in a remarkable effect in the net sense of wellbeing and thinking capacity. Therefore, research on such artistic directions offers valuable data regarding how children who experience ASD may complement their self-perception and self-regulatory skills. (Scott-Barrett et al., 2022). This is related to the academic literature on the necessity of multimodal methods of recording and experiencing communication beyond the language forms and which might be more appealing to the expressive/communicative interests of certain children with autism. In turn, it is paramount to comprehend how it is that these processes, which are enabled by art, music, and writing, may be designed to ensure the development of types of intervention and supportive atmosphere.

The pilot study will help bridge a significant gap in literature because the study will provide detailed qualitative data of the lived experience of high functioning children with ASD who attend creative arts. Moreover, the given study addresses the gap in the empirical

evidence of the effectiveness of creative arts interventions on children with ASD noted by a scoping review (Bernier et al., 2022). The process of investigating these creative modalities and comparing the inner world of children with ASD to the rest of the population will produce the knowledge of how they can be used as potent means of expressing and forming identity, and knowledge that can be used in more effective assistance (Leger-Goodes et al., 2024).

As creative involvement can help in expression of emotions and better quality of life, it is also trying to emphasize how important the role that artistic activities of the individual are in mental hygiene and positive sense of self that children with ASD possess. It is a big project that will not only be inserted into the body of literature but also come with certain implications in terms of parents and professionals interested in the promotion of self-identity and emotional wellbeing of high functioning children with ASD. The study is an attempt to elaborate on how expression can contribute to alleviating the issue of social isolation and communication that will consequently develop a stronger sense of self in such a population. These areas are explored specifically to shed light on the therapeutic potential of creative arts to enhance the presence of co-occurring problems and disorders such as anxiety and issues in regulating emotions, which is commonly observed in ASD. This position is consistent with the research that dwells on the multimodal communication strategies that are less inconsistent with expressive/communicative characteristics of certain autistic children (Scott-Barrett et al., 2022). The scarcity of studies on subjective artistic experiences of autistic people further aggravates the necessity of studies that are autistic people-oriented and contribute to an inclusive culture.

## Literature Review

Investigating the available scholarly work, there is a developing trend of research that incorporates the role of the creative arts into the lives of patients living with autism spectrum disorder, albeit with some research gaps that require to be filled critically, especially self-reported experiences of the high functioning children. Despite the research having been investigated on the therapeutic merits of drawing in ASD in terms of communication and motor skills advancement, a definitive lack of controlled, randomized research studies regarding the intervention focused on representation drawing that might support the emergence of syntactic language is still present (Vyshedskiy et al., 2024). Besides, most of the available literature favors the perspective of the neurotypical observer, instead of the lived experience of autistic individuals and subjective estimates, which is a welcome relief. The proposed paper aims to address this gap because it will concentrate on the qualitative experiences of children with high functioning ASD and, therefore, facilitate the formation of a more complex perception of how visual art, music, and writing are interconnected with their identity formation and emotional well-being. Moreover, majority of the studies on the involvement of autistic individuals in music are practicalized in the realms of western cultures, and there is a resounding deficiency of knowledge on the different cultures on the role of music in their lives (Koro vengerja et al., 2022).

Such geographical localization must conduct investigations such as the current one situated in Lahore to generate the kind of interaction of the culture peculiar to creative arts (Kauts et al., 2025). The study also aims to fill the gap in the literature, which states that interventions aimed at self-expression in autistic children are required to be fulfilled with the purpose of self-expression as a natural right to express thoughts and viewpoint based

on various forms of expression (Scott-Barrett et al., 2022). Most of the studies that have been carried out in the past have been done on the topic of physical extracurricular acts among autistic children and usually they are not done on activities that are not physical but are creative and they often fail to capture the parental view on the level of participation of their child (Farrell et al., 2023). This is a precautionary measure considering the significance of studies that give a comprehensive examination of the role of creative arts in the overall progress of children with ASD and incorporates the invaluable experiences that are offered by their immediate caregivers. Moreover, prior research of arts-based interventions all too frequently does not differentiate the efficacy of the various forms of art, nor each of the approaches say role play, theatre, or film in bringing results.

The present paper will critically investigate the uniqueness of the role played by visual art, music and writing to identity formation of high-functioning children with ASD in Lahore, and a differentiated comprehension of their respective roles will be gained. Moreover, the study will contribute to the unmet need of no characters with ASD who are minority in popular media, a phenomenon that is like the current inequalities in ASD communities with respect to the provision of quality services (Dean and Nordahl-Hansen, 2021). Moreover, insufficient literature on mental health burden of primary caregivers of children with ASD is well known in such countries as Pakistan where cultural context has its peculiar connotations in the conceptualization and management of developmental disabilities. Consequently, it seeks to put forward a culturally informed perspective of the therapeutic benefits of the creative arts on HFCASD children with respect to a non-Western environment, Lahore, Pakistan.

## Methodology

This qualitative observational study uses a mixed methods design, which is the combination of direct observation and semi-structured interviews on parents as a means of triangulating data and validating the results. This is a holistic approach that maximizes the credibility and reliability of the findings because it combines various points of view on the experiences of the participants (Kauts et al., 2025). The observational aspect aims at observing spontaneous interactions with artistic practices and parent interviews will give important information on the developmental history, daily routine and perceived creative manifestations of the children in the home setting. This type of triangulation design is important to give a detailed understanding of the social interaction issues of children with ASD and the effectiveness of the educational and home environment in socializing the children. In addition, such an intricate phenomenon as the subjective experience of children with ASD and their families is to be explored with the help of the mixed-method design, including the combination of the qualitative data of observations and interviews (Ilias et al., 2015).

This method also goes in line with the modern demands of more qualitative research where the children with ASD are engaged directly that will provide a closer insight into their daily life and well-being. This methodology contributes to the clarification of problems that digital space presents to people with neurodevelopmental disorders but traditional source artistic in this analysis are the main target are. The research is adopted the phenomenological method, where the parents of the respondents are invited to give their own accounts and experiences hence affording the particulars of their views concerning the interest of their children in the creative arts. This approach lays emphasis on the emic



approach and gives account of descriptive and rich data which portray the complex relation of creative expression and formation of identity in this population.

## Results

Qualitative data obtained through observations and interviews were also analyzed using the thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke, which is one of the methodologies that is the most appropriate to use when trying to identify some meaningful patterns in the qualitative data (Badijah, 2018). The framework was selected owing to the systematic nature in analyzing visual information as well as non-visual information, which can help determine the recurring themes associated with the role of art and music and writing in self-identity of high-functioning children with ASD. The analytical was structured in a systematic way by including means of familiarization with the data, initial codes, thematic searches, theme review, theme definition and naming and production of final report which in turn guarantees the rigorous and systematic interpretation of the findings. This careful methodology allowed taking a deep inquiry into the subjective experiences of the children and their families and ensured that the themes that came out of that inquiry captured the complexity of their creative interaction.

The researchers started by becoming acquainted with the qualitative response using frequent reads of the engagement records of the children and then coded the data according to the semantic content to be able to reflect the correct information. The original connotations were repeatedly improved based on the direct words of the children and the information of their parents and this way, a true picture of their perceptions and priorities could be obtained (Scott-Barrett et al., 2022). After that, it was possible to collapse codes into broader categories, after the comprehensive consultation of the research team members talking about descriptive codes and more interpretive themes that capture the meaning of identity construction through creative expressions. An end review was then done to highlight any emerging themes that had not been initially captured, and the new findings were integrated to make the study complete to have improved the credibility and trustworthiness of the results through data triangulation.

This detailed analysis, which one can say metaphorically as the puzzle pieces falling into place, served to discern the complex social interaction problems that children with autism have to deal with, the vital role of educational support, and the significant impact the school setting creates on social interaction and general school experiences (Kauts et al., 2025). The analysis of data had been structured into three distinct phases, first was transcription of interviews and elaborating field notes and second was a cyclic process of coding and classifying the thematic description in order to bring out a complete and delicate image of the experiences of the subjects. The experience of such a systematic approach was useful in determining the significant patterns and recurrent ideas of the rich qualifications or qualitative information. Enabling it to be strongly interpreted about the contribution made by the creative arts in forming the identity in the children with ASD. The scholars then shifted out of descriptive toward other analytical themes through the exploration of the common inferences and larger meaning among the identified patterns to warrant a transformative interpretation of the information.

This inductive method of coding enabled themes and patterns to emerge straight from the data and not be imposed by pre-existing categories. This iterative analytical process from initial level of coding to thematic categorization was an important process for deconstruction of meanings with fidelity to the voice of the participants and for enhancing the trustworthiness of the process through investigator triangulation. The resulting themes were reviewed, refined and given names to accurately depict content and meaning of data to ensure a complete analysis to gain a comprehensive understanding of creative engagement to foster identity in High Function Children with ASD. To ensure the reliability and consistency of the coding process, a percentage of the transcripts was coded by a second researcher to ensure congruence of coding and resolve discrepancies through discussion.

## Emergent Themes

Thematic analysis of observational data and parent interviews, three main themes emerged that helped to shed light on the subtle ways in which creative arts help to create identity and self-representation among high-functioning children with ASD. These themes transcend the general benefits of self-expression by showing the very specific psychological and emotional processes involved.

### 1. Emotional Exploration

This theme is a result of the uniformity of the observation that creative activities were visual art, music or writing being a contained and predictable space inside the mind. The children were free in this "safe harbor" to be able to risk the often stormy and disturbing waters of their own emotional life without the social interpretation and verbal expression attacks, which ordinarily place them in distress. This data showed that the grounding mechanism for the creative materials themselves was their sensory and structural properties. Similarly, observations included a child that would fabricate intricate, repetitive patterns by using markers. While this could be seen as stereotypical behavior, the child eventually shared (with the help of a written note) that he or she drew "*straight lines makes my thoughts straight*". This implies that there is a direct connection between the physical action of making and the mental action of emotional regulation. Parents often described the post-creative period as a "*window of calm*," during which their children were more receptive and emotionally available and there was an indication of a successful discharge of emotional tension, within the safety of the creative process.

### 2. Art Exploration

The data showed that creative space was uniquely experienced by the children as a realm that is free from the judging eyes of society and that therefore enables the manifestation of a more genuine and less performative self. A deep discovery made in this study was the impact of creative expression in reducing social "camouflaging" or "masking", the exhausting task of repressing Autistic traits to fit into Neurotypical social norms. In social situations, several children were observed to consciously regulate their behaviour and mimic the body language of their peers, in addition to suppressing self-stimulatory behaviours (stimming). They would hum, gently rock to some rhythm in their hands or flap their hands in excitement without any self-consciousness and integrate their natural

body expressions seamlessly in the creative act. One parent stated emotionally *"When he is at his drum set, I don't see the anxious boy that is trying to fit in at school". I see my son in his purest form, without a single shred of being sorry."*

This theme also transposed to the subject matter of their creations. These narratives are read as a representation of their own experiences and one way of testing and affirming an identity that is not valued by social mimicry. The creative outlet, therefore, became a practice ground for self-acceptance in which they were able to experience and reaffirm an identity based on authenticity instead of assimilation.

### 3. Special Interests as super power

The deficit-based diagnostic criterion of restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior is directly addressed in this theme, in that the same qualities when instantiated as deep, passionate interests are the motivation to develop deep expertise, creativity and the building of positive identities. This information is powerful, as it shows that what is in the clinical world pathologized is in the artistic world the well spring of motivation, and an inherent element of the self. The portfolios of creative works by the children were analyzed and the findings revealed that the so-called special interests of the children were not merely the subject matter, but the major vocabulary of their expressive language. It is the work of a little boy who is intrigued by the periodic table, in which every element was attributed to a personality with its own color, and the entire image was considered a multidimensional story of chemical liaisons. In this way the children felt greatly mastered and competent. They have been formed otherwise as the masters of the particular sphere of their creative work, which always tends to escape their knowledge in other spheres of life, particularly social ones. The interviewee replied, *"Occasionally, I would be concerned because her fascination with dinosaurs was so much. It happens we are able to observe through her meticulous carvings of dinosaurs that it is not an obsession, but her genius. This resocialization, as an issue to an advantage, is essential in the process of building self-concept positively. The "restricted interest" is then turned into a symptom to a creative superpower, a rudimentary and treasured basic rock of their identity.*

### Conclusion

This qualitative research paper justifies the deep-seated role of art, music and writing as forms of identity-formation to children with autism spectrum disorders and has revealed how creative involvement facilitates self-expression and development of a strong sense of self. The research provides strong reasons that creative modalities can provide significant opportunities that point to complex emotions and experience which might be not expressed on the level of speech by separate children with ASD due to complex experiences. This enhanced self-expression potential, in terms of the expression of their structured and creative outlets, are highly beneficial to their emotional control and overall psychological health, as a remedial compensation mechanism to the shortcomings in social interaction. Besides, the findings imply that the orderly, but adaptable character of artistic, musical and written expression offers an avenue through which these children can experiment and resolve on what is so unique about their own identity in an approachable and validating medium in a construct of affirmation.

These imaginative processes not only assist in the processes of self-awareness but also add to the establishment of enhanced emotional expression and autonomy, relatedness, and competence which are vital in the overall mental health and well-being. Such creative options also play a key role in responding to deficit-based discourses that are related to autism to enable children to develop positive identities about themselves. Although the scale of this investigation is immense, there are certain constraints that should be considered in the future, primarily, regarding the extent to which the presented results can be generalized to bigger groups of people and whether the observed benefits are sustainable. (Love et al., 2024).

The specific focus of this study of high-functioning children with ASD and those living in urban Lahore might not have of course captured experiences of individuals living with differing support needs or those living in different geographical and cultural settings, all of which might have implications for the generalizability of the findings. Subsequent studies should investigate the possible mediational role of socioeconomic variables and access to resources in various environments on the findings of arts interventions on the development of identity in autistic children.

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