

Why do so many autistic people like watching animated shows and movies?

Something that myself and many other autistic people have anecdotally noticed is that a significant portion of autistic people enjoy watching animated shows & movies.

So many autistic people I know like watching animated shows that I've jotted it down multiple times as a feature of autistic culture. Ask an autistic person what shows are their favorite, and you'll frequently hear names such as Steven Universe, Fairy Tale, RWBY, Gravity Falls, She-Ra and the Princesses of Power, My Little Pony, etc.

Why is that? Why are so many of us drawn to these shows? I have a theory with multiple reasons:

The visual information presented in animated media is simpler than the visual information in real-life recorded video. **That makes it much easier for us to process and understand what's going on.**

Autistic people process much more sensory information at once than allistic people do, which can make it difficult to keep track of everything in a show where realistic scenes are being presented. In contrast, animated shows are often two-dimensional, and when they're three dimensional they're still simplified.

The benefit of that is, **the only visual & auditory information presented in an animated show is information that we need to know, or that directly enhances our understanding of the scene.** Without the added distraction of random sensory stimuli, autistic people are able to focus on the plot and characters instead.

Along those lines, **it's easier to understand and interpret the emotions, mental states, and facial expressions of characters in animated shows as opposed to real-life recorded ones.** Animated characters are visually simpler, and their expressions are often exaggerated. Therefore, it's much easier to tell when a character is angry, sad, happy, or confused.

Additionally, animated shows are explicitly not real. They often include fantasy elements, and other things that don't exist in real life. **This makes many animated shows an escape, a refuge, for autistic people who feel adrift and unwelcome on Earth in neurotypical society.**

This is not to say that autistic people are incapable of watching or understanding shows and movies with real actors. I myself watch and enjoy many realistic shows & movies, in addition to animated ones.

Rather, it's to say that for those of us who feel bombarded by sensory information and social cues on a daily basis, animated shows provide solace. We don't have to worry about missing cues or getting overstimulated by tiny details when we watch them. Instead, we can just relax and let ourselves get carried away by the story.

~Eden 🐸