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THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ADULTS WITH AUTISTIC SPECTRUM DISORDER AS NOVICE MARTIAL ARTISTS: A THEMATIC ANALYSIS

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This study questions what it is to be an autistic adult as a novice martial artist in the practice of Aikido. It responds to a gap in the literature on martial arts as an intervention in autism and investigates the impact of martial practice on the affective domain. Four participants met with two inclusion criteria: firstly, to be between eighteen and sixty-five and secondly, to hold a clinical diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (DSM-5). Methodologically, the research was conducted using thematic analysis, with influence from Hermeneutic Phenomenology. The sample engaged in an adapted Aikido course, which was taught by officially registered black-belt instructors within a formal dojo setting. Video and photo elicitation were used in the semi-structured interviews and the participants logged their experiences in diary format. Two phases of interviews followed the 12-class course. Phase 2 was conducted between four and six months after Phase 1 in order to register any longitudinal changes. The researcher personally transcribed all interviews, amounting to over 60,000 words. Thematic Analysis was selected and conjoined with the influences of hermeneutic phenomenology Phase 1 revealed codes across the four transcripts that revealed issues of fear, bullying, threat, protection, anxiety, shame and safety. Phase 2 revealed a significant longitudinal impact on the daily lives of the participants, ranging from a newly acquired life-world structure to an increase in peace of mind. The study contributes to the current wave of advocacy for the global autistic nation and should encourage and support further research. On a pragmatic level, it may offer inspiration to martial art instructors teaching autistic adults in their classes.

BIOGRAPHY

Brian McCann is a Doctoral candidate at the University of Dundee. He teaches English at Newpark Autism Centre, Dublin to adolescents. He has taught at Dublin City University, Dublin Business School and King Fahd University, Saudi Arabia and at Aoyama Business School, Tokyo. He has an MPhil in Applied Linguistics from Trinity College, Dublin an MBA in Educational Management from the University of Leicester, UK and four post-graduate diplomas in special education from University College, Dublin; The University of Ireland, Maynooth; Queen's University, Belfast and Trinity College, Dublin. He holds a 4th Degree Black Belt in Aikido awarded from Aikido World Headquarters, Tokyo. He regularly teaches Samurai weaponry to autistic students. He presented his research at the European Autism Congress, Croatia in March 2019 and will give further presentations in 2019 at 2nd International Congress on Mental Health, Amsterdam and 4th International Conference of Clinical Psychology and Counseling, Tokyo.

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