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Exploring the Form, Function, and Meaning of Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu

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Background

Brazilian Jiu Jitsu (BJJ) is grappling-based martial art that utilizes chokeholds and joint locks to incapacitate an attacker. BJJ techniques utilizes knowledge of anatomical weaknesses and focusing a maximal amount of strength to a weaker area of the body. It is important to understand occupations because participation in occupations correlates to one's health and quality of life (Hocking & Wright St. Clair, 2011). Occupational science is the study of occupations through its form, function, and meaning (Larson et al, 2003).

Problem/Purpose

Non-OT-based literature discusses the many benefits of BJJ including physical/mental health, life skills, and social interaction. Occupational science increases comprehensive understanding of occupations and how engaging in them affects overall health (Hocking & Wright St.Clair, 2011). Understanding the meaning, context, and demands of occupations will help occupational therapists make informed decisions on patient care (Hocking, 2009). The purpose of the project is to explore the occupation of BJJ, and to discover the form, function, and meaning of BJJ and to develop a comprehensive understanding of BJJ.

Research Question

What is the form, function, and meaning of Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu?

Results

Form

Directly observable aspects of the occupation (Larson et al., 2003).

- **Chokeholds and Joint Locks:** The occupation of BJJ is meant to incapacitate and kill another human being.
- **Rituals and Traditions of BJJ:** There is frequent bowing in and out of the mat and to each academy member. It's a deep-rooted respect that is ingrained from Judo.
- **Technical skills:** BJJ is a complex occupation that has many skills required to be successful.
- **Cerebral Approach to BJJ:** BJJ requires its practitioners to actively think ahead of their opponent and counter their techniques under resistance.

Function

How the occupation influences development, health and quality of life for the individual participating in the occupation (Larson et al., 2003).

- **Impact on life skills:** *When I first started Jiu-Jitsu, I was probably 355 pounds. I was into powerlifting but there was some unhealthy factors about being that size as well but consistently coming and talking to several guys that have been doing it for years and were in shape. I learned to construct a better diet. (Jerry)*
- **Direct/Indirect skills gained from BJJ:** *It definitely helped me be a lot more confident just in general. Just being able to know like I know I can defend myself pretty much against anybody as well and just being able to use it. (Megan)*
- **Control of Emotions:** *It just has this moderating effect on your emotions. So, if you're really passive and timid it kind of brings you in the middle, if you're really aggressive and you know over the top in terms of your energy, it brings you to that middle. (Thor)*

Meaning

The individual's subjective experience when participating in an occupation (Larson et al., 2003).

- **Primal Nature of BJJ:** *Now dropping your ego at the door essentially happens when you first get beat up, right? First you get choked, you get your limbs stretched out, and first time you feel hurt. A lot of people have never even been in a physical violent confrontation. (Lima)*
- **Camaraderie from Academy Members:** *I think a lot of that camaraderie, that's built like after training, you know, people come in the beginning class and everyone's a little bit quiet, little bit, you know, standoffish and then, you know, we start engaging in the warm-ups and then people start talking more. But it's really after the rolling where people start, you know, relaxing and opening up and talking and laughing and see people hanging out after. (Thor)*
- **Community in BJJ:** *Yeah, you know, the funny thing is that all the people from different walks of life you got we have doctors been on the mat, nurses, dieticians, you had policemen, firemen, congressmen and people from all walks of life, you know other business owners and stuff... So, you will see I'll come in and not roll at all just to come see everybody. (Leon)*

Unique Themes

Unique themes that did not fit into Form, Function, or Meaning.

1. **Ego Dynamics in BJJ:** *Yeah, and I think with that trust builds up and it develops this camaraderie in this culture of kind of looking out for each other because you must. And if you do not, then you have a lot of infighting and ego issues. And so, I think that is an element of that healthy culture as you get everyone's back. If you do not, you know, maybe it's you're back that you have to watch now. (Thor)*
2. **Trait Revelation:** *But it's also a weird thing too, like once you break that barrier and I don't know if it's true, but you see how they roll or something and you kind of get a sense of how that person is. Mine are true, and my predictions have been true so far with that person. So, it's like, when you see them roll, it's kind of a reflection of them. (Lima)*

Methods

A phenomenological approach was utilized to explore the form, function and meaning of BJJ.

- 7 participants
- 1 initial interview and follow-up
- Field notes taken with an observation form
- Participant observation

Data Analysis:

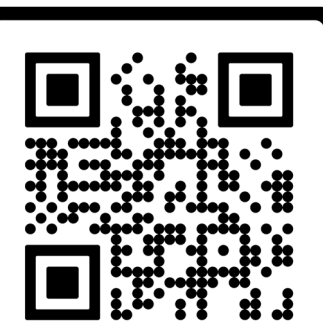
- Inductive coding methods used to allow the production of rich descriptive codes using Dedoose.
- Data was coded using thematic analysis to generate themes (Braun and Clark, (2006).

Discussion

- The results of the study adds to the limited research on BJJ's Form, Function and Meaning. Based on the results from the study
- BJJ presents to be a complex co-occupation due to its shared physicality, shared emotionality, and shared intentionality (Pickens & Pizur-Barnekow, 2009).
- BJJ hosts a unique dichotomy of survival and camaraderie for its participants.
- Understanding BJJ/occupations on a deeper level could allow OTs to create more occupation-based interventions.

Future Implications

- Future research into different BJJ academies in different areas.
- Inclusion of more female participants.
- Results could help guide/inform future OT practice.



References