

**A hermeneutic phenomenological study of the lived
experience of parenting a child with autism**

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Certificate of Authorship/Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Candidate

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Abstract

It was identified that there was little published research into the lived experience of parenting a child with autism that utilised a qualitative approach. There was a paucity of material in the literature, beyond single parent accounts, for a nurse to turn to develop a beginning understanding of the experience. There was also little for a parent to compare their own experience with. This study of the lived experience of parenting a child with autism provides an exploration of the experience within the framework of a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. Initially nine parents were interviewed and the resulting transcripts analysed. This analysis was taken to four focus groups to allow the parent's voice to remain active in the refinement of the analysis. The parents reported a strong resonance with the analysis and the discussion fell silent. The experience identified was not that of a series of activities but profound changes to the self of the parent. This is considered in the discussion in the light of the existential challenge to the parent's being posed by the demands of parenting a child with autism. Chaos theory and its mathematical applications are considered as a potentially fruitful way to pick up the conversational relation with the question of, "what is the lived experience of parenting a child with autism"?