

Healing through words: hypnotherapy, Ericksonian communication, and the management of meaning in Bogor, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores communication practices in hypnotherapy in Bogor, Indonesia, with a focus on the use of Ericksonian language patterns in addressing psychosomatic disorders. Using an ethnographic approach and the Coordinated Management of Meaning theory, this study analyzes the structure and mechanisms of messages used by hypnotherapists in delivering suggestions to clients. Findings show that the Ericksonian approach, which emphasizes indirect, metaphorical, and empathy-based communication, is more effective than conventional methods in building trust, reducing resistance, and facilitating healing. The study affirms that therapeutic communication is not merely a technical tool, but a process of co-constructing meaning rooted in cultural context and interpersonal relationships. This research contributes to the development of alternative communication models in mental health services and opens new space for integrating reflective communication approaches in hypnotherapist training in Indonesia.

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Introduction

In a social climate marked by rising psychosomatic disorders and urban-life pressures, the need for healing approaches that are not only medical but also communicative is increasingly urgent. Hypnotherapy, as a form of intervention combining suggestion techniques and therapeutic language, offers a new space to understand the body and mind as a field of social and symbolic interaction. Urban communities are becoming more open to alternative methods that bridge emotional, spiritual, and social dimensions in the healing process (Corburn et al. 2021; Danielson and Saxena 2019).

Hypnotherapy is gaining ground as an increasingly recognized alternative in handling psychosomatic complaints in urban areas like Bogor. As psychological pressure mounts and medical routes are not always sufficient, a subconscious communication-based approach offers a more personalized healing opportunity. This dissertation investigates how language, narrative, and suggestion are used in

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hypnotherapy to address psychosomatic complaints and construct the meaning of recovery. In a society where verbal expression is deeply intertwined with emotional processing, the strategic use of language becomes a therapeutic tool. Hypnotherapy not only taps into unconscious patterns but also empowers clients to renegotiate their internal dialogues.

As a practice of therapeutic communication, hypnotherapy demonstrates how the intersubjective process between therapist and client can create shifts in perception, reduce anxiety, and rebuild self-image (Palsson and Ballou 2020; Peter et al. 2018). This practice works not only on a technical level but also on the social construction of illness and healing meanings within contemporary urban society (Hetterich and Stengel 2020).

Using an ethnographic approach and the Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) theory (Cronen 2021), this research focuses on message structures and mechanisms in hypnotherapy practices at three clinics in Bogor. The study asks: How are messages structured in hypnotherapeutic communication? How are suggestions delivered to clients? And how does the communication model used influence therapeutic outcomes? To address these questions, the study employed qualitative methods with data collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews with hypnotherapists and clients, as well as documentation of therapy sessions. The selection of informants was conducted purposively, targeting those directly involved in hypnotherapy practice. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify communication patterns, message design strategies, and interactional dynamics that emerged during therapy. This analysis aimed to uncover how specific forms of language and interpersonal engagement contribute to the perceived effectiveness of hypnotherapeutic communication.

Findings

This study found that Milton H. Erickson's communication approach of using metaphorical, indirect, and empathetic language is more effective in building trust and reducing client resistance (Zeb and Hameed 2020; Tkacova et al. 2020). Suggestive communication techniques such as metaphor are used to access the subconscious mind and assist in reframing trauma.

The success of hypnotherapy is also highly influenced by the therapist's sensitivity to cultural context and ability to adapt their communication style. Nonverbal strategies such as voice rhythm and gestures also play a role in creating emotional comfort.

Additionally, the study highlights the importance of empathetic and flexible therapeutic relationships, especially when dealing with client ambivalence (Tkacova et al. 2020). With a tailored approach, therapeutic communication becomes a key tool in opening spaces for expression and recovery.

Theoretical and practical contributions

This study expands the application of the CMM theory into the field of hypnotherapy, showing how personal and therapeutic meanings can be constructed through structured and contextual communication strategies. Communication in hypnotherapy is

not merely a tool for conveying messages but becomes a foundation for deep healing processes.

Practically, the study shows that the Ericksonian approach is highly relevant in the Indonesian cultural context that values softness and politeness (Gunawan et al. 2021). These findings provide strategic guidance for hypnotherapists in designing interventions based on empathy and suggestive language tailored to client characteristics. Thus, this dissertation makes a significant contribution to the development of therapeutic communication in the field of alternative mental health care.

Recommendations

This dissertation also recommends that hypnotherapist training in Indonesia include specific modules on message design, communication sensitivity, and the adaptation of Ericksonian techniques. Effective hypnotherapy practice requires not only hypnosis skills but also the ability to build supportive and empathetic interpersonal relationships.

Conclusion

This study shows that communication is not merely a tool for therapy, but a space for the co-construction of meaning essential in the healing process. By embracing the empathetic and metaphorical Ericksonian approach, along with sensitivity to cultural contexts, hypnotherapy in Indonesia has the potential to become a more meaningful and inclusive healing practice. The dissertation underscores the importance of integrating communication theory with field practice and highlights the urgency of professional training that places human relationships at the heart of the healing process.

Dissertation completion

This dissertation was completed at the Faculty of Communication Sciences, Sahid University Jakarta, and was defended on Monday, August 29, 2022.

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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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