

## Research Article

# Conceptual Photography in Therapeutic Photography

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**Abstract.**

Conceptual photography frees photographers to be creative according to their intent and purpose with various concepts and techniques. Therapeutic photography can provide a unique meaning to conceptual photography. The mode used in this research is qualitative, with a phenomenological method. Design methods using design thinking and external approaches such as photo elicitation, photo reflexive, and photo novella. The results obtained by two research respondents through the design thinking process can provide a therapeutic effect even though they tend to display beautiful visuals, and not seem gloomy, sad, or spooky. In conclusion, Cristina Nunez, an expert on therapeutic photography, considers the results of the research respondents is too beautiful. Still, with these differences, it can be a new finding that therapeutic photography can be explored with other photography approaches.

**Keywords:** conceptual, therapeutic, photography

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## 1. Introduction

Academic research has recognized the benefits that photography brings to the exploration of lived experience because it can render details and has an aura of authenticity that gives it a unique power and fascination [1].

Every photo work that has a concept can be said to be conceptual photography. Broad concepts can produce a variety of visual displays from spooky to beautiful visuals. According to Cristina Nunez, therapeutic photography works do not need to be visually beautiful, do not need makeup, do not need to be beautified, or can portray themselves as positively as possible, just what they are. The research objective is how a beautiful visual appearance in conceptual photography still provides a therapeutic effect.

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## 1.1. Conceptual Photography

The idea of giving concepts to works of art was pioneered by a sculptor named Edward Kienholz in 1950, along with the emergence of the conceptual art movement which emphasized concepts or ideas in a work as a freer form of expression and was not too concerned with techniques, skills, materials and beauty form [2]. Conceptual photography can be used to convey broader and free messages, both in social and political issues, to matters relating to human psychology. Photographers can have different approaches depending on the understanding, intent, and purpose of the photographic techniques used, often containing elements of ambiguity so that they can be interpreted subjectively according to the perception of the viewer, or in other words assimilation or sharpening processes can occur.

## 1.2. Therapeutic Photography

Because of the ease of access to new camera technology, therapeutic photography techniques have become a tool that can now be used to help people experiencing depression and anxiety and help increase their overall well-being [3].

Therapeutic photography is the use of photography applications that can provide results (output) for increasing self-knowledge, awareness, well-being, relationships, and for opposing social issues such as exclusion, social isolation, intercultural relations, social conflict, and social injustice. The result (outcome) of therapeutic photography is in the form of self-disclosure, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and empowerment. The resulting photo work is not a treatment but a useful supplement to increase therapeutic communication [4].

## 2. Research Method

This research uses a qualitative approach aimed at exploring and understanding the meaning of individuals or groups who are ascribed to social or human problems which produce interpretations of the results of interviews, observations, and so on. The method used is phenomenology, a research strategy to identify the essence of the human experience of the phenomenon by understanding its philosophy, methods, and procedures through a long involvement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning [5]. The photo design method uses design thinking, which is an innovation

method that uses an iterative process to produce user-oriented work as a solution to the problems faced. [6].

## 2.1. Methods of Data Collecting

Primary data collection was carried out through online interviews with two informants named Michelle Jasmine Halim and Ferdinan Linardi. Secondary data was obtained through various literacy books, journals, and articles on the internet.

The interview was conducted within a week using design thinking methods such as empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test. Each design subject was interviewed and given the task to do as self-portrait and the external approach of Loewenthal methods such as photo elicitation, photo reflexive, and photo novella.

## 2.2. Methods of Data Analyzing

Analysis of the design result data was carried out utilizing online interviews with the two design subjects and written interviews with Cristina Nunez, an expert in therapeutic photography.

## 3. Result And Discussion

A total of five photos were produced for each design subject. Here are three photos that have the most therapeutic effect on each design subject. Michelle Jasmine Halim with the title (from left to right) Minion, Mom, Flip Side as in Figure 1. Ferdinan Linardi with the title (from left to right) Blue-Sky Thinker, Me, Myself, and I, I Am Blessed as in Figure 2.



**Figure 1:** Michelle Jasmine Halim's therapeutic photograph.



**Figure 2:** Ferdinan Linardi's therapeutic photograph.

According to Michelle Jasmine Halim, the therapeutic effect of the photo can be felt well because it is under a series of design thinking processes that have been carried out. The choice of subjects and photo objects has its meaning for Michelle Jasmine Halim.

According to Michelle Jasmine Halim, if there is an addition to the stylist, it will help her during the shooting process. According to Ferdinan Linardi, the photo had a therapeutic effect on him, and the results were as expected. The photo process also provided a memorable experience for him.

According to Cristina Nunez, she believes the project uses photography's power to build an ideal image of oneself, which can inspire the participant to see themselves from an uplifting point of view, and in this sense, it can temporarily raise self-esteem and self-efficacy and allow some progress. However, she believes this is not enough to provide self-knowledge and self-acceptance, which are needed to attain more stable self-esteem, empowerment, and self-efficacy. It would be necessary to work on (express, perceive, and accept) the more difficult emotions and aspects of the self. Moreover, the fact that the images, makeup, and design are created by someone else, does not stimulate their creative process and suggests that they would need others to get those results, or that they need makeup and design to be acceptable.

Promoting an ideal image of the self is also risky, because it gives more value to the ideal, happy, beautiful self, suggesting that all the rest is invaluable or wrong. In this sense, the project aligns with social media's underlying message that one should be beautiful, happy, strong, and cool, to be successful, and all the other emotions are not ok, and this, to me, is not innovative or beneficial to young people (with mental health issues or not).

## 4. Conclusion

The difference in background and approach taken between the author and Cristina Nunez in making therapeutic photography works gives a significant difference in perception, although to a small extent, there are some perception similarities. The main difference in perception is in the visual appearance which, according to Cristina Nunez, does not need to follow social media standards which must look beautiful, happy, and various other self-image formations. Although in general the two design subjects still felt a therapeutic effect from the photo because of a series of design thinking processes that had been carried out carefully. Therapeutic photography will still provide a therapeutic effect even though it has a beautiful visual appearance as long as the process carried out is under what is expected by the design subject, one of which is a series of design thinking processes.

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