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EARLY EVIDENCE OF NLPR EFFECTIVENESS: INSIGHTS FROM ANONYMOUS COURSE EVALUATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study investigated participant experiences with the Neuro-Linguistic Processing and Reprogramming (NLPR) model to examine perceived value, anticipated applications, and areas for development.

Methods: A qualitative descriptive design was used. Open-ended responses from de-identified course evaluation forms (N = 59) were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. Inductive coding was followed by interpretation through the NLPR framework to connect participant experiences with the model's theoretical mechanisms.

Results: The analysis yielded eight higher-order themes: physiological safety, language awareness, self-awareness, agency and choice, self-compassion, behavioral integration, group-based learning, and tolerance for ambiguity. Participants reported high engagement and identified practical strategies, interactive learning, and a supportive environment as prominent features. Anticipated applications included self-regulation techniques, improved communication, and personal growth practices.

Conclusion: Participant experiences aligned with the proposed mechanisms of NLPR, namely autonomic regulation, language-based redirection, and behavioral integration. These findings provide preliminary qualitative evidence for the internal coherence of NLPR and suggest directions for future research using validated measures and controlled designs.

KEYWORDS: Neuro-Linguistic Processing and Reprogramming, NLPR, thematic analysis, autonomic regulation, language redirection, Language-Based Intervention, Psychotherapy

INTRODUCTION

Language plays a fundamental role in shaping thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, making it a potent tool in psychotherapy (Barrett, 2011; Boroditsky, 2011; Coy, 2024b; St Clair et al., 2019; Thierry, 2016). The emerging psychotherapeutic approach, Neuro-Linguistic Processing and Reprogramming (NLPR), draws from neuroscience, linguistics, and physiology to enhance cognitive and emotional processes through intentional language use (Coy, 2024a; Kross et al., 2011). NLPR capitalizes on the ability of language to engage the brain's neurobiological mechanisms involved in emotion regulation and executive functions (Coy, 2024a; Moser et al., 2017; Zelazo, 2015). It also integrates insights from Polyvagal Theory to incorporate the nature of physiological responses to linguistic stimuli (Porges, 2007; 2009).

NLPR distinguishes itself from other approaches by emphasizing redirection (Coy, 2024a, 2024b) rather than reframing (Beck, 2011). When a client's dialogue moves toward dysregulation, the practitioner intentionally redirects the client toward the Language Guidelines to promote emotional regulation through autonomic nervous system regulation and access to the prefrontal cortex (Bauer et al., 2002; Chaplo & Fishbein, 2021; Eippert et al., 2007). Through repetition, this redirection becomes a physiological program that supports automatic thoughts, feelings, and behaviors aligned with safety and adaptive functioning (Coy, 2024a; Eippert et al., 2007; Friston, 2005).

The NLPR Language Guidelines are a systematic way of redirecting communication (Geurts, 2018). They involve "I" statements to own and integrate experiences (Moser, et al., 2017) and involve redirection of "should" language to reduce self-judgment (Binder, et al., 2019), redirection of "I don't know" statements when discussing the self to establish safety (Geller & Porges, 2014), redirection of "makes me" language to establish personal power (Barrett, 2011), use of accurate feeling labels to improve emotional expression through internal orientation (Alexander et al., 2021), and creating space to maintain a balanced internal state (Arnsten et al., 2012; Coy, 2024a; Friston, 2005).

Although NLPR is grounded in established neuroscience and linguistic principles, empirical research on its application and perceived effects remains limited. The present study aims to address this gap by analyzing anonymous course evaluation data from participants in NLPR sessions. Using qualitative methods, the study explores participant

perceptions of the model, their anticipated applications of learned strategies, and the aspects they found most valuable. The findings are interpreted through the NLPR framework to examine alignment between participant experiences and the model's proposed mechanisms of change (Ressler & Mayberg, 2007).

METHODS

Research Design

A qualitative descriptive design was used in this study to investigate participant perceptions of the NLPR model. Open-ended responses on course evaluation forms were analyzed through reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2023). This methodology enabled the identification of patterns in the data and was grounded in participant perceptions.

Participants

Data were derived from de-identified course evaluation forms completed by participants in NLPR sessions. All forms were systematically de-identified before analysis, removing names, handwriting, and any potentially identifying information. No demographic data were retained. The dataset consisted of responses from fifty-nine attendees across multiple sessions, representing a cross-section of experiences with NLPR. Participants were anonymized and identified only as 'participants' in the analysis, with no specific identification codes used.

Data Source

Evaluation forms included four open-ended questions designed to capture immediate post-session reflections.

1. What did you enjoy most about today's session?
2. What did you learn that you anticipate using in your daily life?
3. Was there anything from today's session that you did not understand?
4. What is the most valuable thing you learned in today's session (be specific. Something about yourself, the process, relationships, or interactions)?

Data Analysis

The reflexive thematic analysis was used to analyze the data in two stages. The responses were initially read out to familiarize the researcher with the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Open coding was used to identify the main phrases and common ideas within each evaluation question (Rogalsky & Hickok, 2011).

Then, the codes were grouped into larger categories and narrowed to themes that reflected participants' experiences and perceptions. To increase rigor, themes were checked and rechecked against the raw data to ensure consistency. (Rozum & Malchiodi, 2003)

In a second analytic step, themes were examined using the theoretical framework of NLPR to elucidate underlying mechanisms of language processing, autonomic regulation, and behavioral change (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Hakim, 1982; Thatcher, 1980). This two-step methodology enabled the analysis to be grounded in participants' voices and to relate findings to the theoretical bases of the model (Thomas & Harden, 2008).

Trustworthiness

Credibility was supported through systematic coding, repeated review of the data, and alignment of themes with participant responses (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Saldaña, 2016). Dependability was maintained by documenting the analytic process, including coding decisions and theme development (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability was addressed by providing detailed descriptions of the course context, evaluation prompts, and participant experiences, enabling readers to assess applicability to comparable settings.

RESULTS

The analysis yielded eight higher-order themes representing participants' reported experiences with NLPR. Table 1 provides an overview of these themes along with representative quotes.

Table 1: Higher Order Themes and Representative Participant Quotes

Theme	Representative Quote
Physiological Safety	Learning and sharing in the safety of the group
Language Awareness	I need to be more aware of how I can alter these words that communicate a negative environment
Self-Awareness	I learned that I intellectualize as a defense mechanism
Agency and Choice	I decide for myself and have all the power
Self-Compassion	I made a mistake, and that's okay; I can learn from this
Behavioral Integration	I plan to begin to create healthy, sturdy boundaries
Group-Based Learning	I enjoyed hearing how others think of things, and about their success it helps me to feel more confident and inspired
Tolerance for Ambiguity	I am still seeking to understand how fear was so prevalent in my spiritual journey

Eight higher-order themes were identified from participant responses (Table 1), representing key dimensions of participant experience within the NLPR framework. Each theme is described in detail in the sections that follow, with supporting participant quotes.

Physiological Safety

Participants frequently described the group environment as safe, accepting, and nonjudgmental. This sense of safety enabled openness and presence with several participants noting that the atmosphere allowed them to stay regulated (Wu et al., 2021; Teper et al., 2013). One participant shared, "I bring the emotional regulation and safety with me when I leave." Another stated, "I feel safe here right now." A third participant noted "the vulnerability demonstrated by the group and the different

challenges we all face" and identified similarities across group member experiences.

Language Awareness

Many participants reported increased awareness of their internal and external language patterns. They described noticing the emotional impact of language and intentionally shifting word choice (Yalom, 1980). One participant planned to use "why" questions in a positive way and noted self-redefinition (Kross et al., 2005). Another reflected, "I need to be more aware of how I can alter these words that communicate a negative environment." A third participant shared, "I need to be more present, how to use verbiage that will help me toward peace and safety."

Self-Awareness

Participants described heightened recognition of triggers, automatic responses, and defense

mechanisms (Siegel et al., 2020; Van Dam et al., 2010). One participant shared, “I learned that I intellectualize as a defense mechanism.” Another noted, “I learned about how I am taking my body into overdrive and surpassing the safety zone.” A third participant reflected, “I learned that I likely spent my entire life avoiding, dissociating with my feelings and emotions, which has fueled my addiction to alcohol, relationships, anxiety, and depression”.

Agency and Choice

A strong theme of reclaimed personal power emerged across responses. Participants expressed a renewed sense of choice over their reactions and a shift toward an internal locus of control (Moser et al., 2017). One stated, “I decide for myself and have all the power.” Another explained, “I have choices and how my perception impacts my thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. New language creates new perceptions.” A third participant shared, “I have power within myself perspective, emotions, thoughts, and actions. I am in charge of me and only me.”

Self-Compassion

Participants described reduced self-judgment and increased self-acceptance (Sipe & Eisendrath et al., 2012). One participant shared, “I made a mistake, and that’s okay; I can learn from this.” Another reflected, “I can forgive myself, and that’s okay.” A third participant noted, “I can be patient with my healing.”

Behavioral Integration

Participants reported applying NLPR strategies beyond the training context, including boundary-setting, slowed responses to create space between triggers and reactions, and intentional communication (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). One participant stated, “I plan to begin to create healthy, sturdy boundaries. I plan to not entangle others' feelings

into my own.” Another shared, “I need to slow down. This is a big one for me. Affirmations, post-it notes around the house.” A third participant noted, “I will focus more on identifying triggers and the stories that I tell myself.”

Group-Based Learning

The group setting was described as an active catalyst for change. Participants valued learning from others, observing peer modeling, and experiencing shared vulnerability (Binder et al., 2019). One participant noted, “I enjoyed hearing how others think of things, and about their success, it helps me to feel more confident and inspired.” Another stated that they enjoyed “listening to others and realizing there is more similarities than differences.” A third participant shared that they enjoyed “the interaction with everyone and today’s topic on self-authenticity.”

Tolerance for Ambiguity

Some participants acknowledged confusion or incomplete understanding while remaining engaged (Falkenström et al., 2015). They expressed a willingness to continue learning even with uncertainty. One participant shared, “I am still seeking to understand how fear was so prevalent in my spiritual journey.” Another reflected, “I think I understood the ideas and that I could learn to understand them in greater detail.” A third participant noted, “I understood the ideas of the group I am more aware of my need for creating safe space in my body.”

Theme Frequency and Pervasiveness

Table 2 shows the number of participants whose responses were categorized under each higher-order theme. Themes were deemed to exist when a participant mentioned the concept directly or when he/she narrated an experience that corresponded to the theme.

Table 2 Theme Frequency across Participants N= 59

Theme	Number of Participants
Physiological Safety	41
Language Awareness	37
Self-Awareness	44
Agency and Choice	39
Self-Compassion	35
Behavioral Integration	42
Group-Based Learning	38
Tolerance for Ambiguity	26

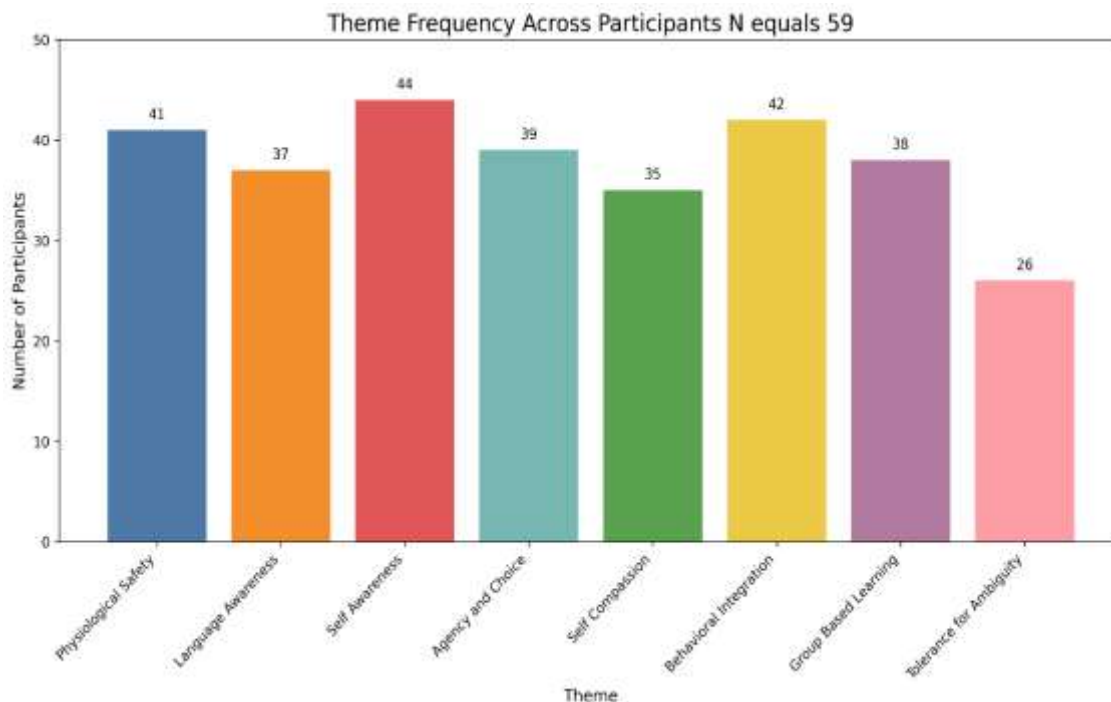


Figure 1: Theme Frequency Across Participants

Table 2 and Figure 1 display the frequency of each theme across the 59 participant responses. Self-Awareness (n = 44) and Behavioral Integration (n = 42) were the most frequently reported themes, followed by Physiological Safety (n = 41), Agency and Choice (n = 39), Group-Based Learning (n = 38), Language Awareness (n = 37), and Self-Compassion (n = 35). Tolerance for Ambiguity (n = 26) was the least frequent and remained present across participants. Overall, the distribution reflects strong engagement with awareness, behavioral application,

and safety-related processes, with uncertainty tolerance representing a less prevalent yet meaningful dimension of participant experience.

Mapping Themes to NLPR Mechanisms

Table 3 matches each higher-order theme with the corresponding NLPR theoretical mechanism, as presented in the published literature (Coy, 2024a, 2024b). This mapping shows how participants' reported experiences align with the models' proposed pathways of change.

Table 3 Mapping of Themes to NLPR Mechanisms

Higher Order Theme	Corresponding NLPR Mechanism
Physiological Safety	Ventral Vagal Activation; Autonomic Regulation
Language Awareness	Language-Based Redirection; Linguistic Input
Self-Awareness	Neuroception; Internal Monitoring
Agency and Choice	Behavioral Redirection; Internal Locus of Control
Self-Compassion	Reduced Threat-Based Narratives; Self-Acceptance
Behavioral Integration	Neuroplasticity; Repetition; Skill Generalization
Group-Based Learning	Social Engagement System; Co-Regulation
Tolerance for Ambiguity	Regulation Under Cognitive Load; Distress Tolerance

DISCUSSION

This paper examined participant perceptions of the NLPR model using open-ended evaluation responses. The results present initial qualitative data indicating that participant experiences are consistent with the mechanisms highlighted in NLPR, such as

autonomic regulation, language-based redirection, and behavioral integration.

Alignment with NLPR Mechanisms

The physiological safety theme aligns with the NLPR premise that safety comes before cognitive and linguistic transformation. In the Polyvagal framework, safety encompasses the activation of the ventral vagal complex, which facilitates social interactions and access to the executive functions (Shokrkon & Nicoladis et al., 2022). The description of participants' feeling safe and regulated indicates that the NLPR sessions facilitated the conditions for autonomic regulation.

Language awareness became a major theme, with participants explaining deliberate changes in word choice as a regulatory mechanism. This aligns with NLPR's focus on language as a regulatory input rather than a mere cognitive activity (Binder et al., 2019; Coy, 2024a, 2024b; Eippert et al., 2007; Friston, 2005; Moser et al., 2017). Shifting language from "should" or "makes me" to statements of acceptance, agency, and choice seemed to serve as a process of disrupting threat-based discourses and reclaiming agency.

Themes of self-awareness and self-compassion are indicative of internal monitoring and reduced self-judgment (Binder et al., 2019; Seligman, 2011; Siegel et al., 2020; Lutz et al., 2008), which NLPR aims to foster. The participant reports of identifying triggers and practicing self-acceptance align with the model's goal of regulated action, which is to redirect threat-based responding (Sipe & Eisendrath et al., 2012).

Themes of Behavioral integration and agency indicate that the participants believed they had transferred the structured NLPR skills to everyday life (Geurts, 2018; Hofmann et al., 2012). This reinforces the idea that NLPRs' focus on repetition and practice as the basis of neuroplastic change, in which repeated redirection enhances the formation of new neural pathways and reduces automatic threat responses (Chaplo & Fishbein, 2021).

The theme of group-based learning emphasizes the importance of co-regulation in facilitating self-regulation. The integration of group processes by NLPR is consistent with the social engagement system outlined in Polyvagal Theory, in which shared experience and attuned interaction lead to physiological safety (Porges, 2009).

Proposed Process Model

The participant's combined responses indicate a sequence of processes in which laying the foundation of safety led to enhanced internal awareness, language-based redirection, behavioral integration of agency, and perceived emotional regulation. This orientation aligns with the theoretical concept of

NLPR and provides a verifiable model for future studies. Taken together, these themes suggest that participants engaged with NLPR as an organized process encompassing safety awareness, agency and compassion, behavioral application, co-regulation, and comfort with uncertainty (Geller & Porges, 2014).

Implications for Practice and Research

These results confirm the perceived effectiveness of NLPR as a method of self-regulation and relational development. For practitioners, the findings highlight the need to develop safe environments that explicitly teach language redirection strategies and offer opportunities for repetitive, structured skill practice. The prevalence of themes related to safety, awareness, and behavioral integration is high, indicating that these elements are especially salient to the participants.

The validated outcome measures might be used in future research to determine the effects of NLPR on emotional regulation and executive functioning. Longitudinal designs would enable the study of the persistence of perceived changes over time. Comparisons with other interventions would be controlled to make the specific contributions of NLPR clearer. Also, those studies that collect demographic information would enable analysis of possible variation in participant characteristics.

LIMITATIONS

The study's limitations include the de-identified evaluation forms, which made it challenging to access participant demographics and obtain follow-up clarification. The depth of responses varied with the brevity of the course evaluation forms. The results are intended to be exploratory and preliminary. This lack of standardized outcome measures implies that outcomes are based on perceived and not measured effects.

CONCLUSION

This paper explored participant responses to the NLPR model, which were perceived as valuable and applicable, and identified eight higher-order themes: physiological safety, language awareness, self-compassion, behavioral integration, group-based learning, and tolerance for ambiguity. These themes were mapped onto NLPR's theory of autonomic regulation, language-based redirection, and behavioral integration, which propose internal consistency between participant experiences and the models' theoretical underpinnings. The results point to the necessity of developing safe settings that teach language redirection techniques and allow practicing these skills. To determine the effectiveness of NLPR

across a variety of populations and settings, future studies warrant the use of validated outcome measures, longitudinal designs, and controlled comparisons to build rigorous evidence of its efficacy.

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