

## NURSE'S VOICE FROM THE FIELD

# Reflections on Research During Difficult Times: Looking Back on the COVID-19 Experience

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The question, "what does life mean?" used to be considered as a paradigm of philosophical investigation. As a researcher, life is meaningless without paradigm and perspective. These are indispensable in peoples' lives as we encounter research in our daily lives. According to James Tartaglia (Veal, 2017), when properly defined, the topic of life's purpose is "the keystone of philosophy," serving to "lock its traditional preoccupations in place" and "allow them to bear weight in an intellectual culture dominated by science." He also contends that we should consider this idea as he rejects the premise of the question and draw the conclusion that "life is meaningless." More precisely, James Tartaglia is one philosopher who is not at all happy about it; in fact, he appears to be absolutely furious about it, as readers who have read this journal's recent symposium on Thaddeus Metz's book *Meaning in Life: An Analytic Study* would be aware. What enrages Tartaglia the most, it seems, is that the "traditional" topic of life's meaning has been completely disregarded by what he refers to as the "new paradigm" in analytic philosophy, which is purportedly devoted to exploring this question. He further states that the conventional question of life's purpose is not only the only genuine, legitimately philosophical inquiry of life's meaning, but it is also the most important one.

A paradigm is a fundamental collection of beliefs that serve as a basis for action (Guba, 1990). Fundamental ideas or ultimates are the subject of paradigms. They are creations of people. They outline the researcher's worldview as an interpretive bricoleur. It is impossible to prove the ultimate veracity of these beliefs. It also examines how information is perceived and investigated, and it outlines the purpose, inspiration and anticipated results of the study.

A researcher-as-interpretive bricoleur cannot afford to be a stranger to paradigms and perspectives.

A paradigm consists of four components: 1) ethics/axiology, 2) ontology, 3) epistemology, and 4) methodology. "How will I behave morally in the world?" is the question that ethics addresses. The question of epistemology is, "How do I know the world?" How are the inquirer and the known related? Every epistemology, as Christians suggests, entails a researcher's ethical and moral position on the world and themselves. Fundamental concerns regarding the nature of reality and the nature of people in society are raised by ontology. The focus of methodology is the most effective ways to learn about the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

I was at the peak of thesis writing and conducting research when three of our dear loved ones died one after the other from COVID-19. They were a "Manang" (an older sister or cousin), an aunt, and an uncle but they were like my sister and second parents.

COVID-19 protocols dictated that I should not be inside hospitals due to my co-morbidity being asthmatic and other limitations. When they all died in September 2021, my paradigm and perspective in life changed as their immediate family in the United States and their children-in-law here somehow blamed me for their deaths. Their reason was that I was the nurse of the family and I was the "only sibling" here with them at that time and I was not able to render the nursing care that they should have. Their urns were finally laid to rest in March 2023. Despite some instances of forgiveness, forgetting the past and starting all over again, our relationship has not been restored. In September 2021, I thought life was meaningless when I was labeled as a "useless nurse", stupid, helpless, and an insignificant person. But in March 2023, when the statement "You're a nurse, right? But you did nothing about it (pertaining to the deaths of those three loved ones)", it did not hurt anymore because I came to terms with myself through my thesis outcome that that was just an accusation or a lie.

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My research had been therapeutic as I had close encounter with those COVID-19 nurses who had fought against the deadly pandemic. I chose qualitative research as I sought answers in the midst of world's critical state at that time. Denzin and Lincoln (2018) describes qualitative research is a distinct area of study. It cuts across fields, disciplines, and subject matter. The phrase is surrounded by a large, interrelated family of terminology, ideas, and presumptions. These include the ideologies connected to cultural and interpretive studies, as well as the traditions of foundationalism, positivism, postfoundationalism, postpositivism, poststructuralism, postmodernism, and posthumanism. Numerous different disciplines employ qualitative research in their work. It is not specific to any one discipline.

As a situated activity, qualitative research places the observer in the world. A collection of interpretive, tangible techniques that make the world visible makes up qualitative research. The world is changed by these methods. They transform the outside world into a collection of representations, which may include field notes, interviews, dialogues, pictures, recordings, and memos to oneself. At this level, qualitative research adopts a naturalistic, interpretive perspective on the world. This means that qualitative researchers investigate phenomena in their natural environments while attempting to understand or interpret them in terms of the meanings that individuals assign to them. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Qualitative research had put me back to my senses in the midst of the critical phenomena that I had encountered.

With time and life experiences, our paradigms and perspectives change. All the while I thought that I am just a constructivist, but I can also be postpositivist, an advocate or do pragmatism. I can also do a combination of these four paradigm perspectives or do them all if I want to be empowered as a researcher.

A viewpoint may share many characteristics with a paradigm, such as a particular epistemology or a shared set of methodological assumptions, although perspectives are not as well-defined or unified as paradigms.

According to Polit & Beck (2017), research is a methodical study that employs structured techniques to find answers to questions or deal with issues. The development and expansion of knowledge is the ultimate purpose of research. More nurses are participating in disciplined research that is advantageous to nursing and its patients. The goal of nursing research is to produce reliable data on topics important to the nursing profession, such as nursing practice, education, administration, and informatics.

Over the past three decades, there has been a notable increase in nursing research, giving nurses a larger body of information on

which to base their clinical decisions. However, there are still a lot of unanswered concerns and work to be done before nursing practice can fully benefit from research advancements (Polit & Beck, 2017). As Nursing is a science and an art, it continues to evolve.

The researcher must be aware of the fundamental epistemological, ontological, ethical, and methodological assumptions of each and be able to discuss them. The disparities between paradigms and perspectives have a great deal of practical, material, and everyday significance. As long as proponents continue to gather to discuss their differences while attempting to expand on those areas where they agree, the distinctions between paradigms are likely to continue to blur.

It is also obvious that there is no singular "truth," as all truths are distorted and imprecise. There will not be a single conventional world view, as Lincoln and Guba (2000) make a claim that all social scientists could agree with. We reside in a historical period characterized by several languages, disputed meanings, new textual forms and paradigmatic disagreements. This era of liberation from the constraints of a single regime of truth, freedom from having only one hue in mind when observing the world.

If paradigms are comprehensive philosophical frameworks designating certain ontologies, epistemologies, and techniques, then switching between them is difficult. The belief systems that bind a user to a specific worldview are represented by paradigms. In contrast, perspectives are less sophisticated systems and switching between them may be simpler. The researcher-as-bricoleur-theorist works within and between contending and overlapping paradigms and perspectives.

Life is not meaningless after all. Life is meaningful when we know our paradigms and perspectives, and that will keep us going. We must continue to embrace research as it is a continuous process and a part of our day-to-day life. Knowledge is power and so with research. As long as there is a fire in us to continue to learn, we must continue to venture in the wonderful world of research. We must have the heart of a child expectant in opening a Christmas gift though he or she does not know what is inside the gift box. The excitement to discover new findings or outcomes in research are invaluable achievement for a researcher-bricoleur if we have the desire to learn. Sometimes, discouragements and failures might limit us to continue with our research but then, there is really no harm in trying. At least we have tried to explore reality and be cleared of our presumptions, assumptions and biases. The world of reality is waiting for us to venture and to discover through research.

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She derives inspiration for doing qualitative research in Nursing from her mother's experiences in giving birth, as she juggles the duties and responsibilities of being a nurse-educator, wife, mom, daughter, and caregiver to her 86-year-old mom.

"The character  
of the nurse  
is as important  
as the knowledge  
she possesses."

– Carolyn Jarvis

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