

NURSE'S VOICE FROM THE FIELD

Embarking on the Unknown: A Personal Journey through Grounded Theory, Reflexivity, and Resilience

James R. Taiza, MAN, RN¹

Stepping into qualitative research felt like embarking on an uncharted journey, where every twist and turn revealed new challenges, questions, and opportunities for growth. I had conducted qualitative studies before, but grounded theory? That was an entirely new beast—one I had never imagined tackling. The theoretical frameworks I had explored until then seemed straightforward compared to the complexities of grounded theory, with its emphasis on inductive reasoning, data collection, and theory development (Hughes, A., & McSherry, W., 2024). But then, inspiration struck from an unexpected place: my adviser. Her uncontainable passion for research was a spark that ignited my own enthusiasm. Her belief in my ability to navigate the complexities of this methodology gave me the courage to believe in myself. With the support of my university and an eagerness tempered with uncertainty, I set forth on this path, ready for whatever lay ahead.

From the very start, I knew that reflexivity would be necessary. I understood that my own experiences, beliefs, and biases would inevitably shape the research process (Engward, H., & Davis, G., 2015). But what I had not anticipated was the degree to which those personal elements would intertwine with the research itself. As I delved deeper into my study, I found myself emotionally entwined with the stories of the Filipino nurses who had weathered the storm of the pandemic. Their struggles, their resilience—it resonated with me on a level I did not expect. In their stories, I saw reflections of my own experiences as a healthcare provider during trying times. Was I reading too much into their words? Was my own emotional investment distorting the data? These questions haunted me, and I

found myself constantly stepping back to reassess. This emotional engagement highlights the importance of considering researcher positionality (Berger, R., 2015) and the potential for researcher bias in qualitative research.

I soon realized that maintaining objectivity in grounded theory was not just about controlling my biases—it was about recognizing and confronting them head-on. Grounded theory requires that the researcher be constantly aware of the emerging categories, relationships, and concepts without letting preconceived notions skew the findings (Hughes, A., & McSherry, W., 2024). To manage this delicate balance, I relied heavily on member checks, peer debriefing, and rigorous coding processes. These strategies became my anchors, keeping me grounded even as I waded through the emotional turbulence of the research. Yet, despite my best efforts, I occasionally found myself making subconscious assumptions, interpreting a sentiment, or connecting a phrase too closely with my own experiences as an educator. It took constant effort to step back, to untangle my own narrative from that of the participants, and to let their data speak for itself.

One of the most powerful realizations during this process was that reflexivity is not a burden—it is an opportunity for growth. By acknowledging my biases and preconceptions, I was able to understand the research at a deeper level (Darawsheh, W., 2020). This process, however, was not without challenges. At times, the line between personal connection and professional detachment blurred, forcing

¹ Instructor II, ILOCOS SUR COMMUNITY COLLEGE, Ilocos Sur; Phd Student, School of Advanced Studies, Saint Louis University, Baguio City; Email: jamesrtaiza21@yahoo.com

me to question my role in the research. Did my empathy as a nurse add richness to the findings, or was it clouding my objectivity? Reflexivity forced me to confront this duality head-on, shape my approach to the data, and made sure the integrity of the research stayed intact.

Making another layer of complexity to that journey was my dual role as a community college teacher. Balancing my academic responsibilities with the demands of my research was a battle in itself. Some days, the weight of institutional duties threatened to drown me, while other days I felt the pull of my research, demanding my full attention. Teaching was a constant reminder of the importance of education in shaping the future, but research was a pathway to understanding the past, the present, and the very nature of human resilience. This experience underscores the importance of self-care and stress management strategies for researchers navigating multiple roles (Johnson, S. K., & Spector, P. E., 2020). I remember one particularly grueling period when deadlines loomed ominously on the horizon, and I found myself questioning whether I had bitten off more than I could chew. But surrender was not an option. I forged ahead, learning to structure my time with an almost militant discipline. Despite the pressure, I found that the weight of expectation, both from myself and others, served as a driving force that pushed me to persevere.

In the midst of this balancing act, there were moments when I found myself overwhelmed by the sheer scope of the task at hand. The responsibility of shaping the next generation of students while also contributing to academic research often felt like walking a tightrope. However, it was during these moments of tension that I discovered a deep well of resilience within myself. It became clear that my commitment to both my students and my research was not a contradiction, but a symbiotic relationship—each role informing and strengthening the other. The discipline required in research seeped into my teaching, while my teaching experience gave me a unique lens through which to interpret the data.

Then, just as I felt I was gaining momentum, the unthinkable happened. My adviser—the very person who had ignited my passion for grounded theory—stepped into a new role as Associate Dean and could no longer provide the feedback I so desperately needed. I was devastated. The steady guidance I had come to rely on was suddenly gone, leaving me feeling adrift in uncertain waters. For a moment, I questioned whether I could continue without the

support I had grown to depend on. The loss of mentorship was a sharp reminder of how essential community and guidance are in academic work. My adviser had not only been a source of knowledge but also a pillar of emotional support. Her absence felt like losing the compass that had been guiding me through the murky waters of grounded theory.

But then, a new resolve took root. I reminded myself of how far I had come, how much I had already overcome. I sought out new mentors, reached out to colleagues, and leaned on the academic community around me. It was not easy, but I adapted. I learned to trust my own instincts and the strength of the foundation I had built it on. It was not about the absence of support—it was about learning to stand on my own two feet. Finally, the loss of one mentor provided the space to find new perspectives, to extend my personal network, and to promote a sense of independence.

As for the coding process, I found, at times, it felt like putting together this huge and complex puzzle. Every single piece seems to be fitting, yet it raises further questions. I go through these transcripts, revisit themes, and question every emerging pattern. The process felt endless, but it was during these intense periods of analysis that I began to understand the beauty of grounded theory. The patterns, themes, and theories did not simply emerge from the data—they were built through an iterative process of comparison, analysis, and refinement (Berger, R., 2015). I found myself deeply invested in the stories of my participants, feeling echoes of their experiences in my own past. The more I soaked myself into the stories, the more I realized how much my experiences had influenced my interpretations.

To ensure rigor, I followed structured coding techniques and constant comparative analysis. I also made inter-coder reliability checks to ensure that the findings were data-driven and not based on personal bias. But even as I worked diligently to safeguard objectivity, I acknowledged the inescapable truth: my connection to the topic had, in some way, shaped my perspective. Reflexivity, I came to understand, was not about eliminating personal influence, but about recognizing and embracing it—about understanding how my own story intersected with the stories of those I was studying. This realization was transformative. It was not a weakness to be overcome, but a strength to be acknowledged and leveraged.

This journey, though grueling, has been transformative. There were sleepless nights filled with self-doubt, moments when I questioned my abilities, my decisions, and my very purpose in undertaking this study. Yet, with every challenge, I grew stronger. With every obstacle, I became more resolute. I have learned through this process that research is about resiliency, not just the process of collecting and analyzing data. It is about the confrontation of biases and limitations, about dealing with uncertainty and shoring up resolve and strength. Reflexivity is even more deeply personal reckoning with the self than I had imagined.

Besides the intellectual rigor of this study, it is really how one experiences being a nurse in real life while highly influencing interactions with participants. It demands more than just academic objectivity; empathy and sensitivity culminated from years of nursing practice. One had to learn to listen not only to the answers but also to the emotions and lived experiences behind them. I witnessed firsthand the vulnerabilities and strengths of those who shared their stories, and in doing so, I was reminded of the profound human connection that underpins both research and health care. That was what I saw through it—interactions in producing the potential of grounded theory: not only as a method in developing certain theoretical insights but also as a way to explain and give meaning to the extremely personal and collective experiences of individuals.

This study is not merely an academic requirement; it is a testament to perseverance. It represents every challenge I faced and every obstacle I overcame. As I move forward, I do so with a newfound sense of confidence, knowing that this is only the beginning of my scholarly journey. I am prepared. I am resolute. And I am ready to take on whatever comes next.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



James Rabang Taiza, MAN, RN, RM is a faculty member in the Midwifery Department and currently serves as the College Secretary at Ilocos Sur Community College, Zone V, Bantay, Ilocos Sur. He earned his Bachelor of Science in Nursing in 2007 and his Master of Arts in Nursing, major in Maternal and Child Nursing, in 2014, both from the University of Northern Philippines. He is presently pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy in Nursing at Saint Louis University, Baguio City. His dissertation focuses on the evolving role of Filipino nurses in the 21st century, reflecting his strong commitment to advancing the nursing profession. His research interests include caring science, maternal and child health nursing, nursing education, and leadership and management.

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of research that improves outcomes for individuals,
families and communities.*

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