

The Road Less Travelled: A Reflexive Exploration of Power, Purpose, and Positionality in Nursing Research

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Abstract

This reflexivity paper explores the evolving identity of a nurse leader turned researcher, tracing a journey along “the road less travelled” in nursing. It examines how personal history, professional experiences, and sociocultural contexts shape the researcher's positionality and influence the pursuit of knowledge. Anchored in critical, feminist, and interpretivist paradigms, the paper underscores reflexivity as both an ethical stance and a transformative process that connects power, purpose, and praxis. Reflective practice bridges experience and empirical knowledge (Sherwood & Webb, 2024). Through self-analysis, the author illuminates how lived experiences, leadership practice, and gendered perspectives inform inquiry, ultimately advancing a vision of nursing research that is self-aware, socially responsive, and justice-oriented.

Keywords: *Reflexivity, positionality, nursing leadership, feminist research, critical paradigm, transformative inquiry*

Reflexivity in Nursing Research

My name is Everrette Castañares Zafe. Derived from the Old English *Eoforheard*, meaning “brave as a wild boar,” my name symbolizes strength, resilience, and courage. These qualities have guided my more than twenty-two years in nursing. My career bridges clinical care, infection control, governance, and data protection, reflecting the *road less travelled* (Peck, 2002): a journey of courage, curiosity, and conviction.

From bedside care to systems leadership as a Nursing Director and Certified Data Protection Officer, I have learned that nursing extends beyond caregiving—it shapes structures, policies, and lived realities. The COVID-19 pandemic deepened my awareness of reflexivity and how *the self* is always present in the act of knowing. It illuminated the power of empathy, resilience, and ethical awareness. Reflexivity is central to qualitative rigour and must be intentionally maintained throughout the research process (Peddle, 2022).

Positionality and Personal Background

My worldview was shaped in Catanduanes, the “Land of the Howling Winds,” where recurring typhoons nurtured resilience and adaptability. Recent scholarship highlights that transparent

positionality enhances the trustworthiness of qualitative research and reveals the power embedded in self-disclosure (Beck, 2024; Sibbald et al., 2024).

Educated in a provincial state university, I was molded by discipline and perseverance—qualities that enabled me to thrive despite the biases privileging urban education. At St. Luke's Medical Center, I was introduced to global standards of excellence; at World Citi Medical Center, I learned that transformation often begins in humble spaces. My hybrid cultural roots—Bicolano, Waray, and Manileña—anchor my relational ethics and commitment to diversity.

Three pivotal experiences shaped my leadership and research orientation:

1. **Being underestimated by a superior**, which strengthened my resolve;
2. **Being mentored by a visionary leader** who embodied evidence-based advocacy; and
3. **Joining a rally** that awakened my sense of nursing as a collective moral force.

These experiences deepened my commitment to equality, empowerment, and transformative leadership.

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Philosophical and Theoretical Orientation

My worldview aligns with critical, feminist, and interpretivist paradigms. The critical paradigm situates nursing within systems of power, examining how social structures shape practice (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). The feminist lens dismantles hierarchies that silence women and nurses (Harding, 1987; Hesse-Biber, 2014), while interpretivism emphasizes meaning-making and co-construction (Schwandt, 2000).

Reflexivity, however, must be ongoing rather than retrospective (Peddle, 2022). I value mixed-methods research for integrating quantitative trends with qualitative depth (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). For me, research is *praxis*, an act not only of understanding but also of transforming (Freire, 1970/2000; Lather, 1991). Contemporary works reaffirm nursing's ethical duty to advocate for social justice (Abu & Moorley, 2023; Tind, 2024).

Motivations and Purpose as a Researcher

Nurse leader behaviors significantly influence organizational culture and staff outcomes, positioning leadership as a site for equity and transformation (Alsadaan et al., 2023). My motivations are grounded in advocacy and curiosity—to amplify nurses' voices, challenge gender biases, and inform fairer policy.

Recent studies reveal persistent gaps in operationalizing social justice within nursing curricula (Abu & Moorley, 2023). My feminist stance fuels my commitment to equity, while my administrative experience strengthens my focus on systems and governance. As a Data Protection Officer, I bring an ethical lens to participant confidentiality and consent. Balancing advocacy and objectivity is a continuing reflexive task, requiring self-audit and peer debriefing to maintain integrity.

Growth and Transformation

My evolution as a researcher parallels my growth as a leader. I once viewed research as mere data collection; I now see it as **meaning-making**. The pandemic heightened my awareness of the moral dimension of inquiry—how systems shape lives and how research can illuminate injustice.

Leadership has taught me humility, courage, and the ethics of listening. Reflexivity, for me, is a practice of continuous self-examination, acknowledging that who I am shapes what I study and how I interpret it.

Reflexivity, Feminism, and Filipino Leadership Praxis

Feminist reflexivity expands traditional understandings of leadership by foregrounding empathy, relational ethics, and inclusivity. In the Philippine context, nursing leadership carries a dual consciousness: rooted in colonial legacies yet striving for autonomy and recognition. Recent Southeast Asian scholarship situates Filipino nurses as both caregivers and social reformers (Lorenzo et al., 2023).

Integrating reflexivity with feminist praxis enables leaders to navigate tensions between authority and care. It transforms positional power into relational empowerment, a hallmark of Filipino leadership characterized by *pakikipagkapwa* (shared humanity). Reflexive feminism in nursing calls for critical awareness, collaboration, and advocacy for equitable workplaces.

Ethical Reflexivity in Nursing Research

Ethical reflexivity is not a procedural step but a moral orientation. It demands transparency about values, positionality, and potential influence over participants (Gelling, 2023; Cronin & Meehan, 2024). It reframes research as a partnership grounded in respect and reciprocity.

In the Philippine context, where power hierarchies persist in academia and healthcare, ethical reflexivity requires courage to question institutional norms and protect participant dignity. It upholds integrity not just in methods but in meaning-making, aligning scholarship with humanity.

Conclusion

Nurse burnout and workforce attrition remain pressing challenges in the Philippines (Alsadaan, et al., 2023; Pepito et al., 2025; Tiu et al., 2025). Reflexivity guides me to confront how my identity and values shape knowledge production. Through critical and feminist paradigms, I aim to contribute to nursing scholarship that is reflective, inclusive, and transformative.

Reflexivity is more than introspection—it is ethical, relational, and emancipatory. By acknowledging power, purpose, and positionality, I reaffirm that research is not merely about discovery but about responsibility—to truth, to people, and to the betterment of nursing and society.

Author Reflexive Note

Writing this paper has reaffirmed that reflexivity is not an act of self-centeredness but of **ethical consciousness**. It calls me to honor my journey as a nurse leader and to remain humble before the truths uncovered through research.

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