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A Researcher in Wonderland:
A spiritual approach from paradigm to practice

Thesis submitted by Ann Michelle Carrington BSW (Hons)

In fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the School of Arts and Social Sciences.

James Cook University, Cairns, Queensland.
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Statement on the Contribution of Others

Research field costs up to $3000 and a HECS Exemption scholarship were provided by James Cook University.

An Australian Post-Graduate Award 2007-2010 provided a stipend.

Denise Carrington – Smith proof read the thesis on a voluntary basis. This is not her field of study and she does not operate a professional editing service.

Declaration on Ethics

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted within the guidelines for research ethics outlined in the Natioanl Statemnet on Ethics Conduct in Research Involving Human (1999), the Joint NHMRC/AVCC Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice (1997), the James Cook University Policy on Experimentation Ethics. Statndar Practices and Guidelines (2001), and the James Cook University Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice (2001). The proposal research methodology received clearance from James Cook University Experimentation Ethics Review Committee on the 25th July, 2007, Approval No. H2723.

_____ _____

Signature Date

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Abstract

Spirituality is a topic that has gained increased attention in a number of disciplines within the social sciences, including social work. The current discussion and debate of this topic within social work have raised many questions and highlighted gaps at paradigmatic, meaning, construct, theoretical and practical levels. The research engaged in a paradigmatic and theoretical journey which aimed to contribute to theory building through the articulation and authentication of spiritual paradigms and an Integrated Spiritual Practice Framework (ISPF) and application of the ISPF (at the level of ideology, theory and practice and individual). The spiritual paradigms and the ISPF were initially developed in my years as a spiritual practitioner, my undergraduate studies in social work and my Post-Graduate Honours project. This research tackled ontological, epistemological and methodological questions across four suggested spiritual paradigms, those being; spiritual positivism, spiritual constructivism, conscious spiritual and integrated spiritual.

The methods employed were semi-structured in-depth interviews, immersion, and literature survey, guided primarily by the process of meta-triangulation and secondly by the emergent Integrated Spiritual Research Model (ISRM). This process involved immersion within four spiritual ideologies (Sufism, Hinduism, Buddhism and integrated spiritual) to scrutinize and analyze the spiritual paradigms and ISPF from each spiritual ideological perspective which informed the initial understandings and structures, and led to further theory building of both. Immersion within Sufism, Hinduism and Buddhism was achieved in person and included a number of semi-structure interviews with the participating practitioners. Immersion within the integrated spiritual was achieved through literature survey of ten texts. Methods employed to demonstrate the potential application at the level of ideology, theory and practice required the additional collection of data from one text pertaining to ideology and one text pertaining to theory and practice. A self-reflective case study of the research was used in the application to the individual.

This study found that each ideological perspective provided evidence and support for the suggested spiritual paradigms, and authenticated and further build upon the basic structures of the ISPF. This resulted in the discovery of new layers within the initial framework and also discovered various distinct uses. This allowed movement from the single framework of the ISPF to its new forms as the Integrated Spiritual Theoretical Model (ISTM), the Integrated Spiritual Analytical Tool (ISAT), the Integrated Spiritual Approach to Practice (ISAP), the Integrated Spiritual Research Model (ISRM) and the Integrated Spiritual Research Approach to Practice (ISRAP). The research was able to contribute further by demonstrating the potential application of the ISAT, ISAP, ISRM and the ISRM.

There were a number of unexpected findings of which the most significant would be the theory for truth, ways of knowing, spiritual methods and measures and spiritual approaches to research. At the completion of the research process two overarching findings were identified: the importance of the paradigmatic links to practice and the importance of addressing tensions and barriers when attempting to integrate spirituality. This research offers the beginnings of a response to gaps in the integration of spirituality, enabling spiritual knowledge, methods, measures, theories and practices to be accessible to the social sciences and social work, academically and practically.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements **iv**

Abstract **v**

Part I: Down the Rabbit Hole **1**

1. Finding One's Bearings **4**

Introduction 4

Initial positioning 5

Rationale 7

Statement of purpose 10

Research aims 11

Evolution of the Integrated Spiritual Theoretical Model 11

Clarification of terms 16

Ethical considerations 19

Scope of the research 22

Research complexities and tensions 24

Presentation 27

Structure of thesis 29

2. Instructions to Follow **33**

Introduction 33

Research paradigm 33

Research design 34

Methodology 37

Meta-triangulation 38

Adapted model of meta-triangulation 39

Integrated Spiritual Research Model 44

3. All Is Not As It Seems **47**

Introduction 47

Meta-triangulation model applied in this study 47

Integrated Spiritual Research Model applied in this study 64

Part II: The People and Places of Wonderland **80**

Clarification of immersion 81

4. Heart of Wonderland – Sufi **86**

An introduction to Sufism 86

Immersion 87

Follow up to immersion 97

Ideological coding 98

Ideological accounts 100

Ideological language 105

Themes outside the research brackets 107

5. Beyond Wonderland – Hinduism **108**

An introduction to Hinduism 108

Immersion 109

Follow up to immersion 118

Ideological coding 119

Ideological accounts 124

Ideological language 128

Themes outside the research brackets 130

6. Within Wonderland – Buddhist **131**

An introduction to Buddhism 131

Immersion 132

Follow up to immersion 138

Ideological coding 138

Ideological accounts 142

Ideological language 146

Themes outside the research brackets 148

7. All of Wonderland – Integrated Spiritual **149**

Introduction to the integrated spiritual 149

Immersion – a reflective summary 166

Ideological coding 170

Ideological accounts 178
Ideological language 181
Themes outside the research brackets 184

Part III: What is 'Real'? 185

8. Reflections in the Looking Glass 188

Introduction 188
Spiritual positivism 189
Spiritual constructivism 192
Conscious spiritual 194
Integrated spiritual 197
Key assumptions of the spiritual paradigms 200
The spiritual and physical perspectives 203
A note on paradigmatic language 206

9. Through the Looking Glass 208

Introduction 208
Theory of 'Truth' and ways of knowing 208
Methods and measures 219
Ego and soul perspectives 226
The spiritual perspective of the physical and spiritual 227
Evolution and consciousness 230
'The Moment' or 'The Now' and awareness or presence 233
Choice and responsibility 238

10. Beyond the Looking Glass 241

Introduction 241
Spiritual and physical paradigms 241
Spiritual and physical approaches from paradigm to measures 243
Spiritual and physical approaches to research 244
Integrated Spiritual Research Approach to Presentation 250
Comparative approaches to the presentation of research 253
Language of the ISRM and ISTM 255

Part IV: Meeting the White Rabbit **257**

11. The White Rabbit – A Guide in Wonderland **260**

Introduction 260

The Integrated Spiritual Theoretical Model 260

Triadic whole and dualities 261

Operational sectors 265

Areas of Spiritual Evolution and Growth 269

Modes of consciousness 273

The pendulum effect 280

Reflections on the ASEG's 283

12. The Rabbit's Recommendations 286

Introduction 286

Application of the Integrated Spiritual Analytical Tool 287

Principles of the ISAT 287

Application approach 292

Part V: Following the White Rabbit **299**

13. A Date with Ideology **302**

Introduction 302

Ideologies explored 302

ISAT applied to ideologies 303

Positioning of the ideologies 304

Interpretation informed by insight and understanding 319

14. A Date with Theory and Practice **334**

Introduction 334

ISAT applied at a theory and practice level 334

Positioning of the theories and practices 336

Interpretation informed by insight and understanding 348

Insight, understanding and interpretation of the application process 352

15. A Date with Self – The 'Mad' Researcher's Tea Party **355**

Introduction 355

Application of the ISAT to self in past - before academia 356
Application of the ISAT to self in the present – within academia 362
The Integrated Spiritual Approach to Practice 370

Part VI: Emergence of a 'New' Reality 374

16. Integrating the Dream 377

Introduction 377
Level of paradigm - ontology, epistemology and methodology 377
Paradigmatic understandings applied to research 382
Discoveries relating to the ISTM 384
Discoveries relating to the ISAT 387
Overarching insights, understanding and interpretations 389
Integration and repositioning of the research 389
Rationale for the inclusion of spirituality 390
Tensions and barriers 392
Paradigmatic link to practice 401

17. A Shift in Perspective 414

Introduction 414
Limitations 414
Future research or 'potential opportunity' 415
Conclusion 417

Glossary 419

References 421

Appendices

Appendix A: Original Research Aims and Design 431
Appendix B: Undergraduate Assignment: Poster presentation of my personal practice framework 434
Appendix C: The Spiritual Paradigms and ISPF at Completion of the Honours Project 442
Appendix D: Invitation to Participate and Information Page 463

Appendix E: Informed Consent Form 465
Appendix F: Example of Interview Schedules 466
Appendix G: Additional Data Pertaining to the Qualities and Attributes of the ASEG's 469

List of Tables and Figures

Tables

Table 1	Focus areas of the ISRAP in Part I	2
Table 1.1	Integrated Spiritual Research Approach to Presentation	27
Table 2	Focus areas of the ISRAP in Part II	81
Table 2.1	Research design	35
Table 3	Focus areas of the ISRAP in Part III	186
Table 3.1	Research brackets for the spiritual paradigms	49
Table 3.2	Research brackets for the ISPF	50
Table 3.3	Themes outside research brackets	58
Table 4	Focus areas of the ISRAP in Part IV	258
Table 4.1	Sufi ideological coding – Ansari	98
Table 4.2	Levels of Vibrational Energy and Consciousness – Ansari	103
Table 4.3	Paradigmatic language within the Sufi ideologies	106
Table 5	Focus areas of the ISRAP in Part V	300
Table 5.1	Hindu ideological coding – Satyananda	119
Table 5.2	Levels of vibrational energy and consciousness – Satyananda	123
Table 5.3	Paradigmatic language within the Hindu ideologies	129
Table 6	Focus areas of the ISRAP in Part VI	375
Table 6.1	Buddhist ideological coding – Truc Lam	139
Table 6.2	Paradigmatic language within the Buddhist ideologies	147
Table 7.1	Ideological coding – integrated spiritual	170
Table 7.2	Exploration of language within integrated spiritual	182
Table 8.1	Paradigmatic brackets across spiritual paradigms	200
Table 8.2	Key paradigmatic assumptions across spiritual paradigms	203
Table 8.3	Chopra's suggested paradigms (adapted from Chopra, 2006, pp. 213-218)	204
Table 9.1	Process of knowing as interpreted by spiritual and physical perspectives	219
Table 9.2	Overarching measures of the spiritual paradigms	223
Table 9.3	Nature of the soul and ego/personality	226
Table 9.4	Values of the soul and ego/personality	226

Table 9.5	The Spiritual view of differences between The Spiritual and The Physical	229
Table 10.1	Key assumptions of the spiritual and physical paradigms	242
Table 10.2	Spiritual and physical approaches from paradigm to measures	243
Table 10.3	Spiritual and physical quantitative and qualitative approaches	248
Table 10.4	Comparative approaches to the presentation of research	254
Table 11.1	Areas of Spiritual Evolution and Growth	272
Table 11.2	Modes of consciousness and their qualities and attributes	275
Table 13.1	Ideologies positioned in the ASEG's with pendulum effect applied	313
Table 13.2	Ideologies positioned within the modes of consciousness	318
Table 13.3	Insights from the application of the ISAT to ideologies in the layer of ASEG's with pendulum effect applied	323
Table 13.4	Insights from the application of the ISAT to ideologies in the layer of the modes of consciousness	332
Table 14.1	Ashrams daily activity schedule	340
Table 14.2	Theories and practices positioned in the ASEG's with duality of masculine/feminine applied	344
Table 14.3	Insights from the application of the ISAT to theory and practice in the layer of ASEG's with duality of masculine/ feminine applied	350

Figures

Figure 1	Scope of focus Part I	3
Figure 1.1	Scope of the research project	23
Figure 1.2	Tensions of the research	25
Figure 2	Scope of focus Part II	82
Figure 2.1	Diagrammatic representation of Lewis and Grimes (1999) model of Meta-triangulation	40
Figure 2.2	Adapted meta-triangulation model as used in this study	42
Figure 2.3	ISRM – A diagrammatical representation	45
Figure 3	Scope of focus Part III	187
Figure 4	Scope of focus Part IV	259
Figure 5	Scope of focus Part V	301

Figure 6	Scope of focus Part VI	376
Figure 9.1	The theory for truth	212
Figure 9.2	Theory for truth – The Physical – relative truth	212
Figure 9.3	Theory for truth – The Spiritual – Eternal Truth	213
Figure 9.4	Experience and outer knowledge – absence of relative truth	213
Figure 9.5	Outer knowledge and inner knowledge – absence of relative truth	214
Figure 9.6	Inner knowledge and experience – absence of relative truth	215
Figure 9.7	Experience and outer knowledge – absence of Eternal Truth	215
Figure 9.8	Outer knowledge and inner knowledge – absence of Eternal Truth	216
Figure 9.9	Inner knowledge and experience – absence of Eternal Truth	216
Figure 9.10	Theory for 'Ultimate Truth' – using The Physical and The Spiritual ways of knowing	217
Figure 9.11	Continuum of knowledge from external to internal	218
Figure 9.12	Continuum collapsed leading to Ultimate Truth	218
Figure 9.13	Theory for truth – The Spiritual informed by the triadic whole	220
Figure 9.14	Theory for truth – The Physical informed by the triadic whole	224
Figure 9.15	Theory for truth – A journey from relative truth to Eternal Truth	233
Figure 9.16	Process of reality	236
Figure 9.17	Theory of reality	237
Figure 11.1	The triadic whole and duality	262
Figure 11.2	Triadic whole and spiritual/physical duality	263
Figure 11.3	Positioning of ontology and methodology in the ISTM	264
Figure 11.4	Triadic whole and masculine/feminine duality	265
Figure 11.5	Operational sectors	267
Figure 11.6	Positioning of the theory of truth in the ISTM	268
Figure 11.7	Positioning the paradigms and methods and measures in the ISTM	269
Figure 11.8	Representation of the ASEG's dynamics	270
Figure 11.9	Areas of Spiritual Evolution and Growth	271
Figure 11.10	Modes of consciousness	274
Figure 11.11	Theory of truth from physical/knowledge to spiritual/wisdom	278

Figure 11.12	The pendulum effect	281
Figure 11.13	The pendulum effect applied to the ASEG's	282
Figure 11.14	Pendulum effect applied to the modes of consciousness	283
Figure 13.1	Ideologies positioned in the triadic whole and duality layer	305
Figure 13.2	Ideologies positioned in the operational sectors	307
Figure 13.3	Example of box system used to depict degrees of focus	311
Figure 13.4	Diagrammatical representations of the degrees of 'swing' scale	311
Figure 13.5	Positioning of physical ideologies informed by insight or double application of the operational sectors	330
Figure 14.1	Theories and practices positioned within the operational sectors	338
Figure 15.1	Positioning of self in operational sectors before academia	357
Figure 15.2	Positioning of self in the ASEG's with modes of consciousness applied before academia	359
Figure 15.3	Positioning of self in the operational sectors within academia	363
Figure 15.4	Positioning of self in the ASEG's with modes of consciousness applied within academia	366
Figure 15.5	Paradigms methods and measures drawn from within my ISAP	371
Figure 15.6	Predominant theories and practices drawn from within my ISAP	372