

FEATURE ARTICLE

EXPERIENCING LEININGER'S STRANGER TO TRUSTED FRIEND ENABLER AS A NOVICE ETHNONURSING RESEARCHER

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Abstract

Leininger espoused that when studying cultures, researchers are likely to discover authentic and credible data when they are viewed by the participants as trusted friends. The Stranger to Trusted Friend Enabler was formulated to guide researchers in identifying indicators that a researcher has become the participants' trusted friend. This article presents my reflections on using Leininger's Stranger to Trusted Friend Enabler as a novice ethn nursing researcher. From my own experience, I have identified four hallmarks of a trusting relationship during fieldwork that correspond with the indicators of a trusting relationship identified by Leininger: (1) participants voluntarily share information about their culture and their personal experiences; (2) participants express concern for the researcher's welfare through their words and actions; (3) participants give the researcher a sense of community identity, such as a native name; and (4) participants suggest steps to further improve the trustworthiness of the study.

One of the limitations of the Stranger to Trusted Friend Enabler, however, is the fact that it only focuses on assessing the participants' trust towards the researcher. A successful ethnographic research requires mutual trust between the researcher and participants. From my experience in conducting an ethn nursing research, I have noted that aside from the participants' trust towards me, my trust towards them was also essential in obtaining rich and accurate data. Furthermore, the transition from being a stranger to a trusted friend is not a linear process in ethn nursing and in other types of ethnographic research. As a researcher transitions to become a trusted friend, he or she does not totally abandon his or her sense of alienation to the researched. The scientific nature of ethnography requires researchers to be a stranger and a trusted friend at the same time.

Keywords: Ethn nursing, stranger to trusted friend enable, fieldwork

Introduction

In 1985, Leininger developed ethn nursing, an approach to ethnography that is more specific to nursing (Streubert & Carpenter, 2011). Ethn nursing is the marriage of the theoretical and methodological principles of nursing and anthropology (Alves, et al, 2015). One of its important aspect is exploring how beliefs and patterns of behavior influence people's wellbeing. This research method aims to obtain data that can enlighten health workers on the "lived experience across lifespan with focus on care and caring" (McFarland & Wehbe-Alamah, 2015 p. 94).

Leininger viewed human care as a highly ambiguous and complex phenomena. She argued that the use of tools, scales or instruments, is a mechanical and impersonal way of knowing and is unable to provide in-depth understanding of human care. She suggested the use of enablers to aid researchers in explicating relevant data about the domain of inquiry (McFarland & Wehbe-Alamah, 2015). Enablers serve a variety of functions in ethn nursing research. They can be utilized to guide ethn nursing researchers in fostering relationships,

understanding contexts, and facilitating processes during the conduct of research. Enablers have been used, tested, and refined over the past 60 years to facilitate analysis of data, monitor the researcher's progress throughout the research process, strengthen the rigor of the investigation, and eventually, discover and communicate unique, elusive cultural data (McFarland & Wehbe-Alamah, 2015).

One of Leininger's eight enablers is the Stranger to Trusted Friend Enabler. Leininger (1959) espoused that when studying cultures, researchers are likely to discover authentic and credible data when they are viewed by the participants as trusted friends. The Stranger to Trusted Friend Enabler was designed to guide researchers as they reflect on their experiences and interactions with their participants. This enabler includes indicators that researchers can use in assessing whether they are viewed by the participants as a stranger or a trusted friend. In this article, I share my experiences and reflections on the use of Leininger's Stranger to Trusted Friend Enabler as tool during fieldwork.

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My interest in ethnonursing began when I first came to Aguinaldo, Ifugao on July 12, 2015 upon the invitation of a non-government organization. It was not the methodological aspects of ethnography that initially captured my interest, rather the warmth of the people's welcome and the deep connection that I sensed between the people and the nurses who have served in Aguinaldo. My first trip was followed by several more visits for surgical missions and community exposure trips for medical and nursing students. As I became more acquainted with the community, a barangay health worker (BHW) encouraged me to study their indigenous beliefs and practices.

From Stranger to Trusted Friend

Trust-building through prolonged engagement is identified as one of the strategies to strengthen the credibility of qualitative researches (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The process of establishing trust is important in recruiting and retaining participants. To add, a trusting relationship between the researcher and the participants has significant effects on the truth of the findings (Burkett & Moris, 2014). People tend to be more open about themselves and their culture when they feel that the researcher respects them and their stories (Fetterman, 2010). Leininger (1959) established the Stranger to Trusted Friend Enabler to guide researchers in identifying indicators that a researcher has become the participants' trusted friend (as cited in McFarland & Wehbe-Alamah, 2015).

From my own experience, I have identified four hallmarks of a trusting relationship during fieldwork: (1) participants voluntarily share information about their culture and their personal experiences; (2) participants express concern for the researcher's welfare through their words and actions; (3) participants give the researcher a sense of community identity, such as a native name; and (4) participants suggest steps to further improve the trustworthiness of the study.

The hallmarks of a trusting relationship that I have identified correspond with several indicators identified by Leininger, such as spontaneous sharing of views and interpretations (McFarland & Wehbe-Alamah, 2015). In the early stage of fieldwork, participants responded to questions, but careful probing had to be observed in order to collect rich data. In the later part of fieldwork, participants were more spontaneous. One community elder called me to add several significant data that he failed to share during the interview. Another elder wrote down notes whenever he recalls additional information to ensure that he could share with me everything that he could remember. The participants also invited me to join feasts and community gatherings. Their spontaneous disclosure of information and their willingness to allow me to participate in their various social activities gave me a deeper understanding of the community's worldviews and lifeways.

Another indicator identified by Leininger that the researcher has already become a trusted friend is when the participants offer their time and presence and work with the researcher as a genuine friend (McFarland & Wehbe-Alamah, 2015). During fieldwork, factors such as weather, security, transportation availability, and my own health had to be carefully considered. I was, to a great extent, dependent on the wisdom of the community elders and the

local government unit (LGU) in determining the peace and order situation of the different barangays, routes, and travel schedules. Families welcomed me in their homes. Midwives and barangay health workers opened barangay health stations to serve as my temporary sleeping quarters. Because the community assured my safety, I was confident to travel even to the farthest barangay of Aguinaldo, which involved a four-hour motorcycle ride through rough terrains and vast pasture lands. Interviews with key informants who lived in more remote areas of Aguinaldo have significantly enhanced the richness of the data I have gathered.

Leininger urged ethnonurse researchers to observe keenly the indicators that the participants have accepted the researcher as a trusted friend (McFarland & Wehbe-Alamah, 2015). When some elders in the community gave me a native name and began addressing me as such, this signified acceptance. A native name given to a non-member of the community is significant as it indicates that the people consider me as part of their community. However, acceptance did not only mean being welcomed into the community; it also meant being accepted as a unique person with different worldviews and lifeways. The participants recognized that in some respects I cannot totally be like them. There was one instance when an elder asked me if I would like them to butcher chickens and assess the characteristics of their bile to predict whether my research will be successful. I politely refused citing that my religious beliefs do not allow me to engage in divination practices.

Furthermore, the researcher should view participants not merely as sources of data but as co-researchers who have the potential to improve the research process. Leininger posited that when a researcher is considered a trusted friend, the participants take steps to ensure that their culture's beliefs, values, and lifeways are accurately reflected in the research findings and interpretation (McFarland & Wehbe-Alamah, 2015). During fieldwork, majority of the interviews, as well as member checks, and community validation of the results were done in the vernacular. However, the participants are aware that the final manuscript is going to be written in English. A retired school principal in the community offered to read the manuscript prior to its finalization. This step ensured that the descriptions and interpretations written in English accurately reflect their cultural beliefs and lifeways. Another elder volunteered to ascertain the spelling of the vernacular words that were mentioned in the final manuscript. According to him, it is important for the next generation of Aguinaldo to learn the unadulterated form of their culture's native words.

Reflections on Leininger's Stranger to Trusted Friend Enabler

Leininger's Stranger to Trusted Friend Enabler can be a useful guide for ethnonurse researchers. However, one of its limitations is the fact that it only focuses on assessing the participants' trust towards the researcher. A successful ethnographic research requires mutual trust between the researcher and participants. From my experience in conducting an ethnonursing research, I have noted that aside from the participants' trust towards me, my trust towards them was also essential in obtaining rich and accurate data. During fieldwork, I trusted the families whose homes I lived in. I trusted the drivers through hours of motorcycle ride across long

stretches of pasture lands. I trusted the participants' advice regarding safety and security status of the different barangays.

It should be noted that every culture and every researcher is unique. The enabler only suggests general indicators of being considered a trusted friend by the participants but does not provide a detailed instruction on how trust can be established. Prolonged engagement between the researcher and the participants fosters the development of trust between both parties. Aside from promoting rapport between the research and the participants, prolonged engagement also allows researchers more opportunities to gather different types of data from different sources at varying times (Shenton, 2004). Literature suggest six (6) months to two (2) years of fieldwork for classical ethnography (Thomas, 2004). However, prolonged engagement does not fully guarantee acquisition of rich, broad and deep data about a culture. People follow different ways and timeframes when it comes to developing trust. One traditional birth attendant narrated that it was 'intuitive connection' that led her to participate in my study. On the other hand, a respected elder expressed he was initially reluctant to share valuable data about their culture and it was only after several visits that he concluded that my intentions were sincere and did not pose a threat to the community nor to their culture. Furthermore, the opportunity to be a participant-observer in some cultural practices is interwoven with trust. A researcher may observe people's lifeways in everyday activities, such as going to the market, attending mass at a local church, and other social activities. However, the researcher cannot be a participant nor an observer in some activities such as birth, marriage or burial unless the participants allow the researcher to be present during such activities.

Every researcher's journey from being a stranger to becoming a trusted friend of a particular people group is different. The published suggestions as to the length of time that would constitute a 'prolonged engagement' remain debatable. The researcher remains the fundamental tool in ethnography, as in other qualitative methodologies. In determining the presence of a trusting relationship, the researcher should understand the cultural concepts of trust as well as the cultural expressions of trust prior to fieldwork. It is also important for researchers to continuously reflect on their experiences, interactions, and responses gathered.

As I reflected on the comments made by the participants, it was not the length of time spent in the community that prompted them to share about their experiences and their culture; it was rather my previous engagements in the community prior to the research that fostered a trusting relationship between me and the participants. During fieldwork, participants recognized me as the nurse in the surgical mission or the nurse they met at church. Rapport-building with the participants prior to the official commencement of the research is, in most instances, serendipitous. I had to continuously navigate the complex process of balancing immersion and reflexive distancing. Immersion allowed me to gain an 'insider's view' of the culture. Reflexive distancing, on the other hand, allowed me make sense of the participants' everydayness and my own experiences in the context of a scientific method of knowing.

Strangeness is not a totally negative aspect of fieldwork. Aside from gaining the participants' trust, another challenge for ethnurse researchers is balancing familiarity and estrangement throughout the research process. Researchers should embrace their role as a stranger, as strangeness is an element that gives researchers the desire to know a culture (Kamsteeg, Ybema & Jong, 2013). Thus, the transition from being a stranger to a trusted friend is not a linear process in ethnursing and in other types of ethnographic research. As a researcher transitions to become a trusted friend, he or she does not totally abandon his or her sense of alienation to the researched. The scientific nature of ethnography requires researchers to be a stranger and a trusted friend at the same time.

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