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Friendship as Method

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Friendship as Method[1][i]

During the research and composition of my Ph.D. dissertation[ii] and first book, *Between Gay and Straight*,[iii] friendship emerged not only as a subject of my research but also as its primary *method*. In my dissertation, I coined the term "friendship as method." Expanding on ideas developed there, this appendix discusses my project and other interpretive and critical studies that exemplify elements of friendship as method.

I begin by defining friendship, positing friendship as a kind of fieldwork, and establishing the methodological foundations of friendship as method. Next, I propose that this mode of qualitative inquiry involves researching with the practices, at the pace, in the natural contexts, and with an ethic of friendship. Finally, I describe this approach's strengths and considerations for both researcher and participants.

Friendship Defined

In *Friendship Matters,* William K. Rawlins defines a close friend as "somebody to talk to, to depend on and rely on for help, support, and caring, and to have fun and enjoy doing things with."[iv] Like romantic and family relationships, friendship is an interpersonal bond characterized by the ongoing communicative management of dialectical tensions, such as those between affection and instrumentality, expressiveness and protectiveness, and judgment and acceptance.[v]

Unlike romance and kinship, friendship in Western cultures lacks canonical status. In the U.S., we tend to accord friendship second-class status. For example, we might say, "We're *just* friends," to mean, "We're neither family nor lovers." On confronting the chasm between unsanctioned and sanctioned ties, Andrew Holleran reflects:

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[1] This serves as the Appendix of my book *In Solidarity: Friendship, Family, and Activism Beyond Gay and Straight* (Routledge 2015). For more information, visit the book's website: http://www.insolidaritybook.com.

> I was always discomfited whenever I accompanied friends to hospitals, or emergency rooms, at having to answer the question of the doctor, "Who are you?" with the words, "A friend." It sounded so flimsy—so infinitely weaker than, "His brother," "His cousin," "His brother-in-law." It sounded like a euphemism; a word that did not, could not, convey what our bond really was.[vi]

Holleran's experience supports Rawlins' claim that friendship occupies a marginal position within the matrix of interpersonal relations and has "no clear normative status."[vii] Kathy Werking affirms this, deeming friendship "the most fragile social bond."[viii]

We can attribute some of friendship's unstable footing in Western societies to the absence of obligatory dimensions. We are not born into friendships, as most are into families. Like marriage, friendship is a voluntary relationship;[ix] but unlike marriage, friendship lacks religious and legal grounding, rendering the creation, maintenance, and dissolution of friendship an essentially private, negotiable endeavor.[x]

Friends come and stay together primarily through common interests, a sense of alliance, and emotional affiliation.[xi] Friendship, according to Rawlins, "*implies affective ties*."[xii] In friends, we seek trust, honesty, respect, commitment, safety, support, generosity, loyalty, mutuality, constancy, understanding, and acceptance.[xiii]

In addition to emotional resources, friendships provide identity resources. Humans form, reinforce, and alter conceptions of self and other in the context of ongoing relationships. This explains why Gary Alan Fine calls friendship "a crucible for the shaping of selves."[xiv]

Friendships tend to confirm more than contest conceptions of self because we often befriend those similar to ourselves, those more "self" than "other." As Rawlins points out, this begins in early childhood, when young persons typically have more access to playmates of the

same age, sex, and physical characteristics.[xv] Similarly, adolescent friends tend to be of the same race, school grade, and social standing. Throughout life, friendships have a pronounced likelihood of developing within (rather than across) lines such as culture, education, marital and career status, and socioeconomic class. Because of this, posits Rawlins, friendships more likely "reinforce and reproduce macrolevel and palpable social differences than…challenge or transcend them."[xvi]

When friendships do cross social groups, the bonds take on political dimensions. Opportunities exist for dual consciousness-raising and for members of dominant groups (e.g., men, Euro-Americans, Christians, and heterosexuals) to serve as allies for friends in marginalized groups. As a result, those who are "just friends" can become *just* friends, interpersonal and political allies who seek personal growth, meaningful relationships, and social justice.[xvii]

Friendship as Fieldwork

When I began proposing friendship as a method of inquiry, I received some quizzical looks. Even some who view friendship as an important topic and who recognize that friendships sometimes arise in the context of research expressed skepticism about a methodological link between friendship and fieldwork.

In many ways, though, friendship and fieldwork are similar endeavors. Both involve being in the world with others. To friendship and fieldwork communities, we must gain entrée. We negotiate roles (e.g., student, confidant, advocate), shifting from one to another as the relational context warrants. Our communication might progress, in Martin Buber's terms, from "seeming" to "being," from I-It (impersonal and instrumental), to I-You (more personal yet role-bound), to moments of I-Thou, where we are truly present, meeting one another in our full humanity.[xviii]

We navigate membership, participating, observing, and observing our participation.[xix] We

learn insider argot and new codes for behavior. As we deepen our ties, we face challenges, conflicts, and losses. We cope with relational dialectics, negotiating how private and how candid we will be, how separate and how together, how stable and how in-flux. One day, finite projects— and lives—end, and we may "leave the field."

Foundations

Friendship as method builds on several established approaches to qualitative research. It is based on the principles of interpretivism, which according to Thomas Schwandt, stem from the German intellectual traditions of hermeneutics (interpretation) and *verstehen* (understanding), from phenomenology, and from the critiques of positivism.[xx]

Interpretivists take reality to be both pluralistic and constructed in language and interaction. Instead of facts, we search for intersubjective meanings, what Clifford Geertz, following Max Weber, calls the "webs of significance";[xxi] instead of control, we seek understanding. For interpretivists, "objectivity becomes a synonym for estrangement and neutrality a euphemism for indifference."[xxii] According to Norman Denzin, we research and write not to capture the totality of social life but to interpret reflectively slices and glimpses of localized interaction in order to understand more fully both others and ourselves.[xxiii]

Feminist researchers laid additional groundwork for friendship as method. Standpoint feminism focuses on intersecting systems of institutional and cultural oppression.[xxiv] According to Kristen Intemann, "standpoints do not automatically arise from occupying a particular social location. They are achieved only when there is sufficient scrutiny and critical awareness of how power structures shape or limit knowledge in a particular context."[xxv] A standpoint, writes Sandra Harding, "is an achievement" and "a collective one, not an individual one."[xxvi]

Feminists have been instrumental in debunking the myth that inquiry can or should be free of politics and values[xxvii] and in promoting communitarian ethics. According to Patricia Hill Collins, we must move from colonization to an "epistemology of empowerment."[xxviii] Pathways toward this way of knowing include an ethic of caring that invites expressiveness, emotion, and empathy;[xxix] "dialogical knowledge production";[xxx] and collaborative social change work.[xxxi] Feminist projects reflect and advance commitments to consciousness-raising, empowerment, equity, and justice.[xxxii] According to Intemann, such inquiry aims "to examine power relations, institutions, policies, and technologies that perpetuate oppression from the perspective of the oppressed, so that they may be changed, undermined, or abolished."[xxxiii]

Queer researchers pursue a similarly political agenda. We queer a text or project when we problematize the binary constructions and the conflation of sex, gender, and sexual orientation; challenge heteronormativity; and interrogate and seek to dismantle heterosexual privilege.[xxxiv]

Michelle Fine's notion of "working the hyphens"[xxxv] also influenced friendship as method. Like other interpretive and critical approaches, Fine's rejects scientific neutrality, universal truths, and dispassionate inquiry and works toward social justice, relational truths, and passionate inquiry. Through authentic engagement, the lines between researcher and researched blur, permitting each to explore the layers of self, other, and relationship. Instead of "speaking for" or even "giving voice," researchers *get to know* others in meaningful and sustained ways.

Fine's philosophy shares much common ground with participatory action research (PAR). According to Reason, this type of inquiry emerged from liberationist movements.[xxxvi] Action researchers view truth as a product and instrument of power. PAR honors lived experience and aims to produce knowledge and action directly useful to those with whom we collaborate. Under this model, we evaluate research by what Patti Lather and Peter Reason term "catalytic validity,"

the degree to which it empowers our research communities.[xxxvii] Centralizing dialogue, the subject-object relationship of positivism becomes a subject-subject one, in which academic knowledge combines with everyday experience to reach new and profound understandings.[xxxviii]

Closest methodologically to friendship as method are interactive interviewing[xxxix] and collaborative witnessing.[xl] These demand more sharing of personal and social experiences on the part of the researcher than does PAR. But, like participatory action research, interactive interviewing and collaborative witnessing are interpretive practices, require intense collaboration, and privilege lived, emotional experience.

Friendship as Method

Calling for inquiry that is open, multi-voiced, and emotionally rich, friendship as method involves the practices, the pace, the contexts, and the ethics of friendship. Researching with the *practices* of friendship, first, means that although we employ traditional forms of data gathering (e.g., participant observation, systematic note-taking, and informal and formal interviewing), our primary procedures are those we use to build and sustain friendship: conversation, everyday involvement, compassion, generosity, and vulnerability.

Keith Cherry's ethnographic account of a community of people living with AIDS exemplifies practices of friendship.[xli] To chronicle participants' experiences and relationships, Cherry conducted fieldwork, shot photographs, and recorded interaction, but he also played ping pong and watched soap operas with residents, drove them to doctor appointments, visited them in the hospital, and helped arrange birthday parties and funerals. These activities added emotional and relational layers to Cherry's intellectual pursuits. Responding to the changing needs of community members, his friend and researcher roles shifted from center to periphery and back again.

Sometimes Cherry had the emotional space to reflect on the meanings residents assigned to everyday practices, such as gossiping and watching television; other times, fear and grief consumed him. The depth of his connections to this community rendered him a vulnerable observer,[xlii] a compassionate witness, and a true ally.

Second, friendship as method demands that we research at the natural *pace* of friendship. The tempo is that of anthropology, whose practitioners typically stay a year or more in fieldwork communities, and of psychotherapy, a process that, in the words of Liz Bondi, "needs to enable 'nothing to happen' or 'time to be wasted' and similar 'inefficiencies.'"[xliii] Over the course of 18 months, Cherry spent 25 to 40 hours per week at the Tahitian Islander, an apartment complex for people living with AIDS.[xliv] Carol R. Rinke and Lynnette Mawhinney each conducted research in urban schools over the course of two academic years.[xlv] Christine Kiesinger, who composed life histories of four women with eating disorders, devoted three years of academic and personal involvement to the lives of her participants.[xlvi] Between formal interviews, Kiesinger shared meals, transcripts, and confidences with respondents. Barbara Myerhoff based *Number Our Days* on four years of participant observation and life history interviewing within an elderly Jewish community.[xlvii] *Between Gay and Straight* required three years of participant observation and interviewing and three additional years of writing, sharing drafts with community members, and rewriting. My follow-up project, *Going Home*, has kept me connected to my friends/collaborators' lives and families of origin since 2003. Michael Angrosino volunteered at a group home for three years before even beginning his study of persons with mental retardation, which lasted another nine years.[xlviii] Since 1999, Kathryn Norsworthy and Ouyporn Khuankaew have facilitated "training of social action trainers" across Thailand and along the border with Burma.[xlix] Each project mentioned here involved (or still involves) a serious time commitment, but in every case,

both profound relationships and provocative accounts resulted.

With friendship as method, a project's issues emerge organically, in the ebb and flow of everyday life: leisurely walks, household projects, activist campaigns, separations, losses, recoveries. The unfolding path of the relationships becomes the path of the project.

The length of time needed may vary depending on whether the researcher and participants begin the study as strangers, acquaintances, friends, or close friends. This approach requires multiple angles of vision. Strangers tend to have keener observational eyes yet must cultivate more intersubjective views, which develop gradually over time. Close friends already may share deeper, more intricate perspectives of one another but must continually step back from experiences and relationships and examine them analytically and critically.

[Insert photo: Cove softball team]

Third, friendship as method situates our research in the natural *contexts* of friendship. *Between Gay and Straight* takes readers into multiple sites: gay bars and clubs, softball fields, restaurants, and coffee houses. For the *Going Home* project, I traveled across the U.S. to places defined by participants as important, such as childhood homes, schools, and houses of worship. The sites themselves hold less significance than what they mean to our collaborators and who we become within them. In Kristen C. Blinne's words, "Employing 'friendship as method' captures my desire to remain connected to my field site as an active, compassionate, and embodied participant."[l]

Perhaps the most important aspect of this methodology is that we research with an *ethic* of friendship, a stance of hope, caring, justice, even love.[li] Friendship as method is neither a program nor a guise strategically aimed at gaining further access. It is a level of investment in participants' lives that puts fieldwork relationships on par with the project.

We sacrifice a day of writing to help someone move. We set aside our reading pile when someone drops by or calls "just to talk." When asked, we keep secrets, even if they would add compelling twists to our research report or narrative. We consider our participants an audience and struggle to write both honestly and empathically *for them*.[lii] We lay ourselves on the line, going virtually anywhere, doing almost anything, pushing to the furthest reaches of our being. We never ask more of participants than we are willing to give. Friendship as method demands radical reciprocity, a move from studying "them" to studying *us*.[liii]

For researchers, this means that we use our speaking and writing skills and our positions as scholars and critics in ways that transform and uplift our research, local, and global communities.[liv] Since 2001, my friend and colleague Kathryn Norsworthy and I have been members of the Orlando Anti-Discrimination Ordinance Committee (OADO), a nonpartisan social advocacy group of LGBT persons and allies. In Orlando and Orange County, OADO played an instrumental role in securing domestic partner registries and non-discrimination protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Kathryn and I have spearheaded resolutions and petition drives on our campus; met with city and county officials; composed newspaper editorials;[lv] spoken at public rallies; and testified before the Orlando Human Relations Board, the Orlando City Council, the Orange County Board of Commissioners, and the school boards of Orange and Lake counties.

Myerhoff contributed to a film that won an Academy Award for best short documentary, bringing renewed visibility and resources to the Aliyah Center. Angrosino developed such close relationships with staff and clients at Opportunity House that they elected him to its board of trustees. Since 1990, Stephen John Hartnett has been teaching not only about but also *within* the U.S. prison system as well as protesting the death penalty and the prison industrial complex.[lvi] In

these and many other ways, researchers can become allies with and for their research communities. Making this move, we do not deny or efface privilege associated with education or any other dominant group identity; instead, we try to use that privilege for liberatory ends.

This ethic of friendship also extends to our relationships with readers. We research pressing social problems that undermine freedom, democracy, equity, and peace. We strive to ensure that our representations expose and contest oppression associated with race, nationality, gender, class, sexual orientation, religion, age, and ability. With compelling, transgressive accounts, we seek to engage readers, and on multiple levels: intellectually, aesthetically, emotionally, ethically, and politically.[lvii] Together, researchers, participants, and readers learn to practice a more active and responsible citizenship.

Strengths of Friendship as Method

For everyone involved, friendship as method can provide a unique perspective on social life. In the ethnographic dialogue,[lviii] we bring together personal and academic discourses, comparing, contrasting, and critiquing them.

For the Researcher

This move offers much to qualitative researchers. Perhaps the most meaningful benefit is the relationships themselves. Total immersion of both our academic and personal selves can foster multifaceted bonds. Of his relationships with the men of Opportunity House, Angrosino writes, "I didn't want to be thought of as just the guy who showed up every so often with the tape recorder. I wanted to remain someone who had connections to their lives in general."[lix]

Such relationships can provide what Kenneth Burke calls "equipment for living."[lx] By

befriending Jewish elders at the Aliyah Center, Myerhoff rediscovered her roots. Through interactive, reciprocal bonds with Abbie, Liz, Eileen, and Anna, Kiesinger added layers of meaning to her own account of bulimia.

Friendship as method can bring us to a level of understanding and depth of experience we may be unable to reach using only traditional methods. In my work, by studying LGBTQ+[lxi] literatures, I learn about my friends/participants historically and politically; by observing their interactions, I get to know them interpersonally and culturally; by giving them my compassion and devotion, I experience them emotionally and spiritually.

Between Gay and Straight and *In Solidarity* involved multiple cycles of conversing, sharing activities, reading LGBTQ+ literatures, exchanging material, writing about the group, distributing the writing, and talking about it. Throughout these cycles, my researcher and friendship roles wove together, each expanding and deepening the other. My participants became (and remain) family. The impact of our relationships ripples through every dimension of my life.

One area profoundly affected has been my connections with women, both lesbian- and heterosexually-identified. Observing my participants' same-sex bonds, I have been prompted to seek new levels of affiliation in my own. I am better able to tap into the loving—even erotic— possibilities of female friendship, and I believe this renders me a more feminist ally to other women.

These layered connections also allow me to see the many faces of oppression.[lxii] As a result, I work continually to infuse my research, my pedagogy, and my institutional and community service with the values of anti-oppressive education.[lxiii] In all of these ways, this academic project has become my *life project.*

For Participants

Respondents can benefit from participation in such projects as well. Through the experience of empathic connection with the friend/researcher, participants can feel heard, known, and understood.[lxiv] Those with whom we collaborate have unique opportunities to (co-)construct meaningful accounts and to offer those to others as gifts. Previously hospitalized for anorexia, a participant named Liz said to Kiesinger, "I have been to hell and back and if I can prevent anyone from going where I've been, I will tell my story."[lxv] Respondents also can take pride in the contributions they make to the researcher's life. About her relationship with a participant who has struggled with bulimia, Kiesinger writes: [lxvi]

> Abbie took a liking to me almost instantly. She seemed very interested in my life, my story, and my bulimia. In our interactions, she played a "motherly" role and seemed eager to take me under her wing. She expressed this most strongly in the intense maternal embrace she gave me after each meeting. She would hold me close to her for a long time, patting the back of my head. I knew that she felt valued, useful, and strong when consoling me. Given that she felt unworthy, useless, and weak for most of her life, I was thrilled to let her shower me with all the advice, nurturance, and counsel she could.

By engaging the friend/researcher in a long-term, multi-faceted relationship, participants can learn as many new ways of thinking, feeling, and relating as the researcher can. Rob Ryan, a friend since 1996 and participant in *Between Gay and Straight*, reported on some specific lessons learned:[lxvii]

> I remember talking to you about what it meant to be gay and some of my hang-ups about it. You were the first person—whether you knew it or not—who clarified for

me that being gay related to my sexual orientation and not necessarily to being masculine or feminine. I didn't see myself as feminine, but my upbringing was that if you were gay, you were feminine, and that was a bad thing.

A year later, I asked if you saw me as "the woman" in my relationship with Tim. Your answer was: "If you're asking whether I see you as the one who tends to be more sensitive and nurturing, then yes, I see you as the woman." You turned being "the woman" from a weakness—as I unknowingly had made it out to be—to a strength. Suddenly, it dawned on me: I should value *all* my good qualities, masculine and feminine.

At the oral defense for my Ph.D. dissertation, Gordon Bernstein, my friend since 1995 and a participant both in the original project and in *Going Home*, said this:[lxviii]

[Insert photo: Lisa Tillmann, Gordon Bernstein]

I grew up playing baseball, played it in college for a couple years. Was very much socialized with middle-class, beer-drinking, heterosexual ideals. Socialized that way all my life. Our group has thought and talked about things since meeting Lisa that we didn't before. Our conversations were very unemotional. I don't know how often we expressed ourselves—what we thought, how we felt, how we came to terms with things. Lisa facilitated those kinds of conversations, and I don't think anyone else here could have facilitated them. I know that I couldn't have been as open, pushed the envelope that often, and really shared my views, because I was socialized not to feel pain. "Deal with it, suck it up, and move on." But Lisa made it comfortable for us, and that made it possible for her to establish the kind of friendships we have with her.

Though it brings unusual dimensions to our relationships, my dual role of friend/researcher provides additional reasons and ways to connect. Because I study them/us, my friends/participants can count on my intellectual interest in their emotional and relational lives. Rob indicated that had I been "just a friend," he may not have perceived a standing invitation to share personal experiences. At the same time, because I care about them so much and embody that ethic of caring, they can trust that I will honor their confidences; do everything in my power to support them and to act in their best interest; and engage in teaching, research, and service pursuits that promote liberation and justice for them and for everyone.

When we approach research as an endeavor of friendship, the emergent texts can have additional benefits for participants, including self-understanding and acceptance. Asked what he learned from the dissertation, Rob told me, "I wish I had read this before I came out. This has helped me become more comfortable with myself." On a similar note, Pat Martinez, another participant in the original study, said:[lxix]

[Insert photo: Patrick Martinez]

I think that I have benefited more from Lisa writing her dissertation than *she* has, or will, even by getting a Ph.D. Becoming involved with Lisa and the work she was doing…enabled me to deal with my coming out. It helped me combine my old athletic, fraternity-brother self and my emerging gay self. I saw that I could be a *gay* athlete, a *gay* man with gay *and straight* friends…The only "drawback" for me is that I wish the project would have started earlier. We met just as I was coming out at 35. I wonder how different my twenties would have been had I crossed paths with someone like [Lisa], had I been asked to look within myself and discuss my inner struggles—as I have in my late thirties.

What we write even can strengthen connections among members of one's research community. Rob said of the dissertation, "I wasn't involved with [my partner] Tim when many of the early events were occurring. So I felt like I got to know the group and the group's history better." David Holland, a friend since 1994 and participant in the original project, made a similar observation:[lxx]

> I never imagined that the dissertation would have such an impact on all of us as friends. My friendships with these guys were pretty solid before, but the project has brought us even closer. Reading the dissertation, we all learned about each other. Since then, we've talked about the events Lisa wrote about, and those discussions have re-forged the bonds between us. This was a very, very unique experience that we all shared.

These works then can be taken outside the fieldwork community and used as sources of education. Tim Mahn, a friend since 1994 and participant in the original study, said of *Between Gay and Straight*, "There are so many people I meet, or I'm friends with, or acquaintances, or family members, or people from my past that I'd like to send a copy. I think they could be enlightened. It's going to be a great tool."

Finally, our writings from friendship as method can promote social change. In Tim's words, "As a reader, I kept thinking, 'I want to do something; I *have* to do something.' [The project] gave me energy. I feel like I'm now a bit of an activist." On a similar note, Rob told me, "You've shown us that we have a lot of responsibility, and that being out is courageous. If we can be that, I know we can help others."

Considerations of Friendship as Method

For both researcher and participants, friendship as method raises the ethical stakes. The demands are high and the implications can be daunting.

<center>For the Researcher</center>

Every researcher must consider practical issues. Deadlines for publication, grant applications, tenure, and promotion structure and constrain our work lives. Not all researchers can afford to spend at least a year in the field and another year or more writing, revisiting, and rewriting.

Questions graduate students have asked include, "How do I get a project like this through my thesis/dissertation committee?" and, "Will anyone hire this kind of researcher?" Students interested in such work must find programs that support it. Some of the projects I have discussed (my own, Cherry's, and Kiesinger's) came out of the Ph.D. program in Communication at the University of South Florida. The Communication departments at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the University of Southern Illinois at Carbondale also encourage critical, ethnographic, and action research. With respect to the job-seeking process, it probably is safer professionally to conduct more traditional studies. But one's passion for unconventional research and for close relationships in the field need not preclude academic employment. In my first year on the job market (1998-99), I was invited to four campus interviews and received two offers.

On the other hand, practicing friendship as method does make it challenging to specify, in advance, research questions and objectives for external evaluators such as dissertation committees and institutional review boards. Our work also may be difficult to contextualize for more traditional colleagues and funding agencies. To help provide such a context, I included a detailed statement of my methodological philosophy, articulating many ideas contained in this appendix, in

a professional assessment report for evaluations at mid-tenure, tenure, and promotion to full professor. The statement sparked discussions with the multi-disciplinary evaluation committees, but I was not asked to defend my approach. Each researcher has to gauge the political and methodological climate of her or his department and institution in order to frame what s/he does in terms that peers and evaluators will find understandable and persuasive.

Careful consideration must be given to emotional demands as well. With friendship as method, researchers must examine, scrutinize, and critique ourselves in ways not required by traditional qualitative inquiry. Kiesinger's relationship with Abbie, whose account of bulimia centers on a long history of sexual exploitation, evoked a vague yet haunting sense that Kiesinger also had been sexually abused as a child. Close relationships with my friends/collaborators make it impossible to shirk from my heterosexism and heterosexual privilege. Though such radical reflexivity can take us to the darkest corners of our socialization and experience, it also can enlighten our thinking, our accounts, and our being.

Relationally, doing fieldwork this way carries all the risks that friendship does. Because we must reveal and invest so much of ourselves, researchers are more vulnerable than we ever have had to be, which means we can be profoundly disappointed, frustrated, or hurt. For three years, Kiesinger witnessed four women battle anorexia and/or bulimia. Three of them followed no clear path toward recovery, and their struggles at times exacerbated Kiesinger's own struggles with body and food. By exploring the borderlands between Jewish and Christian identities, Berger learned to live with uncertainty and began to work through the conflicted feelings she had for her estranged, mentally-ill father.[lxxi] Just as she felt ready to reconnect with him, he suddenly died. During my fieldwork, members of my research community tested positive for HIV, rendering me a fellow traveler down emotional, medical, and political pathways. Myerhoff and

Cherry grieved the deaths of virtually every participant in their studies.

Another consideration involves our sometimes-conflicting obligations. On one hand, we must respect and honor our relationships with participants; on the other, we owe readers as comprehensive and complex an account as possible. After collecting narratives of conversion to Messianic Judaism, Berger wanted to interview participants' significant others about their reactions to the person who had changed faiths. In the end, she rejected the idea, concluding that this "would be too disruptive to the delicate truce many family members share when one member has converted."[lxxii] Though such interviews would have brought a new and provocative dimension to her project, Berger privileged her ethic of friendship over her ethnographic interest.

As mentioned, due to our deep and sustained involvement, we may be told secrets that would add significant layers to our accounts. Even with non-privileged information, the dual role of friend/researcher makes it difficult to decide what to divulge, especially regarding information that potentially discredits our participants.

Berger reports being disconcerted by the conservative attitudes toward abortion and same-sex relations that her participants expressed. On several occasions, the sexism exhibited by my gay male friends/participants troubled me. In face-to-face encounters in the field, both Berger and I tended to suppress much of our disapproval.[lxxiii] Had our participants been strangers or simply "subjects," we may have maintained a more critical distance and felt more empowered to challenge their views directly.[lxxiv] Later, we included these issues in our written accounts, hoping our portrayals would spark reflection and action, both in and outside our fieldwork communities. At some level, though, even this felt like a betrayal to our friends/participants, already members of stigmatized and marginalized groups.

Under friendship as method, researchers must pay constant close attention to ethical issues,

including informed consent, confidentiality, and beneficence. At times, we navigate their pathways in unconventional ways. Angrosino's research, for example, centered on mentally retarded adults, many of whom also have a history of mental illness and/or criminal behavior. Because his participants may have difficulty assessing the consequences of consent, Angrosino wrote ethnographic fiction and created composite characters.

My approach to confidentiality changed as the relationships changed. In my first class paper on the network of friends, I followed social science conventions by using pseudonyms and altering other identifying details. Later, as the project became more collaborative, I asked my friends/participants to choose between having a pseudonym, including their real first name only, or using their real first and last names.[lxxv] I explained that pseudonyms were the standard and safest approach. For the dissertation, one primary participant, Adam (not out at work or to his family), requested a pseudonym and asked that I write only generally about his occupation and hometown. Others (David, Gordon, Rob, and Pat) had me use real first and last names. Because *Between Gay and Straight* would be a more public and accessible document, I contacted the group again. This time, "Adam" gave permission to use his real first name (Al), while another participant, embarking on a new career, asked that I alter his last name. All men consented to having photographs of them in the book, and Tim and Rob agreed to appear on the cover with my husband and me.

When Tim and Rob decided to use their real names, each said to me, "I want to do this for you." While this reflects their level of investment in our relationships and in the project, I urged them not to base consent on their feelings for me or on what they imagined I wanted. We talked at length about the personal and professional risks they would be taking. My friends could be fired for no other reason than being gay—something still true as of this writing. When *Between Gay and Straight* came out in 2001, Tim and Rob could not even legally have sex in Florida and 13 other

states. From conversations I had with them, I came to believe that, while my friends' connections with me could not be completely disentangled from their decisions, each perceived himself to be acting in his own best interest, as well as the interests of other—especially younger—gay men, who need role models for coming out. Had I not believed that, I would have tried to convince them to change their names.

In re-securing informed consent for *In Solidarity*, I opened myself to the possibilities that participants would request significant revisions or even withdraw. I reached out in the fall of 2013 and spent more than a month not knowing whether *any* of the *Going Home* chapters could appear in this book. One chapter entailed significant negotiation and substantive changes. When researchers share decision-making, we give up a lot of control.

In terms of beneficence, I clearly have profited more professionally than have my non-academic collaborators. The original project and its publications proved central to my earning a Ph.D., getting an academic job, and receiving tenure, and my follow-up work was instrumental in my promotion to full professor. My most recent scholarship, however, has involved co-authorship with my friend and colleague, Kathryn Norsworthy,[lxxvi] who identifies as lesbian, and co-production with a friend since 1995, David Dietz,[lxxvii] who identifies as gay. Also, in the interest of distributing the benefits of my LGBTQ+ work, I have donated royalties from *Between Gay and Straight* to activist groups (e.g., the ACLU, the Human Rights Campaign, Equality Florida, GLSEN, and PFLAG) and continually offer myself as a resource to community groups, the media, educators, and students.

When researchers become allies to groups the dominant culture has constructed as deviant (e.g., gay men, Messianic Jews, women struggling with bulimia, people with AIDS) and assign the resultant texts in their classes, not all students respond positively. Confronting this kind of work

may challenge deeply-held values and assumptions. I have had to answer complaints (e.g., this work as "gay propaganda") on course evaluations and directly to my department chair and senior administrators. One student had to be removed from my class before the semester even began. Seeing *Between Gay and Straight* on the reading list, this student called my chair and provost, demanded an alternative to my class (a requirement for the major), and made veiled threats. I am fortunate to be at an institution whose administration supports and defends my work. Nonetheless, these student complaints have been both time- and energy-sapping.

When our projects center on oppression, our emotional and physical safety can be jeopardized as well. My friends/participants and I have been verbally accosted by homophobic slurs. Those politically and/or religiously opposed to my work have sent me virulent anti-gay literature and targeted me in online smears. Enduring still another level of risk, Khuankaew and Norsworthy conduct workshops on violence, trauma, and HIV-awareness on the Thai-Burma border, where it has been illegal for them to organize. With each training session, Norsworthy, a psychologist from the U.S., has risked deportation and blacklist status, and her Thai collaborator, Khuankaew, has faced incarceration.

Friendship as method, while incredibly rewarding, comes with a set of obligations that do not pave a smooth, easily-traveled path. When we engage others' humanity, struggles, and oppression, we cannot simply turn off the recorder, turn our backs, and exit the field. Anyone who takes on this sort of project must be emotionally strong and willing to face pressure, resistance, backlash, and perhaps even violence.

For Participants

When we approach research as an endeavor of friendship and we approach participants as

friends, we also heighten some considerations for them. Because of the power imbalance between researcher and participants, field relationships can be exploitive. Friendship as method seeks to undermine and disrupt this. However, if researchers do not maintain an ethic of friendship in their fieldwork practices and accounts, our participants, readers, and/or listeners can sustain emotional damage.[lxxviii]

In "Emotional and Ethical Quagmires in Returning to the Field,"[lxxix] Carolyn Ellis writes poignantly about the anger and pain members of her fieldwork community suffered when a third party informed them that she had published *Fisher Folk*,[lxxx] a book containing unflattering portrayals of their "backwoods" lifestyle. An extended family had taken in Carolyn as a friend, giving her years of virtually unfettered access, but as a then-realist ethnographer, she rarely allowed herself to be similarly open. Ellis also admits to taping conversations surreptitiously, to securing consent so early in the 12-year project that many forgot about her researcher role or assumed it had ended, and to sharing none of her published work. The honesty of "Emotional and Ethical Quagmires" helps readers become, as Ellis herself has become, a more dialogical and relationally ethical researcher.[lxxxi]

Friendship as method all but demands that writings be taken back to the community for examination, critique, and further dialogue. I have given my central participants interview transcripts, drafts of class papers, the dissertation, proposed changes for *Between Gay and Straight*, drafts of several articles, and the manuscript for *In Solidarity*. Several attended my dissertation defense having read the document, and many participated in the discussion. I also conducted follow-up interviews to attain additional reactions and reflections. At each stage, I incorporated their feedback and suggestions and renegotiated informed consent. Their participation at so many stages required repeated intrusions on their time and energy. Had they been working class or in

poor health, they may not have had these resources to devote.[lxxxii]

While this process helped the projects become more egalitarian, it also rendered my friends/participants vulnerable. As with *Between Gay and Straight*, *In Solidarity* exposes once-private aspects of my collaborators to family, friends, and co-workers. In reading interview transcripts for *Going Home*, three primary informants had to confront heterosexist and/or homophobic comments made by a relative. Seeing such comments, one relative felt so uncomfortable and ashamed that this person insisted that several lines be removed. In the case of "Revisiting Don/ovan," requesting that participants reread the chapter in 2014 also meant asking them to re-immerse themselves in three partnerships—Donovan Marshall and Jackson Jones, John and Barb Marshall, and Doug Healy and me—all of which dissolved painfully.

In some cases, our participants risk not only emotional but also physical harm. To attend Khuankaew and Norsworthy's workshops, for example, Burmese women have defied laws against organizing and risked arrest, abuse, and imprisonment. For me, few thoughts are more sobering than the possibility that one of my friends could become the victim of a hate crime as a result of visibility in my work.

Friendship as method requires that ethics remain at the forefront of our research and our research relationships. Confidentiality and informed consent become ongoing negotiations. Researchers and participants reflexively consider and discuss power dynamics at every turn and constantly strive to balance the need to advance the interpretive and critical agendas of their projects and the need to protect one another from harm.

Conclusion

Most any study involving human "subjects" can incorporate some aspect of friendship as

method. Even in the most empirical, double-blind research, we can treat participants with an ethic of friendship. We can solicit fears and concerns, listen closely and respond compassionately, and use such exchanges to refine the study and direct its implications.

Friendship as method well suits the study of close relationships, including friendship. In contrast to one-time, retrospective surveys, a primary means of studying relationships, friendship as method involves sustained immersion in participants' lives, offering a processual and longitudinal perspective. But most any topic could be investigated with the practices, at the pace, in the contexts, and/or with an ethic of friendship. Topics like living with disability,[lxxxiii] navigating racist discourse in the classroom,[lxxxiv] the experience of incarceration,[lxxxv] or surviving genocide,[lxxxvi] probably lend themselves best to friendship as method, because the more emotional and multi-faceted the topic, the more appropriate it becomes for researchers and participants to share emotional and multi-faceted ties.

For a mutual, close, and/or lasting friendship to develop between every researcher and all participants is unrealistic. Regardless, we can approach respondents from a stance of friendship, meaning we treat them with respect, honor their stories, and try to use their stories for humane and just purposes.

In a strange aligning of the universe, the oral defense for my dissertation took place the same day and time as Matthew Shepard's memorial service. Jim King, a member of my committee, posed this question: "But what if *they* are not humane and just? Would you study Matthew Shepard's killers this way?"

I responded with this:[lxxxvii]

That would be extremely difficult. When something like this murder happens, 'we'—the non-perpetrators—often are so shocked and disheartened that we

distance ourselves from 'them'—the perpetrators. We tell ourselves that they must be crazy or evil. Such explanations come quickly and easily. The hardest question to ask is this: what kinds of personal, familial, and cultural conditions have to exist for this act to make sense somehow, to seem almost *rational*? We don't ask this because it implicates us in the problem; it forces us to identify with the killers, to bring them close and see them as part of us. Russell Henderson and Aaron McKinney were unable to experience their interconnection with Matthew Shepard; that's exactly what made him so disposable. But if we dispose of them in the same way, we come no closer to creating the kind of world where such actions become less possible. It would be profoundly uncomfortable and disturbing to study Henderson and McKinney with the practices and/or with an ethic of friendship, but that may be what's most needed.[lxxxviii]

Certainly, the full scope of friendship as method does not fit every qualitative project. Time, career, and interest constraints limit our ability to study social life at the natural pace of friendship. Likewise, our purposes may not best be served in the natural contexts of friendship. When doing oral history, for example, we must contrive an interview setting where high-quality recording can occur. Practices of friendship, moreover, such as compassion, might feel inappropriate when doing research on groups we consider dangerous or unethical.[lxxxix]

Between Gay and Straight and *In Solidarity* are unique because some of my participants already were friends or acquaintances when I began the projects, and friendship was also a subject of my research. But qualitative researchers need not adopt the whole vision to benefit from friendship as method. Moving toward friendship as method may be as simple as turning off the recorder and cooking dinner with participants; investing more of ourselves in their emotional,

relational, and political welfare; inviting respondents further into our lives than we ever dared before; hanging around longer; writing texts that are as enlightening and useful to our research, local, and global communities as to our academic careers; and/or approaching participants as we would potential or actual friends: with a desire for mutual respect, understanding, growth, and liberation.

[Insert photo: Lisa Tillmann, Tim Mahn]

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[i] Material from this appendix has been adapted from my Ph.D. dissertation, *Life Projects* (Tillmann-Healy 1998)*,* my book *Between Gay and Straight* (Tillmann-Healy 2001; used with permission, AltaMira Press), and an article published in *Qualitative Inquiry* (Tillmann-Healy 2003; used with permission, Sage Publications: http://qix.sagepub.com/content/9/5/729.abstract). Portions of this chapter were presented at the 2003 meetings of the National Communication Association. Dave Dietz shot the photograph of Gordon Bernstein and me.

Other researchers have employed friendship as method in studies utilizing autoethnography (see, e.g., Blinne 2011), co-constructed autoethnography (see, e.g., Ellis and Rawicki 2013; Hill and Holyoak, 2011), participant observation (see, e.g., Bonnin 2010; Rinke and Mawhinney 2014), in-depth interviews (see, e.g., Owton and Allen-Collinson 2013; Rinke and Mawhinney 2014), life history (see, e.g., Roets, Reinaart, and Van Hove 2008), and even archival research (Mattingly and Boyd 2013).

[ii] See Tillmann-Healy (1998).

[iii] See Tillmann-Healy (2001). As indicated in the Preface, my dissertation and first book grew out of an ethnographic and interview study of the network of gay male friends that became family to me and to Doug Healy, my husband until 2006.

[iv] See Rawlins (1992, 271).

[v] See Rawlins (1992, 2009).

[vi] See Holleran (1996, 34-35).

[vii] See Rawlins (1992, 9).

[viii] See Werking (1997, 18).

[ix] See Rawlins (1992, 2009) and Weiss (1998).

[x] See Rawlins (1992, 2009).

[xi] See Weiss (1998).

[xii] See Rawlins (1992, 12).

[xiii] See Rubin (1985, 7).

[xiv] See Fine (1981, 265).

[xv] See Rawlins (1992, 44).

[xvi] See Rawlins (1992, 274).

[xvii] For an application of friendship as method in the context of a relationship between a man with a physical disability and his "frien-tendant," a "nondisabled ally," see Kelly (2013).

[xviii] See Buber (1988).

[xix] See Tedlock (1991).

[xx] See Schwandt (1994).

[xxi] See Geertz (1973, 5).

[xxii] See Jackson (1989, 4).

[xxiii] See Denzin (1997).

[xxiv] See, for examples: Collins (1991, 1998, 2012); Harding (1991, 2009); Intemann (2010).

[xxv] See Intemann (2010, 785).

[xxvi] See Harding (2009, 195).

[xxvii] See Harding (1991).

[xxviii] See Collins (1998, 229).

[xxix] See Collins (1991).

xxx See Collins (2012).

xxxi See, for examples, Khuankaew and Norsworthy (2000), Norsworthy with Khuankaew (2005), Norsworthy and Khuankaew (2012), and chapter 10.

xxxii See, for examples: Cook and Fonow (1986), Lather (1991), McLaren (2011), Norsworthy with Khuankaew (2005), Norsworthy and Khuankaew (2012), Reinharz (1992), and Roberts (1990).

xxxiii See Intemann (2010, 786).

xxxiv Texts that contributed to the development of my own LGBTQ+ affirmative perspective include: Bornstein (1995), Bronski (2011), Butler (1999), Eaklor (2008), Foucault (1988, 1990a, 1990b), Gamson (2000), Jagose (1996), Katz (1996), Miller (2006), Sedgwick (1990), and Warner (1999). *In Solidarity* attempts to show queer-informed scholarship, activism, and pedagogy. For other examples of queer-informed autoethnography, see Adams (2011), Adams and Holman Jones (2011), and Holman Jones and Adams (2014).

xxxv See Fine (1994).

xxxvi See Reason (1994).

xxxvii See Lather (1991) and Reason (1994).

xxxviii See Reason (1994).

xxxix See Ellis, Kiesinger, and Tillmann-Healy (1997) and Tillmann-Healy and Kiesinger (2001).

xl See Ellis and Rawicki (2013).

xli See Cherry (1996).

xlii See Behar (1996).

xliii See Bondi (2013).

xliv See Cherry (1996).

xlv See Rinke and Mawhinney (2014).

xlvi See Kiesinger (1995, 1998a, 1998b).

xlvii See Myerhoff (1978).

xlviii See Angrosino (1998).

xlix See Khuankaew and Norsworthy (2000), Norsworthy (2002), Norsworthy with Khuankaew (2005), and Norsworthy and Khuankaew (2012).

l See Blinne (2011, 253).

li Christine Kelly (2013, 788) discusses "relational and representational conundrums" that arise in striving to practice an ethic of friendship, and Rinke and Mawhinney (2014, 11) highlight the sometimes-delicate balance between the researcher's personal and relational ethics.

lii See Ellis (1995).

liii In Sandra Harding's (2009, 193) words, "It is one thing to gesture toward 'including the excluded' in our thinking and social projects. It is quite another to engage seriously not only with their ways of understanding themselves and their social relations, but also with their ways of understanding us and our social relations."

liv See Christians (2000).

lv See Norsworthy (May 29, 2013) and Tillmann-Healy (October 12, 2001; April 13, 2002; October 24, 2002).

lvi See Hartnett (2003, 2010) and Hartnett, Novek, and Wood (2013).

lvii See Bochner (1994).

lviii See Tedlock (1991).

lix See Angrosino (1998, 38).

lx See Burke (1973).

lxi Refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, plus identities such as intersex and asexual.

lxii See Young (2000).

lxiii See Freire (1999).

lxiv See Hutchinson, Wilson, and Wilson (1994).

lxv See Kiesinger (1995, 54).

lxvi See Kiesinger (1995, 52).

lxvii See Tillmann-Healy (2001, 217).

lxviii See Tillmann-Healy (2001, 217-218).

lxix See Tillmann-Healy (2001, 218).

lxx See Tillmann-Healy (2001, 218).

lxxi See Berger (2000, 2001).

lxxii See Berger (2000, 180).

lxxiii Lynnette Mawhinney (in Rinke and Mawhinney 2014, 10-11) also writes about conflicts between personal and relational ethics. As Mawhinney builds rapport with Shanae, a participant and fellow African-American, Shanae becomes more open about her views on urban education, which include cultural and racial stereotypes. "Not once did I challenge Shanae's views in the year I worked with her," admits Mawhinney. Working as co-researchers, co-authors, and friends, Theon Hill (evangelical Christian, heterosexual, and African-American) and Isaac Holyoak (agnostic, gay, and White) do confront their differences directly (Hill and Holyoak 2011).

lxxiv At the same time, more conventional researchers may have defined their function as observation as opposed to social justice intervention.

lxxv This approach to informed consent and confidentiality may mitigate the hierarchical separation between researcher and participants. However, so long as the researcher determines the options, the differential is not eliminated. Perhaps only co-authorship and co-production have that potential; for examples, see chapter 10; Tillmann and Dietz (2014); Ellis and Rawicki (2013); and Roets, Reinaart, and Van Hove (2008).

lxxvi See chapter 10.

lxxvii See Tillmann and Dietz (2014).

lxxviii See chapter six.

lxxix See Ellis (1995).

lxxx See Ellis (1986).

lxxxi See Ellis and Rawicki (2013) for example of how her approach to research has evolved.

lxxxii See de Leeuw, Cameron, and Greenwood (2012) for a discussion of how participatory projects can burden research communities, especially those already marginalized.

lxxxiii See Kelly (2013) and Owton and Allen-Collinson (2013).

lxxxiv See Sassi and Thomas (2012).

lxxxv See Hartnett (2003).

lxxxvi See Ellis and Rawicki (2013).

lxxxvii See Tillmann-Healy (2001, 212-213).

[lxxxviii] Members of the Tectonic Theater Project did exactly that, interviewing Henderson and McKinney for *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later* (see Kaufman, Fondakowski, Pierotti, Paris, and Belber 2012). Rebecca Barrett-Fox (2011) pursues a parallel endeavor in her ethnographic study of the Westboro Baptist Church.

[lxxxix] See Dawes (July 1, 2013).