"If You Weren't Researching Me and a Friend...": The Mobius of Friendship and Mentorship as Methodological Approaches to Qualitative Research
Kelly Sassi and Ebony Elizabeth Thomas
Qualitative Inquiry published online 5 October 2012
DOI: 10.1177/1077800412456958

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://qix.sagepub.com/content/early/2012/09/11/1077800412456958

Published by:
www.sagepublications.com

Additional services and information for Qualitative Inquiry can be found at:

Email Alerts: http://qix.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts
Subscriptions: http://qix.sagepub.com/subscriptions
Reprints: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav
Permissions: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav

>> OnlineFirst Version of Record - Oct 5, 2012

What is This?
“If You Weren’t Researching Me and a Friend . . . ”: The Mobius of Friendship and Mentorship as Methodological Approaches to Qualitative Research

Kelly Sassi¹ and Ebony Elizabeth Thomas²

Abstract
This article explores the affordances and risks of practicing friendship and mentorship as methodological approaches in two qualitative studies: (a) the mentor’s study in a diverse 9th grade classroom and (b) the protégé’s subsequent study of teacher professional development in the same school. Friendship methodology, as theorized by Tillmann and others, is extended to include protection and mentoring. The effect of mentoring is demonstrated through examples of the former protégé’s own research. Explosive moments in each study demonstrate how research can be analyzed and the course of the research projects influenced within a friendship/mentorship context. Like friendship-as-method, mentorship as methodology can result in rich data, but there is also the potential for more transparent and rigorous data analysis when the researcher is a mentor because the mentor can model research skills for the protégé-participant. Thus, mentorship as methodology socializes peers into the conventions of qualitative research.

Keywords
feminist theory, friendship-as-method, qualitative research, mentoring

Entering a friendship with participants as an intentional methodological choice means recognizing that “our lives are already bound up with the web of life we study” (Stone-Mediatore, 2007, p. 73). Distinctions between outside and inside, and between researcher and researched, can often be blurred in friendship. Outsider/insider and researcher/researched positions are not, however, dichotomous; instead, they function along a continuum. It is not the scientific detachment of the researcher as complete stranger that ensures validity within this approach, but knowledge of where one is along as many dimensions of that continuum as possible (Hayano, 1979). In our two qualitative studies, both involving graduate students working in a high school setting, the recognition that our research relationships involved mentorship and exploration of the dimensions of mentorship, led us to rethink the characteristics of friendship between researcher and researched. Research memos seemed insufficient to encompass this process, so we turned to Corbin and Strauss’s (2008) strategy of creating a “visual device that depicts relationships between analytic concepts.” The visual device we chose was a Mobius strip because for us, following the concept of friendship led to mentorship and vice versa, with no discernible boundary.

“Friendship-as-method,” a term first developed by Tillmann-Healy (2003), and further developed in later work by Tillmann (2008, 2009, 2010), potentially offers robust affordances to researchers. For example, Kirsch (2005) asserts, “The more successful I was at forming close relationships with interviewees, the more likely they were to reveal personal thoughts or feelings” (p. 2164). Conversely, Cotterill (1992) found that “some respondents found it easier to talk to the researcher precisely because of her status as a stranger rather than a friend . . . ” (p. 596). Although much of the literature on friendship-as-method affirms its affordances, there are serious concerns about how friendly relations between the researcher and researched can obscure the power imbalances inherent in the enterprise of research. Furthermore, developing interpersonal fieldwork relationships challenges research traditions that position the

¹North Dakota State University, Fargo, ND, USA
²Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, USA

Corresponding Authors:
Kelly Sassi, Department of English, North Dakota State University, Dept. 2320, P.O. Box 6050, Fargo, ND 58108-6050, USA
Email: Kelly.Sassi@ndsu.edu

Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania, 3700 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104-6216, USA
Email: ebonyt@gse.upenn.edu
researcher more distantly (Bloom, 1997) and leads to complex questions of relational ethics (Ellis, 2007). Mentorship has some of the same benefits and risks as friendship-as-method, and accordingly, has implications for research methodology as well. We are choosing to define mentorship as a research methodology—recognizing that others might call it a “strategy of inquiry” (Creswell, 2009)—because our understanding of mentorship (and friendship) provided specific direction for the procedures we have followed and the choices we made in the research, and those choices have been influenced by our social justice orientation within a larger advocacy/participatory action worldview.

This article will review the literature on friendship-as-method, as well as the literature on mentorship in academic settings, for the purpose of showing how our work in one area follows a Mobius-like trajectory to inform work in the other area and vice versa. We will then explain how a “mentoring episode” (Kram & Ragins, 2007) in the first study influenced our friendship-as-methodology approach and discuss how this approach was extended to a second study in which the reciprocal mentoring was replicated. After comparing and contrasting friendship and mentorship as methodological approaches, we theorize the characteristics and affordances of emphasizing mentorship as methodology, using qualitative data from both studies.

Initial Study and Participants

Friendship and mentorship first arose during Kelly’s qualitative research project on the teaching of Native American literature in Ebony’s ninth grade classroom of predominantly White students. Ebony and her students were reading S. Alice Callahan’s Wynema: A Child of the Forest, (1891) the first novel published by a woman of American Indian descent in the United States. Embedded within a sentimental double-marriage plot are discussions of assimilation—missionary work, schooling, the Dawes Act,1 and the Wounded Knee Massacre.2 Reading the novel challenges readers to move beyond the stereotypes of Indians that are presented in the novel.

Both the researcher (Kelly) and the teacher-participant (Ebony) were students in the same doctoral program at the time of this study, but Kelly was an advanced doctoral student working on her dissertation prospectus, while Ebony had just begun her coursework. Shared identity as graduate students and a culture of mentoring in our common graduate program predisposed us to be open to the methodological approach of friendship as well as to mentorship. We first became acquainted during a shared road trip to our field’s national conference during Ebony’s first semester in the doctoral program. During the many hours we spent on the road, we talked about our families, teaching experiences, and perceptions of graduate school. It was during that road trip that Kelly first mentioned her dissertation project, and Ebony expressed interest. She revealed to Kelly that she had never taught a work of Native American literature, and was interested in expanding her teaching repertoire. Kelly then decided to ask Ebony to participate in the research.

Ebony positioned Kelly as a friend early in the study. She introduced Kelly as “a friend” to her second period class and as “a dear friend” to her third period class. Developing a friendship within the research project (Kelly and Ebony had not taken any classes together) led to the discovery of shared facets of identity. Both of our families stem from the lower economic class—Ebony’s, urban; Kelly’s, rural. Each of us is the first person in her family to earn a doctorate. As experienced teachers when we first entered our doctoral programs, we found that our professional identities as teachers were more established than educational doctoral students without this kind of experience (Labaree, 2003). Kelly’s experiences teaching Alaska Native students resonated with Ebony’s experiences teaching African American students. Transitioning from teaching to research challenged us both to think about how the practice of teaching is different from conducting empirical studies and also how research can inform our teaching. Talk about our similarities and differences was threaded throughout our everyday conversations, and led us to consider the same questions that Christman describes in her own research:

How is this woman like me? How is she not like me? How are these similarities and differences being played out in our interaction? How is that interaction affecting the course of the research? How is it illuminating and/or obscuring the research problem?

(Christman, 1988, p. 80)

In a paper presented at the National Women’s Studies Association in 2007, Ebony addressed some of these questions herself. As she wrote about her experiences as the only woman of color in our doctoral program at the time, she noted that her growing friendship with Kelly was possible because Kelly wasn’t “fakin’ the funk.”

Ebony perceived that Kelly was genuinely interested in getting to know who she was as an individual, not just as a potential research participant, or as a token “Black friend.” At the same time, Kelly and Ebony were able to talk about race; neither pretended to be colorblind. Their interactions extended beyond the academic and research settings. Kelly invited Ebony to have dinner with her family several times during her first year in the program, and in turn, Ebony invited Kelly and her husband to her home for dinner. Ebony wrote, “I viewed . . . [Kelly’s] kindness not as paternalism, not as White guilt, but as overtures to friendship. This is how I express friendship myself—through the giving of time and care. My gut feeling is, and always has
been, that [she] is sincere in her passion for social justice, feminist imperatives, and humanity.” Kelly didn’t know Ebony very well before the research project, except that she had a large network of sorority sisters and family in the area, unlike Kelly who had moved to Michigan from Alaska. Kelly’s mom died in Alaska just before she started the research project, so she was especially grateful for Ebony’s friendship. She was touched that Ebony could make a time and space for her in her busy schedule and extensive social network. Researchers aren’t supposed to have emotional needs, but Kelly had some pretty strong ones at this time, and—thanks to another graduate student who introduced her to the literature on friendship-as-method—she made a choice to acknowledge that need, cultivate a friendship, and pay close attention to how that affected the research.

Review of Literature on Friendship

Feminist researchers have argued for the use of friendship between women as a methodological approach in qualitative research (Bloom, 1997; Christman, 1988; Hayano, 1979; Tillmann-Healy, 2003). Friendship-as-method is sometimes used when researchers are studying participants from their own group. Hayano argues that such researchers are more likely to have “an involvement and intimacy” with their “subjects” (cited in Christman, 1988, p. 73). Another possible condition that promotes friendship is an abundance of everyday conversations rather than structured interviews that reinforce the researcher/researched distinction and imbalance of power inherent in this distinction. One of the greatest potentials of friendship-as-methodology is the possibility that the bonds “take on political dimensions” and lead to the potential for “dual consciousness-raising” and for “members of dominant groups . . . to serve as advocates for friends in target groups” (Tillmann-Healy, 2003, p. 731).

In addition to aiding a social justice agenda, feminist researchers such as Christman detail how their positioning as a friend to their participants leads to the collection of more personal and revealing data and also determines a different relationship with those data. For example, women often speak with more “candor” to female friends and the developing friendships lead researchers to “a kind of collaboration in the research process that further chip[s] away at researcher/subject distinctions” (Christman, 1988, p. 76). This depth has been described in qualitative research between male friends as well (Brooks, 2006). And, as Tillmann has shown, candor and rich data are also possible across groups. Her work, as a heterosexual female researching the coming out stories of gay men demonstrates how “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” (Tillmann-Healy, 2003, p. 737).

One of the possible challenges of pursuing friendship-as-method is deciding how to analyze data that looks very much like everyday conversations. At first, Kelly used conversation analysis only within the parts of the data that related to her research questions, skipping over more personal parts of the transcripts, but over time realized that those seemingly insignificant exchanges were important. Even everyday conversations are tactical (deCerteau, 1984; Erickson, 2004), and thus offer a rich source for analysis. By tactical, we take up deCerteau’s definition of tactics as a way of manipulating events to change the will of another. In Tillmann-Healy’s (2003) theorization of “friendship-as-method,” she argues that the researcher’s “primary procedures are those we use to build and sustain friendship: conversation, everyday involvement, compassion, giving, and vulnerability” (p. 734). Furthermore, “we research with an ethic of friendship, a stance of hope, caring, justice, even love” (p. 735). In looking at these features of friendship, it is notable that aside from “vulnerability” all of Tillmann-Healy’s terms have positive connotations. However, there are significant risks of friendship-as-method, some of which are vividly described by Ellis, who did fieldwork in a fishing community: “When I returned to Fishneck, my friends there confronted me with the words I had written; they reacted strongly to my descriptions of them smelling like fish, taking infrequent baths . . . ” (Ellis, 2007, p. 11). It can be challenging for the researched to read the way they are depicted by the researcher, even within established friendships.

Like Christman, who found it difficult “to think of the conversations in [her] study as interviews” (1988, p. 74), Kelly noticed that much of the recorded talk between herself and Ebony sounded like everyday conversation between friends/colleagues. Ebony, on her part, felt free to talk with Kelly about all manner of things, just as she would many of her other professional friends, including her perceptions and concerns about and within the school. Although much of this discursive data might appear irrelevant, it was actually necessary to Kelly’s critical agenda: studying culturally relevant teaching of Native America/American Indian literatures. As Christman argues, it is “shared status” with research subjects that allows and encourages women to speak of issues that might be seen by outsiders as irrelevant (1988, p. 76). In other words, shared status leads to seemingly tangential talk, but within this talk there are often insights that would be inaccessible in a more formal environment and/or with a more formal researcher-researched relationship.

Review of Literature on Mentorship

The term “mentorship” comes from Greek mythology—Mentor was the name of Odysseus’ trusted advisor. Today, mentoring has broad applications. A review of literature on
mentorship by Johnson (2003) states that mentoring “is differentiated from teaching, supervising, advising, and counseling—other common roles of the graduate school faculty member—in that the mentoring is mostly a task of generativity” (p. 129). Friendship is just one quality in the psychosocial function of mentorship as defined by Kram (1985). Other qualities include role modeling, acceptance and confirmation, and counseling. However, the psychosocial domain is not the only function of mentorship; another is the professional. Career-related support enhances advancement in an organization and includes the mentor functions of sponsorship, exposure and visibility, coaching, protection, and challenging assignments. Like friendships, “mentoring relationships fall along a continuum of quality” (Kram & Ragins, 2007, p. 660). In successful mentoring alliances, Bennetts (2002) argues, participants’ self and work are viewed as inseparable (p. 161).

Although these definitions of mentorship are useful, we are specifically interested in mentorship in a research context. Dohrn and Cummings found that women who had been mentored were more likely to do research (2002). Briggs (2008), found similar results with pretenure counselor education faculty and call for more study of research mentorship (p. 90). Graduate students are in the process of making the transition from doing research to being researchers, an identity that can feel uncomfortable to everyone, but especially to those who have cultural identities that have been “the researched” more often than the researcher. In Gay’s (2004) study of the marginalization of graduate students of color, she argues that doctoral programs should consider culturally responsive mentoring to address this issue. To successfully socialize more diverse doctoral students into the realm of academic research, mentors must attend to identity formation (Hall & Burns, 2009). When the shared status of people in a research project is both personal (as in friendship) and professional (as with mentorship), there is the potential of highly relevant talk about ethics, research methodology, interpretation of results, analysis, and what it means to become a professional researcher.

To explore the role of identity in learning to do research, the traditional mentor–protégé relationship seems limited, because there are really only two researcher identities that are possible (the mentoring researcher and the protégé researcher) and in the power imbalance inherent in this dyad. The mentor is typically considered to be more knowledgeable and the protégé is not only less so, but also dependent on the mentor to acquire that knowledge. Briggs and Person, like other researchers, focus primarily on the benefits to the protégé, though others (Kalin, Barney, & Irwin, 2009) address benefits to the mentor as well. The mentorship between Kelly and Ebony was reciprocal, not only because of their shared status as doctoral students, but possibly also because of the type of research they conducted. Kelly took a qualitative approach that relied on the grounded theory work of Strauss and Corbin, which she studied in a course designed by Dr. Lesley Rex. (Ebony would take this same course one year later.) During the course, Dr. Rex put graduate students into the dual role of participant and researcher. Because all of Dr. Rex’s students experienced both roles, an atmosphere of reciprocal mentoring was established within the class, which in turn influenced the culture within the doctoral program. Schreiber argues that mentors are crucial to learning grounded theory. “If mentors are seen as co-learners, with particular areas of expertise, then mentorship can provide an emancipated approach to learning grounded theory” (Schreiber, 2001, p. 109). That is, the protégé is equally qualified to assign categories, synthesize the coding, and build theory. Grounded theory is a kind of qualitative research that seems especially conducive to developing an egalitarian research relationship. Significantly, after also taking Dr. Rex’s course, Ebony would later take up a similar approach in her own dissertation research, using qualitative research and involving research subjects in grounded theory.

It is a natural human instinct to protect those for whom we care. Mentors typically care for those whom they mentor. However, the caring of mentors is different from that of friends. It is likely to be focused on the professional as well as the personal. Not all of us have friends and family with the experience to fully understand our professional issues even though they may care about the impact of professional issues on our personal lives. Mentors, however, are more likely to be able to turn that caring into protection. For example, Kelly’s faculty mentor advised her to seek a letter for her tenure file from a Native American scholar who could make a good argument for her social justice work on the reservation. In due course, Ebony’s faculty mentor supported her candidacy for a national mentoring program for graduate students and faculty of color in language and literacy, recognizing her need for African American mentors.

Within Ebony and Kelly’s friendship and mentoring relationship, the rich case Kelly chose to focus on in her research on the Native American literature unit—what Ebony called “the powder keg day” and the privilege walk that followed—arose from Ebony’s professional, personal, and political concerns. It is because Kelly cared about Ebony and wanted to protect her from painful experiences that her consciousness of these as significant events was raised. The “powder keg day” also functioned as a “tipping point” (Kram & Ragins, 2007), or a moment at which an interaction becomes a mentoring episode. The “powder keg day” (Sassi & Thomas, 2008) was not only a significant moment within Kelly’s dissertation study, but it became the launching point for Ebony’s entire dissertation, and later, her early career program of research.

This mentorship was not one-sided. Ebony mentored Kelly, too. In our work together, we have found that “mentoring relationships entail more than the transmission and...
acquisition of skill sets for professional work. . . . they are reciprocal negotiations that capitalize on both existing identities. . . . and potentially valuable cultural capital that agents bring with them to socialization processes” (Hall & Burns, 2009, p. 55). Having grown up and taught in Alaska where only 1% of students were African American, Kelly didn’t have much direct experience teaching African American students, nor did she have much experience interacting with African Americans outside of the classroom. She remembers playing with only one Black friend in elementary school. Once she asked if she could touch her friends’ hair, and when she did, an elderly neighbor saw what she was doing and yelled at her. Kelly was ashamed, and wondered if this experience contributed to her initial fear of asking Ebony questions about what it was like to grow up as a Black girl in Detroit. Ebony understood these fears and openly shared her experiences growing up in an inner-city neighborhood, her personal and professional experiences with race, and the contrast between teaching at her former urban high school and Rainfield High School. To Kelly, it seemed like the more she learned about Ebony’s perspective, the more she realized what she didn’t know about the role of race in schools and people’s lived experiences. Ebony helped set Kelly on a path of lifelong learning about her own White privilege.

One of the ways that friends develop a relationship is through allowing themselves to be vulnerable at times. Tillmann-Healy claims that participants are vulnerable, “because of the power imbalance between researcher and participants” and that “field relationships always have the potential for colonization and exploitation.” (2003, p. 744). Because the content of the Wynema unit dealt with colonization and exploitation, and because we were working closely in a cross-cultural relationship with multiple personal and professional layers, these issues were never far from our minds. But researchers are vulnerable as well (Cotterill, 1992; Tillmann-Healy, 2003). After tensions among students exploded during what came to be called the “powder keg day,” Ebony considered leaving the research study. Because of the growing friendship and mentoring relationship between Ebony and Kelly, she agreed to continue. Kelly and Ebony then engaged in a shared intervention in the classroom—a privilege walk. Norms of colorblindness and colorblindness that were common in the school were challenged, and classroom interaction improved as a group of African American girls who were silently sitting in the back spoke up about their experiences and moved forward (Sassi & Thomas, 2008).

To sum up, the features of friendship salient to our projects were conversation, everyday involvement, compassion, giving, vulnerability hope, caring, and justice (Tillmann-Healy, 2003, p. 735). We have extended this model of friendship-as-method to include protection and mentoring. Like other feminist and critical teachers and researchers, we found that “‘just friends’ can become just friends, interpersonal and political allies who seek personal growth, meaningful relationships, and social justice” (Tillmann-Healy, 2003, p. 731). The research was the beginning of not only friendship, but for both of us, an orientation toward mentoring master practitioners into scholars.

Reciprocal Mentorship

As a critical researcher, the potential danger of exploitation was never far from Kelly’s mind. She asked herself, “What if my portrayal of Ebony perpetuated stereotypes of African American women?” Christman warns, “Findings may distort women’s experience; they may inadvertently perpetuate stereotypes; they may be used by others in ways that continue to subordinate women.” (1988). And just as there are risks for gender, so are there risks for race—perpetuating stereotypes and oppression. This was not an imagined fear. Ebony wrote:

I found that some professors and colleagues had the tendency to make assumptions about me—even when they were not trying to do so. One assumption that seemed to be prevalent was that if a person like me worked outside of the university during their induction year of the PhD program, they would not be as successful. I strongly disagreed with—and resented—the subtle pressure that I felt to drop my position at the high school—AND—my identity as a classroom teacher—before I was ready.

What Ebony points to is not only a racial assumption, but an epistemological difference between the academy and school culture. Ebony’s comment here is a piece of data, but it is also an example of how a research participant can shape how the researcher analyzes the data. It helped Kelly to see how Ebony’s work in the classroom impacted her budding identity as an academic.

Reciprocal mentorship is risky. Kelly tested the friendship between Ebony and herself very early in the project through a breach of confidentiality. Confidentiality is particularly difficult to maintain in qualitative research (Ellis, 2007; van den Hoonoord, 2003) and some of the conditions that make it difficult are the state of university offices—nonlocking cabinets, or, in my case, sharing an office with other graduate students. For example, Kelly was in her shared graduate office finishing grading Ebony’s students’ essays when another graduate student asked her what she was doing, and Kelly told her. The graduate student then began to challenge Kelly’s ethics: Should you really be grading papers for a research subject? Did the students know you were grading papers? Kelly became very alarmed about these questions, and went to talk with two committee members who had helped her through the process of writing
her prospectus and IRB. Kelly was sure they could give her some help with this ethical dilemma. However, when she brought that advice back to Ebony, Ebony was “extremely concerned.” Kelly then realized she had made a serious mistake—she had violated her subject’s confidentiality. She felt terrible about it, and made a phone call to Ebony with an attitude of contrition. Her sole aim was to apologize and listen carefully to Ebony’s concerns.

If Kelly had taken a more distant researcher stance in relation to Ebony, the risk would have been less. As it was, she had multiplied the enormity of her mistake because she had not only put Ebony at risk as a researcher participant, but she had also violated her trust as a friend. Furthermore, because Ebony was a student in the same program, Kelly had also risked Ebony’s reputation as a new graduate student (and her own as well). Kelly learned, as did Tom and Herbert, “how easy it is to unintentionally harm people we wish to learn from” (2002). Ebony graciously accepted Kelly’s apology, and the work continued, though it took us time to regain closeness. It was a useful lesson about the risks of reciprocal mentorship.

Another example of reciprocal mentorship took place when Kelly was ostensibly collaborating with Ebony to create a writing assignment for the ninth grade students, but Ebony directed the conversation to a comparison between her unit Ebony was teaching and Kelly was studying, we were negotiating the boundary between researcher and researched was an ongoing activity in this project. Our friendship evolved over the course of the study, and so did the points we navigated along the researcher/researched, mentor/protégé continua of the Mobius strip. For example, Kelly did not think of herself as a mentor at all at the beginning of the project, but slowly shifted into that role. In one of our “everyday conversations” about the Native American unit Ebony was teaching and Kelly was studying, we were talking about bringing in a Native American speaker and that talk shifted to talk about graduate school procedures:

\textbf{Ebony:} Now does any of your committee ever want to come in or visit? Or that’s not what a committee does?

\textbf{Kelly:} That committee doesn’t do that.

\textbf{Ebony:} Yeah. They let you do your research yourself.

\textbf{Kelly:} They’re not . . . I’m not going to meet with them until I have a draft of my dissertation.

\textbf{Ebony:} Wow.

\textbf{Kelly:} Yeah, isn’t that, isn’t that kind of scary? So I’m looking for a research group to write with.

\textbf{Ebony:} Oh, okay. Good.

\textbf{Kelly:} Because I need support.

\textbf{Ebony:} Are there research groups out there?

\textbf{Kelly:} There are. They’re informally constructed. And so I’m kind of=

\textbf{Ebony:} okay so just people with similar interests.

\textbf{Kelly:} =trying to find somebody for me to do that with.

This conversation shows how peer mentors ask each other the questions that they might not ask their professors. We were scared and nervous about the whole dissertation process—a phase we could have easily forgotten had we not been focusing on friendship and mentorship for this research project. We feel that we are better advisors to the graduate students (and novice researchers) we presently work with because we didn’t just brush over this phase. We also try to cultivate reciprocal mentorship opportunities among our graduate students.

In this excerpt, Ebony is teaching Kelly about her experiences working with two different groups of students. This conversation shaped Kelly’s thinking about how to teach Native American/American Indian literatures to students like the Rainfield students. Instead of focusing on content knowledge—as much of the literature suggests—Ebony believed in, and emphasized, the importance of focusing on teaching students how to critically engage with texts. This was a key moment that addressed Kelly’s research question about how to teach this literature. The reciprocal mentoring that led to this insight could happen because the friendship-as-method approach had been well established by this point. The above discussion led to specific choices in both pedagogy and research for both of us. We collaborated on a critical writing prompt for the Rainfield students, generated from our shared sense of social justice.

I think these kids have more knowledge, but the critical analysis, they haven’t had to develop, because, you know—aggregately, because there are individual kids I know that are going through a whole lot of things. Aggregately, the students don’t have to develop the same sort of critical sense that comes from . . . (a sense that) the inside of you and who you are deep down, your humanity, is not reflected in your social situation. There were so many things that I took for granted with my kids in Detroit. I had to build their knowledge base, but the critical tools, because they were already eager and interested in the material, were already developed.

Here, it’s the opposite. The kids have a lot of knowledge, and they think . . . they don’t think they need any more, because they already know everything there is to know. . . about Native American literature. But knowledge without the tools of critical analysis is a dangerous thing.

In this excerpt, Ebony is teaching Kelly about her experiences working with two different groups of students. This conversation shaped Kelly’s thinking about how to teach Native American/American Indian literatures to students like the Rainfield students. Instead of focusing on content knowledge—as much of the literature suggests—Ebony believed in, and emphasized, the importance of focusing on teaching students how to critically engage with texts. This was a key moment that addressed Kelly’s research question about how to teach this literature. The reciprocal mentoring that led to this insight could happen because the friendship-as-method approach had been well established by this point. The above discussion led to specific choices in both pedagogy and research for both of us. We collaborated on a critical writing prompt for the Rainfield students, generated from our shared sense of social justice.

Negotiating the boundary between researcher and researched was an ongoing activity in this project. Our friendship evolved over the course of the study, and so did the points we navigated along the researcher/researched, mentor/protégé continua of the Mobius strip. For example, Kelly did not think of herself as a mentor at all at the beginning of the project, but slowly shifted into that role. In one of our “everyday conversations” about the Native American unit Ebony was teaching and Kelly was studying, we were talking about bringing in a Native American speaker and that talk shifted to talk about graduate school procedures:

\textbf{Ebony:} Now does any of your committee ever want to come in or visit? Or that’s not what a committee does?

\textbf{Kelly:} That committee doesn’t do that.

\textbf{Ebony:} Yeah. They let you do your research yourself.

\textbf{Kelly:} They’re not . . . I’m not going to meet with them until I have a draft of my dissertation.

\textbf{Ebony:} Wow.

\textbf{Kelly:} Yeah, isn’t that, isn’t that kind of scary? So I’m looking for a research group to write with.

\textbf{Ebony:} Oh, okay. Good.

\textbf{Kelly:} Because I need support.

\textbf{Ebony:} Are there research groups out there?

\textbf{Kelly:} There are. They’re informally constructed. And so I’m kind of=

\textbf{Ebony:} okay so just people with similar interests.

\textbf{Kelly:} =trying to find somebody for me to do that with.

This conversation shows how peer mentors ask each other the questions that they might not ask their professors. We were scared and nervous about the whole dissertation process—a phase we could have easily forgotten had we not been focusing on friendship and mentorship for this research project. We feel that we are better advisors to the graduate students (and novice researchers) we presently work with because we didn’t just brush over this phase. We also try to cultivate reciprocal mentorship opportunities among our graduate students.
A Test of Friendship and Mentoring: The Powder Keg Day

A test of our friendship and mentoring interactions occurred after what became known as the “powder keg day,” the fourth day of the *Wynema* unit. Powder keg is an apt metaphor for what occurred because we both knew that dealing with race in the classroom was potentially explosive, and when things did explode, there was no buildup of tension, just a sudden explosion. From Kelly’s perspective, the sudden explosion was in the form of an e-mail from Ebony, an e-mail that left her stunned and fearful that her dissertation research was over. Kelly had been in Chicago for a conference and therefore was not in the classroom on the “powder keg day.” From Ebony’s perspective, the sudden explosion occurred as she interacted with her students as the students moved from an interactive preunit research project in the library to reading the text as a whole class.

Ebony was having students read the introduction to the novel. The match that ignited the powder keg was this line: “Although Samuel Callahan owned slaves, he opposed slavery.” What happened next was a “total gender breakdown.” In her e-mail message to Kelly, Ebony recounted that one student, Chuck said that it was possible to own slaves and oppose slavery at the same time. Two of the other White boys (Carl and Brandon) agreed with him. Allie, the White girl who was reading aloud at the time, according to Ebony, “looked absolutely horrified,” and the faces of the African American students in the class “fell.”

In a tactical attempt to turn Chuck’s face threat into a teachable moment, Ebony replaced Chuck’s words with another historical crisis so that he might understand the ethical fallacy inherent in his words. She told him and the class, “Although Joe Smith aided and abetted the Nazis, he opposed the Holocaust,” asking if that sounded any better. Chuck insisted that this was different because although the Holocaust was evil, slavery was only bad. Carl added that it was mainly economically motivated.

“It wasn’t deliberate?” Ebony asked.

“No,” they insisted.

Ebony then talked very briefly about slavery and the Holocaust, and the similarities between both as evidence of oppression and inhumanity. That’s when Brandon nastily interrupted her, saying, “What does this have to do with anything?”

Ebony read this classroom episode within the context of other racial issues as the school. “Rainfield High School is a total racial powder keg,” she wrote to Kelly. “Ironically enough, the staff had a huge, huge falling out” just prior to this incident. Ebony explained how a critical race theorist . . . told the White teachers that they were ALL engaging in racist classroom practices. Many of the White teachers were furious, and apparently the next day many brought up the race question in one way, shape, or form in their classrooms . . . No wonder three of the five White boys in the classroom at the time reacted with such hostility and anger to the beginning of the introduction.

Still upset over the day’s events, Ebony wrote, “I refuse to teach another lesson like that, and to be honest, if you weren’t researching me and a friend, I’m sure I would shift to another book. Put simply, although I have power and authority over my students as an African-American female teacher, the fact remains that Chuck, Brandon, and Carl’s remarks come from a place of White male privilege. I felt as if I had been oppressed and that the pain and suffering of my own ancestors had been slapped into my face by students I am supposed to be mentoring and teaching.”

There was a lot going on in Ebony’s message about the “powder keg day.” Both her message to Kelly, and the classroom conversation, referenced issues of friendship, pedagogy (including curriculum and classroom management), school context, and race. In the opening and closing of the message, Ebony observed conventions of friendship, expressing hope that Kelly’s trip to Chicago “went well,” understanding about Kelly’s unavailability to do as much planning as usual, saying “That’s quite all right.” In the closing, Ebony wished Kelly “all best.” She also referred to Kelly as a “friend” in the line about not wanting to continue teaching the novel.

The experience of her White male students minimizing the moral issue of slavery was painful for Ebony. Kelly perceived some, but not all of, the depth of Ebony’s suffering, sadness, and anger. Ebony’s initial reaction, to quit teaching the book, also speaks to how traumatic the “powder keg day” had been for her. Furthermore, she needed long talks with a graduate school colleague and a teacher friend, “to take the sting out of their remarks.” The hurt was still there when Ebony emailed Kelly. She asked “not to speak about this or be asked specific questions until Monday, because it took eight hours,” the “it” being the time to calm down after that class period. Ebony assessed the reading lesson as a “BAD way to begin a unit,” thus negatively evaluating (and implicitly critiquing) that aspect of the curriculum that Kelly had developed.

As a researcher and friend, Kelly had her own set of emotions in response to this message, especially the part detailed above. First and foremost, she felt horrible that Ebony had had such a bad experience, and guilt that she had encouraged Ebony to teach the text that sparked the incident. In addition, Kelly saw that it was quite possible she would need to find another research project for her dissertation on the teaching of Native American literatures if Ebony chose not to teach *Wynema* and switched to a non-Native work of literature. Kelly also felt challenged to think of a way to solve the problem of the conflict in class that Ebony
had laid out. Although she couldn’t talk with Ebony about it immediately, Kelly saw that Ebony had left several doors open to her. For example, Ebony ended the e-mail with “See you Monday,” so Kelly understood that it was possible to return. Second, Ebony used first person plural in this line: “If we are encountering this kind of resistance in the classroom before we begin the unit, [author], I think we must have the privilege walk and perhaps a mini-lesson on Peggy McIntosh’s article. . . . before we begin the book” (ll. pp. 63-65). This signaled to Kelly that Ebony viewed her not just someone researching the classroom, but as a potential instructional collaborator. With these entrees in mind, Kelly composed the following reply

Dear Ebony,

Thanks for your long message. I really appreciate you taking the time to tell me about your traumatic Friday. I am so sorry the “powder keg,” as you so aptly called it, exploded. Obviously, we need to talk, but I want to honor your request for time to reflect and renew. One thought I had is that we might ask the head of [a multicultural organization] to come in and lead the privilege exercise to take the pressure off us. What do you think? Let me know what you need—photocopies, coffee, solace, lesson-planning, anything. I’ll plan to be in 3rd period to videotape and from a research perspective, it may be useful to interview some of the kids informally about their perceptions of Friday’s discussion. I will wait to see what you think, though.

Also, ultimately, you are more important to me than this research project, so if at any point, you want to call it off, I respect your decision.

Kelly

It was difficult for Kelly to write the last line, but it was also deeply heartfelt. By this point, Kelly was immersed in the friendship-as-method with a “level of investment in participants’ lives that puts fieldwork relationships on par with the project” (Tillmann-Healy, 2003, p. 735). Furthermore, in following her critical pedagogy frame, Kelly certainly would not want Ebony to pursue teaching a book that resulted in her feeling oppressed. As a friend, Kelly wanted to protect Ebony from further pain. Although the anger that had erupted in Ebony’s classroom has been documented in the literature to sometimes occur when teachers take up Native American/American Indian literatures and would provide a relevant focal point for Kelly’s research, her theoretical and methodological approaches mandated that she not pressure Ebony to continue if she wanted to end the project.

This was the “tipping point” (Kram & Ragins, 2007) that signaled a mentoring episode. After consulting with the multicultural office, Kelly discussed some options with Ebony for the class. One of those was the privilege walk, an activity to raise awareness of White privilege and other kinds of oppression in society. Kelly provided professional mentoring for Ebony on resources available to them: the multicultural consultants could provide materials or even conduct the activity. Today, the privilege walk is a powerful part of both Kelly and Ebony’s repertoire as professors.

In the end, Ebony did continue with the unit and the research project. Perhaps the greatest justification for the friendship-as-method approach is revealed in a line from her e-mail message about the “powder keg day”—“if you weren’t researching me and a friend.” That is, without the support of friendship, taking on the difficult topics of race, slavery, and genocide may be overwhelming in an already tense high school classroom. Furthermore, although Ebony did not feel pressured to continue Kelly’s research project, she had already invested in it personally and professionally. She valued her friendship with Kelly, and ultimately did not blame Kelly for her White students’ hurtful words and actions, because she knew that Kelly did not feel the same way. She also had practical considerations that led to her decision to continue teaching the unit. Along with Kelly, she had already negotiated with the department chair to include this non-traditional novel on the booklet. She was also committed to multicultural education, critical pedagogy, and social justice, and was uninterested in discontinuing Wynema in favor of a “safer” work of fiction. Therefore, she had multiple reasons for seeing the project through.

Another Powder Keg Moment: From Researched Teacher to Researching Teachers

After the semester of the Wynema study with Kelly, Ebony chose to take a leave of absence from Rainfield High School, and entered her second year of their doctoral program as a full-time student. Ebony was intrigued by what she saw in Kelly’s classroom research about her interactions with students, and wanted to analyze her own classroom discourse after taking an initial doctoral seminar on language analysis in education. After conducting analyses of her classroom discourse during Kelly’s study in December 2006, Ebony concluded: “These are not easy issues to grapple with, especially when you are analyzing your own teacher talk. Yet as difficult as confronting myself as a practitioner was, I find . . . the experience valuable . . . This has considerable implications for my own emerging interest in teacher professional development. How do teacher dilemmas such as the ones I faced while implementing the research unit on (Native American) literature
affect student achievement of unit aims and acquisition of knowledge?"

Ebony continued to think deeply about the dilemmas that English teachers face, and how they surface in language by sharing the self-analysis of her teacher talk at several national education conferences and two teacher professional development meetings in the district. Soon, Ebony’s desire was to conduct dissertation research to find out if other teachers’ ability to identify conflicts during their classroom discussions would be enhanced by similarly learning discourse analysis. At the behest of her former department head, she presented her self-discourse analysis during a regularly scheduled English teachers’ meeting. After offering an invitation to convene a study group of teachers interested in learning discourse analysis methods during the second semester of the school year, seven teachers from the department expressed their interest.

Kelly had modeled for Ebony ways of researching teachers who were also friends, mentors, and protégés. Over the course of the second semester of the 2007-2008 school year, Ebony and her seven former colleagues built a community where it was generally safe to talk about issues and challenges in classroom talk and interaction. The teachers talked freely with Ebony, often privileging her past role as their teacher colleague over her then-present role as a doctoral candidate and novice researcher (Thomas, 2010). Yet because they were novices to discourse analysis, Ebony mentored them as well. Ebony, like Kelly, had come to value transparency, rhetorical listening, giving, and reciprocity in her research relationships.

Surprisingly (or not?), Ebony’s study ended up having a “powder keg” moment too. Halfway through the study group semester, the only African American male teacher in the discourse study group, Anthony Bell, clashed with his colleagues and a guest consultant about the ways he believed that marginalized students were being positioned in their discourse. To provide some context, participants in that day’s afterschool workshop included four late-career White teachers (department head Marilyn, as well as Ella, Jane, and Erin), and Anthony. A guest consultant had come in to talk about the value of teachers studying their classroom discourse. The consultant had just completed an action research project at an alternative high school, and was talking about ways to work with diverse students.

Anthony finally spoke after more than an hour of silently listening and following the talk in the group that afternoon. He admitted that he was “at a loss for words,” but the conversation was about the most important aspect of the profession for him—students like the ones he teaches. He asked the group, “Why couldn’t [alternative school students] learn? It seems as if they would be able to learn more easily than the other kids because they’ve had to go through so much in their lives.” When he spoke to the guest consultant and his colleagues, Anthony implored his colleagues that through teacher talk, they had to “make (students) see how it’s relevant to their life.” Yet in Anthony’s view, the consultant didn’t seem to hear his perspective. Angered, he fell silent.

After the workshop was over that day, Anthony asked to speak with Ebony privately. His first comment was “They study us like guinea pigs!” Referring to an insider-outsider perspective, Anthony invoked fictive kinship with Ebony as a fellow African American, overlooking the inconvenient fact that Ebony was the only researcher studying the teachers as they analyzed their classroom discourse. When Ebony nodded in agreement—for she knew what it was like to be studied from having participated in Kelly’s dissertation research—Anthony expressed concerns about White colleagues having a conversation with an outsider about deficiencies in the spoken and written discourse of students of color. Only by listening to Anthony vent his frustrations, appealing to their shared identities as African American critical pedagogues, and assuring him that his contribution was valued and essential did Ebony secure his continued participation in the group.

After that workshop and his cathartic talk with Ebony, Anthony seemed to realize that his perspective would have a place in future workshops, and remained a dedicated member of the discourse study group. He also gained agency and voice through presenting with Ebony at a national conference, and at the time of this writing is applying to doctoral programs, planning to become an education researcher in his own right.

As we have shown, this “passing of the mantle” between Kelly, Ebony, and Anthony was not unproblematic. The researcher/researched, mentor/mentored friendships were fraught with issues of race/ethnicity, gender, and class. Yet through engaging in rhetorical listening, these reciprocal mentorships that were (and are) oriented toward social justice and transforming teaching and learning were beneficial despite the risks for all involved, which will be discussed below.

**Mitigating the Risks of Friendship and Mentorship as Method**

Given the potential benefits of friendship and mentorship as method—access to different kinds of data, a deeper level of understanding of participants in the study, collaboration in social justice, personal and professional growth—it is worth considering ways to mitigate the potential risks. Neal and Gordon recommend the “reflexive and continuous articulation of the ethical dilemmas” (2001, p. 99). Similarly, Ellis suggests “reflecting critically on ethical practices at every step” (2007, p. 23). Listening is key to this negotiation. It is through a very specific kind of listening, that “we can begin to reimagine ourselves, our pedagogies, our scholarship, our discipline in relation to a long and sordid history of American imperialism” (Powell, 2002, p. 9).
428). Although Powell is describing listening to Native American texts, we believe that this same kind of listening can be applied to the analysis of discourse in classrooms where these texts are being taught.

For example, when Kelly listened deeply and with a stance of openness to the message in Ebony’s e-mail: “If you weren’t researching me and a friend, I’m sure I would shift to another book,” Kelly heard how important it was to be positioned as Ebony’s friend. This led her to consider friendship as a category in her coding of data, which led to the discovery of multiple references to friendship in the classroom data and interviews, which led to the revision of Kelly’s research questions, further analysis of the discourse data, and so on. That is, friendship became more than a method for interviewing and interacting at the field site. Friendship became not just a prominent category in the coding of data, but a factor for analytic decisions. For example, out of caring for Ebony and a recognition of her limited view as a White researcher, Kelly chose to make her coding, memos, drafts, and diagrams—indeed, every piece of writing related to the research project—available to Ebony through a password-protected document sharing site. Kelly thought that open access to her process would involve Ebony, but was this approach too passive? Should she have organized sessions to work through the data together as some qualitative researchers do when working collaboratively with participants (Tillmann, 2008, 2009)?

For Ebony, her experiences as Kelly’s research participant, mentee, and friend helped her understand the multiple and competing allegiances in her post-powder keg conversation with Anthony. Although Anthony and Ebony were both African American, and Ebony was highly sympathetic to Anthony’s feelings of racial marginalization, Ebony had a vested interest in Anthony remaining in the research project as a participant. Although she understood that Anthony had been offended by the guest consultant, his discourse and interaction as one of the few African American male teachers at Rainfield were emerging as the richest data from the dissertation. So when Anthony shared with her that he wanted to become a researcher himself, Ebony enthusiastically began mentoring him by talking about the ways in which learning to study his own teacher discourse would be a first step in that direction. She then shared with him the need for more African American researchers to study education, and encouraged him when he expressed interest in becoming a researcher himself. However, Ebony wondered later if she truly viewed Anthony as an equal partner before the incident, or had she become one of those “studiing us like guinea pigs?” Had she invoked fictive kinship (Harris-Perry, 2011)—the sense that in the United States, African Americans have shared stakes and a shared fate—because she entered the study with the intent to mentor teachers into becoming researchers of their own practice, or was the real story more complex? From this experience, Ebony learned to be more reflexive about her power, positioning, and the personal dilemmas she would face as a Black woman researcher.

Research reporting was influenced by the friendship and mentorship methodology as well. When Ebony and Kelly collaborated on an article for a practitioner audience, they worked together more closely and felt their way together into a way of writing collaboratively. Kelly said, “I don’t know how you want to collaborate, whether we write separate sections and then go through the process of revising them. That’s kind of what I did for our book [a project with her advisor] and what happens as you go through rounds of revision is the voice of separate sections begins to sound like one voice, you know, as people revise each others’ work. Another possibility, and this is what I’ve done with the Canadian researcher is to sit down and collaborate, like draft together, so you talk and write simultaneously and produce. This takes longer, but I think then both people equally have a chance to shape where it goes.” In the end we created a hybrid model of collaboration for that particular piece, in which we composed the introduction and conclusion together word-for-word and face-to-face, and then separately drafted sections of the body, coming back together for revisions. Through our conversations, we challenged each others’ thinking and interpretation of the data.

Qualitative research involves specific kinds of communication, including interviews, gaining consent and/or assent, negotiating changes to data collection as analysis evolves, to name a few. In order for this communication to be most effective, listening to participants, especially in cross-cultural contexts, is important. A White researcher needs to be aware that listening is raced. As Nikki Giovanni asserts, “listening is not as necessary in U.S. culture for White people as it is for nonWhites” (as cited in Ratcliffe, 2005, p. 21). White researchers, when researching across cultures, have to acknowledge that this trait is a part of their White privilege and can have a negative impact on their research. Rhetorical listening (Ratcliffe, 2005) potentially offers ways to compensate for this shortcoming. It involves the following:

1. Promoting and understanding of self and other;
2. Proceeding within an accountability logic;
3. Locating identifications across commonalities and differences;
4. Analyzing claims as well as the cultural logics within which these claims function. (p. 26)

Intentionally planning for methods to be informed by friendship and mentorship means deliberate attention to this first move. The second move, a logic of accountability, is also relevant to our methodology because it “invites us to consider how all of us are, at present, culturally implicated in effects of the past (via our resulting privileges and/or
their lack) and, thus, accountable for what we do about situations now, even if we are not responsible for their origins” (Ratcliffe, 2005, p. 32). At a moment of peak tension during the Wynema research project, Ebony found it essential for her students to examine their privilege. Doing so resulted in productive study of Wynema as we reported in a previous article in English Journal: “What happened . . . offers a counter narrative to colormuteness and colorblindness that merely perpetuate societal inequities . . . In this ninth grade class, the African American girls who were silently sitting in the back spoke up and moved forward, essentially desegregating this classroom. We felt this was healing and transformative for us and these students. When students learn to talk in a desegregated classroom, there is potential for them to desegregate their schools, their communities, and we hope, eventually our country” (Sassi & Thomas, 2008). The change in the atmosphere of the class after the privilege walk was palpable to both of us and supported by a comparison of surveys of the students after the “powder keg day” and after the privilege walk day, as well as by one-on-one follow-up interviews with the students. Ebony said to Kelly repeatedly with a great deal of emotion, “You healed my class.” Initially, Kelly felt this was an overstatement, but that was because she did not understand the degree of racial tension in the class and how heavily that had been weighing on Ebony all year. It was only after learning about rhetorical listening later in the project and practicing it was she finally able to “hear” something of the depth of Ebony’s pain.

Both research projects and friendships/mentorships are alive and dynamic; they are ongoing and continually changing and transforming. As the paths of friendship and mentorship continue, so does our collective work. We continue to have conversations, listen rhetorically, and share writing about the project that helps us to see the work from new perspectives. Ebony’s writing about this project is a manifestation of “catalytic validity,” a measure of how research can empower us to understand the world and the way it is shaped (Lather, 1991). Ebony’s agency in taking up this data to do her own academic work and delve further into issues of race in schools also has come to represent, for Kelly, a measure of the Wynema project’s ultimate success. Ebony and Anthony are in the process of similarly writing up research together, as he moves into his own research agenda independently as a scholar. Anthony continues to mentor not only the students whom others write off, but has begun to mentor other teachers toward self-study of their own teaching practices. Friendship and mentorship, at least for us, has had a ripple effect within the communities where we research, teach, and learn.

**Conclusion**

To summarize, the particular qualities of friendship that have been theorized in the literature are the following: conversation, everyday involvement, compassion, giving, vulnerability, hope and justice. To these qualities, we have added protection and reciprocal mentoring, which were a part of the friendship that developed through this research project. However, when mentorship is part of the research relationship, there are possibilities for continuing the relationship—and the benefits to the research—beyond the data collection stage. Our contribution to the literature on friendship-as-method is that when friendship evolves into mentorship, the benefits to the research can extend into data analysis, publication, and further research collaborations. That is, just as feminist researchers have argued that taking a stance of friendship as a methodological choice can result in richer data collection, we contend that taking a stance of reciprocal mentorship can result in richer data analysis and even deeper validity as the mentor is held accountable for research decisions when those processes are made transparent to the research subject/mentored. Furthermore, future researchers who have been mentored into the profession through participation in their mentor’s research project may be better able to cope with the challenges of their own research later. Ebony may have been better able to listen, understand, and respond to Anthony’s concerns because she had inhabited that role in Kelly’s research project. Her openness about her methodology as a researcher may have encouraged Anthony to pursue future studies in education research.

Ways to mitigate risks of friendship and mentorship include consideration of identities, contexts, and expectations about how the research project will change or end. Rhetorical listening, practiced with reflexivity, offers useful strategies for negotiating the complexity of engaging in friendship that includes mentorship, or mentorship that includes friendship, depending where on the Mobius strip one begins tracing the trajectory of these powerful methodological choices. In both studies discussed here, it is unlikely the research could have been completed without taking a stance of friendship and mentorship.

More research is needed into the role of mentorship as research methodology, but based on our two interlinked studies, some themes emerge. Mentorship as research method is based on reciprocity; an acknowledgement that both members of the dyad can benefit and both are always already skilled in teaching and learning. Attention to differences in identity and status between members is necessary in research mentorships, especially those with a social justice component. When the mentor practices transparency, modeling, rhetorical listening, and authenticity to build trust, there may be a greater potential for overcoming classroom conflicts that arise when practicing culturally responsive pedagogy. Benefits of this methodological approach transcend classroom experiences, however. The research itself can benefit by fostering agency in “research subjects,” which lends richness to the data that emerges in this social context and validity to the process of data analysis. Furthermore,
mentorship as methodology socializes peers into the conventions of qualitative research, which strengthens our profession.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests
The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding
The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: Kelly Sassi thanks the University of Michigan Rackham School of Graduate Studies for the 2006 Dissertation Fellowship that supported her research. Ebony also thanks Rackham for the 2008 Graduate Studies for the 2006 Dissertation Fellowship that supported her research. Precandidate Research Grant that supported her research.

Notes
1. According to Lee Francis (Laguna Pueblo) in Native Time: A Historical Timeline of Native America (1996), “The General Allotment Act, often referred to as the Dawes Severalty Act, is passed by the United States Congress [in 1887]. This legislation enables the non-Native government of the United States of America to divide Native People’s lands into 160-acre parcels which are assigned to individual members of sovereign nations and tribes . . . “ (p. 256), and in 1928 the Merriam Report is released “unequivocally documenting abuses in the Bureau of Indian Affairs and citing the General Allotment Act as the major cause of starvation and poverty among the People of the sovereign Native nations and tribes” (p. 274).
2. The Wounded Knee Massacre occurred on December 29, 1890 at Wounded Knee Creek in South Dakota, when the “population of the sovereign Native nations and tribes reaches its lowest point to date, fewer than 250,000 . . . in less that ten minutes more than three hundred old men, women and children are massacred by U.S. army troops of the Seventh Cavalry under the command of General George Alexander Forsyth” (Francis, 1996, p. 258).
3. A privilege walk is a consciousness-raising activity in which “space is used to visually represent the racial, gender, sexual, and socioeconomic differences among the students in the class. The objective of the privilege walk is to help students understand the nature of privilege” (Sassi & Thomas, 2008, p. 26).
4. For a description of this event from a more practitioner-oriented perspective, see Sassi & Thomas (2008).
5. The McIntosh article referred to, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” is a classic text in anti-racist education that raises consciousness about White privilege.
6. Rhetorical listening, as a “code of cross-cultural conduct” (Ratcliff, 2005, p. 25), is useful for research situations in which participants develop and maintain a friendship through the challenges of trust, vulnerability, breaches of confidentiality, and racial tension in the classroom.
7. Fictive kinship, first described by anthropologists observing Black extended family networks and non-relational ties, is further explained by Harris-Perry: “The term fictive kinship refers to connections between members of a group who are unrelated by blood or marriage, but who nonetheless share reciprocal social or economic relationships . . . This imagined community of familial ties underscores a voluntary sense of shared identity . . . Fictive kinship makes the accomplishments of African Americans relevant to unrelated black individuals” (2011, p. 102).

References


**Bios**

**Kelly Sassi**, PhD, is an assistant professor of English and education at North Dakota State University. Her research interests include pedagogical approaches to Native American/American Indian literatures, multicultural field experiences for teacher educators, and composition research.

**Ebony Elizabeth Thomas**, PhD, is an assistant professor of education at the University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate School of Education. Her research interests include discourse analysis, English language arts classroom interaction, and adolescent literatures and literacies.