

Concept Paper

Notes from the Field of the Scholar–Practitioner: Inhabiting the Liminal Space between Research and Practice—A Reflective Account of Holding Dual Identities

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Abstract: Kirsten and Kate are scholar–practitioners studying the people with whom they interact and operate. In this empirical paper, based on their auto/ethnographic reflections, they study some often-neglected circumstances and by-products of scholar–practitioner research. They review aspects of entering research situations with which they are connected, participating in them, leaving them behind, and revisiting them. Kirsten is an ethnographer, both working with and studying intentional communities. Kate is a qualitative researcher who operates auto/ethnographically in studying Triple X unintentional communities. This article arises from discussions of Kirsten’s and Kate’s field notes, which have led them to compare and relate their convergent experiences with one another. Kirsten and Kate focus on the physical culture of the environments in which they study. Some traditional boundaries like the isolation of researchers and communities are eroding. Kirsten and Kate care about those they study and continue to hold some responsibility for the lives of people they have entered. They attempt to narrow the space between theory and practice in recognising their interconnected nature. Civic mission is gaining increased currency for researchers and may form a signpost towards the future of research.

Keywords: scholar–practitioner; physical culture; theory–practice; identity; reflexivity; enlightened critical practice; auto/ethnography; civic mission



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1. Introduction

In this paper Kirsten and Kate reflect on their shared experiences of accessing, organising, and doing qualitative research in settings where they hold personal knowledge and experience. Researchers are rarely divorced from their research topic, and according to Hamdon [1] the idea of complete neutrality is a naive one that does not acknowledge the researcher’s relationship to their own worlds. Kirsten and Kate suggest then, that a common starting point for those who undertake research is generated from a personal interest or involvement in their topic that is informed by their own lived experiences and histories. Indeed, it is suggested by Hill and Dao [2] that one’s subjectivity is something that is present throughout the research process.

Through a series of shared reflections Kirsten and Kate seek to unpick the complexity of this type of “scholar–practitioner” relationship and how this might influence how they see and understand the communities in which they study. Through Kirsten’s and Kate’s writing they invite a new level of self-scrutiny on the peripheral aspects that occur, that are not perceived to be the main focus of the research, and so are usually dismissed or only observed as interesting side issues. In this paper Kirsten and Kate assess their actions, reactions, and learning curves, whilst acknowledging the building of community connections that one needs so as to progress to formally collecting data. Issues of personal anxiety and mindful processes, trust, responsibility, agency, and inadvertent power, and the social–scientist-related role of reflecting people’s worlds back to them, are considered and scrutinised. Reed-

Danahay [3] challenges the notion of a single coherent self and expands the parameters of autoethnographic writing through a recognition of the interconnectedness between personal experience (autobiography) and the broader socio-cultural context (ethnography); this informs Kirsten's and Kate's "auto/ethnography".

The purpose of this paper is to provide a discursive analysis for considering researchers' stances, subjectivity, and reflexivity through a series of phases in the research process, namely: *getting in, being in, getting out, and going back*. Reflecting upon a couple of research projects, Kirsten and Kate discuss their choices to research the communities and individuals that have meaning to them and hold personal as well as academic resonance. Kirsten has conducted ethnographic research into intentional communities and has spent time living and working alongside community members. Kate has conducted contrasting yet interconnecting research into an unintentional community of individuals who do not know each other, but who share a genetic difference or family relationship with someone living with such a difference. This paper presents a unique combination of significant themes explored in interconnected but distinctive manners comprising diverse approaches of two auto/ethnographic researchers.

2. The Scholar–Practitioner

Tenkasi and Hay [4] (p. 49) define the scholar–practitioner relationship as “actors who have one foot each in the worlds of academia and practice” and suggest that this dual identity enables gains in both areas of practice and theory. Similarly, Schein portrays the scholar–practitioner as “someone who is dedicated to generating new knowledge that is useful to practitioners” [5] (p. 19).

As a classificatory term, the “scholar–practitioner” becomes slippery under close examination and appears to share many of the characteristics of the “insider–outsider” phenomenon. One of these characteristics is that of liminality (neither fully in nor out). This dynamic has been depicted by Gair [6] as the researcher who has a pre-existing relationship to the community they are researching. Kirsten and Kate suggest that the scholar–practitioner holds a characteristic positionality in that they straddle the insider–outsider identity in a way that is particular to an individual who is simultaneously not permanently embedded in the community, but who is accepted as someone who holds a dual identity. Equally, there is a sense of the “betwixt and between”, as originally depicted for anthropological contexts by Turner [7], such that, to apply this to modern scholarship, the researcher is neither in one state nor another, but inhabiting the borderlands between two states of being. Humphrey [8] locates this liminal space between the “researcher” and the “practitioner” as a bridge between two worlds. As such, it places responsibility upon the researcher to both attend to their academic responsibilities *and* consider their position as an insider practitioner [2]. Kirsten and Kate consider themselves to embody dual identities which both enhance and complicate their research. This paper provides an alternative perspective from which to assess the scholar's civic mission practice and research.

3. Authors' Backgrounds

In order to provide context to Kirsten's and Kate's reflective accounts they have included brief summaries of their own biographies that have led to their research interests. These auto/ethnographic accounts assist in locating the connections between their lived experiences and subsequent choices of research topics. According to Atkinson and Morriss [9], the use of auto/ethnographic accounts assists in creating a contextualised narrative within which researchers can examine and expose their distinctive stances. Kirsten and Kate have found that although their research fields are quite different, they share some of the methodological approaches, experiences, and feelings of holding scholar–practitioner status as well as the embodied elements of gender and social status, and being women located in higher education.

Kirsten came to academia late having previously worked in community and youth development. As a young practitioner working for the City Farms movement, Kirsten

encountered ideas such as veganism, communal growing, and socialist ideologies; this began an enduring interest in grass roots collective action and countercultural movements. As a young adult, she spent multiple summers living and volunteering with alternative and off-grid communities in both the UK and abroad. This developed a lifelong love of gardening and an interest in permaculture and alternative lifestyles. In 2002 Kirsten purchased a small woodland with her partner with the initial intention of building her own low-impact, off-grid home. This precipitated an intense period of collective engagement exploring the (at the time) battles to be had with planning departments and the sheer difficulty of creating an off-grid low-impact home. This marked a period of networking with those who had chosen to take on “the planning fight”, for example, with an off-grid community in North Somerset known as Tinkers Bubble and associated campaign group who wrote “*The Land Is Ours*” (1999–present). This group of activists provided articles and (often legal) advice to those looking to live on the land. These experiences shaped her personal, cultural, and political perspectives which in turn influenced her chosen research area once she became an academic in higher education. Since 2014 Kirsten has actively researched Intentional Communities, including off-grid and low impact communities; that is, groups of unrelated people who choose to share property and often land together. This research area is rich with examples of countercultural ideas (see [10]) and groups of people experimenting with alternative ways of living.

Kate also came to academia late, having worked in a professional capacity with organisations and individuals to solve their own problems. She also held voluntary roles working with asylum seekers, and with people with disabilities. Her upbringing as a Quaker gave her a social concern which drove her in this direction. Kate’s doctoral study was on cultural Deaf people who sign British Sign Language, and their social businesses and inclusive (or lack of) citizenship.

Halfway through Kate’s Ph.D she became pregnant with a baby with Triple X (Karyotype 47, XXX), a genetic chromosomal difference that is almost unheard of in the non-medical world, but arguably one also only “known” by medical scientists in laboratory terms. Triple X refers to a genetic condition of girls and women involving specific medical traits, some physical differences, and a susceptibility to learning difficulties and various mental health issues. There was no written lay information on Triple X, yet Kate’s university had a medical school and therefore she had unique and full access to medical journal articles. But these medical articles were narrowly focused, somewhat dehumanising, and focused on failure (see [11–13]).

Kate wanted to highlight the presence of Triple X and validate these people’s existence as well as understand the issues they faced, and their potential means of overcoming obstacles. She followed their educational encounters alongside their general life experiences as part of her research (see [14]). Having been an operational practitioner relating to inclusive citizenship in several ways, Kate has become a scholar–practitioner in a way that could be characterised as interested (as a parent and practitioner) yet impartial (as a researcher) in connection with the Triple X position and these people’s sense of citizenship [15,16].

4. Methodological Approaches

Feminism research methodologies are well suited for Kirsten’s and Kate’s role identities and interactions in the field (see [17]); this approach and its effect is explored throughout this paper. Reyes [18] asserts that as qualitative scholars we must interrogate our social positions at multiple levels, and so consider the identities we hold, our social networks, and our histories. As such, research projects that enable the creation and often maintenance of enduring participant–researcher relationships, call for reflection and reflexivity. In this paper there is a particular examination of the way that Kirsten and Kate as researchers operate their multiple identities in the field.

From the start of her academic career, Kirsten identified the field of intentional communities as an area of research that intersected with her professional background, her personal interests and civic missions, and with her academic studies. Kirsten is particularly

interested in the collective and individual experiences of those who choose to live an alternative lifestyle in a communal setting (see [19]). As a research field, this intersects and overlaps with other themes such as environmentalism, degrowth and utopianism, often with the underpinning philosophy of creating better ways of living. Several intentional community scholars have either lived in or spent significant time in one or more intentional communities (examples include Bill Metcalf, Graham Meltzer, Peter Kirby), and this opens the debate around not only insider–outsider positionality, but also of researching those who may share social, economic, or less obvious forms of habitus with the researcher (see [20]). As a qualitative researcher and ethnographer, Kirsten identifies an alignment between her research subject and her chosen methodologies.

For Kate, the core purpose of her research was to create a body of knowledge that evolved from small-scale qualitative primary scholarship that required her interactions with and observations of the data of the lived experiences of girls and women with Triple X. Like Kirsten, the Triple X research choice has similarly complemented Kate's civic missions and academic work interests of exploring participants' constructed social position, understanding how they facilitate and foster their independence, and how they secure their quality of life. In this pursuit Kate uses sociological and educational theoretical perspectives (see examples of [21–23]). This sits within the standard practice of engaged scholars working in applied fields. Kate's position is of an insider as a parent of a daughter with Triple X herself, but as an outsider in relation to the experiences of others who remain unconnected to each other [24]. The two researchers' roles and responsibilities with regard to their position, their awareness of their own subjectivity, and their duties of reflexivity can be seen to interconnect with and form the backbone of qualitative research.

This paper will analyse the above themes and issues through the focus of four stages of the research process, namely getting in, being in, getting out, and going back. Each researcher's experience of these stages is studied through their own auto/ethnographic lenses.

5. Getting In

Access to the field is not always an easy undertaking especially if the research area is considered to be sensitive or private. Hammersley and Atkinson [25] depict the process of getting in as a layered procedure of gradual access mired in nuances and micro-relations. Equally Gobo [26] (p. 129) describes gaining access as "the most difficult phase in the entire process". For the scholar–practitioner, this is not necessarily the case as it is common for them to already have an (imaginary) foot in the (also imaginary) door. However, as this paper examines, the scholar–practitioner's familiarity with the research setting can be complex and at times problematic.

By the time Kirsten had become an academic, these "countercultural" worlds had become a comfortable place for her and an obvious focus for her research. This made "getting in" both easier and more complex: easier because these were familiar spaces, Kirsten was a known person, who shared some characteristics with community members; more complex due to the necessity to "re-set" her relationship with these communities. Kirsten's first piece of academic research exploring Intentional Communities was a discourse analysis based on three main online databases where communities could post that they were either *establishing* or *established*. In many ways this was not a true entry to the field, as her "participants" were not aware of her presence in their worlds. However in the course of engaging in the research she also applied for ethical approval to carry out a number of interviews with founder members (people who had either set up communities, or were present at their inception), and subsequently presented her initial research at an event focused on communal living. Kirsten was fairly rapidly being invited to interview people who had heard through related networks that she was interviewing founder members.

That summer Kirsten ran the first of what is now a bi-yearly intentional communities symposium integrating presentations from academics and community residents themselves. It was during this period that she became aware of the divide between academic research (often inaccessible and behind paywalls) and the community of practice (people living

in communities). Making formal applications to research places that she had previously entered as an (albeit transient) member created a mental shift in her relationship with the various members of such intentional communities, and equally them with her. The process of making an ethics application and presenting herself under her researcher identity repositioned Kirsten's relationship in ways she had not previously considered. The integral nature of participant consent meant that she needed to not only announce her presence as a researcher, but also provide an overview of her research aims as well as navigate the consent process of reminding people that she was a researcher (as opposed to a visitor) [27]. According to Anderson [28] researching the familiar can place additional demands on the researcher to be attentive to factors such as power imbalances and shifting identities. In entering the field, rather than build trust, there was an onus on her to remind her participants of the change in footing of their relationship, and thus to employ process consent. However in many ways the *getting in* stage was the most straightforward with the complexities arising later in the research journey.

Kate had mixed success in *getting in* to the communities of research. She had no way to find participants other than to advertise for people to contact her proactively to choose to take part. Kate wanted to make it clear that she was an academic "professional" so as to imply "trustworthiness", but that she also had a similar experience of being a parent of a daughter with Triple X, thus suggesting some sense of shared operational and ground-level understanding. In the event, Kate received a greater response than was expected, just as Kirsten did, and was surprised to find that additional, unexpected kinds of potential participants offered to be interviewed.

Whilst Kate hoped for as much diversity as possible to represent all types of people within British society, perhaps inevitably more middle class, able-bodied, straight, white women responded. However there was some representation of minority ethnicity, working-class families, and fathers. In fact, there was wide-ranging geographical spread, and diverse age representation among both parents and daughters, and most importantly, apparent diversity in character and experience among Triple X child daughters and adult women. In Kate's research papers she noted both her ambitions of securing comprehensive diversity of social characteristics and the partial fulfilment of these ambitions in the eventual outcomes. Thirty-two people became participants altogether, and Kate much regretted rejecting for practical and financial reasons some applications from geographical distances including those from the Republic of Ireland.

Participants reported feeling exhilarated at being able to assist proactively with widening societal recognition of Triple X, as well as being individually heard and having the chance to reflect on their life experiences. Kate's role was thereby one of multiple responsibilities. She was extremely careful to articulate the academic requirement of her transitory involvement in their lives, and to indicate her intentions for journal publications (which at the time could not of course be guaranteed) (see [17,29]).

Participants might assume that Kate's academic position allows her to underhandedly "take" their data [30]; Kate has sympathy for this possible concern. One day, she hopes that a Triple X woman herself will do research in this field (see [31]). However participants might equally assume that Kate has applied her personal knowledge of her own daughter to others' positions. She has worked hard to demonstrate to participants that neither of these assumptions is the case. In fact, Kirsten's and Kate's positions have been one of genuine curiosity and related inquiry.

From the moment of getting in Kate considered how her research could be "intersubjective". This involves co-producing data with participants, *and* looking for challenge and contrast, and testing the data rigorously so that they become empirical [22]. Westoby et al. [32] (p. 2216), hold the same position; in their research the authors were "in the process" yet also "on the rim". Biesta [22] (p. 129) considers how a "transactional theory of knowledge" can correspond with intersubjective research. An example is where unconventional research and corresponding outcomes can newly inform practice-applicable

knowledge, enabling practitioners to understand a contrasting, alternative perspective of “*what is going on, and what causes (such underlying phenomena)*” [15] (p. 8).

Kirsten and Kate were conscious of the adverse impact they could each produce in conducting research with participants from communities in which each had a presence on the ground. Sometimes Kirsten and Kate had existing relationships or else overlapping experiences within the field, but now they were repositioning their role to academic researcher; that came with tight ethical boundaries and a single-purpose, time-limited task. Both Kirsten and Kate experienced potential participants identifying their research as a form of recognition and validation. Through taking a feminist stance and choosing to make themselves available, even at the inception of the research process, Kirsten and Kate allowed their participants to influence and shape (to some degree) the research parameters (see [33]). In the case of Kirsten this meant a shift in focus from researching founder members to studying the pitfalls of ageing in community. For Kate access to the views and experiences of the unexpected respondents (who were themselves Triple X women rather than parents of Triple X children) modified the research process in that the life experiences of Triple X adults could be directly studied, and her research was enriched by the insights of those most directly concerned.

For many participants, enthusiasm was expressed, and even relief at Kirsten’s and Kate’s presence, in validating their little-known worlds. Kirsten and Kate had to express the possibility of the research project being futile if they did not secure publications. In the event that their work was successfully published, another concern was how they could compose their texts so as to ensure valid and fair representation, and “*transactional knowledge*” for others and for themselves.

6. Being In

Flick [34] discusses the process of first impressions and how as time and experience progress, the ethnographer will construct a layered understanding of the field and its inhabitants. As a researcher with existing connections, Kirsten brought a level of familiarity with her that allowed her deep access from an early stage. For example, she was invited to community meetings and allowed to read minutes of historical meetings, and she was added to work rotas and was trusted with jobs that were normally reserved for internal members only. This would appear to be an advantageous position; however it also came with its risks and responsibilities. The experience of Kirsten was that of being inadvertently absorbed into the research community with the risk that participants would disclose personal information whilst forgetting her status as a researcher. Kate underwent a parallel experience, with respondents disclosing information as if to a fellow parent or advocate, rather than to a researcher (see [29]).

The early stages of ethnography are considered important in that they enable the researcher to enter the field with a (real or created) level of naivety [35]. This in turn allows for questions that may not be considered acceptable later in the research process (for example asking how tasks or finances are distributed). Familiarity may not necessarily be helpful and there is invariably a risk that feelings of comfort (or lack of discomfort) will somehow blunt one’s ability to be analytical in their approach. As Sanson [36] (p. 2) suggests, there is a sense of “*permanent tension between proximity and distance*” within ethnography, that needs to be attended to throughout the data collection period. Equally, inhabiting that liminal space between scholar and practitioner may throw up feelings of being neither one nor the other as in Turner’s “*betwixt and between*” [7], although for such modern contexts Turner would prefer to speak of such space being “*liminoid*” rather than “*liminal*”.

Berbary [37] articulates her sense of “*ethical stress*” when writing about her participants and their lives. Like Berbary, Kirsten continuously wrestles with the tension between creating an authentic representation of the lives of the communities she writes about and the risk of somehow exposing them or making them vulnerable. Unlike historical ethnographic research where the researcher was somehow absent from the field, Kirsten and

other contemporary researchers form relationships of reciprocity, trust, and even friendships. In her discussion of friendships made whilst in the field, Ponocná [38] judges this phenomenon as unproblematic when considered through a feminist framework where participants are invited into the researcher's world. Indeed, there are multiple accounts within ethnography where such a boundary between scholar and practitioner both overlaps and merges (see [39,40]). Over the years, Kirsten has attended weddings and even funerals of community members as well as hosting individuals in her own home.

Sarah Delamont, eminent ethnographer, writes of her decades-long relationship with the martial art Capoeira, and documents her "two handed" ethnographic approach of co-writing with "Trova", a capoeira practitioner [41]. Whilst holding the role of scholar herself, Delamont acknowledges that Trova brings the physicality of the practice of Capoeira to their writing that she would inevitably miss as a non-practitioner. Indeed, the scholar-practitioner role itself does not necessarily lead to an open pass. Kirsten has experienced being excluded due to her researcher status, regardless of her other "hats". During one research visit, the community was dealing with a particularly sensitive and difficult issue to be discussed at the weekly meeting she was usually invited to attend. On this occasion, she arrived with her notebook to be gently told that it was "community members only" for this one. Another time, she became aware that friendliness was not necessarily friendship, and that research participants, particularly in an enduring group setting (as her research often is) may be wary of being seen as the "informant" when spending social time with the researcher.

Kirsten has experienced loneliness as an ethnographic researcher in times when the worlds of her participants are happening around her, whilst her own life is strangely on hold, and when community members fall into shared habits and shared jokes (that she is not a part of), or when conversations dry up as she approaches. These experiences are not common, but they act as a reminder of Kirsten's hybrid (but incomplete) status, or what Turner would in different contexts describe as a state of liminality [7]. Her researcher identity was never fully absent, and accordingly she had to accept her own vulnerability within the research relationship. McMaster [42] documents the feelings of what he expresses as the "loneliness of the long-distance ethnographer", in participating in the lives of others but also being mindful that one's presence is conditional. Arguably another layer is present within the relational ethics of the scholar-practitioner relationship (relational ethics concerns matters such as confidentiality, advice, and support) where an expectation rests with the researcher to be emotionally controlled and mindful of their participants.

In her research with Intentional Communities it is not unusual to meet participants who hold both lay and academic knowledge, and therefore Kirsten expects and welcomes some level of challenge that may not be present in the usual researcher-participant relationship. This dynamic is of interest to her, as it has the potential to disrupt power relations in the research paradigm, in that her participants are also experts.

Characteristically in feminist research [17] it is realistic and indeed opportune to allow interviewees to present interconnectedly their own subjectivities as well as have a more distanced, evaluative understanding of their experiences and encounters. In interviews Kate also consciously understood her research as feminist, and encouraged participants to *both* present their own perspectives and experiences, *and* to interpret these, so that they came to understand themselves as occupying the role of participant partner. Participants were empowered to question and understand their positions from the outside through Kate introducing sociological and educational theories to test against their notions. In order to facilitate collaborative working with participants, this required in-depth "ethnographic knowledge" on the part of the researcher [9]. This process connected traditionally separate aspects of theory and practice closer together. Subsequently, the process also enlightened Kate's critical practice in improving her knowledge and conduct as a practitioner with relation to the real-world experiences of individuals, and additionally with respect to the various "professional" responses that these participants might contend with (see below).

Kate's academic research produced practice-applicable knowledge "providing (tangible practice) recommendations based on rigorous research" [15] (p. 68).

Yet with some participants, Kate felt personally upset by listening to their encounters that they narrated. She had naively assumed that she was desensitised to such feelings, having known about Triple X for 10 years, having read all available Triple X literature, and having taken several years to plan her first research project. Kate's discomfiture was particularly the case when one participant's daughter was slightly older than hers, and the participant's recounted story was harrowing. The daughter had quite significant long-term medical issues that caused them distress, and the pressures of this were impacting on the family's relationships. Kate felt pity for them, but also uneasiness for her own daughter; she reflected that this was an unlooked-for danger, and yet that the encounter was a necessary stage in a justified programme of important research [6]. Gaining this scholarly insight is also likely to benefit Kate's future practice as a scholar-practitioner liable to be personally affected by her research (and thus vulnerable).

Both as answer to, and also outside the scope of formal interview questions, participant parents reported multiple adverse experiences that they had had in dealing with their daughters' issues, and in attempting to persuade professionals to listen to them, and to act on their requests for support. Several parent participants reported being apparently disregarded by being given much shorter appointments than were booked, or having their appointments cancelled and not postponed. One parent met a child health practitioner to request a referral to the local children's hospital. Instead of referring the family to the requested service, the practitioner referred the family to child protection social services. It appeared that the practitioner had observed the parent's slurred speech and assumed they were taking illegal drugs, without questioning the parent. In fact, the parent was on newly prescribed medication that initially caused slurred speech. The parent only discovered the practitioner's serious error through accidentally seeing a child protection social worker's notes which stated "parent is misusing drugs", and consequently felt deceived and disillusioned. Being aware of the "professional" side of statutory practice, it felt galling to Kate to listen to such an anecdote. Again, this story of professional misjudgement was one that she would not forget. The scholar is privileged to be a part of the shared discussion of an interview and a participant's willingness to disclose personal views and experiences; in this way interview incidents such as these indirectly added value to the research. Such discoveries as these could not figure in Kate's research papers, but will continue to shape her practice [32,43].

Participant women with Triple X were particularly intrigued by being represented in an academic journal article, and wanted to challenge the multiple detrimental ways in which they had been treated by individuals, educators, employers, and communities over decades, and to use this platform to educate some of them (see [44,45]). Several participants with Triple X said how this made them realise that they learn in a different way from others, which makes them unique, and most importantly valid human beings. This was one of the unintended benefits of the research and of being a scholar-practitioner, and indeed Kate felt this gave a new meaning to the term "participant validation"; Kate requested that participants validate her selection and interpretation of their data, but in addition they validated their own lives [16,46].

Every researcher develops an understanding of their surroundings and of participants. Yet the researcher's antecedent knowledge could impair what they "see" in front of themselves. As feminist scholars, Kirsten and Kate are engaged with their research subjects, and sometimes form connected relationships. As documented by Ramazanoğlu and Holland [47], feminist methodologies attempt to disassemble power hierarchies and also make explicit the research process. Kirsten experienced her participants as peers who were keen not only to participate, but also reflect on and review her findings. Kate encouraged participants to take ownership of their contributions and join in interpreting their meanings. Thus Kirsten and Kate may be held to engage in what Turner considered to be "communitas", which he believed to be present *inter alia* in circumstances of liminal

marginality in which people's identities are undergoing transition [48]. This is in contrast to Turner's "civitas", a rigid and inflexible form of social relationship.

Kirsten's and Kate's engagement brought an additional sense of responsibility, and yet tension arose through authentically representing individuals in their writing but uncovering too much with the possibility of causing hurt or harm to participants. Often the scholar-practitioner role meant that both Kirsten and Kate needed to remind their participants of their researcher role, by way of securing process consent [27]. Kirsten's participants actually assumed that she was a community member; she had to remind them of her researcher obligations. Similarly Kate drew to her participants' attention that she was just as much a researcher as she was a parent and informal social worker. In addition, since both Kirsten and Kate were engaged in feminist research (see [49]), they proactively fostered participants' contributions by way of interpretations of the data that were co-produced in each case by researcher and participants. Both sought to avoid the traditional framing of participants as passive.

Participants reported meaningful and enriching encounters, allowing them to have enhanced personal insight. Kirsten and Kate are academic researchers researching the worlds where they have an experiential and physical affiliation. Kirsten and Kate are sensitive to the ethical boundaries of the distinct researcher status, which sometimes excludes them from entry. But scholar-practitioner research can have added meaning where participants are invited to interpret the jointly produced data, and thus attain shared deep insights.

7. Getting Out

As suggested by Smith and Delamont [50], leaving the field constitutes an essential but often overlooked aspect of qualitative research that remains under-documented. They also draw attention to the writing that does exist, which tends to lean towards more dramatic exits as opposed to the planned or the mundane. In her reflections of leaving the field Delamont [51] suggests that due to the nature of extensive field diaries and the propensity to re-visit the research site multiple times, ethnographers may never entirely exit the field. In Kirsten's case, "the field" constitutes multiple sites and participants inhabiting each others' spaces. An example of this was a recent editors' meeting for the Diggers and Dreamers collective where an evening pub meal resulted in eleven of them sharing a table; five editors, two community hosting residents, and another four who had travelled within regional distance simply to share news, attended. Community members are inquisitive about Kirsten's research and so may contact her informally due to her connection to the academic world and its associated (and often inaccessible) knowledge base. With the addition of online forums, newsletters, and general correspondence of which she is a part, it can feel like the field is never truly left. Girke [52] suggests that "the field" is now an ever-present entity and moreover that with the emergence of social media and modern online technology it is virtually impossible for the researcher to entirely disconnect from the field.

Of course, Kirsten did leave. Upon reflection in the process of writing this paper, Kirsten realises that she has always left on a note of "until next time", rather than signifying final departure. As Delamont [51] suggests, these communities inhabit her thoughts and her writing even when she is not with them. Equally Kirsten was invited to presentations and sometimes gave them. Unlike conventional ethnographic studies where the group under study may dissipate or move on, intentional communities exist over decades, often with fairly stable residency. Iverson [53] broaches this post-research contact in the context of modern ethnographies, where the researcher-participant relationship is more likely to take on elements of intersubjectivity and co-creation, as encouraged in Kirsten's and Kate's case by feminist research methods. The "smash and grab" method of ethnography is no longer considered appropriate. Research participants are now welcomed into the research process, sometimes as partners or co-creators.

Carolyn Ellis (author of the infamous “Fisher Folk” ethnographies) [54] reflects on her own learning of being part of an intimate community and on her consideration of a concept developed by Tillman-Healy [55] of “Friendship as Method”, wherein the relationships formed are valued on a par with the research project itself. Ellis [29] suggests that this type of “radical reciprocity” means not only leaving the door firmly open when leaving the field, but it also means that participants may wish to step through that door into the researcher’s world, or at the very least read (and possibly scrutinise) their work.

As a scholar–practitioner, instead of Kate and the subject simply co-producing data in an interview collaboratively, Kate interpreted the “co-production” of data and research to an extent far wider than usual understandings of researcher and researched subject [56]. In this case, the data that had been collaboratively (and anonymously) produced in interviews were ultimately presented to public authorities such as public education boards and medical and disability statutory bodies by the researched person. Participants (as independent individuals) had previously attempted to persuade public authorities of the existence of Triple X, but had been rejected on the basis of public authority ignorance, thus undermining their personal accounts. This time, participants had contributed their data to Kate as researcher, and Kate had returned the data to them in the form of a published academic document, which participants had then presented to public authorities; *this time*, public authorities had had to accept the formalised evidence in front of them, as Kate and the participants had intended, or at least hoped. The more unexpected of these outcomes (the surprising success when the same reports were recognised as valid evidence by official bodies) disclosed the unlooked-for extent of the reverberations of her co-production. To return to Turner’s [48] ideas of *communitas* and liminality, this approach can be likened to what he described as “anti-structure”, in terms of partners sharing experience and achieving a sense of equality. Equally, when Kirsten presented the experiences of communities who had ageing demographics, the communities themselves utilised this new knowledge to inform their own decision making and policy development around ageing.

This can partly be characterised in the language of the philosopher J. L. Austin [57]. Austin contrasts the actions that we necessarily perform through our purposeful statements, commands, and questions in his terminology “illocutionary acts”, with the deeds that we perform whether intentionally or unintentionally *in consequence of* our additional utterances, our “perlocutionary acts”. Thus much that we bring about through our conversations is both unintended and unforeseeable. This applies not only to our conducting of interviews but also to what we say in preparing and publishing research articles. The perlocutionary force of much research proves to be far-reaching without ceasing to be beneficial.

However in her university ethics application Kate was careful to anticipate as far as possible the harm she could inadvertently cause to participants. At the end of one set of Triple X interviews, Kate asked participants “How do you feel about your daughter having Triple X?”, but she had not fully anticipated the power of this question for a few participants. One participant was overcome with emotion, and cried, reflecting on their feelings of desolation for their daughter’s life and future. Another expressed grief for the child they never had, and a third conveyed a lack of acceptance, and anger at their escalating stressful and impossible situation. These few participants demonstrated a long-term fear, and a lack of control of their lives, while others showed resolve and determination, or else gratitude in being unconsciously taught by their daughter to become a more tolerant person, and a kinder parent [21]. This would become a long-lasting education for Kate, helping her to improve working both as a scholar and a practitioner (see [58]).

At this point, Kate was duly conscious of her task of *getting out*; she had to leave her research participants with their until-now-unconscious thoughts and memories left brought to the surface, raw, and unmitigated. Kate felt an instantaneous responsibility for winding interviews down carefully. She felt responsible for all research participants from a practitioner perspective (see [49]). She invited participants to contact her if they required any support in relation to their specifically Triple X issues (see [29]). Several participants took up this invitation (see below).

Sometimes when Kirsten and Kate leave the field they can be sure they will meet participants again in a different but connected way. Ellis [29] deploys the “radical reciprocity” approach, inviting participants to maintain connections with the researcher. Sharing their publications with those researched feels morally integral to the purpose of research, and indeed valuable in bringing to light unrecognised perspectives through successful co-production. Kirsten and Kate are responsible for activating raw and previously subconscious, private thoughts of participants as they cope with their lives, and in some cases Kirsten’s and Kate’s engagement has continued. Participants’ reactions have been prone to trigger important learning curves for Kirsten and Kate. Ultimately, they endeavour to facilitate the recognition of people’s worlds, particularly when the data expressed by participants is transformed through the academic process of research that leads to publication. Kirsten and Kate consider their scholar–practitioner roles as ones of creators of a gateway where they are the intermediaries between the academic world and the world of their participants, with the ability, in conjunction with journal publishers, to legitimise and provide visibility to participants’ experiences.

8. Going Back

In comparison to the literature on accessing the field, papers examining a return to the field are noticeably fewer. Kirsten and Kate would suggest that there is a related gap in the current literature and this in itself contributes one of the innovatory elements of this paper. Examples are often from longitudinal ethnographic studies with planned returns over time (see [59]). Returning to the field is nearly always something Kirsten looks forward to. Due to her role as an editor for *Diggers and Dreamers*, and due to her habit of signing up to receive community newsletters when they are available, it often feels as if she is re-entering a familiar world. Kirsten is also likely to visit communities when the opportunity arises, for example, if she is geographically close and if there is an event or celebration.

Re-entering the field always feels more comfortable, especially if it is a community where Kirsten has spent significant time. At the end of her longest period of fieldwork she bought parting gifts for the community, things that held value internally and collectively such as freshly ground coffee (a luxury and valued item) and wine. There is also some trepidation on Kirsten’s part however, particularly if her visit is research-related, as opposed to her visiting for the purposes of keeping in touch. In line with feminist research methods (see [17]), where possible, Kirsten made her research available to the communities she had researched. Unlike interview transcripts where participants may be asked to validate their words, it is not possible to present ethnographic notes and diaries in the same way. It is however possible to present key themes and verify understanding throughout the data analysis period, and in Kirsten’s case, she attempted to make her writing accessible and available to the communities about which she had written. Kirsten’s experience of this so far has been relatively painless, with some members teasing each other (Kirsten has written about difficulties in community decision making), and others nodding with less happy acceptance at her observations (Kirsten has also written about the difficult dynamics of ageing in such communities).

Kirsten has experienced anxiety in her writing, perhaps more so than if her research did not anticipate a possible return, and although she is often returning as a friend, Kirsten is also returning as a scholar and a practitioner. In her examination of researcher vulnerability, Steadman [60] (p. 809), acknowledges the “false dichotomy between ‘personal’ and ‘academic’ selves”. Researchers can be emotionally vulnerable both from the impact of their research and in their relationships to their research participants. Stevens [61] understands long-term ethnography as a form of commitment, where re-entry enables ever-deeper layers of understanding to be accrued. Indeed, Kirsten is at the time of writing approaching ten years of researching intentional communities and as such becoming a recognised (and hopefully trusted) figure. Returning to familiar settings and people allows for a sense of intimacy that is not possible at the start of any research project. Arrivals are often marked with a sense of welcome along with the roll call of who is present and who is missing. The

moment of re-entry itself is an important ethnographic moment as it is often the time when participants will provide vivid summaries of recent events.

Intentional Communities are not static and there will inevitably be changes in routines and changes in people as individuals join or leave over time. As a researcher this means that the field is ever changing, and therefore ever interesting. As a scholar–practitioner it is the re-visiting of the research field that allows for the sharing of knowledge as well as the collection of new data. Discussions take place about recent findings and comparisons are made with others' perceptions and understandings, alongside the testing of theories in the context of the wider movement.

Kate proceeds to reflect here on the *context* of her research as well as the *outcomes* of this research. Traditional sociological research does not intend to create impact; it is ordered observation pure and simple for the sake of the next original research paper, and the next increment in social knowledge. This improves the knowledge of the research community in throwing light on the population of study, and explaining their world both to them in the event that the explanation is new to them, and to the academic community (see [62]). This is in direct contrast to social work studies, which often apply social action research, where the central intention is to give benefit to participants as a part of the research process [32]. Here, one expects to make a difference to individuals' lives, with a view to local recognition and understanding, and the potential improvement of support practices. Social work researchers assume a sense of responsibility and aims for community benefit [63]. Kate's research occupies a mid-point between these different polar positions. Kate's central aim was to increase as widely as possible understanding of Triple X people and their families, and of some of the social ramifications of their situation. A subsidiary aim was to help families to help themselves in securing their own stability, and to educate some of the authorities and statutory bodies with which they interact [47]. This is why Kate followed up the interviews with inquiries about their wellbeing due to her sense of partial responsibility for the state of affairs in which she left them (see [29,47]).

The scholar–practitioner must consider their inadvertent power in terms of their external professional experience and influence [33], alongside the power held by any community to which they belong. When articles have been accepted for publication, this has been an opportunity to contact former participants to update them, and to simultaneously enquire about developments in their lives [63]. Former participants informed Kate that one Triple X article assisted families to provide evidence to education authorities and schools of their daughters' difficult and different experiences in relation to their unfamiliar diagnosis and subsequent impact, as well as to give families confidence in their own knowledge and autonomy.

Research articles became a useful tool for Kate's unofficial social work: participants used these articles as evidence and could be treated as having apparent authority. One participant secured a Care Act 2014 (England, UK) assessment and package, another was successful at a tribunal for UK disability recognition and benefits, and a third gained university acknowledgement and receipt of subsequent support. Two participants used Kate's articles to secure a Special Educational Needs statement (England, UK) for their daughter, which meant legally required, local authority commitment to financial support for the daughters' subsequent school life.

Following Kate's Triple X research project, former participants contacted Kate requesting some personal intervention. One requested her support in composing an appeal letter to secure their daughter's local authority funded place at a special residential school; they were successful in this. A second requested Kate's advice in guiding their provision of information to mental health services relating to the Mental Health Act 1983 (UK) in the form of a leaflet. Different kinds of moral support felt appropriate, especially if any of Kate's research could prompt surrounding ripples of benefit for others not directly involved in the research [64].

Re-entering the field can be easier than previous stages of research for the scholar–practitioner. Kirsten and Kate consider feminist research methodologies which require

the open dissemination of their research to the community of study. Kirsten and Kate present aspects straightforwardly. They care about community members' understanding and acceptance of their research (even if communities find it uncongenial), and intend for their research to be useful to participants personally, while Kirsten and Kate also aim to publicly educate societal bodies about the presence of these communities. Kirsten's and Kate's dissemination can be presented in the form of key themes observed from periods of study, or from selected sections incorporating interviews which have been previously validated by individual participants. Kirsten and Kate endeavour to write in a lay style to interest a non-academic audience (as much as an academic one). The scholar-practitioner role can involve a continuing relationship, which can take the form of responding positively to requests for practitioner advice and moral support by enabling people to help themselves. In addition, publications sometimes enable material changes to occur, thus improving the lives of participants in small but significant ways. The field is evolving and much remains to be studied and grasped. Meanwhile their scholarship will improve their own practice in the field.

9. Conclusions

Kirsten and Kate have reflected on the liminal space they occupy in holding positions between researcher and practitioner in ways that have rarely been previously studied or even considered. Kirsten's and Kate's scholar-practitioner identity is parallel to that of their sports researcher colleagues, in that they too are drawn towards communities where they have existing longstanding ties. Kirsten's civic mission and practice are as an editor for an international intentional communities' collective and as the director for an intentional communities lay and academic research group, and she is simultaneously a scholar ethnographer in this area, observing the lives of people who live in intentional communities. Kate is a practitioner in her civic mission of unofficial social work in collaboratively assisting Triple X families to secure resources. Kate's own auto/ethnographic background knowledge is as a parent of her own child with Triple X. Kirsten and Kate were both surrounded by the physical culture of their own subjects and enmeshed in the functioning of their daily lives. Kirsten's and Kate's auto/ethnographic perspective is unique in bringing insights of reflexivity and in informing their self-understanding and their own ongoing enlightened critical practice. In particular, their research and their civic mission inform and nourish one another: an often-unnoticed element of participant research.

Kirsten's and Kate's involvement in their research worlds inhabits the in-between space where they are never fully insiders nor outsiders, but continually at the fringes. Kirsten's and Kate's research is ethically complex in that their relationships with their participants can be influenced by their ongoing connection with communities due to their shared social worlds and their research communities. Unlike single entry research, Kirsten's and Kate's roles demand that they navigate the "relational ethics" of research (see above) alongside the creation of sometimes ongoing relationships. Kirsten and Kate argue that as scholar-practitioners, they never entirely leave the field behind them, and their community ties can elicit a personal emotive connection to participants' experiences, however professionally they act as researchers. These aspects of the role of scholar-practitioner comprise a further example of seldom noticed elements of research life brought to attention in this paper.

Holding the role of scholar-practitioner affords an enriching and productive experience. Kirsten's and Kate's research serves to validate the lives of their participants in planned and unplanned ways. Being in this position comes with an on-going responsibility in caring about the long-term position of the relevant community. Yet it also supplies a dual benefit of improving the practice of Kirsten's and Kate's own civic missions and of enhancing their performance as authentic social researchers with deepening social knowledge.

Kirsten and Kate recommend that the scholar-practitioner role grows to become widespread among academics as civic mission is mainstreamed, and that the role of the "scholar-practitioner" itself morphs in a direction of self-consciousness. As industry, private

finance, and graduate occupations become more aligned with higher education institutions, scholars are encouraged to engage with external communities, in theory through their own good will, whilst those academics actually gain privileged insights. Kirsten and Kate do not consider their positions of knowledge and practice to be mutually exclusive; rather, at least for them, each enhances the other. Kirsten's and Kate's long-term hope within research is for researchers and communities to construct bridges carrying two-way travel and travellers with enhanced self-awareness.

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