



MY WIKO WINTER
TINA KRETSCHMER

I am a psychologist with a strong interest in the interplay between social and (epi)genetic determinants of mental health and human development. My initial training at the Freie Universität Berlin (2001–2006) was in Pedagogy, Psychology and Sociology and, following this, I completed my Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology at the University of Sussex in the UK (2010). Since then I have worked at the Institute of Psychiatry at King’s College London (2009–2011) and the University Medical Centre Groningen, the Netherlands, where I focussed on trying to understand biosocial explanations of adolescent behavioural development and mental health. Specifically, I ask whether, which, and how the interplay of social and genetic factors explain why bullying/victimization can go “under the skin” and “into the mind”. Since April 2016, I have been working as an assistant professor (tenure track) in the Department of Pedagogical and Educational Sciences at the University of Groningen, where I teach subjects related to youth as a social phenomenon. My research continues to focus on young people’s development and explores outcomes of social stress. – Address: Faculty of Behavioral and Social Sciences, Department of Pedagogical and Educational Sciences, University of Groningen, Grote Rozenstraat 38, 9712 TJ Groningen, The Netherlands. E-mail: t.kretschmer@rug.nl.

I was in the middle of a postdoctoral project concerning biological and social determinants of individual development from late childhood through early adulthood at the University Medical Centre in Groningen, a mid-sized town in the northeast of the Netherlands, when I came across the College for Life Sciences advert inviting applications for a short-term fellowship in Berlin to reconsider and think about one’s research. Berlin is

familiar to me, as I had studied at the Freie Universität, and the prospect of returning to this very special city was more than attractive. The possibility to ponder research questions and scientific ideas far from my day-to-day life sounded extremely inviting, especially as I had been jotting down and discussing ideas for a bigger project for quite some time already, always waiting for a long vacation or holiday period to get a proper project plan in shape and think about the next steps. Taking this unique chance, I based my application to the College for Life Sciences on developing a project plan that would serve as a European Union funding proposal.

Quite unexpectedly, my application was selected; the Skype interview was successful, and in May 2015 I got the happy news that I was invited to the Wiko as a College for Life Sciences Fellow. In the following academic year, I moved all my teaching duties to the first few months and was due to relocate to Berlin in November. In September, I was offered a tenure-track position at the University of Groningen, which I was fortunate to be able to defer until spring 2016. The four months I spent at the Wiko thus marked my transition from being a postdoc to becoming an independent researcher, and I could not have wished for a place better suited to spend this time. After initially trying frantically to finish off as many projects as possible, I began to realize that to truly benefit from the Wiko experience I had to let go of to-do lists, plans and projects.

Indeed, I did not work on the EU funding proposal as I had planned; it still exists largely only in my head and on countless bits of paper taped into two notebooks. Instead, I wrote an empirical and a review paper that will eventually support the planned EU proposal and submitted two smaller funding applications that would allow me to collect pilot data. I reconnected with a former colleague, and together we revitalised a project that we began three years ago and put on the back burner when he moved to Oxford in 2014. I finally found the time to engross myself in some long-cherished scientific interests and read a lot about feminism and gender issues. Had I not come to the Wiko and enjoyed my time out from everyday routine, I would likely not have allowed myself to spend time on these things.

While I am grateful to have found the calmness to focus on other interests, being part of the Wiko community afforded me so much more. I grew academically and personally through conversations with non-experts who asked questions about my research that had never entered my mind, who interpreted my findings from perspectives that social scientists do not often take, with whom I compared teenagers to birds and fish and who patiently explained the biological and molecular aspects of my work, which for someone

without formal training in the natural sciences are sometimes not easy to grasp fully. The curiosity and friendly, thoughtful feedback from incredibly intelligent, open-minded and educated Fellows encouraged me to take a step back and explore my work from a healthy distance. Have I found new answers? I think I have begun to ask new questions, which without a doubt will enrich my research.

The Tuesday colloquia and their intellectual input and the hours spent discussing with other Fellows American politics, women's role in science, criminal court practices and growing up in different political systems and its consequences were at least as valuable as the uninterrupted hours spent reading and writing. The multidisciplinary Wiko community means that many of life's questions are now connected to the people who work to answer them and that topics have familiar faces. I am only just beginning to realize how the intellectual community left its marks in my thinking.

I arrived at the Wiko later than most other Fellows but was very warmly welcomed. My most obvious immediate peers – Barbara Caspers and Hannah Schmidt-Glenewinkel, like me Fellows of the College for Life Sciences and at the beginning of their academic careers – quickly became friends and were excellent company for coffee, wine and chats about work (sometimes) and life more generally (mostly). With them I discussed what it means to be a young female academic, shared my concerns about the rising of the far right in eastern Germany and my disbelief at the events in Cologne on New Years Eve and danced the night away at the Christmas party and in memoriam of David Bowie.

Having studied in Berlin but left ten years prior to my winter at the Wiko meant that there were quite a few people I hoped to spend time with, to reconnect with and to re-establish friendships with. We all have changed and many old study friends are now parents. Being in Berlin allowed me to sneak back into and be part of their lives once again. The change in my friends' personal circumstances is mirrored in the transformation Berlin has experienced in the last ten years. Back then, not many people were keen on meeting me in "my Kiez" Neukölln, known back then as a rough neighbourhood. Nowadays, it seems to be the place to be, certainly for foodies and those who fancy an organic rhubarb spritzer or matcha tea at the "Flowmarkt".

The other Fellows and the city of Berlin were two strong pillars of making my Wiko time such a rewarding experience; the third was the Wiko itself. Ulrike Pannasch, just a little less new than I was but willing and able to organise our College for Life Sciences trip to the KLI Vienna, Daniel Schönflug's impressive translations of French and tips on where to get the best Schnitzel around Grunewald, Thorsten Wilhemy's scientific and

organisational oversight (and not so secret love of football), made me feel incredibly well looked after. My bird's-nest room in the main building with its cosy, light-flooded kitchen in the tower filled me with tranquillity. The amazing hospitality of the Wiko staff, everyone's constant cordiality and of course the delicious food meant that I remember my time in Berlin as a perfect, joyous time for which I am incredibly grateful.