



University of Dundee

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McCulloch, Trish

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Chapter 21

Co-producing desistance? The role of peer support

Trish McCulloch

Abstract

This chapter makes the case for a co-productive approach to supporting desistance from crime, with a focus on the role of peer support. My interest in this particular mode of co-production reflects a concern to move beyond professionally-centred, individual-level and sustaining approaches to co-production, towards more inclusive, empowering and disruptive forms. I begin by providing a brief review of how co-production is understood, before describing the centrality of co-production in efforts to support desistance. From here, I examine the role of peer support in co-producing desistance, with a view to developing knowledge of how we advance peer support within this space. I conclude with optimism and caution, culminating in a call to proceed in ways that embody the integrity and transformative potential of the modalities described.

Key words

Co-production, desistance, peer support, participation, criminal justice, community justice.

Introduction

Since the 1960s, participatory discourses and practices have steadily moved to the fore in public, political and academic discourse. Mobilized originally by critiques of liberal and representative democracy (Barber 1984), top-down governance (Hirschman 1970), and a rethinking of the public sphere (Habermas 1962, 1969), participatory practices were initially advanced as a mechanism for political and social change through processes of citizen empowerment (Arnstein 1971). By the 1970s, the work of Ostrom and colleagues (Parks et al. 1981) on the relationships between public services and service users in US urban reform prompted particular attention to the participatory dynamic within public service provision and to co-production as an emerging concept. In the intervening years, co-production has become a central strand of global public policy, as governments and citizens across jurisdictions have been required to forge new solutions to old and new economic and social challenges.

Like most socio-political turns, the rise of co-production as a 'new' and 'transforming' approach to the delivery of public services, and the now personalised outcomes to which they aspire, can be traced to a number of coalescing economic, social and political developments, many of which are outlined in Part One of this Handbook. Amidst this interplay of ideas, the proposition that public services can only deliver personalised outcomes through a mix of public, private, individual and collective contribution has become both compelling and challenging (Pestoff et al. 2012). In a global welfare landscape marked by demographic diversity, widening inequalities, economic austerity and welfare retrenchment, the appeal and promise of co-production for the delivery and reform of public services appears firm. The consequent challenge is whether public services, and the social relationships they depend on, can be remade to respond to this 'new' truth.

If co-production is perplexing for public services generally (Boyle and Harris 2009), its place in criminal justice systems and services can appear particularly problematic. In neo-liberal cultures of control, criminal justice systems continue to be constructed, typically, within an explicitly punitive

and coercive frame (Garland 2002). Meanwhile, its subjects, that is, those sentenced, are often constructed as the objects upon which justice is done. In this corrective, and for some corrosive, space, the idea of co-production as a legitimate or possible endeavour is highly questionable (McCulloch 2016, Carlen 2012). However, this is only part of the criminal justice story. Running alongside this dominant punishment narrative is another story of desistance. In this story, desistance from crime is not only possible but an expected and even natural trajectory (Maruna 2001); it belongs principally to the individual desister, it occurs variously through interpersonal and social relationships, and it can be aided and obstructed by those relationships - professionals included (Weaver 2019). It is within this story that co-production finds a place. To the extent that desistance is understood as an individual, relational and social process of progression, recovery and re-entry, questions of individual, group and collective co-production become pivotal.

This chapter makes the case for a co-productive approach to supporting desistance from crime, with a focus on the role of peer support. My interest in this particular mode of co-production reflects a concern to look beyond individual-level, professionally-centric and sustaining approaches to co-production and desistance, towards more inclusive, empowering and disruptive forms. I begin by providing a brief review of how co-production is understood and conceptualised before going on to demonstrate the centrality of co-production to efforts to support desistance, as both an individual and social endeavour. From here, I consider the role of peer support in co-producing desistance, with a view to contributing to knowledge of how we understand, enable and advance this old-new modality within this complex space. I conclude with optimism and caution, culminating in a call to co-producers, in our various roles and relationships, to proceed in ways that embody the integrity and transformative potential of the modalities discussed.

Understanding co-production

Early scholarship on co-production places emphasis on the critical relationship between public service professionals and the people who use public services in routine service delivery (Parks et al. 1981). This work remains significant in highlighting the regular contributions made by service users and others in the progression of public service outcomes, and the gains to be achieved through maximising opportunities for citizen contribution. However, as co-production gained ground as a concept, so too did its applications, such that co-production became used to describe a wide range of activities and practices, occurring at different stages of the service production process, and involving contributions from individuals not 'in' the same organisation (Ostrom 1996). In the same period, co-production was evolving as a concept and practice amidst significant economic, social and welfare change, characterized by the advance of new public management values of individualism, marketization and welfare retrenchment (Pestoff et al. 2012). Against this shifting backdrop, co-production became cast simultaneously as: (i) a transforming paradigm for public services and public service relationships, (ii) a mechanistic attempt by western governments to address pressing welfare challenges through the introduction of new consumerist technologies of welfare, and (iii), as Ewert and Evers (2012) observe, all the 'flavours' in between.

Perhaps reflecting the rapid expansion of co-production in appeal, application and scope, a number of more recent definitions have sought to draw the parameters of co-production a little more firmly, with varying degrees of success. In 2007, Bovaird's definition included a temporal dimension to co-production, giving emphasis to 'regular and long term professional-citizen relationships', though this dimension was removed in the updated definition proposed in Bovaird and Loeffler (2012). NESTA's definition included equality as a defining feature of co-productive relationships (Boyle and Harris 2009), a value that, though appealing for some, is demonstrably difficult to operationalise (Pestoff 2012). Around the same time, Alford (2009) sought to delimit citizen co-producers to those who directly consume public services, so distinguishing between co-producers and volunteers. However,

delineating between those who do and do not 'use' a public service introduces new layers of complexity if we consider the direct and indirect beneficiaries of public services.

The above issues speak to the challenge of defining a concept that is evolving across time and space, amidst significant social and political change and in contexts where issues of power and inequalities weigh heavily. In this chapter, my understanding of co-production starts from an acknowledgement that there is no single or coherent narrative for co-production (Ewert and Evers 2012). Rather, as Ferguson (2012, 57) observes, discussing associated concepts of empowerment and participation, "these are contested concepts, terrains of political struggle and debate on which different social forces seek to impose their preferred meaning". Admittedly, the challenge of constructing co-production in this way is that it can be difficult to sell, implement and measure, particularly in environments inclined to certainties. However, it usefully underscores that co-production is an art more than it is a science; it is relational, contingent and constantly 'in the making' (Chilvers and Kearnes 2016). This has important implications for efforts to advance co-production and for the role of and relationships between co-production actors.

While recognizing the necessarily fluid nature of co-production, definitional clarity remains important. My understanding of co-production thus draws upon Ostrom and colleagues early work in this area (Parks et al. 1981) and on the more recent definition by Bovaird and Loeffler (2012), each of which understand co-production as the mix of activities that public service agents and citizens contribute to in the progression of public service outcomes. In using this definition, I understand citizens as people who have a direct and indirect relationship with the outcome(s) being progressed; I recognise different levels of co-production – what Bovaird and Loeffler (2013, 5) describe as 'The Four Co's' (co-commissioning, co-design, co-delivery and co-assessment); differing degrees of contribution amongst members, and different forms of co-production, namely, individual, group and collective forms (see Weaver and McCulloch 2012). Individual co-production can be understood as

producing outcomes that benefit the individual participants and might include the progression of mutually agreed goals between a service user and practitioner within a criminal justice sanction. Group co-production typically brings users or former users together to shape or provide services, and might include reciprocal relationships between public services and mutual aid groups and/or the involvement of users in decision making processes focussed on policy development, service design, delivery and evaluation and/or the operational and strategic management of services. Collective co-production is understood as those strategies that involve and produce outcomes that aim to benefit whole communities rather than just groups of users. In setting out this understanding, it is important to note that the categorisations provided are not discrete categories, other than in a conceptual sense. Rather, they underline the plurality of co-production and enable us to think beyond familiar forms.

Co-producing Desistance

Desistance is understood as the process of ceasing and refraining from criminal behaviour among those for whom offending has become a pattern (McNeill et al. 2012). As a research framework it describes a body of theoretical and empirical research which seeks to understand how and why people move away from criminal identities and behaviours and into something good (Maruna 2001). In this respect, desistance research can be distinguished from rehabilitation research in so far as its focus, ostensibly, is less on what professionals do to produce rehabilitation and desistance and more on how people achieve desistance themselves, including through relationships with others. Importantly, desistance theory underlines that, like most personalised wellbeing outcomes, desistance exists independently of interventions but can be supported by them (McNeill 2006).

Existing scholarship on desistance illuminates the complex personal, interpersonal, social and narrative contexts of criminal careers and their termination and the inherently individualised and interactive nature of these domains in desistance journeys (Weaver 2019, McNeill et al. 2012). Accordingly, it is understood that efforts to support desistance need to be capable of recognising and responding to these interactive domains and subjectivities. In this respect, the desistance literature pays particular attention to the individual desister, constructed as the lead change agent in desistance journeys (Maruna 2001). At the same time, desistance scholarship emphasises the need to look beyond individual-level and corrective approaches to intervention, focussed often on the development of human capital, to support also the development of social capital, that is the interpersonal and social relationships and networks associated with maturation and positive life transitions, including recovery, rehabilitation and re-entry (Weaver 2019). Relatedly, a number of studies underscore that desistance is about more than life transitions, relationships and the acquisition of human and social capital, it is also about the internal and external identity shifts associated with these processes, including the extent to which people with convictions come to see themselves, and come to be seen by others, as citizens worthy of 'redemption' and re-entry (Maruna 2001).

As Maruna (2017) observes, this alternative theoretical framework has subtle but important implications for criminal justice paradigms and practice, reflecting broader developments and debates in the fields of disability, mental health and substance misuse, and recent movements within these fields towards personalised, peer-led and recovery-based approaches. Like recovery-based approaches, desistance emphasises an appreciative rather than a corrective lens. It focuses on strengths and goals over risks and needs and it privileges relationships over treatment, including but extending beyond the traditional worker-client relationship to encompass also a focus on enabling and repairing relationships with family, peers, employers, communities, civic society and state. This is not to negate the importance of professional relationships in desistance journeys, but

it does require us to look more critically at, and beyond, this important relationship, including a willingness to imagine more decentred, empowering and flexible professional contributions (McNeill 2006, Christie 1977).

The centrality of co-production to the above described conceptualisation of desistance as both process and outcome is clear. As McNeill (2006, 46) observed more than a decade ago, services seeking to support desistance need to think of themselves “less as providers of correctional treatment (that belong to the expert) and more as supporters of desistance processes (that belong to the desister)”. More recently, a number of scholars have suggested that co-production may provide a framework for mobilising the kind of paradigmatic shift which many consider is required within criminal and social justice systems if desistance is to be supported and not obstructed by existing public service frames (Fox and Marsh 2016, McNeill 2006). This is a promising if overdue development in the criminological and desistance literatures. Despite the obvious synergies between these two frameworks, understanding of how co-production might work to support desistance is significantly underdeveloped (Weaver and McCulloch 2012).

Weaver and McCulloch (2012) conducted a review of existing research evidence relating to the concept, practice and value of co-production for criminal justice policy and practice. Our review concluded that, within criminal justice, the concept and practice of co-production had been scarcely analysed, rarely progressed and almost never made subject to robust evaluation. We did however find a number of examples of citizen co-production in criminal justice, including collaborative contributions from people with convictions in: programme delivery, peer education and peer support, mentoring, prison and community councils and forums, user led organisations, and feedback and evaluation research. However, despite clear indicators that involvement in co-productive processes can offer intrinsic benefits for individuals, services and communities, we found little systematic or comparable empirical evidence of the impacts and outcomes of

citizen co-production in and across these areas, reflecting, in part, a lack of clarity within the literature about what and how outcomes should be measured. Subsequent studies continue to speak to the potential of co-production in supporting desistance and justice outcomes while at the same time revealing - and often reflecting - an over-reliance on individual level and professionally-centric analyses and applications, that is a preoccupation with questions of what professional actors can do within the traditional worker-service user relationship to better support individual journeys of desistance (McCulloch 2016, Weaver 2013). Relatedly, there is a dominance of academic, policy and professional voices in the extant literature to the extent that we understand very little about how co-productive approaches to desistance are understood and experienced by those directly involved. The study by McCulloch (2016) of user perspectives on co-production, drawing on the experiences of people with convictions, found that though co-production was considered by all participants to be foundational to journeys of desistance, recovery and re-entry, within the confines of criminal justice sanctions it was mostly experienced as a 'penal imaginary', that is, an appealing idea that exists mostly in our imagination and is sustained through the negation of less appealing realities and truths (Carlen 2012). In McCulloch's study, for most, co-production was meaningfully experienced and considered most possible *outside of* justice sanctions and, importantly, between former or 'atypical' offenders and others.

To conclude, research in this area is still in its infancy. Emerging findings suggest that co-production is a foundational feature of desistance journeys and holds considerable potential for penal and social reform efforts more broadly. However, existing applications continue to privilege professionally-centric, shallow, individual-level, and sustaining co-production modalities which appear to have limited benefits for justice users and stakeholders. In this respect the findings chime with broader critiques of co-production, which speak to the limitations of advancing 'new' models within traditional service systems and patterns, and the associated harms of reinforcing old orders and inequalities under a refreshed rhetoric of transformation (Walker et al. 2015, Pestoff 2012).

The role of peer support

Understanding of the role of peer support in supporting desistance, and justice outcomes more broadly, is limited. There is a small scattering of theoretical and empirical studies which review and evaluate different types of peer practices across prison and, to a lesser extent, community-based settings (South et al. 2017, Perrin and Blagden 2014, Edgar et al. 2011, Dhaliwal and Harrower 2009, Boyce et al. 2009, Devilly et al. 2005). More recently, considerable policy attention has been given across the UK countries and elsewhere to the role of peer mentoring in supporting rehabilitation and resettlement, prompting a small number of new studies in this area (Fletcher and Batty 2012, Hucklesby and Wincup 2014). In this same period, some desistance scholars have begun to shed light on the potential of peer support in supporting desistance outcomes, with attention given to the role of prison listening initiatives (Perrin and Blagden 2014), mutual aid (Weaver 2011), social co-operatives (Weaver 2016) and user-led collectives (Maruna 2017) in this process. Though the above studies speak to the existence, variety and benefits of peer practices within justice contexts, many also reveal a preoccupation with professionally-centric conceptualisations and applications of peer support and a sustained failure to recognise the largely untapped potential of people with convictions in supporting desistance and justice outcomes (Eglash 1958-59).

Peer support practices travel under a variety of terms, reflecting the different types of peer activity being described as well as the different disciplines, traditions and theoretical frameworks within which these activities and terminologies are developing. Within justice, terminology also varies - however, the term 'peer intervention' is becoming more widely used, reflecting the development of instrumental conceptualisations of peer support and peer relationships within justice contexts (Fletcher and Batty 2012, Hucklesby and Wincup 2014). My use of the term 'peer support' reflects

my concern to locate this discussion within broader, interdisciplinary and more critical theoretical frameworks (Riessman et al. 1993), as well as my belief that peer support, properly conceptualised, is a less malleable concept and method than some of the developing alternatives (Mead and MacNeil 2006).

Peer support is generally understood as a system of giving and receiving help founded on key principles of respect, shared responsibility and mutual agreement of what is helpful (Mead 2003). It can involve social, emotional, informational and practical support and rests on the understanding that people who have similar experiences can often better relate and consequently offer more authentic empathy and validation (South et al. 2017). In this respect peer support can be distinguished from other forms of social support in that the giving and receiving of support rests on an exchange between peers, that is, people who are similar by virtue of shared characteristics or experience.

Peer support can take place on an individual, group and collective level and can occur independently of, as well as within and/or alongside, public service systems and services. Over the last decade, there has been a discernible shift towards more 'co-productive' constructions and applications of peer support, reflecting increasingly plural patterns of welfare alongside recognition of the value of peer support in supporting personalised public service outcomes (South et al. 2017). This development is not without its critics; scholars across disciplines have argued that the drive to 'integrate' peer support within existing service systems presents a number of problems, prompting calls for clearer adherence to what peer support is, and isn't, if it is to "maintain its integrity to the movement from which it came" (Mead and McNeill 2006, 29).

Various typologies of peer support can be found within the extant literature. Davidson and colleagues (1999) distinguish between three broad categories, described as:

- (i) informal or naturally occurring peer support;

- (ii) peers participating in user or peer run programmes;
- (iii) the employment of service users as providers of services and support within traditional services.

In their review of 'offender peer interventions', Fletcher and Batty (2012, 2) distinguish between two modes, categorised as peer support and peer mentoring, with the former constructed as a 'passive intervention' and the latter as a 'more active role ... encompassing advising and helping'. More recently, South and colleagues (2017) developed a typology of prison-based peer interventions which identifies four modes, encompassing: peer education, peer support, peer mentoring and bridging roles. These different categorisations underline the plurality of peer support as a concept and practice, the different kinds of peer to peer and peer-professional relationships within which peer support can occur and the different kinds of outcomes peer support can be used to progress, including individual, system and social outcomes. Below, I discuss three broad and overlapping modes of peer support, aligned to recent developments within criminal justice contexts.

Peer mentoring

Peer mentoring is currently the most recognisable form of peer support within justice contexts where it can take the form of peer listening, peer counselling and peer advice. It typically involves the training of people with convictions within prison and community settings to offer support to others with a similar experience. In this model, the peer employed to 'provide' support is generally considered to be further along in their journey and uses their experience to support others who are at an earlier stage. As Weaver (2011) notes, the value of harnessing the experiences and unique contributions of people with convictions was recognised as early as the 1960s in the United States through the New Careers Movement. At the heart of this government-funded initiative lay the premise that the life experiences of 'talented but disadvantaged' and stigmatised people could be put to good use through professional training and employment to work with people with similar

backgrounds and experiences. A proportion of these people were people with convictions, some prisoners, who were trained to provide rehabilitative services to other prisoners, whilst developing skills that they could build on post-release. In the years since, a variety of peer mentoring initiatives have developed internationally which include the recruitment and training of people with convictions to support their peers (Burnett and Maruna 2016). Across the UK, well known and wide-spread initiatives include: prison listener schemes (Dhaliwal and Harrower 2009); peer education initiatives (Devilly et al. 2005), peer advice projects and various 'Through the Gate' initiatives (Boyce et al. 2009), which involve the training and employment of 'former offenders' to support prisoners in their transition from prison into the community. The recent and rapid rise of paid peer mentoring as an approach to supporting rehabilitation and resettlement represents a particular application of peer support and has seen significant government investment across the UK countries. Here, peer support has developed principally as an individual-level 'intervention', focussed on supporting and/or supervising individual journeys of change and resettlement, and delivered as part of or as an adjunct to existing service delivery (Fletcher and Batty 2012). However, the recent review by Hucklesby and Wincup (2014) of peer mentoring projects in England raises important questions about the extent to which developing models and applications of paid peer mentoring can reasonably be constructed as peer support. Specifically, the authors highlight that recent applications of peer mentoring within offender management systems rest on an individual deficit model of offending behaviour which is fundamentally at odds with the strengths-based foundations of peer support. Relatedly, they argue that the 'institutionalising' of mentoring within existing service systems has created a situation where mentoring largely duplicates existing corrective approaches and priorities such that its distinctive and transformative attributes become stifled.

Mutual aid and self-help groups, including social co-operatives

There is much less evidence of mutual aid and self-help forms of peer support for people with convictions, at least in the form of small group structures. However, there is developing support for this method amongst desistance scholars as well as some promising signs in this area, including a scattering of new peer practice initiatives prompted by recent scholarship on desistance, gender-responsive services and trauma-sensitive justice practice (Weaver and Lightowler 2017, Maruna 2017, Collica 2010). Further, in the UK and internationally there are a number of mostly nationwide, user-led collectives for people with convictions, some of which appear also to include local mutual aid structures.

Katz and Bender (1976, 5) define mutual aid groups as:

“voluntary small group structures for mutual aid in the accomplishment of a specific purpose ... usually formed by peers who have come together for mutual assistance in satisfying a common need, overcoming a common handicap or life disrupting problem, and bringing about desired social and/or personal change”.

Mutual aid rests then on the idea of reciprocal exchange between peers and on the process of relationship, mutuality, exchange and helping as mechanisms for support, recognition and change. Importantly, mutual aid is often associated with the progression of individual as well as group and collective outcomes and, for some marginalised groups, social and political change.

Linked to the above, Weaver (2016, 2012) is currently examining the role that ‘social cooperatives’ might play in supporting desistance and employment. Examining the rise of prisoner social cooperatives within North America and Europe, Weaver (2012, 13) explains:

“Social co-operatives are democratic organisations owned by their members with equal voting rights. Prisoners co-own and co-control the cooperative together with the other

stakeholder members - ex-prisoners, community members and criminal justice and social work professionals”.

Social co-operatives thus offer a more inclusive, empowering and collective model of peer support than is typical within justice contexts, with early findings demonstrating their potential for social integration, desistance and resettlement (Weaver 2016). However, as Weaver notes, examples of cooperative structures in the criminal justice system remain rare and unevenly distributed, as are systematic and comparable evaluations of their effectiveness.

User-led communities/ organisations

User-led organisations describe organisations and services that are planned, operated, administered and evaluated by service users, former service users and/or communities of interest. Across the UK, UNLOCK (www.unlock.org.uk), User Voice (www.uservice.org.uk) and Positive Prison: Positive (www.positiveprison.org) are self-governing organisations led by and for people with convictions, with similar communities reported across the United States and Europe (Maruna 2017). Each of the above-noted organisations describe a particular mission and purpose, though all share a commitment to: (i) recognising the experience of people with convictions through opportunities for voice, exchange and support; (ii) the provision of practical and emotional support for people with convictions through various forms, including peer support, and (iii) the use of members’ shared experience to contribute to individual, system and social change. There is little documented research on the impacts of user-led organisations and communities on journeys of desistance, in part reflecting the fact that few user-led communities construct their identity and activity on these terms. However, Maruna (2017, 14) has recently argued compellingly that the coming ‘third phase’ and real ‘action’ in desistance will move away from academic and professional communities and be centred around grassroots activist and advocacy work from organisations such as those listed above.

There are, of course, other peer support modes that work to support desistance that are not reported here. For example, a number of group-based intervention programmes involve ‘former offenders’ in the co-delivery of interventions, though control of these initiatives typically sits with professional providers. Similarly, there are almost certainly naturally occurring peer support networks in operation across prison and community settings that may have much to contribute to our understanding of how and why peer support works, or doesn’t, to support journeys of desistance. Again, a key challenge in understanding these dynamics is that naturally occurring peer support communities are unlikely to identify desistance as an explicit goal or outcome and even less likely to engage in recognisable processes of research (Oliver 1992).

How and why peer support works to support desistance

Empirical evidence on the impacts of peer support for people with convictions is light and diffuse. In part this reflects the diverse aims, objectives and methods of peer support within justice contexts and the fact that much of the available ‘evidence’ is hidden within overlapping research literatures, including, for example, empirical studies of desistance, strengths-based approaches and co-production. However, across available studies, peer support has been shown to have benefits for those giving and receiving support, for the organisations within which peer support is situated and for society more broadly (South et al. 2017, Edgar et al. 2011, Frontier Economics 2010, Devilly et al. 2006). Mechanisms of impact appear to correlate broadly with wider research on the theoretical underpinnings of peer support practices, which appear notably consistent across user groups and settings. Salzer and colleagues (2002) identify five theories that underpin peer support, described as: social learning theory, social support, experiential knowledge, the helper principle, and social comparison theory. As Solomon (2004) notes, these theories are mostly inferred rather than empirically tested, reflecting the culture of peer support communities and practices that make traditional research methodologies difficult to employ. However, a small number of criminological

studies are beginning to demonstrate the relevance of these theories to journeys of desistance, some of which are described below.

Social learning theory posits that peers, because they have undergone and survived relevant experiences are more credible role models and that interactions with peers who are successfully coping with their experiences are more likely to result in positive change. This theory is now supported by a number of empirical studies which show that peer educators often have enhanced credibility with people with convictions and that peer approaches can contribute to increased legitimacy of support and may be more accessible for marginalised and underserved populations (South et al. 2014, Devilly et al. 2005, Boyce et al. 2009, Whyte 2011). For like reasons, a number of studies indicate that peer-led approaches can result in increased participant knowledge and life skills and can impact positively on participants' engagement, hope and motivation for change (Rex 1999, Devilly et al. 2005, Boyce et al. 2009).

The relationship between *social relationships*, the development of social capital and desistance is well demonstrated (Weaver 2019, McCulloch 2005, Maruna 2001). Participation in peer roles, relationships and networks has been shown to produce a number of benefits for those giving and receiving support. Dhaliwal and Harrower (2009) found that peer 'providers' reported significant personal growth, increased esteem and confidence. Similarly, Devilly and colleagues (2005) found that the atmosphere of trust, mutuality and respect created through peer practices was associated with increases in participants' sense of self-worth and self-confidence, as well as their sense of autonomy and self-efficacy. A number of studies also speak to social capital gains for participants, including: obtaining a useful qualification, the development of relational, life and work skills and increased employability (Boyce et al. 2009, Burnett and Maruna 2006, Weaver 2016, Edgar et al. 2011, Dhaliwal and Harrower 2009). These and other studies also describe how peer relationships can contribute to reduced stigma and to an improved sense of connectedness to others, to

communities and to society more broadly (Morrison et al. 2006). Relatedly, peer practices and relationships have been shown to present important opportunities for people with convictions to develop and practice 'alternative' identities and behaviours (Edgar et al. 2011, Boyce et al. 2009, Kelman 1958), so contributing to the kinds of identity shifts associated with desistance (Maruna 2001).

Many of the above-noted studies also speak to the significance of the *helper principle* in journeys of change and desistance. The helper principle describes the benefits that a person experiences through helping others and can include an enhanced sense of interpersonal competence, as well as an enhanced sense of worth and esteem, as experienced through the social approval received from and through those helped. The seminal study by LeBel (2007) of 228 former prisoners found that having a helper orientation had a positive relationship with higher self-esteem and greater satisfaction with life, and a negative relationship with having a criminal attitude and the forecast of re-arrest. LeBel's findings are supported by a number of other desistance studies which indicate that taking responsibility for and/or contributing to the life and wellbeing of others, whether through family relationships, employment, volunteering or peer initiatives, is positively associated with desistance (Sampson and Laub 1993, Uggen and Janikula 1999, Maruna 2001). A number of studies also indicate that helping others, often discussed as 'generativity' within the desistance literature, can contribute to reduced stigma (Wahl 2000) and a sense of personal and social 'redemption', that is the personal and social process of making up for one's wrong doing by working to help others (Maruna 2001). Examined more broadly, many of the above findings also underline the need to develop a more co-productive understanding of the outcomes of peer support, a process that is critical to our ability to understand and measure impact.

Importantly, a number of studies also speak to the limitations, tensions and costs of developing applications of peer support, including for those involved. The systematic review by Levenson and

Farrant (2002) of peer practices within prisons concluded that opportunities for participation in peer activities only exist for a minority of prisoners. This appears to reflect both a failure within the UK prison system to recognize and engage with prisoners as citizens, as well as the reinforcement of existing social hierarchies and exclusions within criminal justice systems (see also Edgar et al. 2011). Relatedly, Burnett and Maruna (2006) describe the tensions associated within innovation in this area, chief amongst which they conclude are issues of risk aversion and public trust. Their study also highlights that becoming a peer co-producer can have significant drawbacks as well as benefits, including the process of criminal re-labelling that can occur for citizens taking on these roles. My own narrative research on co-production with people with convictions echoes and adds to these messages (McCulloch 2016). Though most citizen co-producers were positive and sometimes passionate about advancing co-production and peer practices within criminal justice settings, they also described significant obstacles and costs, including: limited meaningful opportunity for peer practices; issues of capacity; reinforcement of existing hierarchies, experiences of re-labelling, stigma and exclusion, and for some, a sense of stagnancy and diminishing returns. In this study, the pains of peer practices were particularly acute in 'institutional' and individual-level initiatives and point again to the limitations of individual-level, shallow and sustaining approaches to co-production and peer support.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that desistance needs to be understood as an individual, relational and social process. Relatedly, I have argued that co-production needs to be understood as a foundational feature of professional efforts to support desistance and that this needs to move from being an interesting (or troubling) idea and become understood as an explicit component and criteria of desistance-focused relationships. I have argued that development and innovation in this area must transcend the tendency towards professionally-centric, individual-level and sustaining co-

production modalities, towards the advance of user-led, group and collective forms. This requires a clearer understanding of the interdependence of individual, group and collective co-production in efforts to support desistance, and a willingness to invest in and experiment with more inclusive, empowering and disruptive forms (Pestoff 2012). The state, professional communities and civic society have important roles to play in supporting desistance but, as argued across a number of studies, the central protagonists in this story must become desisters themselves.

Advancing co-production on the above terms will require clearer articulation of what co-production means within justice contexts, including attention to underpinning theoretical frameworks, core principles, associated processes, desired outcomes and mechanisms of measurement, all of which need to be advanced through genuinely co-productive relationships and processes. Criminal justice is some way from constructing its identity and activity in and on these terms. Further, empirical studies of efforts towards a more co-productive identity and practice reveal significant challenges. However, this kind of transformational system change is taking place within related public service areas – including within health, disability, mental health and substance misuse services - prompted and enabled by social movements which are gradually rewriting the rules of play. There is much that we need to learn from these comparative movements about how to enable and advance transformational change within conservative and often coercive public service contexts (Mladenov 2016).

One of the common and most interesting levers for change within the above-noted movements, has been the rise of peer support and peer activism as a mechanism for individual, social and system change, epitomized, as Mead and MacNeil (2006) observe, in the Independent Living Movement. It is this kind of user-led, collective, rights-based, paradigm-changing, empowered, empowering and advocacy-oriented construction of peer support that is relevant to our discussion here. As research and history demonstrates, the transformational value of peer support does not reside in its ability to

replicate and reproduce existing social and public service systems and relationships, but in its ability to disrupt and transform them, including from the bottom up. A key challenge for would-be professional co-producers in this dynamic, as Christie (1977) observed more than four decades ago, is to work out how to enable and support this necessarily peer-led movement without monopolising the handling of it. Again, this requires a more critical engagement with what peer support is and isn't, including attention to supporting theoretical frameworks, core principles, associated processes, desired outcomes and mechanisms of measurement. It will also require professional co-producers to give greater attention to the system and social conditions, networks and relationships within which peer support can emerge and flourish as a genuinely co-productive endeavor. These are important messages for professional co-producers, as an increasing number of empirical studies shed light on the 'cons' of co-production, including peer practices, within existing criminal justice and public service relationships.

To conclude, there are multiple routes to advancing co-production in efforts to support desistance, each of which will produce differing outcomes. In this chapter I have argued for the advance of user-led, group and collective forms, reflecting a critical questioning of the reliance within public services and systems, and to some extent scholarly debate, on traditional levers for change which, whilst important, are rarely transformative (McCulloch and Smith 2017). Grappling with similar challenges of real world transformation, McAra (2017) argues that to achieve impact criminologists need to evolve multi-level strategies for engagement that recognise the inter-relationships between (i) political strategy, (ii) institutional performance, and (iii) embodied practice. Each of these elements is pertinent to our discussion here. While, for McAra, embodied practice speaks to the ways in which criminal justice is experienced by its service users, it might also be used to describe and imagine the ways in which user, citizen and professional co-producers, individually and collectively, can take ownership of, embody and advance co-production as a mechanism for system and social transformation.

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