

Peer mentoring and the role of the voluntary sector in [re]producing  
'desistance': identity, agency, values, change and power

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## Abstract

Despite much enthusiasm for the practice of peer mentoring by ex-offenders it has received very little empirical scrutiny. This thesis examines the micro dynamics and intimate interactions within these relationships. In doing so it highlights how mentors are often much more than functional additions to existing criminal justice systems. They are also presented as teachers, co-operators and critical agents. The narratives in this study highlight how dominant forms of knowledge often minimise or miss the lived experiences of crime and change. In contrast, peer mentors place lived experiences at the centre of their approach and in doing so they critically question exclusionary practices and re-humanise themselves and their peers. The work of peer mentors also highlights and at times challenges the hidden power dynamics that are subsumed when ‘regular’ interventions take place. But, mentoring cannot avoid or operate outside of these power relationships. It can and does generate other power dynamics. Whilst many of these complex relations remain hidden in current evaluations of the practice they are rendered visible here. Data were obtained from qualitative interviews with eighteen peer mentors, twenty peer mentees, four service coordinators and two Probation officers, who were drawn from a range of voluntary sector providers in the North of England. Observations of practice were also carried out, including: volunteer recruitment processes; training courses; and formal supervision sessions. Where possible mentors were also observed facilitating group work with their peers. The analysis of the data drew upon techniques of thematic analysis and critical discourse analysis focusing upon how mentoring was described, performed and justified by participants. As a result of this analysis five overarching themes emerged. These are: identity, agency, values, change and power.

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**PART ONE**

**BACKGROUND**

## Chapter One

### Introduction

*“It’s so hard to explain it in words and it really does mean so much to me because it saved my life, you know?” (Lin, Peer Mentor and previously a Mentee).*

*“How can he help me? I’ve burgled houses with him!” (Peer group member).*

Peer mentoring is an increasingly popular approach in community and custodial criminal justice settings. However, these snapshot summaries from respondents in this study introduce a number of core complexities inherent in this work. Peer mentoring is not easily summarised, it is not always well received and yet at other times it is conceived as nothing short of life saving. It is characterised by conflicting conceptions and, as will become clear, is often employed for conflicting ends. Whilst these antagonisms pose particular challenges to researching this practice, they also render it fascinating. This thesis will attempt to do justice to the tensions and nuances of this work whilst advancing understanding of the practice.

Despite enthusiasm for and increasing use of peer mentoring schemes in criminal justice, there is very little empirical evidence documenting their value, effects or outcomes in this arena. Whilst there is a growing academic interest in how people successfully leave criminal lifestyles behind or ‘desist’ (Maruna, 2001; Farrall and Calverley, 2006; McNeill, 2006; LeBel, Burnett, Maruna and Bushway, 2008; Shapland and Bottoms, 2011; Farrall, Sparks and Maruna, 2011) there is less focus on interrogating or theorising interventions which support processes of desisting. Furthermore whilst there are some, albeit limited,

academic explorations of peer mentoring, no studies have looked exclusively at peer mentoring by ex-offender volunteers in the context of desisting from crime. This study will therefore address the empirical and critical gaps that pertain to both ‘peer mentoring’ as a practice and assumptions about its relationship to ‘desistance’.

The study results from a research question posed by Keele University in partnership with Clinks – a charity supporting voluntary organisations that work with offenders. They were interested in exploring *the role of the voluntary sector in promoting desistance through peer mentoring*. From this beginning the study aimed to investigate the following research questions:

1. How does peer mentoring work in practice?
2. What sense is made of peer mentoring by the people delivering and using services?
3. What relationship, if any, does peer mentoring have to ‘desistance’?
4. What is the impact of a shifting voluntary sector context on their role and relationships with clients, the community and other services and partners?

The objectives of the research were:

- a. To explore using ethnographic methods the experience of those involved as providers and service users with voluntary sector peer mentoring services;
- b. To critically examine ‘desistance’ as a field of study and theory of practice;
- c. To closely scrutinise the concept of peer mentoring, including the essentialist construction of ‘peers’ and ‘mentoring’ that the practice relies upon;
- d. To examine the relationship between mentors, mentees, their supporting organisations and staff working with them.

A qualitative approach to these questions was adopted, including semi-structured interviews with peer mentors (n=18), mentees (n=20), mentoring coordinators (n=4) and probation staff (n=2). Overt observations of mentoring practices were also undertaken along with documentary analysis of the literature produced by mentoring projects. These data were obtained from four community peer mentoring settings in the North of England, including a mentoring project attached to a Probation Service, a charitable mentoring service for ex-offender care leavers, a charitable mentoring service for women seeking employment and a mentoring service attached to a housing provider for young women at risk of 'gang' involvement. Full details of these sources are given in chapter four.

Peer mentoring schemes have risen to the forefront of political and criminological interest for several reasons. Firstly, there is growing enthusiasm in the field of criminal justice for peer mentoring as an intervention in the belief that it somehow promotes desistance from crime. In 2011 both the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) expressed optimism for the approach: 'There are roles for offenders acting as mentors... They can be particularly effective during transition from prison to outside world' (MoJ, 2011: 23) and 'our ambition is that eventually all offenders in our system will be offered the opportunity of an informal mentor' (NOMS, 2011: 3). A second reason for increased interest is that mentoring appears to address a genuine oversight in offender needs:

[F]or many vulnerable short-termers [prisoners] released without any supervision there is a strong unmet need for support and advice, not only immediately after leaving prison, but for some months afterwards. Many of the stakeholders and the

prisoners we interviewed were strongly in favour of mentoring schemes for this group (Maguire and Nolan, 2007: 166).

As much of this work is taking place within the voluntary sector, the shifting nature of this sector is of critical relevance to this debate. Benson and Hedge (2009: 35) argue that traditionally the voluntary sector's role in criminal justice has been a test bed for new thinking, a platform for dissent, campaigning and social action and as a result the freedom and capacity to take independent action is crucial. However the line between the State and voluntary sector is becoming increasingly blurred. The influential Carter Report (2003) advocated that working relationships between the Probation Service and voluntary and private organisations 'be characterised by contestability or competition, whereby the State would compete with other providers to win contracts to deliver services to offenders' (Gough, 2010: 21). Furthermore:

[T]he Ministry of Justice and NOMS have recognised the benefits of working in partnership with the third sector (NOMS, 2005; MoJ, 2007; 2008), particularly in relation to provision in help to resettle offenders and reduce re-offending (Meek, Gojkovic and Mills, 2010: 1).

The voluntary sector is therefore increasingly a 'partner' to statutory providers in the field, which arguably curtails their potential as a 'platform for dissent, campaigning and social action' (Benson and Hedge, 2009: 35). Moreover as Corcoran (2011: 34) notes, 'the scope and degrees of partnerships vary', often resulting in 'disorganized welfare mixes' or a 'tendency for organizational cloning ('isomorphism') as VSOs [voluntary sector organisations] adapt to the bureaucratic, hierarchical organizational forms of their statutory

partners' (Corcoran, 2011: 34). The Offender Management Act 2007 marked a commitment to cross sector partnerships in legislation and 'empowered private and third sector organisations to take on some of the responsibility traditionally associated with Probation' (Meek et al., 2010: 1). The Coalition Government then continued this direction of travel when they came to power in May 2010 by 'creating significant opportunities for civil society organisations to play an increasing role in the delivery of criminal justice services' (Office for Civil Society, 2010: 7). Additionally the MoJ has made clear its commitment to models which pay services by the results they achieve (MoJ, 2011). This controversial 'payment by results' model arguably poses considerable evidential challenges to services aiming to promote desistance from offending, forcing them to forego qualitative and complex explanations of the distance clients have travelled away from offending in favour of reductive, quantitative 'outcomes':

In terms of measuring the level of reconviction rates [for payment by results], a binary 'yes/no' measure, based simply on whether or not an offender has been reconvicted, is the most straightforward to understand and apply. However, for many offenders, desisting from crime can be a lengthy process, with progress made initially in reducing the frequency of reoffending. This can be an important part of desistance, and providers should be recognised for their contribution towards it (Collins, 2011: 18).

This study will pay attention to these new challenges for voluntary sector agencies. Chapter nine, for example, will explore some of the complexities of applying a payment by results rationale to peer mentoring. It will also trace some of the adaptations that peer volunteers make as they work alongside statutory partners.



The thesis itself is split into two parts. Part one (comprised of chapters one, two, three and four) provides the background to peer mentoring in criminal justice settings and to this study. Chapter two reviews the relevant literature. It will introduce the voluntary sector in criminal justice as the landscape from which peer mentoring emerges. It then reviews the, albeit limited, literature on peer mentoring, presenting the dominant claims that are currently made for the practice. These include claims that peer mentoring *changes people*, that it is *better than what has gone before* and that it is *egalitarian*. The chapter will then explore how these claims relate to desistance. It will summarise desistance research and suggest that peer mentoring has the potential to promote desistance by offering new social connections along with opportunities to ‘do’ and ‘make’ good. In these terms it offers a vehicle to facilitate desistance as distinct from the claimed goal to cause it explicitly. It will suggest that mentors may act as co-authors and readers of mentees’ emerging desistance ‘scripts’, creating a space for acceptance within a broader context of stigma and exclusion. Chapter three introduces a number of pedagogical and sociological theories, which help to make sense of the practice of peer mentoring in new ways. It proposes that four precepts underpin peer mentoring in criminal justice: the *identity precept*; the *pedagogical precept*; the *fraternity or sorority precept*; and the *politicisation precept*. Taken together these precepts constitute a framework with which to ground the later chapters that outline the findings. The thesis does not aim to prove these theories, but utilises them to shine new light on the intricacies of mentoring practice. Chapter four details the methodological approach adopted, explores some of the ethical dilemmas of research in this field and outlines how the data was analysed.

Part two of the thesis (comprised of chapters five, six, seven, eight and nine) details and analyses the findings of this study. Chapter five explores the importance of *identity* to peer

mentoring. The 'ex-offender' identity is constructed here as a useful resource, which can inspire self-improvement and facilitate new forms of communication. Peer to peer relationships are also constructed as horizontal, rather than hierarchical. Paradoxically, however, the chapter highlights a number of barriers faced by mentors as they attempt to employ identity in these ways. Chapter six examines the importance of *agency* within peer mentoring by suggesting that a sense of agency is not just gained through peer mentoring as participants do not necessarily have a clear sense of self direction or motivation at the outset of the work; rather a sense of agency often emerges falteringly from exchanges with others and interactions in social environments. Chapter seven proposes the *core conditions* of peer mentoring in these settings as advanced by those engaged with the work. They include: individualised practice; caring; listening; and encouraging small steps. These values not only illustrate what this work often means to those involved, but also highlights what may be missing from existing rehabilitative approaches. Chapter eight focuses upon concepts of *change* in peer mentoring. It argues that personal transformation does not occur spontaneously, but is inspired by others. This process of inspiration will be examined with reference to Girard's (1962) theory of mimesis, which suggests that human desire is not innate nor individual, but dependent on social models. However, the chapter also suggests that personal change in rehabilitation settings is more problematic than it may appear, as people point to vivid fears, difficulties and conflicts which problematise the notion that role modelling alone can change people. Respondents also outline how peer mentoring often has a broader focus than individual change or improvements as they point to the need for changes to services and wider social attitudes. Chapter nine focuses on relations of power within peer mentoring and seeks to make explicit some of the implicit transactions of power in mentoring settings. In doing so it will reveal the rich and multi layered nature of power in mentoring transactions. Chapter ten is the concluding chapter

and summarises how the thesis has advanced knowledge in this field; it also discusses the limitations of the study and implications for future research.

In summary, peer mentoring is an increasingly popular approach within criminal justice, yet very little research has been done into the practice. This thesis demonstrates how mentoring can indeed support some of the processes that have been highlighted as important in desisting from crime, such as realising personal strengths and imagining a new desisting identity. However, it also indicates that there is more to this practice than we currently recognise. Peer mentoring here emerges as an activity through which people who have had their voices excluded or submerged find voice. In finding a voice people with convictions challenge some of the dominant professional understandings of ‘offenders’ and suggest new approaches. They also begin to assert the centrality of struggle, suffering and social exclusion in their lives; realities of which are often missed or immersed in approaches that seek to correct flawed individuals. As new voices emerge, however, so do new forms of governance. Ex-offenders are permitted roles within rehabilitation fields, but these roles are often heavily policed and contained. Indeed mentors and mentees themselves often collude with these forms of governance. The thesis will pay close attention to these inherent tensions and in doing so will attempt to represent the complexity of peer mentoring relationships.

## **Chapter Two**

### **The penal voluntary sector, peer mentoring, and desistance from crime**

This chapter will explore the landscape from which the practice of peer mentoring by ex-offenders is emerging. It will begin by introducing the context of the penal voluntary sector, including some of the changes and challenges it currently faces, before going on to locate the practice of peer mentoring within this field. It will then focus upon some of the claims currently being made about peer mentoring, including the assertions that peer mentoring *changes participants*, that it is *better than what has gone before* and that it is *egalitarian*. Finally the chapter will introduce the broader academic context, which appears to have been instrumental in allowing peer mentoring to enter mainstream practice that is an increased criminological focus on how people come to ‘desist’ from crime or leave crime behind.

#### **2.1 The Voluntary Sector in Criminal Justice**

In recent decades several countries have transferred some welfare and penal roles from the state to community-level actors including for-profit and third sector interests. This handover is premised on a blend of neoliberal political rationalities for restructuring state welfare systems as ‘mixed service markets’ in late capitalist societies and communitarian aspirations to liberate the untapped social capital of the community and voluntary sectors (Corcoran, 2012: 17).

The context in which the practice of peer mentoring emerges is crucial to any analysis of the role it may play in the lives of people attempting to desist from crime. The penal voluntary sector is the space where this practice is most evident and indeed from which

many of the rationalisations for the practice are made (see for example User Voice, 2015; Princes Trust, 2008; St Giles Trust, 2015). However, as Corcoran indicates above, the premises underpinning a growing penal voluntary sector are not always complementary or even consistent. Indeed the sector can be characterised as a space where competing ideologies converge and collide. The voluntary sector is often idealised, for example, as ‘a platform for dissent, campaigning and social action... [Wherein] holding to account state agencies and interests is crucial’ (Benson and Hedge, 2009: 35); a place where people can work as a matter of ideological conviction, in order to be socially productive but within an alternative, noncapitalist framework (Wolch, 1990). Yet it has also been imagined more critically as a space where ‘Victorian England buried their guilt in good works and headed off potential revolution by smoothing the jagged edges of capitalism’s flotsam’ (Gill and Mawby, 1990: 5). Voluntarism itself has been imagined as:

[S]hifting the burden of guilt from men in power to men on the street... a form of circumventing the more fruitful causal approaches in the analysis of social problems, that is, those that take consideration the understanding of social structure (Abdennur, 1987: 94).

There are not only concerns that the sector excuses and compensates the more negative consequences of modern capitalist societies, but also that it has become too closely tied to State agendas. This has happened as voluntary sector organisations have increasingly operated, not as an addition to the welfare state, but as a contracted provider of welfare state services (Seddon, 2007). Such concerns were crystallised in light of the Coalition Government’s ‘Transforming Rehabilitation’ agenda (MoJ, 2013), which aims to open up the ‘market’ of offender rehabilitation to a ‘diverse range of providers’ (Home Office,

2013). In practical terms this policy has involved a hugely reduced role for the Probation Service, which will now only work with those offenders assessed to pose a high risk of harm; and the creation of twenty one ‘Community Rehabilitation Companies’ (hereafter CRCs), which will provide rehabilitation services to those offenders assessed as posing a low or medium risk. These CRCs are made up of partnerships between private, voluntary and public organisations, although the majority of lead contract providers are private companies; with two multinational companies winning eleven out of the twenty one contracts (MoJ, 2014). The penal voluntary sector today is not simply a place of dissent and campaign (Benson and Hedge, 2009) or of ideological conviction (Wolch, 1990) therefore, but is increasingly a subcontractor to the State and the global private sector. As a result voluntary engagement in criminal justice is an extremely ‘complex arena of social activity’ (Corcoran, 2012: 22). Very little has been written to date in relation to how this shifting landscape is being experienced by those delivering and using peer to peer services. This thesis therefore will pay attention to this broader voluntary sector context within which peer mentors and mentees undertake their practice. Chapters eight and nine, for example, will examine how volunteers negotiate mixed competitive markets and how this form of volunteering can be experienced as both empowering and exploitative.

## **2.2 Peer mentoring**

From within this broader context of an increasing role for the voluntary sector in criminal justice service provision, peer mentoring itself has grown in popularity as a rehabilitative intervention. The MoJ, for example, imagines that ‘offenders’ will play a key role in policy plans:

There are roles for offenders acting as mentors... They can be particularly effective during transition from prison to outside world... Each NOMS [National Offender Management Service] region is delivering an element of mentoring as part of programme delivery (MoJ, 2011: 23).

This popularity is accompanied by an idealist discourse wherein peer mentors are framed benevolently as ‘wise friends’ or ‘old lags’ helping offenders onto the straight and narrow (Grayling, 2012). Despite this enthusiasm the concept of peer mentoring remains under researched and ill-defined. There has been a significant lack of academic research into peer mentoring in criminal justice settings, as most of the available research focuses on mentoring more generally or on peer support in other situations (such as education or health). Furthermore, those studies which have been done have struggled to define or detail mentoring with clarity. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) provides one of the few definitions of peer mentoring, which is relevant to this field:

The use of same age or same background educators to convey educational messages to a target group. Peer educators work by endorsing ‘healthy’ norms, beliefs and behaviours within their own peer group or community and challenging those who are ‘unhealthy’ (UNODC, 2002).

Clinks, a charity supporting voluntary organisations that work with offenders, whilst not using the term ‘peer mentoring’ directly, defines *volunteer peer support* in this field as:

[W]hen people with the same shared experience provide knowledge, experience, or emotional, social or practical help to each other. It commonly refers to an initiative

consisting of trained individuals volunteering to support people with specific or multiple needs to provide practical advice and guidance. This can take a number of forms such as mentoring, befriending, listening, counselling, advocating or being an advisor (Clinks, 2012: 8).

Peer mentoring is therefore imagined to involve the transmission of norms and behaviours along with help, support and guidance. Whilst this provides a helpful starting point, there is significant diversity in terms of how mentoring is understood:

It is widely acknowledged that no one single definition or model of mentoring exists; rather there are a number of different models providing support to young people in a range of settings (Parsons, Maras, Knowles, Bradshaw, Hollingworth and Monteiro, 2008: 5).

Bozeman and Feeney's 'table of mentoring definitions' (2007) included no fewer than thirteen different descriptions of mentoring based just on academic articles written between 1984 and 2005. 'The 'peer' element of the intervention is [also] open to interpretation' (Finnegan, Whitehurst and Denton, 2010: 6), as there is little clarity about what constitutes a 'peer' in these settings. The ambiguity in relation to what constitutes a peer was very much present during my own initial networking visits to peer mentoring services, where *peer-hood* constituted a variable mix of shared past experiences (an offending history), shared demographics (gender or age) and sometimes very few shared characteristics at all – as some volunteer bases included enthusiastic community members or students looking for experience of working with offenders. Despite evident diversity, however, there are a number of recurrent themes, or truth claims about the practice, which run through the



literature. These are: that peer mentoring changes you; that it constitutes an approach which is better than what has gone before; and that it is egalitarian. The first part of this chapter will explore each of these claims in detail before considering them in the context of growing academic interest in how people come to desist from crime.

### *2.2.1 Peer mentoring changes you*

As can be seen in the words of Chris Grayling and the UNODC above, a consistent claim made about peer mentoring is that it has the potential to change and improve its participants. Indeed much of the research into the practice to date has focused on evidencing such a claim. Unsurprisingly in terms of criminal justice the claimed *change* often evidenced is a reduction in offending. The national youth charity *The Princes Trust*, for example, declared in 2008 that ‘65% of offenders under the age of 25 said that having the support of a mentor would help them to stop re-offending; 71% said they would like a mentor who is a former offender’ (Princes Trust, 2008: 3). Evaluations commissioned by the *St Giles Trust*, claim that peer supported “‘Through the gates” clients re-offending rate is 40% lower than the national re-offending rate’ (Frontier Economics, 2009: 15) and ‘the reconviction rate for WIRE [female ex-offender led service] participants was 42%, against 51% for the national average for women offenders’ (The Social Innovation Partnership, 2012: 5). In both of these cases ‘reoffending’ was measured in binary terms after a period of twelve months.

Summarising the available evidence on mentoring more broadly, Jolliffe and Farrington (2007: 3) concluded that mentoring ‘reduced subsequent offending by 4 to 11%’. However they added the caveat that ‘this result was primarily driven by studies of lower methodological quality’ and that the ‘best studies, designed to provide the most accurate

assessment of the impact of mentoring, did not suggest that mentoring *caused* a statistically significant reduction in re-offending' (Jolliffe and Farrington, 2007: 3, emphasis added). Rather: '[m]entoring was only successful in reducing re-offending when it was one of a number of interventions given, suggesting that mentoring on its own may not reduce re-offending' (Jolliffe and Farrington, 2007: 3). They also found that:

Only studies in which mentoring was still being given during the follow-up period led to a statistically significant reduction in re-offending. This suggests that the benefits of mentoring did not persist after the mentoring ended (Jolliffe and Farrington, 2007: 3).

Mentoring may have the capacity to change people's recorded offending patterns, therefore, but only within a wider system of support and potentially only whilst the intervention continues. It is also relevant to note that of the eighteen studies assessed by Jolliffe and Farrington only two were based in the UK and both of these focused on young people.

In terms of change, however, mentoring is also claimed to have a 'modest positive effect for delinquency, aggression, drug use, and achievement' (Tolan, Henry, Schoeny and Bass, 2008: 3) and interestingly, 'effects tended to be stronger when emotional support was a key process in mentoring interventions, and when professional development was an explicit motive for participation of the mentors' (Tolan et al., 2008: 3). It is potentially not just mentoring that changes people, but the type of mentoring and the motivations of mentors. A caveat that should be added here is that these studies were all looking at mentoring *generally*; this is because 'evidence from studies that have considered "peer" mentoring

directly is scarce' (Finnegan et al., 2010: 9). The only peer specific evidence, other than the small scale evaluations of *St Giles Trust* work cited above, comes from now dated reviews of North American models. The 3-year Buddy System study conducted in 1979, for example, concluded that the 'peer network effect' in some cases helped reduce recidivism among offenders (cited in Clayton, 2009: 6). However, there is some evidence that young people participating in peer mentoring 'are less likely to use drugs and alcohol, less likely to be violent, have improved school attendance and performance and improved relationships with their parents and peers' (Parsons et al., 2008: 6). Furthermore:

A study by Sheehan et al (1999) of an 18-month community based US peer mentoring programme on violence prevention found that, compared with a matched control group, children who had attended lessons on violence prevention given by their peers avoided an increase in attitudes that supported violence, showed a decrease in their violence-related attitudes and increased self-esteem (Parsons et al., 2008: 6).

Zimmerman and colleagues (2002), whilst not looking at 'peer mentors' specifically, explored the role of 'natural mentors' or non-parental adults such as teachers, extended family or neighbours in a North American city. They found that 'those with natural mentors were less likely to smoke marijuana or be involved in nonviolent delinquency, and had more positive attitudes toward school' (Zimmerman, Bingenheimer and Notaro, 2002: 221). In the UK context, peer education has been found to improve attitudes and behaviour relating to substance misuse (Parkin and McKeganey, 2000: 302). There are also some claims that peer mentoring can increase a sense of 'agency' or self-direction, an evaluation of a female prisoners' peer led programme in Canada, for example, 'found that both the

peer counsellors and recipients of the service said the programme decreased feelings of isolation and increased feelings of self-worth and autonomy' (Pollack, 2004: 702). This finding is significant in criminal justice contexts given that the success of people to maintain desistance from crime is often linked to their sense of self control or agency (Maruna, 2001; Zdun, 2011).

Another arena wherein peers are deemed to have influence is 'Alcoholics Anonymous' or AA. In these peer recovery groups it is argued that members 'enter, or rather are recruited to, a new figured world, a new frame of understanding' (Holland, Skinner, Lachicotte and Cain, 1998: 66). For Holland et al. (1998: 66), however, it is not just the peer element of AA that factors this shift, but the *personal stories*, which constitute: 'a transformation of their identities, from drinking non-alcoholics to non-drinking alcoholics'. The personal story, which becomes the narrative of these relationships is therefore 'a cultural vehicle for identity formation' (Holland et al., 1998: 71). For Asencio and Burke (2011), however, the 'peer' identity itself may have more relevance. They explored how 'reflected appraisals' (the actions and expressions of others, which are perceived by the self and provide meaningful feedback about how one's identity is coming across in the situation) were internalised among prisoners:

Our results suggest that the internalization of reflected appraisals is dependent upon the identity at issue and the source of the reflected appraisal. We showed that the strength of the criminal identity and the drug user identity (both deviant identities) were influenced by the reflected appraisals of *significant others and peers* (though not the guards) (Asencio and Burke, 2011: 177, emphasis added).

These findings suggest that peers in mentoring roles may have more influence than figures of authority over how identity messages are internalised. However, it is not the authority or profession itself that the authors interpret as influencing appraisal internalisation here:

Since the guards at the jail are not likely to interact with participants on a regular basis due to the rotation schedule, it is likely that participants do not consider what the guards think of them to be relevant to how they see themselves. These results are consistent with the idea that others who are not close to the self have less influence on the self-view (Asencio and Burke, 2011: 179).

Therefore, interaction levels and ‘closeness’ are potentially important in terms of how far identity reflections or labels are internalised. Yet this interpretation, too, is significant for peer mentoring given the practice often involves ‘relatively high levels of contact time between mentors and mentees’ (Brown and Ross, 2010: 32). Moreover ex-offender mentors are claimed to have personal insight into prison life, which makes it easier for [mentees] to bond with the volunteers (Princes Trust, 2012: 1).

Despite evidence that peer mentoring and peer based interventions can effect change in people’s behaviour and sense of identity, there are also some problems with these claims. Firstly, the effects of peer mentoring are not always as intended. Clayton (2009: 6) points to the ‘Cambridge-Somerville Youth study’, which:

[E]xamined mentoring with children under the age of 12 who had been arrested or were at-risk for delinquency. The study found that bringing young people with

similar delinquent backgrounds together might actually increase anti-social behaviors (Clayton, 2009: 6).

It is also often ‘difficult to isolate the direct effects of mentoring, as a number of studies have considered the effectiveness of mentoring within a package of interventions’ (Finnegan et al., 2010: 9). Therefore it is difficult to evidence that peer mentoring itself has resulted in change.

### *2.2.2 Peer mentoring is better than what has gone before*

Another theme from the extant literature is that peer mentoring brings something new to the field of criminal justice, not just in terms of effects, but in terms of the *actors* involved and the *knowledges* they bring. What is more, this new knowledge is claimed to offer something expressly different to the existing forms of knowledge held by trained professionals: ‘Ex-offender mentors’ personal insight into prison life makes it easier for the young people to bond with the volunteers and provides the all-important initial hook with which to engage them in the project’ (Princes Trust, 2012: 1). Peers are therefore claimed to have a credibility that ‘professional’ rehabilitation workers may not. Indeed the Glasgow-based ‘Routes out of Prison’ project uses trained ‘ex-offenders to mentor released prisoners, precisely because they have the credibility that [workers from] statutory agencies don’t often have’ (Nellis and McNeill, 2008: xi). Moreover, peers are claimed to have ‘specific knowledge about risk behaviour occurring both inside and outside the prison, and have an understanding of realistic strategies to reduce the risk’ (Devilly, Sorbello, Eccleston and Ward, 2005: 223). Peers are therefore considered to be at an advantage over Probation Officers and related professionals because they have experienced

first-hand many of the problems faced by their ‘clients’ and can relate to the challenges of life after prison (Boyce, Hunter and Hough, 2009: viii).

Peer mentors are not just imagined to offer something better than what has gone before because they can bond with mentees and relate to their experiences practically, however, but also because they provide ‘inspiration and hope... proof that it was possible to move on and sort your life out’ (Boyce et al., 2009: 20). Whilst this philosophy is relatively new to criminal justice practice it has been dominant in the field of recovery from substance misuse:

It is only through recovery forums and peer-led services that people in recovery can become visible. Once these people become visible recovery champions, they can help people to believe that recovery is not only possible but desirable (Kidd, 2011: 174).

Peer mentoring can therefore result in a ‘multiplier effect’ whereby benefits that accrue to individuals from their work as Peer Advisors are matched by benefits to the recipients of their advice (Boyce et al., 2009: vi). Peers are understood as ‘passing on the baton’ (Boyce et al., 2009: 29). As one respondent in Boyce et al. (2009: 30) remarked: ‘You are giving them inspiration and when they look at you some of them can think to themselves “Well if this person can do it then I can do it as well...”’ (Nicola)’. This theory that people will feel inspired by the visibility of others to affect their own change is a point that will be developed further in chapter three, and indeed, throughout the thesis. The point here, however, is that we can trace within the literature a belief in shared experience as an inspirational factor.

Peer mentoring is not only imagined to be *better* in terms of what it offers potential mentees, but also in terms of what it offers to mentors and the services they work within. On a very practical level, for example, the availability of peer mentoring opportunities offers a valuable opportunity to people who often find it difficult to obtain work otherwise due to having a criminal record (Clinks and MBF, 2012; Corcoran, 2012). This opportunity to gain constructive employment is doubly important given that ‘[d]esistance requires the involvement and cooperation of the offender as well as access to “opportunities”’ (Boyce et al., 2009: 27). It is also claimed that the practice brings additional benefits for rehabilitation services, given that:

Offender mentoring... gives fiscally stretched non-government organisations the capacity to leverage the services of community volunteers as a way of providing a greater range of services... they involve relatively high levels of contact time between mentors and mentees. In contrast, the contacts between professional support workers and their clients are likely to be brief and episodic (Barry, 2000) (cited in Brown and Ross, 2010: 32).

A report by two national charities in 2012 similarly described peer mentoring as:

A support which adds value and goes beyond that offered via statutory contracts as well as the mobility aspect of mentoring support as opposed to office based statutory workers who are unable to take clients anywhere (Clinks and MBF, 2012: 9).



These features are argued to be particularly important for women in the criminal justice system, as mentoring may facilitate the transition from prison, ‘while also offering access to a prosocial source of support, independent from the insecure networks that may be available within the social environments of women offenders’ (Rumgay, 2004: 415). Servan and Mittelmark (2012: 254), whose research focused on women in Norway, found that their respondents unanimously ‘emphasized the importance to coping well of having some close relationships providing emotional and practical social support’. In a UK context it has also been recommended:

that women have a supportive milieu or mentor to whom they can turn when they have completed any offending-related programmes, since personal support is likely to be as important as any direct input addressing offending behaviour (Gelsthorpe, Sharpe and Roberts, 2007: 8).

It is important to note however, that whilst there are pragmatic gains to be made from using volunteers to offer such emotional and social support and indeed to fill gaps in existing services, there is an equally ‘strong consensus that volunteer labour should not substitute for paid professional jobs’ (Corcoran, 2012: 20). Indeed trade unions have expressed concern in the context of health service provision ‘that volunteers might be used to replace lower grade paid staff, or to fill gaps in the event of industrial action’ (Neuburger, 2008: 18).

In addition to offering high contact levels and creating a sustainable social support network, there is some evidence that peer mentors may be *better* at improving compliance with existing structures and institutions. For example, mentoring schemes were found to be

particularly successful ‘in reintegrating the targeted young people into education, training and the community’ (Finnegan et al., 2010: 10). Similarly, ‘retention rates were higher among the peer-mentored group than the non-peer-mentored group in an exercise program for older people’ (Dorgo et al., 2009, in Finnegan et al., 2010: 10).

It is relevant to note, however, that the literature *does not wholly endorse peer-led services as an improvement* on what has gone before. Rather there are also some concerns about the practice. Some of these concerns relate to mentoring procedures, including: mismatches of mentor and mentee in terms of expectations, gender, culture or race, a reluctant or over-zealous mentor/mentee, emotional involvement, broken confidentiality, conflicting roles of manager, assessor, mentor or obstructions from/conflicts of others, and parameters/boundaries not agreed in advance (McKimm, Jollie and Hatter, 2007: 13-14).

There are also concerns that:

Taken together, the mentoring theory remains underdeveloped... The work is, commendably, multidisciplinary and, thus, draws from many theoretical perspectives... [Yet] In most instances it is not easy to sort mentoring from adjacent concepts such as training, coaching, socialization, and even friendship (Bozeman and Feeney, 2007: 735).

Mentoring itself therefore lacks a well-developed theoretical base. Other concerns relate to the charged contexts in which criminal justice mentors operate. Boyce et al. (2009) for example, highlight:

The potential for the Peer Advisors to be subject to bullying or pressure to traffic items such as drugs or mobile phones through the system [although they acknowledge that this] was a concern about the possible opportunity rather than a worry about the number of such incidents (Boyce et al., 2009: 11).

Nonetheless this concern was also raised by Devilly et al. (2005), who argued in their review of prison based peer education schemes that ‘clarification of the many ethical issues... needs to be addressed’ (Devilly et al., 2005: 233), issues such as professional conduct, boundaries, abuse of the system and [particular to the prison setting] ‘the passing of information and or/drugs’ (Devilly et al., 2005: 233). Such concerns highlight early on how mentors with criminal convictions are frequently perceived in terms of risk.

There were also some problems highlighted in terms of volunteering specifically. The familiar problem of inconsistent capital is cited given ‘funding tends to be short-term, “pump-priming” limiting the time for projects to become established and effective’ (Boyce et al., 2009: 22). Indeed in a recent sector survey the ‘most frequently expressed challenge was related to future funding and sustainability’ (Clinks and MBF, 2012: 7). There is also the problem of ‘access to good quality volunteer managers... and the resource intensive and time consuming duties of managing mentors’ activity and supporting them’ (Clinks and MBF, 2012: 9). It is also evident that there are difficulties in relation to ‘recruitment, selection and retention with some specific problems outlined around the CRB (criminal records bureau) clearance process leading to loss of motivation for the volunteer whilst waiting’ (Clinks and MBF, 2012: 11). Finally, but not insignificantly, there are warnings that volunteering, particularly in prison settings, can take a high personal toll with harms including burnout, post-traumatic stress, injury or even death (see Corcoran, 2012: 22).

In summary, peer mentoring is claimed to be better than what has gone before because mentors draw upon lived experiences, which allows them to bond with, relate to and inspire mentees in a personal way. Peer mentors are also able to offer high levels of support and, therefore, fill gaps that exist in existing services. Despite these claims of virtue, however, there are also concerns about the security of the practice, the lack of a coherent mentoring theory and the personal demands upon mentors.

### 2.2.3 *Peer mentoring is egalitarian.*

Not only is peer mentoring claimed to change people and offer something better than the professionally dominated approach to offender management that immediately precedes it, but it also claimed to be more egalitarian than other forms of rehabilitation practice. It is not an intervention delivered by an expert ‘other’, but a peer, purportedly allowing people to engage in a less hierarchical rehabilitation relationship. The *St Giles Trust* Peer Advice Project, for example, claims to test out ‘the concept that prisoners themselves can be an important resource in the rehabilitation and resettlement processes’ and as such is said to serve ‘as a counterbalance to the widespread belief that programmes are something that are “done” to offenders by specialists’ (Boyce et al., 2009: vi). This repositioning of ‘offenders’ as intervening agents as opposed to intervened upon subjects potentially offers something quite different to existing criminal justice approaches, which remain heavily reliant upon teaching ‘offenders’ cognitive skills (Rex, 2011: 68). Pollack (2004), for example, contends that:

Cognitive behavioural programming considered to be ‘what works’ to reduce recidivism... [is] based on the premise that criminal offending is a result of the

offender's inability to think logically, reason appropriately and to make rational decisions (Pollack, 2004: 694).

These dominant psychological approaches pathologise criminal behaviour, 'delineating between "us" (law abiding citizens) and "them" (offenders)' (Pollack 2004: 695). When ex/offenders become the intervenors, however, this constructed divide is destabilised.

This reimagining of who may constitute the providers and users of services is itself part of a broader movement of 'levelling' the field of human services. Hughes (2012: 50), for example, argues that this notion of levelling is encapsulated in the 'user engagement' discourse. Hughes points to an increasing emphasis on the importance of service user engagement in the interventions to which they are subject. Not least because through expert-led 'what works' defined programmes 'we run the risk of pissing [offenders] off... since our methods seem not to match what they see as their primary needs (and most pressing goals)' (Porporino, 2010, cited in Hughes, 2012: 50). Hughes (2012: 52) argues that *offender engagement* exists on a scale, from: 'motivating individuals to participate and attend for interventions determined by a probation officer' to 'securing the full participation of individuals, fostering a sense of ownership, and encouraging them to take the lead on decisions regarding their goals and objectives'. Whatever its form the argument is that:

A greater voice needs to be given to service users in the design and implementation of approaches, to ensure that they are experienced as meaningful and supportive of desistance (Hughes, 2012: 64).

This argument has also been forwarded by McNeill and Weaver (2010: 10) who argue that a more radical desistance supporting approach might be to: ‘involve current and former service users in co-designing, co-developing, co-implementing and co-evaluating a desistance-supporting intervention process’. They argue that:

A strong evidence-based case could be made for this; partly on the grounds that desistance research itself is often about learning directly from offenders’ and ex-offenders’ experiences, partly because of what the desistance research has to say about the importance of and merits of developing agency, generativity and civic participation and partly because services co-designed by their current or former users may well be more likely to be fit for purpose and thus effective (McNeill and Weaver, 2010: 10).

‘Desistance research’ itself will be introduced more fully in the final section of this chapter. Before we get there however, there are clearly a number of arguments within the literature, which advocate that *listening* to the people who are subject to criminal justice interventions may constitute a less repressive approach than imposing expert knowledge upon them. Founded in 2009 the charity *User Voice* attempts to put this theory into practice by arguing, perhaps contentiously, that ‘only offenders can stop re-offending’ (User Voice Website, 2015). This claim is based upon the need to include a voice of experience:

User Voice’s mission is to engage those who have experience of the criminal justice system in bringing about its reform and to reduce offending. User Voice is a charity led and delivered by ex-offenders. This gives us the unique ability to gain

the trust of, access to and insight from people within the criminal justice system (User Voice Mission Statement, 2012).

This approach represents a challenge to the dominant discourse, which holds that ‘what works’ in terms of offender rehabilitation are approaches that utilise *experts* to affect cognitive behavioural changes in flawed subjects. Rungay (2004: 405) has termed this dominant discourse ‘a cognitive deficit model’ and argues that ‘within this paradigm, offenders are deficient individuals whose faulty thinking requires correction by professionals with special expertise in cognitive training’ (Rungay, 2004: 405). The claims to knowledge within this discourse are often based on quantifying practices, rather than lived perspectives:

[T]here is an increasingly scientised conception of criminology [prioritising]... statistical ‘What Works’ analyses over work that would seek to engage offenders by asking what intervention programmes are most meaningful to them (Gelsthorpe, 2006, cited in Spalek, 2008: 4).

In contrast, the increased inclusion of *user* or *offender* voices and indeed the push for people who have used services to deliver services, actively challenge the prioritisation of professional ‘expertise’. In doing so they call for a more *egalitarian* form of rehabilitation practice, which imagines that expertise may reside as much within people’s lived experiences as it does within academic and professional knowledge. In this sense peer mentoring can also be seen as a political act. Little has previously been written about the political action of former offenders. Where reference is made to the actions of prisoners or offenders their political action is understood in terms of ‘expressive mutiny’ (Martinson,

1972) rather than positively organised challenge. Expressive mutiny may include violent or riotous action in prisons, which ‘aims to communicate the inmates’ plight to the public so far as he understands it’ (Mannle and Lewis, 1976: 284) or as resilience, which is ‘emphatically not politically minded’ in the way of, for example, ‘working-class youth sub-cultures [which can offer up] embryonic political resistance to the bourgeois status quo, hidden perhaps in stylistic rebellion’ (MacDonald and Shildrick, 2010: 196). Whilst the limited literature on ex-offender peer mentoring is largely functional and does not specifically make sense of the practice as political statement, there are traces of politicisation within the research. Kavanagh and Borrill (2013: 14) for example, have recognised that mentoring can be ‘empowering in both prison and probation settings’ in contrast to ‘previous experiences of feeling powerless’. Peer mentoring can therefore be read as a stylistic rebellion to the stigma and exclusion former offenders often experience. It is an activity which politically turns the power of these exclusions on their head. Past experience of offending is transformed from a limitation into a unique resource. How far this rebellion is critical, or transforms relations, will be explored in chapters three and ten.

Peer mentoring has so far been conceived of as egalitarian in that it includes voices previously excluded from the practice of rehabilitation. However there are also claims that the practice of mentoring itself aims for a more democratic kind of intervention, one which allows both helper and helped to be afforded a voice within the relationship. Such an egalitarian learning space has been theorised by critical pedagogue Paulo Freire:

The fundamental task of the mentor is a liberatory task. It is not to encourage the mentor’s goals and aspirations and dreams to be reproduced in the mentees, the students, but to give rise to the possibility that the students become the owners of



their own history. This is how I understand the need that teachers have to transcend their merely instructive task and to assume the ethical posture of a mentor who truly believes in the total autonomy, freedom, and development of those he or she mentors (Freire, 1997: 324).

Pollack (2004) examined peer support services as an example of such liberatory practice with women in prison:

The fact that the group was co-facilitated by prisoners, rather than by professional staff, greatly enhanced a sense of self-reliance and the autonomy of prisoner participants who have so few opportunities to author their own stories and define their own needs (Pollack, 2004:703).

This highlights how peer to peer work encourages solidarity alongside egalitarianism. Pollack suggests that peer support ‘helps counter the notion that women in prison have few skills, are unable to assume responsibilities, cannot be trusted and are emotionally unstable’ (Pollack, 2004; 704). Consequently it constitutes a move ‘away from deficit model to one that emphasises women’s strengths and acknowledges their varied and skilful modes of coping’ (Pollack, 2004: 704; see also Burnett and Maruna 2006). An important difference in principle between peer mentoring and other forms of rehabilitation is that both parties are positioned as collaborators in the problem solving process. A prison-based peer programme in New York State, for example, was found to provide:

[L]eadership, support, and guidance for female offenders, and not only created a prosocial environment, but fashioned an entire community. This community

continued outside of the prison walls, provided women with emotional support, and subsequently resulted in increased levels of institutional and post-release success (Collica, 2010: 314).

Such personal connections and links into support networks represent an increase in ‘social capital’, described by McNeill and Weaver (2010: 20) as ‘relationships, networks and reciprocities within families and communities’, a key factor in desistance theory (Farrall, 2011). This approach closely resonates with ‘strengths-based’ practices, which ‘treat offenders as community assets to be utilized rather than merely liabilities to be supervised’ (Burnett and Maruna, 2006: 84). Burnett and Maruna (2006: 84) explain how the goal of strengths work is to provide opportunities for individuals ‘to develop pro-social self-concepts and identity, generally in the form of rewarding work that is helpful to others (the so-called ‘helper principle’)’ (Burnett and Maruna, 2006: 84). The idea is that: ‘Nobody should be only a receiver. If people are going to feel good and be accomplished and be part of something, they have to be doing something they can be proud of’ (Burnett and Maruna, 2006: 84). Peer mentoring builds upon this principle as ex-offenders are seen as valuable resources in their own right, they also benefit from opportunities in a redemptive capacity:

[T]he helper principle suggests that by treating prisoners as positive resources and providing opportunities for them to develop pro-social self-concepts, communities will be more willing to do their share in the process of reintegration, hence reducing recidivism (Burnett and Maruna, 2006: 89).

Whilst peer mentoring may offer people with convictions a role which recognises their skills and indeed may be redemptive, there is also a potential problem with the claim that

the peer mentoring relationship is more egalitarian than ‘expert’ intervention, given it essentially maintains a hierarchical relationship structure. This is not a space where ‘nobody is a receiver’ (Burnett and Maruna, 2006: 84), but rather there are intervenors (mentors) and intervened upon (mentees). Mentees, whilst benefiting in practical and social terms, are still subject to a relationship with an *Other* who has something to teach them, a way to help them improve.

### **2.3 Desistance from Crime**

‘Desistance’ refers to ceasing a pattern of criminal behaviour, or: ‘going straight’ (Maruna, Porter and Carvalho, 2004b: 221). Desistance studies examine ‘not why people *get into crime* but how they *get out* of it and what can be done to assist them in this process’ (McNeill, 2012: 95, emphasis in original). Knowledge of how people desist is important to any service working with offenders because ‘desisting from crime is what practitioners in the field of offender programming and treatment have always wanted for their clients’ (Maruna, Immarigeon and LeBel, 2011: 10). Interestingly, however, Maruna et al., (2011: 11) also highlight that the study of desistance emerged out of a critique of the professionally driven ‘medical model’ of corrections, to explore desistance was to ‘study those persons who change *without* the assistance of correctional interventions’ (Maruna et al., 2011: 11, emphasis in original). Indeed ‘[a]lmost all of the research suggests that “programmes” have a remarkably minor impact on life outcomes like going to prison’ (Maruna and LeBel, 2010: 68). In contrast, desisters’ ‘own resources and social networks are often more significant factors in resolving their difficulties than professional staff’ (Hill, 1999, cited in McNeill and Maruna, 2007: 229). As a result:

The desistance paradigm suggests that we might be better off if we allowed offenders to *guide us* instead, listened to what they think might best fit their individual struggles out of crime, rather than continue to insist that our solutions are their salvation (Porporino, 2010: 80, emphasis in original).

The implication here is that ‘offender management services need to think of themselves less as providers of correctional treatment (that belongs to the expert) and more as supporters of desistance processes (that belong to the desister)’ (McNeill, 2006: 46).

These arguments partially explain how the notion of peer mentoring has gained ground. Peer mentoring, in theory, draws upon the perspectives of people who have experienced crime and change *and* invites ex/offenders to take a central role in their own (and others’) change processes. This context makes the concept of desistance worthy of specific consideration.

Most academic studies present desistance as a process, whereby people either grow out of criminal behaviour, make new decisions based on social ties, or experience an identity shift through new stories, narratives or scripts about their true good self (see McNeill, 2006: 46). In their summary of desistance research Farrall and Calverley (2006) drill down into the more intricate ‘factors and processes’ associated with desistance. These include: the routine of work habits, the quality of intimate relationships, leaving the area you have grown up in, feeling shame, having a motivation to avoid offending, experiencing a significant shock; for example being wounded, growing tired of prison following a period of re-evaluation and experiencing serious physical harm (Farrall and Calverley, 2006: 4-7).

Moving away from crime, it appears, is a complex process influenced by a number of social, emotional and subjective factors. Applying a theoretical lens to the emerging empirical data, Maruna (2001) identified three broad perspectives in desistance literature: Maturational reform, based on the links between age and certain criminal behaviours; Social bonds theory, suggesting that ties to family, employment or education in early adulthood explain changes across the life course; and Narrative theory, stressing ‘the significance of subjective changes in the person’s sense of self and identity, reflected in motivations, greater concern for others and more consideration of the future’ (cited in McNeill, 2006: 46). Reflecting upon this theoretical shape, McNeill (2006) concludes: ‘It is not just the events and changes that matter; it is what these events and changes *mean* to the people involved’ (McNeill, 2006: 47, emphasis in original). More recent debates on desistance are therefore particularly concerned with the ‘complex interaction between subjective/agency factors and social/environmental factors’ (LeBel et al., 2008: 131); in other words, how individual influences on desisting from crime such as maturation, decision making and new self-narratives relate to social factors such as employment, housing and pro-social relationships. By highlighting ‘possible structural impediments to desistance’ and asking ‘how far do social structures impede or encourage that process’ (Farrall, Bottoms and Shapland, 2010: 549) the focus is shifted from simply problematic individuals to structures which may require change. Desistance from crime then is a complex process, which appears to be linked to maturing, entering positive intimate relationships, experiencing criminal activities negatively and perceiving legitimate opportunities as possible. It also involves a positive concept of self, something which can be enhanced by opportunities to *do good*.

### 2.3.1 *Claims that peer mentoring and desistance may be related*

Whilst it remains to be seen whether peer mentoring is related or relevant to ‘desistance’, there is an alluring correspondence between the language of desistance and peer mentoring that has led to claims that they might well be. Considering mentoring in the light of desistance research, Brown and Ross (2010: 37) argue that whilst maturational changes ‘lie beyond the scope of mentoring projects’ social factors such as ‘ties to family, community, employment and the like, seems to lie squarely within the domain of mentoring and concerns the acquisition or maintenance of social capital’. Furthermore, they suggest that ‘the narratives offenders construct around themselves, their circumstances and their future goes to the issue of human capital and would also be a reasonable process target for mentoring relationships’ (Brown and Ross, 2010: 38). Reflecting upon peer mentoring specifically Maruna (2012a) stated:

It was shocking how many [voluntary sector] staff and managers were familiar with and motivated by the desistance literature. As several told me, if desistance is the theory, the *St. Giles Trust* [charity] (with its commitment to hiring ex-prisoner resettlement mentors) is very much the practice (Maruna, 2012a: 1).

Peer mentoring is therefore theorised as ‘desistance in practice’. First and foremost it provides a solid opportunity for people with criminal convictions to ‘do’ and ‘make’ good (Clinks and MBF, 2012). This may be particularly important in a system where ‘released, ex-prisoners [are often] prohibited from finding legitimate means of self-support as a result of their involvement with the system meant to “correct” them’ (Maruna, 2012b: 75). Peer mentoring offers a practical opportunity to make amends, to realise strengths and skills and to heal. It therefore potentially presents a vehicle for ‘allowing individuals to identify themselves credibly as desisters, rather than on trying to “cause” desistance explicitly’

(Maruna, 2012b: 75). The following discussion will expand on this hypothesis by suggesting there are three ways that peer mentoring could potentially support desistance processes: firstly by offering *scripts* for mentees to work with; secondly by offering a *readership* for the new stories which emerge; and thirdly as a *redemptive* practice.

### 2.3.2 *The potential of peer mentors to co-author desistance scripts*

One of the ways in which peer mentoring may have the capacity to promote desistance is by offering mentees a co-author with which to create a new identity story. Images of stories relating to the self, or ‘scripts’, run throughout work on desistance. Scripts are conceived of slightly differently by different authors. Maruna (2001), for example, characterises the self-narratives of desisters as ‘redemption scripts’, which begin by establishing the goodness of the narrator who is believed in by an outside force and is now positioned to ‘give something back’ (Maruna, 2001: 87). Runggay (2004), however, suggests that ‘certain common identities that may present themselves as available (for example, mother) may also provide a “script” by which to enact a conventional, pro-social social role’ (Runggay, 2004: 405). MacDonald and colleagues (2011) describe the ‘critical moments’ [of desistance] as insights of *biographical* insight and reflection from which new directions in life are pursued (MacDonald, Webster, Shildrick and Simpson, 2011: 147-8, emphasis added). The *story* is indeed an appropriate motif to accompany work about people changing as the ‘personal story is a cultural vehicle for identity formation’ (Holland et al., 1998: 71). Crucially, however, the author of desistance stories is not always, solely, the desister. Maruna’s work on desistance, for example, revealed the importance of forming a new identity (or of ‘re-biographing’) to an offender ‘Making Good’ (2001). He described a ‘looking glass recovery’ process wherein at first the offender has no belief in themselves, but someone else believes in them and makes them realize that they do have

personal value (Maruna, 2001: 96). This too could indicate the value of peer mentors – as a respected other to have belief in mentees. Indeed, ‘[i]f secondary [or sustained] desistance... requires a narrative reconstruction of identity, then it seems obvious why relational aspects of practice are so significant’ (McNeill, 2006: 49). In Rungay’s account (2004: 409), common social identities – such as parent, student, worker or partner - ‘present themselves’ to the potential desister. The desister’s role is then to co-author; or co-perform these roles should they choose. The first role of a peer mentor may be to positively model such identities. The script presented, however, is only ever a ‘skeleton’ one, containing ‘only a fraction of the situations and interactions in which the role must be performed’ (Rungay, 2004: 409). An additional task for mentors then, may be assisting with performing the detail of each role through modelling and offering opportunities for new roles to be practiced. Later chapters will focus on whether and how practices of peer mentoring may encourage new ‘self-scripts’, or facilitate compliance with established social scripts. The multiplicity of authors within these conceptions of identity scripts, however, also highlight the complexity of the desister’s position. In constructing a new ‘text’ of the self, authors must:

[M]ake use of the dominant discourse and its available discursive subject positions (e.g. client, defendant, complainant, service receiver, etc.) [Hence becoming] subject to discourse’s constitutive effects (Henry and Milovanovic, 1996: 85).

In context the desister is expected, by the demands of modern neo-liberal societies, to have full responsibility for her or his story; to author her or his choices, roles and truths, and yet in order to do so s/he is bound by the socially constructed, the discursive, yet nonetheless powerful social scripts available. The story that then emerges when people are aware that



change is expected of them is one that must draw on shared ideals, thus ‘the voices of inner speech which seem to be mine, are created from an “orchestration”’, that is, the ‘balance struck among the socially identified voices that comprise inner speech’ (Mageo, 2002: 54). The personal story of change then, whilst appearing initially to belong to the desister, is actually a combination of individual agency, shared language and socially available scripts. In other words desistance does not arise in isolation, but there must be a language and roles that appear to be accessible to people making such changes.

### 2.3.3 *The potential of peer mentors to act as co-readers of desistance scripts*

As Maruna (2001) indicates above, it is not just having *a script* to draw upon, which is important for the formation of desisting identities, but also having *a readership* who recognise or authenticate these performances. Peer mentors may therefore form a crucial part of the social audience, wherein desisters self-stories are constituted; recognised in fullness as social truths. Maruna and colleagues, for example, posit that that ‘if the counselor believes in the client’s abilities, the client will too’ (Maruna, LeBel, Mitchell and Naples, 2004a: 278). Similarly Zdun (2011: 307) found that ‘desisters can progress quickly when agency and motivation are acknowledged by society and when receiving support’. Indeed when such recognition is absent LeBel and colleagues (2008) found that desistance is compromised:

research participants who reported feeling stigmatised and socially excluded during a prison based interview were more likely to be reconvicted and reimprisoned in a ten-year follow-up study, even after controlling for the number of social problems the individual experienced after release (cited in Maruna and LeBel, 2010: 75).

The problem for individuals attempting change of course, is that ‘desistance is a social possibility that takes place within a very specific set of social contexts that may or may not recognise legitimacy of transformation’ (Polizzi, 2011: 150). Peer mentors may, therefore, offer a buffer to such stigma, exclusion and scepticism, offering a forum for acceptance and inclusion.

#### *2.3.4 The potential of peer mentoring to promote desistance through ‘redemption’*

A third way in which peer mentoring may assist in the desistance process is by offering an opportunity for redemptive action. Maruna et al., (2004b: 226) suggest that ‘a lifetime that is deemed a “waste” or a shame can be “put to use” by saving one – “even just one” – other life from repeating the same mistakes’. In this sense the act of giving through mentoring becomes a form of desistance in action:

[H]elping others, as I was once helped, really helps me turn the moral corner on deviance. Behaviours previously declared morally reprehensible are increasingly understood within a new universe of discourse as symptoms of a much larger disease complex (Brown, 1991: 222).

Burnett and Maruna (2006) similarly make a strong case for meaningful volunteering by ‘offenders’, suggesting it is a valid ‘strengths-based approach’ to promoting desistance. They point to Uggen and Janikula’s (1999) study, which ‘found a robust negative relationship between volunteer work and arrest’ (Burnett and Maruna, 2006: 88). This correlation is not just explained in terms of putting a lifetime of mistakes to good use or turning a moral corner, but also in terms of practical social inclusion:

As people change they need new skills and capacities appropriate to their new lifestyle, and access to opportunities to use them. Another way of putting this is that they need to acquire both ‘human capital’ and ‘social capital’ (Maguire and Raynor, 2006: 25).

LeBel (2007) offers evidence of the benefits of such a ‘helper/wounded healer orientation... for formerly incarcerated persons’ psychological well-being’ (LeBel, 2007: 19). He suggests that his findings indicate:

[A] basic incompatibility between a helper/wounded healer orientation and criminal attitudes and behavior. This orientation appears to transform individuals from being part of ‘the problem’ into part of ‘the solution’ as they give their time in the service of helping others who are less far along in the recovery and reintegration process (LeBel, 2007: 19-20).

Peer mentoring, therefore, potentially provides an opportunity to make practical amends through assisting others. It may also offer the opportunity to gain social capital and skills to sustain changes, changes which in turn are incompatible with continued criminality.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has introduced the landscape from which peer mentoring is emerging. It has highlighted how the penal voluntary sector has provided a space for those who have experienced the criminal justice system to introduce a new form of practice; and to challenge the dominance of professional expertise in offender ‘management’. However, it has also highlighted concerns that this sector may be compromised as a critical space due

to processes of co-option by the State and private sector. The chapter has also reviewed the, albeit very limited, literature on peer mentoring in criminal justice. In doing so it has argued that there are three dominant claims currently being made about the practice. These are that it changes people; it is somehow better than rehabilitation efforts that have gone before; and finally that it constitutes an egalitarian form of practice. The ‘ideal typical’ peer mentor who emerges from this review is a mentor who aims to effect change in their mentees by helping them to move away from crime; a mentor who shares their own life experiences for practical and inspirational ends; and one who does so from a non-professional, non-authoritarian position. The claimed centrality of the offender experience within peer mentoring corresponds with emerging research messages about how people come to desist from crime. Indeed peer mentoring has been described as a form of desistance in practice.

The final part of this chapter therefore looked more closely at the ways in which peer mentoring may potentially support desistance processes. It was suggested that peer mentoring may offer co-authors for new desistance scripts; that it may offer an audience to affirm new desisting identities; and finally create a physical space for redemptive practice to be performed. Whilst there is some theoretical correspondence between desistance studies and claims for peer mentoring, however, there is currently no evidence of how mentoring relates to desistance processes. Indeed desistance in itself does not appear to wholly capture the claims that are being made for peer mentoring. The following chapter will therefore offer a broader theoretical framework with which to read this practice, by building upon the precepts, which although not fully articulated, appear to underpin the practice. They are: processes of identity work, ideals of critical pedagogy, collective action based upon fraternity/sorority and processes of politicisation.

## Chapter Three

### **Interactionist theories of peer mentoring: pedagogy, identity and collective politicisation**

The previous chapter outlined some of the themes emerging from the mentoring literature. It also introduced how a growing body of work on desistance has enabled a favourable context for peer mentoring to develop. Indeed, the desistance literature offers a useful theoretical framework with which to hypothesise peer mentoring as a change process. However, the mentoring literature does not *just* refer to peer mentoring in terms of desistance, but also as a process of learning, as a form of coming together or solidarity and as a political social activity. This chapter will, therefore, draw from broader interactionist theories in an attempt to acknowledge these broader processes of communication in mentoring relationships. In doing so it offers a theoretical framework to ground the analysis which will follow.

The theorists in this chapter have been selected because their ideas have a clear relevance to peer mentoring in criminal justice. However, as attempts to define the practice to date are bounded by the limits of criminological literature, the chapter reaches to other disciplines to open out the analytical terrain, drawing upon theorists from the fields of education, sociology and theology. Despite disciplinary and explanatory diversity, each theory employed is congruent with the premises of *symbolic interaction*, that is:

That human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them... that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of,

the social interaction that one has with one's fellows... [and] that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters (Blumer, 1969: 2).

In context it will not be suggested that peer mentoring exists as an independently measurable entity, but that mentors and mentees construct its meanings in interaction with the experience, with other individuals and through interpretation. An interactionist perspective offers a new way of seeing peer mentoring. It sheds light on mentoring in its complexity, not just as a way of supporting desistance, reducing reoffending or numerous other functional claims that have been made for the practice, but also as a practice that employs identity politics; has features of critical pedagogy; relies upon notions of fraternity or sorority; and potentially politicises people.

Whilst there are a number of themes running through the literature about peer mentoring, there is no coherent theory of mentoring and *no* proffered theory at all which aims to make sense of peer mentoring by ex-offenders. This chapter will begin to bridge this theoretical gap by arguing that there are four core precepts which currently underpin this work; precepts that can be traced throughout the literature to date, but have not been formally drawn together or recognised. These are: *The Identity Precept*, which considers mentoring as a process of identity work; *The Pedagogical Precept*, which conceives of mentoring as a critical educational activity; *The Fraternity or Sorority Precept*, which has regard for the collective nature of the practice; and *The Politicisation Precept*, which recognises the often politicised nature of such contexts. This framework not only recognises that peer mentoring aims to help people change or 'desist', but also recognises some of the manifold objectives of the practice, which have not been fully acknowledged to date.

### 3.1 The Identity Precept

The concept of identity is recognised as central to moving away from crime. Chapter two, for example, revealed how important the formation of a new identity can be to an offender ‘Making Good’ (Maruna, 2001) and how offenders who are desisting can experience subjective changes in self and identity (McNeill, 2006: 46). There are also some indications that peer mentoring may involve *identity work*. Brown and Ross (2010: 38), for example, suggest that ‘the narratives offenders construct around themselves, their circumstances and their future goes to the issue of human capital and would also be a reasonable process target for mentoring relationships’. Similarly, McNeill (2006) argued that: ‘if sustained desistance requires a narrative reconstruction of identity, then it seems obvious why relational aspects of practice are so significant’ (McNeill, 2006: 49). There is also some evidence that peer recovery groups, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, encourage ‘a transformation of [group member] identities, from drinking non-alcoholics to non-drinking alcoholics’ (Holland et al., 1998: 66). Where the existing literature references identity, it is framed as an aspect of self which is central to desisting from crime and which can be positively shaped by interactions with peers or mentors. However, just *how* these social processes work is worthy of further scrutiny. This section will therefore theorise peer mentoring as a form of identity work based upon three central elements: *mimetic desire* (Girard, 1977); *situated social performance* (Goffman, 1963); and *shared language* (Bernstein, 1971).

#### 3.1.1 Identity as Mimetic Desire

Rene Girard’s theory of mimesis (1962) has not yet been applied to an understanding of peer mentoring, but is completely congruent with any practice that is reliant upon role modelling and identity. For Girard identity does not emerge in isolation, but rather it is

preceded by desire. Moreover Girard's notion of human desire does not reside within the individual, but is shaped by social models:

If desire is only mine, I will always desire the same things. If desire is so fixed, it means that there isn't much difference between desire and instincts. In order to have mobility of desire – in relation to both appetites and instincts from one side and the social milieu from the other – the relevant difference is imitation; that is the presence of the model or models... Mimetic desire is [what makes it possible for us to] construct our own, albeit inevitably unstable, identities (Girard, 2010: 58).

Imitating the desires of others is seen as key to changes in identity. In Girard's model identity is a construct of mimetic desire, 'we do not desire to change spontaneously, but according to another person; we imitate the Other's desire' (Doran, 2008: xv). Mimetic models (or role models) are therefore fundamental to what people come to desire and who they become:

The mimetic model directs the disciple's desire to a particular object by desiring it himself. That is why we can say that mimetic desire is rooted neither in the subject nor in the object, but in a third party whose desire is imitated by the subject (Girard, 1977: 180).

This dynamic is palpable if unarticulated within the practice of peer mentoring. The practice is constituted of mentees (the intended 'disciple'), desired behaviour change (the object) and mentors (the third party). Mentors are positioned as 'role models' (Kavanagh and Borrill, 2013; Finnegan et al., 2010; Parkin and McKeganey, 2000), suggesting



implicitly that mentees will come to desire that which they see within their mentors (their mimetic models). Desire to desist from crime, in these terms, is not inherent in a mentee from her or his own side, nor is there anything inherently desirable about ‘going straight’, but rather mentees require a model to direct their desire in this direction. The role of the peer mentor is to activate mimetic desire in mentees. The reformed offender as role model constitutes a lived invitation to become: ‘desire to desist, as have I’.

However *peer* mentors are also positioned as role models on the basis of some perceived or constructed point of connection, usually that their previous experiences of offending make them more ‘credible’. *The Princes Trust* for example, assert that: ‘offenders are more likely to relate to a mentor who has previously been in prison’ (2008: 4), whilst the ‘Routes out of Prison project uses... ex-offenders to mentor released prisoners, precisely because they have the credibility that statutory agencies don’t often have’ (Nellis and McNeill, 2008: xi). What makes people with a history of offending viable as role models is their appeal to people who have shared similar past experiences. This makes them more credible and their stories of change more worthy of admiration. This aspect too is congruent with Girard’s conception of mimetic desire. For Girard, the mimicker (in this case the mentee) selects a model that s/he admires and respects; ‘if he had not done so, he would hardly have chosen him as a model in the first place’ (Girard, 1987: 290). It is reasoned that: ‘[w]e desire what we see others desire, and if we admire other people, our desire for what they want is all the sharper’ (Hull, 2008: 594). The *status* of a mimetic model (or mentor), as perceived by the protégé (or mentee) is, therefore, regarded as important as the presence and actions of that model.

For Girard (1991), people are capable of adapting their identity. More specifically, identity constantly shifts as a result of individuals selectively mimicking the desires of those whom they admire and respect. Importantly however, this is not a predictable process. People do not *always* imitate what they desire in another, but rather desire can also result from an urge not to imitate:

When we imitate successful rivals, we explicitly acknowledge what we would prefer to deny – their superiority. The urge to imitate is very strong, since it opens up possibilities of bettering the competition. But the urge not to imitate is also very strong. The only thing that the losers can deny the winners is the homage of their imitation (Girard, 1991: 240).

Thus power relations are integral to Girard's thesis. To mimic is to defer to, to acknowledge another's pre-eminence and to pay 'homage'. Girard sees this process as essential in the human drive toward self-betterment, but he also argues that individuals reject this theory of self because it contradicts the dominant discourse in a modern world, which is 'arch-individualistic' (Girard, 2010: 58). Thus whilst our desires, indeed our very identities, are intrinsically linked to the social world we observe this is not an aspect of ourselves we are comfortable with:

The mimetic quality of childhood desire is universally recognized. Adult desire is virtually identical, except that (most strikingly in our own culture) the adult is generally ashamed to imitate others for fear of revealing his lack of being (Girard, 1977: 155).

In the context of peer mentoring, role models (mentors) may actually inspire a strong urge (in mentees) to become something other than what is modelled. This could potentially lead to a mentee rejecting the modelled desire to desist, or to 'go straight', as the intention of a mentee to deny a mentor their homage is so strong. The very presence of mimetic models therefore introduces the potential for resistance to the offered ideal.

In addition to the potential for mentees to reject their mentors, there is also a need to consider the ethics of encouraging imitated desire through the use of *ideal* models. Consider, for example, the recollections of bell hooks, as she details her experiences as a black scholar entering predominantly white institutions:

Nonconformity on our part was viewed with suspicion... those of us from marginal groups who were allowed to enter prestigious, predominantly white colleges were made to feel that we were not there to learn but to prove that we were the equal of whites. We were there to prove this by showing how well we could become clones of our peers (hooks, 1994: 5).

hooks highlights how aspects of self can be subtly devalued or relegated as people are offered ideal models, whether these are implicit or explicit. In hooks' account these models are implicit, whereas in peer mentoring they are more explicit. People are overtly positioned as mentees (*protégés*) and offered mentors (role models). Within this dynamic of presumed superiority and lack there is potential for mentees to feel a similar pressure to become the 'clones of their peers'.

Whereas Girard (1987) theorises the mimetic practices underpinning identity, mentoring works to exploit such processes. Indeed Girard himself argued that ‘everything that we know under the titles of apprenticeship, education and initiation [to which I would add mentoring] rests on this capacity for mimesis’ (Girard, 1987: 290). Mimetic theory therefore appears to hold a particular relevance for the practice of peer mentoring. The practice can be read as a pure manifestation of ‘mimesis’ in that it offers up ‘role models’ with the implied intention that mentees come to mimic the desire for acquisition of the same thing their mentors have achieved. Whilst other forms of rehabilitation, such as ‘offender management’ or cognitive behavioural work, promote desistance as a desirable *end* to be attained, peer mentoring invites desire for desistance by offering *models* who have already achieved it in the hope their desire will come to be shared. Like Girard, peer mentoring ‘replaces an object-oriented conception of desire... with an intersubjective or “inter-individual” conception predicated on the power of the social’ (Doran, 2008: xv). Nonetheless this process is problematic. Whilst mimesis can result in mimicked desire it can also result in a rejection of the model, an urge not to imitate. To employ ex-offender role models is as likely to inspire a rejection of modelled desires as imitation, dependent upon the will of the protégé (in this case the mentee). Furthermore the presence of ideal models may serve to devalue aspects of the person on the ‘receiving’ side of the exchange.

### *3.1.2 Identity as Situated Performance*

Whilst Girard’s ideas are relevant to an analysis of the identity work of peer mentoring, his work is generally more concerned with desire rather than identity formation specifically. The work of Erving Goffman, however, is principally concerned with identity. For Goffman, identity is seen in terms of performance: people perform a variety of roles, they take on institutional definitions of identity and their character can be inferred from who

their time is spent with (Goffman, 1959; 1961; 1963). However these roles and directions are far from stable and always require interpretation and performance on the part of the individual:

When the individual does move into a new position in society and obtains a new part to perform, he is not likely to be told in full detail how to conduct himself... he will be given only a few cues, hints and stage directions, and it will be assumed that he already has in his repertoire a large number of bits and pieces of performances that will be required in the new setting (Goffman, 1959: 79).

Learning to desist from crime, or being 'socialised' to desist, requires the transmission of 'pieces of expression' (Goffman, 1959: 79) (in this case from mentors), but also interpretation and invention (in this case from mentees). As a result: 'There is no essential character behind one's acts', rather 'the individual is free to perform, project and manage a variety of official and unofficial selves' (Hardie-Bick and Hadfield, 2011: 16). Identity here is viewed as a complex, multifarious set of performances, which take direction from a variety of sources and settings. In this light the interactions which take place within peer mentoring relationships become just one of several sites of stage direction and interpretive performance to which mentors and mentees are subject. Within the mentoring space both mentors and mentees must not only look for hints to their role performance, but also fill the gaps from their side.

To complicate the interaction further, performances are subject to a social audience who themselves have the power to shape the identity of the performer. Goffman (1963: 132) highlights, for example, how 'the stigmatized individual defines himself as no different

from any other human being, while at the same time he and those around him define him as someone set apart'. The existing perceptions of the social audience, therefore, set the parameters of credibility in the performance being viewed. This feeds into the performance itself. In other words, a peer mentor's (or indeed desisting mentee's) performance is only likely to be as successful as its audience decides it to be. Crucially however, there are two 'audiences' to consider here. On one level, peer mentors themselves constitute a social audience offering feedback to mentees as to whether or not the identity performance is successful (Asencio and Burke, 2011). On a broader level society itself constitutes a social audience and within this society 'a criminal conviction – no matter how trivial or how long ago it occurred – scars one for life' (Petersilia, 2003: 19). No matter how well an ex-offender performs the role of desister, of being 'no different', it is likely that they will continue to be viewed as different by those around them. Where a social force as powerful as stigma is at work, the freedom to perform is limited. The social audience already has a strong perception of a person's pre-defined character and indeed often avoids contact on this premise. The very anticipation of 'mixed contact' between people who are stigmatised and people who are not can 'lead normals and the stigmatized to arrange life so as to avoid them' (Goffman, 1963: 23). This serves to undermine any performance on the stigmatised actor's part before it has begun. As a result, Goffman argues, there is a sacrifice to be made: '[a]mong his own, the stigmatized individual can use his disadvantage as a basis for organizing life, but he must assign himself to a half-world to do so' (Goffman, 1963: 32). In this light, peer mentoring can be interpreted as an opportunity for ex-offenders to belong and have a purpose, to 'organise life'; it creates a valuable opportunity for people who often find it difficult to obtain work otherwise (Clinks and MBF, 2012). However, it can also be seen as a restricting practice, one in which mentors are necessarily identified by their past offending. As a result they are seen as targets for bullying or pressure to pass

drugs, mobile phones or information (Boyce et al., 2009; Devilly et al., 2005) and face difficulties in relation to access and CRB clearance (Clinks and MBF, 2012). In Goffman's terms they are consigned to a 'half world'. There is another problem faced by those aiming to *employ* their stigma:

In making a profession of their stigma, native leaders [in this case peer mentors] are obliged to have dealings with representatives of other categories, and so find themselves breaking out of the closed circle of their own kind. Instead of leaning on their crutch, they get to play golf with it, ceasing, in terms of social participation, to be representative of the people they represent (Goffman, 1963: 39).

In aiming to reduce the border between stigmatized and normal, the 'native leader' becomes lost in the wasteland between: no longer representative, but also not 'normal' (Goffman, 1963). This liminal space is potentially one which peer mentors will come to inhabit. As they do so they are potentially doubly disadvantaged as not only are they perceived as 'risky' by criminal justice service providers, but they may also be seen as detached from their peers and therefore not representative. This tension will be explored in chapters five and eight as observers ask questions about mentors' credibility as role models and their close alignment with punitive criminal justice systems.

Goffman has some commonalities with Girard; given that both imagine the self as being dependent upon social interactions for its shape. For Girard this shape is born of mimetic desire, for Goffman the process is more of a dialectic performance correlated with situational routine and audience. Peer mentors and mentees, viewed in Goffman's terms, are essentially social performers. The identity of the mentee, as potential *desister*, receives

direction from situational rules which seem to be in place and from social cues; including the ‘stage directions’ provided by peer mentors. However performances of identity also require individual improvisation, the mentee therefore needs to interpret what is expected of *desister* and *client* roles and manage these expectations. Goffman also illustrates how audiences help to define these performances. Because peer mentors straddle the border between ‘offender’ and ‘desister’ they meet potential problems in terms of how their new identity performance is interpreted by those around them, which may undermine their position as ‘role models’ in the eyes of both professional and lay observers.

### 3.1.3 *Identity as defined and constrained by language*

Whilst Girard and Goffman imagine identity as the result of interaction with the social environment – of interaction with models and through the performing of modes, Basil Bernstein (1971) sees identity as constituted through language, arguing ‘it is through specific linguistic codes that relevance is created, experience given a particular form, and social identity constrained’ (Bernstein, 1971: 146). Class relations are also integral to this thesis. In his provocative and controversial work *Class, Codes and Control* (1971) Bernstein contended that there are ‘entirely different modes of speech found within the middle class and the lower working class’ (Bernstein, 1971: 78). The lived realities of people from different class backgrounds are therefore seen as fundamentally different because the very language, which constitutes that reality has observable variations. Bernstein asserts that ‘the typical, dominant speech mode of the middle class... facilitates verbal elaboration of subjective intent’ (1971: 78), whilst the ‘lower’ working class are:

...limited to a form of language use, which although allowing for a vast range of possibilities, provides a speech form which discourages the speaker from verbally



elaborating subjective intent and progressively orients the user to descriptive, rather than abstract, concepts (Bernstein, 1971: 79).

This early work of Bernstein draws our attention to the capacity for language codes to both express and constitute a particular category of identity (in this case social class). This is a sentiment that can also be traced within the literature about mentoring and peer practices. Turner and Shepherd (1999), for example, make sense of peer education in health promotion in terms of ‘subculture theories’. They draw upon the work of Cohen (1955), who argued that ‘delinquents developed subcultures which promote values and behaviour which were oppositional to mainstream culture’ (Turner and Shepherd, 1999: 242), and Miller (1958) who argued that ‘working class culture is oppositional to middle class culture’ (Turner and Shepherd, 1999: 242). Turner and Shepherd (1999) also argue that these ‘subculture theories’ make sense of four particular elements of peer education, namely: that peers are a ‘credible source of information’; that peer education ‘formalizes an already established means of sharing information and advice’; that education by peers ‘may be acceptable when other education is not’; and that ‘peer education can be used to educate those who are hard to reach through conventional methods’ (Turner and Shepherd, 1999: 242). Whilst they refer explicitly to peer education in terms of social class, the peer mentoring literature more commonly implies that the language of *lived experience* and *professional experience* is what differs. Devilly et al. (2005: 231), for example, argue that peers ‘are deemed more credible sources of information because they have experienced similar struggles and are, therefore, able to “speak the same language”’. Other writers, whilst not referencing language codes specifically, point to mentoring as a process of reducing the inaccessibility of professional services, be it through ““outreach workers” linking individuals with local services that they would otherwise fail to access’ (Newburn

and Shiner, 2006: 27) or the ‘targeting of mentoring for those variously identified as “disaffected”, “disengaged”, “non-participating”, or “hardest to help”’ (Colley, 2002: 9). The unspoken implication within these claims is that non-peers or professional interveners are not connecting with their intended clients or may even be speaking a different language.

The notion that understandings rooted in the experiences of socially similar others have more credibility than professionally constructed and discursively dominant understandings is also one which Bernstein (1971) aims to make sense of. He argues that theories of learning (in North America) have been highly influenced by psychological theories, which place an overwhelming emphasis upon the significance of the early years of the child’s life. These ideas, he argues, ‘are likely to view problems of educability as arising out of interactions which are considered to be deficient, inadequate or even pathological’ (1971: 274). As a result, ‘much of the research into “who is able to learn what” was carried out by psychologists whose intellectual training and whose own socialisation led them to define the problem in a limited way’ (Bernstein, 1971: 274). He goes on to suggest that:

It was only with the radicalising of American academics through Vietnam, the rise of Black Power, through the exposure of the failure of the American urban school, that fundamental questions were raised about the political implications of forms of education during the late sixties (Bernstein, 1971; 274).

Bernstein juxtaposes a dominant discourse about how people learn with movements to challenge this dominance. In doing so he contends that accepted ‘professional’ truths are open to challenge. More specifically, they are open to the challenge that the social world

can be experienced and communicated differently by people from different social backgrounds. Moreover, difference is not necessarily indicative of deficit, but can expand understanding. This argument is echoed by those who attempt to explain the emergence of peer mentoring in this field. These explanations privilege *personal insight* into prison life (Princes Trust, 2012), which offers ex-offenders ‘a *credibility* that statutory agencies don’t often have’ (Nellis and McNeill, 2008: xi; emphasis added). Peers are claimed to have *specific knowledge* about risk behaviour occurring both inside and outside the prison, and an understanding of realistic strategies to reduce the risk’ (Devilley et al., 2005: 223; emphasis added). This quiet but insistent privileging of the lived experiences of crime and criminal justice tacitly challenges notions of deficit inherent in dominant forms of professional intervention. It also holds the potential to shift the focus away from pathological versions of deficiencies in criminal tendencies and toward deficiencies in the social and penal order. Bernstein also recognised, however, that variations in language codes are not limited to different classes or different status positions, but are also situational:

The speech used by members of an army combat unit on manoeuvres will be somewhat different from the same members’ speech at a padre’s evening. Different forms of social relations can generate quite different speech-systems or linguistic codes by affecting the planning procedures (Bernstein, 1971: 145).

People therefore relay meaning through codes, which differ as much in setting as in social strata. Indeed a similar linguistic division was also recognised by Goffman in the context of the asylum:

An institutional lingo develops through which inmates describe the events that are crucial in their particular world. The staff, especially its lower levels, will know this language, too, and use it when talking to inmates, reverting to more standardized speech when talking to superiors and outsiders (Goffman, 1961: 55).

If language bears a print of social class and situated experience and these prints carry, and indeed constitute meaning, this may well explain why people with criminal records claim to *relate* to people with shared histories and why their peers find them ‘credible’. It is not simply that they have experiences in common, but they may also share a common language and elements of a common reality. Whilst Bernstein’s work helps to make sense of this key connecting element within peer mentoring, he is not without criticism. His early work ‘was highly controversial because it discussed social class differences in language that some labeled a deficit theory’ (Sadovnik, 2008: 21). Indeed Labov argued that ‘Bernstein’s views are filtered through a strong bias against all forms of working-class behaviour so that middle-class language is seen as superior in every respect’ (cited in Bernstein, 1971: 273). Bernstein, however, responded to these criticisms by arguing:

In a fundamental sense, a restricted code is the basic code. It is the code of intimacy which shapes and changes the very nature of subjective experience, initially in the family and in our close personal relationships. The intensifications and condensations of such communication carry us beyond speech, and new forms of awareness often become possible (Bernstein, 1971: 275).

For Bernstein the argument was not that middle class codes of speech were superior to lower working class codes, but that they operated in linguistically and therefore conceptually different ways. Moreover this difference allows for exclusionary practice:

Bernstein argued that different social classes used different 'codes' in their language, and the middle/upper classes developed 'elaborate' codes which restricted access to the education system they devised and ran (Rowlingston and McKay, 2012: 195).

By this reasoning, in order to minimise the inequality of opportunity which exists between social classes, there is a need to recognise the different codes in operation and recognise how this difference can be exclusionary. Peer mentoring quietly makes a similar claim. By insisting that mentors have lived credentials, which are as valuable as professional credentials and that they speak a particular 'language', its advocates inherently suggest there is something excluding about the reality imposed by professional forms of understanding.

Whilst Bernstein's theory of language has met with controversy, his central thesis that language codes differ in different social contexts and settings, and indeed that this has a direct bearing on the possibilities of social identity, may have a special relevance to the work of peer mentoring. These ideas help us to consider how language is perceived and used in mentoring relationships. Bernstein also alerts us to the potential for subtle processes of social control and personal limitation where administrators of education provision employ different language techniques to some of their beneficiaries. Indeed, as

mentoring itself is a form of education, any theoretical work must also make sense of peer mentoring as a pedagogical process.

### **3.2 The Pedagogical Precept**

Whilst the importance of identity is relatively well recognised in terms of peer mentoring, less has been written about peer mentoring as a form of critical education. The ‘pedagogical precept’ proposed here explores the principles of teaching and learning, which underpin peer mentoring. It is argued that one of the important and overlooked ways that peer mentoring can be theorised is as a process of social learning. A pedagogical precept denoted by forms of ‘intervention’, whilst not yet fully theorised, is arguably the most dominant principle of peer mentoring which can be traced in the literature to date. The job of the mentor is to draw upon the personal experience of going straight, to ‘steer’ mentees and to convey educational messages (UNODC, 2002), to run ‘programmes’ (MoJ, 2011) and to help with practical tasks, (Hunter and Kirby, 2011). The job therefore is to educate. The desired outcomes of such interventions are generally changes in the mentee, which include reductions in re-offending, reduced aggression and drug use, improved attitudes, behaviours or academic achievement. Despite being grounded in ideals of transformative intervention, however, peer mentoring can also be conceived as having a more radical character. It permits into the field of criminal justice practice a voice of experience, which has long been relegated in the construction of truths about crime and change:

[K]nowledge generated outside scientific discourses such as lived experiences, autobiographies and memories can be silenced, ‘subjugated or disqualified’...

prisoners' version of 'the truth' is located at the bottom of the hierarchy of knowledge – subjugated, disqualified, or 'muted' altogether (Ballinger, 2011: 110).

Through peer mentoring the ex-offender, the ex-prisoner's version of 'the truth' is elevated; indeed it is central to the intervention. This moves the work: 'beyond the cognitive deficit model to harness the strengths residing in peer support networks' (Weaver, 2012: 407). However, this radical potential co-exists with a focus which remains upon 'offenders' as recipients, as subjects who require improvement with the help of morally superior others. It therefore sustains the corrective, normative ethos, which is already dominant in criminal justice intervention work.

The work of critical educator Paulo Freire is helpful in terms of theorising this tension. Freire's critique explored how normative *teaching* conveys unacknowledged power relations. As a result he proposed that pedagogy must 'be forged with, not for, the oppressed' (1970: 30) and that learning must not involve: 'explaining to, but rather dialoguing with people about their actions' (1970: 35). Freire's critique fundamentally questions the construction of experts and receivers within educational practices. He calls for a rejection of the established 'banking' concept of education, which turns students into 'containers', into 'receptacles' to be 'filled' by the teacher (Freire, 1970: 53) in favour of 'libertarian education', which 'must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students' (Freire, 1970: 53). Freire contends that: 'The banking approach to adult education... will never propose to students that they critically consider reality' (1970: 55), whereas: 'To exchange the role of depositor, prescriber, domesticator, for the role of student among students would be to undermine the power of oppression and serve the

cause of liberation' (Freire, 1970: 56). In practical terms '[l]iberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferals of information' (1970: 60). Freire therefore advocates that we abandon 'the educational goal of deposit making and replace it with the posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world' (1970: 60). This indeed appears to be one of the premises of peer mentoring. Kram and Isabella (1985) for example:

[S]uggest that peer relationships are unique because they offer a degree of mutuality that enables both individuals to experience being the giver and receiver of key functions, in contrast to a traditional mentoring relationship where the mentor specialized in the role of guide or sponsor (cited in Ensher, Thomas and Murphy, 2001: 423).

Here a 'peer' is a person of equal position, as distinct from a person who shares a similar past. Indeed Ensher and colleagues, themselves, found that 'the degree of *reciprocity* as well as the amount of vocational and role modelling support that protégé's obtained from their mentors predicted protégé's' satisfaction' (Ensher et al., 2001: 433). Therefore the sense of mutuality or egalitarianism possible through peer to peer work has the potential to 'reconcile the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students' (Freire, 1970: 53). Peers are positioned to simultaneously become givers and receivers, rather than simply depositors, prescribers or domesticators. Applied to a criminal justice context, peer mentoring potentially enables people to 'come to feel like masters of their thinking and views of the world explicitly or implicitly manifest in their own suggestions and those of their comrades' (Freire, 1970: 105). Rather than having their future goals 'banked' by expert others, mentees can explore the possibility of an alternative



future with peers who are living this reality. Freire did indeed reference mentoring specifically as a form of learning and argued that the mentor's task is a 'liberatory' one. It is not to: 'encourage the mentor's goals and aspirations and dreams to be reproduced in the mentees, the students, but to give rise to the possibility that the students become the owners of their own history' (Freire, 1997: 342). This is echoed in claims that peer mentoring can increase a sense of agency, by enabling recipients to feel autonomous and resolve their own problems without professional assistance (Pollack, 2004; Shelter, 2010).

Such ideals are not without criticism however. Roger Lancaster (1988: 199) 'saw Freire's analysis as a kind of 'orientalism' that casts the poor as inanimate and inert, almost prereflective, predialogic 'things' devoid of all subjectivity' (cited in Scheper-Hughes, 1992: 531). Freire's mission to liberate the oppressed was claimed by Lancaster to have been subject to the same patterns of hierarchical imposition that he aimed to overcome:

Freire proposed literacy as the vehicle for establishing creative dialogue, insofar as the illiteracy of rural Brazilians in the modern state was a source and symbol of their "muteness". The irony (or the final "insult") was Freire's suggestion that the silent oppressed had to be "taught" to surrender their passivity and their fear of taking direct action. Freire's radical pedagogy was marred, Lancaster suggested, by a false notion of dialogue, insofar as it depends on the role of the "teacher-vanguard" to enter the imprisoned community from without to initiate reflexive speech, to rupture the silence of the oppressed, and to release the long-trapped flow and exchange of ideas, language, and critical thinking (cited in Scheper-Hughes, 1992: 531).

This is a useful critique with which to consider the dynamics of mentoring in criminal justice. Whilst peer mentoring can be viewed as an attempt to open ‘creative dialogue’, it might equally constitute a form of paternalist awakening inspired by a more ‘enlightened’ other: ‘an initiative consisting of trained individuals volunteering to support people with specific or multiple needs to provide practical advice and guidance’ (Clinks, 2012: 8).

This thesis will argue that such paternalism is as visible in terms of how mentors are trained, prepared for, or governed in the role, as it is in how mentees are mentored. These influences will be discussed more fully in chapter nine.

### *3.2.1 Problems with the egalitarian ideal*

Lancaster’s (1988) critique also gets to the heart of an issue, which will be a recurrent theme in this study, that is: the legitimacy of identity positions which appear to have crossed a border. The ex-offender, for example, has been an *offender* and is now a *desister*. Her or his knowledge of lived reality therefore straddles two identity positions; they can relate to both the experience of being an offender and to being a desister. Similarly Paulo Freire was a part of the oppressed poor in Brazil but became a prominent teacher and theorist. His knowledge of lived reality, too, straddled two very different identity positions. Whilst Lancaster is partially correct to identify a ‘teacher-vanguard’ element to Freire’s argument (wherein he positions himself as an external teacher initiating and releasing those currently less able), he misses the significance of Freire’s own history. What marks him out for Lancaster (1988) is his crossing the border from dispossessed learner to recognised theorist, which then highlights a tension. When do ‘the oppressed’, powerless or stigmatized, by empowering themselves, leave the shared struggle, or even come to be viewed as part of the oppression? Is the border of two identities a space from which one

can legitimately speak from and to both sides of the border, or will tensions of voice arise? To use Goffman's terms (1963: 39) it may be inevitable that 'native leaders... instead of leaning on their crutch, they get to play golf with it, ceasing, in terms of social participation, to be representative of the people they represent'. A potential problem with straddling two perceived identity positions (be it 'pauper' and 'theorist' or 'offender' and 'mentor'), however, is that it may weaken the credibility or authenticity of the message for some listeners.

Regardless of whether or not learners within critical pedagogy need to be 'taught to surrender their passivity' (Lancaster, 1988: 199), it is clear that protégés in this model are not inert receptors, but necessarily active agents. Indeed Freire argues that:

No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption (Freire, 1970: 36).

To a degree peer mentoring exemplifies this ideal. Ex-offenders, as stigmatized 'others', come to occupy spaces of power within the educational exchange when they become mentors; unseating 'distant' professionals and coming to set their own example. This represents a potential dissolution of the power dynamic Freire critiques, given that ex-offenders come from a shared struggle, not an oppressing class. Simultaneously however, a consideration of Freire's arguments problematises peer mentoring.

The first problem is that whilst peers do appear to offer a sense of mutuality or equity not present in more hierarchical, directive educational relationships, peer mentoring remains a space where people perform a more structured educational role than in non-structured peer relationships. There is a focus, for example, on ‘endorsing “healthy” norms, beliefs and behaviours... and challenging those who are “unhealthy”’ (UNODC, 2002), often as part of a broader criminal justice intervention (MoJ, 2011). The sense of mutuality is therefore undermined in both aim and context. The second problem is that peer mentoring carries an implicit expectation that mentees come to emulate their mentors. Whilst appearing to offer a more equal learning plane than traditional educational forms, peer mentoring nonetheless offers models for others to emulate and assumes that mentees require intervention by a superior other. In this case, the mentor is rendered superior by virtue of having mastered ‘going straight’, rather than a superior in terms of broader social status and resources. It therefore maintains a hierarchical approach to knowledge acquisition. Moreover, there is an obscure third party present within this hierarchy. Criminal justice peer mentoring does not exist independently of outside influence, but rather services are almost always required to seek some sort of funding for their work. To do so they often need to fit the agendas and targets of external funders, which may result in ‘drift’ from their original visions and missions of projects (Buck and Jaffe, 2011). This is a critique that has been recognised by Helen Colley in the context of contemporary youth mentoring settings where, ‘the practice of mentoring increasingly reflects class interests, particularly the intrusion of powerful political, institutional and business priorities into supposedly dyadic relationships’ (Colley, 2001: 179). Colley argues that there have been four distinct historical stages in the development of mentoring, which have shifted mentoring from ‘dominant groupings reproducing their own power, to subordinate groupings reproducing their own oppression’

(Colley, 2002: 257). It is helpful to consider Colley's analysis in detail in order to assess the context in which today's peer mentoring emerges.

Colley considers mentoring in the context of classical pedagogical models. She argues that the first historical stage of mentoring (the Homeric stage) resided in mythology and involved 'the (all) powerful [Greek God Athene] mentoring the powerful [King's son Telemachus] to ensure the continuation of the nascent patriarchy and the suppression of matrilineal social forms' (Colley, 2002: 264). Stage two (the Classical stage) is characterised by 'quasi-parental' relationships between exceptional individuals. It is 'activity carried out by the powerful on behalf of the powerful, in order to preserve their dominant social status... Its essence is thus an intra-class and gendered reproductive function, the transmission of cultural capital' (Colley, 2002: 264-5). Stage three (the Victorian stage) identifies middle class mentors befriending working class families in order to improve them by presenting a moral example. It is seen as 'a direct instrument of domination of one class over another with the same essential goal of preserving the status of the ruling class' (Colley, 2002: 266). The fourth and final (Modern) stage, ushered in by New Labour's social exclusion agenda, has a moral aim. Goals of mentoring are employment related and indirect compulsion often features. For example:

Mentoring of this kind has become openly associated with the moral aim of altering the attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviour of the targeted group... in line with employment-related goals determined by welfare-to-work policies (Colley, 2002: 267).

In terms of personnel, Colley argues, this work resembles the ‘weak mentoring the weak’ as non-professional staff, with less qualifications and training and lower pay mentor socially excluded people (Colley, 2002: 267-8).

If we reconsider peer mentoring in the light of Colley’s history, mentors become visible as non-professional (usually unpaid) staff undertaking emotionally demanding work with relatively powerless protégés, whilst subtly directed by the monies and missions of powerful stakeholders. In a criminal justice context much of the ‘power’ to spend monies and direct intervention ‘missions’ currently lies with State agencies. As the Coalition Government’s ‘Transforming Rehabilitation’ Strategy (2013) becomes a reality, however, it will be increasingly dispersed. Transforming Rehabilitation (MoJ, 2013) is a reform programme that aims to open up ‘the rehabilitation market’ to a diverse range of new providers. This includes forming 21 new Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) made up of private and voluntary sector contractors. Despite claims for a mixed market, however, the majority of the prime contracts (the lead provider roles) for these new CRCs were awarded to large private corporations (MoJ, 2014). It is unclear, as yet, whether peer mentoring in such a context will offer ex-offenders an equitable voice within criminal justice practices, or whether it will merely become an affordable add-on, which replicates more established, ‘professionalised’, intervention methods such as case management and cognitive-based interventions. Given that, as discussed in chapter two, much of the drive, funding and enthusiasm for this practice is coming from the MoJ, which is correspondingly committed to the established approach of authoritative experts ‘punishing’ and ‘managing offenders’ (MoJ, 2010); the latter may well prove to be the case.

The works of Freire and Colley allow us to unpack certain normative precepts about peer mentoring that appear in the extant literature, highlighting some real tensions inherent in peer mentoring as a pedagogical project, specifically, the unspoken power asymmetries created by pedagogical practice. Peer mentoring offers role models and aims to deposit information – thus resembling a banking concept of education; it also resembles a ‘weak mentoring the weak’ model, which may serve to perpetuate the oppression of subordinate groups. However, it is also a practice which strives to bring about reform and implies a commitment to critical dialogue: ‘[w]e work to provide ways that enable unheard voices; to make a difference, to urge policy-makers and people with power who make decisions to listen’ (User Voice, 2015). Peer mentoring is therefore currently engaged in a difficult balance between banking received, status quo knowledge and critically challenging received truths.

The first two precepts (*Identity* and *Pedagogy*) proposed here represent prevailing themes in current understandings of peer mentoring. They position mentoring as an intervention upon the individual, be it in order to influence identity shift or to teach new skills. Both of these underlying aims concur (in focus at least) with dominant discourses about criminality, that is, that ‘the offender’ is flawed and needs external intervention to bring them back into line with the ideals of social conformity. The next two principles that this chapter introduces represent less dominant, underlying themes within the claims for peer mentoring, but they are present nonetheless. The *Fraternity or Sorority Precept* and the *Politicisation Precept* both actively challenge the assumption that the offender is an individual who is lacking. These precepts suggest that peer mentoring is not simply concerned with individual change, but also social change and suggests it is a practice

which aims to shape the social view of ‘offenders’ towards one that sees them as positive resources in their own right.

### **3.3 The Fraternity or Sorority Precept**

Notions of brotherhood or sisterhood run through the literature on peer mentoring, from concepts of ‘Big brothers, Big sisters’ and Buddies in early studies in the US (Grossman and Tierney, 1998; O’Donnell, Lydgate and Fo, 1979) to more recent conceptions of female mentors who fashion entire communities outside of prison walls to offer emotional support (Collica, 2010). This section will make sense of peer mentoring as a process of fraternity or sorority. In doing so it will not only acknowledge these foundational, familial ideals, but also propose that another element of fraternity or sorority can also be traced in this work, that is: people finding community or solidarity with ‘folks like themselves’ (hooks, 1993: 77). These are often folks of the same gender, as for example in mentoring projects specifically for women offenders (see Rumgay, 2004). However there is more to such identifications than gender alone. They can be more accurately described as myriad forms of ‘resistance building – the notion that peers can form solidaristic groups to protect themselves’ (Pawson, 2004: 52).

Chapter four will introduce a research field which identifies peer-hood in various and diverse ways. Peers will be conceived of as *ex-offenders*, *community members*, *female offenders*, *gang-leavers*, and *care leavers*, amongst others. In all of the settings, however, the act of mentoring as a peer appears to involve much more than just offering special insight, gaining trust or being an inspiration. It also appears to involve bonding with others who share a common experience, and using this bond to allow space for marginalised perspectives. This aim can also be traced in the literature to date, particularly in the work



of *User Voice*, a charity led by ex-offenders whose mission is to ‘engage those who have experience of the criminal justice system in bringing about its reform’ (User Voice Mission Statement, 2012). *The Princes Trust* (2012: 1) also recognises the importance of ex-offenders’ ‘personal insight’, which makes it easier for mentors and mentees to bond. Members of a user-led fraternity or sorority are able to assert a particular perspective on crime and desistance because they have lived through particular experiences. In this way the precept shares something with feminist standpoint epistemology, which: ‘identifies women’s status as that of victim and then privileges that status by claiming that it gives access to understanding about oppression that others cannot have’ (Stanley and Wise, 1993: 91). Standpoint epistemology supposedly ‘makes possible a view of the world that is more reliable and less distorted than that available to capitalist or to working class men’ (Stanley and Wise, 1993: 91). Whilst peer mentors and mentees are not (always) clearly identified in terms of a victim status, peer mentoring does privilege the offender’s, female offender’s, care leaver’s, or gang leaver’s status, claiming it gives access to an understanding that others cannot have. To quote a respondent in Boyce et al., (2009: 29): ‘I’m able to understand and be empathic towards my client group, because a lot of their situations I’ve been in myself (Sharon)’. The practice therefore offers up forms of what one might term *offender standpoint epistemology*. It positions peer mentors and mentees as members of a collective. Their role is also to create a space for voices and truths, which may not be recognised or evident outside of direct, first-hand experience. The common voice of the mentoring fraternity or sorority need not just be a ‘female’ or ‘male’ voice or even an ‘ex-offender’ voice, but a voice from any marginalised standpoint. The power of shared standpoint, for otherwise unacknowledged perspectives, has been highlighted by Stanley and Wise (1993), who argued, in the context of obscene phone calls they received on a lesbian group contact number:

The only people who immediately accepted our reactions as valid-for-us were other women who had similarly experienced such reactions from men; and these were mainly other lesbians. If other women have shared similar experiences then they're willing to accept ours as valid; and if they haven't then they are much less willing to do so (Stanley and Wise, 1993: 129).

Whilst this context is different to that of peer mentoring, the underpinning assumption is the same: that people who have not shared similar experiences do not afford the lived experience validity. Hence 'prisoners' version of "the truth" is located at the bottom of the hierarchy of knowledge' (Ballinger, 2011: 110) and recovering inmates are seen as 'more capable of establishing credibility and demonstrating understanding compared to hired treatment staff' (Cook et al., 2008, cited in Fletcher and Batty, 2012: 6).

Experience and validity are seen as intricately linked therefore. If experiences are expressed to an audience who cannot relate to such a position, they may not achieve validity or understanding. The achievement of validity is not claimed to be solely dependent upon shared or recognised experiences, however, but also upon power relations: 'Those people with less power, those people without power – the oppressed – are more likely than those with power to find their accounts of reality discredited by others' (Stanley and Wise, 1993: 147). Given the power of criminal stigma the 'ex/offender' may feel that s/he faces a social field where 'valid-for-us' truths are highly restricted. Peer mentoring by contrast, not only makes valid-for-us truths possible, but central.

The problem with employing standpoint in this way however, is that it ‘can slip into essentialist arguments’ (Henry and Milovanovic, 1996: 85). Essentialism is ‘most commonly understood as a belief in the real, true essence of things, the invariable and fixed properties which define the ‘whatness’ of a given entity’ (Fuss, 1989: xi). To create an ex-offender standpoint is therefore to suggest there is a true and unified essence of the criminal experience, when this is evidently not the case. Above the more general ‘anti-essentialist poststructuralist feminist’ concern with ‘resisting any attempt to naturalise human nature’ (Fuss, 1989: xi), a problem with reformed offenders employing essentialist arguments is that: “‘Experience’ emerges as the essential truth of the individual subject, and personal “identity” metamorphoses into knowledge... Exclusions of this sort often breed exclusivity’ (Fuss, 1989: 113-115). This is a concern shared by Spalek (2008: 13) specifically in relation to essentialist groupings: ‘it would be a mistake to view the collectivisation of identities in a solely positive way, since group identities are formed and reinvigorated through the “threat and practice of exclusion”’. To draw upon experience as a claim to knowledge can therefore be to exclude those who do not share that particular experience:

The politics of experience sometimes takes the form of a tendency amongst both individuals and groups to ‘one down’ each other on the oppression scale. Identities are itemised, appreciated and ranked on the basis of which identity holds the greatest currency at a particular historical moment and in a particular institutional setting. Thus, in an Afro-American Studies classroom, race and ethnicity are likely to emerge as the privileged items of intellectual exchange, or, in a Gay Studies classroom, sexual ‘preference’ may hold the top notch on the scale of oppressions (Fuss, 1989: 116).

In the context of peer mentoring, professionals or helpers who are not ex-offenders often find their claims to knowledge relegated beneath those with a history of offending. Returning to the user-led charity *User Voice*, for example, their view is that: ‘*Only offenders can stop re-offending*’ (User Voice, 2014, emphasis added). Such hierarchising excludes other perspectives. bell hooks encourages that we consider these criticisms more closely however. Her counter-argument is that charges of essentialism tend to be directed at already marginalised groups who have already had to struggle for a voice of recognition, thus such criticisms can compound their invisibility:

I am suspicious when theories call this practice harmful as a way of suggesting that it is a strategy only marginalized groups employ... [This] leaves unquestioned the critical practices of other groups who employ the same strategies in different ways and whose exclusionary behavior may be firmly buttressed by institutionalized structures of domination that do not critique or check it. At the same time I am concerned that critiques of identity politics not serve as the new, chic way to silence students from marginal groups (hooks, 1994: 82-83).

For hooks, essentialism becomes a valid strategy to try and counter such negation:

Looked at from a sympathetic standpoint, the assertion of an excluding essentialism on the part of [people] from marginalized groups can be a strategic response to domination and colonization, a survival strategy that may indeed inhibit discussion even as it rescues those students from negation (hooks, 1994: 83).

Thus, whilst ex-offenders may employ essentialism in ways which appear to exclude others, they are not alone in employing such a strategy. The *essentialising* of offenders is commonplace outside of peer mentoring narratives. Maruna for example argues that ‘academic criminology has at times acted as an active coproducer of the discourse of criminal essentialism’ (Maruna, 2001: 6). To be too critical of adopted essentialism within emerging ex-offender voices may, therefore, serve to silence a group with a marginal voice; a group whose truth is already written for them in essentialist terms by others. Viewed from a sympathetic standpoint, the essentialism employed by ex-offender peer mentors emerges as a strategic response to the professional, risk culture dominated, colonisation of their lived offending experiences to this point. However, whilst making essentialist claims to knowledge may serve the purpose of reclaiming voice and may establish a valid position from which to speak, the problem, as hooks highlights, is that as a strategic response it is as ‘inhibiting’ as it is ‘rescuing’. Essentialism creates a fiction of unified experience, which can be as restrictive to the emergence of diverse voices as externally imposed exclusions.

It may be argued, then, that essentialism is part of the complex reality of peer mentoring. This thesis will pay close attention to the manifold ways and contexts in which subject-position is deployed. Chapters six, seven and nine, for example, will explore how essentialism materialises via expressions of personal worth, self-validation and personal dignity alongside forms of alterity, claims of distinction from and criticisms of others.

### **3.4 Politicisation Precept**

A fourth way that peer mentoring can be theorised is as an act of consciousness-raising or politicisation. Consciousness-raising is claimed to supply a means for challenging

oppression in solidarity with others who identify the same way (Gilchrist, Bowles and Wetherell, 2010: 22).

Thus, communities of identity develop as pressure groups and social movements, campaigning against different forms of discrimination and offering mutual support. Claiming the relevant identity in order to be part of these networks allows people to enjoy positive affirmation of their experience, contribute to collective action and may open up new insights into how to gain opportunities in an unfair world (Gilchrist et al., 2010: 22).

The personal-political facet of peer mentoring has not been recognised in the literature to date. The politicisation precept underpins peer mentoring as a form of collective action. Coordinators and mentors capitalise upon emerging peer voices to raise new forms of awareness, be it by engaging those who have experience of the criminal justice system in bringing about its reform (User Voice, 2015) or in the context of addiction recovery, ‘community education’ and shifting ‘pathology-focused discussions within the community to solution-focused discussions’ (White, 2009: 24). The fraternity/sorority precept is a necessary precursor for this element as it establishes the common position from which action and shared purpose can emerge. Indeed, forming a fraternity or sorority, although perhaps not consciously so, constitutes political action in itself. Identifying with others through the construction of an ex-offender experience constitutes what hooks (1994) terms ‘identity politics’. Identity politics emerge, she argues: ‘out of the struggles of oppressed or exploited groups to have a standpoint on which to critique dominant structures, a position that gives purpose and meaning to struggle’ (hooks, 1994: 89). Like Freire she holds that ‘[c]ritical pedagogies... necessarily embrace experience, confessions and testimony as

relevant ways of knowing, as important, vital dimensions of any learning process' (hooks, 1994: 89). Politicisation is already nascent therefore in the adjacent precepts of critical pedagogy and fraternal standpoint. The 'politicisation' precept itself refers to a more deliberate, organised underlying aim however. Peer mentoring in this light is understood as part of a voluntary sector or civil society space, which has aims additional to functional or practical assistance:

[C]ivil society is a space where ordinary people enter into dialogue about power, privilege and rights; come together to develop and express local cultural, economic and gender identities and needs in ways that go beyond voting or consuming; act collectively to make demands on the state... and proactively seek to fulfil their own interests and needs with others who share these interests and needs (Sandler and Mein, 2010: 169).

Peer mentoring is understood here not just as an interpersonal practice therefore but as part of a larger 'social movement' of reformed offenders:

For... groups with stigmatised identities, social movements and equality campaigns have been vital in affirming pride in different dimensions of identity and creating the momentum for increased integration and acceptance. Over the past few decades identity politics, based on collective self-organisation, have built both self-esteem and community empowerment for many people experiencing disadvantage and oppression (Gilchrist et al., 2010: 22).

In this model peer mentors and project coordinators not only provide a service based on ‘shared interests and needs’ (Sandler and Mein, 2010), but also behave as public advocates; promoting the integration and acceptance of those they see as suppressed or misrepresented. Their aims are to establish new understandings on a broader stage, to secure more effective resources or services and to challenge discrimination. For example, many voluntary sector providers, including *St Giles Trust*, *The Princes Trust* and *User Voice*, campaign to raise awareness of the positive potential of reformed offenders and to improve housing and employment opportunities for them. Similarly every one of the projects visited for this study are involved in some form of consciousness-raising activity, be it through publishing their own academic articles (see Project ‘Peer’ and ‘Work’ in chapter four), organising or speaking at conferences (see Projects ‘Safe’, ‘Peer’ and ‘Care’ in chapter four), contributing to multi-agency forums or challenging professional partners.

Despite this emphasis on social activism, or consciousness-raising as an associated practice, mentoring itself perpetuates assumptions about the status and role of ‘beneficiaries’. The role of the mentee in this model is to be a ‘client’. On the one hand, peer mentoring questions the existing order of criminal justice, particularly the social exclusion of offenders and the demotion of their voices. For mentees, however, peer mentoring retains elements of hierarchy, paternalism and *speaking for*, which appear to be being fought against. In this sense mentoring is not a critical practice, but upholds a ‘client’ based model. Some of the theorists already considered in this chapter cast interesting light on the politicisation precept. Goffman, for example, examined the notion of the stigmatised speaking on behalf of their peers:



[A]nother of their [representatives of the stigmatized] usual tasks is to appear as ‘speakers’ before audiences of normals and of the stigmatized; they present the case for the stigmatized... no matter how small and how badly off a particular stigmatized category is, the viewpoint of its members is likely to be given public presentation of some kind (Goffman, 1963: 37-38).

Shared experience of a particular stigma therefore affords political legitimacy; the stigmatised identity can be used as a tool for political action. As highlighted earlier, however, by ‘professionalizing’ their stigma in this way, speakers risk ‘ceasing, in terms of social participation, to be representative of the people they represent’ (Goffman 1963: 39). This is redolent of Lancaster’s critique of Freire’s ideal typical teacher. Where Lancaster (1988: 199) saw Freire as a ‘teacher-vanguard’ entering the imprisoned community from without, Goffman identifies a *speaker-vanguard* partially exiting the community from within. Where Freire as a speaker loses some of his credibility by crossing an imagined line between the socially included and excluded, the peer mentor potentially loses some of his/her credibility to speak by crossing the same imagined line between socially excluded and included in order to become an intervener. Furthermore, in both cases the concern is that the power of the individuals being spoken to or for is undermined, potentially consolidating their oppression.

A return to Freire’s own work challenges this sense of pessimism however. Freire reasoned that an individual’s associates are central to their perception of the possibility for change. He argued that ‘yearning to be free’ from the structure of domination in which people are immersed ‘can be transformed into reality only when the same yearning is aroused in their comrades’ (1970: 29). People need to see a desire for change in others. Peer mentoring can

be read to provide such a context, not just on an individual level, but at the level of the group. It is a space wherein the yearning of comrades (or in this case peers) to communicate alternative truths is made visible. Peer mentors have the potential to act, to borrow Ann Ferguson's term, as an 'oppositional community' (Ferguson, 1996: 121), as a network of 'people who share a critique of the existing order and who choose to identify with and engage in some material and/or political practices to show forth this critique' (Ferguson, 1996: 121).

### *3.4.1 Communal Critique*

The critique which peer mentoring offers is that crucial voices are missing from criminal justice. The material political practice, which makes this case is mentoring itself; expressing the voice of lived experience and offering help on this basis. Ferguson argues that without the existence of such communities fewer people would be able to make 'a reconstitutive leap' (Ferguson, 1996: 122), a theoretical and practical change. To illustrate her point, she uses the following example of speaking against bodily objectification:

I have adopted a goal to redefine beauty as meaning health rather than normalized body objectification... For such strategies to have any possibility of being effective they must be collective and ethico-political... I can only succeed in my goal to redefine beauty as health rather than make-up, if other women are also engaged in the same self-strategy. Otherwise, the normalized social meaning ("She has really let herself go, hasn't she?") will be taken to be the meaning of my refusal to wear make-up, whether I like it or not!! (Ferguson: 1996: 116).

Ferguson therefore adopts a different perspective on the power of communal intention than Freire, yet their arguments reach a compatible conclusion. For Freire, the oppressed subject can be paralysed by an absence of yearning for change among his or her peers. His/her position in the social order therefore seems inevitable and s/he remains oppressed. For Ferguson, however, even if a subject has a personal yearning for change, a lack of a collective recognition among peers can limit the realisation of their individual intention. Both perspectives point to the importance of community, of group solidarity to the establishment of positioned truths; therefore these theoretical arguments have relevance for the settings in this study. Take for example a prisoner who spent much of his childhood in local authority care (Project 'Care' will introduce this client group in chapter four). He has a belief that his experience of local authority care featured in his journey to prison; he may also want to see changes to the care system on this basis. If he feels isolated in this view, however, or if he feels that his peers have not reached a similar determination, he is unlikely to speak his truth and more likely to view his situation as unfortunate but inevitable. If on the other hand he has determined to speak his truth, to make the case for this reality, but the audience who hears him is invested in another reality, for example – that plenty of children leave care and do not commit crimes and that therefore responsibility lies solely with the individual – then his truth is undermined; it loses its power in the face of the dominant discourse. What may break through both of these obstacles however is the presence of an 'oppositional community'. If the same prisoner joins with others (for example, 'care leaver' peer mentors) who value his truth and incorporate it into the discourse of their fraternity it gains a new power. He now speaks from a position of collective truth. However, Ferguson is also keen to stress the limits of working with one aspect of identity in this way:

[A] view of the human subject as an embodied conscious process with multiple aspects and contextualized identities implies that identity politics based on an essentialist singling out of just one of these aspects to reconstitute will not successfully empower individuals. Rather, we will require many networks and coalitions, membership in many oppositional communities (Ferguson 1996: 122-123).

And so we return to the limits of essentialism. Whilst speaking collectively from one identity position may be momentarily empowering, indeed, it may offer a vehicle for establishing previously unacknowledged perspectives, it also neglects the multiplicity of human subjectivity. It relies upon a degree of conformity to a singular identity and of identical experiences within that identity. The way out of this dilemma, Ferguson suggests, is to acknowledge that identity is multifarious and that subjects will require many networks to identify with. In other words, she asserts that identity is intersectional. Chapter five will examine identity within peer mentoring as dynamic and multi-faceted.

This section has argued that a politicisation precept underlies criminal justice peer mentoring and that the work represents not just personal intervention, but also socio-political intervention. The presence of this element begins to counter Colley's concern that 'mentoring aims to "fit" people into society as it exists, rather than equipping them with a critical understanding of society or any means by which they might seek to change it' (Colley, 2002: 268). In other words, a passive view of mentoring gives way to more active possibilities. However, the success, or impact, of this precept remains unclear at this moment. Indeed Colley's critique gets to the heart of the ambiguity on which this precept stands; peer mentoring at once appears to aim to fit people into society *and* equip them

with means by which they might seek to change it. These are not always compatible goals. By sanctioning peer mentoring, the criminal justice system allows for a partial suspension of the divisive structure, for more “free and familiar contact between people” who would usually be separated hierarchically’ (Vice, 1997: 152) and between and groups who had previously had moralistic labels assigned, such as: *offender or manager, helper or client*. Such mixing presents a real challenge to the ordered role constructions, which support authoritarian and punitive justice responses. However, mentoring is also a practice that instils discipline and aims to effect personal change and it is much more likely to be these features that render it attractive to commissioners in the criminal justice system. In this light, the suspension of constraints does not represent a radical shift, but a concession which permits a diluted form of quasi-professionalism. Peer mentors are at risk of being co-opted as cheaper, less well trained and supervised replacements for expensive professional justice staff. Not a revolution then, but the testing of personnel margins, of stigma and division on limited and safe ground. Limited inclusion is permitted, but with no space for critique.

The vast majority of ex-offender peer mentors are volunteers, whilst there are some examples of paid mentors; as will become clear, they are often employed part time and receive low pay. It is these people whose voices are currently being granted validity whilst simultaneously their claims to experiential knowledge serve to *other* or discredit the knowledge of probation officers and social workers. This is expedient given that the privatisation and de-professionalisation of criminal justice services are currently being actively pursued. Peer mentoring can be read as the radical emergence of previously muted voices and as a challenge to the marginalisation of offenders, but it also serves as a wider, altogether less empowering agenda. It is also a practice that undermines well-paid

professionals and provides a low cost workforce in their place, which is auspicious for an emerging justice market intent on reducing costs and maximising business profits.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has constructed four precepts, which I argue underpin the practice of criminal justice peer mentoring, but which are not formally or overtly drawn upon. The intended contribution is to open these possibilities up. These precepts provide a framework for a theoretical reading. *The Identity Precept* positions the ex-offender identity itself as the active element in this process. The past identity experience is viewed as a precursor to trusting relationships, whilst the current identity position acts as an inspiration and a model. Girard, Goffman and Bernstein offer theories which make sense of such ‘identity work’ in different, but pertinent ways. For Girard, identity is premised upon mimetic desire, individuals desire that which they see others desire, in particular those others who they respect. Peer mentoring therefore offers up ‘role models’ with the implied intention that mentees come to mimic the desire of their mentors to ‘go straight’. Whilst mentoring may result in mimicked desire however, it may also result in rejection of the proffered model. Furthermore, the presence of ideal models may serve to devalue the person on the ‘receiving’ side of the exchange. For Goffman, identity is constituted by performances, which take direction from a variety of sources and settings. Mentors therefore receive theatrical direction from the rules, cues and ‘stage directions’ of mentors; and their resulting performance is received by an audience. Yet given the stigma of criminality the social audience already has a strong perception of an ex-offender’s character, which can undermine their performance. Goffman’s notion that identity is formed of a variety of selves also destabilises fixed notions of what it means to be a peer, increasing the potential for mismatches between the intended identity message and the performance as read by the

recipient. For Bernstein, identity is constituted through language and social class. The language codes of class position can express and constitute a particular category of identity. Code variations are not limited to class however, but are also situational. People with convictions may therefore 'relate' to people with shared histories because they share common elements of language and its resulting reality. The *Pedagogical Precept* positions peer mentoring as an educational process, one which is critical in aim and pedagogic practice, but which nonetheless maintains more familiar hierarchical and controlling elements, both in terms of a tendency toward correctional interpersonal intervention and externally set funding targets.

The *Fraternity or Sorority* and *Politicisation precepts* both challenge interventionist assumptions of deficiency. These precepts indicate that peer mentoring is not just aimed at individual change but also at social change, at promoting acceptance of 'offenders' as positive resources in their own right. The *Fraternity or Sorority Precept* constructs peer mentoring as a process of finding community or solidarity, one which will allow space for hitherto unacknowledged perspectives. The practice therefore offers up forms of offender standpoint epistemology wherein experience and validity are intricately linked. The problem is that such a stance can become essentialist, breeding exclusivity. However, as essentialising offenders is already commonplace, essentialism within peer mentoring can be read as a strategic response. The *Politicisation Precept* underpins peer mentoring as an act of consciousness-raising or politicisation. Mentors and coordinators behave as public advocates promoting integration and understanding. Shared experience of stigma affords political legitimacy and group expressions of such shared perspectives help to establish new truths. However, whilst speaking collectively from one identity position may be empowering, it also neglects the multiplicity of human subjects and relies upon a myth of

uniformed experiences; potentially neglecting the uniqueness of each mentee. As political action, peer mentoring may present a solid challenge to authoritarian and punitive justice, or it may simply represent pacification through the granting of limited power. Not a revolution then, but the safe testing of margins as punitive legislation, privatisation and continued stigmatisation rolls on. The aim of this thesis is not to ‘test’ any of these precepts or theoretical positions, but to draw upon them to shed light on current practices within criminal justice settings. Whilst these perspectives are not seen to encompass the full complexity of peer mentoring, and indeed there will be rich and diverse readings available outside of these boundaries, they do provide some new ways of thinking about mentoring and offer a useful framework for fuller theoretical consideration.



## **Chapter Four**

### **Methodology**

This chapter will detail the methodology that was employed in this project. It will begin by introducing the context of the research field entered, both in terms of the voluntary sector environment and dominant forms of sense making in criminology. It will then introduce the methods selected for the inquiry, which included observations, documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews, explaining why these methods were deemed to be most suitable for researching peer mentoring relationships in a voluntary sector context. It will describe in some detail the sources of data and how they were selected, including challenges encountered and adaptations made along the way. Finally it will reflect upon how to proceed ethically with participants who have complex needs and vulnerabilities, before explaining the qualitative analysis tools that were employed to make sense of the emerging data.

#### **4.1 The voluntary sector context**

There are an estimated 1,475 charities, social enterprises and voluntary organisations whose main clients are offenders, ex-offenders and their families in England (Centre for Social Justice, 2013: 7). Their incomes range from ‘none whatsoever’ to in excess of £5 million, although 51% reported an annual turnover or income of £150,000 or less (Centre for Social Justice, 2013: 7). Most voluntary organisations working with offenders, ex-offenders and their families have few employees. A quarter (24%) said they had no full-time equivalent employees; whilst 69% reported having ten or fewer (Centre for Social Justice, 2013: 7). At the time when fieldwork commenced there was no information about

how many of these organisations may be delivering peer mentoring. One methodological challenge was therefore finding the required number of organisations that were engaged in this work. In 2013 Sova reported that ‘there are some fairly stark contrasts across England and Wales as regards the percentage of mentors that are peer mentors’ (Willoughby, Parker and Ali, 2013: 7). Cumbria and Gloucestershire had no reported peer mentors whilst County Durham, Cheshire, Kent, Buckinghamshire, the Midlands and Wales had very low numbers. Most other counties or probation areas [were] considerably below 50%. West Yorkshire, Lancashire and Northumbria reported higher percentages of peer mentors, over 50% in some areas. Warwickshire and Staffordshire were also close to or slightly over the 50% mark whilst Wiltshire (92%), Oxfordshire (71%) and Hampshire (64%) record a very high percentage of peer mentors in their custody based services (Willoughby et al., 2013: 7). These findings corresponded with the field I entered in 2011. Initial inquiries made using internet searches and networking at national voluntary sector and criminal justice conferences reflected a varied picture. I therefore decided to select a small number of these projects from the North of England in order to gain a contemporary local snapshot. Source selection of particular projects will be detailed further below.

#### **4.2 Dominant truths about offender rehabilitation**

The selection of methods for this study was not just informed by the sector in which the research was taking place, but also by a critical consideration of how ‘truth’ is constituted. Prior to undertaking this study I was employed a Youth Justice Social Worker. My training was based largely on what some researchers, trainers and policy makers had deemed *truthful* about the nature of crime and rehabilitation. These truths often posited ‘offenders’ generically as rational subjects making poor choices. The result in practice terms was a dominant discourse, which held that ‘what works’ in solving the crime problem were

approaches that utilised experts to affect cognitive behavioural changes in flawed subjects. Runggay (2004: 405) terms this ‘a cognitive deficit model’ and argues that ‘within this paradigm, offenders are deficient individuals whose faulty thinking requires correction by professionals with special expertise in cognitive training’. The claims to knowledge within this discourse, however, as highlighted in chapter two, were often based on distant quantifying practices:

[T]here is an increasingly scientised conception of criminology... pushing quantitative skills in the training of social scientists... that seems to prioritise statistical ‘What Works’ analyses over work that would seek to engage offenders by asking what intervention programmes are most meaningful to them (Gelsthorpe, 2006, cited in Spalek, 2008: 4).

This study seeks to consider the ways in which mentoring is meaningful to its participants, not just because such views can get lost within dominant functional evaluations, but also because very little has been written to date about the micro dynamics and subjective experiences of these relationships. The study pursues a qualitative understanding of peer mentoring relationships, which engages mentors and mentees themselves in a discussion of what makes these interactions meaningful to them. The work does not seek *objective truths* about peer mentoring or desistance, but ways of seeing these social constructions. In the context of research this position can be crudely translated as elevating a constructionist standpoint above objectivism. Michael Crotty defines *objectivism* as ‘an epistemological notion asserting that meaning exists in objects independently of any consciousness’ (Crotty, 1998: 10). Whereas from a constructionist standpoint:

There is no objective truth waiting for us to discover it. Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world. There is no meaning without a mind. Meaning is not discovered, but constructed (Crotty, 1998: 9).

This approach is particularly compelling for understanding peer mentoring as it allows us to recognise multiple and situated meanings, rather than narrowing down the diverse understandings and manifestations currently available. For example, understandings of what constitute a 'peer' and a 'mentor' are variable. They depend upon individual perspectives and social settings. To try and objectively measure the nature and outcomes of such diversity collectively risks not paying full attention to the variances in positioned understanding or constructions. The 'constructionist invitation' then, 'is not to 'give up and do nothing', but rather to open oneself to the enormous potentials of human relationship' (Gergen, 1999: 235). This open approach offers a potential solution to the problem of striving for truth in a context of fluidity and diversity:

[R]esearchers now seek means of extending the platform, of admitting more voices to the conversation, and generating understanding through exposure to the first-hand accounts of people themselves (Gergen, 1999: 95).

As a result of a diverse, multiply constructed field, coupled with an increasing objectification of the people within it, the decision was taken to adopt qualitative methods.

### **4.3 Qualitative methods**

[R]esearch methods which stand outside the lived experience of deviance or criminality can perhaps sketch a faint outline of it, but they can never fill that outline with essential dimensions of meaningful understanding (Ferrell and Hamm, 1998: 10). In an attempt to represent lived experiences and ‘meaningful understanding’ a qualitative approach was selected. This allows us to explore the meanings that participants themselves attach to their mentoring relationships in the context of the meanings that they attach to desisting from crime. Qualitative methods were appropriate for this task because ‘qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008: 4).

In applied terms a mixed methods approach was adopted, including thirty eight in-depth *interviews* with key players were completed (mentors, mentees), four contextual interviews with coordinators and two interviews with probation officers who were referring to one project. Interviews formed the primary method given they facilitated answers to all four of the initial research questions (how does peer mentoring work in practice; what sense is made of peer mentoring by the people delivering and using services; what relationship, if any, does peer mentoring have to ‘desistance’; and what is the impact of a shifting voluntary sector context on their role and relationships with clients, the community and other services and partners?). *Observation* of voluntary sector practices was also undertaken, including: recruitment, training and supervision of volunteers; and mentoring activities themselves. This provided a supplementary perspective of how mentoring works in practice and some insight into the shifting voluntary sector context. Finally, *Documentary analysis* of organisation literature was undertaken (for example, promotional material, evaluations and reports). These documents provided insight into the origins and rationale of programmes from the perspective of those delivering them, they also again had

relevance for the question about the voluntary sector context and relationships with partners. This mixed method approach is *ethnographic*, in that it balances ‘detailed documentation of events with insights into their meaning to those involved’ (Fielding, 2008: 267).

#### **4.4 Sources of data – project selection**

The study employed a ‘collective case approach’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011: 245) in that it focused upon multiple peer mentoring projects. The original plan was to interview thirty respondents across *three* projects (five mentors and five mentees in each) in an attempt to reflect some of the diversity of peer mentoring in the voluntary sector, but due to the field challenges outlined below this expanded to include *four* peer mentoring projects. Multiple sites were included to try and reflect some of the diversity of peer mentoring practices in this field. Projects were identified using internet searches and conference networking. Over the course of the first year a total of eleven projects were approached to enquire if they would be eligible for and interested in taking part in the research. A ‘purposive sampling method’ (Denscombe, 2014: 41) was adopted, meaning projects were ‘hand-picked’ based on their relevance to the issue being investigated and their knowledge of the topic (Denscombe, 2014: 41). Projects were only contacted if they were operating in the voluntary sector and were delivering peer mentoring in a criminal justice context. The three originally selected for the study were chosen because they expressed an interest in taking part *and* were able to provide both observational opportunities and interviewees. As the fieldwork year progressed, however, two of the initial three projects faced significant problems, meaning adaptations and additions were made to the original design. These will be detailed below under the heading ‘some late additions’. Necessary adaptations to the research design meant that respondents were eventually drawn from a total of seven

voluntary sector projects, four of which formed the core sites; given they were able to facilitate both observations and interviews. All of these projects and the reasons for adaptations will now be detailed below.

#### *4.4.1 Project 'Peer'*

Project 'Peer' was the first peer mentoring project approached directly about the research. I met the probation manager, who then managed the project, at a mentoring conference in 2011 and asked if they would be interested in taking part in the research. The manager of the project allowed a pilot study to be completed and facilitated links with the two volunteer managers. Eventually Project 'Peer' facilitated interviews with six volunteer mentors, five mentees, two coordinators and two probation officers. I was also allowed to attend a volunteer training course as a participant observer; to observe a volunteer in a one-to-one reflective supervision session; to observe a peer-led women's group, a peer-led recovery group; and also to observe a number of volunteer recruitment interviews. Perhaps the best way to introduce the history and aims of the project is to borrow definitions from the project's own promotional materials:

[Project 'Peer'] started life in 2010... This was a shared vision in which volunteers became part of the support package offered to offenders.... Our Mentors will act as experienced guides, trusted allies and advocates whilst encouraging pro-social behaviour modelled on their own (Project 'Peer' Flyer, 2012).

This project came into being following an informal discussion between a local Probation Service Manager and one of her previous supervisees, who was at that time attending a local training provider with a view to becoming a volunteer in some capacity. Both shared

a belief that people with personal experiences of the criminal justice system had something unique to offer in terms of provision; and that this perspective was often missing from Probation Services. As a result the supervisee, along with another ex-service user, worked with the probation manager to bid for grant funding from the local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP). The vision for their proposed project was that it should influence and inspire:

Peer mentors have themselves successfully overcome problems with criminal behaviour, relationships, finances and lack of routine and structure. As a result they are in an ideal position to act as role models. [They help] to establish hope and the belief that recovery is both possible and desirable (Project 'Peer' Funding Proposal, 2011: 3).

Funding was secured for one year on the proviso that the Probation Service initially had managerial oversight. Whilst the manager who supported the application had strategic control, the project's day to day management was the responsibility of two salaried coordinators, one of whom had a history of substance addiction and the other had a criminal history punctuated by periods of imprisonment since childhood. They were given an office within the Probation Service, which they shared with a local drug recovery charity working with probation clients. The probation manager and probation officers explained how this arrangement caused significant unease initially, given that the two new staff members potentially had access to records of people in the area where they themselves had previously been criminally active or in recovery. Both the probation manager and mentoring managers describe a difficult early 'bedding in' period where the new staff had to gain the trust of their colleagues and their manager had to carry the risk of



confidentiality breaches or ‘things going wrong’. By the time my fieldwork commenced, however, the mentors had been in post for twelve months. All of the above parties perceived that the peer mentoring service was now fully embedded and it certainly appeared that the mentoring managers were regarded as trusted colleagues by probation staff.

Project ‘Peer’ was staffed by a team of twenty five to thirty volunteer mentors, many, but not all of whom had a history of involvement in the criminal justice system. This was because of a slight shift in approach that occurred when the project started delivering work:

In the past I’ve felt that experience [of offending] would count for most, but from the last two years I’ve kind of learned that that is not necessarily the case, just being genuine and sincere is more important, but yeah a mixture of both, depending on the individual needing a mentor (Adam, mentoring coordinator).

The original intention to only recruit volunteers with personal experience of drugs or crime shifted to also include skilled volunteers from a variety of backgrounds. The project therefore encouraged applications from volunteers with criminal histories *and* from interested community members without previous convictions. This was because a genuine commitment to clients came to be seen as important as having shared similar experiences. Project ‘Peer’ offers a service to men and women involved with offending or drug and alcohol misuse. Mentee referrals are accepted from the Probation Service, drug and alcohol services and other local health and voluntary agencies. They also accept self-referrals. Most volunteers offer a one-to-one mentoring service to clients, whilst others offer peer support in group settings (such as the Probation Service drop-in, women’s group and

recovery groups). One to one mentors have monthly individual supervision with a named coordinator and have access to a monthly peer supervision group. Group volunteers are supported in their practice by fellow peer mentors and have access to monthly group supervision.

During the fieldwork phase, Project 'Peer' was funded (for twelve months) by the local CDRP. However they were seeking grant funding from other sources including the National Lottery, in order to operate as a community interest company (CIC) when CDRP funding ended. Project 'Peer's' coordinators were also in the process of copyrighting their training documents in order to offer a peer mentoring training and consultancy package that criminal justice services in other areas would be able to buy in. They were acutely aware of the government's *Transforming Rehabilitation* agenda and their need to be able to compete within a 'market' of criminal justice. As a result the coordinators explained that they were going to write business management roles into their bid in addition to their existing volunteer coordinator roles. Their feeling was that they would be unable to operate on a competitive basis with the informal peer led, statutory supported approach they had taken to date.

#### 4.4.2 *Project 'Care'*

Project 'Care' was designed to increase the number of ex-offender care-leavers (that is, people who grew up in local authority care who also have a history of offending) volunteering as mentors for other care leavers who are still in the criminal justice system. It is important to note that these definitions will be complicated in future, given that the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act (2012) makes provision for all children remanded into custody to become a 'looked after child'. At the point of the

research being undertaken, however, Project 'Care' wanted to understand why people who have been 'looked after' as a welfare intervention, be it through a care order or voluntary accommodation, are over-represented in the criminal justice system as adults. *The Prison Reform Trust*, for example, points out that 'Less than 1% of all children in England were looked after [in March 2011]' (Blades, Hart, Lea and Willmott, 2011: 1). They compare this with the fact that 'half the children held in young offender institutions are, or have been previously, looked after' (Blades et al., 2011: 1). Similarly 'Research published by the Social Exclusion Unit in 2002 suggested that 27% of the adult prison population had once been in care' (Blades et al., 2011: 1). From the perspective of project 'Care':

A number of gaps have been identified in respect of support provided when leaving care, entering the secure estate and preparing for release. Through a user led mentoring approach [Project 'Care's'] aim is to address these gaps and ensure greater support for offenders upon release (Project 'Care' Coordinator).

To enable this type of work to be carried out successfully it was project 'Care's' specific intention to employ mentors with experience of both the care and prison systems, believing that these experiences offered unique knowledge and credibility:

Mentoring is about having the best interests of those they are supporting at heart with the support offered being person focused and invaluable... Mentors need to know what it takes to overcome adversity and offer hope [and] demonstrate how you can use your own life experiences to support and inspire others (Project 'Care' Flyer, 2012).

Project 'Care' received government grant funding to run a three-year peer mentoring pilot, which began in 2011. The full time coordinator of the project identified himself as both an ex-offender and a care leaver and described his work as 'user led practice'. I met the manager of Project 'Care' at a voluntary sector conference in 2011 and approached him after he spoke in a workshop to ask if they would be interested in taking part in the research. Whilst Project 'Care' was only in the formative stages of setting up peer mentoring at that point, the manager agreed to be interviewed and agreed that I could observe their volunteer training as it developed. This offered a unique opportunity to see a new project in development from the outset, but also presented unique problems.

The biggest potential obstacle to researching the work of 'Care' was that they were unable to proceed with their training and delivery as planned. Their original plan was to consult with potential mentors and mentees about the type of challenges they face and the type of service they would like to see, to deliver a jointly produced training course and to deliver one to one 'through the [prison] gates' mentoring. Whilst they were able to hold 'consultation events' with care leavers in both prison and community settings, they met significant barriers to training and delivery. In terms of *training*, they found it difficult to recruit enough potential volunteers from their very specific pool of potential recruits. Whilst they were in touch with many care leavers as a charity, and with some care leavers who had a criminal history, not all of these people were interested in becoming mentors. Rather, most of the people the charity usually worked with had support or advocacy needs of their own. Similarly, lots of the people who expressed an interest in volunteering did not meet the criteria of being an ex-offender care leaver. These problems highlight a limitation of the biographical qualification for peer mentors. One of the weaknesses of this strategy is that some projects cannot adequately recruit. In terms of *through the gate* work they met an

additional barrier. The aim was for volunteer mentors to meet clients in prison settings in the months prior to release, in order to build a relationship, then provide a one to one mentoring service ‘through the gates’ and beyond. However, gaining access to some prisons proved to be a bigger barrier than anticipated, given that the manager and potential volunteers – necessarily – had criminal records. They therefore met resistance to gaining entry on security grounds. This obstacle will be discussed in greater detail in chapter nine.

In response to the barriers Project ‘Care’ faced they adapted their approach to peer mentoring. The manager had built a good working relationship with one local prison that was using peer-led group work as an element of their rehabilitation work. As a result the prison invited him to facilitate a ‘care leavers’ group. This group aimed to offer a supportive forum to prisoners prior to release, to enable care leavers to form an in-prison peer support group and also to recruit people who were interested in becoming peer mentors upon release. It was this group that I observed and from which six interviewees were recruited. The interviewees from this setting were, therefore, mentors and mentees simultaneously. They will be referred to throughout the findings chapters as ‘prison peer group members’. The Prison Peer Group was embedded within a rehabilitation wing within the prison. To be eligible for this self-contained wing, prisoners had to complete a holistic rehabilitation programme, which will be pseudonymized as ‘Trust’. Whilst the programme was open to all prisoners, not just those who professed a religion, it was ‘multi-faith’ based and involved working through past behaviours, practising forgiveness, gaining skills and addressing welfare needs. Much of this work was undertaken in therapeutic group settings. The *care-leaver* peer group was one of several peer support groups in the ‘Trust’ structure, which aimed to address a specific need, with other groups focusing on *family life* and *healthy lifestyles*. This posed a challenge for the research as it can be ‘difficult to isolate

the direct effects of mentoring... within a package of interventions' (Finnegan et al., 2010: 9). Indeed, group members could not always separate out the work undertaken within the peer-led group from that of the wider work they were doing as part of the 'Trust' programme, often speaking about the different elements as one and the same. This amalgamation of separate projects in the minds of mentees, as will become clear in chapter six, was not unique to this setting. Not only does this illustrate one of the methodological challenges to evaluating the impact of mentoring, but also shows how peer-led services may become entwined within wider risk management or therapeutic frameworks. Peer mentors come to be seen as part of the wider whole rather than something distinct. Within this dynamic there is potential for compromised goals and methods. For example, it was the intention of Project 'Care' that group members should lead their own discussions and informally mentor one another. However, due to prison security concerns there was always a member of prison staff in the room too. This staff member was not a 'peer' in the sense of being a care leaver or an ex-offender and as a result, the mentoring manager felt that conversations were sometimes guarded.

The changes that Project 'Care' underwent in the early stages of operation offer a fascinating insight into the hurdles that new services can face at their inception. However, the focus of their efforts also broadens existing conceptions of peer mentoring and of desistance. 'Peer-hood' in this setting is not just about shared experiences of offending, but of shared experiences of fractured family lives and how these may intersect with criminal identities and histories. Desistance in this context is not just a case of developing hope and having access to redemptive opportunities, but of coming to terms with social exclusion, isolation and loss. It highlights the difficulty of conceiving positive futures when childhood has often been characterised by abuse and rejection.

#### 4.4.3 Project 'Facilitate'

A women's mentoring project was selected for inclusion in an attempt to redress the claim that: 'much of criminology ignores women and girls in conflict with the law or simply treats sex as a variable to be included in complex statistical analyses' (DeKeseredy, 2011: 28). Project 'Facilitate' is a service that 'provides fresh opportunities for women who are jobless and have a criminal record to learn new skills and find employment' (Project 'Facilitate' Information Pack, 2012). They claim that:

A unique feature of the service will be the opportunity for some participants to receive special training and personal development support and work alongside our professional staff in delivering the service. Peer facilitators will be key members of the [Project 'Facilitate'] team. They will pass on valuable life skills learning, advice and advocacy support to other women ex-offenders at risk of re-offending and those struggling to adapt to life on the outside (Project 'Facilitate' Information Pack, 2012).

Project 'Facilitate' differs from the other mentoring projects included in this research in that *all* of their facilitators (or mentors) are simultaneously active service users themselves. Volunteers are not just facilitators to their own mentees, therefore, but they also each have their own 'project worker' to assist with any difficulties *they* have and to supervise their facilitation work. One of two paid project workers is assigned to each volunteer. The rationale for this additional support is twofold. It offers women with criminal records (who are often subject to current criminal justice interventions themselves) an opportunity to help others and to 'increase their employability', whilst ensuring they are fully supported

and supervised. It also offers women using the charity the ‘assistance of those who have experience of the criminal justice system’ (Project ‘Facilitate’ Manager).

Referrals to the service (for both facilitators and their mentees) come from the Probation Service and other community partners (such as the Job Centre or Women’s Centre). The project also accepts self-referrals, which often come via word of mouth. During the fieldwork period the project had twelve volunteers. They also completed a three day training course for new volunteers twice yearly. Many of the trainee volunteers have been users of the service themselves. Indeed it is the project’s intention that women enter as ‘service users’ and leave having volunteered and increased their ‘social and employment capital’. All of the mentoring at ‘Facilitate’ is undertaken on a one-to-one basis. Mentees can come to the centre or meet volunteers closer to home, for example, at Community Centres or Cafés. Volunteers also attend a local Women’s Centre drop-in to offer employment advice and recruit new mentees. In research terms, Project ‘Facilitate’ arranged interviews with six volunteer facilitators and five mentees. They also allowed me to attend a volunteer training course and a Women’s Centre drop-in as a participant observer. This context introduces the perceptions of women involved in one-to-one peer mentoring relationships.

During the fieldwork period Project ‘Facilitate’ was funded for a period of three years through the National Lottery. As the three years were coming to an end they were actively seeking funding from the Big Lottery Fund and other sources in order to continue delivering a service, which was making demands upon the time of the manager and staff in addition to the demands of managing the service. It was also causing significant anxiety among the staff and volunteer group as there was no guarantee they would have jobs



within the next six months. As a result the project staff were applying for alternative positions as a backup plan. This situation is not uncommon to small voluntary sector projects who often find themselves too focused on ‘chasing the funding’ (Seddon, 2007: 58). As a footnote, Project ‘Facilitate’ did secure further funding, but not before their two support workers secured alternative employment positions elsewhere in the face of pending unemployment. Whilst the service continued, therefore, there was an impact in terms of staffing consistency.

#### *4.4.4 Project ‘Safe’*

Project ‘Safe’ is a young women’s peer mentoring project attached to a community youth development programme. The aim of the programme is ‘to increase self-confidence and self-empowerment, enabling young women to make ‘safe choices’. ‘The programme was initially conceived as a response to the emerging concerns of young women’s’ involvement in gang-activity and the abusive relations that some young women may endure’ (Project ‘Safe’ Evaluation Report, 2012). It is important to note that the term ‘gang’ has been problematised in terms of describing the activity of young people, not least because the application of a gang label does not always fit with the understanding of those so labelled and does little to explain contexts of inequality or lack of legitimate opportunities. Indeed, uncritical acceptance of the term may in particular ‘serve to marginalise and isolate some ethnic minority communities’ (Smithson, Ralphs and Williams, 2013), given the emergence of a:

wave of United States-inspired gang injunctions and dedicated multi-agency and policing units [which] disproportionately target young, ethnic minority males from

already socially excluded, marginalized and heavily policed neighbourhoods (Smithson et al., 2013: 125).

Respondents in this study reiterated some of these concerns as will become clear in later chapters. Nonetheless Project 'Safe' points to the 'growing numbers of young people identified as gang-involved' in addition to the 'dearth of information or evidence relating to the involvement of young women in gangs' (Project 'Safe' Evaluation Report, 2012: 3). Project 'Safe' was particularly concerned:

that a proportion of young women defined as a 'gang-concern' have experienced sexual violence and exploitation by gang members [and that] there remains very few appropriate interventions for young women who are 'at risk' of gang-involvement (Project 'Safe' Evaluation Report, 2012: 3; see also Berelowitz, Firmin, Edwards and Gulyurtlu, 2012).

Project 'Safe' was established by a community member who took it upon herself to address this problem. She secured funding from a local social housing trust and recruited a small group of 'peer mentors' to engage young women locally. Their rationale is that:

Young people deemed 'Hard to Reach', 'High Risk' and 'Marginalised' are often overlooked and undervalued in relation to their potential contribution as leaders within their communities. [They] can often have a greater influence on peer behaviour. This can be useful whilst redirecting them from a position of social alienation towards resilience and empowerment (Project 'Safe' Information Booklet, 2012).

The elastic descriptors which Project 'Safe' refer to here – 'gang-concern... hard to reach, high risk, marginalised' – are treated with some scepticism by the manager of this project. The project literature consistently placed such official terms in quotation marks, whereas staff spoke instead about 'young women' and 'future leaders'. The manager and mentors at this project also spoke at length about the problems with official labels; this will be discussed further in chapter nine. Peer mentors at 'Safe' are paid employees, which is a deliberate attempt to acknowledge and reward the value of the experience these young mentors bring.

Mentors have monthly supervision sessions with 'Aspirational Mentors' who are volunteers. Aspirational mentors are described as 'successful, professional or inspirational' adult women from the local community (Project 'Safe' Coordinator), who volunteer to support the work of the project. Their role is to provide reflective supervision, advice and guidance and to nurture the aspirations of mentors. They are positioned as role models, given that many of the women hold senior management positions within statutory or community sector settings. The intention is to counter the 'poverty of aspiration' young people can face if their life experience has left them feeling de-motivated (Project 'Safe' Information Booklet, 2012).

Referrals to the project come from local schools and from the local gang management unit. The project is managed by a salaried coordinator who has a background of working to reduce gun and gang violence. It is staffed by a team of six paid mentors, all of whom have a history of gang membership, or knowledge of local gang-related issues. The activities of the project centre around 'a ten sessions, multi-modal group-work programme provided

and delivered by specialist and peer practitioners/workers' (Project 'Safe' Evaluation Report, 2012). Mentors build relationships with young women on the course and provide post-course mentoring in school settings, where required. They are also active in raising awareness of gang related issues and, in the fieldwork period, delivered a multi-disciplinary conference focusing on effective ways of helping young women involved in youth violence. Project 'Safe' facilitated interviews with three mentees, three mentors and one 'aspirational' mentor; they also invited me to attend their awareness raising conference. Informal discussions also took place with the project coordinator and mentors.

#### *4.4.5 Some Late Additions!*

Whilst thirty five interviews with mentors and mentees from the above projects were eventually obtained, the fieldwork road was not as smooth as it may appear here. Indeed, whilst the process of securing access to eligible projects eventually presented voluminous data, there was a period when it appeared there would be a lack sufficient respondents. By the start of the fieldwork year (2012) *three* projects had been recruited as planned: 'Peer', 'Care' and 'Help'. In October 2012 however, Project 'Help', a young women's peer mentoring project, advised that their programme had to change due to a decision by their London-based head office to reallocate funds to another geographical area. Whilst disappointing, I needed to be proactive and ensure there was a replacement service. At the same time however, Project 'Care' was also experiencing delays in delivery, meaning it too may have not been operational within the study period. Therefore, for number of months there was only had one operational project ('Peer') on board. At this time it was decided to broaden the search and try again to secure a further two projects, which would be operative within the fieldwork period. Following an additional period of networking and negotiation, access to projects 'Facilitate' and 'Safe' was secured. I also, however, met

three individuals, each working in different settings, who were keen to be interviewed about their experiences of peer mentoring. Given the uncertainty about how many projects would be able to deliver within the time frame, *all offers* of involvement were accepted and I interviewed everyone who expressed an interest. When Project ‘Care’ became operational in early 2013, respondents in Projects ‘Peer’ and ‘Facilitate’ had already been interviewed, along with a number of individuals (detailed below). A visit to Project ‘Safe’ had also been arranged, presenting the pleasant problem of too many participants. Rather than refusing ‘Safe’ or ‘Care’ all offers of engagement were accepted; this was in order to obtain as full a picture of the local field as possible. The projects which yielded data, therefore, eventually totalled four, rather than three. These projects were also supplemented by the individual practitioners detailed below.

#### *4.4.6 Individual Interviewees*

I met *Phil* at a desistance conference in 2012. Phil delivers a youth inclusion programme on behalf of his local housing association. The programme is ‘designed to challenge young people’s attitudes about crime and change negative lifestyles’ (Project ‘Learn’ website, 2012). Phil identifies himself as an ex-offender, his role is to deliver personal development work with young people and to mentor them based upon his own experiences. He has also previously delivered peer mentoring to groups in adult prison settings, having been invited back into prison informally after his own release. Furthermore he has offered one-to-one support to local adult prisoners as they come ‘through the gate’. He therefore has an in-depth understanding of peer mentoring in a number of guises. Phil was interviewed individually in his capacity as a peer mentor.

*Georgie* has recently gained employment as a director of a community resettlement project, which uses volunteer peer mentors. She previously used the same service as a peer mentee following her release from prison. The project that Georgie works for (Project 'Work') 'provides resettlement and support services for ex-prisoners returning to [the local area]... Each beneficiary is allocated a volunteer "befriender" at pre-release stage' (Project 'Work' Website, 2012). Many, but not all, of Project 'Work's' volunteers are ex-offenders. This project sees the benefits of using ex-offenders to be: 'they know what they're talking about and have a life experience closer to their mentee'; they are also often keen to 'put something back' and keen to take on a 'positive pro-social role' (Project 'Work' Coordinator). Project 'Work' did not have enough active peer mentors to provide the numbers initially wanted from each setting, but were keen to speak to the research; Georgie and the Service Coordinator were therefore interviewed about their experiences. Georgie's experiences illustrate, not just a mentee perspective, but also the challenges of changing role from service user to staff.

*Keisha* was initially wary of contributing to the research as she had had some negative experiences of her ideas being appropriated (these will be explored in chapter eight). However, whilst networking for a replacement women's project, Keisha's name was forwarded by a local youth project leader as 'someone you need to speak to'. Having answered her many questions about the aims of the research and where the messages would be published, Keisha agreed to be involved. She wanted to advocate the practice of peer mentoring whilst raising awareness of the difficulties of delivering mentoring when you have a criminal record. Keisha established Project 'Team' after being released from prison. Project 'Team' is a peer mentoring service working 'to deter young people from a life of crime to prevent negative outcomes amongst young people' (Project 'Team'

Website, 2013). Keisha and her business partner were inspired to mentor young people at risk of offending, having spent a significant period of their own young adulthood in prison. The project delivers workshops to young people, which are ‘designed to promote positive behaviour and encourage positive change’ (Project ‘Team’ Website, 2013). They also provide one to one mentoring services, offering advice and support to young people and also some family advocacy. Keisha was interviewed in her capacity as a peer mentor.

What finally emerged did not amount to a tidy cohort of respondents. Indeed, given the initial plan to include three projects with ten interviewees each, there may have been an argument to only analyse the data from projects ‘Peer’, ‘Care’ and ‘Facilitate’. To do so, however, would have not only have been disingenuous, given that ‘Safe’, Phil, Georgie and Keisha informed valuable learning during the fieldwork, but to exclude them would also be to miss the rich data which each of these respondents bring. Therefore the decision to include all speakers was made. Not only are the data now reflective of the shifting local picture encountered, and the very small size of some parts of the sector, but it also illustrates the differences across groups of peer mentors. For example, whilst all respondents considered that they were undertaking peer mentoring in the voluntary sector and all recognised value in recruiting ex-offenders as mentors, not all mentors had to be ex-offenders; not all mentors had to be volunteers; and not all mentors called themselves mentors. These differences will be revisited throughout the thesis.

#### **4.5 Interview Respondents**

In order to select interview respondents a ‘purposive sampling method’ (Denscombe, 2014: 41) was adopted by asking coordinators to choose five mentors and five mentees from each project. This method was chosen as it allowed me to engage with the experiences of people

on both sides of the relationship. Indeed an advantage of purposive sampling is that it ‘allows the researcher to home in on people or events which there are good grounds for believing they will be critical for the research’ (Denscombe, 2014: 41).

On a practical level this approach relied on intermediaries as research ‘gatekeepers’ (Remenyi, Swan and Van Den Assem, 2011: 67). An advantage of using gatekeepers was that they had prior knowledge of respondents’ personal wellbeing and capacity. They therefore provided a safeguard against the unintentional recruitment of especially vulnerable people who were unable to give fully informed consent. A clear challenge this posed, however, was that the gatekeepers were all employed as Project Managers and as a result were interested parties. This afforded a lot of influence to people who could select the most *positive* cases or most *critical* cases, depending on their own agenda. From a constructionist viewpoint of course, this problem is not insurmountable as these voices still tell a valuable truth, however any presentation of this truth requires awareness that it may be missing other perspectives. In order to broaden the scope and reach some of those less ‘successful’ stories the sampling method was enhanced by using direct advertising within projects. This included the distribution of posters and leaflets around offices and group work rooms. ‘Snowball sampling’ was also employed whereby members of the ‘target population’ that had been reached through gatekeepers were asked ‘to locate other members of that population who they happen to know’ (Babbie, 2011: 208). I also spoke to people informally, in the group sessions that I observed, about their experiences in both group and one to one settings. Finally I also employed ‘opportunity sampling’ (Martella, Nelson, Morgan and Marchand-Martella, 2013: 130) given that Phil, Keisha, Georgia and Project ‘Peer’s’ probation colleagues did not form part of the original plan, but were all involved with peer mentoring and were ‘members of the population willing to take part in



the research' (Martella et al., 2013: 130) and came to add important perspectives to the ethnography.

The management teams personally contacted mentors and mentees to ask if they would be interviewed for the research. There was always a time lapse between the request and interview in order to give participants time to change their minds. Managers introduced me to mentors and mentees who had expressed an interest. In order to avoid compulsion (however implicit), I made the request to participate directly following introduction by project staff. Information sheets (See appendices A1-A3) were also personally handed to prospective respondents. Interviewing is a technique which fits well with representing the meaning that people give to an experience:

The qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects' points of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanation (Kvale, 2009: 1).

Semi-structured interviews were selected to offer 'more opportunity for dialogue and exchange between the interviewer and interviewee' (Noaks and Wincup, 2004: 79). However, it became clear from the pilot study that whilst some people can talk comfortably with little structure, others prefer to have a structure to answer to. Therefore the interview schedules were designed to cater for both. Four key questions were asked of *all* mentors and mentees: What is peer mentoring? Why are peer mentors volunteers? What does 'going straight' involve? Does peer mentoring have anything to do with going straight? (See appendix A6 and A7). These not only offered a guide for the interview, but also allowed space for any 'follow up ideas' (Crowther-Dowey, 2007: 102) that the

respondents had. Often these four prompts were all that was needed for the hour long interview. Where respondents were giving shorter responses, however, or did not develop points from their own side, a bank of additional prompts was available (see appendix A6 and A7) to encourage the discussion. These were similar for both mentors and mentees, differing only to acknowledge the different positions of mentor and mentee (e.g. what happens if *mentees* don't attend/what happens if *you* don't attend?) A total of eighteen interviews were completed with mentors from across the projects, and a total of twenty interviews with mentees. In addition the opportunity was taken to interview four project coordinators. These interviews offered an insight into the origins of projects, their aims and the practicalities of service provision. Finally, the opportunity was taken to interview two probation officers who referred in to one of the projects, which gave valuable insight into the perspectives of a partner agency; and in particular into the compromises made over differences in approach.

Whilst the plan was to digitally record all interviews, this was not always possible. Firstly, the prison where six of the thirty eight participants were housed had a policy of 'no recording equipment'. Therefore it was possible to interview group members about their experiences, but only to record their responses by hand. Secondly, two participants in community settings consented to being interviewed, but not to being recorded. As a result, thirty mentor/mentee interviews were digitally recorded and eight were recorded by hand. Debriefing took place with all participants. This involved summarising the main points discussed and how these might be presented in terms of an argument. It allowed interviewees to correct any factual errors or withdraw statements if they wished. It should be noted that few interviewees did actually disagree with these summaries, although some did re-emphasise the points they considered most important. These included the perceived

premature termination of mentoring and the appreciation of support from volunteers. Additionally, debriefing allowed for any distress to be identified and any concerns about disclosure and confidentiality to be addressed.

#### **4.6 Observation sources**

At each project a request was made to observe all that was practicable, however, once again I was reliant on the gatekeeping of managers. Every site gave me a tour of their centre and informally introduced me to staff and administrators. They also allowed me to visit at least one external partner agency or setting where their work is carried out. Project 'Peer' facilitated the most access. They allowed me to complete their three day volunteer training course as a participant (overt) observer, to spend time in their office, to use their meeting rooms for interview and gave me a building security pass allowing access to kitchen areas. They also arranged for me to observe a women's group led by peer mentors at a local Women's Centre, a recovery group led by peer facilitators at the Probation Centre, a number of volunteer recruitment interviews for both training courses and mentoring positions and uniquely, a supervision session between a coordinator and a peer mentor. Project 'Care' invited me to spend time in their office and arranged for me to observe a care leavers group led by peer mentors at a local prison. They also introduced me to the Prison Resettlement Governor and Therapeutic Wing Manager, who in turn allowed me private space to interview group members. Project 'Facilitate' allowed me to complete their three day volunteer training course as a participant (overt) observer, to spend time in their office, and to observe a peer led drop in session at a local Women's Centre. Project 'Safe' invited me to spend time in their office, made their office space available for interviews and introduced me to the head of year at a local school in order to facilitate school based interviews with some of their mentees. They also invited me to attend their

multi-agency conference focusing on effective ways of helping young women involved in youth violence.

#### **4.7 Observing Practices**

It is usually fairly important for the researcher to scrutinize the structural layout of the areas in which the behaviour to be studied takes place... physical characteristics almost always reflect social characteristics (as well as conditioning social behaviour) (Corbetta, 2003: 247).

In addition to formal observation activities, as I built relationships with coordinators and staff, I was also able to informally observe settings, including the physical appearance of offices and rooms, the local areas in which they were based and the administration practices and social cultures within offices. I was also invited along to see places of work outside of offices. I did not observe one-to-one mentoring in any of the settings. This would have been both ethically problematic and a poor source of data, given my presence as a researcher would have been so disruptive to the setting. I was also already getting descriptive accounts of this practice from interviews. The places I did observe illustrated the social settings of peer mentoring, the formal interactions and also allowed access to social actor's 'definition on the situation' (Corbetta, 2003: 285). Given I was a participant observer (albeit overt) in group and training settings, I was able to access a wealth of what would have been otherwise hidden data, such as whispered feelings about particular content and facial expressions of discomfort or pleasure at different points. See chapter nine for specific examples of this. What I came to learn, as I will reflect on more fully later, is that my presence as an observer of planned activities also allowed me invaluable additional access to a wealth of data relating to the culture and character of organisations.

A major problem with observational work is that ‘The presence of the observer may change the nature of the interactions being observed’ (Hall, 2008: 205). Indeed this ‘social desirability bias (SDB)’ or ‘the tendency for individuals to present themselves in a favourable or socially desirable manner rather than respond in terms of their own characteristics or views’ (Hall, 2008: 205) could arguably have been at work in interviews too. As with interviewing, however, the task of the observer who is mindful of social construction is not to employ tools to obtain the objective truth of a situation, as this is ultimately viewed as unobtainable; rather the task is to critically approach the narratives available with an awareness of power agendas and the ways in which texts came to be constructed.

#### **4.8 Proceeding ethically**

I was very aware of the complex power asymmetries and potential for exploitation in the research setting and took steps to minimise these. The informed consent of all participants was sought and participants were fully informed of the purposes of the research and the proposed use of research findings. Participation in interviews and observations of practice was fully voluntary and all respondents were informed orally and in writing (Appendix A1-A3 and A8) that they had the right to withdraw from the research at any point and to decline to answer any questions. The decision was made to anonymise individuals and projects. This was an effort to enhance the likelihood and accuracy of responses (Maxfield and Babbie, 2015: 63) and to offer protection to people and organisations in the event that somebody said something which others found critical. Participants were advised that their answers, discussions, names and any identifying details about organisations would be anonymised carefully to avoid unintended disclosure. However, whilst identities would be

protected within the study, participants were advised prior to interview of the researcher's obligation to report to the authorities any current criminal activity, involvement in terrorism or planned harm to themselves or others.

Research with offenders requires an understanding that their offending is intertwined with complex needs and vulnerabilities. The respondent group comprised a mixture of adult offenders and ex-offenders, adult care leavers and young women at risk of involvement, or involved, with gang crime. As a result the participants had varying needs which needed to be considered. The adult cohorts were vulnerable in that they were subject to criminal justice interventions. Even in the absence of overt manipulation, participants may therefore have felt coerced to take part in the research, simply by being asked, given they were under the management of a system which heavily dissuades non-participation. I aimed to minimise this potential by talking with agency gatekeepers about the importance of voluntary inclusion. I also spent time at the beginning of each interview or observation making clear that participation is a choice and there would be no judgement or consequence if people decide they do not want to take part.

Care leaver respondents were vulnerable in that they were incarcerated at the time of interview and observation. Like the adult community respondents, they may have felt a sense of coercion simply by being asked. Moreover, given they were being asked to reflect on mentoring in light of their identity as incarcerated care leavers, there was a risk the discussions would leave them feeling distressed. To maintain a duty of care in such an event all participants were issued with a leaflet detailing local helplines and services. In the prison context this was supplemented by ensuring they knew how to access help from the Samaritans (Listeners) and mentors. I did have a particular concern for one interviewee in

this setting who had been discussing his care history and offence. Although he did not disclose an intention to self-harm or anything else which required formal disclosure, I was concerned enough to inform a case worker afterwards that he appeared a little shaky and anxious. I asked could they monitor him and put some of the helpline numbers from the leaflet on his phone pin. The case worker agreed and reassured me they would look in on him.

The most vulnerable cohort was the young women working with mentors at Project 'Safe'. These participants were primarily vulnerable due to their young age (13-14), which could impact upon their understanding of the implications of contributing to research (in terms of personal disclosures and the risk of recognition); or what impact research findings may have (on the services they use). To minimise these risks I continually consulted with gatekeepers about respondent suitability and also obtained parental consent where participants were under the age of 18 (with the knowledge and consent of potential participants). Having practised as a Youth Justice Social Worker for eight years, with children aged 10-18, I employed transferrable skills and sensitivities. I am aware, for example, that many young women on the periphery of gang activity are sexually exploited by gang members. I was very clear about my duty to inform the authorities if ongoing abuse was disclosed. As an extra safeguard, all interviews with young people took place at the charity's centre or at the young person's school to ensure they had familiar staff support nearby if the discussions caused them any distress.

Given the high levels of poor literacy amongst offenders (Caddick and Webster, 1998) and high rates of dyslexia (Kirk and Reid, 2001), I also verbally explained all written information regarding the implications of contributing to research and did not proceed

unless assured they were understood. All written information was ‘dyslexia friendly’ (Price and Skinner, 2007) including pastel coloured paper. I also produced pictorial versions of information sheets.

#### **4.9 Reflexivity – the context of analysis**

It is important to note that prior to embarking on doctoral studies I was not an ‘objective’ applicant (Denscombe, 2010: 88). At the time of applying for this studentship I was working as a social worker in a youth offending team. I had also experienced peer mentoring as a social worker in a charity tackling child sexual exploitation. It was these experiences that motivated me to study. Having worked for a number of months with young people who had been sexually exploited, I had the opportunity to support a peer to peer intervention. In one of the most emotional and memorable hours of my life, I supported two young women as they had a conversation about their experiences of forced prostitution. I watched in fascination as through tears, laughter and traumatic honesty the younger of the two dropped some of her shame and self-hatred and the elder grew in stature and compassion. The conversation was an experiment, a ‘pilot’, yet it had such a profound impact on both parties that peer mentoring was implemented on a broader scale across the service. I recall this history to be clear about my own starting point and bias as a researcher, but also to be clear about the need for reflexivity as I conducted the research. I was aware that my first impression of peer mentoring had been favourable, I was also aware that I had witnessed peer mentoring in practice on a one to one basis, yet would not be doing so in this study. I therefore needed to separate out my own impressions and assumptions from how respondents were actually describing their experiences and in order to do so I would need analytical tools, which would remain close to respondent narratives *and* allow me to separate out my own assumptions. Elements of *grounded theory*, critical



*discourse analysis* and Gilligan's *listening guide* were helpful here and will be discussed more fully below. Before doing so however, it is also relevant to note that this personal history was not just a possible influence to be managed, but also a helpful research tool. I was a relative 'insider' when approaching voluntary sector criminal justice agencies given I had worked in similar settings myself. I was therefore familiar with the 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1980: 53) or durable dispositions common to this field. I was 'uniquely positioned to understand' the workings of these settings, to gain access and to engage with gatekeepers in the field (see Kerstetter, 2012). However, there are very few cases 'in which someone can be characterized as a complete insider or a complete outsider', rather:

The 'space between' is usually characterized as a multidimensional space, where researchers' identities, cultural backgrounds, and relationships to research participants influence how they are positioned within that space (Kerstetter, 2012: 101).

This was a complexity I identified with as I went about the business of *managing my identities* within the various research settings. When speaking with professional gatekeepers and gaining access to prison settings I drew upon dispositions and knowledge that I had learned as a social worker, with *mentee* respondents, however, this professional stance had the potential to be a barrier. I therefore needed to be clear in these exchanges that whilst I did used to work in youth justice, I was not connected in any way to the projects being studied. There were points when this convergence of roles and norms was tested however. A major test was leaving behind the social worker habitus when faced with a respondent's distress. One of my earliest interviews, for example, was with a young woman who was tearful for much of the discussion. Whilst some of this emotion was

communicated as sadness at years wasted following an exploitative introduction to heroin as a child, much of it was loss and frustration linked to her perception that her mentoring relationship had been too hastily terminated, at a time when she felt the support was most needed. The young woman went as far as to say it made her feel like committing a crime again to get the support. As a social worker, my immediate response to such a narrative would have been to reflectively listen, to explore alternative problem-solving skills and consequential thinking, to educate the young woman on her rights in relation to accessing support and to advocate on her behalf for a more staged and supported ending. Indeed as a researcher this was the process of responses I could hear being played out in my head as she spoke. As a researcher, however, I had also more recently been schooled in the importance of non-directional listening and therefore felt a real inner conflict about how to respond. I uneasily settled for reflecting on the content and feelings and for information sharing:

*I would like you to ask could you have some support, maybe not at the level you had – but just to bridge that gap until you go into detox... I don't think there's anything wrong with picking up a phone to a manager and saying: 'can I just give you some feedback for how I'm feeling?' You never know what might happen, you're not saying anything bad about anybody who you've worked with, I'm not hearing that. What I'm hearing is that you're feeling like you want something else and the manager just seems like the right person to go to (Researcher).*

Following the interview, however, my inner conflict did not subside. Had I said and done enough to ease this young woman's distress and assist her in securing the service she desired at such a crucial time in her recovery? Had I said and done enough to prevent her

acting on her temptation to offend again? Should I speak with the coordinator about my concerns or would this unnecessarily breach confidentiality? Alternatively, had I already said *too much*, potentially influencing this young woman's response to the service and in turn their performance of endings whilst I was still only in an early stage of my fieldwork? I dealt with my struggle by speaking with my research supervisor and agreed to feedback my concern about 'end points' more generally at the end of the first batch of interviews, thus maintaining individual confidentiality. I also had to accept that my role in this setting was not to effect individual change or advocate on an individual basis.

#### **4.10 Qualitative Data Analysis**

All interviews were transcribed verbatim on a secured laptop with the assistance of 'Express Scribe' transcription software. Whilst time consuming, this had the benefit of allowing me to get 'close' to people's stories. In this sense transcribing was 'as much a form of interpretation and analysis as... a technical activity' (Fraser, 2004: 188). Observation data was recorded by hand contemporaneously in field work diaries and later typed up. These typed diaries included separate sections, which recorded my own observations, impressions and comments. In order to analyse the amassed data I drew upon techniques of *thematic analysis*, *critical discourse analysis* and Gilligan's *listening guide* method.

*Thematic analysis*, or analysis through the identification of common themes, 'involves making choices about what to include and implies some degree of repetition (King and Horrocks, 2010: 149). The thematic analysis of interview data was influenced by the *grounded theory* approach, which encourages researchers to remain 'open to the data' in order to 'discover subtle meanings and have new insights' (Charmaz, 2014: 137). King and

Horrocks (2010: 153) describe one system of analysis using three stages of coding: *descriptive coding, interpretive coding and overarching themes*. In the context of this research, descriptive work involved reading through transcripts, highlighting material and adding brief comments; interpretive work involved creating clusters from these markers and beginning to interpret meaning in relation to the research question. Overarching themes then emerged to form the shape of chapters. For example, the recurrent *description* of the importance of shared experiences was then *interpreted* in terms of asserting submerged voices. This led to an *overarching* theme of *identity*, which not only encompassed this finding, but also the descriptions of peer mentoring involving elements of translation between identity positions (see chapter five for full discussion).

*Critical discourse analysis* ‘remains essentially a form of textual analysis. Typically it involves (a) finding a regular pattern in a particular text or a set of texts... and then (b) proposing an interpretation of the pattern, an account of its meaning and ideological significance’ (Cameron, 2001: 137). In practice the approach is forensic or archaeological where analysts look at the text as a whole; the genre; framing; what is foregrounded/omitted; what is taken for granted; what connotations are used; and is the register formal or informal? The aim is to uncover often hidden evidence to make a case for how meaning is made. Whilst this technique is useful for highlighting unspoken dynamics (see, for example, the taken-for-granted-ness of gendered forms of mentoring in chapter nine), there are concerns that it positions the analyst as superior to the speaker and implies that with the correct analytical process, a critical version of truth superior to the speakers can be gotten at, or as Stanley and Wise (1993) argue:

Data are elicited by the researcher, who then evaluate them in relation to her assessment of the participant's competence in 'properly' understanding what is going on... one of the major ways in which power is exercised in research situations (Stanley and Wise, 1993: 115).

In an attempt to address this imbalance, elements of Gilligan's 'voice method' or 'listening guide' method were also employed (Kiegelmann, 2009). This method attempts to include a fuller representation of the researcher's position in the analysis. The method lays out 'three steps as a way of entering and coming to know another person's inner world, in the context of the research relationship' (Kiegelmann, 2009: 39). These steps are: listening for plot, for the 'I' voice and for contrapuntal voices. Gilligan offers very practical advice on how to listen for and record each of these features and in doing so, she offers an open approach to the problem that much analytical work is 'hidden' and subjective. She suggests, for example, that alongside listening for plot:

[T]rack your responses to the other person and what they are saying, making these explicit so as to avoid projecting them onto others or acting them out in various ways. Objectivity then becomes a matter not of avoiding relationship but paying attention to relationship, not silencing yourself but distinguishing your voice from that of the other person (Kiegelmann, 2009: 39).

She also suggests that analysts create 'I poems' from data by taking 'each I phrase... that occurs and list to them in sequence ("I want, I know, I don't know, I think ...")' She argues that these can 'often prove to be remarkably revealing, picking up an associative logic that runs under the logic of the sentence and capturing what people know about themselves,

often without being aware of communicating it' (Kiegelmann, 2009: 39). The benefit of such openness is that:

By making explicit the connections between evidence and interpretation, other researchers can see how you arrived at the understanding you have come to and also explore different paths. Reliability, reframed within a relational understanding of the research process, means checking one's listening against that of others, especially people whose backgrounds or cultures may lead them to pick up what you have missed or misheard (Kiegelmann, 2009: 39).

This kind of reflective ethnographic practice is not without criticism, however, as there are concerns that the scientific gaze becomes skewed toward researcher at the expense of the researched (Taylor and Winquist, 2001). There was a need to remain focused upon the research question, therefore, and listen closely to the people describing their experiences.

The data from the qualitative interviews are presented in chapters five to nine and are interwoven with the analysis which resulted from engaging with these analytical techniques. All of the participants' names have been replaced with pseudonyms, as have the names of projects themselves to maintain anonymity. Quotations have also been 'cleaned up' (Nespor and Barber, 1995) to render them more readable. Connecting phrases such as 'um', 'like', and 'you know?' have been omitted unless this would have been detrimental to the meaning of the quote. Whilst there are concerns that 'such editing distorts what people said' I would agree with Nespor and Barber (1995: 56), that 'far from being markers of "authentic" speech, these are artefacts of interview practices'.

#### **4.11 Conclusion**

This chapter began by introducing a research field which is relatively unknown. Indeed the number of ‘peer mentoring’ projects in operation is difficult to quantify given the diversity of practices and the short-term or poorly funded nature of many services. In turn, criminology has been conceived of as prioritising statistical analyses over what is meaningful to offenders (Gelsthorpe, 2006). Certainly it is this statistical understanding of ‘what works’ that has most informed the training of Probation and Youth Justice Staff in recent decades. In response to these contexts this study sought to employ mixed qualitative methods in an attempt to uncover what these practices mean to those involved. This chapter has sought to be clear about the methods that were selected, how sources were selected and about the tools of analysis that were selected in order to ensure the reader is clear about how knowledge has been constructed. In aiming for this transparency the chapter has also already begun to uncover some key issues related to peer mentoring. These include: the challenges of delivering services within an insecure funding environment; the difficulty of gaining access to prisons as an ex-offender volunteer; the problem of recruiting volunteers from a small pool of expertise; and the diversity of activities that constitute ‘peer mentoring’. Each of these issues will be explored in greater detail in the following chapters.

**PART TWO**

**MAKING SENSE OF PEER MENTORING**



## PART TWO

### MAKING SENSE OF PEER MENTORING

This thesis began by considering some of the key messages from existing research into peer mentoring, tracing claims that it has the *power to change* people; that it is *better than what has gone before*; and that it is *egalitarian*. It then analysed the practice in light of pedagogical, theological and sociological thought, arguing that a number of key precepts underpin the work. *Identity* is theorised to be a resource for relationship building and for inspiring people; *pedagogy* is important given that peer mentoring aims to be a critical educational process; whilst traces of *fraternity or sorority* and *politicisation* indicate that peer mentoring is not just aimed at individual change, but also at social change and challenge. These theoretically informed themes provided ‘the frame of reference’ (Cargan, 2007: 31) through which I approached the data. Part two of this thesis is, therefore, the result of both deductive and inductive inquiry. Many of the themes identified in the following chapters build upon themes in the existing literature whilst others emerged from the author’s efforts to approach the data as openly as possible (Charmaz, 2014). As new insights and themes emerged the reading was broadened and in this sense the process of theory building has been iterative and cyclical.

The empirical data is organised into five chapters, which address the following themes: *identity; agency; values; change; and power*. Each of these overarching themes emerged from the analysis of the data and each will link back to or advance the precepts that are identified in earlier chapters. Chapter five will focus specifically on the claimed importance of the *ex-offender identity*. Whilst this theme connects most clearly to the identity precept advanced earlier, it also introduces claims of distinction from professionals and their practices. Chapter six will explore the theme of *agency*. Agency is central to all

of the precepts advanced in chapter two. As role models, stigmatised bodies, critical learners and political collaborators, mentors negotiate a social world where they are self-directing individuals, yet they are always also subject to social influence, social judgement and efforts to guide and mould them. This chapter will explore the degree to which mentors and mentees determine their own actions and the degree to which they are dependent upon external influence. Chapter seven draws out what respondents perceive to be the authentic principles, values or ‘core conditions’ of peer mentoring. These conditions illustrate how those involved with mentoring translate their personal understandings into practice; a practice which values emotion, dialogue and strives to re-humanise people following experiences of dehumanisation. Chapter eight will explore processes of *change* within mentoring. It is concerned with the tension between attempting to affect individual change and broader social change. As a result it connects to theories of both pedagogy and political action. However, it also points to significant barriers to change by reference to the often harrowing lived experiences of participants. Finally, chapter nine will highlight some of the articulated and unacknowledged power struggles within mentoring settings. The problems with hierarchical power structures were a central concern of Freire’s critical pedagogy (1970) and hooks’ identity politics (1993; 1994) and we can trace similar concerns in mentoring settings. However, the scope is also broadened to conceptualise power as multiple in its workings (O’Farrell, 2005; Foucault, 1982); not just in terms of a hierarchical system that can be resisted from below, but as multiple systems and discourses, which are co-created and resisted at different points.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Trust me, I'm an ex-offender – The importance of identity to peer mentoring**

This chapter will outline and explain how identity is utilised within peer mentoring settings and explore some of the tensions it creates. The existing literature recognises that reconstructions of identity, or underlying changes in self-identity, are important aspects of maintaining desistance from crime (Maruna, 2001; McNeill, 2006; Burnett and Maruna, 2006). Studies also indicate that peers may be particularly well placed to assist with such identity shifts, given that their appraisals are often more readily internalised (Asencio and Burke, 2011) and that they can recruit their contemporaries into ‘a new figured world, a new frame of understanding’ (Holland et al., 1998: 66) using the personal story as a ‘cultural vehicle for identity formation’ (Holland et al., 1998: 71). Peer mentors, therefore, are potential co-authors helping mentees to imagine and live out new identity stories. This chapter will add to these conceptions by suggesting that identity shift is not just prompted by the presence of peers undergoing changes, but rather it is preceded by desire (Girard, 1977). Mentees often come to mimic the desires of their mentors whom they admire and respect. However, identity is also conceptualised in terms of performance and external audiences (Goffman, 1961; 1963) as mentors recount differing levels of successful identity transformation in the face of social stigma. The chapter will also employ Bernstein’s (1971) theory that linguistic codes are central to social identity by illustrating how peer mentoring often involves translating the spoken word. Respondents suggest that mentors and mentees use shared forms of language, which differ to those used by figures of authority and as a result identity is employed as a resource for translating the social world. Finally, it will consider whether knowledge which draws upon a particular identity position

breeds essentialist exclusivity (Fuss, 1989), or whether it is an important strategy to prevent the silencing of people from marginal groups (hooks, 1994). A third position is forwarded, which calls for an inclusion of excluded voices within practices based upon *dialogue*.

The chapter begins by tracing claims of authenticity in respondent narratives. Mentors and their advocates often employ the ex-offender identity as an authentic position from which others can learn. The ex-offender identity is similarly constructed as a useful resource, which can inspire self-improvement and facilitate new forms of communication. Peer mentors often claim a non-authoritarian standpoint, constructing peer-to-peer relationships as horizontal rather than hierarchical. The chapter concludes by highlighting a number of barriers faced by mentors as they attempt to employ identity in these ways, given that external perceptions do not always reinforce individual efforts.

## **5.1 Claims to authenticity**

This section will explore claims that personal experience of crime and desistance offers peer mentors an *authentic standpoint*, which ‘professional’ helpers do not have. The existing literature suggests that personal experience of offending helps mentors to bond with mentees (Princes Trust, 2012), that ex-offenders possess a credibility that statutory workers do not (Nellis and McNeill, 2008) and that peers have specific knowledge of life inside and outside of prison, which can be helpful to those in the criminal justice system (Devilly et al., 2005). Respondents in this study often agreed with these claims and so buttressed the ex-offender standpoint upon which such statements rest, however, they often did so in ways which excluded other forms of knowledge. Ben, for example, is using a peer

mentoring service attached to his Probation office. He valued knowledge drawn from lived experiences above that which is gained from theoretical learning:

It does seem to work better when you've actually been there, that's how I personally feel anyway. Somebody who's just read it from a book isn't the same as [someone who has] actually been there and done it (Ben, Mentee).

Similarly, Fiona, a mentee using the same service argues:

You can't learn [experience], you can pick pointers up, but you can't get that life skill, that extra that you need that completes it. You can't get it unless you've seen it, been there, got somewhere, you know? (Fiona, Mentee).

One problem with this stance is that it suggests a true and unified essence of the criminal experience. This rests upon essentialist beliefs in the 'true essence of things, the invariable and fixed properties which define the "whatness" of a given entity' (Fuss, 1989: xi) when clearly, experiences of crime and change are different for different individuals. In addition to abridging diverse experiences 'exclusions of this sort often breed exclusivity' (Fuss, 1989: 113-115). They suggest that people without lived experiences of crime have nothing to offer in mentoring settings. Adam, however, who has managed a peer mentoring project for two years challenged this assumption:

In the past I've felt that experience [of offending] would count for most, but from the last two years I've kind of learned that that is not necessarily the case, just being genuine and sincere is more important (Adam, mentoring coordinator).

Whilst there are counter views to the primacy of the ex-offender experience and indeed problems with the premise, the claimed importance of shared offending experience was a dominant theme in mentor and mentee narratives and therefore requires attention. Such shared experience was repeatedly presented as a *privileged* form of knowledge, wherein desistance from crime and the criminal justice system itself can only be fully understood if they have been experienced. Phil, for example, mentors adults in prison and young people in the community having spent a number of years in prison himself. He explains:

The advantage is I've faced many of those barriers that they're [mentees] likely to encounter and obviously come through them, more importantly. So, you know, through that reflective practice I'm able to share that experience with them and prepare them (Phil, Mentor).

Similarly Lin, who mentors adults in a community setting having spent a number of years in the criminal justice system for 'alcohol related' offences, described peer mentoring as:

It's somebody that's had a similar experience or similar problem to me, but found a way to overcome it and then they would guide their client or their peer, by their own experiences (Lin, Mentor and previously a Mentee).

Julie mentors adults in a community rehabilitation setting having also 'drank a lot' and been the subject of a number of community sentences. She considers that she has:

A good [understanding] of the criminal justice system because I've been there myself. Also other things in my past, ye know, like getting in trouble, having horrible ex-boyfriends, other things have happened to me and I think I use that knowledge to guide them in the right way sometimes (Julie, Mentor).

Phil, Lin and Julie all assert that mentors with personal experience have an understanding of barriers, systems and problematic relationships that they can draw upon to prepare and guide people. 'Reflection' upon the tactics learned from experience are essential to this model. These speakers describe forms of learning which rely upon the experiences of 'human beings in their relations with the world' (Freire, 1970: 60). They also suggest that this reflective understanding is not currently being utilised in existing approaches. This position was supported by a probation manager who worked alongside one peer mentoring service:

All of our ex-offender staff [peer mentors who went on to paid Probation roles] changed because of their own connections, not Probation. That's not to say that Probation doesn't help, but that there are other strategies available outside professional understanding (Probation Manager).

These narratives aim to afford people with experiences of crime an authenticity because they have overcome barriers. They do not privilege what Pollack (2004: 697) terms 'professional understandings' or 'deficit based constructions', but 'behaviour is contextualised' (Pollack, 2004: 697). Of course, not all professional Probation staff subscribe to interventions which aim to correct individual deficit. Indeed, as will become clear in chapter nine, not all peers always avoid such models themselves. That said there is

an assertion of voice present here, which aims to undermine professional knowledge; this will be explored further below.

## **5.2 Undermining professional knowledge**

Mentors and mentees alike often created a *hierarchy of knowledge* in which they passionately disregarded knowledge not based on personal experience:

Workers, in this building [probation officers]... they haven't got a clue what they're talking about. They're sat in that chair and I'm not being bigheaded, they just don't know what they're talking about, they've learnt it all out of a book (Fiona, Mentee).

You can't learn everything from a text book. You can't explain to someone certain things you've been through if they don't understand. They don't understand it if they haven't lived it and been through it (Lin, Mentor and previously a Mentee).

Some of them [Probation staff] just don't know what they're talking about, who've not been there. Alright they might have read it in books, but you're not going to know unless you've been there done it, in my eyes anyway (Don, Mentee).

There is an emotive *othering* of knowledge sources taking place, whereby 'books' and formal learning are relegated in favour of the sensed, the felt, the experienced. Indeed there is also an othering of the people who rely upon such formal knowledge. Probation officers and related professionals 'haven't got a clue, don't understand, don't know'. These discursive constructions often reach further than the knowledge base of professionals to



include their assumed personal histories. Toni, for example, was recruited as a peer mentor for a women's employment project having previously used the service herself whilst on probation:

I think it's far better than going into like the Job Centre and someone who's never done anything or experienced anything, you know, had a wonderful life, saying: 'just get on with it; you've got to do it' (Toni, Mentor).

Toni assumes that there are significant differences between her own life experiences and those of the people tasked with helping her. As a result, she views their suggested strategies as unrealistic. Katy, a mentor at the same project, expressed a similar sentiment; she perceived that the professional helpers in her life had degrees of social, educational and practical separation from her own experience, which her peers do not:

Someone who could have been brought up with a silver spoon in their mouth, and gone through college and university, and five minutes out of university, have to get a map out to find where you are and want to sit and tell you how to deal with your life and cope with things. Well no: 'go away I'm not listening to you!' With a peer it's equal, it's on the same level (Katy, Mentor).

Lin, who has used a range of peer and professional services and now volunteers as a mentor herself, expresses a similar perception of professional distance and peer connection:

With someone else like *the man in the suit* I'd just think 'you haven't got a clue, what do you mean?' And it would make me feel angry and resentful towards them, but if I get it off a peer I think, well, they know what they're on about and I trust their comments (Lin, Mentor and previously a Mentee).

These speakers caricaturise professionals and officials by inverting the props and associations of professionalism, or more accurately of social superiority – the wonderful life – the silver spoon – the man in the suit. Attributes associated with formal learning and professionalism are relegated below lived understandings of facing barriers, having 'horrible boyfriends' and overcoming problems. Peers who have 'been there' are elevated above people (particularly professionals) who they assume have not. The peer mentor identity is, in this sense, partly 'formed and reinvigorated through the threat and practice of exclusion' (Spalek, 2008: 13). However this exclusion is targeted at those in positions of authority. Underlying these practices is a 'spirit of carnival... the symbolic destruction of authority and official culture and the assertion of popular renewal' (Arnds, 2008: 70). The carnival motif is a helpful one in terms of theorizing the techniques of inversion which are employed by mentors and mentees here. Mikhail Bakhtin (1965) saw the carnival as 'temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions' (Bakhtin, 1965: 10). Whilst peer mentoring is not intended to be temporary and does not wholly achieve suspension of rank and privilege, as will become clear throughout this thesis, the mentors and mentees speaking here do employ strategies, which challenge the established order and call for a symbolic destruction of professional authority. Indeed, like the carnival, there are moments when peer mentoring represents a fracture of the established order. Ex-offender peer mentors enter spaces and roles that were previously only open to professional officers.

In both prison and probation settings this results in more *free and familiar* contact between ex-offenders and non-offenders. These border crossings, along with a rhetorical inversion of expertise signifiers, attempt to undermine established approaches to ‘rehabilitation’, which have been experienced as hierarchical and excluding. In contrast, as can be seen within the narratives to follow, peer mentors are constructed as non-authoritarian.

### **5.3 The non-authoritarian/ non-hierarchical identity**

The limited literature on peer mentoring does begin to acknowledge a commitment to egalitarianism. Boyce et al. (2009: vi), for example, see peer-led work as ‘a counterbalance to the widespread belief that programmes are something that are “done” to offenders by specialists’, whilst Kavanagh and Borrill (2013: 14) state that mentoring can be ‘empowering in both prison and probation settings’, in contrast to ‘previous experiences of feeling powerless’. Respondents in this study advanced this narrative, arguing that mutuality and parity between mentor and mentee are vital elements of the mentoring relationship. Katy, for example, in dismissing the ‘silver spoon’ privilege of professionally trained interveners (above) also argued that: ‘with a peer it’s equal, it’s on the same level’ (Katy, Mentor). This perception of equality, of horizontal rather than hierarchical relationships, was persistent. In many of these narratives mentors with convictions are positioned not *just* as experts with unique experiential knowledge but also, crucially, as unpatronizing ‘equals’. Steve, for example, an ex-prisoner who volunteered as a peer mentor and now works as a paid probation employee, frames his own past experience as a ‘levelling’ factor:

[My mentees said] you’re straight down the line, but you don’t come across as if you think you’re better than us... So I think that’s why a lot of them tell me about

their past and their upbringing, because I can relate to it (Steve, Mentor and previously a Mentee).

Brad, a volunteer mentor with a long criminal history, employs a similar levelling strategy:

Just being on the same sort of level as these young lads and, and knowing where the ones that have been in care come from, ones with drug habits come from, knowing where ones that have been in trouble with the police, problems with parents. I can relate to that, when I was nineteen I had problems (Brad, Mentor).

Moreover, Brad sees his role as specifically managing the power dynamic present within formal criminal justice exchanges:

If you go in hot handed like a probation officer, or anybody really that deals with them in these sorts of situations, they are all authority figures. It's about being the intermediary – in between that authority figure (Brad, Mentor).

Brad recognises that 'heavy-handed enforcement strategies run the risk of adversely affecting [mentees'] attitudes... [that] oppressive enforcement critically damages the legitimacy of that authority' (Robinson and McNeill, 2008: 438). He sees his own role as a conciliator, mediating the potential damage of such an approach. He aims to be on a level in terms of both approach and status in order to achieve legitimacy.

Roy works as a peer mentor within a group for prisoners who grew up in the care system (Care Leavers). This group was highlighted by a local charity as over-represented within

prison settings. The charity therefore worked with a therapeutic programme within the prison to start a peer-led support group. Roy believes this context offers a unique sense of connection:

Psychologists have probably not got experience [of offending], you're thinking: 'do you really understand?' This group, peers, there's a solid understanding... I wouldn't talk before, but we've [the peer group] got a connection (Roy, Prison Peer Group Member).

There are echoes of Goffman's 'mixed contacts' between the stigmatised and 'normals' here (1963: 25). Goffman argued that 'during mixed contacts, the stigmatized individual is likely to feel that he is 'on', having to be self-conscious and calculating about the impression he is making' (Goffman, 1963: 26), a perception that can be traced in the words of Steve and Roy. For them, common ground levels out this field; it becomes a field free from 'the sort of patronizing you get from straight people' (Goffman, 1963: 26). Accordingly, a mentor who has lived understandings of crime is perceived to level out the power dynamic, which is believed to exist between helper and helped, or between professional and client. Here, peer mentors are *not* distant experts patronizing mentees as flawed subjects and dictating change, but companions *relating* to known challenges and barriers. These mentors describe a joining of forces with their mentees on an equal footing. This representation of peer mentoring shares some characteristics of 'libertarian education', whereby 'people to come to feel like masters of their thinking and views of the world explicitly or implicitly manifest in their own suggestions and those of their comrades' (Freire, 1970: 105). Mentoring is thus discussed here as a form of shared

problem solving, rather than the banking of actuarially assessed improvements by a superior professional. Shared problem solving is about:

Getting on a level with the people, with the audience, so it's not like a teacher model where it's a teacher talking down to the pupil, it's more like on a level (Phil, Mentor).

I wouldn't want to be seen as being above them, or better than them. You know? It's non-judgmental, we are sort of equals and we're doing this together. It's a 'we thing'... If they see you or think of you as being better than them, then you're relationship is not going to work... It's 'us', well a partnership really, to help each other... So being able to meet with someone who's not going to put them down all the time and say 'you should have been here – you should have done this' (John, Mentor).

Being 'on a level' does not just refer to having shared experiences or a sense of shared identity therefore, but it refers to collaborative relationships, which are distinct from 'intervention' in the normative sense. This dynamic was not just voiced by mentors, but also by mentees. Lin for example used a peer-led alcohol recovery group and a one-to-one peer mentoring service. She explains:

I felt more comfortable talking to my peers, because they weren't official people. I felt like they were on my level and I didn't have to worry about what I was saying, worry about their reaction... It wasn't authoritative, I didn't feel like I was getting looked down on. It was very, I was made to feel really relaxed and at ease, which

obviously helps you to open up more then, if you feel like that (Lin, Mentor and Previously a Mentee).

Will and Paul, mentees at a mentoring service attached to the Probation Service perceive a similar lack of hierarchy within their one to one mentoring relationships:

A probation officer only knows what you tell them, and take that on belief, whereas a mentor has been there and done it. So if you speak to them, they know if you're speaking crap or not, it's like a proper conversation... No hesitation or anything, it's hard to explain... Just someone to talk to, like a mate or something, it's mad. [They] still have a badge round [their] neck, but not proper official, [they] talk on a level to you (Will, Mentee).

Not to be too in your face about things, like down to earth, relaxed... Not give you un-useful information. It's like [mentor name], he doesn't chat shit to you, he won't tell you to do something he wouldn't do himself. That's a good quality to have (Paul, Mentee).

These mentees describe experiences of mutual recognition, of some level of parity with their mentors. Mentors are not perceived here as official, but like 'mates', offering suggestions they themselves would or have used, which results in feelings of ease. Importantly, however, this parity is also valued because it differs so much from what has been known before, because it is *not* a relationship with disciplinary consequences for saying the wrong thing, or which requires people to say 'the right thing' even if it is not the truth of an experience; and because it is not 'in your face' or interrogative. Peer mentoring

relationships based upon such collaborative ideals potentially allow more trusting, open and peaceable exchanges. These articulations communicate desires not only for levelling the power disparity between helper and helped, but also for relationships where personal experiences can be explored with less judgement and adverse consequences.

#### **5.4 The limits of parity**

Whilst the speakers here appear to call for open and comfortable relationships wherein relaxed discussions can take place, for non-authoritative, ‘proper’ and open conversations, respondents also spoke of restrictions to such exchanges within current criminal justice settings. Rather, in the relationships they described outside of mentoring, mentors and mentees often felt *unheard*, *dehumanised* and *deconstructed*. Keisha, for example, now mentors young people in the community; she came to this work after being released from prison and feeling that her voice was unheard by the resettlement services she was referred to:

There’s no voice for the people... People just get lost in the system, do you know what I mean? And it’s sad, because most people that do want to make the change, and can’t, go back into crime (Keisha, Mentor).

This demotion of personal voice, as argued in chapter two, can be seen as a consequence of the ‘professional nature’ of justice services, which have increasingly deprived ‘offenders’ of a voice in their own narrative. To quote Ballinger (2011) again:

[K]nowledge generated outside scientific discourses such as lived experiences, autobiographies and memories can be silenced, ‘subjugated or disqualified’...



prisoners' version of 'the truth' is located at the bottom of the hierarchy of knowledge (Ballinger, 2011: 110).

People subject to formal criminal justice processes experience a devaluation of their voices in light of the superior knowledge held by those in 'the system'. As Freire argued, however:

Pedagogy which begins with the egoistic interests of the oppressors (an egoism cloaked in the false generosity of paternalism) and makes of the oppressed the objects of its humanitarianism, itself maintains and embodies oppression. It is an instrument of dehumanization (Freire, 1970: 36).

Freire argues that '[a]ny attempt to treat people as semihumans only dehumanizes them. When people are already dehumanized, due to the oppression they suffer, the process of their liberation must not employ the methods of dehumanization' (1970: 49). Interestingly his proposed antidote to dehumanization is 'dialogue' (1970: 49). This is a notion that will be returned to. For the moment, however, it is important to recognise that the experience of dehumanisation is often familiar to people who have been subject to 'criminal justice'. Indeed a surprising theme emerged from the interviews with both mentors and mentees in which they referred to themselves and each other in *non-human* terms:

In a prison setting that's quite *dog eat dog*, offenders go into survival mode... some people just need to speak humanely to other people which doesn't always happen in prison, a humane conversation (Phil, Mentor).

Jail is *not for people*, jail doesn't rehabilitate you... *it's like a cattle market* (Will, Mentee).

I don't want to go back to jail ever, it's not a good place for anybody it really isn't, the women in there *are like animals*, just so inhuman (Fiona, Mentee).

I told this woman at college (about my conviction) and she just looked at me like she'd just *stepped in me*, and it was a horrible feeling (Eve, Mentee).

When I got referred to that place [a resettlement charity] they thought there was nothing wrong with me because *the bag looked clean*, the bag never had two teeth missing, you know? Because people stereotype don't they? (Keisha, Mentor).

The dehumanising effects of prison have been noted before. Scraton (2009: 73-74), for example, pointed to the dehumanisation reported by many prisoners:

There were constant references by guards to animal descriptions ('beast,' 'dog,' 'maggot') and to waste ('scum,' 'dross,' 'shit')... [As a result] Prisoners experienced loss of identity, lack of respect and personal humiliation.

Morin (2015) also noted how:

Caging humans requires producing them as animalistic first... Prison inmates themselves turn to animal imagery to express the dehumanizing effects of isolation

and exposure in the prison. Many express shame and anger at being caged in view of other that position them like animals in a zoo (Morin, 2015: 75).

It is quite possible therefore that the speakers here have internalised such messages and come to see themselves and their contemporaries in animalistic or non-human terms. However, two of the five voices above are not referring to prison experiences, but to the judgements people make of them as offenders in the community. The ‘dirtying power’ (Bouson, 2000: 131) of such animalistic representations therefore appears to run deeper than direct insults or experiences. These speakers appear to feel their humanity diminished, simply by being gazed on as an ‘offender’. This can be compounded by the use of professional assessment frameworks. Tools such as OASys (the national adult Offender Assessment System) and ASSET (the national Youth Justice Assessment Profile), create ‘an artificial individual constructed from ticking boxes’ (Durnescu, 2012: 206). Identity in these contexts does not exist in terms of a situated, felt, holistic experience, but as an ‘objective’, selective and often electronic assessment. However, ‘categorizing human identity into axis grids and risk instruments is an act of deconstruction of subjectivity’ (Aas, 2004: 387). It breaks complex individuals down into signs or indices and is a partial picture, incomplete in terms of the lived and felt human experience. Steve, for example, explains how he and his mentee had little faith in the processes that the prison service and probation employ:

When you’re in prison you’re just a number... What good is it doing, him coming in here [probation] for half an hour chat with you and then he goes... ‘I’ll just blag my way through, I’ll just attend the appointments, do what I’ve got to do... like I

have done with all my probation appointments’, like *I* have all my life (Steve, Mentor and previously a mentee).

Hope, a mentor in a young woman’s gang intervention project, similarly critiques such decontextualised categorisation:

Professionals need to get people with [personal] experience and not just people to tick a few boxes... To get us in to show them little things they may be missing, it might change people’s perspective, but at least they’ll learn and we’ll all get the same thing we want, which is progression and change (Hope, Mentor).

‘Box ticking’ and assessment ‘appointments’ are derided within these accounts; they are reframed as blocking activities, which mask underlying truths of an experience rather than uncovering them. As experiences are appropriated into managerial formats respondents see such representations as lacking the full picture. Moreover, people who have their subjectivity deconstructed for instrumental purposes and their life history artificially reconstructed through formal assessment, come to see the people doing the deconstructing as ‘not having a clue’ (Fiona; Lin). Peer mentors, in contrast, often seek to recognise the holistic experience of people involved with crime, to recognise them as human:

You’re dealing with a human being and when you’re dealing with a human being it has its own mind (Keisha, Mentor).

We are able to work on enhancing and empowering them as individuals, and as humans, and part of society, because at moment they’re outcasts (Hope, Mentor).

Some people just need to speak humanely to other people, which doesn't always happen in prison, a humane conversation... We always have to get titles, why can't we just be humans? (Phil, Mentor).

In contrast to box-ticking and risk instruments, these aims for peer mentoring are grounded in subjectivity; they position lives as lived experiences rather than measurable, quantifiable components: 'She said this is your life, where do you want to take it? Take a step at a time, you start to think 'oh yea I forgot this is my life' I've been so lost in everything else for ages' (Georgie, Mentee). If increasingly professionalised knowledge of 'offenders' has led to a denial of subject voice, a decontextualizing of identity and a deconstruction of subjectivity, then peer mentoring can be read as a powerful riposte to the authority of professionals and their tools by asserting the need for human-level engagement.

### **5.5 Identity as a resource to inspire self-improvement**

This chapter has argued that mentors and their advocates often construct an ex-offender identity as an authentic position, one which differs significantly from that of the authoritarian professional; and which can assist in building relationships which potentially have greater parity. However, peer mentoring also relies on positioning ex-offenders as role models. The offering of role models rests upon the assumption that people will emulate that which they see in others. Rene Girard (1962) offered a theoretical foundation for this premise, arguing that 'mimetic desire'- imitating the desires of those we admire – is what makes it possible for us to construct 'our own, albeit inevitably unstable, identities' (Girard, 2010: 58). This premise, however, rests upon an intrinsic hierarchy between mentor and mentee because imitation explicitly acknowledges superiority (Girard, 1991:

240). Discourses which frame peer mentoring as non-authoritarian, therefore, serve to mask this otherwise discernable hierarchy. Despite this apparent contradiction, one of the strongest claims made about relationships based upon shared past experiences was that they can *inspire* people to change:

If I'm looking to deter young people from crime, I've got to be that positive change, to make them know that I've made it...I made a change. It wasn't easy, but look what I've done. I've got to inspire people (Keisha, Mentor).

They can see people like myself and [the coordinators], and several other mentors that have come from an offending/drug using background, and can say 'Well look they've done it, why can't I do it? They've gone straight; they've sorted their lives out, they've got good jobs why can't I do it?' That's basically, the basic idea behind it. If people see you, and say: 'You can do it, why can't I do it?' in their own mind (Brad, Mentor).

These perspectives offer further support for earlier claims that peers can be effective inspirational role models (Boyce et al., 2009; Hunter and Kirby, 2011). They also offer credence to policy aims to make 'good use of the old lags in stopping the new ones' (Chris Grayling, Justice Minister, November 2012). Accounts of inspirational mentors also fit with Girard's (1962; 2008) theory that people come to mimic the desires of those they admire:

I wanted to feel the way they did, they weren't beaming out happiness, but they weren't sad, they was that content in their life they were offering to other people, to help them and I wanted to be able to do that (Georgie, Mentee).

To meet people who were just as twisted as I was, they've gone through change, having to change my own view on the world... You see somebody for yourself go through them changes and be like a positive member of the community, you know it's possible (Lin, Mentor and previously a Mentee).

[A]n ex offender comes in here; he's inspired me quite a lot, coming into the places where he's been... He's a young lad, been there, took drugs, done everything, experienced, learnt the dos and don'ts, mentored himself, fair play (Anthony, Prison Peer Group Member).

Because I can see her... Like, what she was telling me about her school life, I thought that about mine, and then now looking at her where she is. I think it's a good experience, because she's got far with her life... I just think they're inspiring (Karina, Mentee).

People are therefore inspired by peer mentors because they *admire* them. They mimic their desire for self-improvement. Importantly, they also *see* the change which is expected. It becomes visible. They 'learn enough pieces of expression to be able to 'fill in' and manage' (Goffman, 1959: 79). However, there appears to be more to these accounts than simply imitated desire or directed performance. Rather mentors appear to provide inspiration in subtly different ways. Whilst all appeared to recognise and respond to the

invitation to ‘look what I’ve done, you can too’, the voices of these mentees also illustrate the complexity of inspiration when at work in different subjects. For Lin, her role model facilitated a shift in perspective, indeed she ‘changed her view on the world’ and in doing so introduced the *possibility* of newness, a map to redemption when none had seemed possible. For Anthony, identity and connection were important for inspiration; for someone not just to know and have done similar things to you, but to have helped themselves in such contexts and *returned* to the places where he has been in order to help others. The message is not just that people can share ‘deviant’ experiences and move on, but that there is something or someone worth coming back for. For Karina it was important to *see* someone who has not only prospered, but who crucially had also been in a similar place to her. This allowed her to relate more easily to potential within herself. Success was not something that just happened to others, but to people *like her*. For Georgie, the process of being inspired most clearly resonated with the notion of imitated desire: ‘I wanted to feel the way they did’. The object of desire inspired in her is not specifically ‘going straight’ however, or even just a feeling of ‘happiness’, but rather it is the desire *to give to others*: ‘they were offering to other people... I wanted to be able to do that’. Future self-projection is key to these narratives; mentors are not just inspirational because they are admirable, or offer pieces of direction, but because they offer a template of a future life, which appears attainable regardless of problematic histories. Hucklesby and Wincup (2014) argue that this dynamic could be particularly valuable:

Mentoring projects have so far concentrated their efforts on enhancing instrumental/secondary goods replicating much of the work undertaken by prisons and probation services (Farrall, 2004). Instead, they could make a unique



contribution to criminal justice by assisting offenders to construct visions of ‘good lives’ free from offending (Hucklesby and Wincup, 2014: 16).

For the speakers in this study, inspiration does not simply require a model to construct a ‘vision’, but a model who has faced similar challenges and has found a new route; who now has something to give. This notion of giving is one I want to stay with for a moment. A significant number of mentees, like Georgie, came to share the desire of their mentors to volunteer or to give:

[Mentor name] is now working for probation; I’d like to do that. I’d love to work with ex-offenders and people with drug problems, cos like I said, who’s the best person to talk to? Someone who’s been there and done it. I’d like to do something like that, like [mentor name] (Don, Mentee).

They [peer mentors] must have a lot of good in them to do that, because personally when I get myself right and get off everything [substances], I’d like to be a mentor, I’d like to be a volunteer (Fiona, Mentee).

One of the lads [mentees], I was telling him how I’ve changed, he said: ‘I could do your job’, I said ‘you could do my job – maybe in a few years get rid of your probation order’, ‘Yea, yea I could do’ (Brad, Mentor).

I’d like to do something like a peer mentor... I’ve always wanted to do youth work, better myself (Michael, Prison Peer Group Member).

I'd love to do counselling, be a listener. Not just for them; it helps me, makes me feel better (Al, Prison Peer Group Member).

This pattern could be interpreted as a form of reciprocity in that mentees persistently described a wish to help in the ways they had been helped by their mentors. However, it also resembles Girardian mimesis, given that mentees come to imitate their mentors' desire to help, '[t]he mimetic model directs the disciple's desire to a particular object by desiring it himself... mimetic desire is rooted...in a third party whose desire is imitated by the subject' (Girard, 1977: 180). Given that *desistance* itself does not appear to mentees as a clearly defined object of desire in mentors, they come to mimic desire for the thing their mentors most visibly want – the desire to mentor others, or to *give*. Whilst this process is not perhaps the intended aim of peer mentoring projects, it is not necessarily a problematic dynamic. Quite the contrary; recall for example, that Uggen and Janikula (1999) found 'real reintegration requires more than physical re-entry into the community, but also should involve "earning" one's place back in the moral community' (in Burnett and Maruna, 2006: 84). If peer mentoring results in mentees becoming volunteer helpers themselves, therefore, it encourages a number of subtle processes, which underpin and maintain *desistance*. Mentees become involved with an activity that decreases their chances of arrest (Burnett and Maruna, 2006: 88) and demonstrates their moral reparation. More than this however, it offers a platform for mentees to reframe their past in new ways: 'who's the best person? / I could do that'. This resembles a feature of 'secondary *desistance*' (Maruna and Farrall, 2004 cited in Burnett and Maruna, 2006: 94), wherein people can distinguish 'between the 'old me', that is the self who had offended, and the 'new' or 'real me', that is a person who is caring towards others and able to use his/her shameful past in order to help others' (Burnett and Maruna, 2006: 94). It also helps mentees to gain a sense of social and

emotional wellbeing – ‘better myself... make me feel better’. Whilst there are clear articulations here that the ex-offender identity offers a form of inspiration, this is a theme that will be returned to and problematised in chapter eight.

## **5.6 Identity as a resource for translating the social world**

This chapter has presented a number of ways in which mentors and mentees utilise shared offending histories. Ex-offenders often construct a common identity, which they position as *other* than an authoritarian professional enabling relations that are more egalitarian. However, ex-offender peer mentors have also been described – by both themselves and their mentees – as privileged; as role models from whom active offender mentees can draw inspiration. This tension between parity and privilege is also present in one of the most surprising themes to emerge in this study: that shared past experiences can be important for helping people to *translate* the social world. Translation here operates at two different levels – making meaning and linguistic comprehensibility.

Notions of translation can be traced in the existing literature on peer approaches. Peer education is seen as a way of educating ‘those who are hard to reach through conventional methods’ (Turner and Shepherd, 1999: 242). Peers are also ‘deemed more credible sources of information because they have experienced similar struggles and are, therefore, able to “speak the same language”’ (Deville et al., 2005: 231). Other studies point to mentoring as a process of reducing the inaccessibility of professional services, be it through ““outreach workers” linking individuals with local services that they would otherwise fail to access’ (Newburn and Shiner, 2006: 27) or the ‘targeting of mentoring for those variously identified as “disaffected”, “disengaged”, “non-participating”, or “hardest to help”’ (Colley, 2002: 9). These efforts allude to the fact that different individuals can conceive of

the same social experiences wholly differently; that they may be speaking a different language. People who have spent lengthy or repeated periods in prison, for example, described feeling excluded from the technical realities and demands of everyday life:

I've been in and out of jail for most of my life, so like opening a bank account and going online, doing a CV, that's never been a priority for me before. It's a bit of a pain in the arse doing it on your own when you don't know how to. [Mentor name] being there, you know how to do it, has really helped me (Paul, Mentee).

Maybe that person [the mentee], like myself, went to prison at a time where social networking weren't booming, and come out to Smart phones and texting. So this is all new operating, and it's important for the person that's going to be mentoring to understand that (Keisha, Mentor).

Paul and Keisha required more than a role model, then, they also argue that mentoring has a role to play in *translating* the social world, in explaining the practical requirements of job seeking and using technology, in rendering these things knowable. Mentoring here involves transmitting the norms of mainstream inclusion to those who have been physically excluded and who consequently 'don't know how' to do specific administrative tasks that may be required of them; or are overwhelmed by technological advances, which have happened in their absence. This kind of translation of unfamiliar tasks and resources is perhaps something we would expect to see in relation to mentoring activity given that practical benefits 'such as help with benefit claims, dealing with frustrations, housing or employment' (Princes Trust, 2012: 4) have already been reported. Moreover peers have

been argued to have ‘specific knowledge’ (Devilley et al., 2005: 223). Translations of *speech*, however, were a less expected finding:

[My mentor] helps me explain things better to the doctor [GP], cos sometimes I don’t know what words to use... So they help me, you know? Any form filling, any forms, I’m no good at spelling, struggle to read sometimes (Fiona, Mentee).

I like putting out simple easy talk in terms they understand clearly, so they can understand better. The best way, the shortest simple way, common sense. There are young kids in school say to the teacher – ‘Miss, we don’t understand this’, put it in simple terms, easier than going too deep... We make it easier to understand, make them feel better, tend to keep on simple talk (Al, Prison Peer Group Member).

Both Fiona and Al suggest there is a language barrier at play in professional settings, which limits communication. The task of the mentor is to *translate* professional forms of speech in simpler terms to mentees and to speak on behalf of mentees to professionals. There is an obvious parallel here with Bernstein’s theoretical contention (in chapter three) that there are ‘entirely different modes of speech found within the middle class and the lower working class’ (Bernstein, 1971: 78). Bernstein argued that ‘the typical, dominant speech mode of the middle class... facilitates verbal elaboration of subjective intent’ (1971: 78). This provided a barrier to the lower working class whose speech ‘discourages the speaker from verbally elaborating subjective intent and progressively orients the user to descriptive, rather than abstract, concepts’ (Bernstein, 1971: 79). This reading seems to be partially endorsed by both Fiona and Al who imply that professionals, unlike themselves, use unknown, complex forms of *talk*. However, there are a number of problems with this

reading. To suggest that mentees speak in ‘simpler terms’ than the professionals they encounter, without adequate words, is to assume a universality of mentees’ linguistic capacity. It also invites the ‘deficit theory’ criticisms levelled at Bernstein in which he is accused of viewing one group as tacitly superior to another (Sadovnik, 2008). Indeed, even if these criticisms are countered with the same response that Bernstein used – that the pattern observed is not *deficit*, but conceptual *difference* – we still have a problem. The task of the peer mentor in these situations is not to translate mentees’ formulation of the world, but to translate into and from *more elaborate* forms into simpler ones. Put more simply, in both of the above quotes the mentee’s voice is relegated in an unfavorable hierarchy; their words are either taken and made to fit those of the medic (in Fiona’s case), or shaped by the perspectives of others, such as the teacher, whose message needs to be communicated in simpler terms (in Al’s case). The social progression of mentees therefore requires that they accept, or must trust, *others framing of the world*, whether those of ‘professional’ or mentor. In neither example is the voice of the mentee elevated to an equal authority:

What’s been missing from some social care for ever and a day has been that user perspective, it’s all been tokenistic, we need to have that user perspective as central and as respected (Lol, Mentoring Coordinator).

This notion of mentoring as bridging a linguistic space is not wholly disempowering however. Indeed Hope, a mentor in a young woman’s gang intervention project, articulates some of the complexities of this theme well. She begins by describing how selfhood and by extension ‘peer-hood’ has a linguistic character:

I never change my language, my language is me, and who I am, and where I'm from. When I'm in a professional setting I know I have to change the way I speak, in order to get in touch with different people. But you know, you are who you are and a lot of kids find they can't relate, because a lot of professionals use big words. Whereas, for me, I just get on that level and that's how I talk to them and whereas that might not be classed as a professional thing to say, if it works: why not? (Hope, Mentor).

For Hope, language is wholly entwined with identity: 'my language is me'; it is also interwoven with personal history: 'where I'm from'. Yet she sees a fundamental mismatch between the language used by the 'kids' she works with and 'professionals' tasked with helping them. They cannot relate, they cannot get 'in touch'; there is a tangible barrier (despite both groups being English speakers), a use of 'big words', which requires translation. As before, there is a strong echo of Bernstein here. Where Bernstein saw a middle class characterised by elaboration and a lower working class discouraged from verbal elaboration (Bernstein, 1971: 78-79), Hope implies that professionals use exclusive speech with people who communicate on a different 'level'. Hope herself does not specify class as the dividing barrier here, yet her clarification below, in which she recalls her experience as a trainee teacher, is replete with references to 'posh' and 'urban' and wholly expressive of social stratification:

They [trainee teachers] would have just turned up and expected the kids to listen, but when you don't have that relationship and your teacher uses a different language a lot of urban children misread well-spoken people for posh. It's automatically 'you can't understand where I come from' and as a child you put

those barriers up... For me, enhancing and empowering an individual is so important, because there are too many people in a professional sense that will write kids off... If they [teachers] don't understand these kids, it's easier to take the easy option, because it takes too much time and effort to work with these kids. Because it's done over a period of time and that's how you develop that relationship (Hope, Mentor).

Interestingly, whilst Hope initially frames herself as something of an interlocutor, it is not translation *explicitly* (whereby meanings are expressed in another word, term or medium) that Hope advocates here. She is not suggesting that mentors translate the words of professionals to 'urban' children using different terms, or even that they translate the words of these children to professionals. Rather she calls for acknowledgement of differences in language and the mutual exclusions which take place as a result of a failure to recognise such differences. In doing so she calls for a levelling of the relationship between the two discussants and for relationships that do not position children as inferior to professionals because they cannot be understood or speak in different ways. She also suggests that patient relationship-building in this context may be a tool for connecting and empowering both parties. What we appear to have returned to then, is a call for inclusiveness of voice. In her call to 'get in touch', to not 'write kids off' and to 'develop that relationship' in language that makes sense, Hope echoes Freire's call for a method 'based on dialogue, which is a horizontal relationship between persons' (Freire, 1974: 42). For this to happen however an awareness of excluded voices must arise:

[A]s a professor... I had to teach people what a small group of white intellectuals had decided was knowledge... it dawned on me that [the arguments and stories]



might just be dreams, reflections of the conceit of a small group who had succeeded in enslaving everyone else with their ideas... [W]e must start learning from those we have enslaved for they have much to offer and, at any rate, they have the right to live as they see fit even if they are not as pushy about their rights and their views as Western conquerors have always been (Feyerabend, 1993: 263 – 265).

This indicates that for communication within criminal justice services to improve, there needs to be more open dialogue between parties, dialogue which respects the voices, histories and perspectives of those subject to justice interventions. This point will re-emerge in chapter seven. For now, however, the potential of peer mentoring, as described here, is not necessarily to translate the language of professionals, of that small group with dominant ideas, but to model communication based on open dialogue. For educated experts to continue ‘banking’ (Freire, 1970: 53) the known answers to *the crime problem* with those who are experiencing it, without really listening or engaging in critical dialogue is merely to maintain the status quo; to maintain the power imbalances inherent in criminal justice and perhaps even to stifle change. What peer mentors often appear to be asserting, through observations of language differences and miscommunications, is that there is a need for a more dialogical communication (Bakhtin, 1984) about crime, communication that includes those people who have perceived criminality as a lived reality *in addition* to those working in theoretical or professional realms. This theme of translation, or more accurately ‘horizontal’ communication, calls for efforts at mutual understanding. These are issues that criminology has not yet fully appreciated as constructive influences in the change process. Peer mentoring, by promoting the inclusion of an ‘ex-offender’ perspective, calls us to task on this.

## **5.7 Problems with common identity claims**

Throughout this chapter respondents have constructed and buttressed an ‘ex-offender’ identity. This is an identity defined by past experiences of crime, which is claimed to facilitate understanding, egalitarianism, connection and inclusiveness. It is important to note, however, that the potential and importance of this identity position was not universally supported. This section will therefore explore two specific problems with employing an ex-offender identity. Firstly, it will highlight the difficulties people faced in having their ‘ex-offender’ identity recognised and secondly, it will draw attention to views that shared experience of offending is not imperative to peer mentoring.

Despite the claimed importance of visible ex-offender role models, peer mentors often referred to specific difficulties in making the transition from ‘offender’ to ex-offender volunteer, because their identity shift was undermined by stigma. Cat, for example, is a mentor at a women’s employment project. In addition to volunteering as a mentor she also volunteers at another charity; whose client focus is not ex-offenders. It was here that she met with difficulty:

I told the head person [of the charity] I’ve got a conviction, they were fine, but I’m sick of tip toeing round people so I told [my colleagues] and that’s when the shit hit the fan, they asked me to stand down (Cat, Mentor).

Janet is also a volunteer mentor at a women’s employment project and has a second voluntary job at a local hospice. Whilst she did not recount any direct discrimination, this was clearly a fear for her:

I work for a hospice as well and I didn't want to tell them [that I'm a peer mentor], I think they have this impression that all the really bad criminals get together and discuss different things and it's just not like that (Janet, Mentor).

Both women speaking here were engaged heavily in voluntary work for local charities yet, in these contexts too, they spoke of forms of exclusion or fear of exclusion (Buck, 2014). They described a sense of *inauthenticity*, of being continually outside and needing to hide. This ambivalence is rarely discussed in the optimistic evaluations of and indeed hopes for mentoring as an approach, yet it highlights how uniquely challenging this work can be for people who are trying to be open about their past criminal histories. Surprisingly, this sense of inauthenticity was also voiced by 'offenders' themselves: 'How can he help me? I've burgled houses with him!' (Peer Group Member). Indeed this scepticism that past experience could be positively reframed to help others was also communicated by Don, himself an advocate of peer mentoring:

Some say about [mentor name], he's a fucking nob working here. They know him, know what he was like, he used to run everything round here, now he's working for probation, it can put some people off. I know a few, they say: 'You'll never guess who they want me to go and see? He's telling me after what he's done!' (Don, Mentee).

The difficulties described by the mentors above in making the transition from 'offender' to volunteer, of coming to feel viewed by their self-defined present rather than their risk defined pasts, recurs. This time, however, it is their *peers* expressing doubt and concern. In Goffman's terms, these observers: 'develop conceptions, whether objectively grounded or

not, as to the sphere of life-activity for which an individual's particular stigma primarily disqualifies him' (Goffman, 1963: 66). They are unable to see their criminalised peers as authentic mentor figures as the stigma of criminality is too strong. Interestingly, however, both the sceptical group member and Don's associate do not just draw upon collective notions of criminal stigma here, but rather they draw upon *lived memories* of their peers as 'offenders'. They therefore struggle to believe they now have a credible voice, which can assist rehabilitation. 'Peers' who knew a mentor's criminal history, either personally or by reputation, can vividly bring to life a remembered identity and in doing so at least partially dismiss the new identity, which the mentor assumes. The problem this poses for mentoring approaches built around an identity position is that there is as much potential for rejection of the model as there is imitation of the model:

The urge to imitate is very strong, since it opens up possibilities of bettering the competition. But the urge *not* to imitate is also very strong. The only thing that the losers can deny the winners in the homage of their imitation (Girard, 1991: 240).

It is important to note that these sceptical perspectives were much less dominant than the prevailing view that ex-offender mentors are well positioned to gain the trust and admiration of their peers. However, it is also important to recap that my respondents were largely accessed via gatekeepers. The 'group member' quoted here was notably one of the speakers that was not chosen *for* me, but who consented to his peer-led recovery group being observed at my request. It is therefore a possibility that such views are more prominent than I was able to access through a selection process involving gatekeepers.

The second potential problem for mentors who utilise their ex-offender identity to appeal to potential mentees was a small current of resistance to the notion that shared experience is a crucial factor. Jen, for example, was referred to Project 'Facilitate' by her probation officer. Her view was that 'experience [of offending] is not important' rather what appealed to her about mentoring was that 'there's a focus on getting a job and I need that focus, they give practical help too' (Jen, Mentee). Jen implies that such practical assistance can be offered effectively by mentors who are not ex-offenders. Michael, a prisoner utilising a peer mentoring group similarly questioned the centrality of personal experience:

I suppose it is important [a shared past], but it could be someone who wants to change and doesn't have those experiences. It can help to hear: bloody hell they've been through all that, but it's not the be all and end all (Michael, Prison Peer Group Member).

Michael highlights the tenuous nature of an identity position based upon 'shared experience' by stressing how experiences of crime can be different for different people. He asserts that identity is intersectional. Gina and Fiona, both passionate advocates of peer mentoring and the importance of shared experience, also suggest that experience *in itself* may not be enough:

I think it would be valuable if they had [personal experience] yea, but I don't think it's a necessary... I think you've got to be a certain type of person, I mean, I think it would be valuable but I don't think it's compulsory (Gina, Mentee).

It sounds strange because there's people, mentors that have been on stuff [illegal drugs], but the few that I've met, I don't know they don't seem to be ready (Fiona, Mentee).

People may therefore have relevant personal experiences but not yet be *ready* to help others. To be 'ready' to help, Fiona, Gina and Jen imply that additional skills, approaches or levels of awareness are required. This theme will be explored more fully in chapter seven.

Interestingly, it was not just those using services who questioned the importance of an offending history to this work. Julie and Lin, for example, are both peer mentors. They are also both advocates of mentoring which draws upon personal experience yet both recognise its limitations:

You could have gone through the same things as them, but you can never say 'I understand' because everyone goes through it totally different (Julie, Mentor).

I wouldn't particularly want to go into depth about what I've done in the past, because it's not about me it's about them. And I don't want the spotlight looking on me. It's not about me, it's about how I can help them... I wouldn't want them thinking 'she's done this or that' and then asking me questions. I think it would be really inappropriate for me to disclose a lot of the past (Lin, Mentor and previously a Mentee).

Julie, like Michael, recognises that experiences of crime, even if similar, are never uniform, nor processed in the same ways. This recognition is also latent in Lin's assertion that 'it's not about me, it's about them'. Moreover Lin considers that her own experience may act as a *barrier* to the mentoring relationship if not handled carefully. In response she strives to maintain a semi-professional 'appropriate' distance. These speakers suggest that whilst the 'ex-offender' identity offers a point of connection, a way into engaging and reassuring people in the criminal justice system, it can only take you so far.

## **5.8 Conclusion**

This chapter has examined how notions of a shared 'ex-offender' identity manifest in peer mentoring settings and in doing so it highlighted a number of themes. Firstly, the ex-offender identity is employed as a standpoint; both mentors and mentees make claims that personal experience of crime and desistance offer peer mentors an authenticity that professional helpers do not have. This enables a form of learning that relies upon the experiences of 'human beings in their relations with the world' (Freire, 1970: 60) and repositions 'offenders' as 'knowers' rather than malleable projects. However, in order to achieve this standpoint many speakers employ exclusionary tactics of othering, which are aimed at undermining professional helpers by disregarding knowledge that is not based upon personal experience. These exclusions appear to reflect disillusionment with a criminal justice system in which people feel misrepresented and dehumanised. In response peer mentors position themselves as non-hierarchical, with a commitment to egalitarianism and humanity. As a result mentors often claim that the practice is 'humanising' rather than objectifying.

Peer mentoring emerges here as a 'levelling' practice. It is a place where the 'ex-offender', the marked and stigmatised outcast, is re-cast as expert. Much like the 'carnavalesque', there is a suspension of the hierarchical structure. 'Carnival allows "free and familiar contact between people" who would usually be separated hierarchically, and allows for "mass action"' (Vice, 1997: 152). However, despite efforts to invert power relations, the strategy has its limits on several fronts. Firstly, the ex-offender identity is not just utilised to connect, empower and humanise people, but also to inspire people. Peer mentoring positions ex-offenders as role models. This premise rests upon an intrinsic hierarchy between mentor and mentee because imitation explicitly acknowledges superiority (Girard, 1991: 240). Mentees are not the equals of their mentors then, but are expected to become more like them. For the mentors and mentees speaking here this is not a problematic feature as most valued the offer of role models they could identify with and felt valued that their peers would give up their time to come back for them. There was also a perception that having people with a range of experiences in helping roles could highlight different understandings of the social world and enable more collaborative methods of communication and relationship building.

The second challenge to asserting an ex-offender identity was more significant, however, this was the ready formed perceptions of intended audiences; be they the public or peers. Peer mentors must continually negotiate the power of criminal stigma in their communities and indeed amongst their own peers, presenting them with a challenging sense of inauthenticity. Moreover, both mentors and mentees acknowledged the tenuous nature of the claim that shared experience constitutes a common identity. Rather, experiences of criminality are diverse and individual. The response to this acknowledgement is not to drop the ex-offender identity, however, but to recognise it only takes you so far. The following



chapters will, therefore, explore what peer mentoring offers in addition to this point of connection. Chapter six will begin this task by exploring some of the themes that emerge, not from shared pasts, but from individual determination. It will focus on the perceived importance of personal agency to peer mentoring.

## **Chapter Six**

### **‘You have the agency to pilot your own life’:**

#### **Agency, action and acknowledgement in peer mentoring**

A lot of offenders have the ability to blame external things for their situation and sometimes they just need to hear that they can pilot their own life, that internal locus of control, self-efficacy. You have the ability, agency to pilot your own life, and it's not going to be easy, it's going to be difficult, gonna be people will try to make it a rocky road for you, but ultimately you determine whether that's a success or not (Phil, Mentor).

This chapter will explore conceptions of personal agency in mentoring relationships by looking at the intentions, activities and relational interactions of peer mentors and mentees. Agency is considered to be important in current conceptions of both desistance and peer mentoring. The putative ‘success’ of people in achieving and maintaining desistance from crime, as Phil argues above, is often linked to their sense of self control or agency. Laub and Sampson (2003) emphasise that ‘personal agency looms large’ in persistence and desistance trajectories (cited in LeBel et al., 2008: 135). Indeed ‘pessimism and a lack of personal agency have been observed among recidivist offenders (Farrall 2002; Maruna 2001)’ (Rumgay, 2007: 164). In her own work, Rumgay detected how ‘discovery of personal agency was accompanied by recognition of alternative ways of managing their [female offenders] lives’ (2007: 205). Zdun (2011: 307) also found that ‘desisters can progress quickly when agency and motivation are acknowledged by society and when receiving support’. In turn the activity of peer mentoring itself is often claimed to increase

a sense of agency, self-worth or autonomy in both mentors and recipients (Pollack, 2004; Shelter, 2010). Indeed Hucklesby and Wincup (2014: 16) argue that ‘mentoring schemes need to acknowledge the agency of offenders and encourage them to build upon their capabilities and strengths in the hope that ultimately it will lead to sustainable positive outcomes’. These authors all appear to share a common precept that *agency* is inherently good and that a realisation of personal agency will lead to ‘positive outcomes’ such as ‘desistance’ from crime. Whilst the importance of human agency is acknowledged here, much of the literature imagines agency in ideal typical ways, as a functional pre-requisite to personal behavioral change. Freire (1970), however, as discussed in chapter three, imagined agency and the conditions which foster it quite differently:

Freire believed that education, in the broadest sense was eminently political because it offered students the conditions for self-reflection, a self-managed life and critical agency. For Freire, pedagogy was central to a formative culture that makes both critical consciousness and social action possible. Pedagogy in this sense connected learning to social change; it was a project and provocation that challenged students to critically engage with the world so they could act on it (Giroux, 2010).

Agency in these terms is not simply a condition of self-discipline or socially compliant action, but it is a condition of critical questioning, which is seen as essential to being able to act *on* the world, not just *in* the world. What Freire’s work asserts is that a sense of agency may require nurturance through interactions with social others.

This chapter will explore the extent to which peer mentors and their mentees see themselves as active agents and look at the ways in which peer mentoring may encourage these views. Many of the mentors and mentees speaking here do not present themselves as conscious political agents, but as accidental recruits. Their agency is only recognised when they are selected by others. In both mentor and mentee voices a sense of self determination is often contingent upon what others determine their roles and potential to be. At other points, however, mentees actively utilise the practical activities and personal approaches of their mentors to gain a new sense of themselves. The chapter will begin by looking at how people enter mentor and mentees roles; and in doing so will reveal an absence of conscious intention to engage with this work at the very initial stages. This is surprising given the consciously political aims highlighted in chapter five, aims such as asserting voices of experience and challenging professional knowledge and discrimination. The chapter will then explore peer mentoring activities themselves and observe the spaces in which people act as mentors and mentees, these activities and settings provide the ‘field of contest, [or] the space of authoring’ in which agency takes shape (Mageo, 2002: 61). Finally the chapter will consider the role of peer mentors as givers of recognition; as creditors and cultivators of their mentees’ emerging identities. This final section will offer an insight into *how* peer mentoring may increase a sense of agency in mentees and in doing so it highlights how a sense of personal agency – a seemingly individual determination – can actually be formed by the reflections of social others.

### **6.1 How do people become peer mentors?**

Whilst peer mentoring is claimed to increase a sense of agency or autonomy in both mentors and recipients (Pollack, 2004), few of the respondents in this study came to the practice under their own inclination initially. Rather the process of becoming a formal peer

mentor was rarely a conscious, or planned one. Instead, two of the most dominant reasons offered by respondents were that it formalised their *existing activity*, or the impetus to mentor came *from elsewhere*.

### 6.1.1 Formalising existing activity

Whilst peer mentoring may well constitute a consciously political act in which mentors and mentees struggle to have their voices heard, as argued in chapter five, few mentors described a wish to enter a formal role; to *become* a mentor. Instead many mentors described more fluid processes whereby they *fell into* mentoring as a way of formalising work they were already doing, albeit very informally, with their friends or family. John, for example, works as a volunteer mentor attached to his local Probation Service. He found out about the role after having sought out some training at a local voluntary agency. John explained that he wanted the training to better equip him with the assistance he had been informally offering to his own friends over a number of years:

The reason I want to get into it is because, I've lost eight friends through various substances from the age of 18... So I'd helped a couple of friends come off their own addictions during that time period, and I don't want to see anyone else go through it... And I quite like doing it, it gives me a sense of wellbeing as well (John, Mentor).

Similarly Katy, a volunteer mentor at a women's employment project, saw herself as already doing the work for which she is now formally recruited:

I've also got two friends who are quite ill at the moment, mentally. One is in hospital... and I've been supporting them... I actually enjoy it. It gives me something to do with my day and it's something I enjoy doing... I do it because she's my mate and I want to do it, I like doing it (Katy, Mentor).

Katy's sense of being a mentor is informed as much by her individual actions with friends as by the formalised space – the structured mentoring setting – she practices within. This dynamic suggests that peer mentoring is not just 'strengths-based' practice, which treats offenders as community assets to be utilised and provides opportunities for such individuals to develop pro-social self-concepts (Burnett and Maruna, 2006: 84), but that it is often more accurately a *strengths framing* practice – a role which showcases to mentors and those around them that they have vital skills that they already employ. This feature capitalises upon Maruna's argument that:

[N]ot all of the roles played by participants in this sample have been deviant ones. All of the narrators [in his study] have played the role of the thief or the junkie, but they have also occasionally played the loving parent, working-class hero, loyal friend (Maruna, 2001: 89).

Peer mentoring becomes a tool with which to build upon this dualism; to frame the socially beneficial qualities that become masked when one is labelled an 'offender'. Phil, for example, now mentors young people involved in anti-social behavior and adults in prison settings. He explains how it was prison staff who initially recognised his potential:

Phil: As an ex-offender I had served on a lifer's wing and I kept in contact with a couple of offenders... and then I wrote to them on my release, whilst they were still serving... That relationship with that prison has just grown and developed over the years, and they'd asked me to come in to do some work with some of their offenders.

Interviewer: So the prison wanted you to be a volunteer based on what they'd seen you do?

Phil: Yea, they wanted to celebrate what I'd achieved as an ex offender and kind of create that motivation for the offenders.

Phil was *invited in* as a motivational other even before he saw himself as such an influence. Before his work was formalised he merely regarded his activities as those of a friend. Similarly, Melina, is now a paid mentor at a gang reduction project. She did not seek out this role, but was approached, given the helping qualities that both she and others identified within her:

I'm just always the friend who's giving advice, listening to everyone else's problems, so everyone just said 'you'd be good like that' and I really enjoy it. So I don't know how [I came to mentoring] actually. [Coordinator name] just told me she was doing the female mentoring and I thought it sounds really good (Melina, Mentor).

Melina already saw herself as something of a mentor, a 'listener' as she put it, and took the opportunity to formalise this quality only when an external party approached her; when a

frame was presented. This leads us on to a second common reason that respondents offered for becoming a mentor.

### *6.1.2 Impetus from Elsewhere*

Whilst the above speakers describe falling into mentoring as it matched activities they were already engaged in, Phil and Melina also describe becoming a mentor at the instigation of others. This was a common theme. Keisha, for example, who now runs her own peer mentoring project, describes her accidental introduction to the work. She explains how, on release from prison, she asked her probation officer what her employment options were: ‘He blatantly told me: “we’re not used to people coming forward like yourself”’. As a result she was referred to a ‘female support group’. Despite being unsure about the relevance of this referral Keisha decided to ‘try it out’:

I ended up being a volunteer there, because I didn’t fit the box... Going there and looking clean and not being on drugs and alcohol... They assumed I was alright, when I wasn’t alright. It was at that point where I was thinking to myself: ‘this is bad’, but then at the same time I ended up getting voluntary work for an organisation and things started to look up. I started working with young people and one thing that I did notice is that is one of my talents (Keisha, Mentor).

Keisha then, describes a completely accidental recruitment. In the absence of a supportive resettlement service for herself which ‘fitted’, Keisha was shelved into the only available service for women. By accident she discovered mentoring was something she was good at and would go on to succeed at. Similarly Brad, a volunteer mentor attached to the



Probation Service, had no express wish to become a mentor, but had the opportunity presented to him and accepted given the impending lack of known structure in his life:

I've got links with [the mentoring coordinator] from back in the day... He heard rumours that I'd sorted myself out, got in touch, we spoke. He said: how would I fancy doing it? [Mentoring], 'It sounds good, I'm looking for a new challenge'... I've exhausted all what I can do with the Army really, I got no chance of going away again, and he said 'come and do this with us, we've got a course next week' (Brad, Mentor).

For both Keisha and Brad these unlooked for opportunities turned into positive personal experiences. Both enjoy mentoring and see it as having opened up new avenues for them. For Cat, however, the external impetus offered something quite different:

They chose me... A couple of months ago I was saying, I need to get out of this, it's boring me now, you know? The [inspirational group] talks. So I actually spoke to [coordinator name] and said 'look, I don't want to do the talks anymore. I'm getting bored, I'm sick of people hearing about my life, let's hear about somebody else's', but they say: 'it's because you're an inspiration, from what you've been through and then you've come out and done all this, really positive about stuff', even though they have seen me... living with my manic depression, up and down (Cat, Mentor).

Cat is a volunteer peer mentor at a women's employment project, but given that she is now successfully desisting after committing a very serious offence, she is often asked to speak

on behalf of her service to a range of audiences. This is a task she has come to resent. Despite the fact that peer mentoring is often claimed to increase a sense of agency, self-worth or autonomy in mentors and recipients (Pollack, 2004; Shelter, 2010), Cat's experience indicates that it can also be experienced as restrictive. Cat does not describe an autonomous process here, but one in which she is selected 'they chose me', framed for the project's needs 'you're an inspiration' and coerced. She also suggests that this public presentation of her *inspirational self* is insincere given that those putting her persona on stage 'see' her 'manic depression', yet present how she has 'come out and is really positive about stuff'. This public form of peer mentoring creates a 'front stage' performance for audiences, and masks 'backstage' performances (Goffman, 1959: 112). The 'mentor' or speaker here is less part of an educational process, which encourages critical agency and poses 'problems of human beings in their relations with the world' (Freire, 1970: 60) and more a resource to be utilised by her charity. The danger of this type of peer mentoring is that it exploits, rather than enables people.

Another interesting theme, which challenged the notion that peer mentoring increases a sense of autonomy, was uncertainty of role. Having been recruited at the instigation of others, peer mentors often described a tentativeness about what their mentoring activity should be:

It's challenging, new for me. I haven't got a stand-point, I'm winging it, trying to do my best. It's difficult... I'm not trained like Listeners, got be careful of boundaries (Roy, Prison Peer Group Member).

The Listeners that Roy refers to here work for the Samaritans 'Listener scheme'. This is a peer support service which:

[A]ims to reduce suicide and self-harm in prisons. Samaritans volunteers select, train and support prisoners to become Listeners. Listeners provide confidential emotional support to their fellow inmates who are struggling to cope (Samaritans, 2015).

Interestingly, they appear here as examples of the 'elite' of peer volunteers. In comparison, Roy sees the peer work he is involved in as more difficult and less well defined. He sees himself as a novice who is somewhat at sea. He is also not alone in this sense. Both Lin and Paula also described levels of uncertainty about the work they were engaged in:

I didn't really understand what peer-to-peer meant until I was going through it myself (Lin, Mentor and previously a Mentee).

Although you've got the theory part of it, I think it's a very practical thing, it's very (huff) it's quite hard to put into words really... I just think it's quite new as well, and it's just everybody is, I think, finding their feet basically (Paula, Mentor).

There is a traceable *experimental* character to this practice. Mentors bring their own ideas, impressions and insecurities to create variances of practice. This, along with the diverse and often unplanned ways that mentors come to the work is one explanation of why it is so difficult to categorise peer mentoring as a consistent, definable approach. Moreover, in terms of agency, becoming a peer mentor is often not shaped by the conscious, political

intention of mentors, but rather it is an activity that people are recruited for in the context of contemporary criminal justice ideals. Mentoring offers an ‘identifiable position’ (Mageo, 2002: 61) into which ex-offenders often drift, rather than consciously seek out. That said, informal peer mentoring appears to be an activity that many ‘ex’ and active ‘offenders’ are already undertaking, and have been informally undertaking for a number of years, albeit without formal recognition or political hype. Peer mentors are therefore selected on two apparently conflicting bases. On the one hand people are recruited in recognition of activities they have chosen to perform and on the other they are recruited externally for work of which they have little personal knowledge.

## **6.2 How do people become mentees?**

One of the most striking features of becoming a mentee, much like becoming a mentor, was the lack of impetus from mentees themselves. Indeed there was often a complete lack of knowledge among mentees about what peer mentoring was:

Interviewer: Was it your Probation Officer who told you [about mentoring]?

Eve: Yeah, well it was [the support worker] because we’d finished by then with the Probation. She just said it was just a young girl coming, and at first I thought ahhh!! [Anxious scream], but we got on (Eve, Mentee).

My employment worker told me about [the mentor] and I asked her: ‘What is it called? Are they volunteers?’ I thought it was a job. I forget her name [the mentor], I met her five times (Jen, Mentee).

She [Probation Officer] said: ‘you might find it helpful if you want to, but you don’t have to, but I can arrange an appointment if you want?’ and I said ‘Yeah’. To be honest, at the time I wasn’t sure what it was about, but... the more I’ve got speaking to them, the more they’ve made me realise what I’m good at, what I like... I’m glad Probation introduced me to them (Janet, Mentee).

I met him [the mentor] through boxing, then [the mentoring coordinator] gave me his number... My Probation Officer put me in boxing, then when he [mentor] found out I was into bikes. We used to go riding... I don’t know, it was just natural (Will, Mentee).

Eve, Jen, Janet and Will were all involved with support workers as part of their Probation Orders and all describe being referred on to mentoring without any real familiarity with, nor introduction to, the concept. Whilst Janet and Will developed an understanding of what mentoring aimed to achieve, both Eve and Jen remained unclear at the time of interview about what the aims of mentoring were, despite both having been mentored for a number of weeks. Indeed Jen intermittently described the work of various other services, for example, the Women’s Centre or Probation when asked about mentoring, suggesting she could not easily differentiate between the various services she had been referred to. This lack of clarity was not limited to Jen alone. Karina was referred to a peer mentor attached to a gang intervention project after her teachers identified that she was at risk of exploitation from local gangs:

Interviewer: Why do you think school wanted you to have a mentor? Do you know?

Karina: No

Interviewer: [project name] is for girls in gangs, or exploited by gangs...

Karina: I don't know, Miss [teacher name] just told me about it, but I weren't sure, she just didn't explain it fully, she just said wait and see how it goes and it went alright (Karina, Mentee).

Karina was not only unclear about why she had been referred to mentoring, therefore, but she was also completely unclear about the nature of the project she was involved with. Becoming a mentee emerged here less as a conscious activity, as an activity which fostered a sense of agency, and more as a vague, externally commissioned exercise. What was surprising, however, was that this lack of understanding or individual intention was not always a detrimental factor. Indeed often respondents came to recognise their mentoring activity as beneficial, despite initial scepticism:

[The mentoring] was... set [by the Court] for four appointments... I didn't think it would be my thing at first, but once I'd sat down with him and got chatting to him, realised that he's alright to get along with and everything, he's helped me in a lot of ways, so it's been good (Paul, Mentee).

To be honest, I didn't think I needed a mentor and they [the prison chaplaincy service] said 'well it's up to you', but I went ahead anyway and it was quite shocking, because obviously I didn't know her, I was quite willing to talk to her. It was quite shocking how much I was willing to let her know. I felt comfortable (Georgie, Mentee).

Two years ago I didn't care, I wanted to be alone, I thought: the world isn't just; it's careless, humanity is greedy, why do we even exist? [Through mentoring] I'm slowly learning... Applying what I've learnt about myself. Humanity is generally selfish, but has the greatest capacity for love and understanding (Mark, Prison Peer Group Member).

These three speakers, like the vast majority of mentees that were interviewed, did not ask for a mentor themselves. In almost all cases the suggestion, or will to initiate the work came from a professional, such as a Probation Officer, Chaplain, or Teacher, who themselves either didn't understand fully what it was they were referring to, or didn't explain this fully to those they were referring. The ways in which mentees were entered into mentoring relationships therefore appeared to have little regard for their personal agency. This is problematic given that for 'ethical and moral reasons, informed consent should be an important principle to uphold' (Hucklesby and Wincup, 2014: 13). That said, once mentees were immersed in mentoring, they often utilised the relationship in ways they found to be beneficial. Each of the speakers here, for example, found something in the process of mentoring that they valued, be it practical help, someone who listened, or a new perspective on the world. What Paul terms as 'help' will be explored later in this chapter. The notions of *listening* and *gaining a new perspective* will also be considered in their own right in chapters seven and eight. Here, however, the important point is that an absence of intention to become a mentee is not always seen as detrimental. Mentees still experienced mentoring positively, despite being vague initially about what they were consenting to.

### 6.3 The spaces in which peer mentoring takes place

This chapter has so far suggested that there is a lack of self-determination in how people enter mentor and mentee positions and that these roles are often entered into at the invitation of others. This section will now look more closely at *where* mentoring happens. The places in which peer mentoring happens are significant to any consideration of the practice. Indeed, it is argued that:

[T]he material environment that surrounds us is rarely neutral; it either helps the forces of chaos that make life random and disorganized or it helps to give purpose and direction to one's life (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981: 16-17).

It is further argued that a sense of agency does not emerge in isolation, but rather:

[A]gency takes shape in a field of contest, the 'space of authoring'. This space is formed, both within us and outside us, by the very multiplicity of persons who are identifiable positions in networks of social production, and of worlds of activity that are also scenes of consciousness (Mageo, 2002: 61).

In Goffman's terms these spaces or 'settings' supply the 'scenery and stage props for the spate of human action played out before, within, or upon it' (Goffman, 1959: 32-33). These settings, therefore, both express something about what mentoring attempts to do and they frame the practice. Fiona, for example, a mentee who lacked confidence leaving her own home, described how her mentor helped her meet her health needs: 'It's good because you can go to doctors with them; say if you've got girl problems, anything: "Will you come the



doctors with me?": "Course I will" (Fiona, Mentee). Fiona's mentor therefore helped her to both navigate daunting personal boundaries and to attend an alien environment. Given the relevance of such performative spaces, it is important to document *where* it is that peer mentoring happens. The settings encountered during the research were predominantly community based, they were places aimed at *practically* meeting people's needs. Steve, a mentor at a project attached to a local Probation Office, for example, like Fiona (above) also described the importance of offering assistance in community health settings: 'Just holding their hands, getting them to doctor's appointments, getting them to see their drug counsellors' (Steve, Mentor). Mentors appear to enter new territories for practical ends. Attendance at settings related to employment was just as prominent in this regard:

Going into the library, doing CVs to help my employment (Paul, Mentee).

Supporting them to the Job Centre, supporting them to the doctors (Julie, Mentor).

Coming here [to the Women's Centre Job Club] has helped... There's a focus on getting a job and I need that focus, they give practical help too, got applications and sent them off (Jen, Mentee).

Supporting people into community health and employment settings is not an activity that is new to the Probation Service or voluntary sector. The difference here appears to be that mentors have the time to complete this work *alongside* mentees, in community rather than correctional locations, as companions rather than referrers. They are therefore able to support people in community settings and support regimes such as keeping appointments.

Often mentoring takes place in multiple settings and it is dependent upon the complexity of needs presented. Don, for example, is a persistent offender who was referred to mentoring by his probation officer. He explains how a long history of drug dependency has left him feeling ill equipped to deal with many of the demands of independent living:

My mentor takes me shopping, makes sure my bills are paid, know what I mean? I've always got food in, he knows my electric's paid for, he makes sure I've got gas... When I came off the sick I had no money for 6-8 weeks. They got me food parcels, I don't know what I'd have done. I could have been tempted... (Don, Mentee).

On one level, these settings are sites of practical social support, a benefit which has already been highlighted with regard to peer mentoring generally (Princes Trust, 2012; Adair, 2005). However, the settings themselves communicate additional messages. Peer mentoring is often an informal and non-office based activity, taking place in shops, cafes, gyms or outdoor sites:

It can be anything from talking to going for a walk, just to get them away from it. Walk down the woods, might go shopping, we do days out, go on bike rides, go to the dog centre, we'll go and walk the dog (Ben, Mentor).

The approach is the antithesis of office based work, which has a direct focus on the 'offender'. There was indeed a voiced ethos for such an *active*, community based approach, in that it provides a chance to 'practice a new identity' (Cam, Mentoring Coordinator). These settings are not buildings associated with waiting to see a Probation

Officer, they are not places where people are defined by their past and their associations; they are *public* places:

It could be in a pub if you want or a coffee shop, wherever you want, wherever they're comfortable with. In the summer, get a little butty [sandwich] and go and sit in the park, do whatever you want; it's on their terms isn't it? Whereas meeting in an office, signing yourself in, being buzzed through doors to get into buildings, it's very different, isn't it? (Joan, Mentor).

There is an acknowledgement here, conscious or otherwise, that 'the material objects we use are not just tools we can pick up and discard at our convenience; they constitute the framework of experience that gives order to our otherwise shapeless selves' (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981: 16). In other words 'being buzzed through doors' is not an innocuous security measure, it constitutes a framework that defines the people being buzzed in as 'offenders', as 'clients' and – by implication – dangerous and excluded. As a result there is a conscious shifting away from the settings and accoutrements that define mentees as 'offenders' or clients:

I've offered to, instead of her coming in here, because this is also for Probation as well, we could meet in a Café and it just looks like two friends, you know? Obviously I still have to wear my badge, but my badge is tucked in and no one needs to know. As long as I'm still wearing my badge it doesn't need to be on show, and it doesn't need to say 'I'm a Peer Facilitator', and then we're just two friends having a cup of tea (Olivia, Mentor).

Peer mentors therefore seek to *change the space*. To borrow Goffman's terms, there is a purging of the institution's definition of identity, a rejection of the 'subtle means of maintaining social distance' (Goffman, 1961: 84). People are not 'buzzed' through closed spaces and separated by badges of authority; these dividers are consciously rejected. Such opportunities to shed the associations of criminal stigma and actively practice a new identity are likely to be useful if desistance from crime involves changes in 'self-concept' (Shover, 1983). The new self-concept offered here is that people begin to see themselves as co-community members, rather than as offenders defined by probation offices and staff badges. This constitutes a ritual of equalization, wherein 'risk'-based exclusions are rejected. Such an approach may also have a role to play in allowing deviant roles to be demoted as by falling back on other non-criminal identities, mentees 'are able to deemphasize the centrality of crime in the life history and suggest that they were just normal people "all along"' (Maruna, 2001: 89). Will, for example, does not conceive of his activity based mentoring as 'sessions' at all, rather he feels *normalised*, a sense of mainstream belonging:

I don't see 'em as workers at all... I just seen [mentor's name] then and he's got a wotsit [volunteer identity badge] round his neck. Normally I see him he's just normal round the gym, he can't be training with one... We went to Blackpool, again a boxing outing... It wasn't like a probation outing, just like lads' day out (Will, Mentee).

The sport and leisure settings that Will joins his mentor in are not just background spaces, therefore, but they serve to dilute Will's sense of being a probation client; they also dilute the hierarchy which can exist between helper and helped. Instead mentor and mentee

become companions sharing an experience: not ‘workers at all, just a lads’ day out’. Furthermore mentoring activity in these settings helps Will to keep his thoughts on the possibilities aligned with his new active identity, to ‘deemphasize the centrality of crime in the life history’ (Maruna, 2001: 89):

I don’t know, just need to fill time. I still get bored and I still have thoughts, but... Just keep thoughts on something else, being productive, self-achievement, boxing, other projects they have going (Will, Mentee).

Will’s narrative does not just highlight the importance of community based activity because it helps him to shape a non-criminal sense of self, but also because it offers a physical diversion. In this sense Will’s experiences of *active* mentoring constitute ‘changes in routine activities’ and ‘different patterns of socialization’ (Shapland and Bottoms, 2011: 272) which provide opportunities to ‘change’ habits by consciously introducing a disruptive (to the offender) routine:

We are not suggesting that offending had become habitual, in the same way that driving a well-known route does not require conscious attention. But there might be, for example, a well-worn path to local shops to commit thefts when money was short. Given such a background, in moments of tension it is easy to revert to previous patterns of behaviour. For persistent offenders, ‘achieving change’ was usually therefore not straightforward, and might well have to involve significant changes in routine activities, and different patterns of socialization and friendship (Shapland and Bottoms, 2011: 272).

This notion of needing to change routine activities, and indeed friendships, was also reinforced by other respondents in this study. Ben for example, a mentor attached to a probation setting explains how: ‘It’s just getting away from their thing, a lot of people will just sit in their little flat, in their room, go to their dealer, they’ve got that used to that. So, no, hang on! We’ll do anything really’ (Ben, Mentor). The worth of this approach was echoed by Don, a mentee at the same setting as Ben:

Blowing money on payday on gear and stone, now my mentor takes me shopping, makes sure my bills are paid, know what I mean? ... If I’ve got any appointments and he can help me he’ll take me there... Someone said to me ‘you’re a soldier [local argot for committed] aren’t you? You come to any group!’ It stops me using (Don, Mentee).

Georgie, a mentee at a charity assisting people recently released from prison, described a similar benefit:

I find it hard to break away from the routine I was used to. You have to break away from a lot of your friends, so I kind of needed a mentor cos I didn’t have no mates. I used to say: I’ve got no-one to go out with at the weekend – she’d [mentor] say: give us a ring, don’t worry (Georgie, Mentee).

Don and Georgie highlight that desistance is often characterised, at least in the early stages, with a sense of social isolation, which mentoring aims to address. However both also refer to the notion of ‘habit’, as described by Shapland and Bottoms above. There is a further

theoretical parallel to be drawn between these descriptions and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, which is described as:

[S]ystems of durable, transposable dispositions... 'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor (Bourdieu, 1980: 53).

The mentees speaking here articulate Bourdieu's ideas in more practical terms. They see a value in having their routine and time orchestrated in new ways because they recognise how established the routines that connect them to criminality are. Crucially, *habitus* is also an *embodied* feature: 'habitus is simultaneously collective and individual, and definitively embodied' (Jenkins 1996: 20). People's habits relating to criminal activity may not always be *conscious* therefore, but as Ben and Don articulate, can be an almost unconscious physical performance of (in this case addiction) routines: 'blowing money on payday/ sitting round flat/ going to dealer'. If peer mentoring involves mentees being *active* in public and non-criminal spaces then, spaces complete with new *habitus*, it is potentially a powerful tool. It facilitates the embodiment of new habits and new ways of being. Indeed one trainee peer mentor acknowledged the power of such forces directly: 'a person is created by those around them' (Mentoring Trainee). However this same speaker also articulated that making transitions between spaces and associated habits is not easy: 'when you move away, even areas, it's a real challenge, you're insecure, trying to find out who you are, without status and influence' (Mentoring Trainee).

The active, community-based character of peer mentoring has so far been conceived of as assisting in the formation of new identities and as diverting people from criminal habits. There is a further theoretical link to be made here, however, to the work of Jack Katz. For Katz (1988), the study of crime had neglected: ‘the positive, often wonderful attractions within the lived experience of criminality’ (Katz, 1988: 3). As a result he sought to focus on the seductive qualities of crimes, ‘those aspects in the foreground of criminality that make its various forms sensible, even sensually compelling, ways of being’ (Katz, 1988: 3). Drawing upon the work of Katz, Cathy Murray has more recently argued that ‘the appeal of offending in terms of its thrill or excitement does not disappear once young people desist, so this is something they lose by desisting’ (Murray, 2012: 32). As a result, Murray suggests, that: ‘For professionals working with young desisters, it is worth considering that replacements for lost pleasures might be prioritized in post-offending programmes’ (Murray, 2012: 32). By offering alternative activities, which are not mundane, but based upon leisure and belonging (as Will and Georgie seem to suggest), mentoring may go some way to compensating for such losses of pleasure or excitement. This feature was articulated by Steve, a prolific offender, whose mentors concentrated on his interests and focused early support on positive leisure activities:

I was committing ridiculous amounts of crime... I used to go out with this lad, he was an ex offender himself, clean and sorted for years and years, so I used to just go and play snooker with him... I’d go out running... They [mentors] identified that I loved running... just getting me involved in stuff that I’d never really done. I never used to go out, all my life was just chaos, and then from that day on I decided, you know what, I’m going give this a really good go. So I really put all my heart and soul into it and I really started to enjoy what I was doing. They set me up



with a gym pass... I thought this might be the right time for me to really sort my life out, because I'd tried before but never done it because I'd never had any support (Steve, Mentor and previously a Mentee).

For Steve, the combination of active enjoyment and support in his own Mentee experience is considered to be transformative. It enables him to make a different and difficult choice.

However, whilst some respondents clearly perceived benefits associated with the *active* nature of peer mentoring, there are also points of tension here. One such challenge was made during a 'group analysis' session. This group took place when I was asked by a participating mentoring project to offer feedback on some of my initial research findings to a new cohort of trainee peer mentors. I used the opportunity to ask trainees to reflect on emerging findings with me, and to ask them whether they made sense in light of their own experiences. As we discussed the theme of *active community spaces*, one trainee highlighted the fact that 'offenders' are not singularly involved with criminal habits, but simultaneously perform criminal *and* socially compliant activities: 'I went to church all the time when I was offending, I was nice to my Nan, I just adapted to situations' (Trainee Peer Mentor). In line with Maruna's argument that 'not all roles played are deviant ones' the 'offender' can also be a 'loving parent, loyal friend' (Maruna, 2001: 89), this respondent's point was that desisting and persisting habits can co-exist. He was therefore sceptical that new habits *alone* could provide enough of a diversion. Whilst introducing new activities and new habits are described as helpful in many cases, this strategy on its own is limited. People can successfully play out a variety of roles and adapt to new patterns while persisting in offending.

#### **6.4 The importance of recognition: peers as creditors and cultivators**

Whilst the previous section explored the physical environments of peer mentoring, this section will focus more closely on the immediate communal environment. In doing so it will suggest that it is not enough for people to practice new identities, these identities also need to be fortified. It is therefore important for peer mentors to offer *recognition* to their mentees. Mutual recognition 'is arguably a foundational condition for humanistic relationships as each acknowledges the other as an autonomous and rational being capable of self-determination' (Morgan, 2013: 19). In a criminal justice context: 'Not only must a person accept conventional society in order to go straight, but conventional society must accept that person as well' (Maruna, 2001:155). Like Goffman (1959; 1963) before him, Maruna acknowledges that the success of a person's identity lies not only in their performance of a role, but also in the reception this performance receives. Performing 'social conformity' is unlikely to be enough in and of itself for 'offenders' to successfully make the transition to 'ex-offenders', there also needs to be external recognition of this shift. Unfortunately for would-be 'desisters' however: 'desistance is a social possibility that takes place within a very specific set of social contexts that may or may not recognise legitimacy of transformation' (Polizzi, 2011: 150). Chapters four and nine, for example, both outline some vivid descriptions of scepticism toward change by offenders, and some real concerns that their social inclusion would pose risks to others. Colleagues, employers and peers all communicated resistance to accepting ex-offenders as mentors. However, there is also some evidence that peer mentoring configures a different kind of audience, that it creates a space where this acceptance can occur and where the legitimacy of transformations can be recognised. This notion was alluded to in the opening section of this chapter, wherein it was suggested that mentoring can be strengths framing for mentors.

Here, however *mentees* also describe the importance of their mentors and others recognising positive changes:

I think it is like me wanting to change but there's someone there niggling in the back of my head saying, 'Look, just carry on doing what you're doing, you're doing well', it's nice to hear it from time to time (Paul, Mentee).

Paul considers that his mentor both sees and recognises his potential. For Fiona, this recognition went further, as it was reported for others to see:

The fact that I had to go back to court every month and a bit helped, because I get a report written from here [the mentoring project] saying what appointments I've attended, what achievements I've made... It's motivated me, and, you know? There were no negatives, no offending whatsoever, just to see that on paper, I've kept all my reports (Fiona, Mentee).

These reflected and written forms of external recognition enter Fiona's 'space of authoring' (Mageo, 2002: 61) and inform her conscious awareness of the possibilities of self. They become treasured evidence of her new truth. Phil too expresses a desire for such positive recognition as he reflects upon his own experiences of being positively encouraged by prison education:

Maybe it's a trait of offenders, but we're a bit needy, need someone to give us a pat on the back saying 'you are capable, that piece of work's good' (Phil, Mentor).

Having been socially excluded and negatively framed by prison, Phil articulates that there needs to be positive responses to counter this truth. Mentors do not just offer mentees vital recognition of positive changes, but also cultivation or nurturing of their potential; guidance toward what that person *could* be. This is done through a persistent reinforcement of – and building upon – ‘positive’ features present. Brad, for example, a mentor attached to a probation setting, vibrantly describes the advice he gave to the mother of one of his mentees when she expressed concern about her son’s setbacks since release from prison: ‘He might be being a dick, but you have to look beyond what you know of him, look beyond all that and see positive steps he has taken’ (Brad, Mentor). Mentors also often see themselves as creating opportunities for these ‘positive steps’:

It’s important that the mentor also tries to find out what they [mentees] think their talents are, or hobbies, or what they think they’re good at... You can pick up on things and then you can say: ‘do you know what I think you’d be good at doing... and I think you’d be good doing...’ you know? (Keisha, Mentor).

This focus on personal strengths was regarded as a ‘positive’ approach. It was valued by mentees and represented a dominant theme in their interviews. James, for example, is a member of a peer support group within a prison and now works as a peer mentor himself in both one-to-one and group prison settings, whilst serving his own prison sentence. He described a peer mentor as:

Someone positive to go to... Engage people into a positive way... Probation and hostels are good at relating the negative things. I’d have to self-praise... For a person like me who’s not confident, I need to know when I’m doing good. In here

[Peer led group setting] I've come out of my shell. I'm more confident, like to go for the mentor role, I've gone for and achieved (James, Prison Peer Group Member).

Candice, a teenage mentee, is mentored in her high school setting having been assessed as at risk of involvement with local 'gangs'. Whilst her context is very different to James's, she describes similar benefits from peer mentoring:

Think about good things about yourself, every week I had to. One week I could only do three, the next week she told me five, she said 'come back with seven, come back with ten...' Every session she came she was explaining how I'd developed my confidence and then my mates have said that. I feel more confidence in myself (Candice, Mentee).

Janet and Gina were referred to a local women's charity following criminal convictions. They both referred to mentoring as a process of coming to see positive factors within themselves, factors that were being submerged by the overwhelming shame of their criminal actions:

They help you to see the positive sides, whereas at the time you can't see nothing other than: 'I've been done for drink-driving and my life is crap'... The more I've got speaking to them, the more they've made me realise what I'm good at, what I like, and things like that (Janet, Mentee).

Gina said that she came to recognise:

You're not a bad person, that actually you're quite nice and what's happened has happened and now it's time to go forward... It wasn't like 'well you should be doing this or this or this', it was just gentle and it was only after a few weeks when I said something to [mentor] and she said 'seeeee!' And I went 'oh yeah!' It's like good psychology because it plants the seed and it grows (Gina, Mentee).

Highlighting personal strengths is therefore regarded as 'good psychology' – it is seen to build confidence, to shift peoples' self-perceptions and to help them feel empowered. Chapter two outlined how there is already theoretical support for such 'strengths-based' practice, which 'focuses on the positive contribution to society that an individual can make in an attempt to re- or de-label them as a "bad person"' (Farrall and Calverley, 2006: 65). The strengths-based philosophy:

[R]ecognizes that even the most resilient individuals emerging from a shameful past need high levels of support in nurturing their pro-social inclinations, to restore their sense of belonging, mastery, independence and generosity (Burnett and Maruna, 2006: 101).

A focus on mentee strengths can therefore inform their *sense* of themselves, by helping to construct a vision of a positive new identity 'they've made me realise what I'm good at' (Janet, Mentee) and promoting engagement and motivation 'I've attended, it's motivated me, you know?' (Fiona, Mentee). This element of mentoring suggests that the practice is more than simply embodied discipline or active habit. It is also an activity which consciously positions mentors as *reflectors of personal positive factors*, as builders of potential, rather than fixers who focus upon deficits to be remedied.

## 6.5 Nudging the conscience

In addition to highlighting and reinforcing personal strengths, mentors were also described as *positive others* in that they acted as a second conscience. This section will explore this interesting micro-intervention, by looking at the ways in which mentors often give their mentees a discreet, gentle nudge. For example, mentors described how they often challenge mentees and offer a sounding board when opposition was likely to be needed:

I shout at him on the phone; (laugh) ‘what you doing?’ I hate shouting at him... I’m his little mate on his arse all the time, mithering him (Brad, Mentor).

I always let them know: if they feel like they’re going to re-offend, or try and use again, they can just get on the phone. If I answer it, I’m available, if I don’t answer it, I’ll call them back (John, Mentor).

This was an approach that mentees often appreciated and utilised. Paul, for example, receives one-to-one mentoring following a conviction, but he also attends rehabilitation courses as part of his Probation sentence. He explains how his mentor attends these same courses to offer additional support:

I see him [my mentor] going there as well, which is a help for me, cos I normally mess about, when he’s there he keeps me in check, I sit there and get something out of it. When I’ve done little things wrong, been about to go back down wrong path he has been there to say, ‘look man, sort your head out. Its only little blip, carry on with it’, which is good really (Paul, Mentee).

Karina, who is mentored in a high school setting, similarly explains how thinking through decisions with her mentor helped her avoid negative consequences in her school life:

I probably would have got sent to the Consequence Room [described as a ‘time out’ classroom where pupils are sent to consider the consequences of their actions], got a detention... We done stuff about making decisions for good reasons and bad reasons, we did worksheets on it (Karina, Mentee).

Mentors make overt efforts to affect their mentees’ decisions here on a micro level and these interventions are welcomed by mentees. Even when mentors are not directly influencing decisions, mentees often describe them as a remembered conscience:

You sort of have their voices at a time when you need them, going in your head... I feel like my peers are still with me on the journey... You feel like you have other people and they understand all my mad quirks in my head and how my head works because theirs works exactly the same, and there is ways of dealing with it (Lin, Mentor and previously a Mentee).

I don’t even phone sometimes I just think ‘Well what would [mentor] say?’ She’d say this or that (Janet, Mentee).

These mentees did not just welcome their mentors’ overt influence in decision making, but they appear to have internalised their mentors expected responses. Peer mentors’ voices, whether real or remembered, therefore, have a regulatory value. They keep people ‘in



check’, they assist with decision making and as a consequence, mentees say that their mentors voices and messages stay with them. Moreover this regulatory conscience is deemed to be acceptable because it comes from people who have ‘been there’ themselves and have regulated themselves in this way. At first hearing such shared discipline might be interpreted as a surrender of agency on the part of mentees, wherein mentors are afforded the power to decide what is right and wrong or ‘good and bad’. It could be viewed, not so much a benign nurturing of self-monitoring, as paternalistic guidance toward what the mentor considers right. However in explaining why, for him, such regulation was so important, Paul challenges the pessimism of such a concern:

In jail everything is structured for you, you’re told when you go to work, when you’re getting locked up, when you have your food, when you get to socialise or use the phone, everything’s structured for you. So coming out of there, out of jail and not having anyone telling you what to do, that was kind of like a free roaming thingy for me – I was just going on a mad one! But getting out then coming here and having a mentor, when I’m going to do them mad things [my mentor] is there like: ‘Whoa, go and do it if you want to, but this is what’s going to happen’. It makes you weigh up the pros and cons in your head, obviously make a right decision instead of wrong one (Paul, Mentee).

For Paul, this voice of conscience helped him to gain a sense of self-control. It provided an initial buffer to the experience of being released after the complete control of prison, *which he saw as essential*, but after this initial protection was offered, it was up to him to decide which way to go next. This is not so much paternalistic control, but a tool used by Paul to help manage his perceived ‘weakness of will’. This feature has been highlighted previously

by Shapland and Bottoms (2011) in their concept 'diachronic self-control'. This is described as a strategy wherein:

[O]ne engages in or deliberately does not engage in an activity so that, at another, future time, one will not face a situation of temptation, which one believes, from experience, is very likely to result in a failure to act as one truly believes one should (Shapland and Bottoms, 2011: 274).

Shapland and Bottoms explain how these strategies are employed by people attempting to desist in order to avoid 'weaknesses' of will. Paul describes something very similar. He visits his mentor in order to be exposed to a voice of reason, a voice which dampens his temptations; temptations he sees as correlated with release from such total control. Moreover, his mentor's voice encourages him to make decisions himself whilst anchoring him with a companion in the face of this new and overwhelming self-government post prison. This voice of conscience does not work to stifle self-direction, therefore, but to *cultivate* it. A feature also highlighted by Georgie:

When you don't talk to someone, everything's whizzing round your head: 'right start there, do this, do this'. We'd [Georgie and mentor] talk and she'd say: 'why don't you just do this', talking to someone puts it in perspective. I'm concentrating on that; deal with that later. That was a biggy [big thing] for me. Too much on my mind, I can't focus... Sometimes you just need to talk to someone and get it out (Georgie, Mentee).

For Georgie, the combination of being listened to and having a peer collaborator, helps *her* to sort through problems she feels overwhelmed by, it helps her to gain a new perspective and to feel more in control.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter offers further support for claims that peer mentoring can increase a sense of agency or self-worth (Pollack, 2004; Shelter, 2010), albeit in ways which may not be expected. Mentors and mentees frequently speak of gaining a sense of self direction or self-control: ‘I’ve come out of my shell. I’m more confident’ (James, Prison Peer Group Member); ‘I feel more confidence in myself’ (Candice, Mentee); ‘actually [I’m] quite nice and what’s happened has happened and now it’s time to go forward’ (Gina, Mentee). But they also outline the important roles their peers play in this acquisition: ‘you sort of have their voices at a time when you need them, going in your head (Lin, Mentor and previously a Mentee); ‘they’ve made me realise what I’m good at’ (Janet, Mentee); ‘Sometimes you just need to talk to someone and get it out’ (Georgie, Mentee). Developing a sense of agency through peer mentoring emerges here as a dialogue, a conversation between role definers and role performers, one in which intimate levels of trust and exchange are necessary conditions. This dual aspect of mentoring, where roles are defined by one group and performed by another, is present in peer mentoring from its very origins. Peer mentors often do not *initiate* the act of supporting their peers, but their work is formalised by external parties such as professional managers and coordinators. Many mentors and mentees do not initiate the practice at all, but come to contribute and benefit once the role is made available. As a result variances of practice emerge along with uncertainty.

Two dominant features which emerged when mentees described their growing sense of agency were not individual at all, but were made available outside of the self, that is: the *physical environment* and *social environment*. Mentees are offered opportunities to ‘practice a new identity’ in community based settings, to embed new routines and to engage in activities they find pleasurable. As a result they come to hold new perspectives of themselves and new hope for the future. Mentors, in turn, reinforce these new identity performances by encouraging a positive sense of self and by recognising and applauding mentee efforts. In this light, intentional self-change is not a prerequisite of desistance, but desistance emerges falteringly as a dialogue between the self, socially available spaces and socially available recognition. This is a point that will be developed further in chapter eight. Before that, however, it will be helpful to look a little closer at the core aptitudes that mentors employ once they are engaged in the activity of mentoring, the things which mentors and mentees themselves see as core to this work.

## Chapter Seven

### The Values and ‘Core Conditions’ of Peer Mentoring

What good is your knowledge to us? Do you in your analyses of our social realities tell us what we can do to transform them? Does your analysis contain some indications of strategies for change? Does your apprehension of our reality speak to our experience? Do you convey it in a language that we can understand? If you do none of these things, should we not only reject your ‘knowledge’ but, in the interests of our own liberation, consider you a friend to our enemies and a danger to our people? (Sivanandan, 1974: 400)

This quote originates from Sivanandan’s post-colonial critique of ‘bourgeois scholarship’ in which he guards against abstruse and obscure work, which engenders a ‘colonialism of the mind’. I include it in order to anchor what I hope the chapter will do; dismantle the power that inheres within the dominant discourse and allow respondents some authority over their own experiences. The chapter aims to speak directly to the experience of the men and women who spoke so frankly about often harrowing personal life experiences for the benefit of this study. It aims to draw out the ‘strategies for change’ which *they themselves* identified. In doing so the chapter outlines what they frame as the authentic principles of peer mentoring.

Chapters one and four highlighted how diverse mentoring theory and practices are. This chapter, whilst not dismissing this diversity, identifies some of the most common interpersonal approaches employed through peer mentoring, as described by those engaged

with the work. The dominance of these approaches not only illustrates what is valued in this work and what influences this work, but also what may be missing from existing interventions. The first feature prominent in interview narratives was ‘individualised practice’. Respondents spoke of the importance of mentees setting their own goals rather than having external ideals imposed. The first section will therefore reinforce the importance of personal agency. It will examine the ways in which mentors aim to encourage self-direction in their mentees through goal setting. The second part of the chapter will focus upon what mentors and mentees articulated as the core values of this work, including the importance of *listening*, *caring* and *setting manageable goals*. These ‘core conditions’ are claimed to have very specific benefits for people attempting to desist from crime. These principles emerge, in part, to resist the dominant interventionist discourse, but resistance to this dominance proves limited. Interventionism, as will become clear here and in chapter nine, is never quite overturned.

## **7.1 Individualised practice**

A significant theme of interviews across the projects was that peer mentoring is an individualised practice. Both mentors and mentees framed this as a positive feature of the work. Mentors, for example, refer to a focus on what the mentee as an individual hopes to achieve, rather than what others assess to be in need of correction:

I get the client to think of something that they’ve always wanted to do, whether it’s a job or training or whatever, just getting fitter, anything like that. I try and ask them what they want (John, Mentor).

How I work at the beginning is ask about them. What are they interested in? And then it seems to break that barrier down a little bit, because your interest is in them... I didn't say 'WE are doing this, WE are doing that' I didn't say none of that, I said 'What do you like? What are you interested in? What do you want to do?' (Julie, Mentor).

This ethos corresponds with the concept of 'Motivational Interviewing', which is included in some format on each of the mentoring training courses that I observed, or had described to me:

Motivational interviewing is a psychological treatment that aims to help people cut down or stop using drugs and alcohol. The... counsellor expresses that he or she understands how the clients feel about their problem and supports the clients in making their own decisions. He or she does not try to convince the client to change anything, but discusses with the client possible consequences of changing or staying the same. Finally, they discuss the clients' goals and where they are today relative to these goals (Smedslund, Berg, Hammerstrøm, Steiro, Leiknes, Dahl and Karlsen, 2011: 2).

Motivational interviewing is described as an effective 'evidence-based' (Levensky, Forcehimes, O'Donohue and Beitz, 2007) approach to overcoming ambivalence. It builds upon the client-centred psychotherapy of Carl Rogers (Miller and Rollnick, 2013). Mentees themselves endorsed this approach, highlighting how being allowed to 'own' changes kept them engaged and allowed them to demonstrate their own potential:

She never... told me what I needed to do, she always gave me suggestions and prodded at me to get me thinking about what I needed to do. It was me who said how I would need to change and what timescales... [As a mentor, you have] got to have the skill to know when not to be pushy... You've got to let them [mentees], by talking and you listening, let them find their own resolution and then push that forward, rather than you thinking that would work and giving them that. And maybe just find the bit – say right 'you've hit the nail on the head' (Georgie, Mentee).

When I first met her it was weird because she said 'what do you want to do?' So I just told her what I was doing and she was like 'whoa, you've got your head screwed on then'... It was up to us, they just wanted to know what I'd been up to and about the [college] course and other things, like how I was feeling about things (Eve, Mentee).

I thought at first it would be someone saying: 'right you're coming with me today, we're going to do this, we're gonna do that', but when I realised I had a choice that was a lot of it as well... If they're forcing it down your throat you don't really want to do it do you? But if you're given information about it, and say 'look this is what we'll do with you, this is what we'll help you with, we'll let you put your part in as well', I think there'd be a lot more people would want to do it (Paul, Mentee).

These mentees are offered a level of freedom to act and to become something new; and this is offered with the nurturance of encouragement, praise and a helping hand. What is also apparent in these narratives, however, is that mentees had expected something altogether



different than this level of ownership over the process, they had expected authoritarian directives, instruction and management. This is perhaps not surprising. Eve and Paul had both been subject to statutory supervision processes whose administrators (probation officers), whilst often utilizing motivational techniques themselves, are ultimately required to *manage* offenders. Probation officers are often trained in motivational interviewing techniques, but are ultimately required to assess risk and to plan interventions around those risks. Despite its client-centred roots then, motivational interviewing is invariably caught up in diagnostic power relations; it has become an institutionalised technique. Perhaps the popularity of the peer mentoring approach with mentees, therefore, is not just that it allows them to *own* their own changes on a conversational level, but that the person facilitating this conversation holds less symbolic and actual power over them. The motivational discussion is not experienced – in the context of these relationships – as a disciplinary tool of expert management, but as the *focus* of the relationship. The agency of the mentee is at its (nominal) centre.

This strong focus on the mentee as director of the intervention not only corresponds to motivational interviewing, but also to person-centred therapy: ‘an approach to therapy that has the non-directive attitude at the centre of theory and practice’ (Wilkins, 2010: xvii). Liz, a peer mentor at a project that works with young women at risk of ‘gang exploitation’ directly referenced person-centred counselling as one of her influences:

The skills are the same as person-centred counselling, which I did before: empathy, active listening, un-judgemental positive regard, rapport... The good thing about mentoring is you can encourage the process... Not like counselling... Focus on the

mentee, bring things to their attention: ‘I notice you did this’. *See* them (Liz, Mentor).

Liz not only acknowledges the similarities between person-centred practice and peer mentoring to be: empathy; listening; non-judgement; positive regard; and rapport, but also reinforces the importance of encouragement and an active focus on personal positives. Stokes (2003), however, warns against an uncritical merging of the two philosophies. He argues that whilst mentors may recognise ‘that there are benefits to be gained from being non-directive’ they also often ‘suggest that they are happy to intervene directly in the mentee’s problems either directly by making a facilitative intervention or indirectly by directing the mentee to undertake some course of action’ (Stokes, 2003: 32). This not only contradicts the non-directive ethos of person-centred counselling, but also raises the ‘danger of the mentee becoming reliant on the mentor for critical insights and interventions rather than having them/making them themselves’ (Stokes, 2003: 32). Despite this critique of merging non-directive and directive approaches, Liz’s perception of the core skills or conditions of peer mentoring were echoed by a number of speakers in this study. These will now be explored in detail.

## **7.2 Core Conditions**

Being an ex-offender alone doesn’t qualify you – we want to be *good* mentors (Cam, Mentoring Coordinator, 2014).

Prominent psychotherapist and theorist Carl Rogers introduced the concept of ‘core conditions’, asserting with reference to person-centred counselling, that: ‘congruence, acceptance and empathy’ were essential conditions (Thorne and Sanders, 2013: 36).

Similarly respondents in this study repeatedly suggested that the *core conditions* of peer mentoring are: ‘Caring’; ‘Listening’; and ‘Encouraging Small Steps’. The fact that these bear a resemblance to the conditions proposed by Rogers could, of course, simply be a reflection of the pervasiveness of psychological discourse more broadly. Fergus McNeill, for example, identifies ‘core conditions’ for effectiveness in criminal justice interventions to be: ‘empathy and genuineness; the establishment of a working alliance; and using person-centred, collaborative and “client driven” approaches’ (McNeill, 2006: 52). Indeed their influence has also been applied to mentoring:

While McNeill suggests the importance of these [core conditions] “are perhaps familiar to probation staff” (p. 52), their significance should also ring true to those with a knowledge of mentoring’ (Brown and Ross, 2010: 37).

The use of ‘should’ as an imperative here is interesting and gives a clue as to how this discourse has entered ‘lay’ mentoring as a truism. The dominance of person-centred values in mentoring reflects a prevailing, if only partially adopted, professional discourse. However, the repeated articulation of key values in this study also appears to communicate something specific to these settings. What follows will therefore suggest that it is not just the presence of *any peer* engaging on positive, or person-centred terms which is important to this work, but a peer who is able to employ a number of skills or ‘conditions’.

### *7.2.1 Core condition 1: Caring*

In the early months of my PhD I attended a national conference at an eminent government venue. The speakers included distinguished academics, government and voluntary sector representatives. In the midst of conference etiquette, academic speeches and professional

discourse, a ‘prisoner’ (allowed a day release to speak at the conference) stood up to explain the positive effect that an intervention had had on his life. What was remarkable, and indeed what elicited a small murmuring of uncomfortable chuckling from attendees, was the prisoner’s description of his prison officer; a man whose approach he described as *loving* toward him. Much like the nervously sniggering audience I am aware of a discomfort when referring to *love* or *care* in the context of an empirical study of criminal justice practice. Particularly as Spalek (2008) argues:

[R]esearch approaches that... stress the fluidity of identities, the value of focusing upon emotions, the importance of drawing upon individuals’ own accounts of their experiences... stand in opposition to modernist agendas, being viewed as somehow less valid and objective, and more partisan in nature, and therefore ‘suspect’ (Spalek, 2008: 4).

Moreover, emotions have been seen as ‘suspicious’ by criminologists: ‘criminology’s approach to emotions has been cautious and circumspect’ (Karstedt, 2011: 1). This ‘distrust of emotions’, Pettersen (2008) argues, is deeply rooted in:

Western moral thinking, and can be explained on the basis of several notions: emotions are associated with the body, sexuality, nature and women, which in Western hierarchical thinking are considered inferior to reason, self-control, culture and masculinity (Pettersen, 2008: 53).

The complex associations between care and gender will be examined further a little later in this chapter. For the moment, however, let us consider how care has been conceived of in a

criminal justice context. The modern criminal justice system, Knight (2014) argues, was shaped throughout the Enlightenment period, and is:

[C]onstituted to respond to, control and punish criminal behaviour in an objective, rational and just manner. As far as possible the system aims to exclude emotion on the basis that emotions are likely to interfere with and distort the process of justice (Knight, 2014: 2).

In contrast to Knight's reading however, Karstedt (2011) argues that we have seen an end to the project of the 'rationalisation' and 'de-emotionalisation' of criminal justice since the 1990's. The 're-emotionalisation of law', she contends, is evident in:

[T]he return of shame into criminal justice procedures, a stronger focus on victims and emotional needs... and finally highly emotionalised public discourses on crime and justice in Western democracies (Karstedt, 2011: 3).

This process is viewed as part of a broader movement or an 'emotional turn' in postmodern societies, two facets of which are the 'informalization' and 'emancipation of emotions' (Karstedt, 2011: 4). Whilst Karstedt points to a re-emergence of emotion within justice, however, rarely is the focus on 'offender' emotions, unless, that is, they are framed as 'dynamic risk factors' (Day, 2009: 119). Rarer still are calls for the nurturance or *care* of 'offenders'. Rather, where emotions are more clearly present is in 'highly emotional and mostly punitive public and political discourse' (Karstedt, 2011: 3).

Despite a context which appears unfavourable to caring for people who have entered the criminal justice system, *care* is a feature that has been highlighted as important to desistance processes. For example, desisters and their probation officers considered the following as crucial characteristics to support desistance:

[H]aving someone that they could get on with and respect; who treated them as individuals; was *genuinely caring*; was clear about what was expected of them and trusted them when the occasion called for it (Leibrich, 1993, 1994, cited in McNeill and Weaver, 2010: 59, emphasis added).

This corresponds with a study of youth justice settings by Matthews and Hubbard (2007), who argued that a supportive relationship with a caring adult mitigates the effects of high-risk environments in three key ways. Firstly, it alters young people's self-perceptions, enabling them to believe that they are loved and valued and this gives them an increased sense of mastery. Secondly, it demonstrates to young people that positive relationships with adults are possible and models effective conflict resolution. Thirdly, it acts as a protective factor for children who have experienced major trauma or stress in their lives, social support outweighs the effects of past terror and encourages healthy ways of coping. As a result of these benefits, it is argued that 'providing youth with a trusting and safe relationship with a caring adult is a viable strategy for promoting resiliency' (Matthews and Hubbard, 2007: 113-114).

The notion of care, which expresses 'both emotion and understanding' (Pettersen, 2008: 55) was also important to the conference speaker with whom this section was opened, and indeed was a theme which persisted in presenting itself in this study:

The ones that are volunteering, you know that it's not just a job for them; they do actually genuinely care (Lin, Mentor and Previously a Mentee).

You've got to care about kids... It needs to be somebody who understands *and* cares where kids are going (Roy, Prison Peer Group Member).

He [peer mentor] genuinely cares, he's got a passion for doing it (Mark, Prison Peer Group Member).

They make you feel like you are their only priority and they're just here to help you and that makes you feel good... There is somebody out there who genuinely cares (Janet, Mentee).

*Genuine* care here is seen as an expression of altruism, which is based upon understanding. These speakers consider that peer mentors are motivated by an emotional awareness of what mentees are going through rather than by personal gain. Not only is genuine care valued in this context, but emotional connections are framed as legitimate mentoring tools:

I'd go in, I'd be crying my eyes out. She'd give me a few cuddles, I don't know if they should do that or not, but it was what I needed at the time and I was dead happy. I'd come out and feel a whole new lease of life (Georgie, Mentee).

Georgie feels ‘valued’ by this act of physical affection and gains ‘an increased sense of mastery’, a new lease of life. *Genuine* care is also deemed to be more spontaneous than ‘professional’ care:

I don’t know, are they sessions? I just go boxing; we go boxing, got it this afternoon, have a hug; ‘what’ve you been up to?’ I don’t know, I wouldn’t call it a session (laugh) (Will, Mentee).

Be yourself, vibrate at their level, not being an expert, allowing them, they’re OK to be in that place at that moment (Liz, Mentor).

Such descriptions of physical and felt human connections are the antithesis of structured risk assessments and of evidence-based bureaucracies, which ‘thrive on impersonality and detachment’ (Lippens, 2009: 84). Indeed both Will and Liz reject associations with formal intervention: ‘I wouldn’t call it a session/ not being an expert’, their understandings are informed as much by what mentoring *is not* as by what it is. Similarly Georgie appears to be aware that her mentor’s approach may violate professional norms: ‘I don’t know if they should do that or not’. Yet she nonetheless asserts her preference for a tactile, embodied approach. Peer mentoring for these speakers is a context in which they are positioned as tactile fellow humans with emotions, imperfections and wishes, rather than subjects to be governed. They are personified, not objectified.

Care is conceived of by these speakers as the opposite of judgement, of expectation and of obligatory intervention. It is described as fostering personal connection and building esteem. Carl Rogers (1980) theorised why this may be significant. For Rogers, such



‘congruence’ or genuineness is important for communicating acceptance of the person, complete with flaws. Reflecting upon his own ‘experiences in communication’, he contends that such acceptance is ‘growth promoting’ because it allows people to *be* rather than expecting them to become another’s ideal:

‘You seemed so genuinely concerned the day I fell apart, I was overwhelmed... I received the gesture as one of the first feelings of acceptance – of me, just the dumb way I am, prickles and all – that I had ever experienced’... One of the most satisfying feelings I know – and also one of the most growth promoting experiences for the other person – comes from my appreciating this individual in the same way that I appreciate a sunset. People are just as wonderful as sunsets if I can let them *be* (Rogers, 1980: 21-22).

This sense of not being judged, but being openly accepted also featured strongly in the experiences and perceptions of mentees; and indeed mentors:

With counselling it can sometimes feel like you are being judged, sometimes it can be a bit patronising, I’ve found. Whereas with peer mentoring, with someone from a similar background who has been there and done that and been on that level, they know it so they don’t patronise. They don’t try and tell you it’s something else when it’s not (Katy, Mentor).

Professionals are very quick to judge, but not have an understanding of why it is the way it is, and if you don’t have that understanding you can’t help nobody (Hope, Mentor).

I've been amazed that nobody has judged me, no one... Here's a person I've never met before, knows what's happened, knows what I've done, but understands why I did what I did and is telling me: 'you're not a bad person, that actually you're quite nice and what's happened has happened and now it's time to go forward' (Gina, Mentee).

I've got mental health problems and a lot of people don't understand and they judge you straight away, but it [mentoring] was such a nice relaxed atmosphere and there was no pressure. As well, it was all go along with my pace, it was very encouraging as well (Lin, Mentor and Previously a Mentee).

A non-judgemental approach helps these mentees to re-frame their view of themselves. They are not a diagnosis, or a bad person, but 'nice' and *normal* or on the same 'level'. However these expressions also serve as a reminder that most criminal rehabilitation work takes place within a system of judgement. Respondents imagine professional caring as distinct from volunteer caring, partly because the latter is deemed to be free of this system of judgement. Probation work and associated health improvement work is perceived through an 'us and them' divide: '*they* judge you', and through feelings of belittlement, anxiety and pressure. Peers, however, are claimed to provide a degree of separation from this; to be free of such judgements because they too have experienced them. It is important to note here, of course, that these expectations do not always concur with the reality. Indeed there are many examples of professional forms of caring within criminal justice settings. Knight (2014: 66) for example, drawing on the work of Rutherford (1993) argues that many practitioners operate under a 'caring credo'; this is an attitude toward service users based upon liberal and humanitarian values:

[T]he caring credo has traditionally been exercised through the philosophical approach of ‘advise, assist and befriend... [Which] continues to be a significant influence in motivating current recruits to the service’ (Knight, 2014: 71)

Correspondingly there were fears that peers may not always have caring qualities:

We might get the wrong people. They should be vetted to see how people get on with other people. An interview is never enough for me, some people probably think they’re better than they actually are, so experience is more important for me... be selective in people (John, Mentor).

Being professional does not by default render you uncaring, just as being a peer does not automatically render you caring. Nonetheless there is a powerful belief among these speakers that judgement and understanding are incompatible. This is something that Martin Buber (1985) argued in terms of dialogue:

“[D]ialogue,” in which I open myself to the otherness of the person I meet, and “monologue,” in which, even when I converse with her at length, I allow her to exist only as a content of my experience. Wherever one lets the other exist only as part of oneself, “dialogue becomes a fiction, the mysterious intercourse between two human worlds only a game, and in the rejection of the real life confronting him the essence of all reality begins to disintegrate” (Buber 1985: 24 cited in Friedman, 2005: 30).

For Buber, true dialogue and true understanding require openness to the fullness of the other's experience. This openness may be stifled by a system characterised by pre-judgement, for example a criminal justice system which has established scientific answers to individual experiences. In this context *the offender* is less a speaker to be open to and more a *collection of risks* to be assessed, processed and managed. Katy, a mentor who had previously been mentored at the women's charity where she now works, illustrates this difference neatly. Following a conviction for selling Cannabis, Katy was mentored by Project 'Facilitate'. She was then invited to train as a mentor. During this time she was offered an opportunity to sell drugs again by some of her old connections. As she was on the local housing waiting list she was also offered – by coincidence – the very property she had previously been selling drugs from as a possible tenancy. She refused both offers and told her mentoring supervisor about them. She explained to me, however, that she did not feel she could discuss the offers as easily with her probation officer for fear of risk-averse consequences:

I told my [mentoring] supervisor about the offer [of accommodation] because it was the house it [my previous offending] was happening in... She'll have probably put it in my file and it's there, but with probation they tend to overreact on it, and my supervision probably would have got extended, and they probably would have called me in on a more frequent basis, and panicked about it, whereas [mentoring supervisor] trusted where I was at and the fact I was honest with her stood for quite a lot (Katy, Mentor).

Katy assumes that her words will be interpreted by her probation officer in terms of a judgement of risk and that her experience will then only 'exist' in these terms. The

perceived responsibility of offender management services to respond to people as risks, therefore, restricts open dialogue. In contrast, peer mentoring is perceived to allow a more open dialogue. Peers separate themselves from this system of expertise, identifying themselves instead with offending and desisting experiences *and* attending to the experience of the speaker before them. They have the freedom to listen and to engage in dialogue, to open themselves and their practices to the ‘otherness’ of the person they meet. This makes space for a new reality, a reality wherein the mentee’s voice is central; their experience and judgements afforded equal ground. The ‘offender’ becomes co-author; changer rather than a problem to be changed. In Freire’s terms, such dialogue enables people ‘to come to feel like masters of their thinking and views of the world explicitly or implicitly manifest in their own suggestions and those of their comrades’ (Freire, 1970: 105). Indeed, this appears to have happened within this pedagogical relationship. It enables mentors and mentees to feel a sense of agency in their own lives. Overall, mentoring emerges here as a caring version of dialogue where issues of inter-personal power imbalance are not so evident.

Caring and a non-judgemental disposition are seen as important qualities for a mentor to have. They foster positive human connections and potentially enable new personal perceptions, perhaps even personal ‘growth’. However Helen Colley warns against such uncritical idealism with regard to care, suggesting that expectations of care in mentoring contexts may be more limiting than they initially appear:

[W]here commitment to the client is made central to the professional role, the worker sells her personality as an integral part of her own labour power. It takes the form of emotional labour, and this emotion work brings its own costs, and does so

disproportionately for women than for men, given women's lower social status (Colley, 2001: 188).

A similar analysis is offered by Arlie Hochschild, who argues that 'the altruist is more susceptible to being used – not because her sense of self is weaker but because her "true self" is bonded more securely to the group and its welfare' (Hochschild, 2003: 196). A limit of such idealised, selfless care, Colley contends, is that helpers become 'trapped inside a concept of nurturance which held them responsible for the freeing of each... individual, and therefore for the management of an idealist dream, an impossible fiction' (Colley, 2001: 188-189). For Colley, to expect mentors *to care* is not simply to expect a harmless giving of one to another, but to expect emotional toil; a toil that is likely to demand more of female mentors than male in a society which has positioned women as: 'more caring in nature, primarily because of their 'natural' child-bearing and child-rearing roles' (Best, 2005: 197). Furthermore, this toil may feel like a failure if care in and of itself does not work its desired magic.

There is also an economic factor to consider here. The 'caring' of volunteer peer mentors is not just valued by respondents, but is framed as the direct antithesis of the often directive, corrective work engaged in by *paid* employees. James, for example, described how he experienced his prison peer group as a caring space, but one which differed from the 'caring' professions he had previously experienced:

I spoke, tears, in [peer] group. I was confident, comfortable... Social worker, foster carer, they're all seeing pounds. I'm not sure I'll ever see from their point of view.

All about money, not care and love, the child's needs (James, Prison Peer Group Member).

An interesting underlying thread here is that many respondents saw being paid as antithetical to caring: 'it's not just a job for them; they do actually genuinely care' (Lin) / 'they're all seeing pounds... not care and love' (James). This narrative appears to indicate a problematic binary between care and economic value. One available interpretation of this separation is that respondents have accepted the pervasive anti-feminist discourse, which devalues emotional labour. Gilligan (2011), for example, argued:

Care is a *feminine ethic*, not a universal one. Caring is what good women do, and the people who care are doing women's work. They are devoted to others, responsive to their needs, attentive to their voices. They are *selfless* (Gilligan, 2011: 19).

The same expectation appears to be placed on peer mentors. To be 'genuine' or 'devoted' implies you must also be *selfless* in professional or monetary terms. The speakers who make the discursive separation between care and monetary reward appear to have no conscious intention to depreciate mentors, or to expect them to do emotional work without reward. Rather, they appear to make the separation in recognition of the enormity of giving emotional labour for free. It is not just admirable on the part of mentors, but it dignifies mentees; these are 'genuine' relationships because they take place despite the absence of financial reward. Nonetheless, there is an intrinsic danger that care remains separated from economic value in this tactic, that selfless care is no longer just what 'good women do', but what good mentors do. Colley (2002) argues that this scenario is ultimately disempowering

for mentors. She identifies a feminine, self-sacrificial construct of care in the field of youth mentoring and argues that the covert outcome of such demands might be:

[T]he intensified productivity, worsened working conditions and post-Fordist super-exploitation of public service workers, internalised and self-imposed through dedication to an idealised image of client care (Colley, 2002: 11).

In this light, volunteer peer mentoring is not just a way for ex-offenders to offer to others what they saw as lacking in their own ‘professional’ forms of rehabilitation, or a re-focus on the importance of offender emotions and loving connections, but it is part of a broader context, which subtly undermines the monetary value of care and limits mentors to roles where they are expected to labour (emotionally) intensively for little or no financial reward.

There were, however, some seeds of resistance to this potentially exploitative situation. One volunteer training session, for example, included the following exchange:

Trainee: Could you get paid for this work?

Trainer: We could – it is our aspiration. (Project ‘Peer’ Mentor Training).

Moreover the coordinator of another project explained:

Our women [mentors] are paid on a sessional basis and paid well. Young people should be valued for the contribution they make... You don’t need to go to



university, you need to recognise what's in you. Nobody tells you this, how to find your power (Mentoring Coordinator).

There is some recognition from those involved in this work, therefore, that emotional labour *should* be valued and not doing so represents a restriction of power. However the very use of the imperative 'should', along with the fact that remuneration is an 'aspiration' rather than an achievement in one setting, indicate that this goal has not yet been reached.

### 7.2.2 Core Condition 2: Listening

One of the clearest themes emerging from the interviews in this study, indeed the most frequently voiced condition of peer mentoring was that of *listening*. The importance of listening in criminal justice settings is not in itself a new finding. Researching female lawbreakers for example, Anne Worrall found that "“helpfulness” was defined by the women in two ways: first, material help, and second, *non-intrusive listening* and advice-giving' (Worrall, 1990: 157 emphasis added). In the context of probation, Trish McCulloch found that 'Almost all of the participants identified "being listened to" as one of the most useful methods in addressing probationers' social problems' (McCulloch, 2005: 18). Finally, Monica Barry noted that the vast majority of her respondents 'suggested that the best approach was for supervising officers to talk and listen to their clients about the problems, fears and consequences of offending' (Barry, 2007: 416). Listening is deemed to be a useful tool, not least because:

Offenders themselves tend to have a good understanding of what they want from practitioners and politicians to help them reintegrate into their communities... this

article demonstrates the need to listen much more to the needs and wishes of offenders (Barry, 2007: 409).

The benefits of listening, Barry argues, include: personal development, learning, and meaningful interaction (2007: 416). Being heard becomes a vehicle for self-development and shared meaning-making, it is important for self-growth. Moreover, it may be vital for the development of knowledge:

If we are to have an informed, effective strategy and approach to deal with the problems of crime – politicians, policy makers and criminologists must *relate, listen to* and *understand* those who are being processed by the ever widening and more punitive criminal justice system (Burke, 2007: 317, emphasis added).

This was an argument echoed by coordinators and volunteers in this study. They also suggest that professional practitioners have something to gain from listening. Lol, for example, works for a charity which supports care leavers (adults who have spent some of their childhood in local authority care). He highlights that his motivation to become involved with mentoring was to get a ‘user perspective’ heard by practitioners:

[They] don’t take into account a care experience, but... twenty five per cent plus in the prison system can say ‘yes I was in care’... It’s fundamental to a person’s progress, throughout the rest of their life, to engage with some of those issues that have led to them feeling so fragile, so alienated, so detached from everything that can possibly support them... So this seminar [organised by Lol for criminal justice agency partners] is about trying to say these things to them, but trying to make sure

we use the idea of mentoring, we use the idea of user perspective as a way to have a big impact (Lol, Mentoring Coordinator).

Steve, a peer mentor was similarly motivated to get a voice of experience heard:

They're [probation staff] listening a lot more to people and I'm not bigging myself up about that, but I think they're listening a lot more to people like myself and [coordinator names]. And we're saying: 'Listen, it's doing no good! What good is it doing, him coming in here for half an hour chat with you and then he goes? Where's the support, what's that doing? It's doing nothing!' Do you know what I mean? 'You're talking about motivational techniques and they're not interested, they're just going through the rhythms' (Steve, Mentor).

Both Lol and Steve imply that by *doing to people* rather than *listening to people*, probation officers and associated professionals miss highly relevant parts of a person's experience and in fact create inauthentic transactions. The 'receivers' of these services do not engage fully, but rather they go through the expected 'rhythms', play the game, which is being shaped by the interveners world view.

Listening is also deemed to be as important within the mentoring relationship:

Listening, good communication skills, the ability to empathise with people is key... I have met mentors that just do a lot of the talking, and forget they're actually there to listen at the same time, so I think listening is equally as important as being able to offer, actually listening is offering (Phil, Mentor).

Brad: A few of the peer mentors don't come from offending or drug using backgrounds, just people that are willing to have listening ear, and be understanding.

Interviewer: Is listening a big part of your role?

Brad: Listening is a massive part, yea. I was sat in this very room last Thursday, and a client was in for hour and half, I hardly spoke, he just spoke about problems at home, problems with his mum, his problems not having a job, all that. Just listening, for him it's somebody that will listen to his problems... backing him up what he's saying, you know? (Brad, Mentor).

For Lol and Steve, there is a value in practitioners listening to the experiences of those who have been through the system. For Phil and Brad, however, experience only takes you so far. Once the face-to-face work of mentoring is underway, it is listening – allowing space for the mentee to make their own sense of things – which is deemed to be more important. Listening in their eyes is *doing* something; it is a means and an end.

When I initially identified the theme of 'listening' within this study it seemed such a blindingly obvious finding that I feared it hardly warranted discussion. As a youth justice social worker, I had understood *listening* to be a core requirement of the work. I therefore assumed that it would be of central importance to most criminal justice interventions, including peer mentoring. What I have since learned from respondents to this study, and indeed from critical re-assessment of some of my own past practice, is that *listening to people* is often not constant in criminal justice practice and all too often is omitted completely: 'listening does not feature as a promising factor in any of the "What Works" literature, nor is it offered as a guiding principle in the National Standards' (Barry, 2007:

419). Whilst it may appear to be a tool with obvious importance therefore, its value may currently be going unrecognised:

The provision of advice and guidance is now well recognized as a useful method in helping probationers to resolve a range of problems (McIvor and Barry, 1998; Rex 1998) though the value of talking and, more significantly, listening to probationers is less well documented (McCulloch, 2005: 15).

What peer mentoring may be quietly doing in practical terms then, is asserting the importance of listening to people who are ‘subject to state sanctions’, something Burke argues that ‘insufficient attention’ has been paid to (Burke, 2007: 316). Not only do these narratives highlight that listening is important, however, but also illustrate why:

I’d say the main [skill] was being able to listen, because nine times out of ten a lot of people who come to probation have a lot of problems that they need to get off their chest. I do feel comfortable telling them [mentors] most family problems, or problems that I have with myself and stuff like that, cos like I said, they don’t criticise you, they listen. They give you good information back (Paul, Mentee).

Georgie, who was mentored by a volunteer following her release from prison, made a similar claim:

She was very good at listening... I just needed emotional help and I didn’t know where to get it... When you can’t deal with your emotions, or things that are going on, you don’t realise that talking to someone can help you (Georgie, Mentee).

And finally, Gina, who used a peer mentoring service when she committed an offence which caused her to lose her career, prioritised the importance of peers who listen. She also thought it important that mentors ‘reiterate your thoughts back so that you know they have listened’. Indeed she regarded this feature more important than a shared history:

It was actually quite nice to be with people who knew what you’d been through... but not necessarily important, as long as they’re a good listener and understand the system and understand you (Gina, Mentee).

Listening then, is an action, an intervention in itself. It enables people to unburden themselves of problems, to begin to see themselves as capable of self-direction when conditions feel overwhelming and to feel heard. The unburdening of problems is a sub-theme that warrants further explanation here, before the third core condition of this work is outlined.

#### *7.2.2.1 Listening as Unburdening Problems*

The following poem is composed as an alternative way of presenting a selection of data. Poetry can be useful as a tool of data representation as it both engages readers and allows an exploration of the lived experience of the research subject (Furman, Lietz and Langer, 2006). Each of the fourteen lines here is taken from a different respondent interview. It is presented in this way to dignify the separate and individual, but connected experiences of suffering that surfaced repeatedly in interviews. Each statement marks an unburdening of grief:

“Care home, YOI [Young Offender Institution], I constantly felt discarded. Nobody cared at all now. I was discarded.”

*“I was in pain, I had to find some help. All the time I’m feeling down.”*

“It hurts like a bastard, rips my heart out that I can’t see my children.”

*“In care, abusive alcoholic family... I brought younger brothers up, got adopted and not allowed to see them... I lost five of my family in five years.”*

“I used to self-harm, no-one was arsed about blood trails in my bedroom... I’ve been hit, abused, family problems, relationship problems.”

*“I felt that really I wasn’t worthy of anything, emotionally at rock bottom.”*

“I was at my lowest point, living in a hostel, I had absolutely nothing.”

*“I got attacked so I just never went back.”*

“There’s a lot of damp, no heating for three days... I feel like hiding.”

*“I lost my granddad, then my Nan... my mum had had a nervous breakdown and she’d tried to top herself... my ex [partner] raped my mum.”*

“Living in a concrete coffin, the graveyard where my friends are buried.”

*“I put my own safety at risk; I had my face cut open.”*

“I feel so lonely, I feel so useless when I say that. Your life is that bad, you just want to forget... You need your drugs, you’re ratting, white, feel awful, sneezing, terrible, it’s awful.”

*“Domestic violence, self-harming, mental health issues, so much stuff that all goes together.”*

This stylised presentation of related interview extracts, together with a wider repeated message in the research that it was useful to talk through problems, very much reframes the experience of these ‘offenders’. As a listener to these narratives I was reminded that *being*

*an offender* is often accompanied by *suffering*. This is not of course a new finding in itself. Criminologists have consistently highlighted experiences of abuse, bereavement, family breakdown, poverty, addiction and poor mental health among offending populations. In Scotland, the entire Children's Justice System is designed around the 'links between deeds and needs', as crime is understood to be 'symptomatic of a broad spectrum of vulnerability' (McAra and McVie, 2010). What is new here however is that respondents locate their suffering within a broader context of 'recovery':

Peer mentoring to me is helping people through recovery basically, helping them to sort out and sort of like be enabled to take on everyday life... It's actually helped me through my recovery as a concerned other, which has then helped me to help my children, so I think that's the biggest thing really (Paula, Mentor).

Talking... feel better, (Michael, Prison Peer Group Member).

I have got problems but I really have overcome a lot since I've had a mentor... when you've lived the sort of life I have you need somebody to drill things into you or you're not going to be doing it, you need that shove to an extent, a bit of hand holding (Fiona, Mentee).

It helps you open up and it helps you be honest with yourself, because you have a certain thought pattern, and it helps break that, it's like retraining your brain in a way and facing your fears (Lin, Mentor and Previously a Mentee).



Show vulnerability, show emotion. Not: 'I'm a man, don't cry', I cry. I get called sissy but its therapeutic (Mark, Prison Peer Group Member).

The mentors and mentees speaking here have very different histories, including personal drug or alcohol addiction, family members with addictions or experiences of abuse, bullying and committing violent offences. Yet despite their diverse experiences, the intertextual presentation of their descriptions of *recovery* illustrates a shared sense that personal improvement is required. Recovery here is associated with not only feeling better and feeling cared for, but also with feeling inadequate; people consider that they need re-drilling, retraining and healing. These are the very corrective processes that people are resistant to from professionals (chapter five), yet they appear to experience them positively from their peers.

Much like the issue of 'care', however, the notion of mentoring as 'recovery' is problematic. Georgie, for example, found her mentoring experience valuable, particularly in terms of helping her to settle into life away from her established peer group when she was released from prison. As the relationship progressed, however, she felt it was lacking in terms of helping her to fully recover from her alcohol addiction:

Georgie: I feel it's more deeper, my stuff now...

Interviewer: OK, so she [the mentor] was able to take you so far, introduce to process of talking and healing...?

Georgie: Yes, [but] I think I need some Counseling or something... If AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] would have been introduced to me two years ago I'd be straight now (Georgie, Mentee).

This point does not discount the contribution of peer mentoring in highlighting the importance of listening approaches, but it recognises that these methods are not a panacea; they will not provide the ‘answer’ for everyone. Taken together, what the above narratives very clearly do however, is reposition ‘offenders’ and desisters. Rather than flawed individuals who must make sweeping life changes, they become people experiencing significant difficulty who can benefit from gentle support. Indeed the changes expected in these settings are often deliberately small, rather than comprehensive, as indicated by the third and final core condition of peer mentoring: encouraging small steps.

### *7.2.3 Core Condition 3: Encouraging Small Steps*

In addition to ‘Caring’ and ‘Listening’, a third important condition that mentors and mentees repeatedly referred to was the encouragement of ‘Small Steps’ toward change. This was initially denoted by Gina (Mentee) when she described her own mentoring as ‘just gentle... it plants the seed and it grows’. Such gentle, small steps were also seen as important by mentors:

I think that setting little goals is what gets people going (John, Mentor).

They’ve got their short term goals, we do things like star [planning] chart, different goals where you can monitor... see how far they are in two weeks, a month’s time.

We can do long term/ short term goals on that (Paula, Mentor).

It’s good to have them [personal employment] goals but it’s not always as rosy as that picture being painted. So if you want to do it, you need short term goals in order to achieve that long term goal (Phil, Mentor).

The significance of liminal goals is that they seem achievable and they therefore motivate people. This motivation is sustained because people begin to see the progress they are making. Whilst they can be overlooked within bigger bureaucratic agendas, which demand tangible ‘results’ such as ‘real reductions in reoffending’ (MoJ, 2013), peer mentors stress the importance of these smaller changes:

To get them out of their little ways, you know? I’ve been like incarcerated most of my life; from the armed forces and then all the way up to prison. It’s like the first time I’ve been in the real world and it is difficult. But because of everything I’ve been through and done and found out, and the things that have blocked me, I’ve found ways round. I may have to take a bit longer, but I’ve done it and it just kind of gives them a bit of hope for the future because I was the same (Cat, Mentor).

Cat highlights how change, particularly from entrenched patterns of criminality or incarceration can take time, yet time is a resource which big systems no longer have. Rather ‘the contacts between professional support workers and their clients are likely to be brief and episodic’ (Brown and Ross, 2010: 32). However this *time* also needs to be marked with indications of success if motivation is to be maintained:

I’m starting to get into the routine now of setting my mini goals to get the eventual thing that I want. Nine times out of ten I was just trying to get the end thing and I was just fucking myself up – sorry for swearing – messing myself up... There’s the odd time where you have a little fall, but it doesn’t hit you as hard as if you’re about to achieve the main goal that you wanted and then you mess up, you know what I mean? (Paul, Mentee)

She [mentor]... used to say: 'Right, one thing at a time, let's go and deal with this'. I come back and I'll go: '[mentor name] I've had a letter back!' It'd only be one step closer but just made me feel better cos I'd got somewhere with at least something... If you're feeling vulnerable, it takes a little something to knock you over edge, commit crime, take drugs, or treat somebody how you shouldn't be treating them, and I think mentoring just takes that edge off (Georgie, Mentee).

For Paul and Georgie, taking small steps provides an opportunity to *demonstrate* success, however small. When success can be witnessed, it can be *felt* by mentees, it becomes a reality. In very practical terms, mentees are conditioned to have hope. Small goals constitute manageable possibilities. The achievement of these goals confirms ability and therefore instils hope. This is a feature, which was posited by McNeill and Weaver:

[H]ope and hopefulness are important factors, ... Building motivation and sense of agency is likely to involve helping the individual to recognise the possibilities of a self hood and lifestyle that is more desirable than what s/he currently has; that possibility needs to be meaningful and desirable for the individual. The worker needs to work with him or her towards its formulation and realisation and to persist and maintain hope through lapses and relapses (McNeill and Weaver, 2010: 8).

Not only do the speakers here describe step by step motivation, which they find manageable and meaningful to them, but importantly they also begin to acknowledge that this road will not always be smooth; that lapses and relapses are a likely and acceptable feature. Indeed both mentees and mentors explicitly described the importance of not over-reacting to slip ups. Paul and Don for example, are mentees using a peer mentoring service

attached to a Probation Service. Both regard that their mentors recognise and tolerate lapses:

It's [change] not going to happen in a day is it? Rome wasn't built in a day. It's going to take time, there is bound to be them slip ups. But most of the time they just seem to be, like, understanding about it (Paul, Mentee).

If I have scored [taken drugs] they say 'don't worry, what set it off?' (Don, Mentee).

Mentors themselves confirm that they strive for such tolerance in their work. Julie, for example, explains:

I failed loads of times in my life. I'd say I've failed but then I've got up... People won't go straight just like that, they'll have their up and downs, but I think having a mentor will support them and show them that you're not giving up on them. And even if they do go off the rails a bit, but showing that you're not giving up on them, then sometimes they'll turn that around and think: 'well I won't do that because she's still there for me' (Julie, Mentor).

Like Julie, Steve rationalises the need to persist with hope, even when others are tiring of lapses. Here he describes a discussion with Probation and Housing staff, wherein he advocates for a mentee who has had numerous relapses during his efforts to lead a drug and crime free life:

On the morning meeting [colleagues said]: ‘We don’t agree, he’s had that many chances’ but in my mind I’m saying: I had them same chances and I kept messing up over and over...

[They say]: ‘We’ve put everything in place for him over and over’,

And I’ve carried on: ‘I’ve just got that niggling feeling that just a little move like that, to a different hostel, more supportive accommodation, that could be the making of him’ (Steve, Mentor).

For the mentees speaking here, their lapses are normalised, rather than pathologised. This works with, not against a ‘zig-zag’ desistance process, ‘whereby – as with addictions – individuals tend to desist gradually rather than suddenly’ (Farrall, 2013: 21). It also creates a sense for mentees that their efforts are not futile, that their attempts to change are still on track. For the mentors, tolerance of mistakes is clearly an intentional strategy, based upon the belief that people will have ‘ups and downs’ but with consistent belief and support, or ‘not giving up’, there is always the hope of success. Uniquely, the driver for Julie and Steve’s perspectives comes not from their knowledge of desistance research, but from their own experiences of change. They both describe ‘failing’ or ‘messing up’ yet both managed to desist in the end. They have an existential confidence in the possibility of change, despite repeated lapses. Moreover both see persistent support as the thing which will eventually conquer these ‘slip ups’. This is theoretically very different to actuarial criminal justice, which regards further offending, or lapses, as risk factors or warning signs to be recorded and addressed. This element of peer mentoring creates one of the many tensions between the managerial aims of criminal justice and alternative forms of knowledge. It will be interesting to see, as time progresses, whether such tensions result in limits upon mentoring or challenges to the broader technocratic system.

### 7.3 Conclusion

This chapter argues that despite diverse client groups, settings and approaches, a number of core values or conditions are advocated within the work of peer mentoring. Respondents repeatedly highlight the importance of ‘individualised’ or mentee-centred practice, along with three core conditions: *caring*; *listening*; and *encouraging small steps*. These conditions are offered as antidotes to what can often be experienced as disconnected, unhearing and technocratic criminal justice practices, as highlighted here and in chapter five. Peer mentoring, in contrast, is claimed to be a space to release suffering, to unburden the self of grief and to become capable of new self-direction. It is seen as a safe space to do this given that mentors ‘genuinely care’ and are tolerant of slip-ups. The chapter therefore illuminates the interpersonal elements of mentoring, which are claimed to promote personal growth and change. Despite these ideals, however, the chapter also introduces a number of core tensions. Firstly, whilst individualised practice is prized, it has its roots in the approaches of motivational interviewing and person-centred counselling, practices which are invariably caught up in diagnostic power relations. Indeed motivational interviewing in particular is a technique that has become institutionalised within probation settings. There is therefore a strain between diagnosis, directive assistance and a non-directive ethos. Secondly, whilst ‘genuine’ care is claimed to foster personal connections and build a sense of self-worth, there is also a risk that this discourse burdens peer mentors with an expectation of emotional toil for little or no financial reward. Finally, whilst mentors and mentees highlight the importance of listening and encouraging small steps, it is unclear how such unquantifiable approaches will fare within an increasingly results driven technocratic justice system.

These tensions are crucial to an understanding of peer mentoring in criminal justice settings. Indeed, what links all three data chapters to this point are strains between established rehabilitation practices and new ways of working. Chapter five highlighted how an ex-offender standpoint can offer mentors a level of perceived authenticity, promote more collaborative working relationships and humanise people. However this standpoint relies upon the exclusion of professionals and their knowledge and is often undermined by social stigma and a sense of ‘inauthenticity’ given that individual experiences of crime are so personal and diverse. Mentoring itself also maintains some aspects of hierarchy through its employment of role models. Chapter six advanced the argument that mentoring can increase a sense of agency, but in doing so highlighted the importance of factors external to the individual. A sense of self direction is often achieved through environmental factors, which enable people to practice a new identity, feel a sense of belonging within the community and establish new routines. It is often supported by the reflections of others, in this case peer mentors, who offer recognition of these changes and cement new self-perceptions. Finally, chapter seven has highlighted the tensions which emerge when mentors attempt to replace diagnostic, technical approaches with emotional, caring and tolerant approaches; in doing so they often retain some of the features of the existing approaches and risk undermining their own practices as an inexpensive add-on to the dominant technocratic system. The following two chapters will offer further evidence of such struggles. Chapter eight will explore mentoring as a site of ‘change’, including the manifold ways in which this is understood, before chapter nine conceives of the tensions within mentoring as practices of ‘power’.



## Chapter Eight

### **‘It’s a tug of war between the person I used to be and the person I want to be’: The terror, complexity and limits of *change***

This chapter will focus closely upon how change is made sense of within mentoring settings. The existing literature construes change largely in terms of reducing reoffending, delinquency or drug use (The Social Innovation Partnership, 2012; Frontier Economics, 2009; Clayton, 2009; Tolan et al., 2008; Jolliffe and Farrington, 2007). Transformations are, therefore, imagined in individual terms and common measures used tend to be instrumental, focusing upon whether mentoring has improved the individual in ways which can be quantified. Studies of desistance have begun to challenge this narrow focus, pointing additionally to structures which require improvement (Farrall et al., 2011; McNeill, 2012). This chapter will add to existing knowledge by exploring *how* individual behaviour change happens in these relationships. In doing so it builds upon earlier theorising that personal transformation does not occur spontaneously, but can be externally inspired (Girard, 1962) and that peer associates are often required to support change (Freire, 1970; Ferguson, 1996). However, the chapter also suggests that personal change in rehabilitation settings is more problematic than it may appear as people point to vivid fears, difficulties and conflicts surrounding both new ways of being and also the very contexts and personnel tasked with assisting these. Narratives also outline how the project of peer mentoring has a broader focus than individual transformation, as respondents point to the need for renewed services and attitudes in order for desistance to appear as a realistic goal.

The chapter will begin by looking at how people become ‘ready’ to change, before examining how mentoring aims to shift individual perceptions from the past to the future. It will then explore how personal change can often be a terrifying and difficult process, before looking at claims that peer mentoring can offer a unique antidote to this terror. Finally the chapter will outline how mentors aim to make changes to the systems and settings they work within; in doing so they often appear to challenge some of the dominant negative discourses, which frame people with convictions.

### **8.1 Getting ‘ready’ to change**

This section will explore the interesting tensions that respondents highlight between external inspiration and individual ‘readiness’ to change. Chapter five highlighted how one of the perceived strengths of mentors with shared past experiences is that they can inspire their peers to change. This perception constructs personal change as a mediated process. In Girardian terms: ‘The mimetic agent is moved by a passionate admiration of the other, who plays the role of a mediator’ (Tomelleri, 2005: 245). If change is a process, this conception suggests that the process begins with an Other: ‘I wanted to feel the way they did, they weren’t beaming out happiness, but they weren’t sad, they was that content in their life they were offering to other people, to help them and I wanted to be able to do that’ (Georgie, Mentee). However, the origins of personal change remains one of the unresolved problems within criminology. Giordano and colleagues (2002), for example, theorise that there are ‘four types of intimately related cognitive transformations’ (Giordano, Cernkovich and Rudolph, 2002: 1000), which accompany desistance from crime. The first of these is not an external mediator, but ‘a shift in the actor’s basic openness to change’ (Giordano et al., 2002: 1000). The importance of this openness, they indicate, ‘has been discussed extensively in various treatment literatures, especially those

dealing with addictions (see, e.g., Boyle, Polinsky, and Hser 2000; De Leon et al. 1994; Miller 1985)' (Giordano et al., 2002: 1000). Secondly, they develop the notion of 'hooks for change', these are external opportunities to which a person is exposed (for example, a job or marriage), arguing that 'while a general openness to change seems necessary; by itself it is often insufficient' (Giordano et al., 2002: 1000). Whilst, like Girard (1962), they acknowledge the power of the social environment, therefore, their chronological concept of change begins with the will of the individual agent. This suggests that there is a process that happens to an individual mentee before the 'inspirational' mentor can even come to play a role. In contrast, Maguire and Raynor (2006) outline a less sequential concept of change, arguing: 'Individuals differ greatly in their readiness to contemplate and begin the process of change' and that 'readiness can be affected by a wide range of factors, including age, major life events or "transitions", physical and social circumstances and social bonds' (Maguire and Raynor, 2006: 25). Moreover, they point out that 'individuals do not move through their cycle of change in a regular, predictable fashion, nor is the process irreversible' (Maguire and Raynor, 2006: 25). Where their account meets with that of Giordano et al., is an assumption that 'a frame of mind receptive to narratives of change' (Maguire and Raynor, 2006: 25) is a necessary condition for gathering the will to alter one's life. These commentators agree that it is the agent (in this case the mentee), not a mediating other (in this case the mentor), who initiates the process of change. Worrall and Gelsthorpe (2009) however, reflecting on Eaton's (1993) work with women leaving custody, suggest that whilst respondents had all made a conscious decision to re-direct their lives 'such motivation was not something that just happened' (Worrall and Gelsthorpe, 2009: 337). They submit that 'In order to make that decision, [women] had to feel confident that change was possible. And to feel confident, they had to achieve recognition – both self-recognition and recognition from others' (Worrall and Gelsthorpe,

2009: 337). The importance of such recognition from others has been confirmed by respondents in this study (chapter six). In terms of change, however, Worrall and Gelsthorpe (2009) also suggest that a person's *will* to change may actually be nurtured externally.

These debates have implications for the argument that peer mentors can inspire change. Indeed, we can trace similar debates within respondent narratives. Whilst mentors and mentees often spoke of 'inspirational' role models motivating personal change (chapter five), there was also a strong parallel and potentially conflicting view that mentees need to be independently ready to change in order to benefit from this approach. Phil, for example, is an ex-prisoner who is now employed as a young people's mentor in the community. He also volunteers to mentor adults in prison. Phil was mentored himself by prison education staff and enthusiastically advocates the importance of setting an inspirational example. Nonetheless, he is also keen to articulate the role of individual will: 'I do believe it's down primarily to individual agency, plays a big part, you've got to want to do it, first and foremost where it starts from I wanted to be crime free' (Phil, Mentor). Whilst Phil acknowledges the power of other parties in supporting change, he conceives that the process begins with the will of the mentee and therefore is not instigated by a role model. There is the possibility of course that such phraseology is formulaic; the result of messages that mentors have heard during training sessions. Three of the project coordinators, for example, reinforced the notion of being 'ready to change' and advocated prioritising services for those who are 'at this stage', fearing that accepting referrals for people who are not 'ready' to change can be detrimental to both the mentee's impression of mentoring and demotivating for volunteers. However, this belief in a resting 'readiness' in mentees was just as dominant among mentees:

They've got to want to do it, no point you being given a mentor if you don't want the help, just flying in the wind (Fiona, Mentee).

If you don't want to help yourself no-one can help you can they? It's nice to have that kick up the backside, but if you're not going to do it yourself man you're not going to do it are ya? (Paul, Mentee).

You can draw a horse to water but can't make it drink, if you don't want to stay out of jail yourself, mentors, PO [probation officer], no-one can help you, but they are important, they are good (Will, Mentee).

If someone is adamant 'I am not going to change, you are not going to do anything to change me', then you're not going to change them are you? (Ben, Mentee).

For both mentors and mentees it seems important that people feel they own this decision, this desire to change; it cannot belong to the intervener or inspirer on their behalf. However there is a problem here, which indicates another tension inherent in this work. If people must be 'ready' independently of mentoring, why have inspirational models at all? Indeed how can people be inspired to change by an external party if the desire to change must come from within? For Girard (1977), this is not an insurmountable conflict. He reasons that whilst our desires are inspired by what we see in others, we simultaneously reject this image of ourselves as imitators because we fear our lack of originality (Girard, 1977: 155). One reading of the tension voiced in mentoring settings then, is that mentees (who are deemed to be changing) and their mentors (who are deemed to have changed) maintain the concept of individually owned desire, in each of their narratives, because it is such a

dominant cultural discourse: ‘resisting social power is the stuff Western narratives are made of from history to television dramas’ (Mageo, 2002: 93). It is how we believe ourselves as social beings to be, even whilst we acknowledge that inspiration can play a part. Mentees may, therefore, find inspiration to change by looking at their mentors, but to ensure they do not relinquish their own role in the change process, they insist they were ‘ready’ all along. However, an application of Girard’s theory of mimesis (1962) does not reduce mentees to docile followers. For Girard, all learning involves the imitation of desire. This process requires not only people to learn from, but also people who are willing to learn. Whilst motivation or readiness to change may not have taken full shape in mentees prior to mentoring, they are required to engage with the role models on offer. We can develop this reading further by listening to the words of respondents themselves. Will, a mentee, for example, argues: ‘if you don’t want to stay out of jail yourself, mentors, probation officers, no-one can help you’; whilst dually acknowledging: ‘but they are important’. In this statement Will describes the complexity and interconnectedness of the model–protégé exchange. In these terms mentees are not singularly inspired by an external model whilst convincing themselves that they had some individuality in that choice, nor are models irrelevant, but rather the self *and* the other play a role. This reading is closer to the conception of motivation offered by Shapland and Bottoms (2011: 272), who agree ‘that the first stage in desistance is a wish to try and change one’s life’ yet they do not think that the formation of this wish should always be characterised as ‘rational’ or a ‘conscious decision [but instead as] gradual, and sometimes spurred by outside events’ (Shapland and Bottoms, 2011: 272). The offer or experience of peer mentoring may indeed constitute one such ‘outside event’, as articulated by Steve, a persistent offender who was offered mentoring on release from prison:

It wasn't just the [mentoring] system, although that was good. That was just getting me involved in stuff that I'd never really done. I never used to go out, all my life was just chaos and then, from that on, I decided, 'you know what? I'm going give this a really good go' (Steve, Mentor and previously a Mentee).

Mentoring provides Steve with an invitation to try out, to become something new, but the choice to engage remains with him. In this regard, 'individual agency plays a big part' (Phil, Mentor). What this dualism seems to suggest, however, is that peer models may represent one of the factors which can enable a person's will or intention to be 'spurred' or realised. Moreover, the process is dialectic; both the agent and model play roles in ways that are not neatly sequential or conscious. Paul, for example, a mentee who had spent most of his youth and young adulthood in prison, did not feel 'ready' for change at the start of his mentoring relationship, expecting he would just 'go through the motions'. However he came to see his mentor as a crucial model and helper, playing an important role when his own will was vacillating:

I didn't think I was gonna get anything out of it. I just thought it would be someone talking to me for four appointments, then sending me on way. 'Cos it can be like that sometimes when you get these Court orders. But it's not like that... Most of time I would say I wanted it [to go straight], but I wasn't making the right choices, so obviously I didn't want it enough... I think it's the fact that I've had help there, but I wanted it myself as well (Paul, Mentee).

Readiness to change does not appear to be present in any conscious way for Paul therefore, but rather change occurs as a stumble, a wavering advance, involving both his own will

and the help of his mentor. Georgie describes a similar lack of conscious ‘readiness’ for mentoring at the outset:

To be honest, I didn’t think I needed a mentor, but I went ahead anyway and it was quite shocking, because I was quite willing to talk to her. It was quite shocking how much I was willing to let her know... you gotta be ready for something, something ticked in your brain to accept mentoring... Anyone that accepts a mentor gotta know they kind of want to change, but it’s just doing it, even with your mentor, it’s doing it (Georgie, Mentee).

With regard to change, then, Georgie separates the process of mentoring from her will to change and it is the process she becomes aware of before her own will, believing initially that she did not need to change. She appears to accept a ‘hook for change’, before she is aware of her own ‘openness to change’ (Giordano et al., 2002: 992–1000). Despite this sequence, however, Georgie is understandably reluctant to relinquish the influence of her own will. Indeed, despite explaining that she was inspired by the mentors she met and ‘wanting to feel the way [her mentor] did’, she retrospectively prioritises the role of her own will as paramount in this process: ‘you gotta be ready for something’. External inspiration and internal readiness to change may work concurrently, therefore, and in ways that are understood differently at different points.

There is a complex and unpredictable interplay of social influence and self-direction at work in these relationships. Some of the inspiration that peer mentors offer may prompt the ‘period of re-evaluation’ (Farrall and Calverley, 2006: 9) that people like Steve often experience before coming to a decision to desist. For others, like Georgie, a subconscious



decision may have been made already, but the mentoring process brings it into being and into awareness. Moreover, when motivation does not seem to be present, or dips as Paul describes, external help is there. Such interaction between mentors and mentees takes us beyond Girardian mimesis. Peer mentoring does not just provide a vehicle for the mimicry of desires, but also a platform on which people can ‘come to feel like masters of their thinking... explicitly or implicitly manifest in their own suggestions and those of their comrades’ (Freire, 1970: 105). It also echoes Ferguson’s (1996) arguments that yearnings for change can only be transformed into reality when shared with and recognised by others, who enable agents to make the ‘reconstitutive leap’ (Ferguson, 1996: 122). In this light mentors do not simply inspire the desire for change, nor are mentees alone with individual yearnings, but mentors can bring into reality, into action, the will of the mentee through multiple processes of inspiration, partnership and social nurturing.

Whilst this section has suggested that peer mentoring may spur, support or constitute a person’s will to change, respondents also placed a heavy emphasis on *sustaining* personal change. The next section will therefore focus on one of the ways in which mentoring claims to actively foster change in mentees.

## **8.2 Changing self-perceptions: from past to future selves**

In addition to having an ‘openness to change’ and recognising ‘hooks for change’, Giordano et al., (2002) also advanced the importance of actors being ‘able to envision and begin to fashion an appealing and conventional “replacement self” that can supplant the marginal one that must be left behind’ (Giordano et al., 2002: 1001). Change, then, is not just about readiness and opportunity, but the ability to imagine a new, future self, which is

often accomplished through recovery stories or ‘redemption scripts’ (Maruna, 2001: 87).

These futures, it is contended should be a focus of rehabilitative work:

Reflexive deliberations which are concerned with generating alternative future possibilities are more likely to lead to the individual exercising transformative agency. This is because, in undertaking these reflexive deliberations, the individual wishes to distance themselves from their present context (King, 2013: 324).

Social work discourse also suggests that focusing on the past, as opposed to possible futures, may be detrimental to change processes:

[T]alking too much about the past encourages the service user to remain in a victim role... even a developing survivor identity concentrates too much on the original trauma, therefore the work should enable the service user’s present to become more vivid than the past so that they can recover the ability to imagine a positive future (Milner, 2001: 11).

There is, of course, a large amount of assumption within this discourse. The view of a person being ‘stuck in the past’ assumes some kind of ‘right’ to diagnose a person’s healing process, to ‘move someone on’. However, something in the arguments of both King and Milner here resonated strongly with people in this study. Indeed one of the more striking themes articulated by respondents was this need to focus on the present or indeed the future as opposed to the past:

I was struggling with him, really struggling with him, to get him to do anything, to motivate him or anything like that. Now he's started looking at the future and not dwelling on his past, because that's a big thing he was doing was dwelling on his past, and he's moving on now. So that for me is a big thing for him... it's giving someone a future to look at to get away from their old habits (John, Mentor).

If people dwell on the past that can sometimes cause the drug or alcohol problem: 'I'm no good, I've done this' so you have to say 'right, let's put that to bed, let's move on, do this or do that'. In six months can say: 'I've done that now, that's the old me, forget that' (Ben, Mentor).

Again, there is an emphasis on moving people on. For these mentors 'moving forward' or going straight requires a focus not on the past but on the future. Indeed the past, including past crimes committed, are almost irrelevant:

I don't always necessarily get to know everything the person has done because it's not really a need, that's up to that person if they want to tell me, but then some people do, some people don't. So yes, unless there was any massive risk then they'd [managers] tell you that, but yeah, I don't really believe it's that important. Why should you judge a person on their past? (Ben, Mentor).

The crime is secondary really, doesn't matter. I mean I don't even ask what people have done, they will disclose it at some point later on, just in general conversation... [Manager] never tells me what anyone's done, it's not my business.

As I said to [Manager]: I don't want people to know what I've done, I know what it feels like, you don't want people to judge you (Joan, Mentor).

Mentors therefore consider that they move people along in a way that is fundamentally different to a professionalised case management approach. The level of non-judgment advocated here includes a complete rejection of the relevance of criminal history. This represents a stark contrast to much statutory criminal justice work that is often preoccupied with risks, or focuses on the extent to which past actions and experiences dictate future potential. In many peer mentoring settings, such historical reflections are replaced by a more future-focused, capacity building approach. What is not clear, however, is whether this temporal reorientation, this focus on the future, transfers to mentees themselves. Is their sense of themselves and their future potential shifted as intended? Indications from the speakers in this study are interestingly diverse. Mentees certainly recognise the importance of this re-focus:

He doesn't.... really dwell on the past that much, it's more the future, past is your past man, you've done what you done, you need to get yourself sorted now and look on (Paul, Mentee).

My mentor says to me 'I'm not bothered about what's happened, I'm bothered about you' and they make you feel like you are their only priority... they're just here to help you and that makes you feel good (Janet, Mentee).

I suffer depression and anxiety, I need to look forward, not look back at the stupid drunk mistake (Anthony, Prison Peer Group Member).

These mentees not only see a need to look forward, but value the fact that their mentors do too. Their mentors, having dealt with their own pasts and *moved on* direct their peers in the same forward facing direction. However, the focus of mentees themselves is not always correspondingly on the future. This came to light through a close reading of interview scripts using Carol Gilligan's 'Listening Guide'. The listening guide, as discussed in chapter four, lays out 'three steps as a way of entering and coming to know another person's inner world, in the context of the research relationship' (Kiegelmann, 2009: 39). These include listening for 'I' phrases and listing them in sequence ("I want, I know, I don't know, I think ...") (Kiegelmann, 2009: 39). In analysing scripts, I wrote 'I poems' (made with a new line for each 'I' phrase that appeared in interview) for each of my interviewees. I noticed to my surprise that the speaking tense in interviews differed for each party. Mentees overwhelmingly spoke in the past tense: 'I've never worked, I wanted, I thought, I started, I looked, I've done...' or sometimes the present tense: 'I put, I hand, I don't know' (from Jen, Mentee). By contrast, most of the mentor 'I' poems are spoken in a present tense majority: 'I'm able to share my experiences, I don't go in there and demand respect, I demand that we are on the same level', or sometimes future facing: 'I could, I think, I can, I should, I believe, I want' (from Hope, Mentor). This difference in grammatical tense came as a surprise given that the thematic pattern had already been identified – in the *content* of what respondents were saying – that peer mentoring is often present or future focused. Mentors rarely communicated a concern with the pasts of their mentees, particularly their criminal pasts, focusing instead on current interests and goals for the future. I therefore expected mentees to speak in terms of the future more frequently. This temporal orientation, however, did not transfer.

One explanation for this difference in self-positioning could be the fact that people were being interviewed as ‘mentors’ and ‘mentees’. Mentors may well have felt obliged in the context of a competitive rehabilitation environment to justify their potential, whilst mentees may well have felt obliged in the face of a researcher asking about their position to justify how they got here. This difference in itself reveals a tacit power dynamic between mentor and mentee. It points to the possibility that peer mentoring, despite its egalitarian claims (chapters two and five), continues to position parties within a relational hierarchy. As a result it does not assist mentees to imagine a positive future as well as might be hoped. Rather, by positioning people as *helper* and *helped*, mentoring may inherently reproduce feelings of power and powerlessness respectively. Maruna (2001), for example, argues that ‘individuals... need to find ways of re-narrating their past lives in order to make those histories consistent with who they are in the present and want to be in the future’ (cited in Farrall et al., 2011: 2). Peer mentoring offers *mentors* an opportunity to do this. It creates space for people to utilise their criminal past in ways that they see as productive. The pasts of mentors can be re-narrated not only as a positive tool, but also as central to who they are and who they can become. Mentors are reminded of their criminal pasts in this context, but this occurs as they perform an influential, exemplary social role. They are therefore more empowered in the present and the future. For mentees, however, this dynamic is not present. They are asked to imagine a positive future, to orient away from the past, but to do so whilst performing a social role (mentee), which simultaneously serves as a constant reminder of that past and as a reminder that outside help is required.

### **8.3 Change as Terrifying and Difficult**

Whilst peer mentors may offer inspiration to change, nurture mentee’s self-determination and strive to re-focus mentees toward possible future selves, there remains, nonetheless, a

dominant current of struggling with change throughout mentee (and mentor) narratives. Moreover, these struggles are not simply connected to the disempowering process of being a person in need of help, but are strongly rooted in fear. The presence of fear has been highlighted previously with regard to people making such changes. Farrall and Calverley (2006: 6) for example, discuss how fear is often reported as a factor associated with desisting from crime. However, they reference fear as associated with the consequences of maintaining criminality; be it the fear of experiencing serious physical harm (Hughes, 1998) or the fear of no longer coping physically and emotionally with prison life (Shover, 1983; Burnett, 2000). Similarly, Paternoster and Bushway (2009) suggest that offenders often have a 'feared self' – that is a fear of what they may become if changes are not made. The respondents in this study introduced another facet of fear in their efforts to change however – that is the fear of what changing entails, rather than the fear of staying the same:

I've been on drugs since I were thirteen... I'm scared to death, and I've just seen someone [who has walked out of his rehabilitation placement before completion] He said: 'I couldn't stand all the rules'... I'm hoping, praying to God that I am ready (Fiona, Mentee).

For six weeks there was no weed and no alcohol – that's why my head come straight, not because of the jail... I know I just need to stop, no doing it in moderation, got to stop, scary (Georgie, Mentee).

Coming off drugs, stopping grafting, it's not easy, it frightens me. I have nothing. I've been alcoholic since I was thirteen (Don, Mentee).

These speakers face a frightening void. The self that they strive for, which is free of substances, what Paternoster and Bushway (2009: 1103) refer to as the ‘positive possible self’, is also not one which they face without fear. Rather there is a tangible anxiety of leaving the known behind. In the above cases there is a fear of ending established substance addictions, addictions which they felt to be necessary to function:

I don't know what normal is it's so un-normal to have to get up in the morning, and if I didn't take Methadone or drugs I couldn't sit here and talk to you. I'd be so poorly I couldn't talk, terrible, awful. But I've got to go through that detox, go through that pain... it is worth it (Fiona, Mentee).

In their efforts to make a change, these mentees must not simply achieve and maintain a desire to change (which they appear to have done), or simply attain role models as motivators and examples (which they have also done), but further they must surmount the fear that surrounds their desired changes. What is more, this fear does not imagine perils, but recognises the difficult realities of recovery and, as will become clear, consequent reintegration. Roy, for example, a mentor who both facilitates and uses a prison based peer support group, vividly illustrates how testing these perils can be:

My decision [to change] was not overnight. I was in high security at the time. I was involved in a lot of gang violence. I'd had enough. I put my own safety at risk. I had my face cut open [points to visible scar] I didn't retaliate. It's a tug of war between the person I used to be and the person I want to be... I've got fears, I don't know society there today [after 10 years in prison] I get out there, nothing... [The]



reintegration [unit] has promised help closer to the finish of my sentence, but it's happening for me now... it's a waiting game (Roy, Prison Peer Group Member).

Roy not only describes serious physical harm, which resulted from his desire to desist, but additionally the fear of not knowing or having anything after such a long period of incarceration. Change, for Roy, is described as both physically dangerous and emotionally isolating; it situates him in a battleground between the person he was and the person he wants to be. This experience is not dissimilar to that of Steve, a prolific offender, who was supported by a multi-agency team comprising of peer mentors and police officers upon his release from prison:

The actual word 'change' used to terrify me; I used to be coming out of prison thinking 'what am I going to do?' Because I didn't have any mates, I lost them years ago. The only people I had were associates... [When] I started going running with a police officer, it was like: 'Oh My God' I'd get labelled a Grass, so I used to keep all that sort of stuff really low key... When you go to prison a Grass, [you are like] someone who harms old people or women or children, they're all classed as one person, you know? They'd get beat up (Steve, Mentor and previously a Mentee).

Whilst Steve did not experience the physical harm that Roy did, he was aware of the threat of it. He also describes the same sense of being lost and isolated in this new unknown. This fear of an unknown future was also articulated by Eve, a mentee at a female offender's project, albeit in a very different context. Eve received a community sentence having fraudulently claimed state benefits, something she explained she was pressured into by her

abusive partner. Her partner left her after she received a community sentence, leaving her facing a different kind of unknown:

I didn't know who I was and I had to find myself. And I was so scared because it was like: I couldn't wear certain things, I couldn't do certain things, I couldn't go to my Mum's or Dad's, because he was like: 'Where are you going? What are you doing? What time will you be back?' I couldn't go to the shop because he'd be texting me. So I got to a point where I didn't even know who I was (Eve, Mentee).

Eve faced the void of 'finding herself' after a life where she had felt wholly controlled, where she had lost her sense of herself. This is wrapped up with the additional pressures of having lived with the terror of domestic violence as a norm. Whilst her circumstances are different to that of Steve and Roy, her sense of an unknown future and shifting self resembles what they too described, as does the accompanying fear.

Change for many of the speakers in this study is characterized by loss, be it of known pleasures, known supports, known lifestyles or even experiences of coercion. Indeed it is not just change itself which is frightening, but the significant challenges that can often be associated with change. Lin, for example, had a desire to get help for her alcoholism; a factor she felt was key in her convictions, which she described as a result of 'drink related fights and disturbances'. However, Lin was also a single parent and she worried that revealing the true extent of her alcoholism would result in her children being removed from her care:

I'd tried getting help for my drinking a few years ago but when you first go in they have got to warn you that... if you say something that could be endangering the kids they have to tell the appropriate services. And the way my drinking was, if I'd have been totally honest, they'd have had to get outside agencies involved, and I was scared of losing the kids. So I kept it hidden. Thankfully everything came to a head and social services found out, so it was like a complete disaster, but it was like 'Thank God', because now I can go to the service and put all my cards on the table (Lin, Mentor and previously a Mentee).

What each of these descriptions indicate is that change is both physically and psychologically difficult, a process fraught with tangible dangers and frightening newness. However what Lin's account also illustrates is that some of this fear is connected to the services tasked with assisting change, she introduces a notable fear of authority.

#### **8.4 Quelling fears of authority**

The notion of feared authority figures was introduced in chapter five and will be developed further here. McNeill (2013) illustrates why interactions with authority can be so fraught for 'offenders':

[I]t is no small task to develop relationships of trust with people whose relationships with others – often especially with authority figures – have often been, at worst, abusive and traumatic and, at best, inconsistent and difficult (McNeill, 2013: 84).

Indeed Lynn Haney (2010) argues that, even when authority figures intend to be ‘therapeutic’, their interventions may pose dangers to the people they aim to help:

Given the realities of their lives, the inmates warned that [staff] ideals may be dangerous to them... they were expected to drop their “masks” and “badass attitudes” as signs of recovery [yet] their masks and attitudes had been key survival strategies for them, allowing them to withstand abusive family members and lovers; this armor helped them to navigate tough inner-city neighbourhoods (Haney, 2010: 174).

Respondents in this study were not just fearful of the power held by authority figures, or dubious about the viability of their approaches, but they also framed such relationships as combative. Indeed when Roy spoke, above, of a ‘tug of war’ between the person he was and the person he wants to be, he introduced a battle motif, which was recurrent throughout mentee narratives. Interestingly however, where this motif was most concentrated was in descriptions of encounters with authority:

I’ve been in and out of jail since 15... I saw authority as the enemy (Roy, Prison Peer Group Member).

In prison everyone’s guards up... once people get to know each other, breaking down barriers (Michael, Prison Peer Group Member).

My old mentor got me a flat... they said stop all the shoplifting, drug use – my mentor said don't give them [the housing providers] any ammunition (Don, Mentee).

[Going straight], for me, is something that could be done to have no criminal record, I feel a little bit that it hangs over me like a sword (Gina, Mentee).

For these speakers the metaphor of a battle serves to describe how they feel positioned in relation to authority. They are not passive victims as they have 'enemies' and can 'guard' themselves, yet nonetheless they consider their combatant armed and poised. Fear does not just accompany the changes that these people hope to make and the incumbent difficulties which attend them then, but also the very contexts and personnel tasked with assisting with these changes. On one level, this fear expresses the subcultural position of labelled offenders (Becker, 1963). Becker contends, for example, that 'a major element in every aspect of the drama of deviance is the imposition of definitions – of situations, acts, and people – by those powerful enough or sufficiently legitimated to be able to do so' (Becker, 1963: 207). People with criminal convictions are acutely aware of their position within this defined hierarchy. However, the substance of these fears goes beyond labels. Lin for example did not *imagine* the authority of social services to remove her children from her care; Don did not invent the tenuous nature of his new social housing tenancy; and Gina is correct in assuming her criminal record is likely to restrict her employment opportunities. When these 'dangers' are invested in as occasions for combat and mentees invest in the position of being in conflict with authority, it creates a barrier to their interactions with those agencies. It is with regard to this dimension of change that peer mentoring may have something unique to offer.

This chapter has so far suggested that change can be difficult for mentees, not just in practical terms, but in existential terms. Mentees question their known way of being and in doing so encounter a deep sense of insecurity. In addition they encounter agents and systems of authority, which often increase this anxiety. Where peer mentoring offers a uniquely alternative approach is through its potential to sooth such feelings of ontological insecurity. Ontological security is, at its simplest, a sense of safe familiarity, a feeling of steadiness, of being tethered to the world as we feel that we know it. For Giddens (1991):

The notion of ontological security ties in closely to the... ‘bracketings’ presumed by the ‘natural attitude’ in everyday life. On the other side of what might appear to be quite trivial aspects of day-to-day action and discourse, chaos lurks. And this chaos is not just disorganization, but the loss of a sense of the very reality of things and of other persons (Giddens, 1991: 36).

In order to avoid this sense of chaos, this un-anchoring of a known reality: ‘Individuals will routinely try to maintain a sense of ontological security, or else they would be paralysed by anxiety’ (King, 2013: 323). Yet making a change from ‘offender’ to ‘ex-offender’ can provoke such feelings of losing a known reality, of plunging into chaos: ‘When you move away, even areas, it’s a real challenge, you’re insecure, trying to find out who you are, without status and influence’ (Training group participant). If such change fosters ontological insecurity however, the physical example of peer mentors can provide a reassuring comfort:

If an experience that suggests the possibility of change is perceived as something that can be easily coped with, possibly by accommodating it within the current

conception of the self, then the individual is unlikely to feel a sense of ontological insecurity; the sense that one's very being is threatened (Hunter, 2011: 224).

Not only have peer mentors often survived the challenge ahead of their mentees, thus rendering the unknown more 'known' and indicating that such change can be coped with, but they are their peers. To see a peer, someone you regard as closer to your own 'conception of self' making this change before you then, offers a sense of security that cannot be gleaned from an external expert, a distant authoritarian:

Seeing the change helps you to not be scared of change, because a lot of people are. I was scared of change, and it's not that bad, but you don't feel like you are going it alone, because people have gone there before you and you can just... It's not like there's somebody in a suit saying 'she's said this and said that' you know? They have more of an understanding where you are psychologically if you know what I mean? (Lin, Mentor and previously a Mentee).

I think they see us differently because obviously I have no authority, I make that clear. I'm just another person who came here, it helped me and like I say... I've gone through the same, going through the other side. Yeah so just it's one of them, instead of being a paid person from a university or... (Ben, Mentor).

These mentors consider that they provide a measure of comfort, which renders change manageable, because they have been in a similar position and because they strive to separate themselves from authority and officialdom.

However, whilst mentors position themselves as not being coercive, there was a current of scepticism about whether peer mentors do in fact constitute less authoritarian figures. For example, at a practitioner conference about ex-service users in the criminal justice system (2014), one conference delegate asked the important question: ‘do you breach people?’ referring to whether or not mentors are called upon to enforce community court orders. Whilst the mentor who was speaking answered that they ‘don’t personally’ return people to court, he did acknowledge that mentors do have to ‘pass on attendance feedback to Offender Managers’ and stated that this can often be a testing part of their role. Indeed, a probation officer and colleague of this mentor, explained: ‘Steve, Cam and Adam (pseudonyms) have all got offending backgrounds, so what? They work in the same guidelines we work in’ (Probation Officer). These organisational requirements indicate that whilst peer mentors may have ‘gone before you’ and be ‘through the other side’ they also now belong to a new professional peer group, which locates them closely to the authority they so fear. This questioning of the apparent security offered by peer mentors highlights the potentially conflicting, even oxymoronic positions of peer and mentor. In Goffman’s terms: ‘in making a profession of their stigma, native leaders are obliged to have dealings with representatives of other categories, and so find themselves breaking out of the closed circle of their own kind’ (Goffman, 1963: 39).

### **8.5 Challenging the Practices of the Criminal Justice System**

Whilst there was some reluctance to see peer mentors as entirely separate from authority, there was a strong theme of peer mentors wanting to challenge the practices of the criminal justice system. Indeed one of the laudatory sentiments played out about peer mentoring is that ex-offenders can uniquely contribute to the shaping or development of services (Fletcher and Batty, 2012; RAPT, 2013). The aim of much peer mentoring is not just to



influence mentee lives on an individual level, therefore, but also to change the shape of services and systems. For many of the projects I worked with, integrating the voice of ex-offenders was a critical motivation for engaging with the system in the first place. Adam for example, an ex-offender who is now employed full time as a mentoring coordinator explained how:

My experience guided how the system could be different... We [ex-offenders] complement what's already going on, we're able to add an additional perspective (Adam, Mentoring Coordinator).

The Probation Manager who first employed Adam into post and indeed who was proactive in recruiting four other people with criminal convictions into paid Probation posts, also explained that one benefit of peer mentoring was the learning that Probation as a service could gain from their insights:

All of our ex-offender staff changed because of their own connections, not Probation. That's not to say that Probation doesn't help, but that there are other strategies available outside professional understanding (Probation Manager).

This section will look at the practical efforts of peer mentors to make systemic, as opposed to individual changes. Paula, a volunteer mentor, for example highlighted that there is often a gap in provision for family members or supporters of people who are dependent upon drugs or persistently offending:

[M]y husband used a lot of drugs, different drugs and that, basically I didn't get any help. I didn't actually know he was on a lot of drugs until quite late in, well before he died really. So I didn't understand anything about it and I actually think that people need to understand what it's all about (Paula, Mentor).

As a result she decided to bridge that gap in her role as a mentor:

We're setting up a 'concerned others' group along at Women's Centre, I think because of people that are coming in to mentoring who have got the other side of it, been a concerned other, it does help, it's all connected (Paula, Mentor).

Paula therefore views herself as stepping into the gap. She is able to become a physical agent of change because her suggestion is taken on board by the project she works for. Similarly, Lol, a mentoring coordinator, is concerned about the lack of focus on the relationship between local authority care and prison. As an ex-offender and care leaver himself this issue has particular resonance:

Twenty five per cent plus of those in prisons can say they've been in care, you can't just take people from the care system and say they're bad people so they end up there, there must be something happening, systemic. So we're trying to work out, our project is about trying to work out, where those gaps exist in terms of that system (Lol, Mentoring Coordinator).

In response Lol facilitates consultation groups with groups of offenders in both community and prison settings, to explore what improvements they would like to see to both the care

and justice systems and to examine how mentoring may assist with these aims. Mentoring, therefore, becomes a tool for this sub-group of ‘offenders’ to examine patterns that have been pertinent in their own lives, patterns which may have been missed using an individual deficit approach to rehabilitation. However, Lol did not describe the same level of success in addressing this gap as Paula did:

When we speak to offender supervisors we don’t seem to be able to develop a relationship there... We think part of it is because they’re so under the cosh, with fifty cases at the side of their desks, having to work their way through all of that, they’re not giving their time to a conversation about that particular experience in care and how that all might fit in (Lol, Mentoring Coordinator).

Lol then expresses frustration that his knowledge, and that of his user-led service, is not heard because they are not allowed into the conversation. His ‘user voice’ cannot compete with the noise of a heavy caseload, a noise which necessarily positions ‘service users’ as passive cases to be juggled, rather than active agents to be engaged. Despite their different short term outcomes however, Paula and Lol’s personal experiences of the criminal justice system acted as their motivation for bridging perceived gaps. These gaps may not have been noticed, or have resulted in such personal conviction to affect change, without the presence of those with personal lived experiences. Keisha gives a similar example of wanting to provide a service that she felt was never provided for her. She explains that she established her own project to provide some of the information and support that she saw as lacking:

Where the prison goes wrong is that they don't give you the right information...  
When I left prison I didn't know what opportunities I had, and there was no courses  
that I come across in prison, and there was no-one talking about it to be truthful...  
So it weren't until I come out of prison that I learnt what I could do (Keisha,  
Mentor).

Keisha went on to set up her own mentoring project and, like Paula, stepped into a gap she experienced. However Keisha went on to hit a different kind of barrier. She explained (informally and tentatively) how her initial entry into peer mentoring was supported by a charity, which helps young people leaving prison set up small businesses. The voluntary sector, therefore, appeared to enable Keisha's aims to provide a new kind of user-led advice service. However, the assisting charity, she explained, later went on to use her business model as a 'success story' in their own funding bids – without consulting Keisha or obtaining her permission. As a result Keisha felt she had been used as a means to an end in a wider context of competitive justice funding, rather than as a source of knowledge and change in her own right. This experience echoes Lol's assertion in chapter five that the user perspective has 'all been tokenistic' rather than 'central and as respected' (Lol, Mentoring Coordinator).

What Paula, Lol and Keisha did have in common, however, was a certain approach to social entrepreneurship; they each established something new (a 'concerned others' group, a user led consultation and outreach support) to address unmet needs. Whilst they did not refer to themselves in these terms, entrepreneurship is perhaps not a surprising theme to uncover in relation to peer mentoring. Criminal justice in the UK increasingly operates as a marketplace, indeed there is a conscious neo-liberal philosophy behind it. The

*Transforming Rehabilitation* policy agenda, for example, seeks to ‘open up the market to a diverse range of new rehabilitation providers to get the best out of the public, voluntary and private sectors and giving them the flexibility to do what works’ (MoJ, 2013). Moreover, ‘Entrepreneurship, in its many forms, provides one achievable route to improve life chances’ (Smith, 2009: 165). In a criminal justice context, ‘self-employment is one distinct possibility open to ex-offenders’ to overcome the ingrained discrimination they face in seeking employment (Smith, 2009: 169). The presence of such entrepreneurship may simply reflect the social context, which encourages individuals to become justice entrepreneurs. There is a pervasiveness of market subjectivities, even by those at the edges of it. Add to this the barriers that people with criminal convictions can face in obtaining employment and justice entrepreneurship becomes doubly attractive. However, whilst mentors often engage with dominant market expectation and achieve varying levels of ‘success’ in addressing gaps, the overall shape of the services these speakers worked with largely remained unchanged.

The notion of a ‘diverse market’ of justice is sold on its ‘flexibility to do what works’ (MoJ, 2013), but what is not clear is how far it allows true flexibility to those with little economic power. Paula and Keisha, for example, meet with a seemingly ‘flexible’ marketplace given their ideas, which require little investment other than their own, are enacted. They are able and supported to perform actions they deemed to be missing (Group Work and Outreach). Lol, however, meets an altogether less flexible space. His aims to discover and include a peripheral voice – the voice of care leavers who are over-represented, but under consulted in the prison system – do not fit with the drive to evidence ‘results’ or ‘what works’. The changes these voices may demand are also likely to require significantly more investment than a group intervention or a volunteer outreach service.

The market is therefore much less responsive. Moreover, whilst Keisha meets with flexibility initially, her lowly position as an individual entrepreneur in the wider context of better funded and better resourced charities – who are willing to appropriate her ideas – means she is soon positioned unfavourably in terms of competing for the work. What these accounts suggest is that ex-offenders are not currently level players in the idealised ‘market’ of justice, but rather they are required to accept work at the margins:

I felt like I needed to do more, but I also knew that I had to start from the bottom and be humble (Keisha, Mentor).

We rely on professionals, don’t tread on toes. It’s a team effort, not duplicating... It depends on the personality of the Offender Manager. Some are happy to allow us authority, others want to control the work more, know everything we’re doing (Peer Mentoring Trainer).

These words encapsulate the need for entrepreneurs with convictions to rely upon good will and patronage. Moreover there is concern that this situation will not change: ‘how does an ex-offender get beyond where we are now? Break the glass ceiling, influence policy and training?’ (Phil, Mentor). The fear voiced here is that peer mentors will not move onto an equal footing, but will remain deferring to policy and practices mandated by others; that they must remain as unassuming outsiders.

## **8.6 Changing Perceptions**

One of the interesting forms of change that did happen as peer mentors attempted to re-shape services, however, was that they often unwittingly came to shape people’s

perceptions. Keisha for example described what happened when she was offered a business advisor to support her developing peer mentoring business:

My business advisor, she's a lovely woman. Before she met us she'd never been in contact with, you know, 'people like myself'... She loves us to death and you know what? Once she got to know us and the people we were, she took us for lunch and she goes: 'Do you know what? You and [Keisha's colleague name] have changed my whole view'. She went: 'I was so negative'. She said she used to manage this company where they used to recruit and you know what she used to tell the people? 'Anyone with records: to the side!' (Keisha, Mentor).

Something similar happened at Project 'Peer'. This project is managed by two coordinators, with long criminal histories, who are well embedded within a local Probation office. They share their office with a drugs service and a building with a range of statutory Probation staff, who value their presence:

We all socialise, they're just our colleagues, on the same level as we are. They came to my wedding... The offenders see our friendship and it's really pro social, says a lot, they're not stuck in that label forever (Probation Employee attached to Project 'Peer').

Their manager, however, explained how such perceptions were not always as dominant. She described numerous battles in advocating for ex-offenders to be attached to the service. Colleagues in the police, prisons and probation alike had reservations about the trustworthiness of ex-offender staff and the ethics of their having access to clients'

personal information. This manager persisted in her commitment to the value of these individuals, however, and the service became something of a flagship in successfully embedding peer led practice. Not only are the two co-ordinators of the peer mentoring scheme ex-offenders, but two paid Probation Service Officers (PSOs) are also graduates of the volunteering scheme. As a probation team they regard their work as ‘desistance in action’; illustrating the positive potential of people with criminal histories. The manager of the team is also keen to point out that these desistance stories have added value for the paid staff in the team, who are tasked with instilling hope in criminal persisters that they have the power to change. In her words there has been a ‘change in the office, you can see hope in the workers eyes’.

The presence of ‘ex-offenders’ in proactive mentoring roles may then have the potential to affect how people with convictions are perceived more broadly; to offer a lived challenge to accepted stereotypes. This is important because the dominant discourse in relation to ex-offenders is overwhelmingly negative. People with convictions enter a social space which has already caricatured them in a negative light. Reiner, Livingstone and Allen (2000: 117-118), for example, found that ‘Criminals are overwhelmingly portrayed unsympathetically... in both fiction and news’. Such media representations, Garland (2000: 363) argues ‘undoubtedly give shape and emotional inflection to our experience of crime, and do so in a way that is largely dictated by the structure and values of the media rather than the phenomena it represents.’ Peer mentors, in contrast, offer the public a personal connection, a direct challenge to this broader discursive othering. The importance of this lived presence, this ‘visibility’ has been acknowledged elsewhere. In the field of mental health, for example, Rufus May, a clinical psychologist and former patient, has argued that: ‘Mental health workers... don’t see the ones like me who got away. Therefore



they have very little concept of recovery from mental health problems' (cited in Basset and Repper, 2005: 16-17). In the field of drug and alcohol addiction, Mathew Kidd argued:

Once these people become visible recovery champions, they can help people to believe that recovery is not only possible but desirable. I refer to both people who provide and people who receive treatment and support services (Kidd, 2011: 174).

'Visibility' may therefore be crucial to believing in or understanding a concept of change – be it for providers or users of services. This reveals another unique potential of peer mentoring. Whilst statutory probation caseloads are full with 'offenders' and their risk scores and public news stories are laden with images of 'the criminal', rarely do we see, in either context, the ones who have desisted. Peer mentoring, however, forges a space for desisters to become visible. Mentors come to constitute the possibility of desistance for mentees, professionals and the public alike. One commissioner of mentoring services, for example, explained the shift in attitude of her own probation staff as peer mentors became a visible part of the service:

There was resistance from staff, people initially wouldn't refer [to peer mentoring] and worried about sharing information, but this was four or five years ago, now the climate has changed... We have a growing number of ex-service users now employed [in the Probation Service] (Service Commissioner).

This speaker's motivation for such a proactive approach was clear: 'we need to practice what we preach, if we believe in change as an agency we need to be ambassadors' (Service Commissioner). This aspect of change was unexpected and has obvious benefits in terms

of fostering contexts conducive to desistance. Nonetheless, such shifts in perspective do not arise without personal risks and costs to those involved. Steve, for example, was a persistent and prolific offender who was mentored himself, before volunteering as a mentor then later being employed as a Probation Service Officer. He explains that this progression carried risks for his employers:

Before, it was like there's too many risks involved. Before, they [Probation] wouldn't take a risk. For them to take on [employ] me, I see that as a massive risk what they've done. Because going off what's in my past, they've took a massive risk and it could've gone really badly wrong (Steve, Mentor and previously a Mentee).

Moreover, making this transition and challenging the perceptions of his new colleagues made personal demands:

I've got the prison officers looking at me, they recognise me, I don't say anything, I just feel uncomfortable. At first there was a lot of loop holes they [Probation] had to jump through to get me in there, but now I go on my own but I love that side of it. Sometimes it's strange, like [Prison A] walking down the main corridor... You're walking past all the prisoners and some are my old associates are like: 'fucking hell, how you doing? Used to be a nightmare him, he was a proper grafter' and I'm thinking 'ohhhhhh!' [Cringe]. I get really embarrassed by it, because obviously I am ashamed of my past (Steve, Mentor and previously a Mentee).

Working in the prisons previously resided in serves as a reminder of a shameful past. It also brings to life an identity remembered by others, which conflicts with Steve's current conception of self. Whilst this in itself can be helpful: 'it's an opportunity for me to revisit them dark places, just to remind myself that I never want to go back there' (Phil, Mentor), there is nonetheless an intense, lived emotionality to this work, which is not present for volunteers without such history.

### **8.7 The Futility of Working with 'Big Boys'**

Whilst the shifts in perspective outlined above come to undermine some of the entrenched discursive othering experienced by offenders, such categorisation is not always contested. Indeed another surprising feature of mentoring in these settings was how mentors often invested in their own categorisations of 'offenders':

You get a different variety of criminals. It's like in prison, you have different sections. You get the ones that just get bullied constantly, you get the ones that I classed myself as, just the middle ground. I wasn't one of the big heads, no one ever took the mick out of me, the big heads never used to try and bully me, because I was sort of like borderline. And then you get the ones who are dead confident, and you can just tell when you're walking on the wing who's who, do you know what I mean? So you have like three sets and I think it's the same in the community as well (Steve, Mentor and previously a Mentee).

Having established this hierarchy, Steve began to characterise those at the 'top':

It's like one of my best ever mates, who tried for years to get me off the drugs. He's doing nine and a half years now because he was the money man. He thrived on selling drugs and the fast cars and the nice women. I think people like that will never, ever; I think it'll just be virtually impossible to sort their lives out. I know he'll never, ever sort his life out. He'll come out and within two weeks he's well respected, and because he's a money man, he makes a lot of big gangsters a lot of money. Within two weeks of getting out he can have like an M5 [sports car], he'll have a gorgeous woman on his arm, he'll have loads of money (Steve, Mentor and previously a Mentee).

As an individual, Steve alludes to a loss of status in the old pecking order, he communicates a sense of envy and regret that he has relinquished that status and a recognition that his new status is 'no match' in the eyes of former associates. He appears to be reflecting on the respect he has given up to gain what he has; on how hard it is to be reminded of what he has lost. As a mentor, however, Steve not only establishes the character of what he terms the 'big heads', personalities who personify 'hypermasculine' (Courtenay and Sabo, 2001), capitalist values, but he also outlines what he sees as the futility of trying to intervene at this level:

Steve: People like that shouldn't be [mentored] because when they're big boys, it's hard to explain; they don't benefit from people like us, probation staff... Because they're too big, they're too past all that sort of stuff, do you know what I mean?

Interviewer: You would have nothing to offer him in response to the life he's got?

Steve: Yeah, I mean one lad was put on [mentoring] and he was a little bit, not intimidating, it's because I knew how big he was. From my past, I knew him... and

what connections he's got. I think I actually felt a little bit uncomfortable, because I didn't think I could offer him. I did try a different tack with him, I kept, I hated it that I kept repeating myself, saying: 'I'm not trying to tell you what to do, obviously, you do what you want' but you know, I kept apologizing because I didn't want him to think that I was trying to... because I knew in his head he was thinking: 'what are you doing in here? I'm too engrossed' ye know?

Steve still valorises the 'big boys' status here, elevating them not just above other criminals, but also subtly above mentors and probation staff. As a result he is intimidated, ambivalent in and discomfited by, his own position. Moreover he feels he has nothing to offer as a mentor. These beliefs inform his behaviour as he comes to apologise for even trying to intervene. Steve's perception is that there is a futility of intervening with a man he deems such a socially successful criminal. This affects not only how he feels about himself in his role as a mentor, but also how he practices:

It's pointless... because he gets what he wants, you know, he's like a proper big boy, he's involved in all the guns and we shouldn't be working with people like that. He needs to be up there with the organised crime and he was, he got took off after a few weeks. So most, all the ones I've got now, no one makes me feel like that, because he made me feel uncomfortable working with him. I felt like he was, how to explain, feeling like: 'what are you doing here, what you doing?' Because everything we said to him he was like: 'yeah' (raising eyebrows sarcastically), I just thought: I'm wasting my breath here. It's nothing we can do, so there is this hierarchy that our service just can't touch them (Steve, Mentor and previously a Mentee).

On a practical level, Steve's views could be seen as evidence of a poor matching of mentor and mentee, but they also raise other questions about assuming that shared histories will lead to constructive outcomes. Steve's reflections here have real significance for how – and with whom – mentoring aims to affect change. Change in this context is not simply about a shift from criminal to non-criminal, about instilling a desire for such change and rendering it manageable, but rather it has regard for the social standing of the potential changer. When the mentee is of a perceived higher social standing (even in criminal terms) than the mentor, the practice is problematised. Steve does not describe here an influential, exemplary social role, which empowers him in the present and the future, but rather he describes feeling incapacitated, uncomfortable and apologetic.

The features with which Steve characterises 'big boys' are also of interest in terms of conceptualizing 'change'. It is cars, 'gorgeous women', money, guns, connections and power that indicate to Steve these mentees are untouchable. The accepted value of such ideals has been highlighted in work on masculine criminal cultures. Dailey (2001: 259), for example, argues that inmate stories were typically about 'fast women, drugs and expensive cars. They always focused on the "fast life"'. What we know less about however, is the impact of such hyper masculine ideals upon volunteer mentors who have left crime behind. For Steve, whilst 'desistance' is desirable, it will struggle to compete with a wealthy, masculine lifestyle, even if this is criminally supported. This is perhaps no surprise. Steve's 'big boy', whilst criminal, simultaneously embodies the Western hegemonic ideal of manhood; he is independent, wealthy and powerful. He also has means of aggression and represents virulent heterosexuality. Whilst the activities of peer mentoring may offer a replacement for some of the lost pleasures or excitements of criminality (chapter six), Steve is right to question whether it will compensate for the wealth and status of 'success';

success not just in criminal terms, but also in terms of the dominant patriarchal, capitalist ideology. This was a question Keisha too asked:

I know people out there that are happy committing crime. They tell me: ‘Oh I couldn’t do what you do [mentoring]. Oh no love’... They’re going to Mexico every week, they’re having brilliant holidays, they own their own house. Do you know what I mean? They’re, like, ‘Oh no’. They’re alright doing that (Keisha, Mentor).

These narratives point to the cost of changing. They suggest that material and social success can maintain criminality as readily as they can promote conformity, a pattern which has been highlighted by Piquero and Benson (2004) with regard to ‘white collar offenders’:

[W]hite-collar offenders often have acquired some level of material, occupational, and social success. In other words, they have something to lose. We usually think of these trappings of success and achievement as factors that promote conformity... However, situations may arise in which these very same factors can motivate crime rather than conformity... the reasons for engaging in criminal activities may not lie with greed or financial gain but rather with the fear of losing what one has already attained (Piquero and Benson, 2004: 160).

Having something substantial to lose adds a significant further barrier to contemplating change therefore. Potential mentees with wealth and status may need to accept significant material losses in addition to the existential challenges outlined above. Moreover, in terms

of peer mentoring, a mentee who has wealth and status can also present as a barrier to mentors even trying.

## **8.8 Conclusion**

This chapter has explored how ‘change’ is perceived to take place in the context of peer mentoring. Respondents often spoke of change in terms of personal improvement, but they also point to changes external to themselves, to the need for transformations in public perceptions and the practices of rehabilitation services. Change for these speakers, whether individual or structural, is constructed as a site of struggle. Peer mentors and mentees reveal in their descriptions struggles between feeling ‘ready’ to change and being externally inspired; struggles between known habits and unknown futures; struggles between wanting to accept help and seeing authority as dangerous. Struggles can also be traced between mentors wanting to use their experiences to reimagine and improve existing services and having these experiences appropriated as they are used as an add-on; a promotion; or a replica, between changing the perceptions of others and having to live and practice within dominant discursive realities. What is at play throughout all of these struggles, in addition to conceptions of change, are forms of power. The following chapter will therefore focus explicitly on some of the implicit transactions of power in peer mentoring.



## Chapter Nine

### **The hidden power dynamics of peer mentoring**

This chapter will point to some of the ways in which power manifests in peer mentoring settings. Illustrations or analyses of power dynamics are often missing from evaluations of the practice, or can be submerged by claims of egalitarianism. ‘Giving greater voice’ to service users (Hughes, 2012) or involving former service users in designing intervention is imagined to dilute existing power imbalances because they involve ‘learning directly from offenders’ and ex-offenders’ experiences’ (McNeill and Weaver, 2010: 10). They serve as a ‘counterbalance to the widespread belief that programmes are something that are “done” to offenders by specialists’ (Boyce et al., 2009: vi). Efforts to equalise perceived disparities of power are certainly a feature of peer mentoring. Chapter five, for example, highlighted how mentors and mentees often question the authority of professionals and their tools and how mentoring is claimed to offer equal, horizontal relationships between parties, rather than hierarchical ones. Chapter six illustrated efforts to counter the power of criminal stigma by configuring a new audience who are willing to accept efforts to change, whilst chapter seven suggested that caring peer to peer relationships are offered as an improvement upon corrective exchanges. Finally chapter eight traced how respondents nullify feelings of disempowerment by framing their interactions with daunting authority figures in combative terms.

Whilst there are clear efforts by those involved with peer mentoring to forge less authoritarian relationships, claims for the practice do tend to veil ongoing practices of power which remain. Abdennur (1987: 94), for example, has argued that voluntarism itself

shifts ‘the burden of guilt [for social problems] from men in power to men on the street’. Similarly, Colley (2001: 188) has reasoned that ‘emotional labour... brings its own costs, and does so disproportionately for women than for men, given women’s lower social status’. These arguments suggest that in seizing new power through voluntary emotional labour, peer mentors are simultaneously burdened with new forms of subjection, which are not always recognised. Chapter eight began to acknowledge some of the hidden hierarchies in peer mentoring settings. Respondents recognised the power of their peers in motivating them to make personal changes, but were equally resistant to this, seeing their own agency as of primary importance. The chapter also reasoned that the dynamic of being a ‘helper’ or ‘helped’ maintains features of hierarchy that are often being fought against. Finally it began to draw out powers external to the mentoring relationship, which can impact upon the work; these included the restrictions of operating within a competitive market and of working within the dominant patriarchal, capitalist ideology. These often unacknowledged influences will be explored further here.

This chapter does not seek to apply any single theory of power to an analysis of mentoring, but rather the themes within emerged from a close analysis of the data. In this sense the analysis is inductive, resulting from recurrent phenomenon and relations that were observed in the field and has been refined progressively (Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2014: 238). As a result, no a priori grid of power is imposed, but rather the chapter draws upon a number of conceptions of power, which help to make sense of respondent narratives. These include feminist standpoint theories which highlight the importance of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, exploring how people make sense of their place in the world and how these accounts are credited or discredited by others. It will also draw upon the work of Freire (1970) who argues that pedagogy without critical reflection can lack

consensus and serve to systematically organise people, rather than develop them. Utilizing themes from the data and these theoretical conceptions, the chapter will seek to make explicit some of the implicit transactions of power in mentoring settings. In doing so it will reveal the rich and multi layered nature of mentoring transactions.

## **9.1 The Internal Power Dynamics of Peer Mentoring Relationships**

One of the things that is often claimed about peer mentoring, as opposed to mentoring by non ‘peers’, is that it diminishes the power imbalance and levels the playing field (see chapter five). However, the mentor-protégé relationship, by definition, ‘is one that is imbalanced in power’ (Scandura, 1998: 458). The way in which mentors position themselves as not being coercive, whilst subtly exhibiting an experimental authority has been a theme throughout the thesis. The initial section of this chapter will focus closely on just what happens ‘with a peer’ and will suggest that there are often power relations at work within these relationships that are not fully recognised within constructions of egalitarianism.

### *9.1.1 The Dynamics and Implications of Setting Goals*

Chapter seven illustrated how individualised, or ‘person-centred’, practice is a central feature of mentoring training and experiences. However, this feature is not universal. Indeed by listening closely to the experiences of mentors and mentees we can often trace subtle influences upon individual goals. Phil, for example, himself an advocate of person-centred goal setting, explains that there is also a need for *mentors* to be active in these processes:

I'd work out what it is they [the mentees] are trying to achieve at the end, what the end product, what we'd like to see. So I'd sit down with group and get them to identify their goals and agree on them. So they're not my goals, they're their goals, they're shared goals, and we know why we're doing them, and they're realistic (Phil, Mentor).

There is an interesting sequencing of 'mentor' and 'mentee' objectives here, which will be explored further in a moment. First, however, there is a point about 'realism' being made, which is important. The task of the mentor, as Phil presents it, is twofold; it is not just to create an environment where personal goals can be set, but to ensure these goals are 'realistic'. This was similarly expressed by Keisha:

It's important that the mentor also asks the mentee what options they think they've got. So it's also important that whoever's going to be a mentor needs to know what options an ex-offender has... You've got to have aims with the person, but you've got to have your personal aims that they don't know, so you know you're doing the right thing. It's not all about them, it's about you too. This is how mentors enhance and come on to higher levels; do you understand what I mean? So it's a two way thing. That's what I believe anyway (Keisha, Mentor).

For Phil and Keisha the importance of this realism was to avoid setting people up to fail. Both recounted examples of how this could happen if what they considered the 'real' challenges of resettlement after prison, such as criminal stigma, were not envisaged. Keisha, for example, was asked by her own resettlement mentor to 'walk round the city centre and ask for jobs', a scenario she imagined with dread:

I've only just been released, walking into these shops: 'Hiya I'm Keisha and I'm an ex-offender. I've been released a couple of weeks. I've got a CV but it dates back to whatever, but this is what I did in prison!' (Keisha, Mentor).

Keisha's own mentor was a volunteer attached to the Probation Service, but was not an ex-offender. Keisha felt that as a result her mentor missed the reality of the context which ex-prisoners face. Phil also described what he saw as unrealistic expectations, although this time from some of his own mentees:

One offender had in his head he was going to come out and get into property management. I didn't want to deflate that goal, but wanted to make it realistic for him. So, trying to let him know that, obviously, the world of buildings and houses has changed greatly over the years. And it's not that easy that you can go and get a buy to let (Phil, Mentor).

A lot of ex-offenders feel compelled to share what you've gone through, to help the next generation... We don't want to crush that desire, but we also have to be realistic: child protection. A lot of long term offenders are in for murder, I don't want to motivate [them] and they can be crushed as soon as they get out (Phil, Mentor).

On the one hand, therefore, Phil and Keisha are both keen to ensure that mentee goals take account of personal and social realities. In this sense they agree with Farrall's assertion that: 'successful desistance entails developing a sense of what the future may hold for the

individual and a sense of how this future can be realised' (Farrall, 2005: 367). However, their examples also indicate that mentors have a role to play in directing or shaping supposedly mentee-set goals. This is less about promoting agency (chapter six) and more about buttressing societal limits as personal realities. It also resembles the 'false notion of dialogue' claim that Lancaster (1988) levelled at Freire, when he suggested that his notion of 'libertarian' education is:

[M]arred by a false notion of dialogue, insofar as it depends on the role of the "teacher-vanguard" to enter the imprisoned community from without to initiate reflexive speech, to rupture the silence of the oppressed, and to release the long-trapped flow and exchange of ideas, language, and critical thinking (cited in Scheper-Hughes, 1992: 531).

The underpinning principle communicated here is that mentees can be individual in their goal setting, but only following a paternalist awakening and realism check from a more enlightened other.

The sentiments of Phil and Keisha here also highlight a crucial tension in their own work. Both these speakers have set up their own peer mentoring businesses, having met significant barriers to employment and to social acceptance as ex-prisoners. Both passionately criticise the prejudice and structural exclusions that ex-prisoners face. Yet in their practice both assist their mentees to accept these realities and work around them, to 'be realistic' and know their 'options', rather than reflecting together upon if they should exist at all, or how they can be challenged. In Freire's terms they rely upon 'transfers of information' rather than 'acts of cognition' (Freire, 1970: 60). Their mentees, in turn,

become ‘passive and malleable recipients of existing culture rather than active and interacting agents in construction’ (Cochran-Smith and Paris, 1995: 191). That is not to say that Phil and Keisha are not active themselves in challenging the injustices they perceive in ex-offender rehabilitation. Indeed, both have made it their vocation to do just this in both practical and educational terms. Phil is an active critical criminologist and a full time peer mentor. Keisha is a full time peer mentor who campaigns for understanding and inclusion through the media and direct workshops, particularly with local businesses. The point here is that within the peer mentoring format their work loses some of its critique and becomes instead a way of fitting people into a reality that they conceive of as unfair. They therefore move between spheres of politicisation (publicly) and individualised pedagogy (in the private sphere of one-to-one mentoring). In the process and by accident, it seems, the political and indeed the social become lost as the work becomes individualised. In this sense the mentoring format becomes a space where social critique is nullified.

There was also evidence of more pronounced direction from peer mentors in this study, of mentors shaping mentee aims based upon already set ideals. Paula, who volunteers as a mentor attached to a local Probation Service, for example, explains: ‘they [mentees] do the goal, the chart – it’s up to them what they actually want, we support them, it’s their goals’ (Paula, Mentor). Whilst passionately advocating person-centred work here, Paula also refers to the ‘goal chart’, which her project utilises as an assessment and planning tool. This is an ‘Outcomes Star’ (Triangle Consulting Social Enterprise, 2012) which encourages mentees to assess their needs and goals on a scale of one to ten using the following headings or prompts: ‘Offending; Managing tenancy and accommodation; Meaningful use of time; Emotional and mental health; Physical health; Drug and alcohol misuse; Social networks and relationships; Managing money; Self-care and living skills;

Motivation and Taking responsibility’ (Triangle Consulting Social Enterprise, 2012). Whilst it is ostensibly ‘up to them’ as mentees to set goals, therefore, they are also offered quite a specific frame within which to locate their thinking. Moreover it is a frame which, whilst acknowledging some social factors, sways the mentee to individualise these problems and to become personally responsible for addressing them should they be present:

An Outcomes Star™ reading is taken by the worker and service user at or near the beginning of their time with the project... they identify together where on their ladder of change the service user is for each outcome area. Each step on the ladder is associated with a numerical score so at the end of the process the scores can be plotted onto the service user’s Star. The process is then repeated at regular intervals (every three, six or 12 months depending on the project) to track progress (Triangle Consulting Online Summary, 2012).

The ‘service user’, or in this case the mentee, is therefore very clearly categorised in terms of the changes *they* need to make and made aware from the outset that their progress will be monitored. The subtle influence of mentors upon the direction of work is not only present in their practice tools, however, but also in their pre-defined ideas of ‘motivation’ and ‘capability’, as highlighted here by Hansman (2002):

In mentoring relationships, mentors may exercise power through the assumptions they make about their protégé. Mentors may function within a framework of power relations that “assumes that one person knows what is best for the other, has



superior knowledge and skills and is perceived as somewhat paternalistic in his [sic] interactions” (Brinson and Kottler, 1993: 241 cited in Hansman, 2002: 46).

This dynamic could be traced within the settings in this study. John, for example, who also volunteers at a project attached to a Probation Service, asked one mentee who he described as ‘poorly motivated’:

‘What do you want to do? Do you want me to put me arm round your shoulder or give you a kick up the arse?’ and he said: ‘Well I probably need a kick up the arse’. I said: ‘Well that’s what we’ll do... Right, well I’m telling you that we’re going shopping’. Cos he wasn’t doing anything, this is what my main thing was with him, you know? It was an ideal activity for me to go with him (John, Mentor).

Whilst John quite probably had his mentee’s personal wellbeing in mind here, it is nonetheless *he* who presents the options available and directs the shape of the work. Indeed John also explains how such directional attitudes are present higher up in his organisation:

The coordinator, he’s a quite good judge of character, he knows a lot of the background [of the mentee], more than I know, and he sort of... gives you an idea: ‘look, what you’d probably be best doing with this one...’ he knows what the mentors are capable of. He knows them, he knows us (John, Mentor).

Whilst the stated values of peer mentoring are often ‘person-centred’ and indeed respondents in this study make a similar claim for their experiences, the subtleties outlined

in this chapter indicate that in practice the work can often be significantly more directive on the part of the mentor. Indeed such micro-government occurred frequently:

One of things I like doing with clients is dog walking at a local charity, so the day before I ask him if he fancies going (John, Mentor).

Sometimes she asks me [what I want to do], but sometimes she has it planned, cos [her manager name] tells her what she's gotta do with somebody (Karina, Mentee).

He sat me down and asked me if I needed help with like searching for a job or opening a bank account and all that sort of stuff (Paul, Mentee).

These reflections illustrate that the content of mentoring is not always 'up to them' as mentees (Paula, Mentor), but rather the power to initiate an activity is often 'up to' the mentor. Moreover a mentor's direction does not always arise from within the mentor-mentee exchange, but is often decided by factors external to the mentee; be they the personal interests of the individual mentor, the aims and directions of management, or the normative dictates of capitalist society (get a job, open a bank account, etc.). The latter two influences pointed to here will be explored in greater detail in the following sections. For now, however, the point is that the presence of directive mentors is often masked by a powerful discourse of person-centred practice within peer mentoring. Moreover structural goals and cultural norms exercise their own influence upon what initially appears as a binary relationship.

### 9.1.2 Routine Activities

Another aspect of mentoring, which was experienced positively by most respondents in this study, but has hidden influence in terms of personal power, is its ‘active’ nature. Respondents in chapter six, for example, argued that the active, community based character of peer mentoring can assist in the formation of new identities, divert people from criminal habits and go some way to compensating for losses of pleasure or excitement attached to criminality. What speakers did not acknowledge, however, was the disciplinary undertones inherent in such embodied activity. Michel Foucault (1979) identified these imperatives of power in routine inculcation of ‘good habits’:

Exercises, not signs: time-tables, compulsory movements, regular activities, solitary meditation, work in common, silence, application, respect, good habits... what one is trying to restore in this technique of corrections is not so much the juridical subject, who is caught up in the fundamental interests of the social pact, but the obedient subject, the individual subjected to habits, rules, orders, an authority which is exercised continually around him and upon him (Foucault, 1979: 128-9).

This critique of the power inherent in routine activities suggests that *activity* as a pedagogical tool, be it the activity of boxing, shopping, drinking coffee or going to the Job Centre, is as much about obedience as it is consensus. Discipline, Foucault contends, is the effect of such habits. This reading undermines the ideal of a more negotiated interaction between mentor and mentee. Interestingly, however, mentors in these settings are also involved in disciplining mentees in order to produce a juridical subject, to restore mentees

to the 'social contract' of law abiding and productive behaviour, which is itself another construct of power. The result of such embodied activity then, is to restore subjects to an established normality rather than to include their situated perspective of what these established norms mean to them, or to support any alternative ways of being. In this light, the expectation upon mentees is to emerge not as self-determining and diverse entities, but as ideal disciplined subjects positioned through the application of bodily techniques. This is of course the antithesis of Freire's 'liberatory' notion of mentoring in which 'the oppressed must confront reality critically, simultaneously objectifying and acting upon that reality' (Freire, 1970: 34). In light of Freire's ideal, uncritically 'active' mentoring appears to include a subtle expectation that mentees play out set rules; that they conform to a performance of expected normality.

To suggest that routine activity constitutes covert discipline, however, perhaps misses the role that mentees themselves play in this performance. Few of the mentees interviewed had any objection to suggested activities; indeed they welcomed the 'normality' of suggestions such as going for coffee, playing a sport or job seeking:

Probation should recognise that a lot of people actually want to feel normal and want to get back into the workforce (Gina, Mentee).

It's hard work sorting your life out... all those stressful things that to normal people it's easy: phone up, make an appointment. But to someone with that chaotic lifestyle it's an absolute nightmare cos... I just wouldn't do it, I'd just always put it off (Steve, Mentor and previously a Mentee).

For Gina and Steve, the opportunity to visit work agencies, make formal calls, feel 'normal' was desired, not merely imposed. Mentoring activities for these speakers become conduits of normality, which they welcome; they mediate a broader social field from which people feel excluded or ill-equipped to manage. Indeed mentors themselves often claimed that the appeal of mentoring is belonging and normality:

[Peer mentoring] is togetherness, not like rest of population of prison... It's normality – in prison you don't get that (Michael, Prison Peer Group Member).

I was off doing naughty things to feed my drug habit, and I just didn't want to do it no more. I'm sick of this game, chasing money; I just want to be like everybody else is (Brad, Mentor).

These speakers do not want to be stigmatised and different, but they want careers, recognition, new lives. They want to be *normal*. This surrender to normality does not always come easily however. Indeed in the moments when mentors did acknowledge such disciplinary power in their work, they were not always comfortable:

I'm teaching them to be respectable members of the community (Brad, Mentor).

I don't think you can ever break down that hierarchy, you try to do, but that hierarchy is always going to exist in that relationship because they are always going to look at you as a professional and see themselves as a service user. But it's trying to break that hierarchy as much as possible, such that that level playing field is

there and if that level playing field is there then that conversation becomes so much easier....we hope! (Lol, Mentoring Coordinator)

I get the impression some [mentors] do it... cos it's an ego thing, they want power, it's about having power over another individual and that's not the work that we [at this organisation] do, quite the opposite, I'll disempower myself in order to empower someone else (Phil, Mentor).

Mentors, therefore, acknowledge and at times reflexively challenge their own practices of power. Whilst Brad is comfortable with the hierarchical, pastoral character of his role and Lol acknowledges the unequal nature of this work, both Lol and Phil attempt to distance themselves from the inherent inequity. For Lol and Phil, mentoring may well involve power, but not in their hands, this is something that they actively seek to diffuse. Such 'cognitive restructuring of events' (Fagan, 1993: 220) fits with Sykes and Matza's (1962) notions of 'diffusion or displacement of responsibility' (cited in Fagan, 1993: 220). This is not surprising given the non-authoritarian basis that peer mentoring nurtures, as illustrated in chapter five. What these cognitive tussles suggest, however, is that there is a tension within peer mentoring work, given it is inherently hierarchical and corrective, yet strives to operate on a much more egalitarian basis.

## **9.2 Power within Organisations**

Whilst both peer mentors and mentees often referred to a lack of authority in their relationships, *mentors* did frequently recognise external powers which encroach upon the work they try to do. They outlined how their organisational power, their 'ability to get things done in an organisation' (Duffee and Maguire, 2007) is often limited in two ways:

by *individual blockers* and a *changeable criminal justice* landscape. The concept of individual blockers, which will be employed here, refers to professional agents (such as prison officials, education providers or employers) who limit access to peer mentors on the grounds of their previous convictions and subsequent perceived riskiness. The notion of a *changeable criminal justice landscape* refers to the shifting and variable nature of prisons and community justice; a landscape which mentors deem to be problematic for ‘getting things done’ with any consistency. This section will therefore begin by considering organisational power in these terms. What mentors seemed less critically aware of, however, was the pervasive power that organisations often have upon the entire structure of their work. Most of the mentors I spoke to, for example, were *selected for, trained and formally supervised* in their roles. Rather than seeing these measures as limiting in terms of their own power, however, they framed them as positive elements supporting personal and professional development. The second part of this section will, therefore, explore the hidden power of *organisational processes* which distribute and manage mentors’ knowledge within mentoring settings.

### 9.2.1 *Blockers*

One of the most recognised ways in which organisational power manifests is through practical restrictions on peer mentoring as an activity. The reasons given for denying access to mentors to complete their work are most commonly issues of security (Clinks and MBF, 2012), although as concerns such as trafficking of items remain ‘a concern about the possible opportunity rather than a worry about the number of such incidents’ (Boyce et al., 2009: 11), it is possible that some of this resistance is also due to prison officer hostility towards ‘outsiders who are concerned with the welfare of prisoners’ (Mills, Meek and Gojkovic, 2012: 400). In terms of this study, mentors and coordinators frequently spoke of

difficulties gaining access to prisoners. This is despite strong arguments that prisoner reintegration ideally requires support before and after release from prison:

[W]e recognise ‘reintegration’ as a process that starts at the point of confinement, preparing the prisoner for success after release, and continuing for some time afterwards (Association of Chief Probation Officers, cited in Deakin and Spencer, 2011).

Moreover reintegration is proposed as a key area of criminal justice for peer mentoring to focus on:

There are roles for offenders acting as mentors... They can be particularly effective during transition from prison to outside world (MoJ, 2011: 23).

The One to One model ideally involves a period of regular contact between [mentee] and Mentor prior to their release from custody to allow time to get to know one another and prepare for return to the community (Hunter and Kirby, 2011: 5).

Despite these arguments, many mentors complained that ‘through the gate’ work is proving a difficult basic to master (Buck, 2014), as illustrated by this exchange between a volunteer and her manager:



Mentor: I want to go into the prisons, do an action plan, say I'll be here if you need anything, get back on your feet and get you away from the people who are going to draw you back in.

Manager: I wish we could, but even the staff have struggled to get into the prison. We did their security training but couldn't pin them down to a planning meeting, and that was the external partner's link person (Project 'Facilitate').

Prisons are therefore perceived as blocking access to the work. This perception is shared by 'Lol', a mentoring coordinator for a national charity. He is employed through a government funded pilot scheme to deliver mentoring services to 'offenders' with specific welfare needs. Despite the legitimacy of his service and remit, it was his personal criminal history which was of most interest to his prison partners:

My offences are not two weeks old. My offences are many, many, many years old and principally as a young offender, by the way, and related to coming through the care system... The prison was interested in supporting us... but could not find practitioners to support the 'through the gate' mechanism... We can't keep meeting through the legal visits; we need to have some space in the offender management unit as our own... [But] because I'm an ex offender, when they do 'Enhanced' [security] clearance for me it says 'no'. So we've gone back to Ministry of Justice... they have come up with this 'Standard Plus' which is not quite 'Basic' clearance, its nowhere near 'Enhanced', it's somewhere between the two. But what that does is allows each prison to do its own local risk assessment (Lol, Mentoring Coordinator).

The examples of ‘blocking’ described at Project ‘Facilitate’ and by ‘Lol’ are not direct, or even necessarily intentional, yet the reluctance of security gatekeepers to assist volunteers who have previous convictions provides a tangible barrier. Moreover, whilst Lol’s account indicates that the Ministry of Justice and individual prisons are taking steps to address the barrier of restricted access, for the moment peer mentors are often additionally scrutinised. For example, even when mentors are granted access to prisons, there is often a staff member or volunteer without a criminal history additionally required:

We have access [in prison X] but a prison volunteer [who is not a peer] is always in the room. That has a massive impact. Last week, when I went over, she turned up late. I had forty-five minutes with the guy on my own and we did more in that forty-five minutes than we did in any of the meetings prior to that, because he just opened up (Lol, Coordinator).

This additional surveillance of ‘ex-offender’ volunteers indicates that they may struggle to overcome the ‘master status’ (Becker, 1963) of having been an offender, despite their current status as volunteers. In other words, they continue to be viewed in terms of a risk defined past, rather than a self-defined and publicly performed present (Buck, 2014). This is a dynamic that Adam, an ex-prisoner and paid mentoring coordinator, illustrates as he describes an experience of attending one of his mentee’s pre-release meetings at a local prison:

I’ve had it, going to [prison Y] as a paid member of probation staff... I’ve gone there to talk to the client getting ready to be released... In that, I’ve talked about my past and what I’m doing now, and how that qualifies me to offer that support,

just so he knows he can have confidence in me as well and build that relationship... By the time I had got back here [to the Probation office] there had been a phone call from the head of [prison] security: 'Next time you send an offender up here to do visits we'd like to notified beforehand' and we was saying: 'He's not an offender, he's a paid member of [trust name] staff' and there was just this hoo-ha about it (Adam, Mentoring Coordinator).

Despite accounts of prison staff attempting to restrict or additionally scrutinise peer mentors, there were also examples of blocks being removed: '[Prison Z] have come back and they've vetted, I went out and met with the governor last week and they're perfectly happy for us to go in three times a month' (Lol, Mentoring Coordinator). What is clear from Lol and Adam's accounts, however, is that in terms of organisational power, peer mentors are positioned in an unfavourable hierarchy. They are not multi-agency partners, but *consigns* reliant upon benevolence of gatekeepers. Indeed this hierarchy also exists outside of the prison gates. Mel, for example, manages a peer mentoring project, which supports female offenders. She explains how her trainees were at the mercy of gatekeepers in community education settings when she attempted to organise some formal accreditation for their mentoring efforts:

Four of our women were selected and signed up for the local college's *Health and Social Care* course, but after being reassured they wouldn't have to do it [the standard criminal history check] as they were all off site, they backtracked and all applications with a criminal record are now on hold (Mel, Mentoring Coordinator).

Mel's volunteers were very likely misadvised at the outset of their educational efforts, but their experience is further evidence of how gatekeepers can raise powerful, practical blocks to mentors. In addition to such individual barriers, respondents often expressed concern about the power of established criminal justice agents to block peer mentoring *as a practice*:

That kind of meaningful relationship... it sounds 'fluffy' to a lot of people, and if you're trying to sell that as a product to a prison they'll rubbish it probably. But that's a powerful experience (Phil, Mentor).

Phil expects that in a marketised prison context, with predominantly masculine values, mentoring as a practice will be seen as soft, feminine, 'fluffy', not a viable 'product'. The powers at work here are a complex interaction of gender and supposedly 'free' enterprise. These governing ideologies will be discussed in their own right in the following section. Before we consider their influence more fully, however, Phil's perception of scepticism by prison staff introduces a second theme, which peer mentors recognised in terms of organisational power; that is, the precariousness of the criminal justice system.

### *9.2.2 A Precarious Criminal Justice Landscape*

A second way in which operational power was understood by respondents was in terms of a criminal justice system in continual flux. Mentors recognised that prison and community stakeholders (such as the Probation Service) held the power to enable peer mentoring and to terminate it, and that this power was often subject to rapidly changing trends or influences. Phil, for example, reflected how there was little structure to his mentoring work when he started out as a volunteer in prison settings:

[Peer mentoring] wasn't structured, it was just something the prison wanted to play with, and the member of staff that I was in contact with wanted to develop it, knew I had good intentions with what I was doing. But unfortunately, the reason it fizzled out it started getting formally delivered by *User Voice* [a charity] in the prison, it was taken out of the education department and given to *G4S* [a private corporation] high up (Phil, Mentor).

Phil, as an individual peer mentor, has little power in this context. His ability to practice is wholly dependent upon the momentary inclination of the prison 'to play' with a particular practice and upon the shifting structures through which such work is delivered; structures which are increasingly being shaped by competitive market practices and operated by large players within this market. Indeed, even whilst he was mentoring within prisons Phil felt there was precariousness to his tenure:

We know only too well how prison establishments think in goals, you can have a million success stories but one failure and that's enough to shut down that peer mentoring (Phil, Mentor).

Phil's perception is that ex-offender mentors are not only more closely scrutinised, but also likely to face harsher sanctions where 'failures' occur. This notion of 'failure' is likely to be important, particularly as the current government are setting out clear, yet one-dimensional guidelines about what constitutes 'success' or 'failure'. The 'Transforming Rehabilitation' agenda (introduced in chapter two) introduces 'payment by results', a policy which plans to 'only pay providers in full for real reductions in reoffending' (MoJ,

2013). This binary standard is likely to pose specific challenges for mentoring. Ben, for example, who volunteers for a project currently attached to a Probation Service, which is in the process of becoming an independent community interest company (CIC), explains:

People, I've seen them after four months and they're still abstinent. There's a success in my view. And let's say if that person did go back to drinking after that, he'll know, for me he'll know, in his head he did four months and he can do it again. So that has helped him, it's got to have done. You can't take what you've learned back (Ben, Mentor).

For Ben success is not defined by the 'result', in this case of abstinence from alcohol, but by the experience of gaining self-belief. Even if relapse does occur one value of mentoring has been to experience personal potential as a pedagogical process. Much like Robinson and Shapland (2008) who argue that we should not think about 'restorative justice as a new-style "intervention" — something which is "done to" offenders — we might be better advised to re-frame restorative justice as an opportunity to facilitate a desire, or consolidate a decision, to desist' (Robinson and Shapland, 2008: 352), Ben suggests that we might re-frame peer mentoring as an opportunity to facilitate the learning of desistance – and to build confidence in this regard. This is a radically different perspective to that of 'payment by results', which attaches principal and monetary value to the quantitatively calculated 'result'. However, this also serves as a reminder that the power to determine what counts in terms of change; what is deemed a 'success', remains with policy makers.

This section has so far considered some of the organisational powers which mentors perceive to materialise in their work. These include people and systems which block entry,

training, and autonomous delivery; *and* the precarious nature of the criminal justice system, which sanctions, funds and terminates practice. These features were all well recognised as power dynamics by interviewees. The next part of this section, however, will cast light on those elements of organisational power, which appeared to be taken for granted by interviewees, including processes of volunteer selection, training and supervision. These elements constitute the apparatus through which peer mentors' knowledge is shaped and managed.

### *9.2.3 Selection*

In the summer of 2012 I was permitted to observe a round of interview and selection processes for prospective volunteer peer mentors at Project 'Peer'. The interviews were conducted by the project's two coordinators (Adam and Cam) who themselves had histories of repeat imprisonment and drug addiction, and their manager; a local Probation Service manager. Adam took the lead in most of the interviews explaining to interviewees the informality of the process. Despite this statement however, the interviews maintained much of the familiar performance of a structured job interview. Interviewees sat opposite the panel of three and were asked a series of pre-determined questions. After the interview the panel discussed the merits of each candidate. It was during these discussions that the power of recruiters to select a particular type of 'offender voice' became apparent. In fact, rather than focusing on the range of personal experiences that volunteers were bringing to the post, the panel focused on volunteers' understanding of 'boundaries', of the mentoring role and of 'inter-agency working'. Where they had reservations it was often on the grounds of candidates still being 'at the client point of view', or if they were concerned about a candidate's ability to understand 'theories' or complete 'star charts'. In sum, they were often recruiting on the basis of how well applicants could fit into existing knowledge

streams and processes, which had up to that point been heavily influenced and supervised by the Probation Service. This is not so much creating a space for peer knowledge and understanding, or claiming that standpoint ‘gives access to understanding about oppression that others cannot have’ (Stanley and Wise, 1993: 91), but rather it resembles a form of semi-professionalisation.

#### *9.2.4 Training*

Not only were volunteers often carefully selected on the grounds of their ability to fit with institutional culture, but they were also formally trained for the role:

The best thing is... getting training. Like my NVQ Level 3 [Health and Social Care Qualification], I wouldn't have gone to college for that... No-one has ever like tried to help me like that. I mean, yeah, ‘Go to college’, but I'm unconfident going to college, so now a tutor comes here [to the mentoring project] to see me (Julie, Mentor).

Indeed mentors from across the projects spoke of appreciating the opportunity to complete a Health and Social Care NVQ (National Vocational Qualification). This qualification is designed to:

equip learners with the skills and knowledge needed to care for others in a broad range of health or social care settings... Learners can select a pathway that suits their role – for example, working with people with a learning disability, people with dementia or children and young people (City and Guilds, 2016).



These courses impart ideal typical working practices such as: effective communication; health, safety and security; reflective practice and the protection of children (City and Guilds, 2016). Peer mentors are given very clear instruction on how to become mentors, a becoming which requires that they see *themselves* as facilitators of change, see quasi-therapeutic *methods and techniques* as the conduits of change and see their *mentees* as in need of improvement. The power to define peer mentoring in practice, therefore, comes from an established frame of professional knowledge, as opposed to a previously excluded voice of experience. In this light, what has been presented as ‘person-centred’ practice (chapter seven) or an intervention which learns from the experiences of mentors and mentees (chapter five), increasingly appears to be determined by existing professional and pedagogical frameworks.

It is important to note, however, that formal education offers volunteers a valuable sense of validation:

It never even crossed my mind to come to University [which Ellie went on to post mentoring], and then... I found [mentoring project], did an interview, did their training, and became one of their first peer mentors, that’s when I really formulated my ideas of what a peer mentor is (Ellie, Mentor).

Such opportunities appear to ‘empower’ mentors who have previously felt disempowered. They enable people like Ellie and Julie (above) to gain skills and pursue careers they had not thought possible and to feel valued. The trade-off, however, is that such opportunities constitute something different to an ‘ex-offender standpoint epistemology’; to peers forming ‘solidaristic groups’ to protect themselves (Pawson, 2004: 52) against a system

which deconstructs the subjective experiences of crime and change (as proposed in chapter two). In other words, whilst such structured training appears to offer individual validation and professional credibility, it also endorses normative educational and professional conformity. These programmes do not always prioritise the ‘ex-offender’ voice or lived experience, but instead can rely heavily upon pedagogical frameworks borrowed from the fields of coaching, guidance and social care. They turn peer mentoring ‘students’ into ‘containers’, into ‘receptacles’ to be ‘filled’ by knowledgeable teachers (Freire, 1970: 53).

The majority of project based training that I observed, and that respondents described, also prescribed specific mentoring approaches. Projects ‘Peer’ and ‘Facilitate’, for example, required volunteers to attend compulsory two or three day training courses, which focused upon ideal typical ethics and practices. At Project ‘Peer’ topics included: Mentoring as a teaching and guiding tool; Communication and boundaries; Trust building; Conflict management and confidentiality; and ‘Mentoring in practice’, which focused on multi-agency working, advocacy, goal setting and the need for volunteer supervision. At Project ‘Facilitate’ topics included: Information, advice and guidance; Listening skills; Ways to empower and enable (including encouraging self-reliance); Boundary setting; Equality and coping with ‘difficult situations’. Most of this training drew upon professional norms, yet worked hard to incorporate a ‘user voice’. At Project ‘Peer’ for example, the trainers heavily promoted the importance of the mentee directing the relationship and mentors drawing upon their own experiences:

Have a friendly chat, see where they’re [mentees] at. It’s different to ‘assessments’; what professionals see as important...

Relate back to being an offender yourself – remember what it was like to feel rejected (Mentoring Coordinator and Trainer).

Trainee: Is it appropriate to disclose our history?

Trainer: Play it by ear, instinct plays a role (Peer mentor training).

Mentoring is about your character and sincerity. We provide the skills, but it's about you (Mentoring Coordinator and Trainer).

These ideals were supported by role play activities in which trainees were encouraged to practice listening without 'advising', which 'is a block to listening' (Trainer) and to not 'project your issues, stick with [mentee] aims' (Trainer). However, the training also promoted practices which constituted well established Probation approaches. These included setting 'achievable' goals, improving individual skills and reporting concerns back into formal risk assessments:

Use the goal setting form. Goals must be SMART. This means specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time bound (Trainer)

Social skills are key. For example, shopping, cooking skills, the life skills group... 'Life skills' – helping to get them ready for work and education (Trainer)

Any concerns [such as mentees not attending mentoring or being involved in crime] should be fed back to the Offender Manager (Trainer).

Similarly at Project 'Facilitate', trainers highlighted the importance of listening to the mentee experience, of using 'open questions' and reflecting, yet they also advocated the need for mentors to prioritise the project's overall aims and to maintain professional boundaries. For example, mentors were advised to 'suspend [their] own concerns' and not speak over people, yet they were also reminded that: 'employment is our overall aim' and that there should be: 'No home visits, no child minding. Don't introduce your friends and family. No personal numbers, it is not a friendship. No personal details, if asked keep it light. No Facebook. No gifts from clients' (Peer mentor training).

Both of these training courses therefore include efforts to *professionalise* peer mentors. Such efforts offer mentors and their agencies a sense of safety and credibility, but they equally risk submerging any new knowledge or ways of working in established practices. The hazard in such a prescribed context is that 'user voices' become tokenistic. Moreover, there is the danger of co-option to the very system which peer mentoring often critiques. On a broader scale Garland (2002) argues that we have seen a 'responsibilization strategy' in crime control in recent years. This strategy seeks to enlist the 'governmental' powers of private actors and 'spread responsibility for crime control onto agencies, organisations and individuals that operate outside the criminal justice state and to persuade them to act appropriately' (Garland, 2002: 124). Training the providers of purportedly 'peer led' services in ways to 'act appropriately', or professionally, appears to illustrate this strategy in action. Garland also argues that in the 'new culture of crime control':

The offenders dealt with by probation, parole and the juvenile court are now less like likely to be represented in official discourse as socially deprived citizens in need of support. They are depicted instead as culpable, undeserving and somewhat

dangerous individuals who must be carefully controlled for the protection of the public and the prevention of further offending (Garland, 2002: 175).

These opposing constructions represent a conflict that has been present throughout this thesis. In justifications for their practice peer mentors repeatedly describe their peers as deprived citizens in need of support (see chapters two, five and seven of this thesis for examples), yet they necessarily operate within a system which characterises ‘offenders’ as actual and potential risks. By adopting tools that have been developed to manage *culpable* and *dangerous offenders* therefore, these ‘semi-professionalised’ mentors risk compromising their own welfare philosophy.

Project ‘Care’, in intention at least, offered a model to resist such capture. The coordinator of Project ‘Care’ chose not to base their volunteer training upon standardised social care strategies, but upon what potential mentors and mentees themselves deemed to be priorities. In an attempt to facilitate this, the project hosted ‘consultation groups’ in both prison and community settings with people who had previous convictions and a history of living in local authority care:

The consultation process was about understanding, from the potential mentors and mentees, what would attract you to it and also in the hope that we would galvanise a number of recruits from those consultations. Consultation groups are organised, the project is outlined, we talk about [local authority] care, offending, the relationship between the two, and where support would need to be if mentoring was to work (Lol, Mentoring Coordinator).

The original intention of the project founders was that training is not imposed upon mentors as ‘banking’ of known knowledge, therefore, but developed in consultation. This process is closer to ‘libertarian’ form of education, advocated by Freire, which reconciles the teacher-student contradiction, ‘so that both are simultaneously teachers and students.’ (Freire, 1970: 53) The method consists of acts of cognition, not bestowing information (Freire, 1970: 60), it prioritises an ‘ex-offender’ voice above established pedagogical knowledge and frameworks. Unfortunately, this alternative training approach was not embedded before the end of the research period. It would therefore be interesting to follow up with a study of the ideal in practice; to see if planners were able to achieve their aims and to analyse if any different forms of learning resulted.

#### 9.2.5 *Supervision*

We do have formal supervision about once a month (John, Mentor).

Another feature of subtle control within peer mentoring is the formal ‘supervision’ of volunteers. In most settings this resembled social work supervision, wherein: ‘[t]he supervisor is in indirect contact with the client through the worker. The supervisor helps the direct service worker to help the client’ (Kadushin and Harkness, 2014: 10). Supervision is therefore an ‘indirect, but vital’ process (Tsui, 2004: xiii). It is also ‘administratively oriented... to ensure quality of service to clients’ (Tsui, 2004: 9). In terms of mentoring, mentors are not only carefully *selected* (in many cases by their ability to fit with an institutional culture) and trained in *how* to mentor, but most mentors are also formally *supervised* by managers or coordinators, offering further organisational power over the development of the mentoring relationship. At all of the participating projects volunteers met with a supervisor or coordinator every one to two months to discuss the

progress of cases and seek guidance and support. I had the opportunity of observing one of these supervision sessions between a peer mentor and his manager in the autumn of 2012:

Supervisor: What do you still think needs to be done? [With a particular mentee being discussed]

Peer Mentor: He definitely needs handing over [to a partner agency]. I've discussed this with him in depth.

Supervisor: I'd agree, just have a conversation with him and the worker; let them know you're moving on, that [the mentoring project] is always available. Also do an Outcome Star [assessment and review tool] ASAP and this will be used to avoid duplication.

This particular mentor also sought the opportunity to ask advice on how his practice could be improved, what he could 'do better':

Supervisor: Take risks talking to people, get to know the paperwork, prep beforehand so you're not always relying on the mentee to come up with solution.

This exchange suggests that there is a displacement of informal mentoring with more disciplined activity and that much of the decision making, which appears to take place within the mentoring relationship, may actually happen in supervisory spaces such as these. It is here that the work is given formal shape and informal influence, where tools are offered and tactics suggested.

At Project 'Safe', supervision processes had a slightly different dynamic in that mentors were supervised by 'Aspirational Mentors' rather than project staff or managers. 'Aspirational Mentors' were described as 'inspirational local women' who volunteer to help develop the paid peer mentors and improve their links with strategic services:

[M]entors are allocated an 'Aspirational Mentor' – a local businesswoman or a woman who holds a senior post in an organisation – who they can look up to for guidance and career advice. Some of the aspirational mentors share similar backgrounds to their mentees (Project 'Safe' Promotional Material, 2013).

Hope, a paid mentor at this project, described how having this aspirational figure was helpful:

We have meetings and they'll check out how we are getting on with our mentees. If I'm unsure, I can phone her and ask for her advice or support. So we've always got support and always have people around us that are there to help us. My mentor is a Chief Constable, but we've got others who run domestic violence places or others in housing. These are all very inspirational women, and just by having them there's always different support, you know? Your own actual Aspirational Mentor, because of all the different fields they work in; there's always support there, which is good (Hope, Mentor).

Melina, a paid mentor at the same project added:



I have an Aspirational Mentor and she's great, she helps me with everything... I've not long started and she helps me with, like, helping me plan my sessions, what we need to work around, or anything. Like, when I lost my first mentee, when they kicked her out [of school], I was upset about that, so I spoke with her about that (Melina, Mentor).

Peer mentoring in these albeit diverse settings is not just about drawing on personal experience and formal training then, but also on the advice of supervisory staff. Moreover at Project 'Safe' these supervisory individuals come from backgrounds as varied as policing, refuge or housing management. Despite this diversity of knowledge, there is often no pre-requisite for such supervisors to undergo the kind of training that mentors themselves do. Nadia, for example, is the director of a housing agency, but volunteers as an 'Aspirational Mentor' supervising peer mentors:

Interviewer: Is there any training or supervision for this role?

Nadia: Erm...no...

Interviewer: Does there need to be? Or not?

Nadia: (long pause)...I think it'd be useful, because I've done other mentoring schemes whereby we had like a briefing session before we did the mentoring... Defining what mentoring was and what our role was; sort of roles and responsibilities... Projects and things that we could do with people. I think training would be useful and it's also good that you've got that shared understanding at the beginning about what mentoring is and how it might work (Nadia, Aspirational Mentor).

When training or formalised knowledge transfer is absent, therefore, volunteers – even highly skilled ones – can feel a sense of absence. This may well be another reason, in addition to credibility, why services persist with formal training processes that are familiar to other settings. What appears to *matter* in terms of the aims of supervision for Project ‘Safe’, however, is not a particular practice ideology, but the input of an individual who is deemed to be ‘inspirational’; who provides aspiration in terms of their career status, even if this career differs in context and approach to mentoring. The job of the ‘Aspirational Mentor’ is not to have an intricate knowledge of the detail of mentoring process or clientele, but to develop the aspirations and confidence of the mentor. This model assumes that mimetic desire (Girard, 1977) is as powerful as practical pedagogic processes. However, whilst Project ‘Safe’s’ approach moves away slightly from directive ‘managerialism’, there was still an assumption that ‘management knowledge... is perceived as the core technology’ (Tsui, 2004: 8). A position which potentially undermines the user-led or peer-led ethos.

#### 9.2.6 *Regulatory Professionals*

In addition to the visible (if not fully acknowledged) structures of selection, training and supervision, there was also some evidence of attempts at professional regulation from beyond the parameters of mentoring settings. In March 2013, for example, I attended a conference organised by a female peer mentoring project. The aim of the conference was to raise awareness of the needs of women in the criminal justice system. Part of the conference was a ‘workshop’ facilitated by two young peer mentors with ‘experience of serious youth violence’. The workshop discussion focused on risk factors for young women who may be drawn into ‘gang activity’ and predominantly on young women who could be at risk from exploitation by male gangs. At one point in this discussion one of the

facilitators, who was a young, black, female mentor, used the context to question the intersection of race and class in her own experiences with the police:

Why do police have conviction rates? Crime is crime. They gave us our name as a gang, put cameras on us, we start walking like that, together as a group, cos it's well-lit and we feel safe. On the street with my urban friends I was stopped all the time, when I went to University, in the same numbers I was not stopped (Hope, Mentor).

This was one of the few times during the study that I heard a mentor (as opposed to a coordinator) being critical of the social order, that I heard a mentor critically question the structural influences upon her life. This may well be because, as illustrated above, the approaches and beliefs of mentors are subject to much formal filtering and shaping. Coordinators in contrast are often in post as a result of their tenacity and entrepreneurship (as discussed in chapter eight). What was particularly interesting about Hope's insights here, however, was the response they received. At the end of the workshop Hope's manager conversationally asked a Probation Officer (who had been a participant in the workshop) how the 'girls had done'. The Officer's response was that it was 'great' but that 'they need to rein in their personal opinions a bit'. This assumption that mentors should collude with the established knowledge of professionals constituted an attempt to silence Hope's voice of experience. It also evoked the arguments of Davis (1981) and Hill Collins (2000) who identified the operation of 'subordinating images of black women' within society, including: "Uppity black women" [who] do not "know their place" and expect to be treated as though they were equal to white women or to white men' (cited in Martin and Jurik, 2006: 44). Whilst the professional's comment about Hope did not appear to be

consciously about undermining her on the grounds of her race or gender, it nonetheless communicated that her personal opinions (or experiences) are in need of external moderation; that Hope should not expect her own voice to have prominence. Regardless of Hope being offered a platform, therefore, in actuality, as a young, black, female, peer mentor she is relegated to a denizen or ‘subaltern’ voice (Spivak, 1988). Her marginalised voice is dismissed as ‘personal’ by the dominant speaker before it is fully heard. This ‘user voice’ is invited to join the justice-practice conversation, but is also expected to perform a marginalised status and endorse established rhetoric. Such subtle pressure conveys a similar message to that of the need to avoid ‘failure’ described above. Ex-offenders may play a part in the justice system, but only if they are suitably grateful and conformist; if they are ‘humble’ and ‘don’t tread on toes’ (chapter eight). In contrast, Campbell argues:

[I]f we want to achieve the kind of ‘justice’ which fosters egalitarian relationships between individuals, groups and communities, then we must include informal, marginal, subaltern and subversive discourses (Campbell, 2011: 168).

### **9.3 Macro power: Governing Ideologies**

What Hope’s experience, above, reinforces is that power is not just manifest in a person’s ability to speak, but also in the capacity of their audience to listen and define; in the capacity for those around Hope to ‘define [her] as someone set apart’ (Goffman, 1963: 132). Moreover, these processes of speaking and listening are made sense of through collectively held images, assumptions and labels, by dominant value systems or ‘governing ideologies’. These disciplinary powers do not solely belong to the mentoring context, but nonetheless manifest here in clear ways. This section aims to shine a light on two such systems of thought, which influence peer mentoring in subtle ways and often go

unrecognised in critiques of the practice. These are: neoliberalism and gender socialisation. Neoliberalism is characterised by ideals of self-governance and ‘responsibilisation’ (Garland, 1996; Rose, 2000), whilst ‘gender socialisation’ begins:

[A]most immediately after a child is born, when parents describe and interact with their child differently depending on whether it is a boy or a girl. Parents of boys describe them as big, athletic, active, serious, angry and determined, whereas parents of girls describe them as small, pretty, delicate, well behaved, emotional and afraid (Plant et al., 2000; and Reid, 1994 cited in Renzetti, 2013:19).

Whilst ‘gender socialisation’ theories are often critiqued for being ‘confined to the narrow nurture theory’ (Palazanni, 2012: 14), there is nonetheless ‘abundant empirical evidence’ (Palazanni, 2012: 14) of gender socialisation. It is also a theory that was helpful in terms of beginning to make sense of some of the extant gender differences in this study. This section will explore the ways in which these two disciplinary influences manifest in the lives of respondents, are communicated to them and the ways in which they resist or replenish them.

### *9.3.1 The Governing Power of Neoliberalism*

Neoliberal governmentality; government ‘at a distance’ (Leitner, Sheppard, Sziarto and Maringanti, 2007: 3) has had a significant influence upon the development of peer mentoring, but the literature to date is largely silent in terms of how it manifests in the micro dynamics of this practice.

Neo-liberalism encourages individuals to give their lives a specific entrepreneurial form. It responds to stronger 'demand' for individual scope for self-determination and desired autonomy by 'supplying' individuals and collectives with the possibility of actively participating in the solution of specific matters and problems which had hitherto been the domain of state agencies specifically empowered to undertake such tasks (Lemke, 2001: 202).

Neoliberal ideology can be traced as an influential factor in many of the findings of this study. Chapter two, for example, linked the appeal of peer mentoring to broader aims to reduce state costs and fill the gaps of a reducing welfare state. Chapter five presented mentors as reformed role models, exemplars of self-determination positioned to share their example and their strategies with their peers. Chapters six and seven outlined how mentoring invites people to account for themselves *and* nurtures them to see themselves as capable of self-direction. Finally, chapter eight accounted the prevalence of entrepreneurship in mentoring, of efforts to respond to a diversifying 'market' of justice'. In addition to these examples there are quite specific neoliberal narratives that can be traced in the reflections of respondents:

Before you can get to a positive trajectory as an offender, have time to have pity and anger, to scrabble through that. Point fingers at everybody else, before you can actually reflect: hang on a minute; this is down to me (Phil, Mentor).

It was just my outlook on life, I felt very angry, very badly done to. I had alcohol problems. I've had drug problems in the past, but the reason I went there [to a

recovery centre] was because *I* was an alcoholic (Lin, Mentor and previously a Mentee).

I've stopped feeling sorry for myself. I've started, it is true, when I do think positive, positive things happen. And I think it's not so much what happens, because I can't control the outside events, but it's how I deal with it. And I look at it now, that you've got to deal with everything in a positive way (Janet, Mentee).

Each of these speakers advocate the need to shift focus from the external to the internal, in doing so they endorse (and accept) neoliberal ideology. There is a strong focus on individual 'responsibilisation' (Besley and Peters, 2007: 143) and on 'self-blaming' (Lyon-Callo, 2008: 154). There is a need to stop 'feeling sorry for [your] self', feeling 'badly done to' and pointing fingers. Individuals must be self-governing, must become responsibilised, rather than looking to external factors as in any way accountable for their current position. What must necessarily be quashed in order for this responsibilisation to take place, however, is any focus on social or structural issues. Responsibilisation displaces structural issues. For Phil, however, some anger remained and gave him moments of doubt about replacing career criminality with mentoring work:

I'm that disenchanted with conventional living that sometimes my mind falters into criminal thinking. An example would be: I'm so bitter about the whole tax avoidance things and the injustice created as a result of the banking crisis, you know? Watching people lose their jobs, losing mortgages, family and marriage breakdowns, people committing suicide, that can be the product of say the banking

crisis and yet the system is focused on criminalising people that have made bad choices (Phil, Mentor).

This critical perception is conceived of by Phil as a ‘faltering’, a personal failure, not compatible with his own personal improvement and his mentoring vocation. His own *voice*, his own standpoint and social critique are therefore voluntarily silenced as he responds to the weighing expectations of neoliberal individualism: ‘*this is down to me*’. Once a belief in personal responsibility is internalised the social and the structural become insignificant, merely things to ‘point fingers at’ on the road to self-realisation. In this light, another element of mentoring which may have previously appeared benign; ‘individualised practice’, now has new significance. This approach, which was valued by respondents in terms of ‘owning their own changes’ and by theorists as desistance supporting (Chapters two and seven), now appears as a governmental element, a feature which assists mentees to accept their own personal responsibility and ‘get past’ feelings of anger and injustice:

She said ‘this is your life George, where do you want to take it? Take a step at a time’. You start to think: ‘oh yea, I forgot this is my life’ (Georgie, Mentee).

The attraction of a sense of agency, a sense which may have been diminished in custodial institutions or heavily managed criminal justice interventions (chapters five and six) becomes the trade-off then for critical silence:

I [previously] felt sorry for myself, I did, and just to let that out and get it out my system. You’re not walking round with this constant ‘the world’s against me’ kind of attitude and that I think was what helped me (Georgie, Mentee).



A sense of self-direction is accepted by Georgie at the expense of a fuller regard for social factors which made her feel excluded. Mentees regulate their own critical perspectives as they accept the ruling ideology of self-discipline. We do not currently know what mentoring would look like if it were informed more fully by collective politicisation, as suggested may be the potential of this work in chapter three, because the influence of individual responsabilisation is so strong. However, it is likely that it would include a critical focus upon, rather than a dismissal of, those factors which caused respondents to feel sorry for themselves, feel *badly done to*, feel that *the world is against them* and want to *point fingers*. Given the loaded language of these quotations, it is also likely that this focus might uncover ill-treatment, exclusion and marginalisation, for which there is currently no space.

Whilst respondents rarely described collective reflections upon social disadvantage, there were traces of individual resistance to neo-liberal ideology within their narratives. These came in the form of a quiet insistence upon social and structural impacts on individual lives. Lol, for example, as highlighted in chapter eight, calls attention to the high number of care leavers in the prison estate and questions whether this can conceivably be explained solely in terms of a problem of self-governance:

Twenty five per cent plus of those in prisons can say they've been in care, you can't just take people from the care system and say they're bad people so they end up there, there must be something happening, systemic, so we're trying to work out, our project is about trying to work out where those gaps exist in terms of that

system: why's it not working? Why is it that care leavers end up in custody? (Lol, Mentoring Coordinator).

Similarly, mentees themselves often called attention to social factors in their lives. Eve, for example, was serving a community sentence for a fraudulent benefit claim, an offence she claims she was encouraged to commit by her then partner: 'It was my ex said, "we won't go legal", and now my kids and me are paying for it' As a result she was prosecuted whilst her partner escaped consequence:

It's not fair that we [Eve and her two children] still have to suffer because it was my mistake but he gets away scot-free, I think he should have got some of it (Eve, Mentee).

Other mentees also insisted there were circumstances that helped to account for their criminal actions. Circumstances which are often ignored or minimised as systems focus on improvements to the individual:

There were circumstances that led up to what happened [the offending] and when I look at that person now I think 'Oh God', I don't recognise myself but there were triggers that caused me to do what I did. And then it was too late to stop it (Gina, Mentee).

What really annoys me is eighty per cent of people are in prison through drink and drugs and not once do they come to you and say: 'right you committed crime through drink we need to deal with that'. They don't. I went to prison for drink-

driving, no-one ever mentioned to me I might be an alcoholic in prison (Georgie, Mentee).

I haven't faced some of the financial difficulties most offenders face, in extreme situations where it's a case of putting food in your mouth. I might have been propelled into crime like some offenders are faced with (Phil, Mentor).

For these speakers there is an insistence on triggers and underlying causes, on social factors as opposed to individual flaws. This insistence in itself begins to resist the neo-liberal insistence upon individual responsibility. Whilst the lack of collective, critical reflection means this resistance is limited, the emergence of these voices from within a dominant discourse illustrates how peer mentoring offers a platform to reflect on issues which challenge received wisdom.

### *9.3.2 The power of gender socialisation*

Neoliberalism does not exist in isolation however. Rather, it endures alongside a number of neighbouring ideologies, one of which is highlighted by Corcoran:

In an environment which allocates a privileged place to the values of close regulation, self-management and "responsibilization" (Garland 1996), women are, or are expected to be, exemplary self-governing citizens and highly self-surveilling with respect to various norms of "femininity" (Corcoran, 2006: 191).

As gender was a particularly prominent theme in interviews this section will explore its governing effects directly. It will consider how peer mentoring often embraces

assumptions about masculinity and femininity and in doing so becomes regulatory from a gendered viewpoint. Indeed the assumption that peer mentoring can free itself of relations of power and control, by virtue of drawing its actors from similar communities, misses as Lynne Haney argues:

One of the most basic of sociological insights: [that] communities also exert discipline and control over their members. And these forms of control can be just as constraining as those at work in more formal organisations (Haney, 2010: 157).

In other words, when peer mentoring is framed as a relationship free of authority, one of the major power dynamics which is veiled is gender. It should not perhaps come as a surprise that peer mentoring itself is gendered. Criminologists and policy makers have increasingly focused on the role of gender in criminal justice settings and there is an established literature on gendered pastoral practice which contextualises this claim. Following a review of vulnerable women in the criminal justice system, for example, Baroness Corston (2007) concluded that:

Women have been marginalised within a system largely designed by men for men for far too long... there needs to be a re-design of women's custody introduced in parallel with other gender specific workable disposals and sanctions (Corston Report, 2007).

This 'liberal feminist' approach advanced the value of gender specific approaches for both individuals and organisations. Arguments for such an approach include claims that:

Policies, programs, and procedures that reflect... gender-based differences [can]... make the management of women offenders more effective... Decrease staff turnover and sexual misconduct... Improve program and service delivery... Decrease the likelihood of litigation against the criminal justice system [and] Increase the gender appropriateness of services and programs (Bloom, Owen, Covington and Raeder, 2003: vi)

However, Kelly Hannah-Moffat's (2010) observations, from a more 'critical feminist' perspective, questioned whether gender responsive ideals always translate into helpful criminal justice practice:

The well-intentioned labels 'gender sensitive' and 'women-centeredness' have been attached to a wide range of improvised and poorly adapted programs and managerial processes without substantial consideration of how gender should be operationalised (Hannah-Moffat, 2010: 196).

As a result, specific strategies and programmes for 'female offenders' have often 'been based on essentialist conceptualisations of gender and have treated women in stereotypical ways' (Perry, 2013: 409). In response Hannah-Moffat argues that:

Dialogue about GR [Gender responsive] principles is general and rarely questions stereotypical femininities and the implicit normative assumptions routinely made about women... GR approaches stress the differences between men and women prisoners, and in doing so constitute gender subjectivity (Hannah-Moffat, 2010: 198).

Whilst there are complex feminist debates at play here, there is agreement that there has been a neglect of the social powers or oppressions at work in women's lives. This section will therefore explore how gender stereotypes manifest in peer mentoring settings and illustrate why the gender dimension of mentoring is important and overlooked.

### 9.3.3 *Peer Mentoring Through Gender*

With a peer it's equal, it's on the same level (Katy, Mentor).

A focus on gender complicates the claim that peer mentoring is an egalitarian practice. Rather, there is some evidence that it often separates male and female mentees into normative pursuits. Take for example the 'mentoring activities' on offer in one community setting attached to a local Probation Service:

We go boxing; I've got it this afternoon... We went to Blackpool, a boxing outing, apart from saying 'We'll meet outside probation' it wasn't like a probation outing, just like a lads' day out (Will, male mentee).

I used to help with the [women's] group, then I did a fashion show with it and one of my clients helped me do that... I've give her that confidence and it was her who wanted to do it too, because she's quite good at fashion (Julie, female mentor).

These activities did not *just* seem to be about practising a new, non-criminal identity, as claimed earlier in relation to the 'active' nature of mentoring. They also appear to be about practising or performing idealised identities, identities informed by stereotypical gender

norms. Male mentees are invited to attend 'boxing', a 'lads' day out'; settings replete with aggression and hyper-masculine performance. Female mentees are invited to attend a group at a Women's Centre and learn about fashion; a setting communicative of traditional feminine norms of passivity, beauty and display. These activities appeared to resemble a re-disciplining of men and women to normative gendered expectations, rather than a 'power-less' peer relationship. However, whilst *my* initial response was to problematise and see a disciplinary underpinning, I was acutely aware that I had heard little of the same problematising from those involved in the practice. Mentors and mentees – that is those creating and doing these activities – did not appear to share this concern. Rather, for those experiencing it, gendered work provided a comforting familiarity, a way of bonding and building trusting relationships. Julie, for example, a peer mentor in a project attached to a Probation Service, reflects further on why she chose a fashion show as one of her mentoring activities:

The way she [mentee] dresses, I'd say: 'Oh you're dead good at colour coordinating' etc. And I think I gave her that confidence, because I was praising her on her fashion. And she was like: 'Well I'm interested in fashion' and... that maybe gave her a bit of support, confidence to think: 'Oh someone really thinks I am good at fashion, I'll get up and do it', because... that's another thing with mentoring if they're doing good you need to praise them too, because I think everyone likes to be praised don't they? And a lot of erm, them might not have been praised by maybe their family, boyfriend etc. (Julie, Mentor).

'Fashion', in Julie's terms, is not important as a socialising or normative instrument, therefore, but rather it presents a familiar social script for her to work with – a script that is

known in terms of expected feminine performance and which her mentee was already invested in. The 'script' concept employed here is influenced by the work of Judith Rungay (2004). Rungay used the concept of scripts to describe the 'socially recognized behavioural routines' of specific personal identities, identities such as parent, student, worker or partner (Rungay, 2004: 409). Script mastery, she argues, 'involves a significant investment in rehearsal across a wide range of interactions and situations' (Rungay, 2004: 415); as a result 'Mentoring programmes might provide one mechanism for facilitating this transition process' (Rungay, 2004: 415). In Rungay's terms an interest in female fashion may constitute a supporting 'subroutine' (2004: 410) of the 'woman' script. The difference between Rungay's conception of mentoring as scripting and what Julie describes is which party selects the script. In Julie's example 'fashion' is not appropriated by the mentee in order to master a new, desired 'womanly' identity, but rather it is appropriated by the mentor in order to achieve some common ground, a space in which to bond. Fashion does not function as a full identity script therefore, but rather functions as a language to connect women through a known feminine subroutine. For Julie, fashion was merely employed as a *tool* to improve confidence, an available route to achieve the wider goal of building a relationship.

Will, the mentee who attends a boxing group as part of his mentoring work describes a similar process: 'We go boxing, have a hug, "what've you been up to?"'. The boxing that I initially interpreted as a hyper masculine performance of aggression, now emerges as a script, or more accurately, a setting, in which men invested in masculine performances can attend comfortably. Once there, however, the focus is upon affection, connection and care. Boxing, like fashion, provides a known language then, but its use within a frame of peer mentoring allows it to communicate new messages too. It becomes a space where men can



connect and support each other emotionally without facing the consequences of gender transgression. Where in the words of one attendee, people can be taken ‘out of their comfort zones’, where men can draw upon shared experiences of ‘sexual abuse, being in prison... get them out in the open, go and seek help... I impress to get everything out in the open’ (Trainee Mentor). In this light essentialist gender positions become a ‘way in’. A gendered social script, like the ex-offender identity itself, becomes a bridge, a known way of being on the path to new. Gendered norms, in this light, are not negative forms of imposed domination, therefore, but a known order which individual subjects utilise, transgress and reproduce for particular purposes.

#### *9.3.4 Resisting gender stereotypes*

There were some invitations to familiar gender scripts, which were not so readily invested in however. On a warm summer morning in 2012 I attended a Women’s Centre in a post-industrial northern English town. The venue was being used by a group of peer mentors attached to a probation setting to deliver a ‘Women’s Group’. Group attendees had been referred by their probation officers or drug workers. Organisers had specific intentions for establishing such a group. They were aware of some of the gender-specific recommendations of the Corston report (2007) along with the strategic plans of their own management team to obtain women-only work spaces, as the probation building in which they were based ‘is not a welcoming building, particularly for some female clients’ (Women’s Group Coordinator). On the day I observed the group, which took place in the shadow of decommissioned Mill buildings and budget supermarkets; women attended a session focused on ‘fashion’. It was part of a six week block of sessions, which included ‘skin, nails and fashion’ and was described as ‘women-led’. The activities I observed that day included matching pictures of clothing and footwear (which had been printed off by

peer volunteers who were leading the group) as to ‘what goes best’ together. Group members were then asked to think about where they would wear each outfit, would it be for example ‘an interview or a night out?’ At the end of the session there was a ‘fashion show’ using second-hand clothing that had been donated to the Women’s Centre. Group members were invited to try clothes on and take part in the show, although there was some reluctance for this and most ‘models’ were volunteer peer mentors. Afterwards group members could choose items of clothing to take away. At this point group members were most animated and many chose items for themselves. Throughout the session, however, the atmosphere was distinctly less animated, many group members crossed their arms, did not speak and kept their eyes averted to the desks in front of them. The atmosphere was dominated for the most part by a core group of three or four group members who sat together, displayed defensive body language and had closed giggly chats among themselves. At one point a group facilitator asked: ‘If you had £50 where would you go to buy clothes?’ Some participants responded, as seemed to be the expectation, with suggestions for budget retailers, including: ‘Primark’, ‘everything£5.com’ and charity shops. These suggestions were praised by group leaders: ‘Yes, you can buy more if you go to the cheaper shops’. However there was also clear resistance expressed, one participant for example, shouted: ‘All we need to do now is win the lottery’, another complained: ‘I haven’t even got the internet’, to which a facilitator suggested they ‘go to the library, its free there’.

The practical, problem solving approach adopted by group facilitators missed the social critique present within these comments, which was that the gendered social ideals of self-presentation being communicated do not easily reconcile with the reality of living in poverty. A reality these vocal women were presenting as more pressing. This recollects

what Freire warned against: submerging voices with good advice; turning people into ‘passive receptacles’ (Freire, 1970: 53). In this scenario, facilitators deferred the potentially oppositional or resistant perspectives of the women (which threatened to destabilise the pedagogical objective of the event) by reducing these comments to immaterial responses. These are quintessentially dismissive devices used by facilitators assuming the teacher role. Had the group facilitators felt they were in a position to engage with these points of strain and resistance, they may have been able to *hear* their peers more fully, to create a space for voice and critical standpoint rather than positioning them as passive receivers. To do so would have been to exchange ‘the role of depositor, prescriber, domesticator, for the role of student among students’, thus, as Freire argues, undermining the ‘power of oppression’ (Freire, 1970: 56). By prioritising the depositing of practical advice above dialogue, however, they – perhaps inevitably – reinforced the dominant ideology of the wider social and justice contexts in which they are positioned. Mentees were disciplined into becoming workers and responsible consumers; they were also made subject to the broader the rehabilitative project for female ‘offenders’, which appears to be one of ‘conformity to traditional ‘feminine’ gender norms as well as a desistance from crime’ (Perry, 2013: 409). The expectation upon women mentees in this group appeared to be to comply with the feminine scripts of beauty and domestic finance management and to not mention the submerged, potentially threatening realities of living with poverty and marginalisation. The mentee who is expected to emerge from such gendered peer mentoring is not just a desister but an *ideal* woman. This is reflective of a broader history, outlined by Malloch and McIvor (2011):

Women who commit crimes are stigmatized on the basis that they have broken social laws; but are additionally stigmatized for breaking gendered codes of

‘appropriate’ behaviour for women (e.g. Smart, 1992). While women resist gender stereotypes in many ways, they are not unaffected by these expectations and the consequences of failing to conform to them (Malloch and McIvor, 2011: 331).

Peer mentoring through gender may not constitute a conscious form of discipline, therefore, but it is a response to broader ideological expectations upon female offenders. Female lawbreakers are aware that they not only broke the law, but also broke the gender code. They are aware of a double rehabilitation project. In this light, familiar ‘scripts’ such as fashion do not just constitute a functional, bonding measure, but simultaneously an ideological socialising measure. In theory then, gender sensitive groups such as the women’s fashion group can offer an alternative to a system designed for men, but in practice, they can reinforce ideals of femininity, which belong to a broader patriarchal context. In this regard they constitute the kind of mentoring which aims to fit people ‘into society as it exists, rather than equipping them with a critical understanding of society or any means by which they might seek to change it’ (Colley, 2002: 268). This can create a message that it is not enough to go straight; you must also become a particular type of woman. Eve, a mentee at a project helping women into employment, describes this pressure well:

Interviewer: How were you matched with your mentor?

Eve: I think it’s because she was so ladylike and I’m not ladylike... I did have a lot of problems [at the job centre] because with me being in construction they didn’t like the fact that a woman (tails off). Now they’re a bit better, but there was a woman up the stairs and she was saying: ‘Well my brother in law is out of work

and he's a bricklayer'... I don't know how they matched us up, probably because they wanted me to be a bit 'girlier' (Eve, Female Mentee).

Eve resists the assumption that construction work should predominantly be a male domain, yet in doing so she feels she is seen as lacking in terms of femininity. Moreover she feels this is the focus of her mentoring intervention – the area where she lacks. Such gendered bracketing was not only felt by female mentees however. Paul also recognised and resisted the gendered expectations of his own mentoring activity:

They do an arts and crafts day for the girls who come here, so I used to sit and do that cos I enjoy doing stuff like that. But a lot of the lads wouldn't do it. So they set up the gym for them at first and people started going, but they stopped cos they couldn't be arsed with it, so they set the boxing up now (Paul, Male Mentee).

Paul resists the assumption that 'arts and crafts' should be a women's activity, yet he illustrates that many of his peers do not share his resistance. As a result, activities which fit more closely with traditional masculine norms are introduced. Both Eve and Paul therefore resist gendered activities, yet in the absence of peer support for their resistance they both settle into compliance with mentoring which appears to support gender conformity. In the space of their mentoring activity at least, they drop their individual acts of resistance to gender normativity. There were other settings, however, where gender stereotypes were more actively and consciously challenged.

The three men speaking below were, at the time of interview, housed in a hyper masculine prison environment, but were all also involved in a peer led mentoring group which encouraged them to reflect upon their experiences of growing up in care and to offer

support to one another. They recognised the value of emotional connections and performed relational care tasks, often in conscious resistance to socially constructed gender expectations:

We have a bond, togetherness, not like rest of population of prison... In here it's all bravado; people find it difficult to talk, probably loads suffering but cos of bravado (tails off)... Here [on the therapeutic wing] there's a structure, doing something... doing something productive (Michael, Male Prison Peer Group Member).

Macho bravado is nonsense, not real ... they rely on it so much. It's difficult to hold onto. Drop that! This is who I am; I have emotion, playing to my strengths (Mark, Male Prison Peer Group Member).

The men in this setting often form relational bonds, which challenge stereotypical notions of masculinity. They both offer and receive an embodied, human ethic of care:

I saw another [lad in here who was self-harming], I showed him [my arms], said: 'Sit down for two minutes, do you want to talk? Why are you hurting yourself?'... I know everything, I've been hit, abused, I've self-harmed, family problems, relationship problems (Al, Male Prison Mentor).

Such resistance to hyper masculine stereotypes in prison environments has been noted previously. Crewe (2006), for example, in his work on English prisons argues:

[T]he cultural standard of ‘real manhood’ – is not the sole version of masculinity within an institution, nor is it something that many men embody. Rather, it is the standard against which most men measure themselves and their peers, and which therefore defines, represses and subordinates alternative versions of masculinity (Crewe, 2006: 398).

Here, however, the prison peer group members go further than measuring themselves against this standard; they also vividly articulate their resistance to hyper masculinity because it has not served them well. It has caused them to ‘reject or dissociate themselves from aspects of themselves that would lead them to appear unmanly’ (Gilligan, 2011: 25-26), which has in turn acted as a barrier to nurturance and personal connections. The ‘caring’ connections they experience in the prison peer group, therefore, result in critical gender consciousness. The speakers here point to the need to ‘drop’ macho bravado. What is not known, however, is whether this critical consciousness was able to be maintained outside of the semi-protective environment of the therapeutic wing on which mentoring took place, or even if such consciousness continued to serve them well outside of this environment. It would therefore be interesting to speak again with these mentors upon release to see if their perspectives on care and ‘macho bravado’ persist, or whether they become affected by stereotypical ‘expectations and the consequences of failing to conform to them’ (Malloch and McIvor, 2011: 331).

Another form of proactive resistance to stereotypical gender roles happened at Project ‘Safe’. The project aimed to address the ‘challenges and difficulties faced by young women’ including ‘the representation of women within contemporary society and the social, cultural and personal pressures exerted upon women’ (Project ‘Safe’ Evaluation

Report, 2012: 4). They actively sought to minimise these challenges and cultivate alternative representations. This took the form of not only offering ‘aspirational’ role models, but also encouraging young women [and men] to view themselves as leaders:

It is essential that we work towards enabling young people to move from a position of social alienation towards resilience and empowerment enabling the development of future ambassadorial and leadership roles within our communities (‘Safe’ Promotional Booklet, 2013: 5).

Peer mentoring in these two examples is, therefore, informed by a critical awareness of the problems with gendered standards and mentors actively seek to minimise their impact; in doing so they offer mentees small practices of re-socialisation. They also, by drawing on their own lived experiences, realise what James Messerschmidt (1986) concluded in his studies of capitalism, patriarchy and crime:

Throughout our society... violence is associated with power and males... As a result most young males come to identify the connection between masculinity – power – aggression – violence as part of their own developing male identities... men validate their masculinity through aggression/violence (Messerschmidt, 1986: 59)... [In contrast] Females play a very subordinate role. In teenage gangs, for instance, the females who are recruited remain hidden and powerless, spending their time nurturing the demands of the male leaders rather than planning and executing serious forms of criminality (Messerschmidt, 1986: 44).



Gender socialisation may therefore ‘encourage or inhibit criminal offending among females and males’ (Renzetti, 2013: 19). In offering mentoring practices which actively challenge these forms of socialisation peer mentors suggest that desistance work may also need to include *resistance* work. By diminishing the gendered expectations upon male and female ‘offenders’ participants diminish the power of the roles which can maintain forms of exclusion and encourage particular types of offending.

#### **9.4 Conclusion**

Whilst peer mentoring is often claimed to empower its participants (Kavanagh and Borrill, 2013; chapter five of this thesis), to be egalitarian and based on liberatory principles (chapter two) this discourse has a tendency to mask relations of power which persist within the practice. This chapter has explored some of these relations including the power of those *internal* to the mentoring relationship to set goals and arrange activities, the power of those *external* to the mentoring relationship – such as prison staff, education staff and probation staff – to block work, sanction work and define the shape of recruitment training and delivery and finally the power of collective *social ideals* such as neoliberalism and gender. These governing ideologies can be traced through the ways in which people describe themselves and the activities which they are, or *should* be involved in. These three manifestations of power are often overlooked in more favourable assessments of peer mentoring. However, whilst it is important to recognise these dynamics, it is equally important to appreciate that those subject to these powers are not *powerless*. Rather the chapter has also highlighted ways in which both mentees and peer mentors push against established hierarchies and ideals. These include: battling exclusion by prisons and succeeding in gaining access to those settings; developing training that includes a ‘user’ perspective despite the strong influence of existing pedagogical frameworks; a quiet

insistence upon the social and structural factors in people's lives, which can influence their choices despite the dominance of neoliberal, responsabilising ideology; and finally individuals resisting normative masculinity and femininity, even creating environments where these expectations can be explored and challenged given their intrinsic links to particular 'criminal' roles. Despite powerful restrictions upon the work of peer mentoring and strategies of co-option, therefore, those involved in the practice often find ways to resist the powers that manifest in the work. What emerges is a practice in continual tussle, which often accepts professional norms and social practices in place, but which also presses at the edges of received wisdom. It questions our collective constructions of who 'ex-offenders' are and how we should deal with them. In doing so it holds a mirror to our established practices and ideals.

## Chapter ten

### Conclusion

This chapter will draw together the key findings of the research. It will begin by acknowledging some of the limitations of this particular study and will consider how these may be overcome in future research. It will then summarise what this thesis has found out about peer mentoring and how these findings change the terms of the debate.

#### 10.1 Limitations

There are a number of limitations to this study, which should be acknowledged. Firstly, the findings presented here cannot be generalised. They reflect a snapshot of *some* practices, performed by *some* actors, in *some* settings in the North of England. Whilst they bring important insight about emergent patterns across these specific contexts, further research in other areas with other groups is required before broader patterns can be drawn. That said, it is unlikely that a consistent and generalizable story of peer mentoring will emerge at all, given the huge diversity of practices and the way in which projects end or change in response to an unstable funding environment and continually transforming criminal justice context. Secondly, the snapshot presented here relies on respondents selected through institutional gatekeepers. Perhaps, as a result, the majority of interviewees presented a generally complementary picture of the practice. It would, therefore, be interesting to seek out perspectives of peer mentoring which did not rely upon gatekeepers, or indeed to seek the perspectives of those who *opted out* of peer mentoring to see if they differ. My own findings are drawn from field work that was undertaken with *active* mentors and mentees between 2011 and 2013. The research did not continue after the respondents finished

mentoring and did not include any follow up studies. It is therefore unclear at this stage whether the claims that are made for the practice persist when people move on. Given that Jolliffe and Farrington (2007: 3) suggest the benefits of mentoring did not persist after the mentoring ended, this would be a useful focus of future research into peer mentoring. Given these limitations, future studies could focus on larger samples and other geographical locations. They could also include more longitudinal work to look at perspectives and experiences post mentoring.

Despite these limitations, the study has also enabled new perspectives of peer mentoring to emerge. Firstly, the study has provided theoretical and qualitative support for the potential of peer mentoring to promote desistance from crime.

## **10.2 Peer mentoring and the role of the voluntary sector in [re]producing ‘desistance’**

One of the benefits of peer mentoring highlighted here is that it assists people to master a ‘new redemptive self-narrative’ (Maruna, 2001) with the help of peers who offer a ‘blueprint for conventional, pro social role’ (Rumgay, 2004) and act as an encouraging audience for new performances. Peer mentors often offer lived examples or maps to redemption where none had seemed possible (chapter five). These lived examples are supplemented with new interactions, social situations and behavioural routines through which people can rehearse their new roles, or play out their revised scripts (chapter six). This ‘active’ form of mentoring in community settings constitutes a change in ‘routine activities’ and offers ‘different patterns of socialization’ (Shapland and Bottoms, 2011: 272), which are disruptive to offending routines. The emerging new identities that mentees act out in these settings are also buttressed by their mentors who point out emerging

personal positive factors (chapter six), building what have been termed ‘positive illusions’ about [the mentee’s] essentially good self (Maruna et al., 2004b: 225- 226). However, the study also problematises the notion of script mastery, locating scripts within a broader context of gender socialisation. In this light, men and women often described a sense that they were ‘lacking’ or inhibited by gendered expectations. Peer mentors can also feel ambivalence and discomfort in their own position if the ‘script’ they have to promote is deemed to be of inferior status to that of more socially ‘successful’ offenders.

Peer mentoring further connects with processes of desistance in that it fosters redemptive contexts. One project, for example, regarded their work as ‘desistance in action’ (Project ‘Peer’) given they were illustrating to others the positive potential of people with criminal histories. Employing ex-offenders as paid Probation staff not only gave individuals a practical opportunity to lead a new kind of life, but also changed the perceptions of established Probation staff ‘you can see hope in the workers eyes’ (Team Manager, chapter eight). These shifts in perception even extended outside of criminal justice contexts. Keisha, for example, recounted how her peer mentoring project challenged the stereotyping and excluding practices of her independent business advisor (chapter eight). Despite these descriptions of peer mentoring as redemptive, however, there were also times when people were not redeemed. Mentors met physical barriers from colleagues in prison and education settings given their criminal histories (chapter nine) and even objections from their own peers (chapter five), who at times questioned their authenticity or ‘readiness’ to help others. Indeed, peer mentoring work is often a constant reminder of shameful pasts (chapter eight). These are costs that often remain obscured within more functional assessments of the practice.

Existing desistance research recognises the importance of subjective changes (e.g. in motivation or self-concept) and changes in social factors (e.g. in marital or employment status) in desistance from crime (LeBel et al., 2008). This study adds a third dimension to this paradigm, which has not been recognised in research to date: mimetic desire. Mimesis (Girard, 1962), or the process of mimicking the desires of others, offers a theoretical explanation of how ‘role modelling’ works. Utilising Girard’s inter-individual theory of mimesis, it is argued that desistance from crime may not just depend on a person’s self-concept or social opportunities, but can also be triggered by desire for what people see others desire. Peer mentors are significant to galvanising this process because they are often respected by mentees; and mentees repeatedly mimicked their desires. Interestingly, it was not *desistance* itself that mentees most clearly came to desire in mentoring exchanges, but to help others in ways that they had seen modelled by their mentors. This in itself is an important finding, given that desistance often involves “‘earning” one’s place back in the moral community’ (Burnett and Maruna, 2006: 84). However, within Girard’s mimetic theory is also the potential for rejection of a model, given that ‘the adult is generally ashamed to imitate others for fear of revealing his lack of being’ (Girard, 1977: 155). Correspondingly, both mentees and potential mentees did often express concern, doubt or complete rejection of the peer mentors’ example. This is problematic for policies which aim to offer mentoring to all as a generic good (NOMS, 2011). This mimetic conception of desistance also speaks to the unresolved criminological problem of the origins of personal change. Respondents here suggest that openness or determination to change can be influenced by the presence of role models who inspire a desire to change and sustain such desire through the offer of their lived example.

Whilst there are clear parallels between aspects of peer mentoring and known desistance processes, this thesis also suggests that in ‘promoting’ desistance through ideal type role models and behaviours, mentoring services risk reproducing desistance as a goal, an end point. In doing so the danger is that they replicate functional efforts to reduce offending and that they miss the myriad additional benefits that mentoring can bring.

### **10.3 The wider potential of peer mentoring.**

This thesis reveals that there is much more to the practice of peer mentoring than its functional capacity. It does not *just* aim to promote desistance, or to improve the skills, opportunities and life chances of its mentors and mentees, although these objectives do feature. It is also an activity which people utilise for a number of political and therapeutic ends. It is therefore often comprised of varying and often contradictory ideals.

One important contribution this thesis makes is that it uncovers the budding politicised elements of peer mentoring. Whilst only embryonic in many settings, and often almost completely subsumed by professionalised norms, this is a critical feature. It is also a feature that could be threatening to peer mentoring as a popular practice, given it potentially challenges the status quo; this raises the need for ethical reflection. Indeed, it was with some significant caution that I developed this finding at all. Whilst peer mentoring has found popular and political support up to this point, this is because it is understood as a functional, desistance promoting activity: making ‘good use of the old lags in stopping the new ones’ (Grayling, 2012). Moreover, as these ‘old lags’ are usually volunteers, they constitute an affordable workforce in the new competitive ‘market’ of criminal justice. It is difficult to imagine the same level of enthusiasm for a practice which seeks to assert a voice of experience that has been submerged, to critically question

technocratic managerialism and to financially value the contributions of people who have experienced social exclusion. However, to ignore these aims would have lacked rigor, indeed it would have been disingenuous. As researchers we can recognise that peer mentoring has elements of social protest, which tests the boundaries and hierarchical basis of our current knowledge, or we can mask the politicisation inherent in this work and ensure that it is only understood as a functional practice, thus subsuming the voices within once again. Further research in this field should therefore shed careful light on this element of the practice by paying close attention to how far peer-led approaches are political, how much they offer a challenge to existing practices and to how far they become subsumed by established forms of knowledge and governance. Given the persistent attempts within this study to assert a voice of experience, it would also be enlightening and fitting to utilise participatory research methods in future research. Participatory action research, for example, provides ‘opportunities for codeveloping processes with people rather than for people’ (McIntyre, 2008: xii). Such ‘alternative methodologies... [offer] a counter-discourse and challenge the status quo. They are increasingly employed to uncover state and structural violence, human suffering and inequalities of marginalised and oppressed groups’ (Bhatia, 2014: 162-3). As such they fit well with a practice which critiques the marginalisation of voice and which is budding with politicisation.

What happens in peer mentoring settings is a diverse set of practices, ranging from one to one sessions through informal and formal group activities to very informal leisure activities. One to one work often employs similar approaches to those adopted by the Probation Service; approaches such as individual assessment, planning, ‘intervention’ and review. In this sense mentoring often shows signs of becoming institutionalised or professionalised. However, peer mentoring is also often accompanied by supplementary



practices such as publishing academic articles, organising and contributing to conferences and raising awareness of the experience of particular groups with prison or probation professionals. In these arenas mentors and mentoring managers often speak a critical voice. They attempt to improve ‘the system’ from within. More than a process, a product or a critique, however, this work is about transformational and trusting relationships, it is about seeing people in different ways. Mentoring is frequently described as something quite separate to the Probation approach – it overtly rejects the ‘badges’ of authority and being buzzed through locked doors, in favour of a more egalitarian, leisure based activity. This is an approach very much valued by mentees. Group peer mentoring is also fascinatingly diverse, ranging from therapeutic self-help type groups through more formal pedagogical ‘learning’ environments with a clear ‘leader’ to more exploratory dialogue, which encourages people to make sense of their actions through discussion and reflection on contexts. This diverse range of approaches was present within just the four local settings that this study focused upon. The variety was influenced by client groups, the previous experience of mentors and the environments practiced within. Despite this diversity, there were some features common across settings that were of note. The thesis organised these features into five overarching themes: *identity; agency; values; change; and power.*

### *10.3.1 Identity*

Identity is central to peer mentoring, both as a resource and a focus of the work. Peer mentors often utilise the perceived authenticity of the ‘ex-offender’ identity to inspire change in others and assist in the narrative reconstruction (Maruna, 2001) of mentee identities. However, identity has also been shown to be important in much broader terms than desistance alone. Peer mentors do not just utilise their ‘peer’ or ‘ex-offender’ standpoint to engage, inspire or improve their contemporaries, but also as a political tool.

These standpoints elevate knowledge which is based on lived experiences above that of trained ‘experts’ or professionals. This represents a symbolic destruction of authority. In these terms, peer mentoring is claimed to offer a form of communication that is egalitarian, free of patronisation and which espouses collaborative ideals. Mentors and mentees question ‘rehabilitation’ practices that systematically categorise and dehumanise them, calling instead for humane approaches, which have regard for social contexts and how these can be subjectively experienced. Progress, in these terms, does not require experts employing ever more sophisticated ways of quantifying and *improving* individuals, but it requires dialogue with those individuals. It calls for more critical forms of pedagogy, which acknowledge differences and exclusions in order to build more equal relationships of knowledge exchange. The importance of these efforts at horizontal communication and mutual understanding not always appreciated within criminology or criminal justice practice. ‘Identity’, in these terms, is not just another feature which requires rehabilitation, but identity positions can be utilised to deconstruct depersonalised, decontextualized and actuarial approaches to ‘offender management’.

### *10.3.2 Agency*

Whilst social critique and standpoint are nascent in the ways in which mentors employ identity, there are also parts of the practice which do not appear to be led by mentors and mentees. Indeed, at times this study contradicts claims that mentoring can be ‘empowering’, in contrast to ‘previous experiences of feeling powerless’ (Kavanagh and Borrill, 2013: 14). Mentors and mentees are frequently invited in to the practice, or enter the work with little knowledge of why they are there. They are often coerced, rather than active, critical agents. Mentees are also offered externally set activities and routines along with peer mentors who act as a second conscience, subtly directing their decisions. Despite

these apparently *disempowering* processes, however, respondents report that peer mentoring can increase a sense of agency or self-worth. Mentees are offered opportunities to practice new ways of being in community based settings, to embed new routines and to engage in activities that they find pleasurable. As a result a sense of agency emerges as a dialogue between peers. Mentees not only gain replacements for routines and pleasures, which may have been lost when desisting from crime, but emerging new identities are cultivated and nurtured. Mentors configure a new kind of audience, creating a space where acceptance occurs and where the legitimacy of transformations can be recognised. Importantly, these elements of collaboration provide mentees with a protective buffer after being released from the complete control of prison, allowing them to reach new perspectives of themselves and new hope for the future.

### 10.3.3 Values

Whilst I have traced political and personal aims here, in terms of asserting excluded voices and gaining a sense of personal agency, there were also prominent therapeutic aims espoused by those involved with mentoring services. The ‘core conditions’ of *caring* and *listening* were often made sense of in terms of suffering. Respondents spoke of a need to release suffering and unburden themselves of grief. Peer mentoring was seen as a safe space to do these things given that mentors are perceived to ‘genuinely care’ and are tolerant of slip-ups. The significance of *small steps* or liminal goals is that they seem achievable and therefore motivate people; people begin to see the progress they are making. Mentoring emerges here as a caring version of dialogue where issues of interpersonal power imbalance are not so evident. This focus highlights the social contexts of people’s lives, which can often be masked by a managerial focus on ‘offenders’ as *flawed* individuals. Indeed, by *doing to* people rather than *listening to* people, criminal justice

professionals can miss highly relevant parts of a person's experience and create inauthentic transactions. Despite the perceived benefits of the reorientation peer mentoring offers, however, mentors also risked burdening themselves with high expectations of emotional toil for little or no financial reward. Their approach is also at odds with a criminal justice 'marketplace' which is increasingly 'results' driven and technocratic.

#### *10.3.4 Change*

Whilst, as highlighted above, peer mentoring often seeks to effect personal change – to *inspire* change – respondents also pointed to changes external to themselves, to the need for transformations in public perceptions and the practices of rehabilitation services. Whether individual or structural; change was frequently presented here as a struggle. People spoke of a tension between known habits and unknown futures, between wanting to accept help and seeing authority as dangerous. They spoke of their desire to reimagine and improve criminal justice services and also of having their experiences appropriated by more powerful players. These tensions again insist that we pay attention to the social and discursive contexts in which people must live out their individual desistance efforts. Personal change emerges here as an often terrifying and difficult process, yet there were claims that peer mentoring can offer a unique antidote to this terror, the visibility of reformed role models evidence that change is possible and provide inspiration. Success is also not defined by the 'result' of having changed, but by the experience of gaining self-belief. Even if relapse does occur, one of the values of mentoring is to experience personal potential as a pedagogical process. However, these processes are complex and dialogical – both external inspiration and internal readiness to change appear to work concurrently. There is a complex and unpredictable interplay of social influence and self-direction at work in these relationships. Furthermore, there is a cost to changing. Change is described

here as physically dangerous, materially humbling and emotionally isolating. Mentors themselves also come to belong to a new professional peer group, which moves them toward the authority that is so feared. This highlights the potentially oxymoronic positions of peer and mentor.

#### *10.3.5 Power*

What each of the above themes have in common is some form of power struggle. Whilst the mentoring literature more broadly addresses some of the inherent dynamics of power within (and without) mentoring relationships (Scandura, 1998; Colley, 2001), the limited literature on *peer* mentoring largely lacks this analysis. This may well be because peer mentoring is very much an emerging practice within criminal justice settings. Not only has very little research been done in this arena, therefore, but that which has been done, quite necessarily given the increasingly marketised setting in which projects operate, is often concerned with proving functional worth in quantitative or monetary terms. This study has looked more closely at the micro dynamics of these relationships. This closer focus has not only illustrated what happens within mentoring relationships and how these relationships are made sense of by those involved, but also clarified some of the unrecognised or unspoken dynamics of peer to peer practice. These include the power of peer mentors to set goals and arrange activities; the power of prison staff, education staff and probation staff to block work, sanction work and define the shape of recruitment, training and delivery; and the power of collective social ideals such as neoliberalism and gender to shape the activities, which people are – or feel they *should* be – involved in. Whilst mentoring often aims to resist the dominant interventionist discourse, resistance to this dominance proves limited; interventionism is never quite overturned. Both mentors and mentees, at times, affirm existing power structures and ensure their continuance. However, a close focus upon

some of the manifestations of power in peer mentoring also highlights that those subject to these powers are not *powerless*. Rather both mentors and mentees frequently push against established hierarchies and ideals, be it by challenging exclusion in prison settings, developing training and approaches which include a ‘user’ perspective, or insisting upon the centrality of social and structural factors in people’s lives.

At this point in a thesis authors often include a set of ‘recommendations’ for policy and/or practice, this thesis will not do so, at least not here, and not in technically explicit terms. This is because two of the primary findings of this study are that there is value in collaborative forms of change, and that people with lived experience of criminal justice and social exclusion have succinct and creative suggestions, yet their voices are often silenced or appropriated. Concluding with *my answers* in terms of what should happen next therefore seems incongruous. As a result, one of the follow-on pieces of work from this study will be a dialogue of essays, co-produced with peer mentoring entrepreneurs and pioneers, to explore *their* ideas and concerns for policy and practice moving forward.

This thesis contends that our current understanding of the field of peer mentoring is too narrow. Those engaged in this form of mentoring are not *just* concerned with reducing reoffending, offering a supplementary criminal justice service or even promoting desistance, but also with listening to and offering a platform to submerged voices, with offering a practice based upon care and tolerance and with promoting broader social changes. Peer mentors and their coordinators often aim to shift focus away from individuals who require correction and toward social systems and practices that require change. The practice positions people in new ways and asks critical questions of established approaches. In these regards peer mentoring is often a critical and political

practice, one which has the potential to foster 'egalitarian relationships between individuals, groups and communities [by including] informal, marginal, subaltern and subversive discourses' (Campbell, 2011: 168). With the help of the mentors and mentees who spoke to this research, this thesis has identified the core values or conditions of peer mentoring, something which had previously not been captured. It also draws attention to the richness of radical pedagogical approaches, reflectively used, including the ways in which dialogue with disempowered parties often enhances learning on all sides.

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**APPENDICES**



**Gillian Buck PhD Student,  
Mentor Information Sheet**



**Study Title:**

The Voluntary Sector Role in Promoting Desistance through Peer Mentoring

**Aims of the Research**

- To find out what peer mentoring by ex-offenders is
- To explore the what is good about peer mentoring and what needs to be improved
- To look for any links between mentoring and 'going straight'.
- To explore how important being a volunteer is to the process of mentoring.

**Invitation**

You are being invited to consider taking part in the research study *The Voluntary Sector Role in Promoting Offenders' Desistance through Peer Mentoring*. This project is being undertaken by PhD student Gillian Buck, and supervised by Dr. Mary Corcoran.

Before you decide whether you are happy to take part, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read this information carefully and discuss it with friends and relatives if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is unclear or if you would like more information.

**Why have I been chosen?**

You have been chosen because you are working or volunteering as a peer mentor. Five to ten people from the service you work with will be randomly selected for interview. I will also be observing groups, drop-ins and other activities, where participants agree to be observed.

**Do I have to take part?**

You are free to decide whether you wish to take part or not. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign two consent forms, one is for you to keep and the other is for our records. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time and without giving reasons.

**What will happen if I take part?**

If you decide to take part you will be invited to meet with the researcher to be interviewed for approximately one hour. The interview will be asking about your experience of (and thoughts about) peer mentoring by ex-offenders. Interviews will be tape recorded with your permission, but the recording will be safely stored without your name attached to it and destroyed at the end of the research. No direct quotes from your interview will be used in the research without your consent and only the researcher will hear the original recordings.

#### **If I take part, what do I have to do?**

If you agree to take part I would like you to be interviewed by myself on a one-to-one basis for approximately one hour.

#### **What are the benefits (if any) of taking part?**

You will have the chance to talk to someone about your experiences and what you have found to be good and bad. The findings will later be passed on to your service and other staff in the criminal justice system in the hope that services can be improved.

#### **What are the risks of taking part?**

Because we will be talking about a service you are involved with as a result of your offending, there is a chance that you may want to talk about related issues or problems which you find upsetting. If these kinds of discussions arise I will help you to find someone you can speak with so that you are not left dealing with these feelings alone.

There is a very small chance that someone reading the research could recognise you by the comments of yours which I include. I will work with you to avoid this by thinking together very carefully about which comments we use.

#### **How will information about me be used?**

Information gained from interviews will be typed up and sorted into 'themes'. This means I will be reading all the information I gather together and seeing if there are shared patterns in people's experience of mentoring. I expect that I will be writing about what is both good and bad about the peer mentoring experience, and what the findings tell us about human identity. The work will be published in book form and held in the University library. The work may also be used to produce articles for academic journals (such as criminal justice or social work journals). When the study is completed the original interview recordings will be destroyed. None of the interview content will be used again without your permission.

#### **Who will have access to information about me?**

The comments you share with me will be used to help me write about the peer mentoring experience. Only I will have access to these original interview records. I may use some direct quotes from you in my written report, if you consent, but these would not include your name. Your personal details will remain confidential and I will try my best to anonymise any of your comments which I use.

Interview data will be stored securely in a locked filing cabinet and on a password protected computer. It will be difficult to identify you from the data because it will be coded, with your personal details kept in a separate locked file. The data will be kept by the researcher for five years before being securely disposed of.

I do however have to work within the law and so offers of confidentiality may sometimes be overridden. For example if you tell me that you are planning future criminal activity or abuse, either to yourself or another or if you tell me of any suicidal thoughts you have, I must pass this information to the relevant authorities.

#### **Who is funding and organising the research?**

The research is funded jointly by Keele University in Staffordshire and 'Clinks'; a national organisation which supports, represents and campaigns for the Voluntary and Community Sector working with offenders.

**What if there is a problem?**

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you can speak to the researcher who will do their best to answer your questions. You should contact Gillian Buck at [g.buck@ilpj.keele.ac.uk](mailto:g.buck@ilpj.keele.ac.uk). Alternatively, if you do not wish to contact the researcher you may contact her supervisor Dr Mary Corcoran, Lecturer in Criminology on 01782 733104 or [m.corcoran@crim.keele.ac.uk](mailto:m.corcoran@crim.keele.ac.uk).

If you remain unhappy about the research and/or wish to raise a complaint about any aspect of the way that you have been approached or treated during the course of the study please write to Nicola Leighton who is the University's contact for complaints regarding research at the following address:-

Nicola Leighton  
Research Governance Officer  
Research & Enterprise Services  
Dorothy Hodgkin Building  
Keele University  
ST5 5BG  
E-mail: [n.leighton@uso.keele.ac.uk](mailto:n.leighton@uso.keele.ac.uk)  
Tel: 01782 733306

**Contact for further information**

Dr. Mary Corcoran  
Lecturer in Criminology  
Phone: (+44) 01782 7 33104  
Email: [m.corcoran@crim.keele.ac.uk](mailto:m.corcoran@crim.keele.ac.uk)





**Gillian Buck PhD Student  
Mentee Information Sheet**



**Study Title:**

The Voluntary Sector Role in Promoting Desistance through Peer Mentoring

**Aims of the Research**

- To find out what peer mentoring by ex-offenders is
- To explore the what is good about peer mentoring and what needs to be improved
- To look for any links between mentoring and 'going straight'.
- To explore how important being a volunteer is to the process of mentoring.

**Invitation**

You are being invited to consider taking part in the research study *The Voluntary Sector Role in Promoting Offenders' Desistance through Peer Mentoring*. This project is being undertaken by PhD student Gillian Buck, and supervised by Dr. Mary Corcoran.

Before you decide whether you are happy to take part, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read this information carefully and discuss it with friends and relatives if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is unclear or if you would like more information.

**Why have I been chosen?**

[You have been chosen because you are using a peer mentoring service.](#) Five to ten people from the service you work with will be randomly selected for interview. I will also be observing groups, drop-ins and other activities, where participants agree.

**Do I have to take part?**

You are free to decide whether you wish to take part or not. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign two consent forms, one is for you to keep and the other is for our records. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time and without giving reasons.

**What will happen if I take part?**

If you decide to take part you will be invited to meet with the researcher to be interviewed for approximately one hour. The interview will be asking about your experience of (and thoughts about) peer mentoring by ex-offenders. [Interviews will be tape recorded with](#)

[your permission](#), but the recording will be safely stored without your name attached to it and destroyed at the end of the research. No direct quotes from your interview will be used in the research without your consent and only the researcher will hear the original recordings.

#### **If I take part, what do I have to do?**

If you agree to take part I would like you to be interviewed by myself on a one-to-one basis for approximately one hour.

#### **What are the benefits (if any) of taking part?**

You will have the chance to talk to someone about your experiences and what you have found to be good and bad. The findings will later be passed on to your service and other staff in the criminal justice system in the hope that services can be improved.

#### **What are the risks of taking part?**

Because we will be talking about a service you receive as a result of your offending, there is a chance that you may want to talk about related issues or problems which you find upsetting. If these kinds of discussions arise I will help you to find someone you can speak with so that you are not left dealing with these feelings alone. [The Samaritans can also be contacted free of charge from wing telephones and portable telephones providing a direct line to them are available on each wing on request.](#)

There is a very small chance that someone reading the research could recognise you by the comments of yours which I include. I will work with you to avoid this by thinking together very carefully about which comments we use.

#### **How will information about me be used?**

Information gained from interviews will be typed up and sorted into 'themes'. This means I will be reading all the information I gather together and seeing if there are shared patterns in people's experience of mentoring. I expect that I will be writing about what is both good and bad about the peer mentoring experience, and what the findings tell us about human identity. The work will be published in book form and held in the University library. The work may also be used to produce articles for academic journals (such as criminal justice or social work journals). When the study is completed the original interview recordings will be destroyed. None of the interview content will be used again without your permission.

#### **Who will have access to information about me?**

The comments you share with me will be used to help me write about the peer mentoring experience. Only I and my supervisor will have access to these original interview records. I may use some direct quotes from you in my written report, if you consent, but these would not include your name. Your personal details will remain confidential and I will try my best to anonymise any of your comments which I use.

Interview data will be stored securely in a locked filing cabinet and on a password protected computer. It will be difficult to identify you from the data because it will be coded, with your personal details kept in a separate locked file. The data will be kept by the researcher for five years before being securely disposed of.

I do however have to work within the law and so offers of confidentiality may sometimes be overridden. For example if you tell me that you are planning future criminal activity or abuse, either to yourself or another or if you tell me of any suicidal thoughts you have, I must pass this information to the relevant authorities.

#### **Who is funding and organising the research?**

The research is funded jointly by Keele University in Staffordshire and 'Clinks'; a national organisation which supports, represents and campaigns for the Voluntary and Community Sector working with offenders.

**What if there is a problem?**

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you can speak to the researcher who will do their best to answer your questions. You should contact Gillian Buck at [g.buck@ilpj.keele.ac.uk](mailto:g.buck@ilpj.keele.ac.uk). Alternatively, if you do not wish to contact the researcher you may contact her supervisor Dr Mary Corcoran, Lecturer in Criminology on 01782 733104 or [m.corcoran@crim.keele.ac.uk](mailto:m.corcoran@crim.keele.ac.uk).

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Keele University  
ST5 5BG  
E-mail: [n.leighton@uso.keele.ac.uk](mailto:n.leighton@uso.keele.ac.uk)  
Tel: 01782 733306

**Contact for further information**

Dr. Mary Corcoran  
Lecturer in Criminology  
Phone: (+44) 01782 7 33104  
Email: [m.corcoran@crim.keele.ac.uk](mailto:m.corcoran@crim.keele.ac.uk).

## Peer mentoring research

### How will information about me be used?

I will sort all my interview data into patterns to summarise the experience of mentoring. I expect that I will be writing about what is both good and bad about peer mentoring. When written up the interview recordings will be destroyed. None of the interview content will be used again without your permission and no direct quotes from your interview will be used in the research report without your consent.



### Who will have access to information about me?

Only I will have access to these original interview records. Your personal details will remain confidential. Interview data will be stored securely in a locked filing cabinet and on a password protected computer. The data will be kept by the researcher for 5 years before being securely disposed of.

I do however have to work within the law and so confidentiality may sometimes be overridden. For example if you tell me that you are planning future criminal activity or abuse, to yourself or another or if you tell me of any suicidal thoughts you have, I must pass this information to the relevant authorities.



This research is funded jointly by Keele University in Staffordshire and 'Clinks'; a national organisation which supports, represents and campaigns for the Voluntary and Community Sector working with offenders.

### Research contact

Gill Buck  
[g.buck@ilpj.keele.ac.uk](mailto:g.buck@ilpj.keele.ac.uk)

### If there is a problem:

Dr. Mary Corcoran  
Lecturer in Criminology  
Phone: (+44) 01782 7 33104  
Email: [m.corcoran@crim.keele.ac.uk](mailto:m.corcoran@crim.keele.ac.uk).



Gill Buck, PhD Student  
Supervised by Dr Mary Corcoran

## The Voluntary Sector Role in Promoting Desistance through Peer Mentoring

Research Information Sheet



### Aims of the Research

- What is *peer mentoring* by *ex-offenders*?
- What is *good* about peer mentoring and what *needs to be improved*?
- Are there any links between *mentoring* and '*going straight*'?
- How important are volunteers to mentoring?

### Invitation to be interviewed for research

[g.buck@ilpj.keele.ac.uk](mailto:g.buck@ilpj.keele.ac.uk)

## Peer Mentoring Research

YOU DECIDE!



At

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide if you are happy to take part, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read this information and discuss it with friends and relatives if you wish.

Ask us if there is anything that is unclear or if you would like more information.



### Why have I been chosen?

Because you are using a peer mentoring service.

### Do I have to take part?

It is your choice to take part or not. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time and without giving reasons.

YOU DECIDE!



### What will happen if I take part?

You will be interviewed for approximately 1 hour. I will be asking about your experience of peer mentoring by ex-offenders.



Interviews will be tape recorded with your permission, but the recording will be stored without your name attached and destroyed at the end of the research.

No direct quotes will be used

### What are the benefits of taking part?

You will get the chance to talk to someone about your experiences and what you have found to be good and bad. The findings will later be passed on to your service and others in the hope that services can be improved.

### What are the risks of taking part?

There is a risk that any changes that you hope to see are not put in place which could lead to frustration. There is also a risk that the project findings don't match your own experience and this could lead to frustration.



You may decide to talk about problems which you find upsetting; I can help you to find someone you can speak with so that you are not left dealing with these feelings alone.



You could be recognised by your comments. We will plan comment write up together very carefully to try and avoid this.



Keele  
University

SCHOOL OF SOCIOLOGY AND CRIMINOLOGY

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## CONSENT FORM

**Title of Project:**

The Voluntary Sector Role in Promoting Offenders' Desistance through Peer Mentoring

**Name of Principal Investigator:** Gillian Buck

**Please tick box**

- 1 I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- 2 I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time.
- 3 I agree to take part in this study.
- 4 I understand that data collected about me during this study will be anonymised before it is submitted for publication.
- 5 I agree to the interview being audio recorded
- 6 I agree to be contacted about possible participation in future research projects.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature



Keele  
University

## SCHOOL OF SOCIOLOGY AND CRIMINOLOGY

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### CONSENT FORM (For use of quotes)

**Title of Project:** The Voluntary Sector Role in Promoting Offenders' Desistance through Peer Mentoring

**Name of Principal Investigator:** Gillian Buck

- Please tick box**
- 1 I agree for any quotes to be used
- OR
- 2 I don't want any quotes to be used
- 3 I want to see any proposed quotes before making a decision

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

[1 for researcher, 1 for participant]



**Gillian Buck PhD Study  
Parent/Carer Information Sheet**

**Study Title:** The Voluntary Sector Role in Promoting Desistance through Peer Mentoring

**Aims of the Research**

- To find out what peer mentoring by ex-offenders is
- To explore what is good about peer mentoring and what needs to be improved
- To look for any links between mentoring and 'going straight'.
- To explore how important being a volunteer is to the process of mentoring.

**Invitation**

Your child has been invited to consider taking part in the research study *The Voluntary Sector Role in Promoting Offenders' Desistance through Peer Mentoring*. This project is being undertaken by PhD student Gillian Buck, and supervised by Dr. Mary Corcoran.

Before you decide whether or not you are happy for your child to take part, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read this information carefully and discuss it with friends and relatives if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is unclear or if you would like more information.

**Why has my child been chosen?**

Your child has been chosen because he or she is using a peer mentoring service. Five to ten people from the service she works with will be randomly selected for interview. I will also be observing groups, drop-ins and other activities, where participants agree.

**Does my child have to take part?**

You are free to decide whether you wish for your child to take part or not. If you do agree you will be asked to sign two consent forms, one is for you to keep and the other is for our records. You are free to withdraw your consent from this study at any time and without giving reasons.

**What will happen if my child takes part?**

If you decide that your child can take part, she will be invited to meet with the researcher to be interviewed for approximately one hour. The interview will be asking about your child's experience of (and thoughts about) peer mentoring. Interviews will be tape recorded with your permission, but the recording will be safely stored without names attached to it and destroyed at the end of the research. No direct quotes from interviews will be used in the research without your consent and only the researcher will hear the original recordings.

**If I agree my child can take part, what will they have to do?**

I would like your child to be interviewed by myself on a one-to-one basis for approximately one hour. My interviews with young people will all take place at the charity's centre or at the young person's school so that they have familiar staff support nearby.

**What are the benefits (if any) of taking part?**

Your child will have the chance to talk to someone about her experiences and what she has found to be good and bad. The findings will later be passed on to the mentoring service she uses and to other staff in the criminal justice system in the hope that services can be improved.



**What are the risks (if any) of taking part?**

There is a chance that your child may want to talk during interview about issues or problems in her life which she finds upsetting. If these kinds of discussions arise I will help her to find someone you can speak with so that she is not left dealing with these feelings alone.

There is a very small chance that someone reading the research could recognise your child by the comments of hers which I include. I will work with her to avoid this by thinking together very carefully about which comments we use.

**How will information about me be used?**

Information gained from interviews will be typed up and sorted into 'themes'. This means I will be reading all the information I gather together and seeing if there are shared patterns in people's experience of mentoring. I expect that I will be writing about what is both good and bad about the peer mentoring experience, and what the findings tell us about human identity. The work will be published in book form and held in the University library. The work may also be used to produce articles for academic journals (such as criminal justice or social work journals). When the study is completed the original interview recordings will be destroyed. None of the interview content will be used again without your permission.

**Who will have access to information about me?**

The comments you share with me will be used to help me write about the peer mentoring experience. Only I and my supervisor will have access to these original interview records. I may use some direct quotes from your child in my written report, if you consent, but these would not include her name. All personal details will remain confidential and I will try my best to anonymise any of your child's comments which I use.

Interview data will be stored securely in a locked filing cabinet and on a password protected computer. It will be difficult to identify your child from the data because it will be coded, with your personal details kept in a separate locked file. The data will be kept by the researcher for five years before being securely disposed of.

I do however have to work within the law and so offers of confidentiality may sometimes be overridden. For example if I am made aware of future criminal activity, abuse either to your child or another (i.e. child or sexual abuse) or suicidal tendencies I must pass this information to the relevant authorities.

**Who is funding and organising the research?**

The research is funded jointly by Keele University in Staffordshire and 'Clinks'; a national organisation which supports, represents and campaigns for the Voluntary and Community Sector working with offenders.

**What if there is a problem?**

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you can speak to the researcher who will do their best to answer your questions. You should contact Gillian Buck at [g.buck@keele.ac.uk](mailto:g.buck@keele.ac.uk). Alternatively, if you do not wish to contact the researcher you may contact her supervisor Dr Mary Corcoran, Lecturer in Criminology on 01782 733104 or [m.corcoran@keele.ac.uk](mailto:m.corcoran@keele.ac.uk).

If you remain unhappy about the research and/or wish to raise a complaint about any aspect of the way that you have been approached or treated during the course of the study please write to Nicola Leighton who is the University's contact for complaints regarding research at the following address:-

Nicola Leighton  
Research Governance Officer  
Research & Enterprise Services  
Dorothy Hodgkin Building

Keele University ST5 5BG  
E-mail: [n.leighton@keele.ac.uk](mailto:n.leighton@keele.ac.uk)  
Tel: 01782 733306

**Contact for further information**

Dr Mary Corcoran, Lecturer in Criminology  
01782 733104  
[m.corcoran@keele.ac.uk](mailto:m.corcoran@keele.ac.uk).

**PARENT/CARER CONSENT FORM**

**Title of Project:** *The Voluntary Sector Role in Promoting Offenders' Desistance through Peer Mentoring*

**Name and contact details of Principal Investigator:** *Gillian Buck, Keele University, Staffordshire. [g.buck@keele.ac.uk](mailto:g.buck@keele.ac.uk).*

**Please tick box if you agree with the statement**

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| 1 | I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. | □ |
| 2 | I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw consent at any time.                        | □ |
| 3 | I agree for my child to take part in this study.   | □ |
| 4 | I understand that data collected about my child during this study will be anonymised before it is submitted for publication.       | □ |
| 5 | I agree to the interview being audio recorded  | □ |
| 6 | I agree to be contacted about possible participation in future research projects.  | □ |

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of person with parental responsibility

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature



**PARENT/CARER CONSENT FORM**  
(for use of quotes)

**Title of Project:** *The Voluntary Sector Role in Promoting Offenders' Desistance through Peer Mentoring*

**Name and contact details of Principal Investigator:** *Gillian Buck, Keele University, Staffordshire. [g.buck@keele.ac.uk](mailto:g.buck@keele.ac.uk).*

**Please tick box if you agree with the statement**

1 I agree for any quotes to be used

2 I do not agree for any quotes to be used

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of person with parental responsibility

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

**PEER MENTOR Interview schedule May 2012**

**MAIN THEME QUESTIONS FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS:**

*(The interview will ideally only use these 4 theme questions and reflective listening techniques to develop individual perspectives. The depth questions are for if participants find this interview style difficult or are not responding independently)*

- **What is peer mentoring?**
- **Why are peer mentors volunteers?**
- **What does 'going straight' involve?**
- **Does peer mentoring have anything to do with going straight?**

**ADDITIONAL DEPTH QUESTIONS:**

*Peer mentoring process*

- What skills does a mentor need? *[if led: why is listening important]*
- Are there any benefits of peer mentoring?
- Are there any problems?
- Who decides what happens during the relationship?
- What is a typical day as a peer mentor like? (Typical session content?)
- How are you managed, supervised, developed?
- What happens if mentees don't attend? *(How do you deal with poor motivation, do you breach? Are users ever coerced?)*

*Peer volunteers - The construction of the relationship*

- What are your views of the training you received? (Did it prepare you for the job? Did you agree with what it included?)
- Is there an expectation for you to talk about yourself / your past crimes/ your emotions when mentoring? *(Are mentees interested in whether or not you have been in trouble?)*
- Is it important for mentors to have had experience of offending themselves? Why? *[AUG: How does your own experience help you to understand your mentee?]*
- What are the benefits / problems of having a shared past?
- Do you work with all types of offending? *(Do you see differences in mentoring success given the nature of the crime?)*
- Should peer mentors be paid or volunteer?

*Going straight - Understandings of Desistance*

- What helps people stop offending (go straight?) – *What do you base this on? (Own knowledge or training?)*
- Is there anything difficult about 'going straight'?

*Linking desistance and mentoring - The selves*

- How did you come to do this work?
- How are you matched with mentees?
- What is a peer? (What does the word peer, in peer mentoring, mean to you?)
- Do you consider your mentee to be a peer? (Or client?)
- Are you expected to be peer to staff (justice professionals) too? Are there ever conflicts?
- Are you optimistic about your mentee's ability to change? (Are others optimistic?)

**Thank- You!**

## MENTEE Interview schedule May 2012

### **MAIN THEME QUESTIONS FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS:**

*(The interview will ideally only use these 4 theme questions and reflective listening techniques to develop individual perspectives. The depth questions are for if participants find this interview style difficult or are not responding independently)*

- **What is peer mentoring?**
- **Is it important that peer mentors are volunteers?**
- **What does 'going straight' involve?**
- **Does peer mentoring have anything to do with going straight?**

### **ADDITIONAL DEPTH QUESTIONS**

#### *The Peer mentoring process*

- What skills does a mentor need? *[If app why is listening important?]*
- Are there any benefits of peer mentoring?
- Are there any problems?
- Who decides what happens in the mentoring relationship?
- What is a typical mentoring session like?
- Have you had other types of help offered before? (How is this relationship different to other helping relationships you have had?)
- Is mentoring added on to a Court order or completely separate? (How should it be?)
- What happens if you don't attend?
- What happens if you decide you want to stop? *(What would change for you/ consequences/ coercion?)*

#### *Peer volunteers - The construction of the relationship*

- Is there an expectation for you to talk about yourself / your past crimes / your emotions?
- Is it important for mentors to have had experience of offending themselves? Why?
- What are the benefits / problems of having a shared past?
- Should peer mentors be paid or volunteer?

#### *Going straight - Understandings of Desistance*

- How long have you been involved with offending (is it a career?)
- What helps people stop offending (go straight?) – *What do you base this on?*
- Is there anything difficult about 'going straight'?
- Has anything your mentor done made you want to stop crime / made you feel able to?
- Have you had the opportunity to commit a crime in the last 12 months but chosen not to? Why?
- Are you making any current plans to avoid further offending? What?

#### *Linking desistance and mentoring - The selves*

- How did you come to have a peer mentor?
- How were you matched with your mentor?
- What is a peer? (What does the word peer, in peer mentoring, mean to you?)
- Do you consider your mentor to be a peer? (Or a professional helper?)
- *How would you describe yourself? How would your mentor describe you? How would others describe you?*
- *Have you changed in any way since being on the mentoring programme?*
- *Are you ready to change? (Were you ready to change at the beginning?)*

**Thank- You!**



**Gillian Buck PhD Student  
Peer Mentoring Research Information Sheet**



**Study Title**

The Voluntary Sector Role in Promoting Desistance through Peer Mentoring

**Aims of the Research**

- To find out what peer mentoring by ex-offenders is
- To explore the what is good about peer mentoring and what needs to be improved
- To look for any links between mentoring and 'going straight'.
- To explore how important being a volunteer is to the process of mentoring.

**Peer mentoring activity observations**

Researchers from Keele University are currently learning about peer mentoring at [Project name]. As part of this study a researcher will be observing the activities that volunteer mentors are involved with (including group work, group supervision, sport and drop in activities).

The researcher will be in the room during group activities and will be taking notes about the kinds of activities that volunteers undertake and how much support they receive. The researcher will **not** be focusing on group members.

If you do not wish for your activity to be observed please tick this box:

*Gill Buck, Researcher*

## Need to talk?

Sometimes talking to a researcher about your life can bring back upsetting memories.

This leaflet is a list of help available locally if you need someone to talk to.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR PEOPLE ABUSED IN CHILDHOOD - 0800 085 3330

NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR ONE-PARENT FAMILIES - 020 7428 5400

NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE DIVORCED AND SEPARATED - 0116 270 0595

NATIONAL DEBT LINE - 0121 359 8501

NATIONAL DRUGS HELPLINE 24 hour freephone - 0800 776600

NATIONAL FAMILY MEDIATION helping parents who live apart to stay close to their children - 0207 383 5993

NHS DIRECT 24-hour medical helpline - 0845 4647

NORTH AND SOUTH MANCHESTER

COUNSELLING SERVICE free to people on a low income - 07659 879593 (calls charged at local rate)

NORTHWEST CENTRE FOR EATING DISORDERS - 0161 491 4935

PARENTLINE - 0808 800 2222

PARENTS' HELPLINE Advice, information and practical help for drug users and their families - 0800 716701.

Rape Crisis Merseyside

Helpline offering counselling, information and support for women and girls who are survivors of rape, sexual assault, child sexual abuse or any other form of sexual violence.

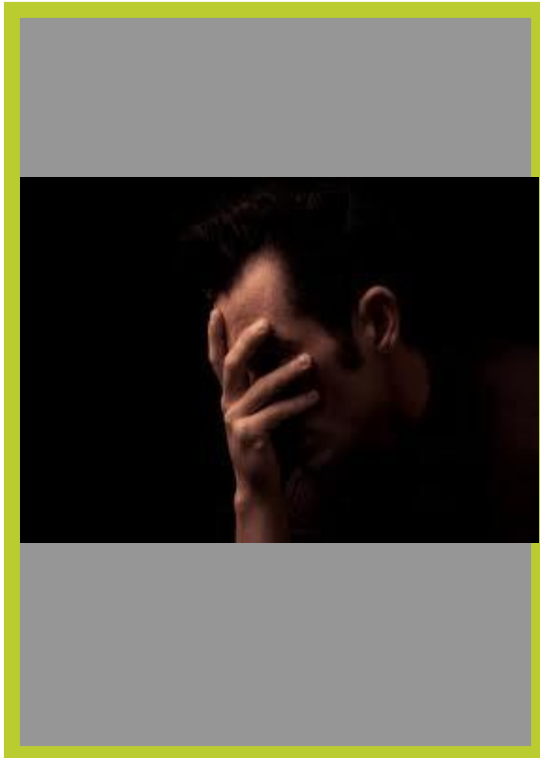
0151 666 1392

ST MARY'S SEXUAL ASSAULT CENTRE - 0161 276 6515 /0161 226 6515

SAMARITANS - 0161 480 2222 or 0345 909090

SPACE NW Help for schizophrenia sufferers and their families - 01925 571680

**Gill Buck**  
Researcher  
Keele University



## Thank-you

If you need any support...

**G Buck**  
Support leaflet



## Need to talk?

Sometimes talking to a researcher about your life can bring back upsetting memories.

This leaflet is a list of help available locally if you need someone to talk to. In a Crisis?

### **SAMARITANS:**

Whatever you're going through, we're here to help.

Whatever you've done.

Whatever life's done to you.

Call Samaritans.

No names.

No pressure.

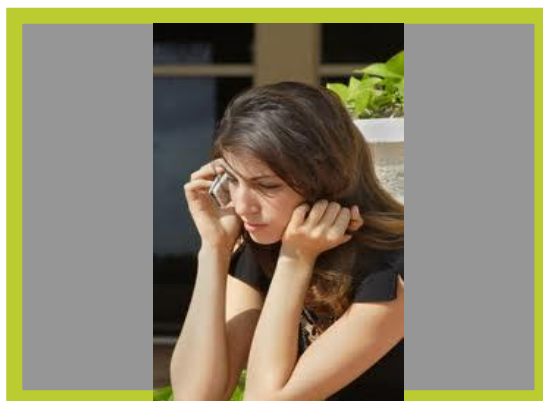
No judgement.

Any time.

Samaritans: **08457 90 90 90**.

**CALM** Campaign against Living Miserably  
**0800 585858**

(Free, confidential, anonymous helpline)



### AIDSLINE Merseyside

Helpline for people who have concerns about, are living with or affected by HIV/AIDS. Part of Sahir House, an organisation providing support and services for people living with or affected by HIV/AIDS.

0151 237 3990

CHILD BENEFIT ENQUIRY LINE - 08701 555540

Child death HELPLINE - free phone 0800 282986

### Families Outside Support & Information Helpline

The only dedicated Helpline for families with a relative in prison. We can give information and support over the phone, via text messaging or through email facility, and have a range of materials that can be posted or accessed via the website.

0500 839383 Free phone

### Family Line

Helpline and email support service for all family members. Deals with a wide range of issues including child abuse, adolescent behaviour, divorce and separation, depression, stress and anxiety, bullying, isolation and other family problems.

0808 800 5678

## You're not alone

### Local A-Z

GamCare is a national provider of information,

advice, support and free counselling for the prevention and treatment of problem gambling. The service is confidential and non-judgemental, and we signpost to a wide range of relevant support, depending on the needs of the individual caller.  
0800 8020 133

GINGERBREAD Support and advice for lone parents  
- 020 7240 0953

HEALTHWISE Confidential advice and someone to talk to for males and females aged 16 and under -  
0800 665544

### Lifeline

Helpline providing a listening service, emotional support and guidance through a current crisis to people aged 17+. Information on mental health issues, including the availability of services and self-help groups.

0808 808 2121

<p><b>Thank-you</b>          If you need any support... Sometimes talking to a researcher about your life can bring back upsetting memories. This card is a list of help available if you need someone to talk to.</p> <p>Need to talk? Contact ChildLine anytime - calls are free and confidential <b>0800 1111</b></p> <p>Connexions Direct          Instant, confidential telephone or online advice on anything that affects teenagers. Between 8am and 2am every day.          Tel: 080 800 13 2 19 Text: 07766 4 13 2 19          Web: <a href="http://www.connexions-direct.com">www.connexions-direct.com</a></p> <p>SOCIAL SERVICES emergency out-of-hours 0161 480 0700</p>	<p><b>Thank-you</b>          If you need any support... Sometimes talking to a researcher about your life can bring back upsetting memories. This card is a list of help available if you need someone to talk to.</p> <p>Need to talk? Contact ChildLine anytime - calls are free and confidential <b>0800 1111</b></p> <p>Connexions Direct          Instant, confidential telephone or online advice on anything that affects teenagers. Between 8am and 2am every day.          Tel: 080 800 13 2 19 Text: 07766 4 13 2 19          Web: <a href="http://www.connexions-direct.com">www.connexions-direct.com</a></p> <p>SOCIAL SERVICES emergency out-of-hours 0161 480 0700</p>
<p><b>Thank-you</b>          If you need any support... Sometimes talking to a researcher about your life can bring back upsetting memories. This card is a list of help available if you need someone to talk to.</p> <p>Need to talk? Contact ChildLine anytime - calls are free and confidential <b>0800 1111</b></p> <p>Connexions Direct          Instant, confidential telephone or online advice on anything that affects teenagers. Between 8am and 2am every day.          Tel: 080 800 13 2 19 Text: 07766 4 13 2 19          Web: <a href="http://www.connexions-direct.com">www.connexions-direct.com</a></p> <p>SOCIAL SERVICES emergency out-of-hours 0161 480 0700</p>	<p><b>Thank-you</b>          If you need any support... Sometimes talking to a researcher about your life can bring back upsetting memories. This card is a list of help available if you need someone to talk to.</p> <p>Need to talk? Contact ChildLine anytime - calls are free and confidential <b>0800 1111</b></p> <p>Connexions Direct          Instant, confidential telephone or online advice on anything that affects teenagers. Between 8am and 2am every day.          Tel: 080 800 13 2 19 Text: 07766 4 13 2 19          Web: <a href="http://www.connexions-direct.com">www.connexions-direct.com</a></p> <p>SOCIAL SERVICES emergency out-of-hours 0161 480 0700</p>



18 June 2012

Ms Gillian Buck  
Keele University  
Keele  
Staffs  
ST5 5BG

Dear Gillian

**Re: 'The Role of the Voluntary Sector in Promoting Desistance through Peer Mentoring'**

Thank you for submitting the above research proposal for ethical review. The proposal was reviewed at the Ethical Review Panel meeting on Thursday, 14 June 2012 and the following information/amendments are requested before the project can be approved:

**General Point**

- It was noted that the presentation of the proposal was excellent and the panel would like to thank the applicant.

**Application Form**

- It states that you will also obtain parental consent where participants are under the age of 18. Please clarify how you will obtain consent. The panel also recommends that you produce an information sheet and consent form for guardians/parents. If the researcher needs guidance on this matter she could contact Jackie Waterfield or Steve Wilkinson.

**Information Sheets**

- Under the section 'what if there is a problem' please replace Nicola Leighton's contact details in the first paragraph with your supervisor's details.

**Consent Forms**

- Please use the latest version of the consent forms which can be accessed using the following link: <http://www.keele.ac.uk/researchsupport/researchethics/>

I should be grateful if you would address the above points and forward a letter outlining the changes you have made along with the amended documents to: Michele Dawson ERP Administrator [m.dawson@uso.keele.ac.uk](mailto:m.dawson@uso.keele.ac.uk) (**Note:** please highlight all amendments in any revised documents in red and also please remember to amend the version number and date on any revised documents).

Please note that your project is not approved until all of the issues listed above have been addressed to the satisfaction of the Ethical Review Panel and you should not undertake any data collection until approval has been granted.

The deadline for your response to the Ethical Review Panel is 18 August 2012 (2 months time). If we haven't received your response by this date, then your application will be rejected and a new application will be required.

If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact Michele Dawson, in writing, at [m.dawson@uso.keele.ac.uk](mailto:m.dawson@uso.keele.ac.uk)

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. Dawson". The "M" is large and stylized, with a dot above it. The "D" is also large and stylized, with a horizontal line through it. The "awson" is written in a cursive, lowercase style.

PP **Dr Jackie Waterfield**  
**Chair – Ethical Review Panel**

CC RI Manager, Supervisor

22<sup>nd</sup> April 2013  
Gillian Buck  
Claus Moser Research Centre  
Keele University

Dear Gillian,

**Re: The Role of the Voluntary Sector in Promoting Desistance through Peer Mentoring**

Thank you for submitting your application to amend study for review.

I am pleased to inform you that your application has been approved by the Ethics Review Panel.

The following documents have been reviewed and approved by the panel as follows:

Document	Version	Date
Application Form	1r	22/04/2013
Parent/Carer Information Sheet	1c	22/04/2013
Parent/Carer Consent form	1c	22/04/2013
Parent/Carer Consent form (use of quotes)	1c	22/04/2013

If the fieldwork goes beyond the date stated in your application, you must notify the Ethical Review Panel via the ERP administrator at [uso.erps@keele.ac.uk](mailto:uso.erps@keele.ac.uk) stating ERP1 in the subject line of the e-mail.

If there are any further amendments to your study you must submit an 'application to amend study' form to the ERP administrator stating ERP1 in the subject line of the e-mail. This form is available via <http://www.keele.ac.uk/researchsupport/researchethics/>

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me via the ERP administrator on [uso.erps@keele.ac.uk](mailto:uso.erps@keele.ac.uk) stating ERP1 in the subject line of the e-mail.

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Cameron  
ERP1 Administrator

Dr Jackie Waterfield  
Chair – Ethical Review Panel  
CC Supervisor – Dr Mary Corcoran