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Counter-hegemonic co-research as learning from the margins

Line Lerche Mørck[1]

[1] *Aarhus University, School of Education, Campus Emdrup, Tuborgvej164, DK-2400 Copenhagen NV*

Participatory researchers have criticized tokenistic forms of co-research, calling for reflection on how co-researchers participate and discussion of what constitutes genuine co-production of research. This article discusses concrete methods and meanings of co-research across different approaches, conditions, and premises for co-researchers' participation. The article proposes counter-hegemonic co-research as a way of co-producing knowledge and learning with co-researchers, while we explore counter-hegemonic struggles and possibilities for transformative change. A decade of praxis research in collaboration with two former gang leaders provides the basis for discussing dilemmas and understandings of counter-hegemonic co-research. This includes methodological and theoretical discussion as well as empirical examples of the possibilities for transformative change. Counter-hegemonic co-research is explored through three questions: How can we engage in praxis research through reflection on common interests across different positions and communities? How can research and intervention be combined to support collective reflection on contradictions and (dis)alienation? How does co-research (re)produce meanings in the everyday lives of participating (co-)researchers?

Keywords: Praxis Research, Participatory Methods, Gang Exit, (Dis)Alienation, Situated Ethics; Counter-hegemonic Struggles.

Introduction

Meri Kulmala et al. (2024, p. 2) argue that the key task of co-research is to *counter* power asymmetries and destabilize hierarchies among professionals and co-researchers (see also Goodley et al., 2022). Co-research is described as concerned with the pursuit of social change, addressing real-world inequalities and exclusion from access to knowledge production (e.g. Spies et al., 2022). Co-research takes a stand, often combining scientific and practical aims and thus bridging the traditional divide between theory and practice by seeking to both understand and effect change – or at least identify directions for change (cf. Howard et al., 2021, p. 1020; Kulmala, 2024, p. 2). Unlike participatory action

research (PAR) and service-user involvement, which primarily seek to enact change within a specific community or service environment (a context-specific area of intervention), counter-hegemonic praxis research seeks to understand transformative possibilities for change across levels of praxis (Lave, 2026) and often also across different practice fields (Mørck et al., 2025). Conceptualizing counter-hegemonic praxis research I spell praxis with an x to emphasize Marx's original philosophical roots and its transformative meanings:

> Marx's original German term 'Praxis' is used [..] historically as a widening of the Aristotelian conception of communal political self-determination (praxis) to include the necessities and instrumentalities of labor (poiesis). [..] It recasts the theory's foundation as the general self-reflection of socio-historical practices. On this basis, the key to psychological issues is the idea that human individuals are born with *potentials*, including both needs and capacities, to develop *agency through participation in praxis.* (Nissen 2012, p. 37).

Counter-hegemonic praxis research encompasses a broad range of approaches that challenge power imbalances within research processes and cultivate change at the personal and societal levels (cf. Littlechild et al., 2015; Kulmala, 2024, p. 2). Kulmala et al. (2024) note that minoritized people have often been underrepresented in co-research. Co-research with marginalized or vulnerable groups is ethically and methodologically complex, requiring further reflection and development (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2018; Cotterell & Buffel, 2023).

In this article, I explore how situated ethics can be integrated into standards of counter-hegemonic co-research. My work is rooted within the German–Nordic critical psychological praxis research tradition, in which:

> [T]he co-researcher position is not predefined by specific tasks or levels of involvement. Rather, the co-researcher participates through situated and evolving collaboration, e.g. by pointing out concerns from their (user or

> professional) perspectives, and taking part in shaping research problematics and activities. (Kousholt et al., 2026, p. 46)

Praxis research aims to support collective reflection and action among participants, as well as the development of meaningful knowledge that can help them to understand and transform practice (Kousholt et al., 2026, p. 44). Praxis research should be understood and explored as a practice itself alongside the practices it studies (Nissen, 2009). Meanwhile, counter-hegemonic co-research should be seen as an ongoing process that is part of evolving everyday practices and as involving the co-production of knowledge and co-design of methods for research and intervention. This concept of counter-hegemonic co-research thus emphasizes active engagement.

Phillips (2024) and Lenette (2022) discuss how approaches to co-research are jointly articulated within a field shaped by tensions with technocratic, neoliberal, and positivist scientific discourses. For instance, researchers are under increasing pressure to prioritize large grant-funded research projects with externally defined timelines. However, as we will see in this article, praxis research can also be "free research" [in Danish: Fri forskning] that is conducted with minimal funding in the (co-)researcher's spare time. It is "independent" in the way it unfolds as emergent, manifold, iterative processes surrounding different projects, where levels of intensity and engagement change over time. Another tension that has been identified is the conflict between the ethics requirements of research institutions, which are often based on rigid, predetermined, and externally imposed risk assessments and strategies (Lenette, 2022, p. 83), and lived or situated ethics understood in relation to co-researchers' everyday lives and productive needs (Mørck, 2021). Phillips argues that these tensions make it difficult to do "real co-research," where co-researchers participate in genuine co-production of knowledge. Lenette (2022) also discusses questions of "genuine participation" and "genuine co-production," arguing that if we are to realize the transformative potential of participatory methodologies, we need to understand and prioritize collective engagement – even when such engagement challenges or transgresses institutionally defined notions of good scientific practice.

Within critical psychological praxis research and social practice theory, *engagement* is understood as active participation and as processes of interpellation and

recognition within communities (Nissen, 2012). *We* engage in different activities together while co-producing different things. Counter-hegemonic co-research must consider power-relations and meanings in pursuit of shared, common interests, as well as discussing how we care for each other when participating in co-research that involves conflictual and sensitive topics. Co-research requires deeper ethical reflections than those outlined in universities' institutional procedures and ethics guidelines.

Based on praxis research conducted as joint ventures with two former gang leaders (Martin Celosse-Andersen and Fatih Türkoglu), I explore counter-hegemonic co-research as a further development of the critical psychological practice research tradition, while analyzing their counter-hegemonic struggles and mo(ve)ments beyond gang exit and forensic psychiatry through the following questions:

How is co-research practiced and in what ways do we engage as (co-)researchers across different positions and communities? How do we combine research and intervention to support collective reflections of contradictions, (dis)alienation and co-production of transformative possibilities? How does the co-research (re-)produce (new) meanings in the everyday lives of participating (co-)researchers?

I use these questions to explore critical practice-based reflection on ethics and standards for counter-hegemonic co-research, which I will return to at the end of the article. First, I will elaborate on what is meant by counter-hegemonic.

Counter-hegemonic co-research as learning from the margins

Critical psychological practice research is inherently critical and counter-hegemonic when seeking to question and move beyond the ideological forms and ideas that govern practices (Kousholt et al., 2026, p. 43). With reference to Marx, Kousholt et al. (2026) emphasize collective "revolutionary practice," transformation, and intersubjectivity through listening, dialogue, and collective action. Within the PAR-tradition, Lenette (2022, p. 22) describes "counterhegemonic approaches" as linking transformation and knowledge construction with(in) oppressed communities, with reference to Paulo Freire (1970).

Jean Lave conceptualizes counter-hegemonic struggles and counter-hegemonic alternatives within dialectical relational theory, drawing on Lefebvre and Gramsci: Disalienation is analyzed in relation to alienation (Lefebvre, 2014), and counter-

hegemonic struggles and counter-hegemonic alternatives are analyzed in relation to hegemonic or established ways of thinking (Lave, 2026). With reference to Gramsci's prison notebooks, hegemonic forms of taken-for-granted knowledge (or common sense) are to be found and analyzed not only in ruling policy, but in every human community (Crehan, 2016, p. 43). Counter-hegemonic alternatives are researched from below as they are co-produced in collaboration with co-researchers (Fatih and Martin) and practitioners co-producing change and alliances across positions (Mørck et al., 2025).

With the notions of "*Learning from the margins"*, "*difference in equality/equality in difference"*, and "*learning with/as difference"*, we can ask how persons, in their practices, produce transformation and transformative possibilities (Gomes et al., 2026, p. 43). "Learning from the margins" means learning *with* co-researchers, (research) practices, and marginalized dimensions of everyday practice. With the notion "learning from the margins" (Mørck, 2000) I seek to avoid categorizing and thereby reproducing stigma and stereotypes of so-called "marginalized" and "vulnerable" individuals or communities (see also Lenette, 2022, p. 82). The emphasis on *learning* from the margins implies a deep respect for the lived experiences, first-person perspectives, and knowledge linked to marginal positions and struggles from the margins. Counter-hegemonic co-research seeks to understand these struggles and utopian transformative possibilities while at the same time co-producing alternatives from different positions and perspectives. Our counter-hegemonic praxis research invites practitioners to engage and collaborate around shared interests and common causes. Counter-hegemonic struggles and alternatives should always be analyzed from below, from the learners first persons' perspectives (Dreier 2008; Schraube & Osterkamp, 2013). This leads to the following concrete questions: How are Fatih and Martin struggling from different marginal positions, and how does their struggles change over time? What differences affect their struggles? How are these differences fueled by marginalizing discourses and "tough on crime" policies? Even though they have moved far beyond their former involvement in gangs and crime, certain differences continue to affect them. Since 2013, Fatih has been struggling from a position as forensic psychiatric patient, with double binds (Bateson et al., 1956) and stigma linked to his different positions as a former gang leader and as forensic patient. As Fatih is actively engaged in becoming a "good Muslim" (Mørck & Khawaja, 2026), an increasingly Islamophobic and stigmatizing crossover discourse

linking gang involvement to religious radicalization (Christensen & Mørck, 2017) also affects his struggles, meaning that he must live with an extra level of control in the form of security risk assessments, including the established system's concerns about radicalization (Mørck & Khawaja, 2026). This is an important difference between Fatih and Martin, who is not Muslim.

I will now present a more concrete analysis of how our co-research began and has changed over time, moving beyond a method of investigation and discovery toward mutual processes of teaching/learning/advocacy (Gill et al., 2012, p. 11; Lenette, 2022, p. 27), where I pay close attention to, care about, and learn from the double binds and differences that my co-researchers are struggling with.

First meetings – how it all began

When I first met Martin in 2014 and Fatih in 2017, they were both former gang leaders who had closed their gang units (for different reasons) and had been sentenced to forensic psychiatric treatment. However, their positions within forensic psychiatry were different. Whereas Martin had received a treatment sentence, Fatih was sentenced to placement on a high security psychiatric ward. A placement sentence means that you have very restricted access to life outside the ward, while a treatment sentence allows you to live an everyday life as part of society (Mørck et al., 2025, p. 156).

There were also differences in terms of who first made contact and took the initiative. In Fatih's case, my colleague associate professor Iram Khawaja and I asked if he would like to do research with us. Meanwhile, Martin initially contacted me in a handwritten letter (sent from the high security forensic ward, where he was placed while waiting for his sentence), before sending a follow-up email a month later asking me: "Do you know of a program that has room for 'someone like me' (i.e., a former, failed biker gang president with a 15-year history of psychiatric treatment) to participate in an educational context?" (1st email from Martin, 3.4.2014).

I responded via email the same day, which began a stream of daily email exchanges that, in the space of a few months, also connected Martin to other students, scholars, and practitioners with a shared interest in and various forms of engagement with the field of gang exit. Six weeks after the initial contact, Martin had taken part in two interviews and had started reading my book about boundary communities (Mørck, 2006).

He was in movement – becoming, learning – starting to participate in our joint academic venture. He commented on articles and on my book, asking questions about the content, theories, methods etc. He also took the initiative to produce audio logs recording situations of importance in his life and exit process (Mørck & Celosse-Andersen, 2019), and we discussed how to ensure the scientific quality of such audio logs. All these activities had a concrete and collective motivation, as we had agreed to make a joint presentation about gang exit for *The Association of Young Criminologists* (in Danish: Foreningen af Yngre Kriminologer, FYK). The following is an excerpt from one of the emails that Martin sent me:

Hi Line,
I think life is treating me well at the moment, so it's hard not to be happy.
That presentation in week 48 sounds really exciting, and I would really like to contribute to that.
Yes, I'm open to other interview topics, as I find it very rewarding for me every time. For everything I do that has a direct relation to the world I'm trying to penetrate the barrier to, I feel that it becomes a little more possible to reach the goal.
I've found that the interviews, and especially meeting people from the field [academia and gang exit practice] (like you, Søren, Camilla, Lone Maj) mean a lot for the developmental journey (I think I'll call it the "project": from biker to academic) I am now on.
So that's why I'm happy to do interviews, projects, workshops and lectures etc.
PS: Informants is the police term for snitches [“stikkere” in Danish]. I don't know if that was a conscious choice of words?
Best regards, Martin

Box 1. Deep meanings, access, and a problematic choice of words (email 15.5.2014)

Martin shares his developmental “project”: “from biker to academic,” which should be understood alongside his reasons and desire “to penetrate the barrier” into our “civilian world” (Mørck et al., 2025, p. 168) that he is struggling to become a recognized as part of. He finds it especially meaningful to participate in “interviews, projects, workshops and lectures” alongside people from academia and the broader boundary community

related to the field of gang exit because it contributes to his "developmental [..] project: from biker to academic." In the email's postscript, Martin questions the term "informant," which FYK used to refer to him in the description of our presentation, leading me to contact FYK and ask them to change the term "informant" to "co-researcher." Ten years later, Martin still remembered this episode, mentioning it as an example of careful listening and quick action that was very important in building his trust in me.

In 2015, a year into our joint venture, we made our first co-presentation at an international conference. I had carefully prepared and planned our 20-minute presentation, suggesting excerpts from quotations that Martin could present. My ways of planned preparing made him feel like a "performing circus monkey." This is an example of how conflicts can lead to mutual learning. From that point on, we changed our ways of presenting: I was careful not to prepare what he should say, and we instead developed a more dialogical way of co-presenting. I prepared a draft for slides that he would comment on. These slides would provide a framework for our dialogue during the co-presentation, but we never knew exactly what we were going to say. This dialogical approach opened up an innovative space of co-creation and mutual learning. We used our co-presentations as an analytical step toward the co-production of articles and to develop new methodologies.

Meeting Fatih "in movement and on neutral ground"

Iram Khawaja and I first met Fatih in September 2017 at a gang seminar held at *Grundtvig's Højskole*, a Folk high school (see Mørck et al., 2013), where he delivered a keynote on his life and relationship to Islam. The gang seminars formed a boundary community where people could meet and engage in dialogues across very different positions that I had attended and co-produced each year since 2008. This boundary community was important for our meeting, which can be described as "meeting youth in movement and on neutral ground", a "motto" introduced by a community of wild social work practitioners to describe how they work with young people of the streets of Copenhagen (Nissen, 2015).

Fatih had been invited to attend the gang seminar with the head nurse and his contact person from the forensic psychiatric ward (Mørck et al., 2025).



In the first photo, Fatih (with the Islamic prayer cap) listens to a presentation by the police director, before his own presentation (second photo). This "meeting in movement and on neutral ground" offered a social space co-produced around shared interests, opening up new transformative possibilities for Fatih and for us as researchers. We were 'doing trust' (Jefferson, 2004, p. 52) while listening to each other presenting and participating in discussions and group work. A couple of months later, Iram and I asked Fatih to do research with us.

Research codex and negotiations of shared interest

Across different contexts and teams of researchers, our research joint ventures began with the formulation of a written code of conduct, that we call "research codex", that was signed by the team of researchers but not by the co-researchers. This research codex contains four elements: an invitation to participate in a shared inquiry; a description of the researchers' interests and responsibilities; a statement of the co-researcher's rights to withdraw and to read, correct, delete, or delimit the use of material; and a commitment to revisit sensitive issues throughout the collaboration. This approach does not replace informed consent, GDPR rights, or principles of anonymization. Rather, it extends them. In contrast to informed research consent, where potential research participants read about the research project and agree to their participation by signing a document, a research codex invites dialogue about common research interests and reflection on how co-researchers can influence research methods and processes. The co-production of counter-hegemonic alternatives always involves both aligning oneself with and challenging established and taken-for-granted practices. In producing the research codex, we aligned

ourselves with utilitarian hegemonic academic norms (Flinders, 1992), informing co-researchers about the research, asking for consent, and describing how we would secure their ethical rights to withdraw at any time from all or part of the research. However, the hegemonic focus on securing informed research consent was challenged by our emphasis on continued dialogue regarding the content of research projects and ethical issues. We call this approach *situated ethics*, continually discussing with co-researchers what information is sensitive and negotiating how research material about them will be (co-)presented in research publications and conference papers (Mørck, 2021).

The following excerpt is from the written research codex that Iram Khawaja and I formulated for Fatih in 2017:

> We would like to invite you to take part in our research on "community-building practices" [in Danish: fællesskabende praksis]. Until we receive research funding, the work will take place during our independent research time. We would like to discuss with you how this can be arranged in a way that also matches your interests and is on your premises. (Research Codex, 4.11.2017)

The notion of "premises" refers to Nissen's concept *premises for participation,* which is closely connected to the critical psychological concept of *productive needs* (Holzkamp-Osterkamp, 1976):

> Humans have "productive needs" for agency, defined as the participation in praxis which […] is validated by recognition […]. Without recognition, the individual does not simply dissolve, but regresses to some proto-subjectivity, which is *painful*. Conversely, as a recognized, productive, and developing subject, [s]he enjoys and flourishes. [...] this "struggle for subjectivity" […] is what anchors the normativity of ideology, and this provides a set of "bottom-up" criteria, or *premises,* for the subject's participation beyond mere survival and autonomy. (Nissen, 2012, p. 209)

As human beings, we all long for or need agency and recognition. Living on a forensic ward, a place characterized by extreme marginalization, access to expansive agency and recognition are restricted (Mørck et al., 2025). Participating in our research as a co-researcher offers a counter-hegemonic alternative, partly moving beyond these restrictions.

Based on Fatih's presentations at the gang seminar, Iram and I already knew quite a lot about his everyday life and his premises for participation when we formulated the codex. At the bottom of the written research codex, we asked Fatih if it was "okay that we compile and transcribe our notes from the gang seminar and use them as material in our ongoing research." We explained in writing that he had the "opportunity to read through, delete, and correct these notes if there are parts concerning your presentation we have misunderstood or that you do not wish to be included in the research." During a meeting, Fatih and I corrected the notes (and there were several mistakes to correct), after which Fatih accepted that they could be used in our research. This is an example of how we use dialogue to ensure the quality of the knowledge produced and how co-researchers' approval of knowledge give us access to contexts that were not initially defined as research.

Box 2 illustrates how we (Iram, Fatih, and I) negotiated our shared research interests and explored Fatih's premises for participation in the research based on his *productive needs* in our first interview in November 2017:

Line: I would like to turn this into an English-language book – if that's okay with you? We're trying to find more examples, and you would be one of them. You will be given another name, but you would be an example included in a book, where 16 others have been interviewed.
Fatih: Okay.
Line: That is just one option. Another option is that we could write an article together for a scientific journal. Those are often in English. We're interested in how Islam can create a sense of community – something that provides meaning, something that moves a person in a positive direction. A lot of people and politicians in Danish society think that Islam primarily pushes individuals with a gang background toward radicalization. [As it is]

always the direction it goes. But you're an example of: "Wait, there are other nuances here."

[..]

Line: That's where we think your story is important. Also, because you have experience of having gone a bit in the wrong direction and then finding your way back again.
Fatih: I just don't want to get into crime and stuff like that. I don't want to talk about that.
Iram and Line: That's completely okay. We haven't asked about that either [referring to the interview guide, which we sent him before the interview]
Fatih: I can see that. But if there are questions about it, I would rather not get into those things.
Line: We respect that.
Fatih: I've read through it [the research codex and the interview guide] and it looks fine.

Box 2. Dialogue about research interests and possible research publications

In this dialogue, our exchange of shared research interests is contextualized in relation to recent changes in policy and discourses about "crossovers" (overlaps between former gang membership and religious radicalization), but it is also a step toward understanding the life interests of our co-researchers and agreeing that we do not ask questions about crime.

New positions—new life interests

The critical psychological notion of *life interests* refers to the possibility of "consciously/collectively" creating the societal conditions for a self-determined life (Osterkamp & Schraube, 2013, p. 6). For both Martin and Fatih, becoming a father was a new life condition that altered meanings, matters, and interests in their everyday lives. Whereas Martin became a father to his first child in 2014, Fatih became a father much later, in 2022. This new position and responsibility as a father motivated both co-researchers to participate in our research as co-authors in their own names.

Like Nissen (2012), I understand this change as a "struggle for subjectivity." As fathers, Martin and Fatih developed new productive needs for recognition. They wanted to become positive co-producers and developing subjects in relation to their children and to the world that they and their children live in. As former (biker) gang leaders, they are

well-known figures in the public eye, and they and their families have had to live with stigmatizing media representations due to their former position. They wanted to move beyond this stigma and hoped it would be possible through their participation in boundary communities and research, creating new meanings and gaining recognition.

During the research we conducted together, Fatih indirectly learned from and was inspired by the research joint venture with Martin. Through our research dialogues and Martin's many social media posts, Fatih knew that Martin had participated as a co-researcher and co-author under his own name, and that this participation had meant a lot for Martin and his development. This later inspired Fatih to make the same choice of using his own name in our research.

Martin and Fatih's life conditions, premises for participation, and life interests (Osterkamp & Schraube, 2013, p. 6) have changed over the last 8–12 years, as has my position in relation to them. In the summer of 2023, Fatih asked me to become his support guardian.[1] The task of a support guardian is to provide personal support, to care for him when life is difficult, be a spokesperson and a lifeline to the outside world and help to ensure that his interests and rights are protected. Accepting this role gave me a new way of accessing the Danish welfare state's interventions – a position within practice – and a way of "giving back." Swartz (2011) advises us researchers not to be afraid of participating in interventions in practice and of the opportunities such participation offers of "giving back." "Giving back" as part of research is a counter-hegemonic alternative to standard research practice – many researchers would consider such a position "too close," "too much of an advocate," not neutral, and thereby in conflict with what is usually considered a legitimate position as a researcher.

I told Fatih that I did not know of any other researcher who had also acted as a support guardian for a co-researcher or research subject, so I would have to carefully consider if there was conflict of interest between the two roles. I am first and foremost a researcher, I explained. I wanted to continue our praxis research collaboration while at the same time acknowledging the transformative principle: that praxis research is "not just research": Praxis research develop and include other common causes, such as

[1] When defendants are given a placement sentence, Danish criminal law § 71 requires the appointment of a support guardian of the defendant's choosing, with the court or police confirming the appointment.

intervention and mutual friendship-like care-relations (Skovlund et al., 2023), meanings and causes co-existing together as *both* research *and* care as intervention. Accepting this changed role, I had to reflect on the possibilities and potential ethical dilemmas it involved. One possibility it offered is greater access to different facets of forensic psychiatry across different levels of practice. As a support guardian, I gained access to every forensic ward whenever Fatih invites me, including high security wards. I also gained access to court reports and was invited to court proceedings and to psychiatric treatment meetings involving professionals from different psychiatric wards. As a support guardian, I became involved when Fatih filed complaints about coercion and communicated with psychiatric professionals and the state attorney's office about matters important to Fatih's life. We have compiled and submitted complaints together and shared publications with professionals who expressed interest. All these activities have given me a much deeper understanding of forensic psychiatry across various contexts and levels of practice, even if some of these insights are too sensitive to be used directly in our research. My new position as both a researcher with that of a support guardian for Fatih meant that we had to revise our research codex, stipulating that it is Fatih who decides what should (or should not) be transformed into research data.

Our praxis research continually adapts to the different and changing premises for participation of co-researchers, thereby enabling subjective, affective, cultural, and creative forms of knowledge production (see also Lenette, 2022, p. 25). Counter-hegemonic co-research dares to challenge the established assumptions of scientific knowledge production, such as where and with whom research is conducted. In our counter-hegemonic approach, individuals can have multiple positions, for instance as both a researcher and a support guardian within forensic psychiatry.

Does counter-hegemonic co-research prioritize processes over outcomes?

In counter-hegemonic co-research, we continually strive to establish and co-produce intersubjectivity through the collective planning of research activities with co-researchers. This co-production of methods and approaches helps establish a strong "we" – a collective subjectivity – that also helps us exchange and transform our different references. The exchanged references consist of scientific concepts and experience-based

references, and these exchanges are an important part of both knowledge-production and practice development as part of praxis research (Nissen, 2012).

Counter-hegemonic co-research shares PAR's social, ethical, and moral commitment to recognize and value the diverse experiences and knowledge of all involved rather than reducing people to objects of research (Lenette et al., 2019, pp. 161–162). My co-researchers and I, along with our communities (and our ways of participating), are both objects of research and subjects engaged in doing research (Haug et al., 1999).

Employing a dialogic stance that is rooted in post-structuralist, new-materialist, and post-humanist traditions, Phillips (2024, p. 112) problematizes the romanticization of co-creation, which idealizes "creating knowledge together" as a meeting of equals where everyone has the same degree of involvement, level of commitment, and decision-making power. Meanwhile, our approach seeks to "learn from the margins," exploring "difference in equality/equality in difference", and "learning with/as difference." We agree with Phillips that co-research does not imply equal involvement among researchers and co-researchers. It is important to reflect on our different ways of participating, how they change over time, and the role played by power relations and resources, where research is a paid job for some of us, while our co-researchers participate on a purely voluntary basis.

Conducting praxis research, we continually seek to reflect the relation between research participants and our different and shared *interests* (Osterkamp & Schraube, 2013: 14). Nissen helps us address differences and shared interests between researchers and co-researchers with specific relevance for counter-hegemonic co-research. He conceptualizes "*joint ventures between academic-theoretical and practical* (political, personal, professional, social, etc) *projects of radical change"* (Nissen, 2012, p. 250). Nissen (2012) presents *joint ventures* as a reconceptualization of the critical psychological subject-perspective:

> The methodological idea of a subject-perspective, reconceptualized as a joint venture to allow for a reflection of the constitution of the collectives of research, had to be reconstructed in a critical articulation of their work as

> projects of radical change – with concepts of local-ideological life-modes as expansions of a substantial-universal welfare state. (Nissen, 2012, p. 250)

For Martin, his personal development project, "From biker to academic" (Box 1), was a local-ideological life-mode and an expansion of a substantial-universal welfare state. We explored this trajectory and life-mode as a counter-hegemonic struggle in relation to double binds. "From biker to academic" became the title of our first journal article, which Martin co-authored under the pseudonym Peter Hansen (Mørck & Hansen, 2015). We shared interests in both the development of alternatives to gang exit and knowledge about these alternatives, which also became the title of one of our first co-presentation at FYK (Box 1). This co-production of alternatives to the established gang exit program was motivated by Martin's lived experience of severe double binds in relation to problems within the established exit program. As we describe in Mørck & Hansen (2015), double binds are 'no-matter-what-you-do-you-cannot-win' situations, also referred to as a "checkmate situation." (Bateson et al., 1956). Back then, Martin shared his feelings of being stuck in the exit program – of "hitting a wall" stating "There is no future for me in your world" and opining that "I should have realized long ago that there was no help to be found that way" (referring to the exit program).

Swartz (2011) proposes "going deep" and "giving back" as strategies for exceeding minimum ethical expectations when researching with vulnerable youth. I understand going deep as the long-term production of empirical depth through close relationships to co-researchers developed across contexts, which includes conflicts, mutual care, trust, and continued collaboration across research projects and themes. Giving back means allowing research to become part of practical support, care, recognition, and intervention while critically reflecting on the risks of becoming too close, too protective, or too entangled. In my collaborations with Martin and Fatih, going deep and giving back have become inseparable from the epistemic quality of the research.

Recognizing the complexity of the double binds that characterize Martin and Fatih's situations at points when they are on the verge of losing hope is a way of practicing relational care ethics and ecological ethics. An ecological approach to ethics (Flinders, 1992) reminds us that collaborating with others requires sensitivity to aspects of social life that are usually taken for granted. The main point is that an ecological approach

regards hegemonic norms of detachment as a potential source of harm (Flinders, 1992): "the researcher cannot assume the role of distant and detached observer. On the contrary, he or she must be present, attentive, and fully engaged as a co-member of the participants' immediate community. This engagement is a matter of both receptivity (e.g., the art of listening) and involvement (e.g., providing assistance)" (Flinders, 1992, p. 107).

In both joint ventures, there has been an ecological ethical need to attend to and care for Martin and Fatih's double binds, including understanding all the (political) conflicts within the field of gang exit. How did it affect Martin and his exit process that his exit coordinator was the very same policeman who used to investigate him and his gang, and that this exit coordinator was still a policeman investigating local gang conflicts? Has this dual role and the coordinator's interests as a police investigator affected Martin's housing situation, which remained unchanged for a long period, even though rehousing is something that Danish exit programs can provide if an individual is in danger? Why was the exit program reluctant to help Martin with the housing deposit that he needed to move to another town, even though they were aware that he was in danger as a car bomb was found under his car?

As time passed without any change in Martin's housing situation, combined with him feeling overwhelmed by numerous extremely challenging double binds, it strengthened his engagement and motivation to participate in the academic communities that I invited him to join. However, he felt doubly "stuck" because his double-bind situation drained him of the hope and energy needed to engage in these meaningful boundary communities. When my co-researchers experience such feelings of futility and hopelessness, I respond with care, understanding, and acknowledgement of their situations.

At the same time, I also strive to build bridges, co-create alternatives to the exit program, and co-produce spaces for genuine care within and outside forensic psychiatry. In the first article we co-authored, we discuss Laing's view that the overwhelming feeling of being stuck in a double-bind situation is impossible to fully grasp or convey in words (Laing, 1967). From Martin's first-person perspective, this feeling of "stuckness" is concretely and bodily experienced. However, the sharing, caring, and recognition they encounter, as well as their engagement in research publications and other common activities, encourage both co-researchers not to give up.

By the end of 2014, things had changed for Martin. His wife gave birth to a daughter, and 14 days after the birth, the exit program helped him fund a housing deposit. In 2015, he attended and made a presentation at the gang seminar held at Grundtvig's Folk High School, as well as engaging in many other meaningful activities in his life.

In the research joint venture with Fatih, I learned that he was never invited to join a gang exit program. However, such programs did not seem relevant for him as he had access to meaningful alternatives. He described his personal development project as "becoming a good Muslim," and we developed a common interest in contributing to in-depth knowledge of "how Islam can create a sense of community – something that provides meaning, something that moves a person in a positive direction" (Box 2). Iram and I also invited the head nurse at the forensic psychiatric ward where Fatih was placed to take part in an interview. Furthermore, the chief psychiatrist, a prison chaplain who chaired a Muslim–Christian organization, and his Shaykh at a Muslim learning center that Fatih attended (Mørck & Khawaja, 2026) were all invited to be part of a grant proposal submitted to the Danish Research Council. We did not receive external funding, which meant that we never found the time to write the English book that we had discussed at our first meeting. However, we have co-produced multiple articles and meaningful interventions. As such, emergent, manifold, iterative processes were prioritized over planned research projects and products, but these priorities could have been different if we had received external funding.

Ethics and standards of counter-hegemonic co-research

I will now return to practice-based reflections on research ethics with co-researchers struggling from marginal positions and propose five standards, which are important to discuss as part of counter-hegemonic praxis research.

First, counter-hegemonic praxis research must specify what it is an alternative or counter to; it is not enough to invoke counter-hegemony or hegemony as a general adversaries. In this article, counter-hegemonic alternatives is produced in relation to security-oriented gang policy, established exit programs, and other concrete forms of dehumanization and alienation. Stigmatizing crossover discourses linking former gang membership and religious radicalization are also hegemonic forces. So are procedural research ethics that risk reducing researchers' care for and reflection on the concrete

concerns of co-researchers and the real-world consequences of their participation in research to a checklist of abstract ethical standards. These hegemonic forces and forms do not form a uniform or seamless totality. They are hegemonic because they tend to reproduce the double binds that we study and restrict our common research joint ventures and the lives of our co-researchers.

Second, co-researcher positions must be understood as emergent and differentiated. Not everyone who participates in a project becomes a co-researcher. Some mainly contribute as interviewees, practitioners, gatekeepers, audience members, or members of boundary communities. A co-researcher position emerges when a participant is invited to become a co-researcher (an invitation that we formalized through agreement on a research codex). A co-researcher must engage by sharing their lived experiences, reasons and interests as part of the co-production of knowledge. Becoming a co-researcher requires engagement in research activities, research content and processes. The position as co-researcher is strengthened through engagement with research questions, feedback on analysis, concepts, co-development of methods, and engaging in co-presentations or co-production of publications. The level and form of engagement may vary over time. The goal is therefore not equality but ensuring that the collaboration is responsive to different premises for participation and gives co-researchers meaningful control over the things that matter to them.

Third, formal ethics must be supplemented by situated, lived ethics. Informed consent, confidentiality, anonymization, and data rights are crucial, especially for people exposed to stigma and surveillance. But they cannot predict ethical issues that can arise over the course of multi-year co-research collaboration. Compiling a research codex legitimizes continued dialogue concerning ethics. It holds the researchers accountable, makes the co-researcher's boundaries explicit, and allows consent to be renegotiated as new risks, roles, and life interests emerge. Pseudonymity and publications in one's own name must both be possible – neither is de facto ethically correct without a concrete assessment of recognition, risk, care, and agency.

Fourth, assessments of epistemic quality must include empirical depth and dialogical validation and reflect practical relevance and generalizability in relation to real-world problems and issues that matter to the involved co-researchers and others. Knowledge generated through co-production is not inherently superior. Instead, its

strength lies in offering co-researchers the opportunity to correct misunderstandings, challenge categories, reflect on and discuss analyses in public presentations, and try out whether or not concepts shed new light on lived contradictions. Examples of this include the corrections Fatih made to field notes and the changes in how Martin and I prepared for and conducted joint presentations. These examples show that the co-researcher's critique is not just feedback on analytical findings but part of the process through which the object of knowledge is formed. Empirical depth requires going deep across time, place, and various conflicts. Research with two co-researchers cannot claim to be representative in a quantitative sense. Its quality lies in prototypical depth: the capacity to show how common contradictions are experienced and change over time in relation to individual lives and specific practices. Long-term collaboration makes it possible to follow how elements such as fatherhood, public stigma, religious belonging, psychiatric placement, exit practices, and academic recognition change the premises for participation, thereby challenging hegemonic assumptions that quality depends on the number of participants. This does not render quantitative scientific standards irrelevant but shows that different research questions require different standards.

Fifth, counter-hegemonic co-research thrives on boundary communities. Individual researcher–co-researcher relations are insufficient to transform restrictive life conditions. Martin's movement "from biker to academic" was driven and supported by meetings with us researchers and with students, criminologists, social workers, and practitioners in gang-exit boundary communities. Similarly, Fatih's movement toward becoming "a good Muslim" was dependent on Muslim learning communities, more humane ward practices, family relations, and professionals who were willing to listen. Boundary communities provide provisional neutral grounds, not because they are free of power or conflict, but because they facilitate new relations and encounters between participants who would otherwise remain in fixed positions as enemies, experts, patients, criminals, or informants.

These standards also clarify why counter-hegemonic co-research goes beyond advocacy. Advocacy usually starts from an established position in a struggle. While praxis research may involve advocacy, it must remain analytically open to contradictions in and between co-researchers' positions, the researcher's own practice, and the alternatives that they co-produce. Martin's criticism of how I prepared for our joint

conference presentation is one example; Fatih's boundaries regarding discussions of criminal activities are another. In both cases, the disagreement made our collaboration stronger, with boundaries recognized as opportunities for mutual learning and developing higher quality research rather than being treated as obstacles.

Furthermore, these standards demonstrate what it means for research to be "not just research," to paraphrase Jean Lave's understanding of transformative learning (Lave, 2026). Research becomes more than just research when interviews, notes, presentations, complaints, publications, and everyday conversations become part of broader struggles for agency and recognition. This does not erase the difference between research and intervention. Rather, the difference itself becomes a situated ethical and methodological question. As researchers, we must continually ask questions such as: What is being produced as knowledge? Who is invited to co-determine its circulation? Who might be harmed? What action possibilities does it enable or prevent? And how can critique and care remain accountable to the people whose lives are at stake?

Conclusion

Learning from the margins as counter-hegemonic co-research is an approach concerning how knowledge is produced, but it raises an additional epistemological question of validity criteria. I argue that in praxis research, validity depends on situated generalization of prototypical practice objectified as both "a model of" praxis and "a model for" other practices (Nissen, 2009). The collaborative co-production of concepts and analyses enable discussion of lived contradictions; but to become prototypical it also has to be relevant in and across other contexts, when applied in other praxis research projects and/or other practice (Nissen & Mørck, 2019).

The critical psychological concepts of life interests and premises for participation are central for prototypical situated generalization. Life interests concern the possibility of collectively creating societal conditions for a more self-determined life (Osterkamp & Schraube, 2013). Premises for participation are the concrete conditions, reasons, and possibilities from which a person acts. These include formal restrictions, bodily and emotional conditions, institutional positions, relations of trust, risks, hopes, and the person's assessment of what matters. As such, co-research does not mean equal levels of involvement. It must instead be evaluated based on whether the collaboration adapts to

changing premises, whether co-researchers have genuine influence over what is said and done, and whether the knowledge that is produced is meaningful and relevant for co-researchers and their practice.

These criteria and the above-mentioned standards of counter-hegemonic co-research can also be used to assess research quality. It increases the strength and robustness of knowledge when co-researchers are actively involved in its production and validation: When errors and disagreements are open to discussion, when empirical analyses highlight contradictions across contexts, and when the knowledge and knowledge-production enable rather than prevent action possibilities. Sharing field notes with Fatih and correcting mistakes together is not only an ethical gesture; it is epistemic work. Changing the format of a conference presentation when Martin felt it positioned him as a "performing circus monkey" is not only a methodological adjustment; it realigns positions within knowledge production. In both cases, the co-researcher's critique changes the conditions for the production of knowledge and thereby improves research quality.

The double role as researcher and support guardian may appear to be a conflict of interest from the conventional standpoint that the researcher should maintain a certain distance. It also raises a methodological question: Can knowledge still be scientific when produced in such close proximity to the person whose life is being studied? My answer is yes, but only if the closeness is documented and reflected upon as part of the analysis. Scientific quality stems from transparency regarding the conditions for knowledge production, letting co-researchers challenge and redefine central themes and concepts if they do not consider them relevant or important, and carefully distinguishing between private knowledge, and research material approved for analysis. The question then becomes how to reflect on and represent the closeness of the researcher–co-researcher relationship, how to establish boundaries for what should remain private and ensuring accountability. In this case, giving back became part of the knowledge process, with a mutuality in care, support, dialogue, complaints, meetings, and publications all revealing how institutional contradictions affected both of us, Fatih's life interests and his possible development.

Counter-hegemonic co-research as learning from the margins requires conceptual discussions and precision, methodological patience, and ethical accountability. As this

article has shown, hegemony always must be understood dialectically in relation to the concrete counter-hegemonic alternatives, struggles, and ideologies, and as dialectical relations that we study and (re)produce. The margins are a range of relational positions created by these struggles and dialectical relations and are not a fixed set of positions, categories, or identities. Counter-hegemonic co-research is therefore not simply any research involving marginalized people. It is a collaborative practice that reveals the struggles and contradictions in relation to hegemonic ideologies and practices and works to expand agency, recognition, and common control over life conditions.

The long-term joint ventures with Martin Celosse-Andersen and Fatih Türkoglu demonstrate how co-research is shaped by changing premises for co-researchers' participation. Martin's objection to being called an informant, his critique of being positioned as a "performing circus monkey," and his later decision to co-author publications in his own name all changed hegemonic forms of scientific practice. Similarly, Fatih's correction of field notes, the boundaries he set regarding discussions of crime, his movement toward publishing in his own name, and his invitation for me to become his support guardian all affected the project's ethics and epistemology. In both cases, learning from the margins meant learning to transform research practices.

The proposed counter-hegemonic co-research standards do not reject formal research ethics, anonymity, informed consent, or data protection but insist that these protections must be embedded in lived, dialogical, and situated ethics. Nor do they reject scientific quality but redefine the concept of quality to suit research in which knowledge is co-produced through the objectivation of contradictions, conflicts, corrections, and changes across standpoints, practical relevance, and transformative possibilities.

However, this prototypical case of counter-hegemonic co-research has its limits. It is based on unusually long collaborations with two co-researchers and on my own involvement in practices, with a risk of cultural closure (Alvesson, 2003), where I become blind to the contradictions. The arguments and counter-hegemonic co-research standards presented here should not be generalized as a recipe for all participatory research. Rather, I have proposed a situated counter-hegemonic approach to develop standards and questions that other researchers can use when reflecting on the ethical accountability and epistemological strength of collaborative co-research and co-production. At a time marked by securitization, stigma, and polarization, such co-research cannot guarantee

transformation. However, it can create boundary spaces and communities where people on the margins of society that are usually talked about within research and broader societal discourses without being given a voice become co-researchers, producing knowledge, offering critique, and creating new possibilities for societal change.

My co-researchers and I have engaged in the co-production of concrete counter-hegemonic changes as part of existing boundary communities – and not just through research. Our highly ambitious long-term goal is to achieve emancipatory relevance by enabling societal change across different levels of praxis. However, trying to change the Danish welfare state, forensic psychiatry or gang intervention practices for the better based on critical psychological reflections on the common interest often conflicts with politicians' short-term interest in implementing new tough-on-crime policies aimed at reproducing political power and winning the next election.

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About the author

Line Lerche Mørck is full professor at the Danish School of Education (DPU), Aarhus University. She develops critical, practice-based and participatory psychology/educational research on how young people and adults in marginalized positions move beyond marginalization through participation, boundary communities, belonging and expansive learning. She is known for her original contributions to practice research, social practice ethics, ethnographic mo(ve)ment methodology and co-production with people positioned at the margins. She has also developed theories on boundary communities and expansive learning and has authored articles on mo(ve)ment methodology, gang exit, forensic psychiatry, social practice ethics and preventive work—in collaboration with people from practice, including former gang leaders, leaders of crime preventive work and parents to children in need.