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Mark Halsey and Simone Deegan, *Young Offenders: Crime, Prison and Struggles for Desistance*, Palgrave: Basingstoke, 2015; 263 pp.: 978-1-137-41121-1, £63.00 (hbk)

This book, based on 135 in-depth interviews with 14 young men who were followed over ten years, explores their pathways into crime, through criminal punishment, and sometimes, tentatively, out of both. In addition, the authors interviewed significant others, and criminal justice professionals (mostly prison officers).

The first chapters give the context to the research. Chapter 1, the literature review, starts by considering the range of desisters in different countries, and estimates the savings increased desistance could make, given the high cost of policing, judging, incarcerating and supervising repeat offenders. While it is interesting to see these figures, this section perhaps sets the wrong tone for the rest of the book, which is much more passionate and value-infused than it, with its economic rationale for desistance, suggests. The authors go on to give a good (short) exposition of theories of desistance, and sensibly reject any one as the *only* theory given the individual nature of desistance, which is reflected so well in the rest of the book. The second chapter discusses the methodology. It is refreshing to see the authors start this chapter with the sources which have inspired the book, setting out what they are trying to achieve. The chapter explains how an initially short study into negotiating conditional release turned into a longitudinal much bigger project with admirable clarity.

The next four chapters form the core of the book, giving the life stories of twelve of the young men, divided by their current situations: being 'On Track' (Chapter 3), experiencing 'Recurring Breakdown' (Ch. 4), having suffered 'Major Derailment' (Ch. 5) or taken a 'Catastrophic Turn' (Ch. 6). As the purpose of the book is to show the individual differences in these stories, despite often similar circumstances, this section requires the reader to take this seriously and read each story and reflect on it, before moving on to the next one. I have to confess I read them all at once on during a plane journey, which meant it was difficult to keep these men's childhoods (for example) distinct in my mind. It is partly wanting to know the ending to these stories that make them compulsive reading (rare in academic texts). As the way their stories are described means you come to care about the young men the earlier chapters are happier reads, because the ending is, to some extent, given away in the title. In the later chapters, this desire to know 'what happened (last)' is sensitively handled. Instead of reporting on, for example, 'catastrophic turns' at the end of the chapter, the authors refuse to let this bracket the person's account and instead report it towards the start of the discussion, before returning to the rest of their lives in more detail. This allows the person beyond the offence to remain the focus of attention.

While the three chapters describing the lives of the young men form the heart of the book, the final two chapters bring these accounts together with the literature, to deliver some hard-hitting messages about the need for a different approach in criminal justice. Again, these are arranged along the life course, with a strong case for early intervention followed by an emphasis on individual attention and genuine help for those already caught up in the criminal justice system. Policy makers and practitioners would do well to read this book. Even though other national contexts will have different criminal justice configurations to some extent, it is clear that in every context there are young men who fall through the net of social welfare and end up managed through the criminal justice system, without success.

The book also makes a significant contribution to understandings of desistance. Because the young men who are its subjects were interviewed over such a long period of time, their accounts include depth and reach that other, less extensive, research cannot hope to achieve. This means that desistance can truly be understood *within the data* as a process with many setbacks, illustrated by the finding that even two of the three young men who were 'on track' were again facing further prosecution at the time the book had to be submitted to the publisher. It also demonstrates the almost inconceivable odds against which some people do still manage to desist, with the narrative of Billy, who had to deal with violent provocation and threats of violence without retaliation, a particular example of desistance against the odds.

This is a book that is in continuous dialogue with its readers, guiding their attention sensitively, but also making demands on the effort expended in benefiting from the material. While it focuses on a small sample of young men, the similarities in their experiences make it clear where system failure occurs. With almost all of the men still struggling for desistance, I look forward to the next book on their experiences, with more successfully escaping the cycle of offending and imprisonment.