

Shapland, J., Farrall, S. and Bottoms, A. (eds) (2016) *Global Perspectives on Desistance. Reviewing what we know and looking to the future*. Abingdon. Routledge.

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This rich and authoritative book originated in a conference held at Sheffield University in September 2014 to which researchers from around the world were invited to discuss their work in the field of desistance from crime. Simultaneously, the Criminal Justice Alliance in the UK published a report on twenty interviews with policy-makers and managers which made clear that, despite the attractions of desistance research for policy and practice in criminal justice, there was widespread misunderstanding regarding its findings, their strength and implications. In this context, the conference presenters agreed to revise their papers and subject them to peer review for publication in this book. Conference 'Ideas Sessions' formed the Afterword with which it concludes.

As the Editors note, the book seeks to 'draw together the authors of these various studies on desistance into a creative dialogue.' (P5) At the same time, it 'celebrates the 'coming of age' of research on desistance in many countries of the world' (P2) as, for example, longitudinal studies following the careers of participants over time begin to generate successive sets of data. It provides a wonderful statement of current knowledge regarding desistance from offending, raises a wide range of fascinating questions and is rich in suggestions for further research. Although extremely accessible given the complexity of the conceptual and methodological issues discussed, this collection is perhaps best approached by those with some initial grounding in desistance studies. The success of the book in acting as a forum for dialogue means that it might be most fruitfully read as a whole, allowing the reader to hear the echoes and disagreements between the voices of the different contributors.

There is a danger of misrepresentation and over-simplification in reviewing the chapters which make up the book which are so full of fascinating detail that a summary would be impossible. What follows therefore is an indication of some of the points and themes which most impressed this reader without any intention to be comprehensive.

Between a brief Introduction and Afterword the contributions are presented in three sections. The first section includes four chapters which share a focus on the relationship between agency and structure in the process of desistance. It is opened in a tremendously cogent and authoritative chapter by Giordiano who considers the role played by cognitive processes when individuals move towards and sustain desistance. The cognitive processes themselves (the development of openness to change, receptivity to catalysts, the generation of an alternative self, etc.) are envisaged less as a series of sequential steps than

as emerging simultaneously and as mutually reinforcing. Taking this discussion of the nature and role of agency forwards, Carlsson draws on the Stockholm Life-Course Project in a chapter which aims 'to discuss and reflect on human agency in a way that connects life-course theory to life-course methodology, and methodology to empirical findings' (P28). In a fascinating analysis Carlsson explores 'intentionality' and 'transformation' as core constituents of agency. Moving on to a consideration of the impact of methodology in desistance research he highlights the dangers of 'exaggerated order' and of flattering or culturally conditioned 'self-representation' in data which derives from qualitative methods and which encourage participants to reflect on their life stories. Shifting the location of research to Ireland, Healey's chapter reports the findings of a prospective study which looks in part at how 'social opportunities and constraints shape the construction of the conventional adult self' (P51). Desistance is mapped against shifts in the Irish economy as it passes through boom and bust phases in the expectation that good economic times will structurally support transition to adulthood through increased opportunities and hard times have the reverse effect. Interestingly, this effect was not found and Healey suggests that what impacts on desistance are locally determined opportunities in specific localities rather than macro-economic fluctuations at the national level. Cid and Marti complete this section reporting on a Spanish study which they believe to be the only example of desistance research not only in Spain but in Southern Europe more generally. Considering an incarcerated and then released population, the authors highlight a desistance-supporting dynamic whereby prisoners visited by family in prison envisage change on release in compensatory or reciprocal terms. They explore the relevance of the Spanish familial tradition but with careful caveats regarding changes in family patterns and the position of migrant prisoners separated from family.

The next section of the book draws together studies of desistance in relation to age, life stage and 'turning points.' In a refreshing chapter, Loeber, Stouthamer-Loeber and Ahonen expand the discussion through studies of conduct in children and patterns of cessation from, for example, fighting in two to six year olds. They signal the possibility that desistance from different types of offences might have a different relationship with age (for example, early desistance from vandalism). In terms of desistance from offending they also expand the parameters of the conversation by distinguishing desistance in the frequency, variety and severity of offending whilst also considering 'ceiling effects' whereby individuals maintain internal barriers against certain types of offending and possible substitution dynamics as individuals cease one type of offending whilst taking up another, possibly less severe type. Bottoms and Shapland drawing on the Sheffield Desistance Study in England follow with a rich chapter offering both an 'interactive theoretical framework' and a 'heuristic interactive model of early desistance.' Echoing Giordano's analysis of the role of agency in desistance, Bottoms and Shapland give the example of the 'diachronic self-control' observed in their desisters whereby young people consciously avoided locations and other individuals which might be associated with relapse. Considering research in the USA, Mulvey and Schubert

focus on desistance in early childhood and adolescence bringing an awareness of neurological development and the timing of the development of capacities such as temperance, perspective and responsibility. Blokland and De Schipper discuss life course transitions such as marriage, divorce and employment and desistance and research findings which suggest that whilst marriage is associated with desistance, the length of time married does not amplify the effect. They warn that employment may not appear to support desistance as it is often low quality and short term in the case of offenders. Extending this discussion, Skardhamar and Savoleinen reporting on their work in Norway, point out that cohabitation before marriage is 'not only 'normal' but perhaps even a normative part of the family formation process' (P 174). As a result, the supportive effect for desistance of stable relationship is noted long before marriage which signals no additional effect. Interestingly they suggest that, rather than being understood as triggers for desistance, 'marriage and employment should be viewed as consequences of desistance'(P 178). After all, a third party in these cases must perceive someone to be stable and trustworthy and this is more likely after desistance. In this view, life course events might be seen as sustaining rather than initiating desistance.

The final section of the book explores the implications of desistance research for policy and practice. Opening this section Farrall reports on a longitudinal study of the impact of probation supervision on desistance. Interestingly, his initial findings suggest very little impact whilst the fourth and fifth sweeps of interviews with participants reveal a much longer-term impact as individuals, now more ready to desist, use the advice given by their probation supervisors in the past as mental resources. This can seem weak endorsement of probation supervision which is often cast as muscular intervention which of itself instigates change in the here and now. This chapter and, perhaps, the book more generally seem to call for a more humble view of probation work as attuned and supplementary to an individual's own process. Halsey follows with a chapter based on one aspect of his longitudinal study in Australia which focuses sharply on the mismatch between what potential desisters say they need (someone rather than something and practical access to resources) and what the criminal justice system offers them by way of a mechanistic and alienating (even criminogenic) treatment. In a more overtly politicised commentary Halsey asks whether the neglect of white-collar crime in desistance studies indicates that research has been 'politically co-opted.' Uggen and Blahnik explore the timelessness of labels ascribed to individuals in the criminal justice process by contrast with the very time-limited nature of most offending careers. Pointing out how the 'stickiness' of labels has been magnified by the power of technological changes to communicate spoilt identity, they draw attention to impact of negative labels on individuals' lives 'from employment, to education, to public assistance, to online dating, to family relationships, to housing, to restrictions on physical movement, to voting, to volunteering and to other public service.' (P238). Kurlycheck, Bushway and Denver examine the policy implications of different theoretical approaches to desistance. For example, continuing the discussion of labelling and stigma as obstacles to desistance developed in the previous chapter, they note that policy responses would depend on the theoretical interpretation. For example, one obvious response might

be diversion from criminal justice wherever possible to avoid formal and negative identity ascription. However, should the reaching of a 'rock bottom' be thought of as necessary to human change, then labelling might accelerate arrival at that place.

Closing the sequence of chapters, McNeill makes effective and amusing use of sustained nautical imagery. Reviewing the relationship between desistance paradigms for probation practice and the 'What Works?' or RNR research and practice tradition, he considers the potential for 'rapprochement.' He also reasserts what a desistance-focused probation practice might look like (individualized assessment of inter-related factors, 'engaging, active, participatory relationships characterized by optimism, trust and loyalty,' 'pro-social labelling' (P271)) and it is perhaps surprising that this is the only concerted practice indication for probation in the collection. However, McNeill concludes that probation supervision is only one vessel for desistance and is certainly not the main one. The message for probation again is that individuals must own and navigate their own desistance voyages.

In what this reader found a rather subdued Afterword, the Editors consider some of the big questions arising out of what is a very impressive collation of current knowledge. Is a general theory of desistance possible or desirable? Where are the indications for further research? Whilst acknowledging that the research base, although global, emanates from Europe, the USA and Australia predominantly, the Editors consider how far knowledge can be considered to be true generally or true in a locally situated way. They have certainly succeeded in facilitating a hugely impressive conversation about knowledge and desistance and one which must be read by everyone with a serious interest in the field.

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