

death sentences had not ever been sought in the first place. During this era, fixed sentencing models and cutbacks on parole were prominent “reforms.” These dismantled the ground on which life sentences had long been defined, generating LWOP as a residual effect. Michigan’s story provides an example. In 1991, in *Harmelin v. Michigan* (1991), the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of LWOP for a first-time drug possession case in this state, signaling that the punishment was justifiable in a broad range of crimes. In the third stage, beginning in 1992 and proceeding to the present, the removal of any protections against LWOP were set: determinate sentences flourished, parole and commutations were fully abandoned, and LWOP took its current form of truly meaning death by prison.

Seeds reminds us that the history of LWOP in American penal practices is intertwined with both the death penalty and mass incarceration, but LWOP has also charted a path of its own—one permitted by a growing neglect for the human condition and protections against this sentence. He writes, “While there is an affinity between mass imprisonment and death by prison, the latter concerns a specific disregard for the indignity of dying in confinement.” Neglect for humanity is a component of both punishments, but LWOP has been implemented on such a broad scale, without the legal protections and scrutiny that accompany a death sentence (however, flawed such protections are), that it brings concern for human dignity and legal accuracy to a new level.

As criminal legal reform advocates push for stricter restrictions or wholesale abolition of life-without-parole sentences, *Death by Prison* lays out the enormity of the task. Efforts to end LWOP must tackle American society’s apathy regarding those sentenced to death by imprisonment, in whatever form. Activists stand to accelerate progress by placing this sentence within the context of a widespread shift in the purpose of imprisonment from reform and redemption to permanent removal. Understanding the history at the local level reveals how the landscape of normative punishments is now changed because of LWOP. Seeds says, “Perpetual confinement is now seen, in the penal field and society alike, not simply as something that happens on occasion for expedience or along secondary track, but as a *normative way of punishing*” (174, emphasis in original). His analysis of how LWOP and perpetual confinement spread through the penal paradigm provides a roadmap for advocates wishing to reverse course.

REFERENCES

Harmelin v. Michigan. 1991. 501 U.S. 957.

Maguire, K., Pastore, A. L., and Flanagan, T. J. (Eds.) (1993). *Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics, 1992*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Nellis, A. 2021. *No End in Sight: America’s Enduring Reliance on Life Imprisonment*. Washington, DC: The Sentencing Project.

Nellis, A. 2022. *Individuals Serving Life Without Parole*. Washington, DC: The Sentencing Project.

DOI: 10.1111/lasr.12645

Surviving solitary: Living and working in restricted housing units. By Danielle S. Rudes, with Shannon Magnuson and Angela Hattery. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press. 2022. 252 pp. \$26 paperback

Reviewed by Natalie Pifer , University of Rhode Island, Kingston, Rhode Island, USA

In *Surviving Solitary*, Danielle Rudes uses an immense set of qualitative data collected from seven prisons in an unnamed state to explore the perceptions and views of people living and working in the prisons’ solitary confinement units. Rudes and her team spent a collective 1666 h in these units (called Restrictive Housing Units, or RHUs, in her fieldsite), during which they observed day-to-day unit operations and conducted interviews with 351 people living in solitary and 95 staff members. The scope of data collected in such an intentionally inaccessible fieldsite alone represents a

significant descriptive contribution to our understanding of how solitary confinement units operate and how people experience and perceive these extreme spaces from both sides of the cell front door. The book's substantive chapters explore important themes like how these units generate particular risks, hinder relationships, operate under complex and sometimes contradictory rules, and undermine the processes of reentering back into the community and into lower custody environments within the prison system itself.

Rudes' synthesis of the conditions, experiences, and perceptions described by her participants demonstrate the harm inflicted by solitary on the well-being of "residents" (the term Rudes selects to describe the people living in solitary confinement to "represent current, not lifetime status in custody, and to acknowledge individual rights" p. 1), staff, and, as shared in the methodological appendix, her team. Recounting how solitary does harm to correctional officers adds an especially important contribution to the growing set of literature by criminologists looking at staff experiences. Rudes' vulnerability and candor about the harm inflicted on her and her team of researchers, comprised of faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students, during the process of collection and analyzing the data makes an especially significant contribution to the growing field of reflexivity in qualitative prison research.

Taken collectively, Rudes argues that the features of solitary produce a "masked malignancy" (p. 8), comprised of a set of harms that "may exist for years without notice, and yet it is present ... and potentially killing" (pp. 8–9). To cope with this masked malignancy, people in her study develop what Rudes terms a "tenacious resilience" that "guides them through the RHU and helps them cling to the hope that something better awaits; it must" (p. 9). Exploring the features that comprise this masked malignancy represents an important empirical contribution to the field, and the book deepens our knowledge of the nature and scope of solitary's harm. For most punishment scholars, though, that solitary is harmful is social fact. As Rudes writes in her appendix's penultimate paragraph, "[i]t is not ground-breaking" to document the "prison world and the treachery within" but that she hopes her work "suggests more questions than it answers" (p. 220). In the spirit of continued curiosity that Rudes invites, I offer just one of the questions that the analysis has generated for punishment scholars to grapple with as we interrogate things like solitary confinement: what exactly constitutes survival?

The book's title is suggestive of the empirical conclusion Rudes ultimately reaches on the book's final page. However, if the people living and working in long-term solitary confinement are indeed surviving the conditions Rudes analogizes to an undiagnosed cancerous growth, then perhaps the meaning of survival for punishment scholars ought to be troubled. One way to begin this work is to reflect critically on how we construct survival as an analytical concept. For example, in her concluding section, appropriately subtitled "surviving solitary," Rudes notes how people in her study used strategies of tenacious resiliency to "literally and figuratively" survive (p. 182). While delineating between the literal and figurative is not the point of Rudes' concluding section, the phrase offers a starting point to think intentionally about how survival is—and ought to be—operationalized.

On the one hand, the people interviewed for this project have survived; they are alive to share their stories, unlike the people who they tell us have died while living and working in these units. For example, a CO shares that "there were more staff suicides... that inmate suicides" (p. 36), while two residents recount how they watched other people die in their cells (p. 58).

These data excerpts describing instances where people did not survive solitary are incredibly bleak, as are the unit policies that govern how staff must respond to these, which require them to use "pepper spray before cutting any materials they [the residents] used to hang themselves and dislodging them" before providing help (p. 57). The realities of living and working in solitary are incredibly difficult to read about, and, importantly, Rudes is transparent about the harm endured by her team while hearing them. In the appendix, she writes, "several years later, even writing this, I have difficulty managing the emotional toll this took on me" (p. 197). Yet, while painful, they do support the book's central argument that most people, and indeed everyone interviewed for the

study, living and working in solitary are surviving. Thus, literal survival means at least not being physically killed by the masked malignancy of solitary. But what constitutes figurative survival?

Again, Rudes offers a starting point for beginning to clarify figurative survival, this time in her conclusion's final paragraph. Here, she writes: "Both RHU residents and staff feel alone, at risk, and discarded. But it if offers any hope at all, they still feel. They are, in fact, surviving. But so much more is needed and so very much more is possible" (p. 184). So, figurative survival, Rudes suggests, means possessing the capacity to feel, even if those feelings are reflective of the "cavernous wounds and festering sores" (p. 184) inflicted by solitary.

This conclusion offers an invitation to interrogate and identify the other facets of the human experience that must inform the operationalization of survival. Is hope, which informs Rudes' construction of tenacious resilience, a component of what it means to survive, figuratively? Are relationships (the subject of Chapter 3)? More broadly, should survival as an analytical construct for interrogating punishment be bifurcated into its literal and figurative components? And, if components like hope, relationships, and the other ideas that comprise the meaning of individual rights—are part of an integrated definition of survival, can we still empirically conclude that people in solitary are surviving?

Parsing the difference between literal and figurative may seem an exercise in semantics. Already, though, the field is increasingly taking the task of selecting a word to describe the people who live in carceral spaces seriously, so perhaps other seemingly self-evident concepts are also ready for more careful consideration. If, for example, we choose "resident" to describe the people living in solitary because it denotes, as Rudes argues on the book's first page, "individual rights," unlike a word like inmates, offenders, or prisoners, then it is also worth reflecting on the set of individual rights that constitute survival and on whether we, the people who live, work, and study solitary, are surviving.

ORCID

Natalie Pifer  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9716-0294>

DOI: 10.1111/lasr.12646

The politics of rights and southeast Asia. By Lynette Chua. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. 2022. 66 pp. \$22.00 paperback

Reviewed by Thaatchayini Kananatu, School of Arts and Social Sciences, Monash University, Malaysia

When I first read Lynette Chua's book on the politics of rights and Southeast Asia, I was inspired. Not only did she successfully encapsulate the Southeast Asian position on "rights" in the post-colonial neo-liberal age, she managed to strategically reflect on the sheer diversity and heterogeneity of Southeast Asia—in terms of its' cultures, laws, politics, development policies, and governance structures. The book is certainly not just an account of the "black-letter" law or legal rights, partisan or elite politics—it goes further by accurately depicting the mobilization of rights and politics from below. It is a story about the utility of rights by social movements and civil society organizations that represent the disenfranchised and marginalized in Southeast Asian countries in the Global South region.

The book is divided into four main sections: Section 1 is titled Concepts and features of politics of rights; followed by Sections 2, 3, and 4, respectively, titled Power and control, Power and resistance, and Power of rights. The structure and design of the various sections make it easy for the reader to understand the complexities of power that exist in Southeast Asian states and societies. In the introduction section, Chua reveals the challenges faced in mapping the politics of rights in such a diverse and disparate region (which comprises mainland Indochina and the Malay Archipelago). As Emerson (1984) described it, Southeast Asia is "heterogeneous, disunited, and hard to delimit."