BOOK REVIEW

Tim Goddard and Randy Myers: Youth, Community and the Struggle for Social Justice

Routledge, Abingdon, Oxon, UK, and New York, 2018, x+172 pp, ISBN: 9780367228132 (PB), ISBN: 9781138210004 (HB), ISBN: 9781315456218 (eBook)

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What does it mean to read a work of nonfiction? Must one read every page of every chapter? Does the order in which one reads the book matter?[1]

Tim Goddard and Randy Myers' *Youth, Community and the Struggle for Social Justice* (2018) is a book that one will want to read *well*, by which I mean, one will want to read it carefully and closely from beginning to end. In this exquisite monograph, Goddard and Myers explore and analyze the efforts of twelve grassroots social justice organizations in the United States (US) that approach youth crime as a product of social injustice—in contrast to the orientation of more popular and prevalent programs focused on individual-level factors and risks. Drawing on qualitative interviews with staff members at the different organizations, Goddard and Myers investigate both how such organizations promote social consciousness-raising and social action as a catalyst for personal change and how they (the organizations) endeavor to mobilize against and transform draconian criminal justice and penal policies targeted at young, poor people of color. The authors' choice of and use of qualitative methods is significant and is worthy of commendation not only because of criminology's preference (or, at least, "orthodox" criminology's predilection) for quantitative research methods (see, e.g., Lynch et al. 2017), but because gathering qualitative data as a team is unusual in the social sciences. (In Appendix B, Goddard and Myers share with us some of their fieldnotes from their study (or "scaffolding," as they refer to it)—a particularly delightful part of the book that should excite students new to social science research

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[1] For a discussion of nonsequential approaches to reading nonfiction, see Brisman (2016). For a consideration of *why* we read nonfiction, see Brisman (2021).

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and which has provided me with much inspiration (see Brisman 2022).) The end result—of their research and writing—is a compelling picture of alternative youth justice interventions and a searing indictment of neoliberal policies and carceral expansion.

In Chapter 1, "Introduction," Goddard and Myers explain the book's purpose—to document grassroot efforts to reimagine the carceral state and to end mass incarceration—and offer an account of a research site that they visited in 2013, providing readers with a tantalizing glimpse of their thought processes during the data collection for their book. From here, Goddard and Myers describe the background for their study, before turning to an overview of their research questions, methods, and research sites. It is in this part that we appreciate more fully the authors' goals for their study and the issues animating their fieldwork, namely: (1) to comprehend "how organizations that oriented to youth crime as a product of social injustice understood and navigated barriers consistent with neoliberal governance, and … to more fully chart the possibilities and limits of this autonomy"; (2) to learn "how the people who ran organizations that focused on social change as a catalyst for personal change thought the 'success' of their programs should be measured—given that their definitions of 'success' went beyond individual-level, behavioral outcomes"; and (3) to understand "how market forces and coercive means of governance conditioned the ways in which organizations related to one another. Specifically, how did competitive funding arrangements—the constant competition for grants and contracts—condition how organizations that championed cooperate and solidarity relate to one another?" (2018: 6). In this part, Goddard and Myers also distinguish the twelve organizations that they studied, categorizing them as either "activist-oriented social justice organizations" (which focus on protest and advocacy efforts towards criminal justice and social reform), "service-oriented organizations" (which offer *inter alia* after-school programs and life-skills classes), or "coordinating organizations" (which publish reports, meet with lawmakers, and connect with other grassroots organizations fighting for youth justice and criminal justice reform)—although, as the authors note, some of the organizations are geared towards more than just one of the three orientations (activism, service, and coordination).

In Chapter 2, "Background, context, and description of the social justice organizations," Goddard and Myers delve more deeply into the crime and criminal justice issues that the social justice organizations they studied are working to address: incarceration, policing, and deadly violence in poor communities of color in the US. Entire volumes have been written on each of these issues and one might be initially skeptical as to how thorough Goddard and Myers could be in surveying the vast literature on the carceral state, while also acknowledging the realities of violence in many US urban areas. The authors handle the challenge with aplomb, though, in a review that can be described only as both comprehensive and concise. Perhaps what makes the chapter so alluring is that it is devoid of diatribe and grandstanding. Goddard and Myers' cogent and convincing arguments are persuasive because of the authors' *compassion*, which is revealed when they step back: they intersperse their analysis and understanding of the problems of control, punishment, racialized policing, and violence with the words of their participants/respondents—those most ensnared in or impacted by such harmful phenomena. In so doing, Goddard and Myers reveal their subtle genius—their sensitivity to the complexity and entanglement of power and deprivation, social and economic inequalities, crime and criminal justice reactions. For example, in their discussion of incarceration, Goddard and Myers (2018: 18) contend that "public officials, backed by an uneasy public, *created* mass incarceration and the carceral state as a mechanism to maintain a social order shaken by changes in the global economy and domestic social and cultural shifts" (emphasis in original). They balance this statement, however, with the acknowledgment of two of their respondents that "young people

usually perceive the criminal justice system negatively, but they also see [it] as necessary and as representing, at times, the only answer for making their neighborhood 'safer'" (2018: 20); as they quote from one of their interviews:

> Their ideas around policing are not always positive, right? 'Cause of what they see in their communities, right? Friends are being locked up. Their families are being jailed for no reason. So, they understand that the system is messed up. But they also have an understanding that in order for us to be safe, we need police. So there's conflicted ideas of like [police are] fucked up, but then they're also safe.

Similarly, in their consideration of the roots and realities of violence in the US, Goddard and Myers illuminate the human toll of homicide and street violence in US cities, but they are measured in their apportionment of causation. To be sure, the authors are unequivocal in their assertion that the "US's neglectful social policies and punitive crime policies make living in [some parts of major US cities] unnecessarily difficult" and that such "high crime neighborhoods are the result of decades of policy decisions, which have exacerbated already high levels of economic inequality and slashed social safety nets" (2018: 30). But Goddard and Myers make clear that the organizations in their study "did not deny that the actions, choices, and behaviors of youth played a role in their system involvement and the levels of violence within a community" (2018: 33). As Goddard and Myers (2018:33) explicate, "[c]rime was not seen as something created out of thin air by those in power. They [the social justice organizations] saw youth involved in crime as those in need of social and material supports, including programming that might change them at the personal level." Essentially, while Goddard and Myers do not hold back in their denunciation of decreased state support(s) and neoliberal policies that have widened inequalities, they demonstrate the courage to assert that poor communities of color—and the young people who reside in them—possess *agency* and that youth participation in efforts at/programs involving social change can function as "crime prevention" and "rehabilitation."

To appreciate more fully how these organizations intervene in the lives of young people—and the unique ways in which they do so—Goddard and Myers devote the rest of Chapter 2 to juxtaposing their approaches (focused on addressing economic inequality and reducing youth criminalization) with contemporary state-driven reform efforts in crime prevention—those expertly-designed (or expert-derived), cognitive-behavioral programs viewed as "best practice." As Goddard and Myers (2018:38) summarize, "[i]n contrast to currently understood 'best practices', the programs offered by social justice organizations had the following characteristics: a grassroots component, which stressed the importance of local knowledge in designing solutions to youth crime; an explicit linking of social, political, and economic conditions to crime causation; and a preference for using the cultivation of social consciousness and involvement in protest and community action projects towards personal transformation." What makes these organizations' philosophical and political positions so special, Goddard and Myers' conclude, is that their emphasis on democratic decision-making practices and sociological understandings of the roots of inequality, material deprivation, punishment and violence "affirm human dignity": they (the organizations) conceptualize crime as a "fully social phenomenon" (2018: 46)—one that should be confronted with more humane and emancipatory versions of crime prevention and intervention.

In Chapter 3, "Source reduction of delinquency and youth violence," Goddard and Myers continue their comparison of the philosophies and practices of the social justice organizations that they studied with so-called evidence-based youth crime prevention and intervention programs. Goddard and Myers begin with a critique of these "evidence-based"

programs, which tend to concentrate on how individuals can take responsibility for their lives and change their behavior, but which fail to address the social environments and structural causes of crime. In other words, Goddard and Myers (2018:58) assert, these programs "disconnect[] the problems of families and individuals from the broader inequalities brought on by competitive capitalism. … help[ing] [to] mask the lived realities of exploitative conditions and social neglect, which give rise to individual-level risk factors." To illustrate the myopia of evidence-based youth crime prevention, Goddard and Myers contrast a "public health" approach to youth crime and violence to the public health tactic used to fight the Zika virus, which spread to the Americas in late 2015/early 2016. As Goddard and Myers explain, in the case of the Zika virus, individual-level prevention measures were encouraged, but community-wide changes were also implemented.

Youth, Community and the Struggle for Social Justice was published on October 17, 2017 (with a copyright year of 2018). Since then, the world has endured more than two years of the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, for some readers, a comparison between public health youth crime prevention models and the public health approach to the spread of the Zika virus (what was then a recent problem) may seem outdated. It is not. Goddard and Myers' clear explication of how a public health approach necessitates *both* action to address community-based and structural risks *and* individual ones should have been/ should be required reading for governmental officials—or, frankly, *anyone*—confused by (or reluctant to follow) World Health Organization (WHO) and US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines regarding COVID-19. Arguably, the authors' analogy is *more* salient in 2022 than 2017 or 2018 because of the scale of COVID-19 has rendered more commonplace much of the language of epidemiology and prevention that appears in the chapter. For scholars of youth crime and violence, for practitioners working with young people "at risk" of offending, and for politicians endeavoring to reform youth justice policy, Goddard and Myers really are like Dr. Anthony Fauci!

Before turning to Chapter 4, a few more words about Chapter 3 are in order. While the most ingenious parts of the chapter can be found in the part entitled "An argument by analogy against evidence-based programs," discussed above, I would be remiss if I did not mention Goddard and Myers' lucid analysis and powerful criticisms of evidence-based prevention programs (and their particular attention to these programs' targets and treatment orientation(s)). Indeed, it is in the part entitled "Model and promising evidence-based prevention programs" where Goddard and Myers (2018:63) issue one of the more provocative rebukes of "model" and "promising" programs that ostensibly treat the *symptoms* of delinquency and violence, but ignore/leave untouched environmental risk factors:

> In the US, we allow the well-known roots of violence to grow. We allow desperately poor mothers to fend for themselves, we allow kids to go hungry, we allow schools to run short on books, we provide poor young people few safe places to play, and we fail to provide young people the skills and opportunities to challenge their minds and establish careers. In the neighborhoods where police patrol most aggressively, we fail to provide young people with the baseline levels of safety necessary for human development. Allowing all of this to take place is *abusive*— though we do not often recognize it as such. At the individual level, most of us would condemn a parent for not feeding their child. Most Americans would condemn a parent for not providing a formal education to their children (in fact, it is illegal to do so). Most of us would condemn a parent for neglecting a child's need to play outside. And wouldn't most of us also condemn a parent for not working harder to address these needs (that is, solve the causes of hunger, etc.)? It is not

unusual to see or read about a news story that condemns such acts of parental neglect. But why don't we condemn the same neglect at the social level? Why don't we condemn policymakers, businesses, and ourselves for not working harder to address these sources of risk and need? [emphasis added]

Such an admonition becomes all the more potent when one encounters the admission in the next sentence on the same page:

We do not have the immediate answer, but what we do believe is that asking a young girl to replace her anger with a smile even though she sat in school hungry, exhausted from lack of sleep because she heard the routine gun shots at night, is akin to treating a symptom while ignoring the source—a source that will continue to structure the lives of the next generation of young people entering their early teenage years, the next generation after that, and so on.

Knowing that Goddard and Myers (2018: 68) have seemingly pulled their punch(es), right when one would expect a knockout blow, actually encourages us to read on—to see how their condemnation of contemporary evidence-based programs and their endorsement of broader measures aimed at "source reduction" (i.e., the structural producers or variables that leave young people "at risk" of crime and violence) aligns with the philosophies, orientations and activities of the social justice organizations that they studied. Goddard and Myers conclude Chapter 3 with a description of the "misalignment," in their words (2018: 68), of the social justice organizations and present-day evidence-based programs.

Chapter 4, "Navigating the dilemmas of funding and reporting," and Chapter 5, "Negotiating neoliberal governance and the political limits of community," describe in detail the funding context in which the social justice organizations that Goddard and Myers studied operate and the challenges such organizations face. In Chapter 4, Goddard and Myers explore a number of key issues, including: (1) how market-based funding arrangements and current measures of success under these funding schemes influence the work of the social justice organizations; (2) how competition over funding and grants changes the relationships that workers in the organizations have with young people; and (3) how measures of success often ignore or fail to incorporate the kinds of outcomes that youth justice advocates and workers regard as most important—such as those that extend beyond recidivism and involve overall (or broader) youth well-being.

What stands out in Chapter 4 (and what reappears in Chapter 5) is the sheer amount of time that social justice workers need to devote to produce the type of "reportables" used to measure success in many of the contracts that the organizations have with state agencies—and that for organizations that try to deliver services to young people *and* organize them for advocacy and protest efforts, different funders want different outcomes and have different audit and reporting requirements. As Goddard and Myers (2018:84) explain, "[s]uch reporting requirements can take time away from actually working with young people. It is particularly resource-draining for social justice organizations because contract or grant money most often cannot be used for a timekeeper, auditor, or clerical worker"—leading some organizations to decide not to seek public money. Those organizations that do accept state funding, however, often need to abide by stipulations in the contracts. For example, in some states, Goddard and Myers (2018:86) clarify, "taking public money meant that undocumented youth could not receive services paid for with those funds; some state money would have required staff at publicly funding organizations to serve as 'mandated reporters' of child abuse and neglect. This meant that the program staff would have to

alert a state agency—a move that could trigger the criminal justice system or immigration enforcement authorities—if they suspected a child was being endangered in their home or even through their survival strategies."

But private funding mechanisms are not without their own shortcomings, as Goddard and Myers make clear. For instance, "success" for some private funders might be measured by "policy wins" and Goddard and Myers' respondents describe how such funders are often not interested in supporting and giving money for "the sort of day-to-day work with youth that need[s] to be done by social justice organizations.... So, while a private donor or philanthropy might be willing to fund travel for youth to … speak to lawmakers about police violence in a state capital, they [a]re less willing to make long-term investments in those youth once that campaign [i]s over" (2018: 90).

One of the themes that emerges from Chapters 3 and 4 is that "neoliberal governance coerces and hinders the progressive services and organizing efforts of social justice organizations" (Goddard and Myers 2018:106). In Chapter 5, the authors offer further insights into "the political limits of 'acceptable' youth intervention," providing details about how certain neoliberal governance techniques "*shape*, *channel*, and *limit* social justice organizations" in order to "maintain[] the status quo," "protect[] the interests of those in power," and "keep 'the community' docile" (2018:101, 106, 104 (emphasis in original)). These "overlapping shaping elements," to use Goddard and Myers' (2018:107, 113, 115) wording, include (1) shaping by evidence-based programs and practices (favoring organizations that adopt "proven" programs or practices (as outlined in Chapter 3)); (2) shaping by auditable outputs and privileging short-term outcomes (showing preference for "short-term measures of success and the amount of labor needed to generate quantifiable outputs—[ones] that track the extent to which a program is adhering to the models and processes required by a funder," as revealed in Chapter 4 with the illustration of the mismatch between what organizations and funders think are important); and (3) precarious finances—"inadequate funding or constantly shifting funder preferences," which lead to uncertainty and instability that "keeps organizations malleable to the rationalities and techniques favored by funding sources." Here, again, we see how competing for money and responding to requests for proposals (RFPs) takes time and saps an organization's resources. And here, again, we witness how if the social justice organization is successful, it must keep track of the number of hours in which it delivers youth services because both public contracts and private grants require that the organizations report "*every* contact with *each* youth, *sometimes down to the minute*"—prompting one of Goddard and Myers' respondents to lament that the organization is kept "busy chasing minutes and contacts as opposed to chasing the individual" (2018:113 (emphasis added)). This occasions Goddard and Myers (2018: 105) to observe: **"**With so much time and so many resources devoted to 'proving their worth', what they can achieve is restricted; organizations may well end up doing less than what might, at first blush, seem possible for them to accomplish. Yet without … support, community-based organizations may not even be able to operate in the first place."

In addition to the "overlapping shaping elements" or "overlapping points of governance"—or "three bands of power" (2018:107, 118)—Goddard and Myers also discuss direct political opposition that can arise and can further complicate efforts to undertake social justice work in a coercive neoliberal environment. As Goddard and Myers recount, this political opposition can take two different forms: an *active* one, whereby social justice organizations are targeted by various powers that be (such as when a police officer came to the office of one of the organizations and discouraged the group from marching and engaging in protest activities); and a more *passive* form, where funding for an organization might disappear with little attention.

All of this might lead one to conclude that the coercive governance and power of states and private philanthropic entities would severely restrict the autonomy and constrict the activities of the organizations. But as Goddard and Myers (2018:108, 104) reveal, this is not always the case and the authors encountered in their fieldwork many instances of resistance—situations where the organizations exploited "*neoliberal instabilities and potentials*" (emphasis in original)—where they took advantage of "fractures of control" in neoliberal governance. Goddard and Myers (2018:108) explain how "[o]ne method was to re-label 'homegrown' activities with the language of the dominant discourse; that is, to use the language of evidence-based practices to describe more socially conscious-oriented intervention." For example, they continue, "'youth leadership program' is a more neutral way of describing developing activists." Such reframing is vital to garnering public funds. As one respondent divulged to the authors (2018:111), "[w]e don't change what we do, it just changes sometimes what we call it." Similarly, another respondent—a director of an organization focused on youth violence prevention—told Goddard and Myers (2018:109):

> We learned that we had to develop a service model to get the city grant, and then we had to do a community advocacy model, or leadership development, or community organization, whatever you want to call it. When we talked to the city, . . . we called it leadership development. It was almost like have to have hide, we're like the enslaved people in . . . Brazil, like dancing, doing Capoeira, and the slave master sees them, 'Oh, they're only dancing,' but they're really preparin' for battle, you? And, we've had to use that concept.

Essentially, Goddard and Myers illuminate how practitioners working in the social justice organizations that they studied use the language and jargon of state-supported approaches to re-label, rename or reframe their activities in creative ways to garner public (and private) funds—all while staying committed to their social justice aims and continuing to deliver their programs and services. The process, Goddard and Myers (2018:111) are careful to underscore, is "not so much deception of the funding agencies (whether government or philanthropic), but rather a *re-interpretation* or *expansion* of what it means to be evidence-based; namely, research-driven or research-based" (emphasis added).

For Goddard and Myers, the ways, in which the social justice organizations navigate funding requirements and accountability arrangements, measures and schemes, lead them to draw the following conclusion: "*through neoliberal governance, those in power shape— but are not fully in control of—the ways in which community organizations intervene on youth, communities, and social policy*" (2018:104 (emphasis in original)). This is important, the authors contend, because it means that "unexpected approaches are increasingly going to take place, but, contradictorily, will be limited at the same time" (2018:104). Thus, Goddard and Myers continue, they regard the community approaches of the social justice organizations "as standing somewhere between determinate and indeterminate— and this tension … is always going to be unsettled" (2018:104).

In Chapter 6, "Grassroots mobilizing and the carceral state," Goddard and Myers reflect on their study's findings. Although the politics and worldviews of the social justice organizations that they researched are not identical, all of the organizations see the importance of "looking and going upstream … working to bring consciousness and change to policies that criminalize and damage young people at the margins of US society"—and all of the organizations tend to impugn "approaches to youth crime that take a strictly reactive, lifeguard sort of approach" (2018:130, 131). That said, while all of the organizations are attuned to the social and economic inequities at the root of crime and criminalization—and understand that the source of crime and criminalization is "upstream"—they

also recognize the need to work "downstream" as "lifeguards" and provide services to "young people trying to keep their heads above water" (2018:131). As Goddard and Myers (2018: 131) explain, attempting to "head upstream" while also "playing a lifeguard role downstream" presents numerous challenges—and "[t]here are costs, tradeoffs, and barriers to trying to do both" (or choosing to focus on only one). Indeed, Goddard and Myers (2018:131) maintain, "there are various bureaucratic, scientific, and political forces that encourage, steer, cajole, and bully organization to engage in only lifeguard work—and to only do this reactive, service work in a certain evidence-based way." While some of these hurdles can be surmounted, there are, as Goddard and Myers (2018:131) remind us, "real limits to [the organizations'] relative autonomy as the real trouble seems to arise when organizations start heading upstream in earnest and bring[] marginalized, often criminalized youth with them on these upstream treks." "When this happens," the authors continue (2018:131–132), "the barriers switch from bureaucratic and science-based ones to overly political ones—and the lower order threats and barriers also multiply and intensify: Audits and site visits occur more frequently, and grant officers at elite foundations are less likely to return organizations' calls."

In the rest of the chapter, Goddard and Myers continue their "upstream"/"downstream" analogy, stressing the significance of looking "upstream" (and distinguishing this from the "best practices" in criminology), while also teasing out "how unequal power relations rooted in neoliberal capitalism structure the barriers that social justice organizations face, especially when they march up the river bank to figure out who is pushing so many young people into the water" (2018:132). By doing so, Goddard and Myers leave readers with the understanding that *Youth, Community and the Struggle for Social Justice*, as a whole, is a book about the novel ways in which twelve social justice organizations (and other similar organizations in the US—the authors provide a list of forty such organizations in Appendix A) apprehend and negotiate these barriers and their creative, alternative methods to prevent youth crime, delinquency and violence. But we, as readers, also come to recognize that *Youth, Community and the Struggle for Social Justice* is also a book about the broader contours and operation of power in contemporary society—and that we, as social science scholars, have a duty to intercede. Goddard and Myers' (2018:138) parting message is unambiguous in what we need to do: "Our work must not only systematically document and come to better understand the formidable obstacles vulnerable people face in an increasingly hostile economic and political environment, but must *fight against* acceptance of this reality" (emphasis added; citation omitted).

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