



Book Review: A better justice? Community programs for criminalized women by Nelund, A.

Magill, J. (2023). Book Review: A better justice? Community programs for criminalized women by Nelund, A. *International Criminal Justice Review*, 33(4), 434-436. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10575677231185787>

[Link to publication record in Ulster University Research Portal](#)

Published in:
International Criminal Justice Review

Publication Status:
Published online: 26/06/2023

DOI:
[10.1177/10575677231185787](https://doi.org/10.1177/10575677231185787)

Document Version
Author Accepted version

General rights

The copyright and moral rights to the output are retained by the output author(s), unless otherwise stated by the document licence.

Unless otherwise stated, users are permitted to download a copy of the output for personal study or non-commercial research and are permitted to freely distribute the URL of the output. They are not permitted to alter, reproduce, distribute or make any commercial use of the output without obtaining the permission of the author(s).

If the document is licenced under Creative Commons, the rights of users of the documents can be found at <https://creativecommons.org/share-your-work/licenses/>.

Take down policy

The Research Portal is Ulster University's institutional repository that provides access to Ulster's research outputs. Every effort has been made to ensure that content in the Research Portal does not infringe any person's rights, or applicable UK laws. If you discover content in the Research Portal that you believe breaches copyright or violates any law, please contact pure-support@ulster.ac.uk

Book review: A Better Justice? Community Programs for Criminalized Women by Amanda Nelund

Nelund, A. (2020) *A better justice? Community programs for criminalized women*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

198 pages

ISBN: 978-0-7748-6363-6

Amanda Nelund, Associate Professor of Sociology at MacEwan University, Edmonton is a pioneer of feminist and critical criminology with previous publications in diverse topics including restorative justice, sexual violence, and gendered marginalisation in the criminal justice system. Her latest book builds on this work, by reimagining how systems, both informally and formally, can do justice differently through an 'important prairie-centric analysis' (Jennifer Kilty, University of Ottawa). This book, *A Better Justice? Community Programs for Criminalised Women* shines a light on the disproportionate rate women are being imprisoned throughout Canada. In skilfully dissecting this problem, Nelund engages in extensive theoretical and empirical analysis to identify practices alternative justice programs can offer criminalised women in comparison to the formal Canadian criminal justice system.

The author battles with literature from critical criminologists, attempting to label alternative methods of justice as either formal or informal. A task made more difficult when examined in tandem with the writings of feminist criminologists that stress the need for alternatives to incarceration, but one which is communicated concisely in this piece. She begins from a feminist perspective, outlining the mismatch between the alarming literature on the unique harms of women imprisonment and the rapid increase in criminalised women in the Canadian system. A strong case for alternative justice approaches is put forward, and is then set against the writings of critical criminologists who remain sceptical about this need. The first chapter details alternative services for criminalised women in Winnipeg, highlighting the work staff within these programs are engaged in. The following two chapters depict the construction of the criminalised woman, identifying differences from a correctional perspective and alternative justice discourse. Nelund brings this analysis together in chapter 4 arguing alternative justice programs can, with difficulty, resist neoliberal governance strategies rooted from the formal justice system. The book offers a persuasive argument for better justice for criminalised women whilst disclosing key questions that remain.

From the outset, Nelund strongly suggests that despite the 'alternative' label, justice programs available in Winnipeg conduct very little work that is considered different to the formal criminal

justice system. Instead, she frames the work as 'key sites of government at a distance' (p28) that form an informal and formal justice regime. Restorative justice, education and reintegration services are unique elements of the alternative programs. However, whilst dominant literature often portrays alternative programs as exempt from state power, Nelund compellingly employs social control theory along with empirical data to demonstrate how alternative programs are regularly absorbed by the state despite being based in the community, and therefore are not an absolute alternative.

This identification logically informs the next 2 chapters, examining how the criminalised woman is constructed through the lens of correctional and alternative justice discourse. Nelund clearly links the presence of state governance within the alternative discourse on how criminalised women are labelled and their offending rationalised. Both discourses point to neoliberalism and psychologised constructions to explain female offending. Nelund critiques this perspective based on gender, arguing men are often perceived as logical criminals whereas female offending is attributed to psychological disorders requiring treatment. The author draws on enlightening empirical data to construct the marginalised woman, arguing alternative programs link criminal behaviour with oppressive social structures, directly impacting a woman's ability to make rational choices. She draws on these co-existing subjectivities and stigmatising label of offender to make a case for informal support that does not conform to neoliberal governance strategies.

Through Nelund's in-depth analysis of neoliberalism, she identifies a new mentality present in alternative programs framed as an ethic of care. Different from correctional discourse, this mentality focuses on emphasised recognition by alternative justice that anyone can commit crime and care is needed to address societal causes. Albeit, recognising both neoliberal and ethic of care mentalities co-exist in a problematic sphere with Nelund affirming care is coerced, as women are obliged to be there by the criminal justice system. This again draws on previous scepticism of alternative justice being a legitimate alternative for criminalised woman. The last part of the book focuses on two main arguments whilst highlighting questions that remain. Firstly, Nelund determines there is a possibility of resistance within the programs from neoliberal mentalities, but this is dampened by their overall part in upholding the justice system. Secondly, the author regards access to the programs solely through criminalisation as very problematic yet grapples with addressing this concern both practically and theoretically.

The comparative analysis between discourses observed through the constructed criminalised woman and identified mentalities seemed initially exhaustive. After reading the book, it is clear this

substantial piece acted as the essential backbone to the overall examination of better justice provisions. Interviewing alternative justice program staff allowed these mentalities to shine and offered an insightful account when cross examined with theoretical perspectives. Nelund openly recognises methodological limitations, and this naturally leads me to my only critique. Significant input gained from interviewing staff throughout the programmes combined with the ongoing emphasis placed on the unique informal-formal justice environment indicates another interview set would have been advantageous. Obtaining an additional perspective from those working in the Canadian criminal justice system may have provided a more grounded comparison of the governing mentalities presented. Particularly how criminal justice staff view criminalised women and why they are routinely constructed as neoliberal, psychologised, and victimised subjects in the formal justice complex. Nevertheless, it was the author's intention to examine whether alternative community programs offer a better justice for criminalised women, not to delve into a comparative study of the formal justice system.

Nelund's account of "A Better Justice" is of valuable significance for those involved in forming criminal justice policy, practitioners working informally or formally in justice and those offering societal support in the community. The book offers a timely unique feminist perspective into not only the gendered harms of female incarceration but provides a critical thought for scholars and policy makers of how justice is better served. For professionals working with criminalised women, this is an essential read.