A HANDBOOK FOR CORRECTIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS

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Second Edition

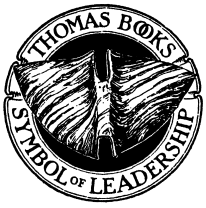
A HANDBOOK FOR CORRECTIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS

Guidance for the Prison Practitioner

By

KEVIN M. CORREIA, PH.D.

Federal Correctional Complex
Beaumont, Texas



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PREFACE

Correctional psychology is an area of specialization that has recently enjoyed explosive growth along with the burgeoning United States prison population and renewed interest in providing correctional rehabilitation programs that reduce inmate recidivism. *A Handbook for Correctional Psychologists* provides an overview of empirical findings and practices of the field. It serves as an introduction to basic principles of correctional psychology for the psychologist-practitioner working within, or contemplating working within, a correctional setting. It focuses specifically on the psychologist's role within a correctional institutional setting and clarifies the differences in working with inmates and correctional staff from populations more commonly encountered by those working in the field of psychology. It summarizes the state of current relevant research and offers practical advice and examples for successfully transitioning into this environment. Topics covered include trends in correctional psychology, unique aspects of the correctional work environment, the many roles and opportunities of the correctional psychologist, establishing successful relationships with correctional staff and inmates, and assessing malingering through the use of interviewing or psychometric evaluation. This book serves as a reference for those within the field and an investigative tool for those contemplating entering this field so that they may make a more informed decision as to whether such work would be a good fit for them. The book is an excellent way of exposing graduate students to the applied aspects of psychology and/or criminal justice at the graduate level.

DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in this article represent those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Federal Bureau of Prisons or the U.S. Department of Justice.

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A HANDBOOK FOR CORRECTIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

THIS AUTHOR HAS THE RECOLLECTION of attending the funeral of a family member during his days as a graduate student when he was approached by a distant relative he had not seen in several years. She was a particularly outgoing individual and immediately upon approaching the author enveloped him in a warm interaction designed to reconnect after such a long time. After a matter of only a couple of minutes she asked the fateful question of what endeavors the author was currently involved with. Upon informing her of his alliance with the field of clinical psychology the author noticed a seachange in her demeanor. The friendly warm smile was replaced with an apprehensive stare and a stiffening movement coursed through her entire body. She suddenly remembered some forgotten responsibility elsewhere, excused herself too politely and disappeared among the various funeral attendees.

I learned then that people have many different reactions to learning that one is a psychologist, and frankly, the negative and apprehensive reactions seem to greatly outnumber the positive and warm ones. Perhaps some believe that psychologists possess mystical powers of being able to peer through others protective veneer and isolate the deviant aspect of their being without there being any way of stopping it. Undoubtedly, much of the reaction comes from an insecurity about themselves and a basic misperception about psychologists in general. Certainly they do not realize most psychologists lack of personal concern into the intrapsychic motivations of casual acquaintances, friends and family, although I must admit when one virtually runs away screaming at the first indication of my chosen profession that I cannot

help but make mental notations regarding their abnormal behavior. With experience I came to appreciate people like my relative who took flight from my powers. After all, this is far preferable to others who assume that psychologists want to know everything about them and quickly begin revealing intimate details of their lives in hopes that a few minutes with a psychologist will allow them to uncover what has ailed them for so many years or perhaps unlock the key to their spouse's or child's pathology.

It is tempting to believe that perhaps this was why professionals unite into organizations devoted to their chosen field. Do not doctors get solicitations for medical advice from casual acquaintances? Do not lawyers receive masked or outright requests for legal advice from virtual strangers? And how about the plumber down the street who never seemed to get around to answering the question about why my toilet makes that ungodly noise? All right, so perhaps this phenomena is not so unusual. However, I noticed that something happened to my own colleagues when I decided to apply my skills to the field of corrections. I was accepted as a psychologist easily enough. But when mention of my work site entered the conversation I realized I had developed within my personal arsenal another way of distancing myself from others. All I had to do was divulge that I practiced within the confines of a prison. I now had a way of distancing myself from my colleagues and a choice of two alternatives of how to stop conversations with those outside the field. After all, laypeople respond no more affectionately to revelations that one works within a prison than they do to news that you are a psychologist. Either piece of information can easily result in raised eyebrows, a heightened stare and a tightening of the lips. All of this brings us to the purpose of the present publication. If psychologists are misunderstood, then correctional psychologists are doubly so.

SEPARATING FACT FROM FICTION: THE TRUTH ABOUT WORKING IN A CORRECTIONAL ENVIRONMENT

The idea of working as a psychologist in a correctional setting is one full of ideas about dealing with maniacal lunatics, extremely violent individuals, reforming those most in need of assistance, and other somewhat naive assumptions of what it must be like. The truth of the matter is that while there may be some substance to each of these con-

ceptions, our imaginations tend to run wild and take them to extremes that have no basis in reality. It is surprising that given the number of psychologists that currently work full or part-time in correctional settings that there is very little information as to what they do in these environments and how they go about it. There are few training programs that provide much information, if any, on this area of specialization such that when it comes time to find gainful employment (yes, there is an end to graduate school) the only information to go on when considering possible positions in the correctional field are these vague ideas, which emanate more from movies than reality. Most graduate programs spend more time discussing the behavior of rodents than prison inmates. In the present environment of government cutbacks, along with modern realizations that rats are not as neurotic as initially believed (nor very well insured), finding gainful employment treating such rodents is becoming more difficult. Thus, perhaps our training programs are doing us some disservice.

The realities of working in a prison environment are quite different than most people imagine. It is both better and worse than most people might think. Hopefully as you read through the following chapters this last statement will make sense and you will finish with a better idea of what correctional psychologists do and/or have some ideas/clarifications of how to most effectively go about your job if you have already taken the plunge and accepted a position in the field. Much of the information contained in this book are data that I found myself discovering, needing, or at least wanting, as I launched into the field of correctional psychology. In learning and looking for the information I was surprised that there existed no single general source of such knowledge, so that I was made to gather it from a motley collection of often difficult to find journal articles and books. Part of the motivation for the present publication, then, is to organize the data thus collected and provide a single cohesive source of materials for other correctional psychologists.

The goal of the ensuing chapters, then, is to provide a general introduction and overview to what correctional psychologists do, the differences one encounters in doing clinical work in a correctional setting, some prescriptions on successfully interacting with both inmates and correctional staff, and some considerations one may wish to contemplate to accurately discern if working in the correctional field is appropriate for the reader. A general view of the current and possible

future status of psychologists working in the field, as well as the general state of the correctional field itself is presented. Additionally, some specific attention is given to the issues of detecting malingering and deception amongst inmates, because there is more often sufficient motivation for clients in this setting to attempt to feign mental illness. Additionally, the field has progressed fairly well in methods of distinguishing true from feigned mental illness through investigative research, but has sometimes not been as successful in disseminating the results to psychologists in the field. The present book explores this issue from both an interviewing and a psychometric approach. Finally, because these very same issues often threaten to arise in legal proceedings, some discussion is presented about proper approaches and methods for being comfortable in the role of expert witness in criminal proceedings.

This book is not meant to be an authoritative source of knowledge, but strives to provide a basic resource from which any more detailed searches can be launched. Much of the writing herein also represents my personal views and is based on my personal experiences and interactions with others in the field. There is no representation made as to its representing the Federal Bureau of Prisons to which the author is currently employed or any other public or private entity. I do not profess to have found the single most effective way of performing the duties of a correctional psychologist, but hope through the dissemination of this book to stimulate others in the field to develop a more organized cognitive framework for the work they do and the environment in which it occurs. Additionally, it is my hope that this manual will be utilized as an investigative tool for those contemplating entering this field so that they may make a more informed decision as to whether it provides a good fit for them. Finally, perhaps some enlightened members of the academic establishment will view this manual and others like it as a way of exposing graduate students to the applied aspects of our field prior to their graduation. As for how to deal with those prickly responses of others first learning of your chosen profession: tell them you are a janitor at an elementary school and then analyze the hell out of them!

GROWTH OF CORRECTIONS IN THE UNITED STATES

In recent years there has been a burgeoning growth in the number of prisons and prisoners in the United States fueled by an increasingly aggressive enforcement and prosecution of drug and other crimes, a trend toward increasing the length of sentences served by convicted offenders, a push to force convicted offenders to serve a greater percentage of their assigned sentences, an end or move away from paroling offenders and an increasing popularity of career offender laws, which further lengthen sentences of repeat offenders.

From 1990 to 1999 the rate of prison and jail incarceration jumped from 458 per 100,000 U.S. residents to 682 per 100,000 (U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). By 2005, the United States reached an incarceration rate of 737 persons per 100,000 US residents. In 2005, about 1 out of every 136 U.S. residents was incarcerated either in prison or jail (Harrison & Beck, 2006). The United States has 5 percent of the world's population and 25 percent of the world's incarcerated population (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2007).

The U.S. incarcerated population showed an average increase of 5.8 percent from 1990 to 1999 (U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). Federal Prison populations showed an average annual increase of 8.5 percent during the same period. From 1990 to 1997 the United States state prison population of sentenced inmates increased from 708,393 to 1,131,581 (Gilliard & Beck, 1998). During these years the Nation's prison inmate population grew more than 60 percent. At midyear 2007, the Nation's prisons and jails incarcerated 2,299,116 persons (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2006). The rate of growth has been unprecedented and translates into the equivalent of an additional 1,610 more prisoners every week in the period 1990–1999 (U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). Other than an increase in drug education and drug treatment programs, this population explosion has not generally been accompanied by corresponding growth in rehabilitative programs.

In recent years, budget pressures created by increasingly short-sighted government policies and the incredible cost to the Federal government of engaging in costs associated with various military excursions has led to a somewhat disturbing trend of lower funding for prison institutions during a period of continued population expansions. This has often led to prison systems jettisoning rehabilitative programs as

extravagant expenses and searching for ways to reduce populations they can no longer afford to maintain.

The State of California's medical and mental health care was placed under judicial receivership for being judged woefully inadequate in providing acceptable levels of care when U.S. District Judge Thelton E. Henderson ruled in a class action lawsuit (*Plata v. Schwarzenegger*) that the system was "broken beyond repair." The court found the medical care being provided was a violation of the Eighth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which forbids cruel and unusual punishment of the incarcerated. Problems are undoubtedly worsened by a Nation-al health care crisis that leads to the incarceration of individuals that could not afford and/or did not have access to virtually any kind of healthcare entering a system that then is expected to provide for all needed medical/psychiatric care once they are incarcerated. States across the nation have become engaged in efforts to release inmates because they cannot afford to maintain their ever-increasing numbers (Richburg & Surdin, 2008).

The safety of existing institutions has also become increasingly questioned as initial efforts to save money by reducing staffing have led to environments that place staff and the general public at an increased risk. For example, the Federal Bureau of Prisons has long maintained unusually low levels of staffing relative to inmates housed in that system as compared to state systems and touted itself as a model prison system for states to emulate. However, it has been acknowledged that to maintain even its relatively low staffing rate prevalent in the year 2000 at present would require the addition of 9,000 staff. Even the Director of Federal Bureau of Prisons has been forced to publicly acknowledge in 2008 that the inmate to staff ratio has become dangerously imbalanced owing to inadequate funding.

The cyclical nature of the criminal justice system historically suggests that although the offender population may not have entirely peaked at this point, that an increasing emphasis on rehabilitating, rather than merely housing, offenders is likely to follow in the next decade. At present, however, efforts seem to be more focused on quickly easing population pressures by searching for ways to divert placing more people in prison or justifying the increasingly early release of those already incarcerated. Efforts to reduce somewhat the recent push towards more stringent and less flexible sentencing is also beginning to occur as well (White, 2008).