

Book Review by Ashley Kilmer, Youngstown State University of Robert D. Hanser and Scott M. Mire's Correctional Counseling (2011).

Correctional Counseling by Hanser and Mire is a practical guide to common therapeutic techniques used in correctional settings. It is a book written by actual practitioners in the field of correctional mental health and is intended to provide students and mental health workers with detailed information on techniques being used with inmates. It is unique in that its focus isn't on large-scale issues related to correctional mental health, but on practical treatment techniques and how they are implemented. The authors state this text is designed specifically with criminal justice students in mind (although students and workers in other fields could also benefit from the book) in order to provide them with insight on how correctional mental health treatment is practiced and present them information on real-world issues faced by clinical workers in correctional settings.

The book is broken down into fourteen chapters with the first two chapters introducing the role of a correctional counselor and the ethical, legal, and cross-cultural issues involved in working with inmate populations. Some of the specific issues given attention include limits to confidentiality and the conflicts between the counselor's ethical obligation to the well-being of the client and the policies of the correctional system. For example, the counselor may not feel that twenty-three hour isolation within the inmate's cell is conducive to the inmate's treatment, but due to the prison's policies regarding violent offenders, the inmate is required to be kept at that security level. This section of the book also extensively covered the important role culture plays in working

with inmates. Many inmates are members of one or more minority groups and it's important for the counselor to be aware of the role those particular cultures play in how the inmate behaves, expresses emotion, and responds to the idea of receiving psychological treatment.

The next several chapters cover specific counseling techniques that are commonly used in correctional settings to help inmates change their cognitions or behaviors. These chapters outline the steps to forming a strong therapeutic relationship with the client, the differences in techniques used in group versus individual therapy settings, and the techniques involved in family systems therapy (which involves bringing family members into the counseling sessions and is commonly used with juveniles or offenders with substance abuse issues). These chapters provide readers with specific guidelines on how to conduct the counseling sessions as well as strategies to overcome obstacles encountered during the sessions such as the inmate engaging in thinking errors, the inmate being resistant to treatment, and unique issues that occur in group therapy sessions (such as "group think" and certain members monopolizing the sessions).

The chapters near the end of the book discuss how to treat specific populations of offenders including women, sex offenders, juveniles, and elderly offenders near death. Each of these chapters discusses issues unique to that particular population. For example, in the juvenile chapter, the issues of drug use, teen sex, and family problems are mentioned as core areas to address in treatment. In the sex offender chapter, the authors emphasize how offenders are often manipulative, and while on the surface may seem compliant, they are actually in denial and resistant to treatment efforts.

The final chapter discusses research that evaluates treatment techniques and how research can help treatment programs make changes to improve services and better benefit the clients. This chapter discusses how to evaluate properly treatment programs and describes several evaluation instruments that are commonly used and explains what they assess. Interestingly, the authors include instruments that not only assess the progress of the inmates, but also the competency and performance of the treatment providers. The authors bring up sex offenders again in this chapter and assert their belief that sex offender program needs to be evaluated frequently due to the public concern over this population recidivating once released from prison. The chapter concludes with the authors discussing how treatment and evaluation are cyclical in nature due to the process of treatment needing evaluation on whether it's effective, evaluation results leading to potential improvements to the treatment strategies, and then the need to re-evaluate the treatment programs to determine whether improvements actually occurred.

This book will appeal to students and possibly correctional mental health staff, due to its presentation of the information provided. The book is extremely well organized. Each chapter is broken down into smaller sections of material and there is a summary following every section as well as a summary of the entire chapter that ties all of the sections together to provide the reader with a clear "take home message" from each chapter. Also contained in each chapter are vignettes that help readers show how certain treatment techniques are carried out or describe certain inmates' behaviors and symptoms to illustrate different types of mental illness. There are also several "learning checks" contained within each chapter following the summary sections that are true-

false questions designed to help readers assess their comprehension of the material. The summaries, vignettes, and learning checks are all useful aids and make the material remarkably easy to understand. Even readers who do not have a background in psychology of treatment techniques would easily be able to understand how the various techniques are used with the inmates.

A second strength of the book is that the authors make a point to explain to the readers *why* a treatment provider would choose one technique over another. Readers would most likely be overwhelmed by all of the techniques described in the book and confused on how a provider selects one technique and not another. However, the authors explain how offender characteristics and the type of issue being addressed are important considerations when choosing a treatment technique. The authors even further explain what types of issues and offender characteristics are best suited for each type of treatment technique. For example, the authors state that if an inmate has difficulty focusing their thoughts or efforts on one particular problem then the treatment provider should use what is known as the “Lazarus technique” that takes the inmate through a process of identifying a single word that best describes their problem, then using that word in a sentence to better describe their problem, and then finally expanding on that one sentence to clearly explain their problem. These explanations and examples help the reader better understand which treatment techniques are best suited for which types of inmates.

Along with its strengths, this text also has some substantial weaknesses. The most significant weakness is how much the authors’ opinions and biases are observed in the chapters. This is particularly evident in the chapter regarding the treatment of sex

offenders. It is well-known that this is a difficult population to treat, however, the authors make it evident that they view this population as unresponsive to treatment and whose sole purpose is to manipulate the treatment provider. While certain sex offenders are definitely manipulative and cruel, this does not apply to the entire group. Furthermore, this attitude is in complete opposition of the approach that treatment providers are supposed to have regarding their clients. In the first few chapters in this text, the authors describe the importance of treatment providers being able to withhold judgment (or at least be very conscious and aware of their biases and judgments) of their clients in order to better work with the clients to resolve their issues. Although this chapter has the most obvious display of the authors' personal biases, the biases are captured in other chapters as well including the overwhelming inclusion of cognitive-based treatment techniques over other approaches such as behavioral and psychodynamic – based treatments. Cognitive-based treatments may be the most successful in correctional settings, but the authors should state this (and support it with empirical findings), if it is indeed true, or if it is not, the authors should have provided readers with a more balanced assortment of techniques. It's understandable (and usually inevitable) for authors to have biases and personal opinions on the material they present, but these should be made clear to the reader from the beginning.

Another significant shortcoming is the lack of empirical research findings to support the information being presented. The authors stress the importance of evaluation and research to determine which treatment techniques are the most effective, but they provide the readers with none of these findings to actually support the effectiveness of the treatments they chose to describe. It would have been useful for

readers to know how frequently used the various treatments are in correctional systems (for example, the percentage of prisons that use group therapy or family therapy techniques). If a treatment that is presented in the book is hardly ever used by most prison mental health staff, then it may not be very useful for the reader to understand. More importantly, the authors should have informed readers on how effective the treatment techniques actually are in reducing symptoms of mental illness, reducing recidivism, as well as other important outcome measure. The treatment techniques described in this book lose some of their meaningfulness if the readers cannot conclude that the techniques are effective and benefit inmates with the appropriate empirical support. Finally, as mentioned earlier, it is frustrating to the reader to have the authors emphasize the importance of evaluation and research, but then choose to leave out results from the evaluations and research in their text. It raises suspicions on how much the authors actually stand by what they say.

Although it is important for readers to be mindful of the limitations of this book that were described above, the text provides readers with well-organized and clearly presented information on how to implement various types of treatment techniques in a correctional setting. This would be an informative reference for both students and practitioners to add to their libraries.

Reference

Hanser, Robert D. and Scott M. Mire. (2011). Correctional Counseling. Upper Saddle River, NY: Pearson Education, Inc.