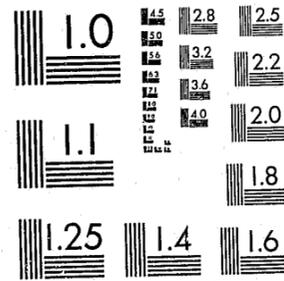


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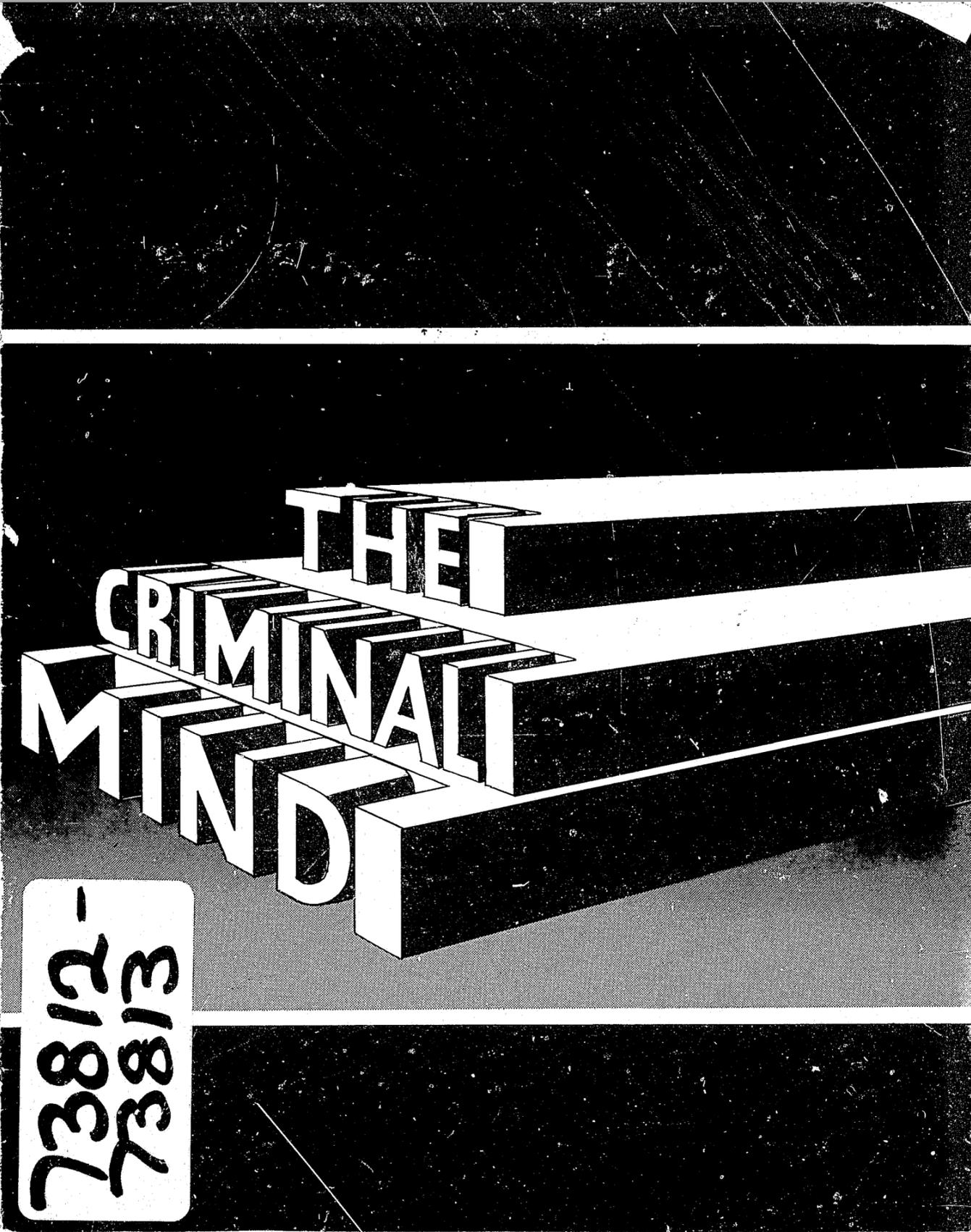
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# Texas Journal of Corrections

Published by Texas Corrections Association

September/October 1980

Volume 6, No. 5

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Editor Judie Gustafson

Subscription included in membership dues. Non-members send \$7.50 for six issues of the *Texas Journal of Corrections*. For more information for persons wishing to contribute articles, contact the editor, *Texas Journal of Corrections*, 7800 Shoal Creek Boulevard, Suite 364W, Austin, Texas 78757. Second Class postage paid at Austin, Texas. (USPS 361-410)

Published bi-monthly. The Texas Corrections Association does not assume responsibility for the content of the *Journal* as submitted by contributors.

The *Journal* is funded by Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (L.E.A.A.) through a grant from the Criminal Justice Division (C.J.D.), Office of the Governor. The opinions stated herein do not reflect the opinion of the C.J.D. or L.E.A.A.

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## A COUNSELING MODEL

# RATIONAL BEHAVIOR TRAINING

by Michael E. Ruhnnow

A set of principles and skills which teach people how to solve their own thinking, feeling and behavior problems using their ability to think.

Since the objective of probation and parole is the "protection of society through the rehabilitation of the offender," counseling is one skill which the correctional worker must possess. Too often too many correctional workers have little if any training in counseling, and even then they consider themselves "eclectic." They do not know a counseling model which "works for them" and which they can use in most situations. They progress through their career picking up bits and pieces from this model and that model but never quite getting it all together.

Rational Behavior Training is a counseling model developed by Dr. Maxie C. Maultsby, Jr., M.D., during the late sixties and the early seventies. He describes it as a "... highly directive method of teaching people how to increase their skill in reasoning so they will be better able to deal with the problems and stresses of daily living" (Goodmand & Maultsby, 1974).

A great deal of research has been devoted during the past several years to the study of the "criminal personality" and ways to rehabilitate the public offender. The fifteen-year study of the criminal personality by Doctors Yochelson and Samenow (1976 and 1977) at Saint Elizabeth Hospital in Washington, D.C., eliminated sociological and psychological explanations (including mental illness) for criminal behavior and rehabilitation. Instead of dealing with a person's environment or psychological mechanisms to explain his criminal behavior and the way to "rehabilitate" him, they suggest dealing with the person's "patterns of thinking." In fact, they call for a "total

conversion" of the person's way of thinking about himself and others because they define criminality in terms of the thinking patterns themselves instead of the outward criminal behavior, and define the criminal as a "person whose patterns of thinking have led to arrestable behavior."

For Doctors Yochelson and Samenow the ultimate objective becomes the "total elimination of criminal thinking and its replacement by responsible thinking." Their "treatment" program, which consists of three-hour individual daily sessions five days per week for a minimum of one year, trains the criminal in phe-

nomenological reporting where he learns to write down on paper all of his thoughts during the past 24 hours. The criminal is then taught to challenge his criminal thoughts identifying the 52 "thinking errors" and changing his thoughts to more responsible, crime-free thoughts. He then is helped to change his behavior and develop self-understanding and insight into his thinking patterns and subsequent behaviors.

A number of other helping techniques have begun to emphasize the importance of helping a person identify his thinking patterns and change his irresponsible and irrational thoughts to more responsible and rational thoughts. Some of these helping models are: *Reality Therapy* (Glasser, 1965), *Rational Emotive Therapy* (Ellis, 1961), *Bio-Feedback* (Brown, 1974), and *Self-Talk Therapy* (Zastrow, 1979). Among these is the work of Dr. Maxie C. Maultsby, Jr., M.D. (1975) which he calls "Rational Behavior Training" and/or "Rational Self-Counseling."

Rational Behavior Training as developed by Dr. Maultsby is a highly systematic, comprehensive and scientifically based set of principles and skills which teach people how to solve their own thinking, feeling and behavior problems efficiently and effectively using their ability to think.

While some helping techniques focus on changing a person's environment (e.g., the Model Cities Program), a person's perceptions (e.g., getting glasses or a hearing aid), a person's feelings (e.g., Carl Rogers), or a person's behaviors (e.g., behavior modification), Rational



Michael E. Ruhnnow is currently a United States probation officer in Dallas. He developed and implemented a Rational Behavior Training group counseling program in the northern district of Texas in 1974 which he still conducts.

Behavior Training focuses on a person's thinking — or his self-talk. Dr. Maultsby states that "... thinking is the single most important act humans do. It directs all of their voluntary behaviors" (1978). Dr. Maultsby's work is based on recent research in experimental psychology and psychosomatic medicine which indicates that habits of perception and thinking trigger and maintain most habitual emotional feelings. Most people then physically behave according to their emotions — they act the way they "feel" at that time.

The main goal in Rational Behavior Training then becomes one of teaching people how to perceive, think, emotionally feel and physically behave rationally — in their best interest (Maultsby, 1976).

Dr. Maultsby's approach — which he calls Rational Self-Counseling — consists of three basic steps. The first step involves teaching people how their emotions and behaviors come about via their self-talk. The second step involves teaching people how to challenge their irrational self-talk using the five characteristics of rational thinking and replacing their irrational self-talk with rational alternatives. This is done by doing an exercise called a Rational Self-Analysis (RSA). The third step involves teaching people a way of making the rational alternatives a habitual way of responding in the present and the future. This process is called Rational Emotive Imagery or REI.

Since 1975 the United States Probation Office in the Dallas Division of the Northern District of Texas has been involved in using Rational Behavior Training as a casework technique working with federal probationers and parolees. A team of two probation officers routinely conduct a Rational Self-Counseling course based on Dr. Maultsby's Rational Behavior Training model. Each course usually consists of fifteen to twenty probationers and parolees meeting two hours one night a week for thirteen weeks. Through lecture and discussion the probation officers teach the probationers and parolees the basic principles and skills of Rational Behavior Training. Each client is expected to attend all of the thirteen weekly sessions and submit a minimum of eight written Rational Self-Analyses on real personal problems.

The overall evaluation of the Rational Self-Counseling groups by the probation officers is positive (Ruhnow, 1977) using the following three criteria of success:

1. the client verbalized significant personal changes;
2. "significant others" favorably noted

significant changes on the part of the client; and

3. the probation officer noted significant changes on the part of the client.

A growing number of studies have been made evaluating the effectiveness of Rational Behavior Training as a rehabilitative casework technique teaching public offenders how to change their criminal patterns of thinking to noncriminal patterns of thinking. United States Probation Officer Charles L. Clark (1977) in the western district of Missouri found that training probationers and parolees in Rational Self-Counseling brought about significant changes in their pre-test post-test gain scores on the *Irrational Personality Trait Inventory Scale*. Patrick G. Lawrence (1979) found that Rational Behavior Training taught to inmates in the California Department of Corrections reduced trait anxiety as measured by the *STAI (A-Trait)*, reduced irrational beliefs as measured by the *Irrational Personality Trait Inventory Scale*, and increased emotional adjustment as measured by the *Parole Outcome Scale*. G. Barry Morris' study (1976) of 53 male inmates of the Fort Saskatchewan Correctional Institute in Alberta, Canada, found that "... inmates are significantly more irrational as measured by the *Adult Irrational Ideas Inventory* and are non-self-actualizers as measured by the *Personal Orientation Inventory*." His second study of 104 male prison inmates compared with 63 non-institutionalized males from the general population found that the criminal sample possessed significantly more irrational beliefs and were less future oriented than non-criminals. He concluded that "... if irrational thoughts lead to emotional conflict, then replacing them with rational thinking may enhance the criminal's ability to anticipate the future in a manner consistent with social standards."

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***The main goal in Rational Behavior Training becomes one of teaching people how to perceive, think, emotionally feel and physically behave rationally — in their best interest.***

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Steven G. Cox (1979) found that Rational Behavior Counseling taught to male offenders at the Federal Correctional Institution at Lexington, Kentucky, brought about a decrease in the number of discipline reports received by the inmates while they were in custody

and an increase in the success rate of parolees during their first six months in the community. United States Probation Officer T. W. Moss, Jr., in Amarillo, Texas, is currently completing a study entitled "A Survey of the Effects and Usefulness of Rational Behavior Therapy As Applied by the United States Probation Service in the Northern District of Texas." His thesis is that Rational Behavior Training is an effective and useful counseling tool for probationers and parolees.

In 1976 and 1977 the Federal Judicial Center of the United States Courts in Washington, D.C., sponsored seven Rational Behavior Training Workshops for 234 United States Probation Officers. Each workshop consisted of approximately 40 hours of classroom and experiential training in the basic principles and skills of Rational Behavior Training. One of the basic goals of the workshops was to teach United States Probation Officers how to conduct Rational Self-Counseling courses for probationers and parolees. Since that time some 23 districts have initiated Rational Self-Counseling groups for probationers and parolees. The probation officers in these districts are using RBT to: (1) help themselves become better probation officers; (2) help their clients on a one-to-one basis in individual counseling; and (3) help their clients in a group counseling setting.

Dr. Maultsby developed Rational Behavior Training as an extension of Dr. Albert Ellis' Rational Emotive Therapy and has extensively used RBT in the field of corrections. Rational Behavior Training is based on the workings of the human brain, a research-tested concept of human emotions and learning theories of human behavior. Its basic premise is that all normal people (normal people are those people who are not under the influence of drugs, have an IQ of 70 and above, and have no significant brain damage) create, maintain and change their emotional responses. Since most people normally and logically act on and follow their emotional feelings, they are responsible for their behavior.

Rational Behavior Training is divided into three component parts:

#### ABC's of Emotions

This concept states that an individual's evaluating thoughts or "self-talk" about an event, and not the event itself, create an emotional response which in turn motivates behavior. A complete human emotion, therefore, consists of: (1) perceptions (what you see, hear, physi-

## Rational Behavior Training

cally feel, etc.); (2) thoughts (only the ones you believe); and (3) emotional feelings.

According to Rational Behavior Training, rational behavior is behavior which is in an individual's own best interest. Dr. Maultsby believes that thinking, feeling and physically acting behaviors are rational if they meet at least three of the five characteristics of rational: (1) rational behavior is based on objective reality; (2) rational behavior helps you preserve your physical and mental health; (3) rational behavior helps you achieve your short- and long-range goals quickly; (4) rational behavior helps you feel the way you want to feel and helps you from feeling the way you do not want to feel; and (5) rational behavior keeps you out of trouble you do not want with other people.

### Rational Self-Analysis (RSA)

The RSA is a practical homework assignment where an individual learns to separate a personal experience into the ABC's of emotions. "A" refers to the facts and events you perceive were involved in your personal experience. "B" describes your self-talk, your conscious thoughts, as well as any beliefs or attitudes that you had about the event described in the "A" section. "C" describes the emotional feelings you had about the event described in "A" created by the self-talk noted in "B." "D" describes the more accurate habits of perception and more rational habits of thinking which you must practice to achieve your emotional goal at "E." "E" describes the new emotional and physical reactions you want to learn for future "A"-type events. Almost all personal experiences will easily fit into the A-B-C format.

### Rational Emotive Imagery (REI)

After completing a written RSA, you are then ready to do REI on it. REI is mental rehearsal of the new emotional and physical habits you want to learn. When you pair frequent REI with real-life practice, you are using your brain most efficiently regardless of what you are learning.

Most probation officers who have been involved in the Rational Behavior Training group counseling program have experienced positive changes in their own lives and in the lives of their clients. The probation officer begins to realize that he does have specific skills to share with his/her clients and can use these face-to-face contacts in a more construc-

tive and productive manner, that of providing clients with the skills to solve their own problems.

For most clients, the level of hostile feelings toward the probation officer and supervision decreases noticeably. Once a client learns to stop upsetting himself/herself and calm down, he/she is more open to supervision and assistance in solving personal problems. Another noticeable change is in the relationship between the client and the probation officer in that the client begins to see the probation officer as someone who cares and who can help.

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**Once a client learns to stop upsetting himself/herself and calm down, he/she is more open to supervision and assistance in solving personal problems.**

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Since Rational Behavior Training deals with a scientific concept of human behavior, almost any problem can be handled with the RBT model. Other helping models such as Carkhuff's Human Resource Development, Berne's Transactional Analysis, Wolpe's Desensitization Therapy and Mowrer's Learning Theory can supplement Rational Behavior Training. Dr. Maultsby has demonstrated significant rational changes in people's behavioral habits such as alcoholism, drug addiction, psychosomatic illnesses, acting-out adolescence, irrational fear, suicidal depression, overeating, smoking, compulsive gambling and homosexuality.

In summary then, Rational Behavior Training is a simple, yet very efficient and effective, helping model which probation officers can use in their own lives, in individual counseling with clients, and/or in group counseling with clients. Its effectiveness has been demonstrated both within correctional institutions and in the community with probationers and parolees. The main goal in Rational Behavior Training is to help people learn how to perceive, think, emotionally feel and physically behave rationally — more in their best interest and the interest of their community.

A future article on Rational Behavior Training will focus on the principles and skills of Rational Self-Counseling and will discuss ways that correctional workers can use RBT in institutions with inmates and in the community with probationers and parolees.

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Michael E. Ruhnnow is currently a United States probation officer in Dallas. He has been a district parole officer with the Board of Pardons and Paroles and minister of youth with the Zion Lutheran Church.

Ruhnnow developed and implemented a Rational Behavior Training (RBT) group counseling program in the northern district of Texas from 1974 to present, developed and conducted RBT programs for 300 U.S. Probation officers from 1976 to 1979 and has taught RBT at several area community colleges from 1976 to present.

Ruhnnow gave a presentation on RBT at the northwest regional conference in Lubbock last spring. This article is the first in a series on RBT.

# END