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Identifying Interventions That Work in Juvenile Justice:  
An Analysis of the Moral Kombat Program

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A thesis  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of Criminal Justice & Criminology  
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Arts in Criminal Justice & Criminology

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by  
Thelma Payne McGowan  
December 2011

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Larry Miller, PhD., Chair  
John Whitehead, PhD.  
Michael Braswell, PhD.  
Nicole Prior, PhD.

Keywords: Juvenile Justice, Interventions, Effective, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

## ABSTRACT

Identifying Interventions That Work in Juvenile Justice:

An Analysis of the Moral Kombat Program

by

Thelma Payne McGowan

Effective intervention programs play a fundamental role in reducing rates of juvenile delinquency. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is an evidence-based psychotherapy that is strongly supported by research (ACT, 2010). Moral Kombat (MK) is an intervention that combines character-building and CBT concepts in programs for at-risk and delinquent juveniles with the goal to change their belief systems, thus improving their behaviors (Marchant, 2009). The purpose of the study was to evaluate the extent to which MK incorporates the principles identified in the literature as necessary for a CBT program to be successful. The occurrences of the 11 CBT principles identified in the literature found in the MK participant manuals were counted. MK appears to be a structurally sound program that has the potential to help participants but includes barriers to success such as resistance due to compelled attendance, social factors, costs, and inability to meet participant-specific therapy needs.

## DEDICATION

*.....for my fellas*

*Your love and devotion have been an inspiration. Thank you for standing in the gap!*

*Love forever,*

*.....your wife, mother, and friend*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I give glory and thanks to my Lord and Savior who gave me the strength to persevere and surrounded me with friends, family, and professors who truly care.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Like many other institutions, the juvenile justice system is a work in progress. The system has long sought effective responses to the ever present problem of juvenile delinquency. Attempts to improve the system are driven by delinquency trends, theorized offender motivations, public perceptions, and what appears to work in regards to rehabilitation and treatment. Efforts to address and reduce delinquency include informal adjustments, education, probation, diversion, transfers to adult court, and placement in state custody. Research and statistics inform us of what does and does not work, and considering that juvenile courts disposed of over 1.7 million delinquency cases in 2007 (Puzzanchera, Adams, & Sickmund, 2010), effective and efficient programs are a must! Effective programs reduce recidivism, lower the costs to society, and improve the lives of youths (Greenwood, 2008). The Moral Combat Program (MK), which incorporates cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), was developed in response to this need. CBT therapy programs change behaviors by addressing maladaptive thought patterns (ACT, 2010) and have been found to be effective in addressing criminal behaviors (Chambless & Ollendick, 2001; Henshaw, Henker, & Whalen, 1984; Muris, Meesters, Vincken, & Eijkelenboom, 2005).

#### *Statement of the Problem*

Crime within the United States takes a costly financial, physical, emotional, and psychological toll on its citizens. In response the criminal justice system searches for strategies that will reduce crime. The more recent trend seen in the juvenile court is towards the just desserts model, which includes accountability, more severe sentencing, determinate sentencing, transfer to adult court, and removal from the community to state institutions. The option to be

punitive may be counterproductive. For example, all states permit juveniles to be tried as adults after taking into consideration the age of the offender and the seriousness of the crime (Redding, 2010). Some states have no minimum age, while laws in other states are very specific and specify that youth as young as 10 years old may be transferred to adult court for certain offenses, including murder, aggravated assault, and aggravated robbery (Redding, 2010). The long-term outcomes of the transfers to adult court are generally detrimental. Specifically, Lanza-Kaduce, Lane, and Bishop (2005) conclude in their study that policies transferring juvenile offenders to criminal court have a criminogenic effect instead of the intended deterrent effect, and that transferred juvenile offenders are significantly more likely to reoffend than those retained in the juvenile court system. The policy to transfer violent juvenile offenders to adult court at younger and younger ages when the outcomes are detrimental is a step in the wrong direction and perhaps a symptom of a much larger problem within the criminal justice system. The system is being guided, or misguided, by fear and politics instead of sound, evidence-based practices.

Ghetti and Redlich (2001) depict a juvenile justice system that evolved into a rehabilitative model and then regressed. The authors assert that the regression to harsher treatment is fueled by a combination of factors that include an increase in violent juvenile crime, a lack of faith in the juvenile system to carry out its goals to rehabilitate and reduce crime, and sensational media coverage of juvenile crimes (Ghetti & Redlich, 2001). The movement is sustained by misconceptions instead of fact. Puzzanchera (2009) indicates that violent crime rates rose steadily until they peaked in 1994. However, they have consistently declined and/or leveled off since 1994 with the exception of a few periods during which they rose slightly. Thus it is illogical and counterproductive to operate on policies derived primarily from politics, passion, and fear instead of being predicated upon reality. Policy and treatment should be

informed by sound, evidence-based practices. Along that vein, CBT programs have proven to be effective means to change offenders' pro-criminal attitudes and beliefs and to reduce recidivism (Chambless & Ollendick, 2001; Henshaw et al., 1984; Muris et al., 2005; Przybylski, 2008) by helping individuals change behaviors through altering their negative thinking patterns (ACT, 2010).

The MK program being analyzed in the present study incorporates CBT in order to change the attitudes and beliefs of its juvenile participants. Juvenile judges in Northeast Tennessee frequently order youth with delinquent charges to complete MK as a condition of their probation or informal adjustments. The current study evaluates the extent to which MK incorporates the principles and methods identified in the literature as necessary for a program of CBT to be successful. The presence of the CBT principles will provide support for further investigation and expansion of the program. However, should MK not meet the CBT standards, the program should receive further scrutiny in the least.

Crime in the United States is a burden on its victims, society, and the criminal justice system. Contemporary researchers advocate for implementing evidence-based programs to treat juvenile offenders, thereby minimizing this burden (Greenwood, 2008; Lipsey, Howell, Kelly, Chapman, & Carver, 2010). CBT programs have been shown to be effective interventions for reducing delinquent behaviors (Muris et al., 2005; Przybylski, 2008). If Moral Kombat is found to adequately incorporate CBT into its programs in the present study, the findings may be indicative of its ability to accomplish the program goals of changing procriminal attitudes and beliefs.

## Overview

This thesis is comprised of five chapters. Chapter 1 provides background information on the problem being addressed in the study and states the purpose of the study. Chapter 2 is a literature review that encompasses CBT, MK, and theoretical frameworks. Chapter 3 includes the details of methodology used in the study. Chapter 4 presents the findings, both qualitative and quantitative. Chapter 5 includes conclusions, limitations, future research, and policy implications for the use of CBT programs among delinquent populations.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Reducing juvenile delinquency and recidivism while controlling costs is a monumental task that is reflected in the volume of cases handled by the courts. Effective intervention programs play a fundamental role in reducing rates of juvenile delinquency. Puzanchera et al. (2010) report that juvenile courts handled an estimated 1.7 million delinquency cases per year from 2000 to 2007. According to the 2009 Tennessee Annual Juvenile Court Statistical Report (2010), there were 71,870 referrals for delinquent offenses made in Tennessee courts in 2009. Figures such as these coupled with the media fuel the public outcry for more punitive policies towards juveniles. The need for justice has been answered by politicians with the modern trend towards the just desserts model, but there are better alternatives available. Cognitive behavioral therapy, for instance, has been shown to have positive outcomes for responding to the problem of juvenile delinquency (Muris et al., 2005; Przybylski, 2008). Moral Combat (MK) incorporates CBT as part of its interventions for delinquent and at-risk youth. Chapter 2 first examines the extent of the problem of juvenile delinquency and the efficacy of other interventions. The chapter then outlines the principle components and practices of CBT followed by a description of the MK program and its origin. The chapter concludes with a discussion of criminal justice theories that can explain crime and inform policy.

#### *The Extent of the Problem*

The oftentimes punitive nature of the efforts to address juvenile delinquency is not justified by the reality of what has been happening with delinquency since 1994. Compared to 1985 figures, the number of delinquent cases rose a total of 61% from 1985 through 1997. However, the number fell 11% from 1997 through 2007, making the net difference compared to

1985 44% (Puzzanchera, 2009). There is a pattern of increase, decrease, and leveling off as the numbers have remained somewhat steady since 1997. American citizenry and politicians have continued to react as if crime were at its pre-1994 levels. In the meantime taking a punitive approach can have disastrous outcomes and actually increase the problem. For example, Lanza-Kaduce et al. (2005) found that youth who are transferred to criminal court are significantly more likely to reoffend and that transfer policies have a criminogenic effect. Failure to take notice and implement what works may prove to be an injustice to everyone.

#### *Interventions: Identifying What Works*

MacKenzie (2006) conducted extensive research to identify interventions that work, fail, or appear to have potential in adult and juvenile corrections. MacKenzie examined thousands of studies to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of interventions, policies, and programs on recidivism. The studies included rehabilitation, education, life skills, employment, and cognitive behavioral programs. In most cases the MacKenzie study was not able to limit the explanation for efficacy to a single factor. For instance, MacKenzie determined that drug courts are effective. However, because drug courts incorporate elements of both rehabilitation and deterrence, she could not distinguish which aspects are responsible for the positive outcomes.

MacKenzie (2006) found that cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) programs are generally effective in reducing criminal behavior for adults. According to MacKenzie CBT programs assist offenders with their dysfunctional information processing, moral development, and coping skills. Results varied for the type of offender and location of treatment. CBT was most effective for felony offenders and felony drug offenders, but it was not effective for DWI offenders. MacKenzie surveyed one juvenile study, Moody's 1997 study on pair counseling, for which CBT was ineffective. The sample for Moody's study was made up of 28 juvenile male inmates at

a North Carolina training school who were divided into a treatment and a control group. The youths' mean ages were approximately 14.4 years, and they were representative of the school's population. The treatment group participated in pair counseling, which incorporated social and relationship skills and moral reasoning. The participants in the treatment group were assigned to work with a counselor as pairs for the 10-week program. The control group received no treatment. There was evidence of relationship improvement in the treatment group; however, there was no noted impact on recidivism or increase in moral reasoning (Moody, 1997). MacKenzie concluded that further research is needed in the area of CBT (MacKenzie, 2006). Other researchers had more favorable findings for CBT in their studies.

Goodman, Getzel, and Ford (1996) evaluated a CBT group program that was implemented for Black and Latino urban juvenile probationers who were at high risk of rearrest. Probation officers, after receiving intensive training, led 32 sessions that taught skill-building techniques, prosocial interpersonal skills, and how to follow daily routines. The researchers concluded that preliminary results indicated the program reduced rearrest rates for youth who participated in the program. In another study on Van Manen's Self Control program, researchers evaluated behavior problems within the school setting that have been associated with delinquency later in life (Muris et al., 2005). The researchers selected 42 students between ages 9 and 12 with aggressive and/or delinquent behaviors for the study. The youth attended 11 weekly classes after which a series of questionnaires were administered to evaluate the program's effectiveness. The researchers concluded that the program was effective based on 54.8% of parents reporting improvement in their children's behavioral problems (Muris et al., 2005). Research establishes CBT as an evidence-based practice with positive effects on delinquent

behavior. Policy should also be informed by an understanding of crime and its causes. The following section is a brief overview of criminal justice theory.

### *Theory*

The design and implementation of effective policies and programs should be guided by, at the very least, a basic understanding of crime and its causes. Numerous theories have been developed to offer insight into the causes of delinquency and direction for how to address it. Because of such theories and subsequent research on treatment efficacy, programs such as Moral Kombat have been developed to mitigate the factors associated with criminal behavior and to use that which is expected to work thereby moving the criminal justice system towards an ideal balance of interests. The following section provides a broad overview of criminal justice theory.

Contemporary theories generally have their foundation in the broader Classical, Positivist, and/or the Chicago Schools of Thought (Williams III & McShane, 2004). Classical criminology developed in response to the barbaric and inconsistent system of law, justice, and punishment that was in existence before 1789. With its focus on law-making and the legal process as opposed to criminal behavior, Classical Theory states that crime occurs when the benefits outweigh the costs due to ineffective punishments. Crime is a free-willed choice as people pursue self-interests. In their writings on Classical Theory, Cesare Beccaria (1738 – 1794) and Jeremy Bentham (1748 – 1832) stressed that punishment would be sufficient to deter people from committing crime when it was greater than the pleasure of criminal gains. Crime is more likely to be deterred if the costs to the potential offender are increased by increasing the effort required or the punishment received. In order to be an effective deterrent, punishments must be swift (celerity), sure (certainty), and proportional in their severity. In regards to deterrence, experience with punishment and avoiding it (specific deterrence) or observation of

others' punishment and avoidance (general deterrence) inform the cost-benefit analysis. In contrast to this line of thought, the Positivist theorists focused on criminal behavior and determinism.

Cesare Lombroso (1835 – 1909) is credited with starting the Positivist School (Williams III & McShane, 2004). Positivists believe that crime is caused or determined by biological, psychological, and social factors. Thus, their focus was on the prevention of crime through the treatment of offenders. Lombroso put forth the idea of the “born criminal” individual. While Lombroso placed more emphasis on biological deficiencies, other scholars emphasized psychological and sociological factors. The use of scientific research and experimentation to determine the factors associated with crime is a key element of positivism. Lombroso later added social and economic factors as secondary causes of crime. The Chicago School (1892), on the other hand, considered them as primary factors in the cause of crime.

The Chicago School focused on human behavior, which they theorized was determined by social and physical environmental factors, as opposed to genetic characteristics. The community was believed to be a major factor affecting human behavior, as people were considered a product of their environment. According to the Chicago School communities with competing norms and values developed as a result of urbanization and industrialization breaking down older and more cohesive patterns of values (Williams III & McShane, 2004). The basic institutions such as the family, friendships, and other social groups become impersonal and opposing definitions about proper behavior occur and come into conflict with other behavior. Shaw, McKay, and other scientists of this school literally took their work to the streets. Empirical sociology, which is studying humans in their natural environment, was developed by researchers from the Chicago school. In addition, Chicago scientists combined data with

population statistics, thereby constructing an important foundation that has since been the basis for many criminological theories of today.

Theories that have been developed over the years include Subculture, Control, Classical, Rational, Peacemaking, Labeling, Feminist, and Conflict theories. Today's theories generally fall into biological, psychological, and sociological categories and have their roots in the schools of thought described above. Classical Theory, for instance, gave rise to Rational Choice and Deterrence Theories, which state that crime is a choice that is influenced by rational consideration of costs and benefits. Other theories that fall into the aforementioned categories include the following: Cohen and Felson's *Routine Activities Theory*, Eysenck's *Differential Conditionality*, Bandura's *Modeling Theory*, Sutherland's *Differential Association*, Akers' *Social Learning Theory*, Freud's *Psychoanalytic Theory*, Merton's *Strain Theory*, Durkheim's *Anomie Theory*, Cloward and Ohlin's *Differential Opportunity*, Hirschi's *Social Bond Theory*, and Braithwaite's *Reintegrative Shaming*. Of the contemporary theories, attempts to explain juvenile delinquency are included primarily in control, labeling, and subculture theories (Williams III & McShane, 2004).

Noted criminologists who have contributed subculture theories include Marvin Wolfgang and Franco Ferracuti (*Subculture of Violence*, 1967), Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin (*Differential Opportunity Theory*, 1959), Albert Cohen (*Subculture of Delinquency*, 1955), and Walter B. Miller (*Lower-Class Focal Concerns*, 1958). Subculture theories were developed to explain delinquency rates among lower-class males, particularly in gangs. They are extensions of strain theories and cultural deviance theories, which include social disorganization and differential association theories. Strain theorists contend that crime is a result of frustrations suffered by lower-class individuals who are deprived of legitimate means to reach their goals.

Cultural deviance theories claim that people become deviant by learning the criminal values of the group to which they belong. Collectively, subculture theories posit that the delinquent subcultures emerged in response to the special problems that the members of mainstream society do not face but that do confront lower class individuals (Williams III & McShane, 2004). Individuals in similar circumstances assemble for mutual support as they feel isolated or neglected by mainstream society. Though the members of the subculture are not like the dominant culture, the subcultures do exist within the larger society. While subculture theorists consider why crime occurs in societies, control theorists seek to explain why individuals do not commit crime as everyone faces temptations, inducements, and peer pressure.

The control theories offered by Travis Hirschi (*Social Control Theory*, 1969), Michael R. Gottfredson & Hirschi (*General Theory of Crime*, 1990), David Matza and Gresham Sykes (*Techniques of Neutralization*, 1957), and Walter Reckless (*Containment Theory*, 1961) have the general assertion that because everyone has the motivation to commit criminal acts, the absence of control is a key factor in the cause of crime (Williams III & McShane, 2004). The controls that help regulate human behavior are internal and external. The internal strategies and techniques are simply referred to as self-control. External, or social, controls include norms, laws, values, and social bonds. Social bonds include relationships in the context of school, church, and family. These internal and external controls act as forces that drive adults and juveniles to conform to the laws and expectations of society. Criminal and deviant behaviors occur when the controls are defective or lacking. In addition, commitment to conventional activities is positively correlated to the strength of attachments to others, which is negatively correlated to the likelihood of committing criminal and/or deviant behaviors.

### *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy*

The juvenile justice system has long sought effective responses to the growing problem of juvenile delinquency. Intervention programs play a fundamental role in reducing rates of juvenile delinquency. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) appears to have potential for being a part of the solution to reducing crime and recidivism in this capacity. According to the Academy of Cognitive Therapy web site (ACT, 2010) CBT is an evidence-based psychotherapy in which clients actively use newly learned education, skill building, and problem solving skills to address the issues that brought them to therapy. The treatment focuses on maladaptive patterns of thinking and their underlying beliefs. Research (Chambless & Ollendick, 2001; Henshaw et al., 1984; Muris et al., 2005) demonstrates that CBT is effective in helping people make emotional and behavioral changes (ACT, 2010). CBT focuses not only on an individual's thinking but also on the interconnectedness of a person's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors and how they affect one another.

Because emotions, thoughts, and behaviors are all linked, CBT approaches allow for therapists to intervene at different points in this cycle (ACT, 2010). CBT attempts to empower patients by helping them acquire the skills to make their lives better. Treatment applications for children and adolescents include depression, anxiety, and conduct disorder. Conduct disorder has been linked to delinquent behavior and recidivism in serious juvenile offenders (Brand, Bullens, Mulder, & Van Marle, 2011). CBT, along with the Six Pillars of Character and ethical decision-making strategies, establish the foundation of the Moral Combat (MK) programs (Marchant, 2009). The MK 1, 4, 5, and 6 programs incorporate CBT in an attempt to help participants break the cycle of maladaptive thinking that contributes to delinquent behaviors.

The National Association of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapists (NACBT) identifies the most common components or principles of CBT, a name that actually refers to a classification of a variety of therapies that generally include the elements presented below (NACBT, 2010). Eleven principles were identified.

CBT is based on the Cognitive Model of Emotional Response that holds that thoughts are responsible for feelings and behaviors as opposed to feelings and behaviors being influenced by external, situational factors. CBT, therefore, operates on the premise that one can change the way one thinks, even when the situation remains the same (NACBT, 2010). This principle, if found in MK, will benefit participants because they are not likely to be in the position to change some situational factors that may contribute to their delinquency due to their age.

CBT is time-limited and brief in comparison to other therapies. ACT (2010) identifies the length of treatment, which is determined on a case by case basis, as generally lasting an average of 16 weeks, though it may last for many months in some cases. Brief, but effective, therapy may be very beneficial for MK participants who may resent their compelled attendance in the program.

Clients are encouraged to actively participate in treatment both in and out of session (NACBT, 2010). Homework assignments for reading and practice are part of therapy because the skills that are taught in therapy sessions require practice. Individuals typically learn better by doing, and there is a positive correlation between the amount of practice and how well the subject is learned. If the principle is part of the MK program, principles will be reinforced and participants should have better outcomes.

The effectiveness of other therapies relies heavily on a positive relationship between the client and therapist. While a sound therapeutic relationship is needed, the client-therapist

relationship is not the focus during CBT. Clients are taught rational self-counseling skills that enable them to think differently and subsequently act on the new thought patterns (NACBT, 2010). If found in MK, this principle has the potential to equip participants to apply the changes across situations.

CBT is a joint effort in which the therapist attempts to learn the clients' goals in life and help them achieve their goals. The clients' roles are to learn and apply the learning. The decision to end formal therapy is made by the therapist and the client (NACBT, 2010). This particular principle may prove more of a challenge for MK because it is a group program.

CBT incorporates characteristics of stoic philosophy in that clients are taught to be calm in the face of undesirable situations. The number of problems to handle in any given situation is reduced because the task of dealing with the issue of being upset is avoided. As a result, one is left in a better frame of mind to deal with the situation (NACBT, 2010). If present, this principle will be important for all of the MK programs evaluated in the present study but especially for MK 4 that addresses emotion control.

CBT therapists use the Socratic Method insofar as they ask questions in large part to obtain a good understanding of the client's concerns and views. Clients are also encouraged and taught to ask themselves questions to evaluate situations that are stressors (NACBT, 2010). Because of the group setting, this principle may be challenging to accomplish in the traditional question-answer context.

CBT is thought to achieve more rapid results because it is structured and directive. With the focus on the clients' goals, each CBT session has a specific agenda used to teach particular techniques and concepts. Therapists teach clients how to think and behave to accomplish the identified goals, as opposed to telling them what to do (NACBT, 2010). The MK program

facilitator will have a key role in following the outline of the participant manual if it holds true to this principle.

CBT is based on an educational model that states that most emotional and behavioral responses are learned, an assumption that is supported by science. Therapy is designed to “help clients unlearn their unwanted reactions and to learn the new way of reacting” (NACBT, 2010). The educational focus may lead to the added benefit of long-term results for MK participants because they learn the how and why of what they are doing.

By using techniques that are based on the Inductive Method, clients learn to look at thoughts as guesses that can be questioned and tested (NACBT, 2010). This reasoning allows the opportunity to see things as they are instead of how they appear to be and to change one’s thinking accordingly. Inductive reasoning also involves drawing conclusions, or generalizing, from specific individual facts and/or old experiences. Inductive reasoning is demonstrated in the following example: All roses we have seen are red. Therefore, all roses are red. The conclusion is false even though all of the premises are true. Drawing conclusions on incomplete or inaccurate information may lead one to overgeneralize. Based on this principle, if present, MK participants will be prompted to examine their beliefs before they act on them.

Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy (REBT), which was developed in the 1950s by Albert Ellis, is classified as one of the many CBT models. While many of the CBT models are more problem driven, REBT takes the position that behavior and/or emotions are simply consequences of the patient's core belief structure, which then leads to psychopathology (Ellis & Bernard, 2006). REBT uses disputational methods in an attempt to modify the client’s overall philosophy. Moral Kombat seeks to help participants become aware of irrational belief statements and dispute them by replacing them with rational thoughts and statements. This

process is intended to change their core belief systems (Marchant, 2009). MK simultaneously introduces the concept that thoughts are responsible for feelings and behaviors.

In brief, the principle components of CBT are as follows:

1. Thoughts are responsible for feelings and behavior
2. Homework that encourages practice and reinforces concepts
3. Rational self-counseling skills
4. Stoic – calm through problems
5. Socratic Method – questions by self and therapist to understand issues and stressors
6. Focus on goals and specific techniques – highly instructive
7. Learn new way to think and react – unlearn old way
8. Inductive – question and test thoughts as guesses
9. Address and change core belief structure (REBT)
10. Time limited and brief
11. Collaborative effort

#### *Risks of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy*

The Mayo Clinic (2010) associates little risk with CBT. The extent of the risk is generally limited to the feelings of anxiety and stress that often accompany the emotional discussions that occur when one explores painful and/or uncomfortable feelings and experiences. By design, however, the coping strategies that clients learn should help them overcome the negative feelings.

### *The Moral Kombat Program*

Effective intervention programs serve a fundamental role in reducing rates of juvenile delinquency and recidivism as well as their costs to society. Cognitive behavioral therapy programs have proven to be effective forms of intervention in the juvenile arena (Chambless & Ollendick, 2001; Henshaw et al., 1984; Muris et al., 2005). The Moral Kombat (MK) Program incorporates CBT to address delinquent behaviors to include theft, disorderly conduct, assault, and drug use. The Foundations for Life Principles' Moral Kombat Program *Facilitator Training Manual* describes MK as “intensive intervention” as opposed to mental health counseling that “provides tools for the at-risk (at-hope) youth and their families to help them literally step out of the dysfunction they find themselves in (p.1).” The MK program is made up of individual programs that are designed to address specific offenses or issues that have occurred. At-risk youth may also be referred to the programs as a proactive measure when the adults involved in their lives see signs that they are headed down the wrong paths such as disobeying rules, conflict in the home, breaking curfew, and poor school performance. According to its creator the first MK program was designed and implemented because the needs of courts, youth service organizations, and schools in Northeast Tennessee were not being met (Marchant, 2009).

This researcher interviewed Carrie Marchant, the author of MK, about developing Moral Kombat. Marchant reports that she used the knowledge she acquired from her work as a curriculum designer for probationers and as a national faculty member of the highly acclaimed CHARACTER COUNTS! character education program to develop the Moral Kombat Program. Marchant spent many years studying what works with those who are high-risk and used the nation's best practices that stemmed from such research. She found that some of the best programs had elements of CBT, Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy (REBT), mentoring,

facilitation, collaborative groups, a variety of learning styles, experiential learning, and service learning, etc. Marchant stated that the lessons are structured to include these elements of what research has identified as best practices. Numerous books were consulted, including several from Albert Ellis, as well as experts on character education, bullying, learning styles, coaching, mentoring, facilitation, experiential learning, and service learning from across the world to design the lessons. The CHARACTER COUNTS! Six Pillars of Character, CBT, and ethical decision making strategies provide the foundation for all of the MK programs. Participants have the opportunity to learn from their mistakes, as the programs instill a desire to control and improve behaviors and change their belief systems while inspiring change from within (Marchant, 2009). According to the facilitator manual, independent studies over 3 years found a success rate of 80% on average of graduates that do not reoffend. The programs offered range from character building education to parenting and driver education (C. Marchant, personal communication, May 15, 2011).

A list of the different MK programs and brief descriptions according to the MK website (2010) follows. MK 1, Intensive Character Education, focuses heavily on the Six Pillars of Character and teaches participants to internalize the values, which are trustworthiness, caring, respect, fairness, citizenship, and responsibility. MK 2, Surviving Life: Job, Life, & Survival Skills, teaches parenting, relationship, and job skills to older teens. MK 3, Helping Parents Survive & Thrive with Today's Youth, is a course used for parents whose youth are completing an MK program or who need support with discipline issues. MK 4, Emotion Control for Teens: Trying to Hang onto the Ragged Edge of Life, introduces youth to anger management techniques. MK 5, 2LIVE4: Drug & Alcohol Early Intervention, provides education and intervention for teens who have experimented

with alcohol and drugs. MK 6, 2MUCH2LO\$E: Shoplifting, Theft, & Bad Checks, helps youth and adults in the areas of shoplifting, theft, and bad checks to make the right choices and build better futures. MK 7, 2MUCH2LIVE4: Preventive & Defensive Driving for Teens, teaches teens good decision making skills and self-control to help keep them safe on the road. MK 8, Family Reunion: Parent and Teen Communication & Conflict Resolution, addresses communication skills and understanding each other's needs. MK 9A/B, Making Choices Count!: Truancy Intervention, provides a long- and short-term option for truancy intervention. MK 9C, Making Choices Count!: Truancy Intervention Grade Recovery, is for students who have missed too many days but maintained their grades. They may be advanced and allowed to attend this program. MK 10, Smoke Free 4 Me: Tobacco Deterrence, is a tobacco cessation class.

Each program is designed to be completed in six 2-hour sessions. However, the classes actually meet for 10 hours of classroom instruction and a 4-hour community service component that may be scheduled and completed as a group or arranged and completed individually, totaling to 14 hours. Classes meet 2 hours a week for 5 consecutive weeks. Marchant explained that the scheduling adjustment was made per the court's request. Marchant stated that the logic behind the request was to improve attendance and participation of youth by minimizing the hardship and inconvenience of the time commitment. Marchant stated that the facilitator is available by phone both before and after classes to assist participants. Homework, or "experiential learning activities," is a key feature of the program. The total cost is \$205.00, which includes the \$45.00 fee for a 4-hour mandatory parent session. MK 3 is the parent session, which not

only introduces parents to MK concepts and techniques but also prepares them to reinforce at home what their children are learning in the classrooms.

### *CHARACTER COUNTS!*

The CHARACTER COUNTS! Program is a character education program that resulted from a conference of ethics and character education experts hosted by the Josephson Institute in 1992 (Josephson Institute, 2011). The Six CHARACTER COUNTS! Pillars referenced above are trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. The Josephson Institute describes its Six Pillars of Character as universal values that transcend cultural differences. The Pillars are geared towards helping children behave as ethical citizens and improve behavior. Participants include over 7 million young people who are reached on a daily basis through membership organizations that include schools, human service agencies, businesses, municipalities, and youth service groups (Josephson, 2011). As a participating organization, the MK program incorporates the Six Pillars of Character to teach its participants these universal values.

### *Extent of Moral Kombat Use in Northeast Tennessee*

Some of the juvenile courts in Northeast Tennessee are taking advantage of the option they have in the MK program. The MK office provided this author with the number of attendees for MK 1, 4, 5, and 6 in Green, Sullivan, and Washington Counties in Northeast Tennessee. Table 1 depicts information that was provided. The numbers reflect the individuals who were ordered into and completed the program.

Table 1

*Distribution of Moral Kombat Classes by \*County in 2009*

	Green	Sullivan	Washington
MK1-Character	54	32	31
MK4-Emotion Control	27	41	60
MK5-Alcohol & Drug	0	69	71
MK6-Shoptlifting and Theft	3	103	55

\*Northeast Tennessee Counties

*Conclusion*

Attempts to reduce juvenile delinquency and recidivism must be balanced with a myriad of interests that include financial costs, justice for the victim, public safety, and the overall outcome for the offender. The volume of the cases entering juvenile courts and conflicting philosophies about how to address the problems with delinquency make approaching this balancing act a monumental task. CBT programs are effective responses to reduce juvenile delinquency. CBT, the Six Pillars of Character, and ethical decision making strategies form the basis of MK. To successfully reduce juvenile delinquency the criminal justice system needs programs like MK to deliver on what they promise. The following chapter introduces the

methodology used for the present study that analyzed MK for the presence of CBT principles the literature indicates must be present for a CBT program to be effective.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

The previous chapter demonstrates the efficacy of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). Many theories contend that crime is a result, totally or in part, of learned behavior. If the Moral Kombat Program does what it purports to do, the criminal justice system may very well have a well kept secret that needs to be let out of its box. The general purpose of this study was to evaluate the extent to which Moral Kombat incorporates the principles and methods that the literature identifies as necessary for a program of CBT to be successful. This chapter details the research methodology employed in the present study.

#### *Data Collection*

The author referenced two nationally recognized professional cognitive behavioral therapists' web sites and Ellis's (2006) book on rational emotive behavioral therapy (REBT) approaches to identify 11 common principles of CBT for the purpose of this study. The results are represented in the list below. The principles were discussed in detail in the previous chapter. Each principle was assigned a number based only on the order in which it was identified. As such, the principles were numbered as follows:

1. Thoughts are responsible for feelings and behavior
2. Homework is assigned following each session
3. Rational self-counseling skills
4. Stoic Philosophy
5. Socratic method
6. Focus on goals and specific techniques
7. Learn new way and unlearn old way

8. Inductive (question and test thoughts as guesses; evaluate)
9. REBT (Address and change core belief structure)
10. Time limited and brief
11. Collaborative effort

Only MK 1, 4, 5, and 6 are ordered by juvenile judges in delinquency cases due to their design to prevent, diminish, or eradicate delinquent behaviors that may cause youth to become involved with the juvenile justice system. The focus of the present study is on these four programs because this analysis is concerned primarily with the impact of the program on delinquent behaviors. The MK participant manuals were used to count occurrences of each CBT principle. As the author read through the manuals, each principle was labeled with its number when identified. The author tallied the counts for each component and prepared a table to present the findings.

Participants are introduced to the CBT principles on some level from the very beginning of the program. Therefore, the counts began in the overview, or introduction, before Session 1 in each manual. The principle did not have to be referenced by name specifically to be counted as long as it was clear to the author that the principle was present. For instance, “internalize universal values” was a count for “unlearn old and learn new way.”

The homework counts for each program were derived from the total number of individual homework assignments that were related to the sessions that preceded them. Some sessions are followed by multiple assignments. For example, Session 1 of MK4 is followed by two homework assignments. In Experiential Learning Activity #S1-1, participants rate the importance of various concepts related to the Pillars of Character that were covered in Session 1

of MK4. Participants are then guided through identifying and making use of warning signs to help control their tempers and negative behaviors in Experiential Learning Activity #S1-2.

The author worked closely with Richard Kortum in the Philosophy and Humanities Department at East Tennessee State University to correctly identify and count activities and concepts related to the Stoic, Inductive, and Socratic Method principles. As these are less concrete concepts, Kortum not only gave endless examples and definitions to assist the author but also further explained the benefit of the principles to the participant. Kortum stated that inductive reasoning “allows for the possibility that the conclusion is false, even where all the premises are true.” The Socratic Method is a “manner of attaining knowledge as it forces one to examine his or her beliefs and the validity of those beliefs.” In other words, it inspires critical thinking (R. Kortum, personal communication, March 14, 2011).

All of the programs were marked “yes” for time limited and brief because they are completed in five 2-hour sessions for a total of 10 hours. The literature states that the average is 16 hours. The MK programs were originally designed to be completed in six 2-hours sessions for a total of 12 hours, which would be closer to the average and perhaps more beneficial for the participants. When the goal is to change one’s core belief structure, more time would certainly seem more advantageous.

Principles are present in the statement of the goals in the introductory paragraphs as they are given a brief overview of the program. For example, in the manual for MK the participants are told that “things will get better when you start to make better decisions based on the rational part of your thinking” (Marchant, 2010). This item was scored with a “3” for the principle “Rational self-counseling skills.” The text goes on to inform participants that they will have a group facilitator who will serve as a mentor and a coach. This item was scored as a “6” for the

principle “Focus on goals and specific techniques.” The item was scored as such because the emphasis is on the goal and not on forming a therapist-client relationship between the participants and the facilitator. The facilitator goes on to have an active role in the first activity, “The Web of Life,” which sets the stage for his or her role as a coach as opposed to putting the focus on building a therapeutic relationship.

Collaborative effort activities range from very involved, serious discussions about substance abuse and delving into underlying causes of negative behaviors to fun group fort building projects that demonstrate a concept that is being discussed. Narratives typically precede or follow activities to introduce and/or reinforce subject matter. Because this setup allows multiple opportunities to distinctly present a principle, it did allow occasion for multiple counts within one activity for a given principle.

By definition, REBT encompasses principles 1, 3, 6, 7, and 9. Reference to REBT, therefore, resulted in a count for each of the five principles. Likewise, because of the prominent role of “Mind Twists” in REBT, activities, narratives, and discussions that referenced the term “Mind Twists” were credited for the presence of principles 1, 3, 6, 7, and 9.

### *Conclusion*

MK was evaluated for the presence of the common principles and practices of CBT. If found in MK, the presence of the principles may be indicative of the program being an effective intervention for reducing juvenile delinquency and recidivism. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the present study.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter examines and discusses the findings from the qualitative and quantitative analyses used to answer the research question posed in the present study. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the extent to which Moral Combat incorporates the principles and methods that the literature identifies as necessary for a program of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) to be successful. A review of the literature was used to determine the core principles of CBT that must be present for it to be effective. Participant manuals were examined to identify if these principles were present in the Moral Combat (MK) program. The following sections provide an overview of the findings, tables, and examples.

#### *Principle Findings*

All of the CBT principles were present in each MK program used in the study. The following tables illustrate the counts for each principle in the participant manuals for the given MK program. While the literature provides information about what makes CBT programs effective (ACT, 2010; NACBT, 2010), the literature does not qualify or quantify any of the 11 principles identified as more important or significant than the others. Therefore, each principle is given equal weight in the present study. In addition, there is no interpretation of the degree of the counts. This researcher identified multiple occurrences of each principle. The findings are shown below in Tables 2-5. Combined results are presented for a side-by-side comparison in Table 6.

The concept that thoughts are responsible for feelings is reinforced throughout the program from the introduction till the end of the program through various modes. Homework assignments that reinforce what is presented in class follow each session. Rational self-counseling skills are introduced in each program. The stoic philosophy is also integrated

throughout the program. Socratic Method, though adapted to the group setting, is also present. The group setting does not allow the Socratic Method to go forth in the traditional question-answer dialogue format. The MK programs succeed in focusing on specific techniques as well as presenting participants with opportunities to learn new ways to think and behave as they “unlearn” old ways. MK prompts participants to evaluate their thoughts. The participants are introduced to REBT as the program helps them identify and change their core belief systems. The programs are time limited and brief. The classroom instruction lasts 10 hours. The program is a collaborative effort between the facilitator and participant, as well as between the participants.

Table 2

*CBT Principles in Moral Kombat 1*

<b>CBT and REBT Components</b>	<b>Occurrences</b>
Thoughts are responsible for feelings and behavior	19
Homework	11
Rational self-counseling skills	10
Stoic	12
Socratic method	05
Focus on goals and specific techniques	58
Learn new way and unlearn old way	58
Inductive (question and test thoughts as guesses; evaluate)	09
REBT (Address and change core belief structure)	22
Time limited and brief	Yes
Collaborative effort	35

Table 3

*CBT Principles in Moral Kombat 4*

<b>CBT and REBT Component</b>	<b>Occurrences</b>
Thoughts are responsible for feelings and behavior	30
Homework	11
Rational self-counseling skills	17
Stoic	23
Socratic method	09
Focus on goals and specific techniques	76
Learn new way and unlearn old way	74
Inductive (question and test thoughts as guesses; evaluate)	14
REBT (Address and change core belief structure)	23
Time limited and brief	Yes
Collaborative effort	46

Table 4

*CBT Principles in Moral Combat 5*

<b>CBT and REBT Component</b>	<b>Occurrences</b>
Thoughts are responsible for feelings and behavior	17
Homework	09
Rational self-counseling skills	15
Stoic	11
Socratic method	08
Focus on goals and specific techniques	53
Learn new way and unlearn old way	54
Inductive (question and test thoughts as guesses; evaluate)	12
REBT (Address and change core belief structure)	17
Time limited and brief	Yes
Collaborative effort	28

Table 5

*CBT Principles in Moral Combat 6*

<b>CBT and REBT Component</b>	<b>Occurrences</b>
Thoughts are responsible for feelings and behavior	15
Homework	08
Rational self-counseling skills	14
Stoic	11
Socratic method	10
Focus on goals and specific techniques	85
Learn new way and unlearn old way	84
Inductive (question and test thoughts as guesses; evaluate)	09
REBT (Address and change core belief structure)	12
Time limited and brief	Yes
Collaborative effort	41

Table 6

*Table of Combined Program Results*

<b>CBT and REBT Component</b>	<b>Occurrences</b>	<b>Occurrences</b>	<b>Occurrences</b>	<b>Occurrences</b>
Thoughts are responsible for feelings and behavior	19	30	17	15
Homework	11	11	09	08
Rational self-counseling skills	10	17	15	14
Stoic	12	23	11	11
Socratic Method	5	9	8	10
Focus on goals and specific techniques	58	76	53	85
Learn new way and unlearn old way	58	74	54	84
Inductive (question and test thoughts as guesses; evaluate)	09	14	12	09
REBT (Address and change core belief structure)	22	23	17	12
Time limited and brief	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Collaborative effort	35	46	28	41

*Further Evaluation of the Program*

Steps for accomplishing the overall goal of profound change are clearly listed in each program manual. Participants are expected to define their own core beliefs. In addition, participants are expected to learn and begin to internalize universal values as identified by the group and by studying the Six Pillars of Character. This step is based on the premise that an understanding of good character is required to help one start the process of thinking through decisions. Participants are taught to use ethical decision making strategies along with healthy attitudes and beliefs to dispute and replace irrational beliefs. The prominent roles our thoughts play in our behavior are described in an age-appropriate manner using a simple flow chart to

illustrate their role (see Appendix B). Participants are encouraged to accept responsibility, to exercise self-control, and to choose a positive attitude. The program also gives attention to a setting that is conducive to success.

The program strives to provide an open, safe forum to discuss and process strategies, issues, and thoughts. Individual and small “collaborative” group activities help to create an environment in which the student may simultaneously be a teacher, and the program caters to different learning styles. Homework, or experiential learning activities, is an integral part of the program as it stresses the importance of practice for learning new, positive ways to behave. A facilitator, whose role is to become a mentor and coach, oversees each session. The program uses a variety of manipulatives and activities including creating a symbolic web of life ball with yarn, skits, building a fort, role play, breaking toothpicks, flying paper airplanes, and parking ideas on easel pads to accommodate different learning styles.

The setting is further established through the use of affirmation and validation to build positive relationships from the beginning. Concepts are consistently reinforced through reviews and repetition. Youth-friendly terminology, such as “mind twists,” “logical thinking,” and “stinking thinking” is used throughout the programs. REBT is introduced as “logical thinking” to assist participants with getting “rid of stinking thinking.” Aggressive, passive, and assertive behaviors are called hot, cold, and cool respectively. Those negatively or positively impacted by the youths’ decisions are referred to as “stakeholders.” Individuals are prompted to use personal experiences and thoughts to relate the concepts to their own personal issues through individual and group activities. The programs encourage the use of journals in which facilitators answer questions and encourage participants, thereby giving each youth a voice.

The individual programs have unique points. MK4 describes violence as a learned behavior that can be replaced with positive responses that lead to meaningful communication and positive outcomes. “Emotional intelligence” is learned, as well, and to change it requires a decision to do so. MK 6 includes budgeting exercises.

#### *Limitations to the Present Study*

The present study has several limitations. First, the present study does not include an in-depth look at the role of the facilitator who has a pivotal part in the program. This researcher did not investigate the required training and/or certification of the facilitators. Second, this researcher did not perform statistical analyses that may have revealed significant information about the data collected. Third, the CBT literature does not rank the importance or significance of the principles. Therefore, if the data had a pattern, its significance would not be readily obvious. Finally, this researcher limited the present study to the MK programs that are used for delinquent youth. Consequently, the results are not generalizable to all MK programs.

#### *Examples of Principles Found*

The CBT principles were found in varying quantities in the MK programs. The following sections provide examples of the activities, narratives, introductions, and other elements of the programs that this researcher counted in the manuals for the CBT principles as reflected in the tables above.

*Examples of Principle 1:*

*Thoughts are Responsible for Feelings and Behaviors*

Cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) posits that thoughts are actually responsible for feelings and behaviors. Identifying and changing maladaptive thinking patterns are primary goals in CBT. Moral Kombat (MK) explicitly states these as goals of the program. MK identifies CBT as part of the foundation of the MK programs, along with the Six Pillars of Character and Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy. The following sections present examples of this principle from each program manual.

*Moral Kombat 1.* In the opening sentence of the Moral Kombat 1 (Marchant, 2009) manual participants are introduced to the concept that the program will address their thoughts and beliefs (p.iii).

Experiential Learning Activity #S1 – 1 (See Appendix A) directs participants to rate various statements on a scale of one to five to reflect how important each statement is to him or her. The statements are related to The Six Pillars of Character that were discussed in Session 1. Sample questions: “How important is it that I can trust others?” and “How important is it that I give back to my community, state, nation, or world?” These questions and the directions that follow the ratings prompt participants to consciously identify and reflect on their own thinking patterns and their tendency to be egocentric individuals (Marchant, 2009, p.16).

In Session 2 of MK1 participants are told as part of the discussion of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) that “everything we do begins in our thought processes. In other words, our actions don’t become our actions until we think about it. Some place in our mind our thoughts become beliefs. Then we begin to act on our beliefs” (p. 19). This discussion is followed by a Collaborative Group Activity in which participants are asked to discuss any of the

“Mind Twists,” or cognitive distortions, they have experienced and give examples (Marchant, 2009).

The manual provides a Thoughts model (see Appendix B) that demonstrates the outcomes of logical and illogical thinking when coupled with positive and negative self-talk, respectively (Marchant, 2009).

MK1 has a collaborative group activity in which a group of four or five participants are asked to consider how an incident of intolerance might have been different if “Mind Twists,” or cognitive distortions, were not allowed in the thought process and what kind of thoughts might have replaced them (Marchant, 2009).

*Moral Kombat 4.* The prelude in the Moral Kombat 4 (MK4) manual includes a discussion of Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) and Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) that explains that participants are taught to “dispute and uproot their own dysfunctional beliefs and take charge of their lives, thus promoting profound philosophic, emotive, and behavioral changes (Marchant, 2009, p. iii).”

Session 1 of MK4 includes a list of several program goals to identify what the program is about and why one might participate in it. Listed among the goals is being given “specific tools to help you overcome your irrational thinking which leads to poor choices and actions (Marchant, 2009, p. 3).”

Session 2 of MK4 has a more in depth discussion of REBT. The text explains that “everything we do begins in our thought processes. In other words, our actions don’t become our actions until we think about it. Some place in our mind our thoughts become beliefs. Then we begin to act on our beliefs (Marchant, 2009, p. 24).”

Session 2 of MK4 includes a collaborative group activity that directs participants to discuss any of the listed “Mind Twists” they have experienced and provide examples. The cognitive distortions include: overgeneralization, mental filter, jumping to conclusions, labeling and mislabeling, and emotional reasoning (Marchant, 2009, p. 25).

The manual provides a Thoughts model (see Appendix B) that demonstrates the outcomes of logical and illogical thinking when coupled with positive and negative self-talk, respectively (Marchant, 2009, p. 28).

Experiential Learning Activity #S2 – 1 directs participants to choose five words from a list of “feeling words” to describe how they felt when faced with a situation that could become violent and reacted with violence and another potentially violent situation when they did not choose violence. Participants are then asked to choose words to describe how they now feel about their choice regarding one of those situations. These tasks are followed by a series of questions that stress the importance of having vocabulary to communicate feelings and that link feelings to behaviors. “Feeling” words are provided to help understand personal feelings, which can also help control actions. Each participant is encouraged to be honest with himself or herself (Marchant, 2009).

Session 3 of MK4 includes a section titled “Frustration and Confusion.” The section covers the illogical thinking-irrational beliefs-and negative self-talk and rational beliefs-positive self-talk relationships while emphasizing that “our words stem from our thoughts, and then our belief systems begin to develop (Marchant, 2009, p. 42).” Actions, then, are a reflection of belief systems.

In Session 4 of MK4 participants are told that how they think and react to being subjected to teasing, bullying, intimidation, or threats determines their outcomes and destinies (Marchant, 2009). Again, this links the thought process to actions.

MK4 Session 6 includes the following steps among its Ethical Decision Making Strategies: Stop stinking thinking. Replace the irrational thoughts with rational logical ones. Get rid of mind twists (Marchant, 2009).

*Moral Kombat 5.* The prelude in the Moral Kombat 5 (MK5) manual includes a discussion of Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) and Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) that explains that participants are taught to “dispute and uproot their own dysfunctional beliefs and take charge of their lives, thus promoting profound philosophic, emotive, and behavioral changes (Marchant, 2009, p. iv).”

Experiential Learning Activity #S1 – 1 (See Appendix A) directs participants to rate various statements on a scale of one to five to reflect how important each statement is to him or her. The statements are related to The Six Pillars of Character that were discussed in Session one. Sample questions are “How important is it that I can trust others?” and “How important is it that I give back to my community, state, nation, or world?” These questions and the directions that follow the ratings prompt participants to consciously identify and reflect on their own thinking patterns as well as their tendency to be egocentric individuals (Marchant, 2009, p. 8).

Session 2 of MK5 has a more in depth discussion of REBT. The text explains that “everything we do begins in our thought processes. In other words, our actions don’t become our actions until we think about it. Some place in our mind our thoughts become beliefs. Then we begin to act on our beliefs (Marchant, 2009, p. 20).”

Participants are directed to discuss the “Mind Twists,” or cognitive distortions, and give examples following the discussion of REBT. The cognitive distortions include overgeneralization, mental filter, jumping to conclusions, labeling and mislabeling, and emotional reasoning (Marchant, 2009).

In an Ending Group Discussion to Session 2, participants are asked to discuss Charles C. Noble’s quote, “First we make our habits, then our habits make us.” (p. 26) in the context of what they have learned about the Six Pillars of Character, Mind Twists, and Logical Thinking (Marchant, 2009).

Experiential Learning Activity #S2 – 1 requires participants to document in their journals each time they experience or witness “Mind Twists” or the application of “Logical Thinking” for 1 day. The exercise allows for practical application for what they have studied as they are instructed to document their own response or the one they witnessed as well as their opinion of the appropriate one based on what they have learned so far in the sessions (Marchant, 2009).

MK 5 and MK 6 conclude with a Self Contract (see Appendix C) in which participants acknowledge among other things that they have learned to base decisions on logical thinking (Marchant, 2009).

The manual provides a Thoughts model (see Appendix B) that demonstrates the outcomes of logical and illogical thinking when coupled with positive and negative self-talk, respectively (Marchant, 2009).

*Moral Kombat 6.* The prelude in the Moral Kombat 6 (MK6) manual includes a brief discussion of Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) and Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) that explains that participants are taught to “dispute and uproot their own dysfunctional

beliefs and take charge of their lives, thus promoting profound philosophic, emotive, and behavioral changes” (Marchant, 2009, p. iv).

Session 2 of MK 6 opens with a discussion of why some teens shoplift. Each participant who feels he or she deserves an opportunity to learn healthy ways to cope with difficult situations in life is encouraged to “stop stinking thinking and give” himself or herself “that chance” (Marchant, 2009).

A “Collective Group Brief Activity” in Session 3 leads to the relatively detailed discussion of REBT, which is directed towards the issue of shoplifting. Examples of “Mind Twists,” or cognitive distortions, include magnification or minimization, disqualifying the positive, mental filter, overgeneralization, personalization, and emotional reasoning (Marchant, 2009).

Session 3 of MK6 has a collaborative group activity that directs participants to discuss any of the listed “Mind Twists” they have experienced and share examples (Marchant, 2009). This exercise is followed by further discussion of REBT and the concept of changing belief systems.

The manual provides a Thoughts model (see Appendix B) that demonstrates the outcomes of logical and illogical thinking when coupled with positive and negative self-talk, respectively (Marchant, 2009).

In Session 5 of MK6, participants are asked to make a connection between their bad attitudes and “stinking thinking” (Marchant, 2009).

After demonstrating that positive attitudes lead to positive actions, participants are cautioned to be thoughtful about what they are saying because not only is there power in their thoughts but also in their words (Marchant, 2009).

MK6 concludes with a Self-Contract (see Appendix C) in which participants acknowledge among other things that they have learned to base decisions on logical thinking (Marchant 2009).

*Examples of Principle 2:*

*Homework*

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) has been credited with achieving results more rapidly because of its highly instructive nature and its use of homework. Moral Kombat (MK) homework assignments are referred to as “Experiential Learning Activities.” They are generally coded in the following format #S1 – 2, where “S” refers to Session, “1” refers to the first session, and “2” refers to the second homework assignment for Session 1. Based on the given format, #S2 – 3, then, would refer to Session 2, Assignment 3. Experiential learning activities include rating values and beliefs, identifying character assets and liabilities, designing a self-representative shield, visualizing oneself in 10 years in the future, and giving program feedback. Participants are prompted not only to look within but also to become conscious of positive and negative responses of others through observation in homework exercises. By design the experiential learning activities are an extension and reinforcement of the lessons and concepts introduced in the classroom sessions. This section lists multiple examples of the CBT Principle 2, “Homework.”

Each MK program (MK1, MK4, MK5, and MK6) requires participants to complete a 4-hour service learning project before the fifth session and to be prepared to report the choice at the following session. The project is geared towards fostering a connection to the community and giving something back. The hours must be done outside normal responsibilities and must incorporate what is being learned in the MK program. Each program later requires each

participant to complete an experiential learning activity that is referred to as a “Service Learning Report” (Marchant, 2009). Questions for the report elicit not only the basic information one would expect about the service but also stimulate critical thinking. Participants are asked to consider how the organization might have been impacted had they not served in that capacity as well as what advice they would give others who might be needed to serve there. They are also asked to consider why a historic altruistic figure gave wholeheartedly and why as well as what Pillars and “Mind Twists” that figure may have dealt with along the way (Marchant, 2009).

Each program (MK1, MK4, MK5, and MK6) also requires each participant to complete an experiential learning activity, referred to as “Making Your Voice Heard.” The requirement to prepare a letter about their Moral Kombat experience not only provides feedback for the program but also prompts participants to reflect on class content. According to the program director the feedback is taken in earnest and used to “tweak” the program (Marchant, 2009).

Each of the programs includes a homework activity that prompts the participant to visualize his or her life 10 years in the future while reflecting on rational thinking and applying what he or she has learned. MK1 and MK4 require that participants script a movie. MK5 does so in the form of time travel. MK6 requests notes about their lives in 10 years. The program posits that one must establish a goal to which one’s behaviors should conform (Marchant, 2009).

Experiential Learning Activity #S1 – 1 (See Appendix A) directs participants to rate various statements on a scale of one to five to reflect how important each statement is to him or her. The statements are related to The Six Pillars of Character that were discussed in Session 1. Sample questions: “How important is it that I can trust others?” and “How important is it that I give back to my community, state, nation, or world?” These questions and the directions that

follow the ratings prompt participants to consciously identify and reflect on their own thinking patterns and their tendency to be egocentric individuals (Marchant, 2009).

Moral Kombat 1, #S1 – 2 requires participants to draw a coat of arms on which they depict that which symbolizes what they stand for. Participants also complete activities and/or discussions to identify some of their personal values (Marchant, 2009).

Moral Kombat 1, #S2 – 1 asks participants to keep a journal of the irrational belief statements they have spoken for one day as well as the times they were able to dispute the illogical belief with a rational one (Marchant, 2009).

Moral Kombat 4, #S4 – 1 requires participants to keep a journal for 1 day about their response or the response they witness to any occurrence of threats, teasing, bullying, or intimidation as well as what they consider a “cool” response based on what they learned in Session 4 (Marchant, 2009).

Moral Kombat 5, #S5 – 1 is a two-part assignment that requires participants to create a bumper sticker that applies what they have learned so far especially with “Logical Thinking” and “Mind Twists” in mind. Moral Kombat’s parent company, Foundations for Life Principles (also run by Marchant), selects bumper stickers for stipends at various times. For the second part of the assignments participants are asked to identify something that represents their history at this time to place in their time capsule. The lesson points out that they will discuss and place both positive and negative events in the time capsule (Marchant, 2009).

Moral Kombat 6, #S4 – 1 requires participants to complete a sample budget worksheet to help them become familiar with their own *needs* as well as those of their families (Marchant, 2009).

*Examples of Principle 3:*

*Rational Self-Counseling Skills*

In many forms of therapy building the client-therapist relationship has a direct impact on the effectiveness of therapy (ACT, 2010). While the relationship is clearly important, less emphasis is placed on the client-therapist relationship in CBT. Clients are instead taught rational self-counseling skills. Rational self-counseling skills are taught to participants in several formats in Moral Kombat. Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy, Ethical Decision Making Strategies, Strategizing, and Burns's theory of Cognitive Distortions present numerous options for participants to identify issues, build their skills, and change behaviors (Marchant, 2009). This section lists multiple examples of the CBT Principle 3, "Rational Self-Counseling Skills."

Participants are told in the preludes and/or introductions to the Moral Kombat programs that they will learn to dispute irrational beliefs and replace them with healthy rational beliefs using Cognitive Behavior and Rational Emotive Behavior Therapies (REBT). Each program goes on to later include a more thorough discussion of REBT as well as frequent use of its concepts in the sessions and homework assignments (Marchant, 2009).

In Moral Kombat 1, Session 1, participants are encouraged that "things will get better when you start to make better decisions based on the rational part of your thinking" (Marchant, 2009, p. 1).

Participants are given the following list of Ethical Decision Making Strategies (some with a slight variation) in Moral Kombat 1, 4, and 5:

1. What decision would you make if your decision was posted on the front page of the newspaper?
2. When trying to make a good decision, ask yourself:

What would Mother Teresa do?

What would Forrest Gump do?

What would \_\_\_\_\_ do?

What would your parents, grandparents, or caregivers do?

3. Stop “Stinking Thinking” and replace the “Irrational Thoughts” with “Rational” ones. Get rid of the “Mind Twists”.

4. Use the “Golden Rule”... Treat others the way you want to be treated.

(Marchant, 2009)

Participants in Moral Combat 1, 4, and 5 participate in a paper airplane collaborative group activity in which real life irrational belief statements that are linked to destructive consequences are replaced with rational belief statements. This provides them an opportunity to practice their newly-learned rational self-counseling skills in a controlled environment (Marchant, 2009).

The manuals for Moral Combat 1, 4, 5, and 6 provide a Thoughts model (see Appendix B) that demonstrates the outcomes of logical (rational) and illogical (irrational) thinking when coupled with positive and negative self-talk, respectively. Positive and negative self-talk are part of the rational self-counseling skills (Marchant, 2009).

Experiential Learning Activity #S3 – 1 in Moral Combat 4 requires participants to create a written or video project that explains the importance of positive self-talk versus negative self-talk (Marchant, 2009).

An overarching theme of Session 4 in Moral Combat 5 is to STRATEGIZE to “attract the good things in life,” and “to bring balance to your life” (Marchant, 2009).

Session 5 of Moral Kombat 6 is titled “Strategizing for Success – I’ve Got a Plan!”

During one of the activities participants are directed to make a plan for overcoming the obstacles that could come between them and important people and goals in their lives (Marchant, 2009).

*Examples of Principle 4:*

*Stoic Philosophy*

In regards to cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) the Stoic Philosophy entails maintaining a calm demeanor when faced with problems so as to avoid secondary issues that emotions like anger and frustration may cause. The benefit is that one is not only left with only the primary issue to resolve but also one is in a better frame of mind to address the original issue. This section lists multiple examples of the CBT Principle 4, “Stoic Philosophy.”

Moral Kombat 1, 4, 5, and 6 identify “Mind Twists,” or Cognitive Distortions, along with the discussions of Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy (REBT). Emotional reasoning is defined as “making decisions and arguments based on how you feel rather than objective reality.” Irrational beliefs are associated with helping one “create disturbed feelings and actions that sabotage your coping with unpleasant activating events” (Marchant, 2009, pp. 25-26).

All of the Moral Kombat programs use the CHARACTER COUNTS! Six Pillars of Character. Responsibility is one of the Six Pillars of Character. Twelve major concepts of responsibility are identified. Choosing positive attitudes and exercising self-control are listed among them, both of which are consistent with the Stoic Philosophy (Marchant, 2009).

Moral Kombat 1 has a collaborative group activity in which participants are asked to consider how an incident of intolerance might have been different if “Mind Twists,” or cognitive distortions, were not allowed in the thought process and what kind of thoughts might have replaced them (Marchant, 2009).

Session 1 of Moral Kombat 4 opens with a Chinese Proverb: ““If you are patient in one moment of anger, you will escape a hundred days of sorrow”” (Marchant, 2009, p. 1).

Moral Kombat 4 Experiential Learning Activity #S1 – 2 directs participants to write down the physical and physiological warning signs that accompanied an incident that brought harm to their lives in an attempt to help them become aware of the signs and control their tempers (Marchant, 2009).

Moral Kombat 5 has a collaborative group activity that gives each of four smaller groups a scenario to discuss to determine what each person in the scenario should do to bring peace to his or her life using the Six Pillars of Character, Mind Twists, and Logical Thinking concepts they have learned so far (Marchant, 2009).

Session 5 of Moral Kombat 6 includes a “Positive Thinking” activity that is followed by an encouraging narrative that explains to participants that choosing positive responses to life and its obstacles goes along with being a responsible person (Marchant, 2009).

*Examples of Principle 5:*

*The Socratic Method*

In the context of cognitive behavioral therapy, the Socratic Method is used to help the participant and Moral Kombat facilitator understand the client’s issues, concerns, and views that contribute to behaviors that brought the youth before the court. Furthermore, the Socratic Method teaches and develops critical thinking skills. Moral Kombat participants potentially discover and come to have a deeper understanding of issues through the application of the Socratic Method. This section lists multiple examples of the CBT Principle 5, the “Socratic Method.”

Moral Kombat 1 (MK1) includes a collective group activity about honesty and promise keeping. Participants are directed to discuss the consequences of being involved in relationships with the wrong kind of loyalty. Afterwards, they are asked to answer the following questions: “Why is it so hard to resist being loyal to the wrong cause or the wrong people?” and “What do you think the right kind of loyalty looks like (Marchant, 2009, p. 12)?”

An MK1 collaborative group activity requires participants to discuss incidents of intolerance and the Mind Twists that contributed to them. Participants are prompted to ask questions for clarification, to identify the associated Mind Twists, to identify more rational thinking that could replace the distorted thinking, and to discuss how the outcome might be different based on that thinking (Marchant, 2009).

The Ethical Decision Making Strategies were collectively identified as an example of the Socratic Method. They include challenges for participants to consider what others like Mother Teresa and Forrest Gump would do when faced with a given decision or to think about the decision being made being publicized in the newspaper (Marchant, 2009). The manual does not specify if the participants are told who Forrest Gump and Mother Teresa are.

A collective group discussion about fairness in MK1 lists several questions that address the perspective from the other side, judging fairness based on feelings versus emotions, and awareness of difficulty making decisions (Marchant, 2009).

Participants discuss the Six Pillars of Character (Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Caring, Fairness, and Citizenship) as individual components within collaborative group activities in Moral Kombat 4, 5, and 6. Definitions of the terms are followed by series of questions that among other things prompt participants to reflect on how they feel in the absence, violation, or presence of the values when dealing with others (Marchant, 2009).

Moral Kombat 4 and 5 include the following series of questions after a discussion of Mind Twists. They follow a self-control quiz in Moral Kombat 6: "Who really has control over your behavior? Although there are, and always will be things beyond your control, who has the power to control how you prepare for and react to them? For every decision you make, is there a direct result or consequence (Marchant, 2009, p. 29)?"

Experiential Learning Activity for Session 2 (see Appendix E) in Moral Kombat 4 attempts to teach participants how feeling words can help one understand oneself and others. The activity includes questions that prompt self-exploration as they ask participants to make connections between understanding feelings and controlling actions, feelings provoking behaviors, and feelings and physical warning signs (Marchant, 2009).

The following questions are part of a Collective Group Discussion in Session 1 of Moral Kombat 5: "Who admits to using drugs and alcohol in order to adapt to change? Does the use of drugs and alcohol really help us adapt to change? If so, does it help in the long-term? Do you agree or disagree that techniques to help deal with change and better decision-making would help improve your life (Marchant, 2009, pp. 5-6)?"

The Moral Kombat 6, Session 2 "Me-to-Peer-to-Me" Collaborative Group Activity incorporates a pebble-count guessing exercise to demonstrate peer pressure. Participants switch groups to make multiple rounds of consensus guesses before making a final individual personal guess. The activity concludes with a series of questions that prompt participants to consider the influence of peer pressure and the role of self-respect and responsibility (Marchant, 2009).

*Examples of Principles 6 & 7:*

*CBT Focuses on Goals and Specific Techniques & Learn New Ways and Unlearn Old Ways*

The length of different therapies can range from a few sessions to several years depending on the type of therapy and the type of problems being addressed. Because cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is “structured and directive,” it lends itself to more rapid results (NACBT). With the focus on the clients’ goals, each CBT session has an agenda used to teach specific techniques and concepts. Therapists help clients identify goals then teach clients how to think and behave to accomplish the identified goals as opposed to telling them what to do (NACBT). Moral Kombat (MK) programs identify goals and employ a variety of activities, discussions, narratives, and manipulatives to satisfy this component of CBT. Overall goals for the programs are pre-established during the introduction of the programs, but participants are afforded opportunities to take ownership and personalize goals. Each occurrence of this principle as a technique or strategy (not a goal) was also considered an opportunity to learn a new way to react or think. By design therapy is supposed to help clients learn the new way to react and think as they learn to stop unwanted responses (NACBT, 2010). All of the MK homework assignments would also fall into both of these categories.

The following is a list of examples of goals and/or techniques that this researcher identified in the program manuals. The activities, discussions, narratives, and manipulatives listed among the examples are also counted as an occurrence of Principle 7, Learn New Ways and Unlearn Old Ways.

*Goals.* Among its other purposes MK is designed to help participants address specific thoughts, as outlined in the opening statement of MK 1 (Marchant, 2009).

MK participants will establish healthy attitudes and beliefs (Marchant, 2009).

Participants will define and change their core beliefs as they learn and internalize universal values (Marchant, 2009). Participants start the process of identifying universal values through the introduction of the Six Pillars of Character and the development of their own group values for the class.

Participants will be provided with an open and safe forum in which they can discuss and process ideas, thoughts, and strategies (Marchant, 2009).

MK participants will learn to make ethical decisions based on their belief systems. Learning ethical decision-making strategies to assist in making life-changing critical decisions is identified as a goal. Application of the strategies leads to profound life changes (Marchant, 2009).

Participants will learn to identify and dispute irrational beliefs and replace them with healthy, rational ones (Marchant, 2009).

*Techniques and Strategies and Opportunities to Learn.* All of the MK programs use facilitators whose role is to guide the process from a mentoring and coaching perspective. They are expected to listen and talk at an 80% to 20% ratio (Marchant, 2009). While the facilitator is expected to culture a safe, open environment and trust among participants, the focus is not on the facilitator-participant relationship.

CHARACTER COUNTS! Six Pillars of Character, ethical decision-making strategies, CBT, and rational emotive behavioral therapy (REBT) form the foundation for all of the MK programs (Marchant, 2009).

Participants are introduced to the REBT concept of cognitive distortions, or “Mind Twists,” in the MK programs. The 11 Mind Twists include all or nothing thinking, mental filter, catastrophizing, overgeneralization, and emotional reasoning (Marchant, 2009).

Participants have multiple discussions and perform a variety of collaborative group activities related to the Six Pillars of Character that include Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring, and Citizenship (Marchant, 2009).

Participants have multiple opportunities to discuss, reflect upon, and participate in projects centered around quotes. The following are a few examples from the MK texts:

“He who gains victory over other men is strong, but he who gains victory over himself is all powerful (Lao-Tsu quoted in Marchant, 2009, p. 49).”

“Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect (Chief Seattle quoted in Marchant, 2009, p. 3).”

Participants in each MK program must complete a 4-hour service learning project before the 5<sup>th</sup> week. The project is given as a homework assignment after the first session. The choice for completing the assignment is shared in Session 2. The hours must be done outside normal responsibilities and must incorporate what is being learned in the MK program. Each program later requires each participant to complete an experiential learning activity that is referred to as a “Service Learning Report” (Marchant, 2009). Questions for the report extract not only the basic information one would expect about the service but also stimulate critical thinking (Marchant, 2009).

Participants are introduced to the 12 major concepts of responsibility in each program. The concepts include the following: Be Accountable, Exercise Self-Control; Set a Good Example, Be Ethically Independent (Morally Autonomous), and Pursue Excellence (Marchant, 2009).

Participants are presented with a simple but practical ethical decision-making strategy. They are asked to consider what others like Mother Teresa and Forrest Gump would do when faced with a given decision or to think about the decision being made being publicized in the newspaper (Marchant, 2009).

MK 5 and MK 6 require participants to complete a self-contract (see Appendix C) in which participants acknowledge, among other things, that they have learned to base decisions on logical thinking (Marchant, 2009).

MK 4 has a section on violence, which is described as a learned behavior that can easily become a habit once an individual chooses it as a response (Marchant, 2009). It closes the door to other options and to meaningful communication. Participants are then prompted to have an honest discussion about violence and its alternatives.

Sessions 2 – 6 begin with a review of group values and materials covered in the previous sessions as well as review and discussion of the previous week’s experiential learning activity.

*Examples of Principle 8:*

*Inductive Reasoning (question and test thoughts as guesses; evaluate)*

Making decisions based on inaccurate perceptions or information may lead to negative or even disastrous consequences. By using techniques that are based on the Inductive Method, clients learn to look at thoughts as guesses that can be questioned and tested. This reasoning allows the opportunity to see things as they are instead of how they appear to be and to change one’s thinking accordingly. Inductive reasoning also involves drawing conclusions, or generalizing, from specific individual facts and/or old experiences. Doing so on incomplete or inaccurate information may lead one to overgeneralize (NACBT, 2010). The rational emotive

behavioral therapy (REBT) concept of Mind Twists satisfies CBT Principle 8, Inductive Reasoning, in many instances.

Each of the MK programs gives participants a concise, but clear, explanation of REBT. REBT helps combat illogical thinking and cognitive distortions, or “Mind Twists,” which are inaccurate thoughts that perpetuate negative emotions and thoughts (Marchant, 2009). The following is a list of examples of Principle 8 that this researcher identified in the manuals for the MK programs.

Overgeneralization is included among the 11 cognitive distortions listed after the explanation and introduction of REBT and Mind Twists in each program (Marchant, 2009).

Each program has a collaborative group activity that directs participants to identify and discuss their struggles with the Mind Twists (Marchant, 2009).

The Ethical Decision-Making Strategies include getting rid of the Mind Twists (Marchant, 2009). One may employ inductive reasoning to do so for overgeneralization in particular.

The homework assignment that follows Session 2 of MK 1 requires participants to write a “Thinking Report” in their journals. The assignment requires them to evaluate what they were thinking and feeling (emotionally and physically) as they dispute the irrational beliefs and/or allow them to come out as statements. The assignment also requires participants to document specific beliefs, attitudes, and Mind Twists (Marchant, 2009).

Participants are told that all people should be respected based simply on the fact that they are human (Marchant, 2009).

An MK1 collaborative group activity requires participants to discuss incidents of intolerance and the Mind Twists that contributed to them. Participants are prompted to ask

questions for clarification, to identify the associated Mind Twists, to identify more rational thinking that could replace the distorted thinking, and to discuss how the outcome might be different based on that thinking (Marchant, 2009).

The group discussion on Respect in the MK 4, 5, and 6 programs asks participants, “How do you think others feel when you don’t respect them?” and “What do you think it means that you don’t hold everyone in high esteem or admire them (Marchant, 2009, p. 11)?”

The group discussion on Fairness in the MK 4, 5, and 6 programs asks participants, “Do you believe that in almost every situation someone will feel that the outcome was unfair (Marchant, 2009, p. 13)?”

MK 4, Session 3 describes valid and invalid criticism and gives examples of both. The narrative is followed by a collective group discussion that among other things asks participants to consider Mind Twists when they discuss invalid criticism they have received (Marchant, 2009).

MK 4, Session 3 has an exercise on embarrassment that walks participants through an application of what they have learned about mind twists and replacing irrational thoughts in response to a teacher’s statement about weight (Marchant, 2009).

A three-step “Rational Thinking” model (See Appendix F) illustrates the process of getting rid of “stinking thinking” that is demonstrated in the previous example (Marchant, 2009).

MK 5, Session 2 is followed by a homework assignment that requires participants to document in their journals each time they witness or experience Mind Twists or opportunities to apply logical thinking for 1 day. Participants are directed to apply decision-making strategies, which are introduced in the lesson and to document the responses (Marchant, 2009).

MK 5, Session 3 begins with a collaborative group activity in which participants are assigned to one of four groups with a scenario about a teen who is using drugs and/or alcohol.

The group must discuss the scenario and apply what they have learned about Mind Twists, logical thinking, and the Six Pillars of Character to offer a solution to the situation (Marchant, 2009).

*Examples of Principle 9:*

*Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy (Address and change core belief structure)*

There are numerous models of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy (REBT), which was developed by Albert Ellis, is classified as one of the CBT models. Ellis and Bernard (2006) explain that REBT teaches the clients to use disputational methods to modify the client's overall philosophy, or core belief structure. While many of the CBT models are more problem driven, REBT takes the position that behavior and/or emotions are simply consequences of the patient's core belief structure, which then leads to psychopathology (Ellis & Bernard, 2006). Each of the MK programs gives participants a concise but clear explanation of REBT. According to MK REBT helps combat illogical thinking and cognitive distortions, or "Mind Twists" (Marchant, 2009). The following is a list of examples of Principle 9, Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy (Address and change core belief structure), that were found in the MK programs.

The introductory paragraphs explain that MK goals include defining core belief systems and that MK uses techniques from REBT (Marchant, 2009).

The MK 1, 4, and 5 programs have an experiential learning activity (See Appendix A) that requires participants to rate various statements on a scale of one to five to reflect how important each statement is to him or her. The statements are related to The Six Pillars of Character (values) that were discussed in a previous session. The questions and directions that

follow the ratings prompt participants to consciously identify and reflect on their own thinking patterns and belief systems (Marchant, 2009).

Participants in MK 1 must design a personal coat of arms that symbolizes their values and what they stand for after completing the previous activity (Marchant, 2009).

The MK programs refer to REBT as “Logical Thinking” that will help participants get rid of Mind Twists and “stinking thinking” to produce rational and emotional change (Marchant, 2009).

The MK programs give participants a brief explanation of Ellis’s REBT and conclude that “it is about changing belief systems (Marchant, 2009, p. 26).”

Each of the MK participant manuals has a Thoughts model (see Appendix B) that is a basic depiction of REBT and the outcomes of logical and illogical thinking when coupled with positive and negative self-talk, respectively (Marchant, 2009).

The MK 1, 4, 5, and 6 programs have a collaborative group activity that requires participants to recall some of their irrational belief statements and dispute them as a group by replacing them with rational belief statements (Marchant, 2009).

The homework assignment that follows Session 2 of MK 1 requires participants to write a “Thinking Report” in their journals. The assignment requires them to evaluate what they were thinking and feeling (emotionally and physically) as they dispute the irrational beliefs and/or allow them to come out as statements. The assignment also requires participants to document specific beliefs, attitudes, and Mind Twists (Marchant, 2009).

An MK1 collaborative group activity requires participants to discuss incidents of intolerance and the Mind Twists that contributed to them. Participants are prompted to ask questions for clarification, to identify the associated Mind Twists, to identify more rational

thinking that could have replaced the distorted thinking, and to discuss how the outcome might be different based on that thinking (Marchant, 2009).

Each of the programs includes a homework activity that prompts the participant to visualize his or her life 10 years in the future while applying what he or she has learned including Mind Twists, disputing irrational thinking, and ethical decision-making strategies. MK1 and MK4 require that participants script a movie. MK5 does so in the form of time travel. MK6 requests notes about their lives in 10 years (Marchant, 2009).

Participants are given a list of four ethical decision-making strategies in MK 1, 4, 5, and 6. The third one in the list is a brief outline of REBT (Marchant, 2009).

MK 4, Session 3 has an exercise on embarrassment that walks participants through application of what they have learned about mind twists and replacing irrational thoughts in response to a teacher's statement about weight (Marchant, 2009).

The MK 4 program teaches participants that if they must stand up to a bully, they should have healthy negative emotions and dispute unhealthy thoughts (Marchant, 2009).

The MK manuals have a Rational Thinking model (see Appendix F) that depicts three steps to getting rid of stinking thinking (Marchant, 2009).

A collective group activity requires participants to discuss methods of using the three steps in the Rational Thinking model after reading a scenario about an overweight teen in the MK 4 program (Marchant, 2009).

MK 5 has a homework assignment that requires participants to document in their journals each time they witness or experience Mind Twists or opportunities to apply logical thinking during the course of a day. Participants are directed to apply decision-making strategies, which are introduced in the lesson, and to document the responses (Marchant, 2009).

MK 5, Session 3 begins with a collaborative group activity in which participants are assigned to one of four groups with a scenario about a teen who is using drugs and/or alcohol. The group must discuss the scenario and apply what they have learned about Mind Twists, logical thinking, and the Six Pillars of Character in order to offer a possible solution to the situation (Marchant, 2009).

MK 5 has a homework assignment that requires participants to create a bumper sticker that reflects what they have learned, especially with “Logical Thinking” and “Mind Twists” in mind (Marchant, 2009).

Participants play attitude charades in MK 6. Afterwards, they are asked if they can make the connection between their bad attitudes and stinking thinking (Marchant, 2009).

*Examples of Principle 11:*

*Collaborative Effort*

CBT is a joint effort in which the therapist attempts to learn the clients’ goals in life and help them achieve them. The clients’ roles include expressing their concerns, learning, and implementing what is learned (NACBT, 2010). The decision to end formal therapy is made by the therapist and the client. The Moral Kombat (MK) programs must accomplish this in a group setting by using facilitators. While the facilitator is expected to promote a safe, open environment with trust among participants, the focus is not on the facilitator-participant relationship. The MK programs use facilitators whose role is to guide the process from a mentoring and coaching perspective. They are expected to listen and talk at an 80% to 20% ratio (Marchant, 2009). In addition the facilitator interacts with participants on an individual basis through their journals and through before or after class meetings as needed. Many of the course

exercises are referred to as “collaborative group” activities and discussions. The following is a list of examples of Principle 11, Collaborative Effort.

Participants in Moral Kombat 1, 4, and 5 participate in a paper airplane collaborative group activity in which real life irrational belief statements that are linked to destructive consequences are replaced with rational belief statements. This provides them an opportunity to practice their newly-learned rational self-counseling skills in a controlled environment (Marchant, 2009).

A discussion of REBT is followed by a Collaborative Group Activity in which participants are asked to discuss any of the “Mind Twists,” or cognitive distortions, they have experienced and give examples (Marchant, 2009).

MK1 has a collaborative group activity in which participants are asked to consider how an incident of intolerance might have been different if “Mind Twists,” or cognitive distortions, were not allowed in the thought process and what kind of thoughts might have replaced them (Marchant, 2009).

In the MK5 Session 2 Ending Group Discussion participants are asked to discuss Charles C. Noble’s quote, “First we make our habits, then our habits make us.” in the context of what they have learned about the Six Pillars of Character, Mind Twists, and Logical Thinking (Marchant, 2009, p. 26).

In Session 5 of MK6, participants are asked to make a connection between their bad attitudes and “stinking thinking” (Marchant, 2009).

Session 3 of MK6 has a collaborative group activity that directs participants to discuss any of the listed “Mind Twists” they have experienced and share examples (Marchant, 2009).

This exercise is followed by further discussion of REBT and the concept of changing belief systems.

A Collective Group Brief Activity in Session 3 leads to the relatively detailed discussion of REBT, which is directed towards the issue of shoplifting. Examples of “Mind Twists,” or cognitive distortions, include magnification or minimization, disqualifying the positive, mental filter, overgeneralization, personalization, and emotional reasoning (Marchant, 2009).

Moral Kombat 5 has a collaborative group activity that gives each of four smaller groups a scenario to discuss to determine what each person in the scenario should do to bring peace to his or her life using the Six Pillars of Character, Mind Twists, and Logical Thinking concepts they have learned so far (Marchant, 2009).

The MK 6, Session 2 “Me-to-Peer-to-Me” Collaborative Group Activity incorporates a pebble-count guessing exercise to demonstrate peer pressure. Participants switch groups to make multiple rounds of consensus guesses before making a final individual personal guess. The activity concludes with a series of questions that prompt participants to consider the influence of peer pressure and the role of self-respect and responsibility (Marchant, 2009).

The MK 1, 4, 5, and 6 programs have a collaborative group activity that requires participants to recall some of their irrational belief statements and dispute them as a group by replacing them with rational belief statements (Marchant, 2009).

### *Conclusion*

The results of the analysis of the MK programs indicate that all of the components outlined in the literature for a CBT program to be effective are presented. The program appears to do well in some areas, such as focusing on goals, while it is borderline regarding the time

limited and brief principle. Limitations of the study and barriers associated with the program are discussed further in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study was to evaluate the extent to which the Moral Kombat (MK) program incorporates the principles and methods that the literature identifies as necessary for a cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) program to be effective. This chapter provides an overview of the present study's findings and discusses the implications for the use of CBT programs among at-risk and delinquent juveniles. This chapter concludes with a discussion of barriers for the MK program and suggestions future research.

#### *Overview of the Findings*

The Moral Kombat (MK) program combines the Six Pillars of Character morals and values training with cognitive behavioral therapy. Stated program goals include instilling submission to authority, honesty, and respect for others' property. CBT as a primary component of the program is used to address the systemic, underlying issues that cause youth to choose negative paths and peers, specifically their maladaptive thought processes. Analysis of the MK 1, 4, 5, & 6 programs in the present study revealed that each individual program has all of the identified components of CBT. The programs fulfill the claims of what they have to offer. For example, the programs offer open and safe forums as well as facilitators who will serve as mentors and coaches. The programs train facilitators to provide an environment in which participants may comfortably discuss and process strategies and their thoughts. Furthermore, facilitators actively participate in activities and guide discussions. Manuals offer statements that affirm and encourage as well as employ various learning styles. The program acknowledges that it is hard to be a teen and that teens are faced with tough choices. It takes courage to make the tough choices (Marchant, 2009). Participants may use their journals to share sensitive issues with

the facilitator. Essentially, MK appears to adapt CBT to group level therapy. Participants in the programs are exposed to each CBT principle on multiple occasions.

The principle “Thoughts are responsible for feelings and behaviors” occurs an average of 20 times in the four programs. “Homework” is assigned an average of 10 times. “Rational self-counsel skills” appears an average of 14 times. “Stoic philosophy” occurs an average of 14 times. The “Socratic Method” is present an average of 8 times. The principles “Focus on goals and specific techniques” and “Learn new way and unlearn old way” are presented an average of 68 times. “Inductive reasoning” appears an average of 11 times in the programs. “Rational emotive behavioral therapy” is present an average of 19 times. All of the programs fulfill the principle “Time limited and brief” by completing the programs in 10 hours over 5 weeks. The principle “Collaborative effort” occurs an average of 38 times throughout the programs.

Though statistical analyses were not performed on the counts of principles to interpret the significance of the results in the present study, there was one figure that stood out to this researcher. The number of occurrences of Stoic philosophy in MK 4 for emotion control, or anger management, had a considerably higher number of occurrences compared to the other three programs. There were 23 occurrences of Stoic philosophy for MK 4 compared to 12, 11, and 11 for MK 1, MK 5, and MK 6 respectively. The finding was consistent with what one might expect for an anger management class. It is this researcher’s opinion that more emphasis on exercises to help calm individuals should occur in a class that addresses anger.

#### *Use of Evidence-Based Programs*

Having over 1.7 million delinquent cases processed through juvenile courts each year necessitates effective programs (Puzzanchera et al., 2010). Effective programs reduce recidivism, save money, prevent wasted young lives, and avert the onset of adult criminality (Greenwood,

2008). Greenwood (2008) advocates for the use of evidence-based practices. Failure to use evidence-based practices risks promoting treatment programs that have little or no positive effect on behavior and misallocation of funding on ineffective programs. Tennessee lawmakers apparently took notice and passed the “Evidence-based Law” in 2007. The law provides that state funding only goes to programs for juveniles who are adjudicated delinquent if the programs are evidence-based. Because past research demonstrates that CBT has a positive effect on delinquent behavior, a CBT-based program such as MK may meet state requirements. Further evaluation of the program is warranted to make a determination.

Lipsey’s (2010) Standardized Program Evaluation Protocol (SPEP) provides for a more thorough evaluation of MK than the present study. Lipsey developed the SPEP to assess the effectiveness of juvenile justice programs and identify areas of improvement. Lipsey conducted meta-analyses of almost 600 studies of effective programs to identify common features and develop a scoring system based on the features. Points are granted for the following categories: type of service (such as CBT), supplementary services, amount of treatment, treatment quality, and juvenile risk level (Lipsey et al., 2010). The scorecard shows that programs with a higher score use more evidence-based practices than programs with a lower score. Therefore, programs with a higher score are assumed to be more effective at reducing recidivism. CBT is included among the higher scoring service types.

#### *Potential Barriers*

This section identifies potential barriers that may reduce or eliminate the benefits of the program for participants. Barriers include compelled attendance, costs, length of treatment, and social factors. This researcher believes that a key ingredient to the success of a rehabilitative or intervention program is a willing participant. An individual who is compelled to attend by court

order is more likely to lack a will or desire to change. The participant will likely be influenced by his or her family and peers' views of the program, which may be negative. The program's cost of \$205.00, which can be partially offset with a scholarship based on need, may hinder participants and parents from committing to the program due to resentment. Activities that use learning styles that do not appeal to certain participants may cause them to be lost. The engagement skills of the facilitator and group setting may help overcome these barriers.

The program lasts 5 weeks instead of 6 weeks, which results in less time to work on the strategies and skills introduced and falls on the low side of the 16 hours identified by the literature as the average (NACBT, 2010). Along that same line, the program may prove to be inadequate for those who begin to respond but need more sessions. This researcher questions whether it is realistic to expect one's belief system that has formed over 12 to 18 years to change in response to 10 hours of MK instruction. Facilitators are available to meet with participants before and after sessions and offer information for additional resources for participants who are willing to take advantage of the opportunities. Participants might choose to stay where they are because change is seen as invalidating feelings or as a sign of weakness. One might also feel a sense of loyalty to someone whose behavior keeps him or her from getting legitimate needs met. Other times the lack of progress may be due to a simple fear of change. Another area of concern is the absence of booster or follow-up sessions to provide reinforcement for long-term benefits. It is not safe to assume that every family instills values, morals, or a caring attitude in its members. Moral Kombat may be the only exposure one has to the lessons offered by the program.

#### *Future Research*

The need to control costs, reduce recidivism, and balance the interests of victims, society, and juveniles in the criminal justice system calls for effective treatment programs and services.

States like Tennessee are raising the bar for how that will look and work. As a result programs that use CBT among at-risk and delinquent juvenile populations may become more prevalent. Future research on CBT-based programs like MK can benefit criminal justice agencies.

The limitations of the present study lead to several suggestions for future research projects. Future evaluations should consider performing statistical analyses to determine if there are significant relationships between the principles or other data collected and outcomes. Such analysis might also assist with prioritizing principles and inform program developers where to place emphasis. For instance MK 1 had only five occurrences of the Socratic Method identified compared to 9, 8, and 10 for the MK 4, 5, and 6 programs, respectively. While having only five is comparatively fewer, all of the counts would be low if this principle were determined to be a significant feature of CBT. Future researchers should consider expanding the analysis to include all of the MK programs. The MK programs used for youth with delinquent charges (MK 1, 4, 5, and & 6) were used in the present study. The other programs are used for status offenses. A longitudinal study of recidivism for participants who complete the program with a control group would present a practical picture of the program's effectiveness.

### *Conclusion*

The juvenile justice system is responsible for identifying and advocating for what works. Research is the primary vehicle to achieve this goal. Thus, evidence-based programming is now mandated by many states (Lipsey et al., 2010). The present study examined Moral Combat for the presence of CBT principles the literature identifies as necessary for a program to be successful. The analysis found that all of the principles are present in the MK programs evaluated. In addition, suggestions were given for future research based on the limitations identified in the present study. Lipsey's SPEP has the potential to further determine the

soundness of the MK program and to identify areas in need of improvements. Further research and application of the SPEP may produce favorable results and bear out that MK should be offered nationally.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Moral Kombat Experiential Learning Activity #S1-1

On this scale, please rate a **one “1”** as *not important to you at all* and a **five “5”** as *extremely important to you*.

**Trustworthiness, Honesty and Loyalty**

**How important is it that...**

*(Others=parents, other family members, friends, teachers...everyone!)*

I can trust <i>others</i> ?	1	2	3	4	5
Others can trust me?	1	2	3	4	5
The truth is told to me?	1	2	3	4	5
I tell the truth to <i>others</i> ?	1	2	3	4	5
Others be loyal and dedicated to me?	1	2	3	4	5
I am dedicated and loyal to others?	1	2	3	4	5
Total of all numbers circled:					

**Respect and Being Heard**

**How important is it that....**

*(Others=parents, other family members, friends, teachers...everyone!)*

Others respect me? (Not meaning everyone has to admire me, but respect me because I am a person, a teen, a son or daughter.)	1	2	3	4	5
I respect <i>others</i> ? (Not meaning I admire them, but I respect them simply for being human, elderly, authority figure, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
I am heard?	1	2	3	4	5
I listen to <i>others</i> ?	1	2	3	4	5
Total of all numbers circled:					

**Responsibility and Fairness**

**How important is it that....**

*(Others=parents, other family members, friends, teachers...everyone!)*

Others do what they are expected to do?	1	2	3	4	5
I do what is expected of me?	1	2	3	4	5
I am treated fairly?	1	2	3	4	5
I treat others fairly?	1	2	3	4	5
Total of all numbers circled:					

**Caring, Compassion, Empathy & Kindness**

**How important is it that....**

*(Others=parents, other family members, friends, teachers...everyone!)*

Others show compassion, empathy, or kindness for me and others?	1	2	3	4	5
I show compassion, empathy, or kindness for others?	1	2	3	4	5
Others care about my well-being and the well-being of others?	1	2	3	4	5
I care about the well-being of others?	1	2	3	4	5
Total of all numbers circled:					

**Being a Good Citizen**

**How important is it that....**

*(Others=parents, other family members, friends, teachers...everyone!)*

I give back to my home (family) as a good citizen to my family?	1	2	3	4	5
My family shares in the giving back to the home (myself and other family members) as a good citizen to our family?	1	2	3	4	5
I give back to my community, state, nation or world?	1	2	3	4	5
Others give back to their communities, state, nation nor world?	1	2	3	4	5
Total of all numbers circled:					

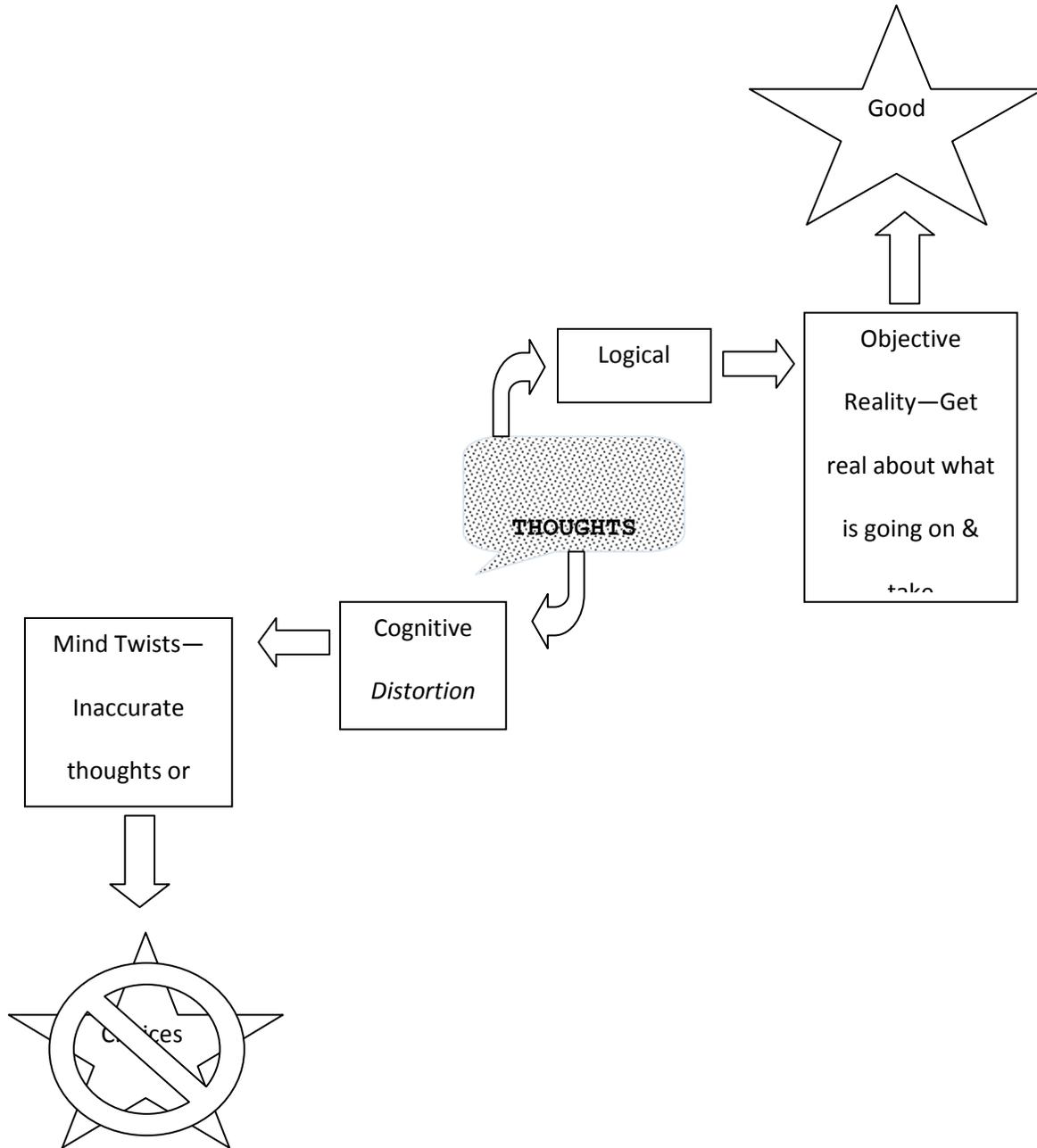
Summary S1#1

	<b>Trustworthiness Honesty Loyalty</b>	<b>Respect &amp; Being Heard</b>	<b>Responsibility &amp;Fairness</b>	<b>Caring Compassion Empathy &amp; Kindness</b>	<b>Being a Good Citizen</b>
<b>Total</b>					
<b>Gray</b>					
<b>White</b>					

1. Total the number of scores per category box and place them in the summary box. Now just score the “white” sections of each of the category boxes. Then score the “gray” sections of each of the category boxes. Place those scores in the summary box.
2. Look at your totals in the first row of the summary box. If you had an eight or lower, chances are that particular category is not very important to you. If you had a score of nine to twelve that category is probably fairly significant to you. If you had a score of thirteen or higher, that category is extremely important to you.
3. Now compare the scores for the gray and the white. Which is higher? Chances are the “white” section will be higher, indicating the ego-centric nature of humans. We are mostly concerned with ourselves first and concerned about others after that. However, we hope we can help you begin to explore the importance of looking outside of “self” and considering others, as you did in considering “stakeholders”. This is yet another step to putting “Good Choices in Action”.

Appendix B

Moral Kombat Thoughts Model



Appendix C

Moral Kombat Self Contract

I, \_\_\_\_\_, make this contract with myself  
on \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_.

I admit that I have not made the best choices with the following:

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---

---

and these problems have brought distrust, disrespect, pain, hurt or harm into my relationship  
with: \_\_\_\_\_

---

and these problems have brought the following harm into my life personally:

---

---

While participating in this group, I have learned that it is extremely important to be honest with  
myself and others, to make better decisions based on logical thinking, positive self-talk, taking  
personal responsibility for my actions and my choices and being a person of good character. I  
choose the following things and people 2 LIVE 4:

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---

---

I choose 2 avoid the following types of people and things:

---

---

---

I plan to bring balance into my life by setting the following goals for myself:

---

---

---

Within the next six months I choose to accomplish:

---

---

---

Within the next year I choose to accomplish:

---

---

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Within the next three years I choose to accomplish:

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I plan to reward myself “when” I succeed at reaching my goals by:

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**Signature**

**Date**

## Appendix D

### Moral Kombat Avoiding Dishonesty Trap Activity

#### **Activity: Avoiding the Dishonesty Trap:**

To truly set the scene for a successful future, you must dig a little deeper within yourself, and think about what you have discovered about yourself while participating in this group

Now, move where no one else can see you and you are in private while answering the following questions, as this is a private and sensitive activity.

In order to avoid falling into the dishonesty trap and bring balance to my life I must decide the following:

#### **I need to avoid the following people:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Why must I avoid the people I have listed?**

---

---

#### **I need to avoid the following places:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Why must I avoid the places I have listed?**

---

---

#### **I need to avoid the following things:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Why must I avoid the things I have listed?**

---

---

Appendix E

Moral Kombat Feeling Words Activity

**Understanding “Feeling Words” and how they help you to understand others and yourself.**

Think about a time when you were confronted with a situation that was about to become violent and *you chose an alternative to violence*. Choose feeling words that describes how you felt after the alternative. Refer to the appendix page called “Feeling Word” and find descriptive terms.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

Think about a time when you were confronted with a situation that was about to become violent and *you chose violence as the alternative*. Choose feeling words that describe how you felt after the violence. Refer to the appendix page called “Feeling Word” and find descriptive terms.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

Now looking back on the alternative or violence chosen, choose feeling words that describe how *you feel now about your choice*. Refer to the appendix page called “Feeling Word” and find the descriptive terms.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

How important is it to have a “feeling word” vocabulary in order to communicate with and understand yourself and even others?

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If you understand what you feel, how likely is it that you would be able to control your actions?

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Describe the relationship between feelings and behaviors—do the feelings usually provoke the behavior, good or bad?

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Do you see a need to begin to understand what it is you are feeling inside when the physical warning signs are telling you that you are about to explode? Why?

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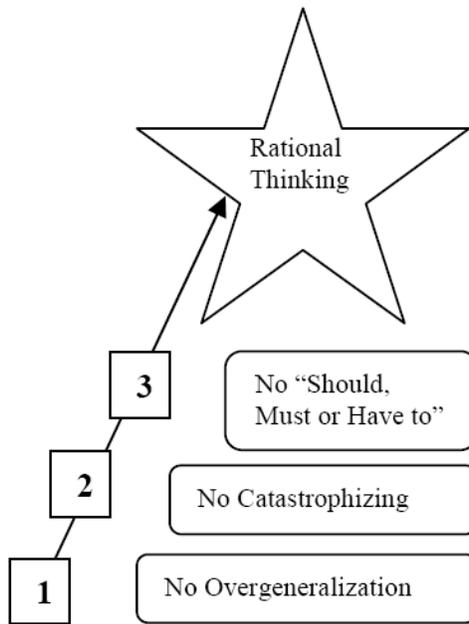
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# Appendix F

## Moral Kombat Rational Thinking Model



VITA  
THELMA PAYNE MCGOWAN

Personal Data:                   Date of Birth: October 15, 1966  
  Place of Birth: El Paso, Texas  
  Marital Status: Married

Education:                        M.A., Criminal Justice & Criminology, East Tennessee State  
  University, Johnson City, Tennessee, 2011

  B.S., Criminal Justice & Criminology, East Tennessee State  
  University, Johnson City, Tennessee, 2004

  Public Schools, Johnson City, Tennessee

Professional Experience:        Family Service Worker, Tennessee Department of Children’s  
  Services, Kingsport, Tennessee, 2007 – present

  Graduate Assistant, East Tennessee State University  
  Department of Criminal Justice & Criminology, 2004 – 2006

Publications:                    “An Ethnographic Analysis of Bullying Among Juveniles at an  
  After-School Program,” Southern Sociological Society, April 2005

Honors and Awards:             Dean’s List