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## **Moral Dilemma Discussions: An Effective Group Intervention for Juvenile Offenders**

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*The purpose of this research was to measure the effectiveness of moral dilemma discussion groups with 48 incarcerated juvenile male and female offenders. The treatment group participated in 10 sessions of moral reasoning groups. Repeated measures multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) were used to test for significant differences from pre- to posttests on the Defining Issues Test, number of successful days completed, and number of infractions incurred at the correctional facility. Results indicated that discussion groups helped improve the behavior of the male and female treatment groups. Regarding moral reasoning, female offenders were found to use significantly higher levels of principled reasoning than were male offenders.*

Although juveniles make up only 12% of the U.S. population, they commit 22.1% of the most serious crimes perpetrated in the United States, such as murder, nonnegligent manslaughter, forcible rape, aggravated assault, and robbery (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, 1997). Although male offenders still account for most of the juvenile crimes reported, female involvement in crimes is increasing. For instance, between 1984 and 1994, the number of known juvenile murderers increased 211% among young men and 34% among young women (Poe-Yamagata, 1997). During that same period, arrest rates for all violent crimes almost doubled for young women and increased 60% for young men (Snyder, 1998). Between 1981 and 1997, the arrest rate

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for property crimes increased 42% for female offenders and declined 15% among male offenders (Poe-Yamagata, 1998).

It is often difficult to implement interventions with juvenile offenders because many lack social as well as cognitive skills, including an inability to anticipate the consequences of their actions (Freedman, Donohoe, Rosenthal, Schlundt, & McFall, 1978; Gibbs, Arnold, Ahlborn, & Chessman, 1984; Moody, 1994). Furthermore, many juvenile offenders do not respond well to group counseling due to personality conflicts or unwillingness to participate appropriately (Gordon & Arbuthnot, 1987; Niles, 1986).

Moral discussion groups (MDGs) were developed by Kohlberg to stimulate moral development (Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972). In a meta-analysis conducted by Blasi (1980), 10 of the 15 studies indicated juvenile offenders used lower stages of moral reasoning than did nonoffenders. Kohlberg (1984) believed there was a direct link between an individual's stage of moral development and his or her moral behavior in society. His theory was supported by Blasi's examination of more than 74 studies, 78% of which indicated a relation between individual scores on moral reasoning tests and an individual's behavior in society.

Kohlberg's (1984) stages of moral reasoning identify the characteristics of morality that change with a person's development. As people progress through the stages of development, how they perceive social relationships and their responsibilities to their communities change from egocentric to perceiving issues from the perspectives of others (Rest, Cooper, Coder, Masanz, & Anderson, 1974). At Stage 1, the individual obeys rules to avoid punishment. In Stage 2, the individual changes his or her behavior to receive rewards. More specifically, the right action is whatever successfully satisfies one's own needs and may or may not occasionally satisfy another's needs (Kohlberg, 1984). Children ages 9 to 11, as well as juvenile offenders, are usually characterized as being within Stages 1 and 2 (Jennings, Kilkenny, & Kohlberg, 1983).

Typically, most adolescents and adults function at Stages 3 and 4 (Kohlberg, 1984). At Stage 3, the individual concentrates on winning approval from his or her immediate peer group. The individual also changes his or her behavior to avoid disapproval from others. As children enter adolescence, if they have not proceeded to Stage 3, they will have a markedly more difficult time resisting the antisocial peer and societal influences that they may encounter (Gibbs et al., 1984). At Stage 4, behavior consists of doing one's duty, showing respect for authority, and abiding by the social order (Kohlberg, 1984).

At Stage 5, an individual's duties are determined by contracts and respect for others' rights. Emphasis is placed on equality, democratic

rights, and order. There is also an increased awareness of the needs and values of others when attempting to reach a consensus. Stage 6 involves the individual not only respecting the rules of social order but also exhibiting personal choices in which universal well-being is a priority. Stages 5 and 6 are often referred to as *principled reasoning*. In essence, Kohlberg (1969, 1984) found that as one moved through the stages of moral development, the decision-making process regarding moral conflict was altered from the emphasis on self toward a universal consideration. Because juvenile offenders tend to function at Stages 1 and 2, one could hypothesize that their behavior would improve if they used more Stage 4 and principled-level reasoning. Therefore, in this study, we focused on Stage 4 (abiding by the law) and principled-level reasoning (doing what's best for others).

There has been some discussion about whether men and women have the same type of moral reasoning. Gilligan believes that women choose and express their morality "in a different voice" from that of men in their personal and societal relationships (Gilligan, 1982; Hekman, 1995). Gilligan stated that Kohlberg's emphasis on moral development surrounds values of rationality, individuality, detachment, and impersonality (Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan & Attanucci, 1988; Gilligan, Ward, & Taylor, 1988), but women follow the *care perspective*. The care perspective emphasizes attention and response to needs in relationships with others and rejects the problems of detachment and abandonment (Gilligan, 1982; Hekman, 1995). In this study, we examine whether female offenders respond differently to dilemma discussion groups than do male offenders.

Multimodal programs with juvenile offenders have integrated MDGs as one of the intervention's methods because they allow young offenders the opportunities to experience healthy role models and to have a safe environment to experiment with different roles themselves (Bailey, 1995; Le Furgy & Woloshin, 1969; Mulvey, Arthur, & Reppucci, 1993). One such program was developed by Gibbs, Potter and Goldstein (1995) and is designed to provide youth with the "equipment" they need to behave prosocially. The program consists of dilemma discussions, anger control, and social skills training as well as implementation of a positive peer culture into the institution. Results have indicated that these methods positively influenced male juvenile offenders' institutional postrelease behaviors (Gibbs, Potter, Goldstein, & Brendtro, 1996; Lee-man, Gibbs, & Fuller, 1993). In this study, the impact of dilemma discussion groups as a stand-alone intervention is examined.

This article describes moral dilemma discussion groups and how they can be used in a residential facility. Program rationale, theoretical framework, and research results are also discussed, and the following

research questions are addressed: (a) Do dilemma discussion groups as an intervention by themselves increase the development of moral reasoning among adolescent offenders? (b) Does participation in dilemma discussion groups improve the behavior of juvenile offenders? (c) Do dilemma discussion groups affect male and female adolescent offenders differently?

## METHOD

### **Participants**

The sample for this study consisted of male and female incarcerated juvenile offenders ( $n = 48$ ) at a North Carolina training school. A juvenile offender serves a commitment in training school only after all other nonresidential (e.g., outpatient counseling) and residential options (e.g., hospitalization, group homes, detention centers) have been exhausted. Training school combines elements of prison and boarding school, and it is the last resort for troubled youth in North Carolina (Division of Youth Services, 1997).

### **Recruitment Procedures**

All staff at the correctional institution were consulted for referrals to this study. Criteria for recruitment included availability throughout the duration of the intervention, a willingness to participate in the study, and identification during the intake interview as in need of anger management training. Students with full-scale IQ scores below 70 were excluded from the study because it has been hypothesized that moral development is dependent on cognitive development (Perry & Krebs, 1980; Walker, 1980). A pool of students was developed from recently admitted students and those referred by staff. Students were divided into treatment and control groups. The treatment group contained 12 male and 12 female participants, as did the control group. The sample was selected nonrandomly due to the unique characteristics of the population. The first author placed the students into either the treatment or control group based on their behavior, intelligence level, and interest in the group, so that each treatment group would be similar in characteristics. Efforts were not made to match the treatment and control group.

Before beginning the MDGs, the group leader assessed each group member's stage of moral development with the Defining Issues Test (DIT) and formed the treatment groups based on the members' stages of moral reasoning. Students from different stages were represented in

each treatment group, so that there was ongoing group discussion activated by the members' differences in moral reasoning. However, as Goldstein and Glick (1987) suggested, participants within one stage of one another were selected because youth will only understand reasoning at one stage above their level of functioning. For example, a Stage 2 child will understand Stage 1 and 3 but be unable to understand Stage 4 reasoning.

### Measures

*Defining issues test.* The DIT was used to measure the participants' level of moral reasoning. The DIT is an objective paper-and-pencil test that is based on Kohlberg's theory of moral development (Rest, 1986). The DIT has two standard versions. One longer version has six stories, and another version has three stories. The shorter version of three stories was chosen for this sample because it could be completed in less time, and it was hoped that the students would be more willing to cooperate with the shorter version. The short version contains three stories with 12 questions or statements each for the participants to make judgments based on the dilemmas presented. One dilemma on the instrument involves whether a neighbor should report to the police an individual who escaped from prison 10 years ago. The individual has been a model citizen since his escape, and a sample question is, "Would it be fair to all of the prisoners who had to serve out their full sentences if Mr. Jones was let off?" The DIT requires a reading level of at least the eighth grade (Rest, 1986).

The Test of Adult Basic Education is administered to youth after they arrive at training school. The male treatment group had a mean grade equivalent score of 4.8 for reading, whereas the male control group had a mean score of 8.2 for reading. The female treatment group had a mean grade equivalent score of 9.3 for reading, and the control group had a mean grade equivalent score of 6.5. Because many of the participants had reading levels below the eighth grade, the DIT was read to them.

The DIT is based on a normative sample of 1,080 participants, ranging in age from 15 to 82, with 424 males and 452 females. The DIT yields stage scores, as well as the principled reasoning, or *P score*, which is the percentage of Stage 5 and 6 reasoning used by the respondents in judging the dilemmas. Test-retest reliability ranges from .70 to .80, and internal consistency reliability is between .70 and .80 (Rest, 1986). Construct validity for the DIT has been supported by its successful use in more than 200 studies (Moreland, 1985).

As Rest (1993) wrote, "The short form correlates with the long form about .90" (p. 3). The short story form *P* correlates at .91 with the six-story form. Internal consistency reliability is .77. Test-retest reliability is in the 70s and 80s for *P* and generally in the .50s and .60s for stage scores (Rest, 1993).

*Numbers of successful days earned.* The earned successful days and infraction system, defined by the Division of Youth Services, was used to measure the students' behavior in the training school. Based on the crimes for which students were convicted, they are sentenced to a certain number of days or given an indefinite commitment that is not to exceed their 18th birthday. A student in training school can earn 2 days for 1 successful day completed both in school and at the dorm. The number of successful days a student earns determines how soon he or she is released. A *successful day* is defined as respect for self, respect for others, and respect for property, which includes accepting responsibility, personal cleanliness, following instructions, keeping a clean room, and completing chores. The students' days earned and infractions were totaled at the beginning and conclusion of the intervention (Division of Youth Services, 1997).

*Numbers of infractions.* When a student incurs an infraction, the staff member completes a form detailing the circumstances and evidence of the infraction, which is sent to the student's dorm. The infraction is recorded in the dorm log, and sanctions are applied. A copy of the infraction is placed in the student's master file, which is kept at the administration building and goes wherever the student goes (e.g., goes with the student if transferred to another facility). The file is placed at the Office of Juvenile Justice after the student is released. If the student is recommitted to training school, the file is sent to the facility at which he or she is held.

There are two different kinds of infractions—moderate and major—that a student can receive while at training school. A *moderate infraction* is incurred by a student who interferes with the orderly management of the facility. Each moderate infraction results in the loss of one successful day. Examples of moderate infractions include disruptive behavior, failure to follow instructions, horseplay, intimidating staff or students, obscene language, sexual or racial slurs, tobacco use, and ownership of pornographic material (Division of Youth Services, 1997).

A student who potentially endangers the students' or staff's safety and/or property incurs a *major infraction*. A major infraction may also require the isolation or extended commitment of a student charged with the violation. Major infractions include assault with or without a

weapon, attempting or planning an escape, destroying or damaging property, setting fires, fighting, interfering with staff, possession of dangerous contraband, possession or use of illegal substances, and sexual misconduct. If a student commits a new crime while in training school, he or she may incur new charges (Division of Youth Services, 1997).

### **Treatment Conditions**

*Moral dilemma experimental treatment condition.* The experimental group was composed of four treatment groups with six participants in each group. One male and one female group were conducted twice a week for 5 weeks. Typically, the youth were seen on Tuesdays and Fridays. Days were changed to accommodate group members who would have missed the group if it were held on the regular day. For example, group might be moved up one day to Thursday from Friday if a group member had a home visit scheduled on Friday. At the completion of those groups, the first researcher commenced a second set of treatment groups for 5 weeks. The treatment groups participated in 10 moral dilemma discussion sessions, which lasted 1 hour each.

The following is a description of each group meeting agenda.

*Session 1: Introduction and sharing collage.* This session's focus is establishing group rules, agreeing on consequences if the rules are broken, committing to the group by signing a contract, and a getting-acquainted activity. Much time is spent explaining the purpose and procedures of the group as well as group rules and consequences. The rules include willingness to participate, confidentiality between group members, being respectful of each other, agreeing to disagree with opinions, and no abusive language or aggressive behavior. Consequences include friendly reminders of the rules by group members, warnings from the leader, infractions, or elimination from the group. After the group agrees on the rules and consequences, each member signs a contract.

A Sharing Collage is the first group warm-up activity. A Sharing Collage has various pictures or words from magazines that express personal information about the person making the collage. The directions for the Sharing Collage are to tear out pictures or words from magazines that describe your likes and dislikes and then glue them on opposite sides of the paper. After everyone is done, each group member explains his or her collage.

*Session 2: The Passenger Ship* (Goldstein & Glick, 1987). The focus of this session is to review the group rules, participate in a warm-up activ-

ity, and discuss the Passenger Ship dilemma. After the rules are confirmed, the group participates in a warm-up activity involving a Koosh ball that is tossed around with a different topic every group meeting for group members' self-expression. For example, a Koosh ball topic may be to describe how you are feeling and why on a scale from 1 to 10, or to rate on a scale of 1 to 10 how you are progressing with your goals at training school.

The dilemma from Goldstein and Glick (1987) involves a passenger ship sinking in the middle of the Atlantic during the winter and is used to help the group learn how to grapple with a dilemma. The problem is that, in all of the confusion, some passengers get into an overcrowded lifeboat. If someone does not get out of the lifeboat, everyone will die. The group discusses what is the best thing to do. They are asked questions like, Is it ever right to kill some people to save many more? Individuals who do not mind throwing people out of the boat are asked what they would do if all the people in the boat were their family members?

*Session 3: The Booby Trap* (Goldstein & Glick, 1987). This dilemma involves a farmer whose home is broken into repeatedly. After the police are unable to catch the thief, the farmer makes a booby trap that triggers a gun to shoot when someone walks through his door. The thief breaks into his house and is shot in the leg, resulting in a chronic limp. The thief then sues the farmer for damages.

The group discusses whether it is right to use booby traps or force to protect one's property. After some discussion, the group role-plays a trial, with one participant being the prosecutor and another being the defense attorney. Remaining group members can serve as jurors or witnesses. The trial of the farmer is role-played first, followed by that of the thief.

*Session 4: The Toy Revolver* (Goldstein & Glick, 1987). This dilemma involves a young man going into a store and robbing an elderly man with a toy gun. The young man, Henry, does so because he needs money for an engagement ring. Unfortunately, the older man is frightened by the toy gun, has a heart attack, and dies. The group discusses whether Henry is guilty of murder and what should happen to him. This dilemma is also role-played in a trial to help the group see the large number of people affected by the crime.

*Session 5: The Escape* (Moody, 1997). This dilemma involves two friends who have been locked up for a long time. One of them, George, obtains the key to the fire screen in the dorm and is planning to escape. The key questions are, Would you go with him? And if you choose not to go,

would you help him? Participants discuss the circumstances that lead people to attempt to escape as well as the consequences of an escape attempt or helping someone escape. Different group members role-play telling their decision to George.

*Session 6: The Stolen Car* (Goldstein & Glick, 1987). This dilemma is about an older brother who has stolen a car and told his younger brother about it. The group discusses whether it would be OK to keep the car. When the group decides it is wrong to keep the car, they discuss whether they would confront him or call the police. Group members frequently role-play confronting the older brother.

*Session 7: Drunken Driving* (Goldstein & Glick, 1987). This dilemma is about a police officer who works in a town where drunk drivers recently have killed three people. The mayor has told the police to crack down on drunk drivers. One night, the officer stops a driver who has been drinking heavily. The person driving is his old friend from high school whose wife has been very sick. The family has very little money because of the expensive doctor bills. The discussion involves what the officer should do.

*Session 8: The Threat* (Goldstein & Glick, 1987). In this dilemma, three robbers have broken into the apartment of a young married couple. They have guns and a can of gasoline. After they steal their belongings, they start to molest the woman in front of her husband. They say they will pour the can of gasoline on him and light it if she does not cooperate. The group discusses what she should do.

*Sessions 9 and 10: movie and party.* Sessions 9 and 10 should consist of a movie and popcorn party. The movie should have dilemmas that the group can discuss. The female experimental group watched *The Color Purple*, and the male experimental group watched *White Squall*. At the end of the session, the group members can process their group experiences together.

### **Control Group Condition**

The control groups received the training school's standard treatment. After a student arrives at training school, they attend orientation for 2 weeks, in which the rules and expectations are explained. Students are assigned to a dorm and begin attending school after the first 2 weeks. They attend school all year except for a 2-week break for Christmas and summer. Each student works on competencies that include anger man-

**TABLE 1 Criminal Background of the Sample**

	<i>Experimental</i>		<i>Control</i>	
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Mean number of criminal convictions	4.3	2.5	3.3	3.1
History of assaultive behavior	50%	66%	66%	50%
Convicted of crime on person	33%	50%	50%	58%
Family history of criminal behavior	41%	66%	25%	50%

agement, victim empathy, and relapse prevention. As students earn their days, they can be promoted through levels only if they have completed their competency work. All staff members are trained to use reality therapy, and all the students have access to a psychologist and psychiatrist on an as-needed basis. The treatment group also experienced this condition with the addition of moral reasoning groups (Division of Youth Services, 1997).

## RESULTS

### Preliminary Analysis

The mean age in the male treatment group was 14 years and 5 months. The racial and ethnic composition was 42% African American, 42% White, and 16% other. In the other category, there was one male offender from White and African American cultures and a second male offender from Asian, Philippine, and Cambodian cultures. The average length of time spent in training school at the onset of the MDGs for the males in the experimental group was 3.2 months. This was the first training school commitment for all of the participants. They had been convicted of an average of 4.3 offenses (see Table 1).

The mean age in the male control group was 15 years and 3 months. The racial and ethnic composition was 58% African American, 34% White, and 8%, or one participant, with White, African American, and Asian cultures in his background. The average length of time spent at training school at the onset of the intervention for the males in the control group was 2.3 months. This was the first training school commitment for 92% of the male control group, and the second commitment for 8% of the participants. They had been convicted of an average of 3.3 offenses (see Table 1).

The mean age in the female treatment group was 14 years and 8 months. The racial and ethnic composition was 42% African American, 33% White, and 25% other, which included a female from White and Asian descent, one of Asian descent, and a third from Philippine cultures. The average length of stay in training school for the females in the control group at the onset of the intervention was 4.3 months. This was the first training school commitment for all the females in the experimental group. They had been convicted of an average of 2.5 offenses (see Table 1).

The mean age in the female control group was 16 years. The racial and ethnic composition was 66% African American and 34% White. The average length of stay in training school for the females in the control group at the onset of the intervention was 2.5 months. This was the first training school commitment for 84% of the female control group and the second commitment for 16% of the participants. They had been convicted of an average of 3.1 criminal offenses (see Table 1).

Forty-one percent of the male experimental group had an immediate family member with a history of criminal behavior, compared with 25% of the male control group. Sixty-six percent of the female experimental group had an immediate family member with a history of criminal behavior, compared with 50% of the control group.

*T* tests were used to test for differences on the pretests. There were no significant differences between the female treatment and control groups on Stage 4 of the DIT,  $t(23) = .22, p > .05$ , or principled reasoning,  $t(23) = .84, p > .05$ . There were also no significant differences between the male treatment and control groups on Stage 4 of the DIT,  $t(23) = 1.03, p > .05$ , or principled reasoning  $t(23) = .79, p > .05$ .

Chi-square was used to test for differences on treatment conditions. There were no significant differences between the male treatment and control groups on race,  $\chi^2(2, N = 24) = .78, p > .05$ , or the female treatment and control groups,  $\chi^2(2, N = 24) = 3.7, p > .05$ . There was also no significant difference between the male treatment and control groups on number of times committed to training school,  $\chi^2(2, N = 24) = 1.04, p > .05$ , or the female treatment and control groups,  $\chi^2(2, N = 24) = 2.17, p > .05$ .

### Main Analysis

Repeated measures MANOVAs were used to test each of the research questions with gender and treatment condition as the independent variables, and time (pretest, posttest) as the repeated measure. There was not a significant main effect for gender,  $F(3, 47) = 1.21, p > .05$ , so analyses will continue with both genders.

**TABLE 2 Results on the Defining Issues Test on Stage 4 and P Reasoning**

Group	n	Male Offenders				Female Offenders			
		Pretest		Posttest		Pretest		Posttest	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
<b>Stage 4</b>									
Experimental	12	33.00	14.98	41.45	14.65	28.33	15.67	30.25	11.69
Control	12	28.22	8.84	25.22	17.46	29.00	15.03	20.00	19.60
<b>Principled reasoning</b>									
Experimental	12	12.5	5.28	14.58	10.74	24.33	18.49	26.91	19.95
Control	12	16.16	8.91	12.83	13.1	19.25	12.41	21.5	13.13

### Effects of Gender and Treatment on Moral Reasoning

To test the impact of the intervention on moral reasoning, a repeated measures MANOVA was conducted on Stage 4 and principled reasoning scores. Means and standard deviations are displayed in Table 2. The interaction effect for Time  $\times$  Gender  $\times$  Treatment Condition was not significant,  $F(3, 47) = 1.7, p > .05$ .

The interaction effect for Time  $\times$  Treatment Condition was not significant,  $F(3, 47) = .067, p > .05$ .

The interaction effect for Time  $\times$  Gender was significant,  $F(3, 47) = 7.19, p < .01$ . The males (treatment and control groups) scored higher on Stage 4 reasoning from pretest ( $M = 29.7, SD = 2.7$ ) to posttest ( $M = 38.7, SD = 2.7$ ) than did the females (treatment and control groups) from pretest ( $M = 28.9, SD = 2.6$ ) to posttest ( $M = 30.25, SD = 2.76$ ). However, the females (treatment and control group) scored higher on principled reasoning from pretest ( $M = 22.63, SD = 2.4$ ) to posttest ( $M = 23.8, SD = 3.0$ ) than did the males (treatment and control groups) from pretest ( $M = 15.07, SD = 2.4$ ) to posttest ( $M = 12.8, SD = 3.07$ ). Post hoc analyses with Tukey's HSD were calculated, and it was determined that at a .05 level of significance, means would need to differ by 9.6. On the Stage 4 pretest, the males did not differ significantly on any of the means from the females. The male Stage 4 pretest was significantly different from the male pretests and posttest means on principled reasoning. On the Stage 4 posttest, the males scored significantly higher than did the females on pretest Stage 4 reasoning. The male posttest Stage 4 mean was significantly different from the female pretest and posttests on principled reasoning. The male posttest mean was also significantly different from the male pretest and the male posttests on principled reasoning.

On female Stage 4 reasoning, the pretest mean was significantly different from the male pretest and posttests on principled reasoning. None of the other means was significantly different from each other. On the female Stage 4 posttest, there were significant differences from male pretests and posttests on principled reasoning. None of the other means was significantly different from each other.

On the male pretest for principled reasoning, they differed significantly from the female pretests and posttests on Stage 4. The means also significantly differed from the male pretests and posttests on Stage 4. The only means on which the male pretests did not differ from the female's pretests and posttests was on principled reasoning. The male posttest for principled reasoning differed from the female pretests and posttests on principled reasoning, female pretests and posttests on Stage 4 reasoning, and male pretests and posttests on Stage 4 reasoning. The male posttest on principled reasoning differed from all the means except the male pretest on principled reasoning.

The female principled reasoning pretest differed significantly from the male posttest on principled reasoning and the male posttest on Stage 4 reasoning. None of the other means differed significantly. The female principled reasoning posttests were significantly different from the male posttest on principled reasoning and the male posttest on Stage 4 reasoning. None of the other means differed significantly.

The interaction effect for Gender  $\times$  Treatment Condition was not significant,  $F(3, 47) = .015, p > .05$ , suggesting that males and females were not differentially affected by the treatment.

The main effect for treatment condition was not significant,  $F(3, 47) = 2.8, p > .05$ .

There was a significant main effect for time,  $F(3, 47) = 26.4, p < .001$ , indicating that, across time, there was a trend for both the treatment and control groups to improve.

### Effects of Gender and Treatment on Behavior

Repeated measures MANOVAs were used to test for improvement on the behavioral measures of days earned and infractions incurred.

The interaction effect for Time  $\times$  Gender  $\times$  Treatment Condition was not significant,  $F(3, 47) = .505, p > .05$ .

The interaction effect for Time  $\times$  Gender was not significant,  $F(3, 47) = .484, p > .05$ . The interaction effect for Gender  $\times$  Treatment Condition was not significant,  $F(3, 47) = .968, p > .05$ .

There was a significant interaction effect for Time  $\times$  Treatment Condition,  $F(3, 47) = 11.11, p < .005$ . The treatment groups (male and female) earned more days from pretest ( $M = 6.5, SD = 1.5$ ) to posttest

( $M = 32.88$ ,  $SD = 2.7$ ) than did the control groups (male and female) from pretest ( $M = 5.21$ ,  $SD = 1.5$ ) to posttest ( $M = 17.5$ ,  $SD = 2.7$ ). The treatment groups (male and female) incurred fewer infractions from pretest ( $M = 2.3$ ,  $SD = 0.5$ ) to posttest ( $M = 7.0$ ,  $SD = 1.1$ ) than did the control groups from pretest ( $M = 3.0$ ,  $SD = 0.6$ ) to posttest ( $M = 8.4$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ).

Post hoc analyses with Tukey's HSD were calculated, and it was determined that at a .05 level of significance, means would need to differ by 7.2. On the pretest for days, the treatment group differed significantly from the control group posttest for days and the treatment group. None of the other means differed significantly. On the treatment group posttest for days, the mean differed significantly from all of the means: control group pretest and posttest on days, treatment group pretest on days, control group pretest and posttest for infractions, and treatment group pretest and posttest on infractions.

On the treatment group's pretest infractions, there was a significant difference from the control group's posttest for days and the treatment group's posttest for days. None of the other means was significantly different from each other. On the treatment group's posttest for infractions, the mean was significantly different from the control group's posttest for days and the treatment group's posttest mean for days. None of the other means was significantly different from each other.

On the control group's pretest for days, the mean differed significantly from the treatment group posttest for days and the control group posttest for days. None of the other means was significantly different. The control group's posttest for days was significantly different from all the other means: treatment pretest and posttest days, treatment pretests and posttests for infractions, control group pretests for days, and control group pretests and posttests for infractions.

For control group infraction pretests, the mean differed significantly from the treatment group's posttest for days and the control group's posttest for days. None of the other means was significantly different. On the control group's posttest for infractions, the mean differed significantly from the treatment group's posttest for days and the control group's posttest for days. None of the other means was significantly different. Both groups improved on the behavioral measure of days earned, but the treatment groups earned significantly more days than did the control groups (see Table 3).

The main effect for treatment was significant,  $F(3, 47) = 6.11$ ,  $p < .01$ , reflecting that, overall, there was improvement on the behavioral measures for both groups.

**TABLE 3 Results on Measures of Behavior**

<i>Group</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Male Offenders</i>		<i>Female Offenders</i>	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<b>Mean number of days earned</b>					
Experimental	12	26.58	18.04	26.04	3.94
Control	12	9.98	10.13	15.45	10.25
<b>Mean number of infractions incurred</b>					
Experimental	12	5.6	6.24	3.75	3.74
Control	12	5.1	4.52	5.6	3.56

## DISCUSSION

Based on the results of this study, it does not appear that moral reasoning groups alone can increase the moral reasoning of offenders. This means that if one expects to achieve the maximum change with offenders, it may be necessary to implement institutional change as well as moral reasoning groups, as Gibbs et al. (1995) suggested. However, when interpreting the results of this study, it is important to consider the small sample size used. One can only speculate about the results with a larger sample. It is also possible that the DIT may not adequately assess the moral reasoning of juvenile offenders.

There is some indication that dilemma discussion groups have a positive impact on behavior. Although all of the participants in this study improved, both the male and female treatment groups earned significantly more days than did the male and female control groups. However, the treatment group did not have significantly fewer infractions. But the improvement in days was very important, especially to the youth in the study. The number of days an individual earns directly affects how long they stay in training school, so the students who participated in the treatment groups went home sooner, and, although they did not receive significantly fewer infractions than did the control group, they clearly did not commit major infractions (which often involve an assault), which would have resulted in them not earning their days.

This study did indicate that females used higher levels of principled reasoning than did males, which may indicate some support for the notion that male offenders reason differently than do female offenders. The females used significantly higher principled reasoning on the pretests and posttests. More research in the area of moral development of adolescent offenders would contribute to the findings of this study.

Future researchers should attempt to select a larger and randomly assigned sample to discover more reliable results. The difficulty comprehending the DIT was also a limitation of this study.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR GROUP COUNSELORS

Moral dilemma discussion groups could contribute to the behavioral goal of releasing better-reformed adolescents into society. Results of this research lend some support to using moral dilemma discussion groups with adolescent offenders. Because adolescent offenders have less-mature levels of moral development than do nondelinquent adolescents, training schools should conduct moral dilemma discussion groups with the students regularly. If moral reasoning groups are conducted regularly and skillfully, students' overall behavior could be influenced positively. The result could include earlier release and better preparation for appropriate behavior in society. Researchers and counselors also need to plan programs to follow up on the MDGs. At-risk and delinquent adolescents require continuing education to refamiliarize themselves with the concepts of empathy and societal consequences. Other kinds of interventions, such as the well-researched social role-taking programs, need to be implemented to facilitate moral and other domains of development (Goldstein & Glick, 1987).

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