

# Issues in Yoga Therapy

## A Process Evaluation of the Art of Yoga Project Mentor Program for Incarcerated Teenage Girls

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### Abstract

Returning to the community upon release from custody is a difficult process to navigate, and there are scant resources available to juvenile female offenders, in particular. Comprehensive wraparound aftercare and mentor services are a central component of successful community reentry, and the well-established unique characteristics of juvenile girls make it necessary to create programs catered specifically to them. The present study employed a case study design to describe and evaluate the Art of Yoga Project's Mentor Program. Eight girls and their mentors were followed for a period of 12 months after the girls' release from custody. Preliminary results from qualitative content analysis suggest that the program was valuable for the girls who participated.

**Keywords:** aftercare, juvenile girls, yoga therapy, mentoring

Almost everyone who is incarcerated eventually returns to the community (Petersilia, 2004), and in light of the rapidly increasing custodial population in the United States, those numbers are not insignificant. This is especially true for juveniles; in 2004, for example, an estimated 100,000 juvenile offenders were released from correctional facilities in the United States (Snyder, 2006). The number of women under some kind of correctional supervision (prison, jail, probation, or parole) in the United States rose from 600,000 in 1990 to over one million in 2001 (Covington & Bloom, 2006). Although their absolute numbers remain much lower than those of men, the rate of the increase in female incarceration is double that of incarcerated men (Boyd, 2009; Giordano, Cernkovich, & Rudolph, 2002). Teenage girls are the fastest growing segment of the incarcerated population in the United States (NCTSN, 2010; OJJDP, 2000; Weis, Whitmarsh, & Wilson, 2005).

Men have traditionally been the standard population managed by the criminal justice system (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2008). For this reason, there is an acute male bias in existing juvenile justice programs. Many programs are based on a male model, and although boys and girls engage in comparable behaviors and face similar risks, they experience

these at different rates and with different sensibilities (Zahn, Hawkins, Chiancone, & Whitworth, 2008). Juvenile girls warrant age-appropriate, gender-responsive, and culturally sensitive services, but a substantial shift is required to attend to the unique needs of offending girls (Bloom, Owen, Deschenes, & Rosenbaum, 2002). As Holsinger and Ayers (2004) report, "Ideal programs would take girls' unique experiences and development into account and recognize that many girls' lives have been affected by victimization, poverty, sexism, and racism."

Girls in care are often more challenging to work with than their male counterparts (Harris & Fitton, 2010), requiring much more time and attention (Schaffner, 2006). This is likely due to their higher rates of co-morbid psychiatric diagnoses and emotional issues that stem from previous trauma (Handwerk, Clopton, Huefner, Smith, Hoff, & Lucas, 2006). The nature and extent of these conditions are difficult to measure, but studies generally suggest that approximately 80% of incarcerated girls report some kind of trauma, including two-thirds reporting experiencing physical violence (Ryder, Langley, & Brownstein, 2009). Further, it is estimated that 74% of adolescent girls in detention meet the criteria for mental disorders (Gido, 2009). These observations underscore the importance of providing separate and specific interventions uniquely designed for these girls (Connor, Doerfler, Toscano, Volungis, & Steingard, 2004; Gido, 2009).

Research demonstrates that involvement in the criminal justice system itself puts individuals at a greater risk of reoffending (Carr & Vandiver, 2001). Further, it is argued that one of the effects of juvenile incarceration is recidivism. In fact, juvenile recidivism rates are as high as 55% for those released from a correctional facility and even higher for those who have been transferred to the adult system and subsequently released from an adult facility (Barton, 2006).

Release from custody does not necessarily mean an individual's challenges are over. The effects of exposure to violence and profound negative influences can stay with juvenile offenders long after they exit the institution (Hartwell & Orr, 2009; Steinberg, Chung, & Little, 2004). Some have argued that any progress made in juvenile cor-

rectional facilities usually vanishes once a youth returns to the community (Deschenes & Greenwood, 1998). Further, returning to the same toxic environment that arguably created the opportunity for deviant behavior in the first place can elevate a juvenile's risk of reoffending, just as it does for adults (Carney & Buttell, 2003).

Community reentry is a difficult process for anyone to navigate, but it is especially complicated for juveniles. Care often stops when juveniles leave the system (Hammet, Roberts, & Kennedy, 2001), and they commonly return to their communities unprepared for that transition (Kings County District Attorney's Office, 2001). As Snyder (2004) adds, when girls exit custody they are rarely afforded "the financial or emotional safety net of a family or social programs." Releasing offenders from custody with no support can leave them without the tools necessary to make positive life choices (Altschuler & Armstrong, 2002) and maintain an offense-free transition to living in the community. The period of reentry is an extremely delicate time that must be negotiated carefully (Hartwell & Orr, 2009). Mentor services are a central component of successful community reentry (Holsinger & Ayers, 2004), and the unique characteristics of juvenile girls make it necessary to create a program catered specifically to them (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2008). Upon returning to the very environment that may have contributed to the onset of their delinquency, many girls face the temptation of drugs, alcohol, gang involvement, truancy, and self-harm. The concurrence of these variables can lead to recidivism (Kings County District Attorney's Office, 2001; Snyder, 2004).

**Mentoring and Aftercare.** "Troubled children need models of hope to transcend adversity" (Brown, 2006). The development of aftercare programs for adolescents occurred as a direct response to their increasing numbers in the criminal justice system and began around 1990 (Bonell, 2002; Grimshaw, Eccles, Walker, & Thomas, 2002). The general model of mentoring and aftercare has existed for some time (Jackson, 2002). Aftercare, typically focused on supervision within the community upon release (Flynn, Hanks, & Bowers, 2003), is also concerned with preparing individuals for their return to the community, their families, and their friends.

The rationale behind aftercare programs is to provide juveniles with necessary social assistance upon completion of a custodial sentence. These programs tend to emphasize community service goals and objectives (Flynn, et al., 2003) and can include post-placement support, intensive "wrap-around" services, anger management classes, rehabilitation programs for substance abuse, and the provision of more specific skills, such as job training and placement, educational attention, family intervention (Flynn, et al., 2003),

and family reunification (Gagnon & Leone, 2006).

Mentoring is an important component of aftercare. Mentoring programs aim to provide an alternative prosocial role model for youth who experience challenges in their environment or relationships. The development and maintenance of positive and meaningful relationships with adults have been identified as strong protective factors for adolescents with behavioral problems (Brown, 2006), and this is especially relevant for girls reentering the community (Holsinger & Ayers, 2004; Loeber & Hay, 1997). The criminological literature on desistance and recovery also emphasizes the importance of social supports (in the form of family and friends) (Maruna, 2001).

**Previous Research on Mentoring Programs.** Because these services are relatively new, there is limited research on their effectiveness. In 2009, approximately 93,000 youth were being held in juvenile justice facilities in the United States, at an estimated average cost of \$241 a day per juvenile (Petteruti, Walsh, & Velazquez, 2009). Research suggests that community-based alternatives like aftercare programs (Petteruti, et al., 2009) are much less expensive. Outcome studies are rare and rely almost exclusively on very small convenience samples of self-selected voluntary mentors and mentees, but the available studies generally report positive results, including increased self-esteem and reduced maladaptive behaviors in children (Jackson, 2002).

Carney and Buttell (2003) evaluated a community-based wraparound services program in Ohio. This strengths-based program focused on such individual needs as substance abuse treatment and trauma therapy. Designed to be culturally appropriate, adjustable, and responsive to the needs of the juvenile's family, the study followed a sample of recently released juvenile offenders for 18 months. The researchers compared 68 young offenders who received traditional juvenile probation with an experimental group of 73 delinquent youth who received the wraparound services in addition to conventional probation services. The experimental group missed fewer days of school, ran away from home less often, committed fewer assaultive offenses, were suspended from school less frequently, and were picked up by police less often.

Holsinger and Ayers (2004) evaluated an eight-week-long mentoring program that paired girls in juvenile facilities with female college students during two consecutive summers. Consistent with extant research on adolescent girls, the program focused specifically on the provision of "one-on-one relationships with prosocial female role models." The authors cited multiple studies that indicated how "well-run mentoring programs have been shown to lower problem behaviors, reduce substance abuse, improve academic scores, and lead to increased self-confidence and self-

control” (Holsinger & Ayers, 2004). Vigorita (2002) also found that mentoring programs helped increase self-esteem in delinquent children.

Bouffard and Bergseth (2008) compared 63 participants and 49 nonparticipants of a state-funded juvenile reentry program that operated in a rural Midwestern county. The authors focused on preliminary and outcome indicators and reported positive short-term outcomes (within six months of release from the program). Recidivism rates differed significantly between groups, with only 37% of the youth who received aftercare having subsequent contact with the justice system within the study period, compared with almost half (49%) of the control group.

Minor, Wells, and Angel (2008) investigated recidivism in a sample of 467 male and 113 female juvenile offenders released from various out-of-home placements, residential programs, and secure facilities in Kentucky. During 18 months of follow-up, boys were almost twice as likely as girls to reoffend, and girls with prior experiences of out-of-home placements or residential treatments were one-third less likely to recidivate than those girls without such assistance. This study strongly supported the value of aftercare assistance for young girls.

Jackson (2002) reviewed an intensive mentoring program in which 13 self-selecting undergraduate students mentored 13 at-risk children from local junior high schools. Student mentors spent between 15 and 20 hours per week with the mentee over the course of one academic year. Teacher-reported, parent-reported, and self-reported results indicated moderate reductions in internalizing and externalizing behaviors, and the program was found to benefit both the mentors and their mentees.

Taken together, the findings from these studies generally report better outcomes for juveniles who participated in mentor-type programs than for their nonparticipating counterparts. Mentor and aftercare programs are consistently found to be less disruptive and more cost-effective and to have longer lasting effects than comparable custodial options.

**Previous Research on Yoga and Mindfulness Interventions.** Over the last decade, several studies have examined various curricula that combine yoga, mindfulness, and creative arts in a broad range of populations, including elementary school children with attention problems (Peck, Kehle, Bray, & Theodore, 2005); children coping with stress (Stueck & Gloeckner, 2005); adolescents in high school (Wisner, Jones, & Gwin, 2010; White, 2009); mildly depressed young adults (Woolery, Myers, Stemlieb, & Zeltzer, 2004); women with cancer (Monti, Peterson, Shakin Kunkel, Hauck, Pequignot, Rhodes, et al., 2006); and male and female residents of drug units in cor-

rectional facilities (Samuelson, Carmody, Kabat-Zinn, & Bratt, 2007).

Taken together, studies indicate these programs tend to improve overall levels of self-reported mindfulness, self-respect, and self-control regardless of age, gender, current health, psychological diagnosis, or correctional status. Participants experienced increases in observed levels of attention, concentration, and brain activity (Chaoul & Cohen, 2010; Peck, Kehle, Bray, & Theodore, 2005; White, 2009), as well as reductions in symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress (Kabat-Zinn & Massion, 1992; Ma & Teasdale, 2004; Woolery, Myers, Stemlieb, & Zeltzer, 2004). Other studies reported increases in self-reported self-esteem and self-respect and improved body image (Junkin, Kowalsk, & Fleming, 2007; Samuelson, Carmody, Kabat-Zinn, & Bratt, 2007; Wisner, Jones, & Gwin, 2010). Multiple studies have reported increases in self-control and the ability to self-regulate behavior (Peck, Kehle, Bray, & Theodore, 2005; Wisner, Jones, & Gwin, 2010, White, 2009), as well as reductions in self-reported feelings of helplessness, aggression (Stueck & Gloeckner, 2005), and hostility (Samuelson, Carmody, Kabat-Zinn, & Bratt, 2007).

The results from some of these studies are especially relevant for the present sample. White (2009) concluded that yoga was particularly effective with youth because of yoga's ability to accommodate their unique educational, developmental, and physical needs. Stueck and Gloeckner (2005) found yoga and mindfulness training to be very well suited for children and adolescents as a means of enhancing self-control. Samuelson et al. (2007) concluded that the female participants in their study benefited to a greater extent than the men with respect to improvements in hostility, self-esteem, and mood disturbance.

**The Present Study.** The broad objective of the present study was to examine the Art of Yoga Project's (AYP) Mentor and Aftercare Program (MAP). The objective includes a description of the AYP MAP's creation and process, the use of a case study design to follow individual mentor-mentee pairs, and an evaluation of the program's achievement of its stated objectives. The present study was largely exploratory in nature, in that this is the first external evaluation of the program. The study followed eight girls and their mentors for a 12-month period to examine the extent to which the five expressed goals of the AYP (detailed below) were achieved.

**The Art of Yoga Project.** The AYP provides an integrated curriculum of yoga, mindfulness training, meditation, and creative arts to adolescent girls incarcerated in three California counties. The AYP's mission is to lead teen girls in the juvenile justice system toward accountability to

themselves, others, and their community by providing practical tools to effect behavioral change (Harris & Fitton, 2010; Harris & Stupi, 2012). The AYP's goals include intervention, rehabilitation, recovery, and reducing recidivism in the teen girls, as well as increasing mindfulness, self-respect, and self-control. The AYP provides incarcerated girls with a fundamental sense of self, with the hope of managing, and eventually eliminating, the high-risk factors that most girls in the juvenile justice system face. These factors include (but are not limited to) sexual risk-taking, eating disorders, depression, self-harm, drug and alcohol abuse, and criminal recidivism. Other goals of the AYP include providing girls with an understanding of yoga and its purposes, benefits, and history; the experience of a strengthening and energizing exercise; and beginning meditation instruction (Harris & Fitton, 2010).

The AYP Yoga and Creative Arts Curriculum (YCAC) focuses on mindfulness, self-respect, and self-control. It anticipates that participants will learn to become more aware of themselves and their surroundings in order to make better-informed decisions. Creative arts, such as painting, journal writing, and collage, are incorporated into the curriculum. Each class is structured independently, which allows for a range of participants (those incarcerated for two days or for two months, for example) to benefit from partial or short-term involvement in the program. The format of this curriculum enables participants to enter and exit the program at any time, while still benefiting from individual classes. For girls who are involved for a longer period of time, the cumulative lessons build on one another (Harris & Fitton, 2010). Interested readers are referred to Harris and Fitton (2010) for a thorough description of the AYP YCAC offered to teens in custody, as well as a discussion of principles of best practices and suggested guidelines for implementing a similar program.

Upon completion of their custodial sentence, each girl who has participated in the AYP curriculum receives a specially designed "Take it OM" bag that contains a yoga mat, an eye pillow, the girl's personal journals and artwork, and a list of yoga studios where she can practice free of charge. (The AYP maintains a relationship with multiple "partner studios" throughout the area.) The AYP also offers aftercare classes tailored to address the challenges facing girls once they return to their home communities. Classes include money mindfulness and financial education, substance abuse prevention, and improving general well-being and provide girls with an opportunity to meet in a safe setting in the community. Girls who wish to participate are paired with a yoga mentor. Mentors meet their mentees once a week to participate in yoga and various activities intended to enhance their rehabilitation and ease their transition back into their community. Mentors maintain a presence in

the girls' lives as positive female role models and demonstrate various yogic techniques and principles as they relate to life in the community.

Mentors spend more than 30 hours in training prior to engaging with their mentees. This training includes background information on the population served; description of the foster care and juvenile justice systems; and up-to-date research on child development, cultural awareness, trauma, and other mental health considerations. All mentors are mandated reporters and are trained by the county in the principles of confidentiality and mandatory reporting. Mentors are strongly encouraged, although not required, to support their mentees on their court dates. Mentors facilitate successful reintegration of teens into the community by reinforcing tools for enhancing self-awareness, self-respect, and self-control (M. L. Fitton, personal communication, February 23, 2013; S. Prasad, personal communication, February 23, 2013).

The desired outcomes of the AYP MAP include enabling girls to (1) view themselves in a more positive and hopeful way, (2) choose more-positive behaviors, (3) improve relationships with family members, (4) improve relationships with probation officers and judges, and (5) improve relationships with peers. Each goal is described in more detail below, and the specific components of each goal appear in Table 1.

*(1) Viewing themselves in a more positive and hopeful way.* Research indicates that the practice of yoga improves self-respect (Peck, Kehle, Bray, & Theodore, 2005; Woolery, Myers, Stemlieb, & Zeltzer, 2004), and a recent evaluation of the AYP curriculum demonstrated an increase in self-reported self-respect (Harris & Stupi, 2012).

The extent to which a person feels better about him- or herself or views him- or herself more positively is difficult to evaluate. Identity formation and the development of self-esteem are significant milestones for any adolescent, but the impact of an interruption, such as custodial punishment, on this process is profound (Dinsmore & Stormshak, 2003). In their inventory of best practices for female programming, Greene et al. (1998) mention specifically the importance of promoting "positive aspects of womanhood" and providing girls with role models who have overcome life challenges. The individual components of this goal (Table 1) include expressing compassion for others, discussing the future, and expressing optimism about the future.

*(2) Choosing more-positive behaviors.* To reduce recidivism, harmful behaviors must change. Behavior modification can be especially difficult for girls who have, for years, used destructive behaviors for survival. The individual components of this goal (Table 1) include reoffending less, access-

**Table 1.**  
**Achievement of desired goals by individual case**

	1 Girl 1	2 Girl 2	3 Girl 3	4 Girl 4	5 Girl 5	6 Girl 6	7 Girl 7	8 Girl 8
<i>Views self in more positive, hopeful way</i>								
Setting goals	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Asks for help	+	+	+	+	-	+	-	+
Discusses future	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Expresses compassion for others	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	-
Expresses optimism about future	+	+	+	+	+/-	+	+	+
<i>Chooses more positive behaviors</i>								
Accesses services for herself	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-
Takes positive steps outside residential life	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Reoffends less	+/-	+	+	-	+/-	+	+/-	0
Less behavior that hurts others or self	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
<i>Improved relationships with family</i>								
Walls coming down b/w family members	-	+	+	+	+/-	+	+	-
Can address issues with family members	+	+	+	0	+	+	+	+
More open-hearted communication	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
<i>Improved relationships with PO/judge</i>								
PO/judge is support rather than “enemy”	+	+/-	+	+	+	0	+	0
More honest with PO/judge about problems	+	+	+	+/-	+	-	+	0
Work with, instead of against, PO/judge	+/-	+	+	-	+/-	+	+	0
<i>Improved relationships with peers</i>								
Confronts peers positively, receives input	0	+	+	-	+/-	+	+	-
Distances self from negative influences	+/-	+	+	+/-	+/-	+	+/-	0
Able to positively support peers in facility	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	-
Sees qualities she doesn’t want in friends	0	+	+	+/-	+/-	+	+	+

ing services or help-seeking, and engaging in fewer behaviors that are self- or other-harming.

(3) *Improving relationships with family members.* Although improving familial relationships is an expressed goal of the AYP MAP, many of the families from which these girls come are toxic or chaotic and may have prompted their rebellion in the first place (Dinsmore & Stormshak, 2003). With this in mind, mentors encourage mentees to create healthy boundaries with their families and do not necessarily advocate family reunification.

(4) *Improving relationships with probation officers and judges.* Many girls that move through the juvenile justice system blame the system and its actors for their incarceration. Thus, they do not typically engage with members of the criminal justice system in a positive or productive manner (Schaffner, 2006). The AYP MAP aims to improve the relationships between probation officers, judges, and the mentees by stressing the importance of mentees' respecting authority and being responsible for their own actions. Mentors stress the importance of asking for help, whether from the mentors themselves or from other available supports, such as social services or the mentee's probation officer, parents, or friends. Mentors strive to improve these relationships by helping their mentees understand the likely perspectives of these professionals and their motivations for making their decisions.

(5) *Improving relationships with peers.* In order to change the destructive behaviors in which these girls engage, a central objective of the AYP MAP is to foster healthy peer relationships. The emphasis that AYP mentors place on improving relationships is consistent with research observations about the importance of developing healthy boundaries, building general relationship skills, learning to identify unhealthy relationships, and interacting with people respectfully (Holsinger & Ayers, 2004). The importance of peer groups to an individual's identity development is especially relevant in the literature on girls (Schaffner, 2006). Depending on the nature of their existing friendships and relationships and the difficulties the girls may have already experienced, this goal might include strengthening ties with friends and family or severing connections with certain peers.

## Methods

### Participants

The eight girls in the present study were drawn from the first cohort of 20 AYP mentees. AYP has so far followed 79 girls aged 14 to 17 ( $M = 15.97$ ;  $SD = 1.05$ ) incarcerated in two juvenile correctional facilities in California (Harris &

Stupi, 2012). The population in each facility is ethnically diverse and includes 63.7% Latina, 8.8% African American, 6.3% Native American, 5% White, and 3.7% Asian/Pacific Islander girls. (A substantial minority [12.5%] of the girls self-identified as a mix of two or more races, rather than as belonging to just one of the provided categories.)

The eight mentees had a mean age of 17.6 years ( $SD = 1.8$ ; range, 15–20 years). Half of the sample was Latina ( $n = 4$ ), three girls were Caucasian, and one was African American. The charges for which the girls were sentenced included drug possession, running away from home, escape from juvenile hall, driving under the influence, fighting, and theft. They had served a mean of 1.75 separate sentences ( $SD = 1.39$ ; range, 1–5) and had spent approximately 14.29 total months in custody ( $SD = 15.25$ ; range, 4–48 months). Half of the girls reported having been raised by both parents, and two girls reported experiencing childhood sexual abuse. Five of the girls had graduated high school or achieved their GED and one had started college. At the time of the most recent follow up, four girls were working full-time and three had part-time jobs.

Below is a brief description of each girl at the time she was participating in the AYP MAP. Mentors are neither required nor encouraged to discuss the girls' criminal histories with them, so the specific nature of their offenses and sentences (unless they arose naturally in conversation) are not always known.

Girl 1 was 16 years of age at the time of her release from custody. She had served approximately eight months for a drug-related offense and reported having spent time in juvenile hall on multiple occasions. Her maternal grandmother raised her in a family plagued with drug use; many of her family members were incarcerated during her youth. At the conclusion of her mentor relationship, she was unemployed and working towards obtaining her GED.

A self-described "angry person," Girl 2 was detained twice for aggravated assault between the ages of 13 and 15. Although she reports being raised by a supportive family and did not use drugs or alcohol, she often chose friends who were gang-affiliated. She is currently attending high school and has had no further arrests.

Girl 3 reported spending a total of almost four years in custody for crimes ranging from running away to fighting and multiple status offenses. Her offending began around the age of 14. She was raised by her mother and grew up with an older brother and younger sister at home. Her father passed away while she was in custody the most recent time. Girl 3 was 20 years old at the time of her release and working towards obtaining her GED.

Girl 4 had served two custodial sentences for public drunkenness (eight months) and running away from home

(four months). She was later arrested for drinking and smoking and returned to juvenile hall. Girl 4 said her mother was abused by her father and has since divorced and remarried. Girl 4 completed her GED while in custody and is currently enrolled in community college and works part time as a nanny.

Girl 5 served four months in custody for alcohol-related offenses (including driving under the influence) and was later transferred to a residential recovery program before being released to the community. She was raised in a chaotic family and frequently moved between her parents' homes after they divorced. She reports drinking with her father from an early age and now acknowledges the problematic nature of that relationship. She is currently 18 years old and is pursuing her cosmetology license.

Girl 6 served two custodial sentences during her teenage years. She was raised in a middle-class family and was molested repeatedly by her father, beginning when she was 12. Although she reported the abuse to her mother (and wanted to press charges), her mother's disbelief, threats, and intimidation prevented Girl 6 from pursuing legal action. Her mentor reported that this abuse led directly to Girl 6's frequent suicide attempts, dependence on alcohol, and high-risk sexual behavior. Girl 6 is now 22 years old; she has received her GED and completed three years at community college, earning high honors. She is currently two years sober and is working full-time as a receptionist while continuing school.

Girl 7 served eight months in juvenile hall for an undisclosed offense. She was raised in an intact family in a middle-class neighborhood. She is currently 19 years old and is taking college courses while she completes the third and final phase of a local outpatient recovery program.

Girl 8 served six months in custody for running away from home. At the time of her offense, she was living with her mother and stepfather. Girl 8 graduated high school and is currently attending community college. She is 19 years old.

### Procedure

Each girl was paired with a mentor for at least 12 months. Mentors were volunteer yoga teachers with at least one year of experience with the AYP. Each mentor was required to commit to mentoring a girl for at least 12 months, for a minimum of one hour per week. According to the AYP curriculum, mentors support the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual development of their mentees by establishing a healthy relationship with them and by modeling a mindful lifestyle. The broader objectives of the AYP Mentor Program include effecting behavioral change in the girls served and providing a holistic continuum of care and support for them.

Mentors kept logs of their interactions with their mentees through weekly summaries sent electronically to the mentor workgroup (including the aftercare director and research assistants) (M. L. Fitton, personal communication, February 23, 2013; S. Prasad, personal communication, February 23, 2013). At the conclusion of each meeting, a brief description of their conversations and activities was emailed to the work group. Meetings typically included participation in a yoga class and meeting in a café, for example. In some cases, mentors conversed with girls' families to a limited extent, but this did not occur routinely, and it was neither encouraged nor prohibited. A research assistant was assigned to each pair to collate and review the emailed descriptions of the meetings and to interview the mentor (via email) at various points throughout the year. The emailed updates were analyzed using content analysis to explore the extent to which the objectives of the mentor program were achieved. Consistent with Becker's (1998) techniques of qualitative analysis, both positive and negative themes were coded. Positive themes refer to occasions when positive evidence of the *presence* of a theme (or achievement of a desired goal) was identified. Negative themes refer to cases where there is evidence of the opposite condition of the expected theme (or failure to achieve a goal). The *absence* of a theme (that is, no mention of achievement of a goal) was also noted. The author was an external, independent observer who neither participated in the MAP nor the larger AYP curriculum. The project and its inclusion of human subjects from a vulnerable population were approved by the university's Institutional Review Board (protocol #F1102025).

### Results

The results of the qualitative content analysis are provided below and arranged thematically in accordance with the intended objectives of the AYP MAP. Each goal is restated, and evidence of the extent to which each goal was met is described. Table 1 provides an overview of the results. ("+" indicates positive evidence of a theme; "-" indicates negative evidence of a theme; and "0" indicates the absence of a theme, missing data, or insufficient evidence from which to measure the presence or absence of a theme.)

(1) *Viewing themselves in a more positive and hopeful way.* The AYP MAP builds upon the skills developed during the custodial curriculum and works to improve the way girls view themselves by encouraging them to view themselves in a more positive fashion.

Although it is difficult to assess empirically, changes in confidence and self-esteem were observed in the words of the girls themselves. The overall results for this goal were mostly

positive and consistent across cases. For example, Girl 8 reported that she “felt prettier doing yoga” and talked with her mentor about being more hopeful about her situation and her life in general. According to her mentor, Girl 8 commented that “life is a gift—it’s so precious. I want to treat it that way instead of being so careless with alcohol and drugs.”

Girl 1 openly discussed with her mentor the importance of staying clean and sober. She reported being able to use the yoga techniques she learned in her weekly classes to work on her goal of reducing her anger issues.

All of the mentors reported that their mentees successfully discussed the future with optimism. In particular, with the help of her mentor, Girl 5 set concrete goals for herself and was able to look to the future in a positive way. Girl 5 also acknowledged that she needed to work on her anger issues. She applied and was subsequently accepted into cosmetology school and has since received a scholarship to assist with her tuition. Since her release, Girl 5 has held a number of part-time jobs and received a promotion at one of them. She has secured an apartment and bought a used car. She credits her success to her mentor's support.

Girl 8's mentor reported some mixed evidence on Girl 8's feelings of optimism for the future. Although Girl 8 was hopeful, she recognized the challenges she faced. Her mentor said:

*We talked about how she has what it takes to thrive on the outside and that she really could change but it will be an uphill battle for a while. It seemed to sink in as usual but I find that she gets excited about the possibilities of change in her life when we talk, but is then discouraged with her reality and quickly slips back into old cycles, so easily influenced by friends (especially boys).*

(2) *Choosing more positive behaviors.* The AYP MAP graduates took critical steps in turning away from their destructive behavior. As the results in Table 1 indicate, all mentors reported that their mentees now accessed appropriate services for themselves and engaged in less behavior that was self- or other-harming. In the four cases where mentors observed reoffending, all incidents involved self-reported substance use. One specific factor in the mentees' behavior change was their participation in yoga practice at least once a week with their mentor. Mentors also emphasized changing destructive behaviors by making both long- and short-term goals with their mentees and detailing ways in which the girls could achieve their stated goals.

For example, Girl 5 was able to recognize that her old job was resulting in destructive behaviors and worked with her mentor to find alternative employment. She was able to get a new part-time job, receive a promotion, and apply for (and receive) a scholarship to attend college.

Girl 8 reported being able to use the breathing techniques she learned from her mentor to focus on more positive behavior. Furthermore, with the assistance of her mentor and her broader support system, she gained the strength necessary to face her attacker in court. When Girl 8 struggled, returning to her old lifestyle, she talked openly with her mentor and they developed a plan that enabled Girl 8 to continually work on keeping up her new routine. After a difficult incident at home, Girl 8 ran away. In a situation that could well have led to re-incarceration, she turned to her mentor and was able to use the skills she learned through the AYP's curriculum. With the help of her mentor, she was able to decide to be accountable for her behavior and to turn herself in to Youth Services. The strong relationship that she had developed with her mentor was clearly instrumental in this situation; instead of returning to her old lifestyle and breaking off from the community that had formed around her, she called on the people she knew she could count on and get help.

(3) *Improving relationships with family members.* All of the mentees reported more openhearted and honest communication with their family members, and most of the mentors observed “walls coming down” between their mentees and their families. For Girl 6, this was achieved by developing a deeper understanding of the substantial cultural differences that separated her and her mother. For Girl 1, this meant acknowledging that she did not need to get involved with the “drama” that her family created. Instead, she was able to focus on the practice of acceptance and understanding, as presented in her yoga practice. Improving family relationships was not a straightforward or simple task. For example, Girl 1's mentor reported that “she had some eloquent reflections on how so much of her family is either currently in jail or on probation or parole and wondering how she can shift and change the pattern in her life.” Girl 8, for example, was able to stop fighting with her mother for a period of weeks—a remarkable improvement on their previous relationship. This was ultimately achieved by Girl 8's mentor's acting as a mediator between mother and daughter and facilitating a level of understanding between them.

(4) *Improving relationships with probation officers and judges.* Many mentees initially expressed that their probation officer or judge was “out to get them.” Girl 6 and Girl 4, in particular, expressed fairly negative sentiments toward the actors of the criminal justice system. Almost all of the mentors reported that their mentees were now more honest with their probation officers and/or judges. For example, Girl 8 role-played with her mentor and practiced more positive ways to address the situations she wanted to discuss with her probation officer. Following this role-playing experience,



her mentor reported seeing a more positive relationship develop between Girl 8 and her probation officers throughout the duration of her aftercare.

Girl 1's mentor found the change in Girl 1's relationship with the criminal justice system to be particularly inspiring. Girl 1 had spent a great deal of time and effort resenting and rejecting her probation officer, but after the mentoring program her mentor reported that "Girl 1 said she wants to be a [parole officer] or a social worker when she is older—she is so interested in people's life stories and being a supportive person in her community. She's even looking for ways to get involved with the community by volunteering." Although it is beyond the scope of this study to describe in more detail, the author notes that Girl 1's sentiments are consistent with Maruna's (2001) redemption script of desistance, where reformed felons seek to compensate for their past wrongdoing by helping others. This will be the subject of further examination in other studies.

(5) *Improving relationships with peers.* Consistent with almost a century of psychosocial and criminological research (see, for example, Hirschi, 1969), mentees acknowledged that the people with whom they chose to spend their time had a substantial impact on their likelihood of success. Although most girls in the mentoring program were observed to positively support their peers while in the correctional facility, only four demonstrated that they could confront peers positively, and only three were able to clearly distance themselves from negative influences. The mixed results for this goal likely underscore the difficult nature of navigating peer relationships during adolescence and emerging adulthood and highlight the importance of peer groups in the development of one's identity.

Most of the girls were able to identify qualities they wanted in a friend. For example, Girl 7's mentor was especially proud when Girl 7 said that one of the qualities of a good friend was a person who promoted positive behavior. Girl 5 and her mentor had many long conversations about the challenges she faced as she reentered the community and reconnected with old friends. According to Girl 5's mentor, "She shared that this life is all she knows, and she wants new friends but doesn't know how to do it, really. She also talked about how gang life may interfere with her success."

Girl 1 and her mentor worked on rebuilding broken relationships with friends and felt they had achieved some measure of success when Girl 1 agreed to join a meditation group that included a girl with whom she had experienced great conflict in the past. Her mentor notes, "Girl 1 said that she has been keeping to herself and staying out of the drama with the other girls. She feels like she has found her purpose in staying focused on school and does not want drama with the other girls to stand in her way."

## Discussion

The present report provides a detailed description and process evaluation of the Art of Yoga Project's Mentor Program. Using a case study approach, eight mentees (and their mentors) were followed for a period of 12 months after their release from custody. The cultural diversity in the sample is particularly noteworthy, given Holsinger and Ayers' (2004) observation that nonwhite delinquent girls of lower socioeconomic status have unique needs that have not yet been adequately addressed by evaluative research. The present study makes a novel contribution to the small body of knowledge regarding the critical needs of this population. Although this work was largely exploratory and results are preliminary, substantial improvements are already visible on an individual level for the girls served by the AYP MAP.

The study used qualitative analysis to examine the extent to which five specific "desired goals" were achieved by the mentees included in the sample. Results indicated that by the conclusion of the mentor program, all of the girls could set goals, discuss the future with optimism, and "view themselves in a more positive and hopeful way" (Goal #1). Further, according to their mentors, six of the girls expressed compassion for others and were able to ask for help when necessary. Much correctional research rightly emphasizes recidivism. In lieu of available criminal records, "choosing more-positive behaviors" was articulated as Goal #2. Although official data were not available on the reoffending rates of the present participants, mentors indicated that 4 girls self-reported using alcohol or drugs upon release. Importantly, all mentors indicated that their mentees were engaging in self-harming or other-harming behavior less often than before their most recent custodial sentence.

The final three goals measured improvement in relationships with family members (Goal #3), probation officers and judges (Goal #4), and peers (Goal #5). Given the often-chaotic family environments from which these girls came (Schaffner, 2006), it was encouraging to observe so many mentees reporting better relationships with their families. Specifically, all girls reported engaging in more honest and openhearted communication and most reported that they could now address important issues with their family members. There was mixed support for the achievement of Goal #4, with five girls viewing their probation officer or judge as a support person rather than an enemy and four girls actively working with, instead of against, their probation officer or judge. Mentors also indicated mixed support for Goal #5. Three girls were reported to have definitively distanced themselves from negative peer influences, but both positive and negative evidence for this theme was uncovered for the remaining five girls. Here, it is appropri-

ate to underscore the tumultuous experiences of peer relationships for teen girls in general (Dinsmore & Stormshak, 2003; Schaffner, 2006) and especially for those who have come from chaotic families, who have been subject to various kinds of abuse, and who have been incarcerated. The impact of positive and negative peer relationships on girls warrants further investigation (Holsinger & Ayers, 2004; Jackson, 2002).

The experiences of the AYP mentors indicate that pursuing these five specified goals and meeting the girls in a specific context (such as participating in a yoga class together) removed some of the pressure that can be present in other, more traditional, mentoring relationships. Finding an appropriate activity in which both mentor and mentee can engage is important, and the girls reported satisfaction that they were able to do that.

### Limitations

Limitations of this study included the small sample size, the selection bias, the data-collection techniques, and the impact of social desirability. The present study is limited by the small size of the sample. Although a sample of eight is appropriate for a preliminary, qualitative investigation such as this, it would certainly be preferable to include a larger number of participants. As the AYP MAP continues, the author looks forward to expanding this research and following up with a larger sample in the future.

The 8 girls included here were drawn from the 20 girls that have so far participated in the AYP MAP since its inception. Although a concerted effort was made to reach out to all 20 participants, it was only possible to follow up those girls who maintained contact with their mentors for 12 months after release from custody. Thus, the girls who returned to custody or, for various reasons, ceased to communicate with their mentors were excluded from this report. The specific explanations for their attrition are unknown; mentors reported (through other girls still incarcerated) that some mentees ran away from home, or left the state, or simply stopped being able to pay their cell phone bills (often their only mode of communication). This resulted in an unavoidable selection bias that favors positive results, because it is likely that those girls who maintained contact and continued working with their mentors fared better than those who did not. Future studies will include a control group that would capture the girls who are not paired with a mentor upon release. Although this bias limits the impact of the results, we hope that these findings will inform future approaches to this kind of research.

The thematic analysis of written descriptions in the absence of direct observation and interview and the impact of social desirability bias on the mentors' reports are also limitations. Although the evaluation was conducted externally to the AYP MAP itself, it is conceivable that mentors wrote their email summaries with a desire to project results in an especially positive light. Further, people may be more likely to edit themselves in writing, compared with face-to-face communication. Although we encouraged honesty on the part of the mentors and emphasized the importance of neutral reporting, mentors may have accentuated positive experiences and deemphasized their negative experiences with their mentees. This study was largely conducted retrospectively to evaluate the girls who had already been released. As the study moves forward, research interns are following the mentor-mentee pairs prospectively and engaging with them on a regular basis.

A key component of qualitative analysis is the discovery of emergent themes that arise naturally. The available information consisted entirely of the mentors' descriptions of their meetings with their mentees. Mentors were instructed to comment specifically on the extent to which they had achieved the desired goals for this study expressed by the AYP. Therefore, the analysis herein was limited by focusing only on those components. The study will continue with a larger sample and face-to-face interviews to better manage this limitation and to allow for the discovery of other emergent themes.

### Conclusion

The present report describes and evaluates the mentoring component of the AYP MAP. Although these results are preliminary, girls who participated in the program have achieved substantial improvements. Benefits of mentoring so far include fostering the relationships with their AYP mentors, as well as the other important people in their lives (family, peers, and actors in the criminal justice system). Establishing concrete, achievable long- and short-term goals for a successful life in the community appears to be an effective method of positively reinforcing desired behavior. Finally, achieving these objectives while reassuring the girls that they have a trusted and trustworthy adult to whom they can turn in difficult times is possibly the greatest contribution of the mentor program so far. This study underscores the increasing body of research that supports the positive impact of yoga and mindfulness interventions with at-risk girls. We hope that our research will stimulate further study of programs like this.

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