



# #freemind: Young Women Using Mindfulness Meditation to Cope with Life in a Juvenile Justice Institution

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to introduce mindfulness meditation, a recommended adjunctive treatment for trauma in juvenile justice-involved youth, to incarcerated young women and collect narrative commentary about their experiences to answer the following research questions: What is the experience of incarcerated young women who participate in Internet-based mindfulness meditation classes? How do incarcerated young women apply mindfulness meditation to life in a juvenile justice facility? Participants attended bi-weekly guided meditation sessions and wrote about their experiences after each session in a journal. Three coders used open-coding content analysis to identify topics and themes across 38 journal entries. The primary theme, found in 61% of entries, described the difficulties of living in a juvenile justice facility, providing context for the descriptions found in 58% of entries regarding the usefulness of mindfulness meditation to cope with those difficulties. This study highlights the challenges of living in a correctional institution as a young woman and the barriers such settings pose to the wellbeing and healthy development of their residents. It also points to mindfulness meditation as an operative method of supporting these highly traumatized young women until that time when alternatives to incarceration can be identified.

**Keywords** Juvenile justice · Trauma · Adolescent development · Mindfulness meditation

Young women represent the largest proportionate increase of youth incarcerated in the juvenile justice system (Leve et al. 2015), with unique mental and behavioral health needs relative to their male counterparts (Teplin et al. 2002) including higher rates of trauma (Baglivio et al. 2014), posttraumatic stress disorder, suicide attempts, and self harm (Leve et al. 2015). Although there is a recognized lack of programming that addresses the specific needs of this population (Baglivio et al. 2014), intervention research has overwhelmingly been conducted with incarcerated males (Leve et al. 2015). The purpose of this study was to document the experiences of incarcerated young women with mindfulness meditation (MM), an intervention that has been recommended as an

adjunctive treatment for trauma in juvenile justice-involved youth (Winters and Beerbower 2017). To better capture the direct perspectives of the young women who participated and thus gain a better understanding of the ways in which the intervention addresses (or does not address) their specific needs, a qualitative study was conducted.

## Background

Youth in the juvenile justice system experience trauma at rates higher than youth in the general population (Levenson et al. 2017). These traumas include higher rates out of custody, heightened exposure to trauma while in custody, including exposure to violence and violent victimization (Beck et al. 2010; Sedlak et al. 2013), and the trauma of out of home placement (Park et al. 2005).

## Trauma in Incarcerated Young Women

While 64% of young adults in the general population report at least one traumatic event in childhood, 98% of young women and 97% of young men entering the juvenile justice system

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report the same (Baglivio et al. 2014). Young women in the juvenile justice system report higher overall rates of multiple traumas, with 45% reporting five or more traumas compared to 27% reported by incarcerated young men (Baglivio et al. 2014) and 12.5% reported by the general population (Anda et al. 2006). Compared to their male counterparts, incarcerated young women report higher rates of physical abuse (41% v 26%), sexual abuse (38% v 7%), emotional abuse (39% v 31%), emotional neglect (39% v 31%), and physical neglect (18% v 12%; Baglivio et al. 2014).

The short and long-term consequences of childhood trauma are significant, with the number and severity of poor mental and physical health outcomes increasing exponentially with each additional exposure (Anda et al. 2006). Girls who experience physical abuse by a household adult are over four times more likely to self-harm and over five times more likely to have suicidal ideation or suicide attempts (Duke et al. 2010). Given the disproportionately high rates of abuse experienced by young women incarcerated in the juvenile justice system, it is not surprising that they are also found to have high rates of suicide attempts and self-harm (Leve et al. 2015).

## Mindfulness Meditation

Mindfulness meditation (MM) has been recommended as an adjunctive treatment for the poor neurological and behavioral outcomes associated with trauma in juvenile justice-involved youth (Winters and Beerbower 2017) and has been used successfully with incarcerated youth to increase self-control (Evans-Chase 2013) and self-awareness, and to decrease stress and anger (Derezotes 2000). MM has also been used successfully with non-incarcerated adolescents as an effective treatment for behavioral and emotional problems similar to those reported by youth leaving custody, including suicidal ideation, anger management, anxiety, and depression (Bennett and Dorjee 2016; Snyder and Sickmund 2006).

The most common definition used to describe mindfulness is “nonjudgmental, present time awareness” (Biegel et al. 2009; Burke 2010), which is a specific state that arises when one is purposely and neutrally attending to the present moment’s experience or deliberately taking in ongoing experiences non-reactively with patience and courage. MM by itself or as part of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction is the most studied method of practicing and increasing mindfulness. Along with traditional in-person delivery, MM has been successfully taught with guided meditation tapes (Ditto et al. 2006), MP3 recordings of guided meditation classes (Evans-Chase 2013, 2015), and online mind-body instruction (Kemper et al. 2015).

Overall outcomes associated with MM include a greater sense of emotional well-being (Broderick 2005; Jain et al. 2007); better sleep quality (Martires and Zeidler 2015); reduced stress (Broderick 2005; Jain et al. 2007; Manzoni

et al. 2008); reduced substance use (Bowen et al. 2006); reduced anxiety, depression, anger, worry, and binge eating (Greeson 2009). Brain-imaging studies of adults have found that MM increases structural and functional connections within and between areas of the brain in charge of the regulation of emotions and emotional responses (Chiesa et al. 2013; Tang et al. 2012), attention regulation (Holzel et al. 2007), considering the future (Holzel et al. 2011), and taking the perspective of others (Holzel et al. 2011). These areas are also undergoing significant change during the adolescent period (Ernst et al. 2005; Fareri et al. 2008; Giorgio et al. 2010; Nelson et al. 2005), making them particularly sensitive to experience, as well as areas whose development is impacted by trauma (Anda et al. 2006).

**MM Instruction and out-of-Custody Context** A meta-analysis of the effect of MM on stress and well-being suggests that an important, often overlooked, component of a successful MM intervention is the use of expert instruction and a continued practice over time (Goyal et al. 2014). This can be challenging when MM interventions are utilized in the juvenile justice system and with youth returning to low-resource families and communities (Bjerk 2007; Carlson 2006). One method of delivery that assures correct instruction and the ability to access that instruction in the long-term is the use of free Internet-based instruction lead by an expert teacher. This method of delivery not only increases the integrity of intervention delivery in ensuring that the important aspects of MM instruction are delivered, it also has minimal impact on facility resources and empowers youth with the opportunity and autonomy to continue the practice with the same expert teacher they became accustomed to in the facility (Evans-Chase 2015).

## MM with Young Women Incarcerated in the Juvenile Justice System

Research has shown that MM has been used successfully with adolescents as an effective treatment for behavioral and emotional problems similar to those reported by youth leaving custody (Snyder and Sickmund 2006) as well as those disproportionately experienced by juvenile justice-involved young women (Leve et al. 2015). There are also indications that MM would be accepted by incarcerated youth as a practice both during and after incarceration: in anecdotal reports of success with youth both in and out of juvenile correctional facilities (Levine 2005) and the endorsement of the practice by youth in a long-term juvenile justice facility for young men, wherein the participants found that the MM practice was interesting enough to engage in both in and outside of weekly classes (Evans-Chase 2015). It is still unclear however, if an Internet-based delivery would also be engaging and/or an

MM practice helpful to young women incarcerated in the juvenile justice system.

Additionally, while the quantitative results of MM research supports the use of MM to increase self-regulation and other well-defined outcomes in incarcerated young men (Evans-Chase 2013; Winters and Beerbower 2017), it is the qualitative data that has provided insight into the unique application of MM to life in a juvenile justice facility (Evans-Chase 2015). Employing a qualitative approach with incarcerated young women may reveal new perspectives on MM in this setting by providing participants with the opportunity to discuss what is most important to them about their experience without the bias of questions that would lead them to think about those parts that we, the researchers, deem most important.

To address the overall dearth of intervention research conducted with incarcerated young women and to explore the practice of MM from their unique perspective, a qualitative study was conducted guided by the following research questions:

- (a) What is the experience of incarcerated young women who participate in Internet-based MM classes?
- (b) How do incarcerated young women apply MM to life in a juvenile justice facility?

## Method

### Participants

Ten young women over the age of 18 living in a juvenile justice facility in the northeastern part of the United States participated in the study. All of the residents of a female secure facility in the northeast United States were welcome to participate in the classes, whether or not they were also interested in participating in the study. The first step in the recruitment process involved facility staff reading a script to the residents providing basic information about the study, including that it was voluntary and being conducted by a research team that was not affiliated with the state Juvenile Justice Commission. Interested residents were invited to attend a meeting with the research team.

### Consent

Because of the vulnerability of incarcerated youth, several procedures were enacted to ensure that participation was truly voluntary. First, consent interviews were conducted with residents over 18, and assent interviews were conducted with youth under 18. Residents who assented to participate were asked to sign two assent forms, one to keep for themselves and

one for the research team. They were also asked if the research team could contact a parent/guardian about the study and if so, to initial a statement giving the research staff permission to do so. Parental consent forms were sent to the parents/guardians of all residents under 18 who assented to participate. Residents who were 18 and consented to participate were asked to sign two consent forms, one to keep for themselves and one for the research team. Second, to assure that residents felt safe to decline and did not face any consequences for doing so, the research team told residents during the consent interview that anyone who declined to participate would be referred to as “not qualifying” in communications with facility staff. Third, the research team reminded participants at the beginning of each class session that participation was voluntary, that they could drop out at any time during the study period, and provided instructions on how to drop out if they no longer wished to participate.

### Measures

MM instruction was provided via downloaded MP3 files of guided sessions conducted by an expert in MM and available for free on the Internet. The two MM expert teachers used for the study were Noah Levine and Vinnie Ferraro. Mr. Levine has a graduate degree in Counseling Psychology and over 20 years of experience teaching meditation to a range of audiences including incarcerated youth. Mr. Ferraro has been teaching MM to youth and young adults since 2001. A hand-out with website addresses, information on the key elements of MM instruction, how it is practiced, and the outcomes associated with regular practice was given to the participants on the last day of class for their own and their parent’s reference.

**Solicited Journals** Solicited journaling is a qualitative methodology that asks participants to provide written or audiotaped narratives about their day-to-day lives or specific experiences (Hayman et al. 2002). It is a methodology that allows the collection of perspectives, thoughts, feelings, etc., in a way that lessens the bias inherent to researcher questions that can lead participants to think in particular ways or about particular aspects of their experience at the expense of other aspects or perspectives that may be previously unknown or more important to the participants.

Each participant was given a blank journal to use throughout the study and was asked to put their name on the inside of the back cover. Journals were handed out and collected at each class session and taken out of the facility to protect participant confidentiality. The journals were handed out at the beginning of the session to give participants something to do (doodle, draw, write) if they found it difficult to sit still during the 30-min audio session. Participants had full control over the information they provided to the research team with the ability to

change that information at any time prior to the final day of class when the journals were handed in for the last time.

## Procedures

Eight bi-weekly class sessions were conducted during which participants meditated for 30 min and then wrote their thoughts, feelings, experiences, and opinions about the class and the use of MM in personal journals. Classes were held on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons for 4 weeks, with a break between weeks 2 and 3 due to an administrative issue within the facility. At the beginning of each of the eight class sessions, participants were asked to sit at a table in a small conference room after which a member of the research team handed out journals and pens, took roll, and turned on the audio for that session. Once the audio session concluded (approximately 30 min later) participants were asked to write in their journals, noting what they thought of the class, if they had any suggestions about making the class better, about any practice of MM or application of class skills since the last class session, and anything else they wanted to say about their participation in the class, the study, or MM.

## Data Management & Analysis

Once classes were completed, the journals were stripped of names and replaced with case identification numbers. Members of the study team manually entered journal entries into Excel spreadsheets, with ID numbers identifying each journal instead of names. The list connecting names and study ID numbers was kept until all entries had been entered, after which the list, which was the only link connecting each participant to their journal, was destroyed.

**Content Analysis** Conventional, open-coding content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon 2005; Padget 1998) was used to identify topics and themes across journal entries. Three coders worked both individually and collectively to break down the narrative data into meaningful pieces or data points (topics) from which common themes (collections of topics) were identified. When discrepancies were found, each coder discussed how the meaning of the entry in question was captured for them by the topic and/or theme and discussion continued until there was consensus amongst the three coders. Multiple coders were used in this way to protect against individual coder bias and to strengthen the validity of the findings (Padget 1998).

## Results

Ten young women aged 18 to 23 participated in the study and together contributed a total of 38 journal entries. Although none of the parents of residents under 18 who assented to

participate returned consent forms providing permission for their daughters to participate in the study, the young women were welcomed to attend classes (without keeping a journal), and all but one did so regularly. Overall, analysis of the journals suggests that the young women enjoyed the class sessions and found MM helpful in coping with their lives in a juvenile justice facility. Along with these entries, the young women wrote a substantial amount about the challenges of living in a juvenile justice facility. Table 1 lists the primary themes and associated topics that arose in analysis along with the frequency with which each was identified across the 38 entries (See Table 1).

## Difficulty of Living in the Facility

The most common theme, seen in at least one entry for 9 out of the 10 young women, addressed the difficulty of living in the facility. The topics under this theme included: loss of freedom; feeling anger, sadness, or frustration; being away from family; and the stress of living in the facility. The young women's loss of freedom was the most common topic under this theme with the entries communicating that their "captive status" (Paradis 2000, p. 844) was difficult for them to cope with, such as "#lockeduptheywontletmeout (participant 104: journal entry 6) and "My thoughts lately: I miss home! certain things have been urking me! And not being able to go home when or as quickly as I want is bothering me" (102:4). Thoughts of freedom in the future, however, were also described as a way to

**Table 1** Primary themes and associated codes

	N	%
Difficulties of Living in the Facility	23	61%
Loss of freedom	7	
Anger, sadness, frustration	6	
Away from family	5	
Stressful environment	4	
MM as Coping Mechanism	22	58%
With difficult thoughts or emotions	15	
To increase wellbeing	7	
MM for Physical Relaxation	17	45%
Relaxing	10	
Helps with sleep	5	
Calming	3	
MM Outside of Class	17	45%
Practiced outside of class	12	
Planned to use outside of class	5	
Appreciation	13	34%
For researchers	8	
For class	4	
For MM	4	

help them cope with the frustrations of their current situation. For instance, one young woman wrote: “Dislike: the whispering like: Relaxing Thoughts: I was first thinking of my ex and some memories we have. But I pushed that out my mind. Then I thought of freedom. Live Laugh Love.” (102:1). Another wrote: “I got some bad news since the last class and its been hard to relax at night so I just take myself out of My bad thoughts by imagining myself Free and Home and living my life Day dreaming is my form of meditation” (109:2).

Another commonly expressed difficulty associated with living in the facility was separation from family. One young woman wrote about the pain of being separated from her daughter:

I listened to the voice I thought about my daughter, I saw her future. I felt the pain of us being separated but I saw the sweet ending. I saw our house. I saw us living. I saw God guiding us. I saw me, my daughter, and her father getting over our obstacles and living a Great Life. my mind drifted off to a lot of different places. but I saw my future and it was Bright (107:1).

### MM as a Coping Mechanism

The second most common theme, seen in at least one entry for 8 out of the 10 young women, addressed the use of MM as a mechanism to help cope with life in a juvenile justice institution. The topics under this theme included: using MM to deal with difficult thoughts and emotions and using MM as a positive coping strategy. For instance, participants wrote about using MM to handle anger: “Today I practiced it because these cops got me so mad so I had to take deep breath. Thank you” (105:3) and “Everyday when I’m mad. The same as every other day” (105:6).

Several young women also wrote about handling difficult thoughts using specific practices (acceptance and patience) that are a part of MM instruction:

This is my second class and next week is my last i really enjoyed this tho i relaxed easy. I am nervous about closing my eyes in a room full of people. IDK Why? I am going through heart Break Right Now and the thoughts i have are causing me to literally Feel Sick and im just tryna Live in the moment an have Patience and acceptance of my current situation...I want Patience I need to have acceptance...I just want to Stop the eternal Hurt im feeling. I want to learn to be less critical of myself and realize I’m not the one in the Wrong I only Pray that this Pain heals with time (109:2).

Another young woman wrote:

I have been meditating off and on throughout the day trying 2 keep my mind calm and it works. (Patience) is bitter but it bears its sweet fruits. When we want what we want we want it now. But life Doesn't work that way so I inhale the wants and exhale the patience. I need to carry patience with me like a bag and use it everywhere in ever situation (107:4).

While the majority of entries supported MM as a successful coping strategy, there appeared to be some limitation to its usefulness. One young woman wrote: “Came into here already annoyed, meditation isn’t working” (101:3). While this was not the only entry that expressed frustration with the MM class – several entries communicated difficulty meditating in a group or with the lights on – it was the only entry that communicated the failure of MM to help handle difficult emotions. This does not mean that this was the only participant to feel this way as we cannot assess non-events (i.e., experiences not written about), but it is important to note that the same young woman who wrote about the failure of MM to help her cope with her emotions had previously written that it did help her relax: “So tired but yet relaxed...” (101:1). She also attended the next class and was willing to try again: “Thankful to be alive & Well. Not a good day. Hopefully I could relax today during this class” (101:4).

### MM Helps with Physical Relaxation and Sleep

Another common theme, seen in at least one entry for 8 out of the 10 young women, included commentary about how MM helped them physically relax. The topics under this theme included: physical relaxation, helps with sleep, and calming. For instance, one young woman wrote: “Everytime I can’t sleep I use the mindfulness. I sleep better. Thank you. Beautiful sleep <3 My hand was asleep and I didn’t even notice because the sleep was so good” (105:2). Another young woman wrote about MM helping to slow her thoughts, which then led to feeling relaxed and being able to sleep:

it took a while for my thoughts to stop wondering but when they did I completely Relaxed and fell asleep. When im in my cell at night I have so many thoughts running through my head its hard to Relax (109:1).

Two-thirds of the participants who wrote about MM helping them sleep or relax wrote at least one of the entries in relation to having this need because of the stress of living in an institution. One young woman wrote: “Mindful Meditation definitely was working for me. I haven’t felt that relaxed since I’ve been here. I’m definitely going to keep using it” (103:6). Another young woman wrote: “I practiced it yesterday.... I had a lot on my mind. I missed my son and I wanted to cry but I meditated and I forced to

stop the thoughts.... I was having such a beautiful sleep man! My mind was totally relax” (105:5).

### MM Outside of Class

Eight out of the 10 participants made at least one reference to using MM outside of the class setting, either writing about practicing between classes or that it would be a practice that they would use once the class concluded: “I’ve practiced Mindful Meditation about everyday since the last group, & I learned it, it’s helped me to calm down, sleep, & forget about the negative” (103:7). Other participants wrote:

I definitely have been using it when I’m angry & having trouble sleeping. I’ve used it many times. This was a different type of meditation & it was just as good. But with a room full of people that don’t want to join, I cannot concentrate. I always use it alone or when every-one’s asleep (103:8).

Another young woman wrote:

I felt a tingle in the tips of my fingers. I thought about plans, old memories, things that happened today, my mind kept wandering. My stomach was tight But the rest of my body was relaxed. I would use this on a daily bases (110:1).

### Appreciation

The final theme, Appreciation, was found in at least one entry for 7 out of the 10 young women and included explicit statements either thanking the research team for conducting the class, appreciation for how MM made them feel, or appreciation for the opportunity to take the class itself. One young woman wrote: “I’m taking the class psychology in January & I cannot wait, especially if it is like this. Thank you for this opportunity, have a Merry Christmas & Happy New Year” (103:8); while another wrote: “I’ve been meditating talking to the Lord and Just really Asking him to keep his hand on the situations going on in my life. It helps me a lot everyday. Thank you.” (107:5). Yet another participant wrote about feeling grateful for both the research team and the MM practice:

2nd class- Very peaceful. I enjoy sitting quiet an calm and peaceful. I feel less stress. people that don’t take it serious piss me off\* happy to have people that don’t treat me like shit here and people that want to spend time with us and care about our feelings and well beings because the people here dont give a f\*\*\*. #53 days until I go home. I like that while we’re meditating no ones able to say nasty things or bully (106:7).

## Discussion

This study was conducted to gain the perspectives of young women incarcerated in the juvenile justice system of an Internet-based mindfulness meditation (MM) class. The use of an Internet-based delivery made the classes easy to implement without utilizing facility resources beyond the space for the class itself. The journals kept by the participants indicated that the young women found the MM practice helpful in coping with the difficulties of living in the facility and supportive of their overall wellbeing in terms of their sleep quality, ability to physically relax, and ability to maintain more positive thinking.

### Adolescent Development in Correctional Facilities

The most common theme found across the journals was the day-to-day difficulties of living in an institution, for reasons that seem to have little to do with the facility itself and more to do with the experience of living in a correctional institution, separated from their family, and with little control over their day-to-day lives. The repetition with which they wrote about their captive status, anger, frustration, and stress associated with it, along with the physical reactions to those emotions, is an indication of the degree to which their situation compromises their wellbeing.

The salience of these young women’s lack of freedom and autonomy may reflect not only their objective incarceration status but also the normative drives of the young women’s developmental period. Late adolescence is a developmental period during which youth would normally be attaining more control over their actions and environment as well as autonomy from the adults around them (Akos and Ellis 2008; Nakkula and Toshalis 2010). This is not just a social artifact of our culture, but part of a developmental drive based on significant neurological changes that occur in late adolescence (Casey et al. 2008, 2005; Ernst et al. 2005). This neurological drive may further contribute to the salience of their captive status and exacerbate the difficult emotions, stress, and physical difficulties associated with incarceration in a way that adults in similar situations may not experience.

### MM and Wellness

Along with describing the difficulties of living in a juvenile justice institution, almost all participants described MM as a useful coping mechanism. They described how practicing MM helped them deal with difficult thoughts and emotions, attain their goals of thinking more positively, and increased their patience and acceptance of the situations they could not change. The young women also described how MM helped them with much needed physical relaxation and sleep, both of which were a challenge due to the stress they experienced

living in the facility, a concern that has received little, if any, attention in the juvenile justice literature. The quality of sleep reported by the participants is no small problem given that sleep disturbances in adolescence has been associated with disruptions in neural reward systems (Casement et al. 2016), increased impulsivity and risk-taking behavior (Rossa et al. 2014), increased risk for mental health and substance use disorders (Hasler et al. 2015; Roberts et al. 2008), and decreased self-control (Clinkinbeard et al. 2011; Meldrum et al. 2015).

Every participant endorsed MM in at least one entry as a useful strategy to support self-control, sleep quality, and physical relaxation. These entries reflect findings from previous research on MM whereby participants demonstrated measured increases in their ability to self-regulate emotions and behavior (Evans-Chase 2013; Derezotes 2000), and reductions in stress levels (Greeson 2009; Manzoni et al. 2008), symptoms of insomnia, and disrupted sleep (Martires and Zeidler 2015). Given the high stress environment and institutional barriers to normative development, the experiences described by the participants suggest that MM may be an operative, low-cost way of supporting the wellbeing of incarcerated young women. Increases in the ability to physically relax, have higher quality sleep, and cope with difficult emotions and situations may not only support their immediate wellbeing but may, in turn, support institutional outcomes that are self-regulatory in nature (Evans-Chase 2014) given the relationships between sleep, stress, and self-regulation (Chan and Wan 2012; Pilcher et al. 2015).

## Limitations

Because the participants are incarcerated and thus dependent on the facility for their wellbeing, they would likely have felt some pressure to have a positive relationship with researchers whose project is supported by the facility. This could threaten the validity of the findings due to participant bias, particularly those associated with the *Appreciation* theme. However, in recognition of their captive status and the effect it can have on their responses to institutionally-supported researchers (Landau 2008), additional negative case analysis was conducted with particular focus on the *Appreciation* theme to see if there was evidence that the entries were affected by the pressure to be positive. While no negative commentary was found regarding the researchers themselves, negative commentary was found regarding MM practice and the MM class itself such as “Came into here already annoyed, meditation isn’t working” (101:3) and “I cant stand when the same things constantly run through my mind, therefore Meditation wouldn’t be for me on a daily basis. 2X a week is fine. So much Running through my head Right now its so annoying” (101:2). Some entries were mixed in that there was both appreciation and negative commentary about the class: “Everyday...thank you...I have nothing to say but thank

you.....I didn’t like this one.....”(105:4) and “I haven’t used meditation lately. I liked the class but some people and things are a disturbance. THANKS 4 Coming” (102:8).

These entries suggest that the participants felt comfortable expressing both positive and negative attitudes and experiences. The research team was also very careful to communicate throughout the study that we were interested in both what they liked as well as what they thought could be changed to make the class better for future participants. Therefore, we think it is safe to consider these findings valid and representative of how the young women felt, both positive and negative, about MM and the MM class, and that their journals were not impacted by participant bias based on fear of reprisal.

Additionally, the study was conducted with a convenience sample, and thus we cannot be confident that it represents the population in the same way as a randomly selected sample. However, because all of the young women over the age of 18 present in the state’s central female intake facility participated in the study, it is plausible that they represent older female youth incarcerated in the juvenile justice system in this northeast state. As with all qualitative research, there are limits to the ability to generalize the findings to other young women in other facilities. However, the pragmatist perspective, as described by Morgan (2007), and the lens through which the research team approached this study, views generalizability as secondary to the important question of transferability, which asks: are the results actionable in another setting? Will the knowledge produced be useful in similar settings? This approach recognizes that while generalizability is an important part of research, no sample or setting is so unique as to have no applicability in any other settings, while at the same time not so generalizable as to be applicable in all settings (Morgan 2007, p 72). We believe that the insight offered by these young women, while limited in generalizability, is useful in informing more effective ways to support young women in other juvenile justice facilities and is thus valuable in its transferability.

## Conclusion

This study provides support for the use of Internet-based MM as a juvenile justice intervention that can support incarcerated young women to: (a) cope with the myriad difficulties they experience in their day-to-day lives in the facility, specifically with difficult emotions and stress; (b) maintain more positive thought processes; and (c) better quality sleep. The findings from this study also provide evidence of gender differences in the way MM supports wellness in young women compared to young men incarcerated in the juvenile justice system. For instance, the young men in Evans-Chase’s study of MM in a male juvenile justice facility reported applying what they termed class skills (i.e., what they learned in class) to

interpersonal challenges inherent to life in a juvenile justice facility (2015), while narratives told by young women in the current study reflected more of an application to intrapersonal challenges. More specifically, the young men in Evans-Chase's study described MM as helping them avoid conflict with others through the self-regulation of their behavioral responses, while the young women in this study described MM as helping them self-regulate their thoughts and emotions about the difficulties inherent to a lack of freedom and separation from family. While the young women's journals also included descriptions of frustration towards other people in the facility, they did not include narratives of direct conflict in which they used MM to self-regulate behavioral responses (interpersonal self-regulation), but instead involved descriptions of using MM to cope with the thoughts and feelings they had about other people's behavior (intrapersonal self-regulation). The juxtaposition of these findings once again reinforces the differences between young men and women incarcerated in the juvenile justice system and the implications of that difference for effectively supporting both populations of youth in the system.

Finally, the findings of this study contribute to the understanding of the lived experience of young women incarcerated in a juvenile facility and highlight the need for increased attention to their overall wellbeing in addition to the focus placed on the criminal justice goals underlying their incarceration. Future efforts should continue to not only focus on the therapeutic and wellness practices that may help ameliorate the challenges young women face during incarceration, but should also work towards ending incarceration as a strategy for dealing with the behaviors that are a response to the trauma, abuse, and neglect disproportionately experienced by this population outside of custody and exacerbated by their time in custody.

## Compliance with Ethical Standards

**Conflict of Interest** On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

**Ethical Standards and Informed Consent** All study procedures were approved by the Rowan University Institutional Review Board and the state-level Juvenile Justice Commission Research Review Board. Additional informed consent was obtained from all individuals for whom identifying information is included in this article.

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