

Supporting College Women Mentors' Strengths and Needs with Mindfulness Training

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The Faculty of the Curry School of Education

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Doctor of Philosophy

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by

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May 2, 2016

SUPPORTING COLLEGE STUDENT MENTORS WITH MINDFULNESS

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SUPPORTING COLLEGE STUDENT MENTORS WITH MINDFULNESS

Clinical and School Psychology Program

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APPROVAL OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation, (Supporting College Women Mentors' Strengths and Training Needs with Mindfulness Training), has been approved by the Graduate Faculty of the Curry School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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DEDICATION

Mom, this dissertation is for both of us.  
Without your love and sacrifice, none of this would have been possible.  
I love you.

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## **Linking Document**

In recent years, youth mentoring programs have faced a nationwide shortage of adult mentors (Manchir, 2011, O'Connor, 2006). However, college students are increasingly interested in community service opportunities with youth mentoring and are a viable source of mentors to help combat this deficit (Dote, Cramer, Dietz, & Grimm, 2006; Wasburn-Moses, Fry, & Sanders, 2014). College students enroll in youth mentoring because they want to form a relationship with a youth, to be a role model and source of support (Hughes & Dykstra, 2008), and to experience more leadership opportunity (Wasburn-Moses et al., 2014). Interestingly, mentoring programs have utilized this population to provide more mentors to interested youth. In fact, findings from the Big Brothers Big Sisters school-based mentoring study indicate that 31% of their total mentors are now college students (Herrera, Kauh, Cooney, Grossman, & McMaken, 2008).

In addition to their motivation to work with youth, multiple characteristics of college students make them well suited to mentor youth, including their similar developmental issues and flexible schedules. Compared to older adult mentors, college students are closer in age with youth mentees and may be seen as “cooler” than older adults. This may be especially true for adolescent mentees. College students also face developmental issues similar to adolescent mentees, including identity exploration and navigating growing independence (Arnett, 2000). These shared experiences can contribute to an enhanced sense of mutual understanding within the mentoring relationship and may help to facilitate a strong bond between mentor and mentee (Rhodes, Spencer, Keller, Liang, & Noam, 2006). Logistically, college students are likely to have more availability in their schedules, compared to older adults who may work full time or have significant familial responsibilities (Davis, 2012). Given that the amount of time invested in a mentoring relationship is positively associated with mentor satisfaction (McGill, Adler-Baeder,

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Sollie, & Kerpelman, 2014), it is advantageous for programs to recruit mentors with more availability and flexible schedules.

At the same time, mentoring youth can be challenging and college student mentors face programmatic, relational, and individual issues that are unique for their age group (McGill et al., 2014). Compared to older adults, college students are likely to have less experience with youth and may not have a strong understanding of the natural ups and downs that occur while building a relationship with an adolescent (Deutsch, Futch, Varga, & Fox, 2015). In addition, college students' focus on achievement and evaluation during college may, inadvertently, cause them to strive for perfection as a mentor, which can put undue pressure on both the mentor and mentee. This achievement-oriented mindset (Eccles, Barber, Jozefowicz, Malenchuk, & Vida, 1999) may also make college students more susceptible to feeling like a failure if their mentoring relationship does not advance as they expect it to (Spencer, 2007). Finally, factors related to college students' academic schedules (i.e., changing class schedules each semester, extended vacations, study abroad, transportation issues) may interfere with consistent meetings with their mentee and stymie the development of a successful mentoring relationship (Jekielek, Moore, Hair, & Scarupa, 2002). Over time, logistical barriers and developmental issues can lead to a premature termination of the mentoring relationship if mentors are not receiving adequate support. In fact, approximately 55% of mentoring relationships end before their initially agreed-upon commitment (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). This statistic is particularly troubling given that premature termination has been associated with negative outcomes for mentees (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). Thus, it would behoove mentoring programs to consider the satisfaction of their mentors, since mentor satisfaction suggests the likelihood that a mentor will remain in their

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mentoring relationship for the full duration (Weiler, Zarich, Haddock, Krafchick, & Zimmerman, 2014).

### **The Three Manuscripts**

Tailoring mentor training to meet the incoming strengths and needs of college student mentors may help programs increase mentor satisfaction and reliability. However, there is a dearth of research examining the pre-existing characteristics of college students who sign up to be youth mentors and how these initial characteristics may be associated with mentor satisfaction. The first study, *Initial Characteristics and Mentoring Satisfaction of College Women Mentoring Youth: Implications for Training*, sought to fill this gap in the literature by addressing the following research questions: (a) who among college students signs up for youth mentoring and (b) how are college mentors' initial traits associated with their mentoring satisfaction. This study builds on recent qualitative research investigating the experiences of college students enrolled in service-learning youth mentoring programs (Banks, 2010; Weiler et al., 2014) and expands the focus to college mentors' initial characteristics and their association with mentoring satisfaction. In addition, the study utilizes a comparison group of female college students interested in working with youth (i.e., teaching) but not enrolled in mentoring to assess whether the initial characteristics of college mentors differ from those of their peers who have not signed up to be youth mentors.

For the first study, survey data from college women enrolled in a youth mentoring program ( $n = 158$ ) and a comparison group ( $n = 136$ ) were analyzed to determine how initial characteristics of youth mentors differ from comparisons and are associated with mentors' satisfaction. To answer the first research question, a multivariate analysis of covariance was conducted and assumptions met, with group (mentor vs. comparison) as the independent variable

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and initial characteristics (GPA, depressive symptoms, autonomy, and cultural sensitivity) as the dependent variables, controlling for year in college and ethnicity. Group means and effect sizes are reported in Table 2 of the first manuscript. Relative to the comparison group, the mentor group reported fewer depressive symptoms and higher initial levels of autonomy, cognitive empathy, and collective self-esteem. To answer the second research question, partial correlation analyses were conducted to determine the relationship between each of the pre-test measures and mentoring satisfaction (see Table 3 of the manuscript). Grade point average, having fewer depressive symptoms, and cognitive empathy were positively correlated with satisfaction and collectively explained 13% of the variance in mentoring satisfaction.

Results from this study suggest that in comparison to college women interested in working with youth (i.e., teaching) but not engaged in youth mentoring, a relative strength for college women who sign up to mentor youth is their willingness to be empathic about and sensitive to the issues and views of their own and others' racial/ethnic group. Other relative strengths for the college women mentors in this study included higher autonomy and fewer depressive symptoms than the comparison group. These findings have several implications for mentor training for college students. First, training for this population should acknowledge their empathy, since this characteristic is both a strength and positively associated with satisfaction among college student mentors. Given the natural ups and downs of mentoring relationships, including relational challenges from mentees (Rhodes, 2002), however, it also may be important that mentor training for college students include a focus on how to remain empathic toward their mentee during these challenges. In addition, given that recent research findings suggest mentor autonomy is negatively associated with mentee satisfaction (Leyton-Armakan, Lawrence,

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Deutsch, Williams, & Henneberger, 2012), it is important that mentor training for college students focus on the value of collaborative decision-making between mentee and mentor.

The second study, *Mindfulness and Mentoring Satisfaction of College Women Mentoring Youth: Implications for Training*, builds on these training implications. It examines whether the addition of mindfulness training is an effective way of tailoring mentor training for college students. Given the unique issues that college student mentors face, additional training aimed at stress management may be particularly beneficial for this population. Stress reduction strategies such as mindful awareness practices (MAPs) may help college student mentors feel better able to handle relational challenges and be more likely to remain in the mentoring relationship. Training in MAPs is associated with enhanced relationship satisfaction among couples (Barnes, Brown, Krusemark, Campbell, & Rogge, 2007; Carson, Carson, Gil, & Baucom, 2006; Jones, Welton, Oliver, & Thorburn, 2011) and in parent-child relationships (Coatsworth et al., 2015). MAPs have also been linked to lower stress among college students (Oman, Shapiro, Thoresen, Plante, & Flinders, 2008). Despite these positive outcomes for relationships and college students, no study to date has examined the potential benefits of mindfulness for college student mentors. The second study sought to address this gap in the literature by examining the following research questions: (a) is the addition of a mindfulness component to college student mentor training associated with mentors' mentoring satisfaction; (b) does this help them enhance their ability to be empathic in challenging situations; and (c) does this help them shift their inclination for autonomous decision-making and prescriptive mentoring toward a more collaborative, youth-centered approach.

The second study is quasi-experimental and analyzes survey data from mentors from the 2014 academic year ( $n = 59$ ) who completed three hours of formal training on mindfulness

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research, application, and practice. Additionally, MAPs designed to foster mindful listening, eating, and emotion regulation skills were incorporated into the 2014-2015 YWLP group mentoring curriculum, which the mentors used to teach mindfulness strategies to their mentees and practice mindfulness as a group over the course of the year (Lawrence, Foukal, Trevett-Smith, & Peifer, 2015). An overview of the MAPs training sessions for mentors and additions to the group mentoring curriculum is included in Table 2 of the second manuscript.

Survey data from this mindfulness group was compared to a group comprised of mentors from the 2011 ( $n = 85$ ), 2012 ( $n = 73$ ), and 2013 ( $n = 65$ ) academic years, who received the same mentor training and group mentoring curriculum, but without the mindfulness component. Complete demographic information for this sample is available by group in Table 3 and by cohort in Table 4 of the manuscript. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to compare the mean mentor satisfaction between the two groups and separate repeated measures general linear models were conducted to determine whether participation in mindfulness training was associated with a change over time in empathy and autonomy scores. Mentors who participated in mindfulness training reported significantly higher mentor satisfaction, greater increases in empathy, and greater decreases autonomy, compared to mentors received similar training but without the mindfulness component. These findings provide quantitative support for the inclusion of a mindfulness component to college mentor training. Yet further research is needed that more closely examines how college student mentors experience and apply MAPs within the context of their mentoring relationships with youth.

The third study, *College Women Mentors' Experience and Application of Mindful Awareness Practices Training*, was conducted with the goal of filling this gap in the literature. The primary aim of this exploratory study was to gain a more detailed, comprehensive

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understanding of college student mentors' application and experience of MAPs, in order to better inform the field's knowledge of how MAPs may be useful for this population. This study addressed the following research questions: (a) how do college women mentors experience and apply MAPs in the context of their mentoring relationship with an adolescent girl and (b) are there differences in outcomes between college women mentors who report high dispositional mindfulness after a semester of training in MAPs compared to those who report low dispositional mindfulness.

Data consisted of 30 reflections written at about one month intervals (T1, T2, T3) over the course of a semester by a subsample of YWLP mentors from the 2014-2015 cohort, the mindfulness group from the second study who received MAPs training. Selection criteria were based on mentors' post-program score on the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS; Brown & Ryan, 2003); Mentors with the five highest and five lowest post-program MAAS scores were selected for inclusion and assigned to either the high mindfulness group or low mindfulness group (see Table 2 of the third manuscript). Once de-identified, all reflections were uploaded and stored securely using the online qualitative research software platform, *Dedoose*. Open coding in the early stages of analysis identified initial concepts present in the raw data. Next the researcher composed narrative summaries for all reflections, which facilitated analysis of individual mentors' change over time and comparison of patterns both within and between groups. The majority of coding and analysis (including composition of narrative summaries) was performed blind and a subset of reflections was coded a second time by two different researchers to check for accuracy of initial codes.

Only half of the mentors included in the present study discussed mindfulness in their reflections (see Table 1 of the manuscript). It may be that some mentors did have experiences

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with mindfulness but did not write about them; nevertheless this finding suggests that while MAPs are simple strategies, college women mentors may need more support in how to apply them in the mentoring relationship. Thematic analysis identified five ways that college women mentors might respond to MAPs training: 1) noting a specific past experience during which one “should have” practiced mindfulness; 2) planning to practice mindfulness; 3) practicing mindfulness; 4) teaching one’s mentee mindfulness; and 5) one’s mentee practicing mindfulness. The first three of these themes (“should have,” practicing, planning) appear to mirror aspects of the contemplation, preparation, and action stages of change, respectively, of the transtheoretical model (TTM) of change (Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992). A notable implication of this finding is that training for college mentors may need to provide ongoing opportunities for mentor reflection on MAPs application to the mentoring relationship across the stages of change (i.e., contemplation, preparation, and action).

In addition to identifying stages of adoption, results from this study also provided light on how mentors may use MAPs during mentoring. Mentors described applying MAPs as a way to calm themselves and to teach their mentee support in calming herself. Mentors discussed using their breath to help manage self-judgment and to set their intentions before a difficult conversation with their mentee. Some mentors in the low mindfulness group expressed self-judgment, saying they felt guilty or like an inconvenience in situations related to one-on-one time, transportation, and interactions with their mentee’s parents. Some low mindfulness mentors also avoided difficult conversation at T3, which differed greatly from the high mindfulness mentors’ descriptions of initiating difficult conversations at T3 (see Table 5 of the manuscript). Results suggest that some mentors may not experience the same level of dispositional mindfulness as their peers and, consequently, may respond better to instruction other than MAPs

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training. Teaching developmental issues may be one way to help mentors with lower dispositional mindfulness be less judgmental of themselves and others and to engage in difficult conversations. Given that both of these skills are important parts of mentoring (Rhodes, 2002; Spencer, 2007), programs can benefit greatly from supporting mentor development in these areas.

### **Conclusion**

This three-paper manuscript-style dissertation bridges several areas of the literature, including youth mentoring, college student development, and mindfulness. Thus, results will be valuable to researchers across a variety of disciplines. In addition, the implications of each study will help strengthen the quality of training provided by mentoring programs working with college student mentors. Ultimately, this may translate to more effective mentoring and better outcomes for mentor and mentee. Taken as a whole, this dissertation enhances the mentoring field's knowledge of college women mentors' strengths, training needs, and experiences and explores how the incorporation of a new mentor training strategy—mindfulness—may allow programs to better support this unique population of mentors.

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Initial Characteristics and Mentoring Satisfaction of College Women Mentoring Youth:

Implications for Training

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### Abstract

Being a youth mentor is popular among college students, yet little is known about how their initial characteristics are related to mentoring satisfaction. Survey data from college women enrolled in a youth mentoring program ( $n = 158$ ) and a comparison group ( $n = 136$ ) were analyzed to determine how initial characteristics of youth mentors (a) differ from comparisons and (b) are associated with mentors' satisfaction. Mentors reported higher autonomy, cultural sensitivity, and lower depression pre-participation than the comparison group, and their pre-participation GPA, cognitive empathy and depression predicted post-participation mentoring satisfaction. Implications for mentor training are discussed.

*Keywords:* youth mentoring, college student mentors, mentor training

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Perhaps as a result of the increased attention to mentoring as a vehicle for supporting vulnerable youth, mentoring programs face a nationwide shortage of adults willing to serve as mentors (Rhodes, 2002). A potential source for additional youth mentors may be young adults in college, since mentoring is an increasingly popular service-learning option for college students (O'Connor, 2006). College students are well-suited to mentor youth because of their proximity in age, availability, and similar developmental issues (Jekielek, Moore, Haire & Scarupa, 2002). College students who serve as mentors indicate they are motivated by the opportunity to be a role model and have a positive impact on youth (Hughes & Dykstra, 2008; Hughes, Welsh, Mayer, Bolay, & Southard, 2009). They may also perceive serving as a mentor to be a valuable experience for their own development (Banks, 2010). Washburn-Moses, Fry, and Sanders (2014) found that some college students are drawn to youth mentoring because it offers them a service learning experience in which they can develop their own leadership skills. Thus, mentoring programs that pair college student mentors with vulnerable youth have the potential of enhancing the development of mentors as well as mentees (Banks, 2010; Weiler, Zarich, Haddock, Krafchick, & Zimmerman, 2014).

However, experts in the mentoring field have expressed concern about college students' ability to be youth mentors (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). In particular, this population is likely to have inconsistent access to transportation, variable availability due to scheduling changes each semester, and extended holiday breaks (Jekielek et al., 2002). In addition to the demands of mentoring, college students must navigate their own time management and academic stress, factors associated with negative experiences among college mentors in service-learning programs (Weiler et al., 2014). There also is evidence that college students experience a decrease in motivation in service-learning over the course of a semester (Darby, Longmire-Avital,

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Chenault, & Haglund, 2013). Although not restricted to college student mentors, another mentoring challenge college students must manage is the racial and socioeconomic differences that often exist between mentors and their mentees (Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, Feldman, McMaken, & Jucovy, 2007). Unless successfully navigated these differences make it difficult for pairs to form an authentic and close relational bond (Pryce & Keller, 2012).

College students themselves see challenges in mentoring. McGill, Adler-Baeder, Sollie, and Kerpelman (2014) examined college student mentors' experiences and found that mentor-reported challenges fell into four categories: programmatic, relational, individual, and emotional in nature. Positive outcomes were more likely for mentors who were able to seek support from others, adjust expectations, invest time in the relationship, and push past their comfort zone (McGill et al., 2014). Given their own developmental phase and, perhaps, more limited experience with youth than older adults, college students may be more vulnerable to unrealistic expectations of the mentoring relationship than older adults. Mentors with romanticized ideas about saving at-risk youth may be quickly disappointed or experience negative outcomes when the mentoring relationship does not progress according to their expectations about time, closeness, or benefit for them (Faith, Fiala, Cavell, & Hughes, 2011; Hughes & Dykstra, 2008; Pryce, 2012; Spencer, 2007). It may be particularly important for mentoring programs using college students as mentors to retain a focus on producing positive experiences for both members of the relationship. In order to do so, sufficient attention must be paid to the mentors' needs, and not just the needs of the mentee, which have traditionally been the main focus of mentor training and research (O'Connor, 2006).

It would benefit the mentoring field to better understand who among the college student population is more likely to be a mentor, and who among the mentors will be able to successfully

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manage mentoring challenges. Fewer than half of all formal mentoring relationships last throughout the duration of their original time commitment (Bernstein, Dun Rappaport, Olsho, Hunt, & Levin, 2009; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002), and mentoring by college student mentors, in particular, has been linked to premature termination (Grossman, Chan, Schwartz, & Rhodes, 2012). This finding is particularly troubling, given that early termination may have harmful effects on mentees (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Herrera et al., 2007). Thus, there is potential for negative outcomes for both mentors and mentees when a mentoring relationship is unsatisfactory.

There is a dearth of research on mentors' initial characteristics and their relationship to youth mentoring satisfaction. Dubois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, and Valentine (2011) reported that mentee outcome was related to prior experience with youth, and being a social science major. Randle, Miller, Ciarrochi, and Dolnicar (2014) examined the characteristics of adults who expressed interest in becoming a youth mentor and found that potential mentors were more likely to be younger, female, positive about their problem-solving skills, and have prior volunteer experience and higher levels of empathy and hope compared to those who would not consider being a mentor. Martin and Sifers (2012) explored factors related to mentor satisfaction among a sample of adult mentors found that greater perceived training and confidence significantly predicted greater mentoring satisfaction, while communication problems between the mentor and mentee served as a barrier. In a recent study, Leyton-Armakan, Lawrence, Deutsch, Williams, and Henneberger (2012) investigated the association between initial mentor characteristics and mentee satisfaction and found that mentor's academic self-worth was positively correlated with mentee satisfaction, while mentor's depression and autonomy were negatively correlated. Given these findings, initial mentor characteristics may be an important

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variable in understanding mentor satisfaction as well and warrant further investigation. However, how pre-existing characteristics among college students may contribute to the variability in this population's volunteering to be mentors and mentoring satisfaction has not been examined to date.

### **Present Study**

In the present study, we sought to fill this gap in the literature by building on recent qualitative research investigating the experiences of college students enrolled in service-learning youth mentoring programs (Banks, 2010; Weiler et al., 2014) and expanding the focus to college mentors' initial characteristics and their association with mentoring satisfaction. In addition, this study utilizes a comparison group of female college students interested in working with youth (i.e., teaching) but not enrolled in mentoring to assess whether the initial characteristics of college mentors differ from those of their peers who have not signed up to be youth mentors.

The mentor characteristics included in the present study—GPA, depressive symptoms, autonomy, and cultural sensitivity—were chosen based on prior research indicating their association with mentoring outcomes. GPA was examined due to previous findings from Leyton-Armakan and colleagues (2012) that demonstrated a positive correlation between mentors' pre-existing academic self-worth and mentee outcomes and suggested that GPA could be a proxy for mentor availability both physically and emotionally. Mentor depression was included because of a reported significant negative correlation between mentors' initial level of depression and mentee's self-reported improvement in their sense of their own competence (Leyton-Armakan et al., 2012). Autonomy was selected based on research that found mentors' initial autonomy to be negatively correlated with mentees' self-reported improvement in their sense of their own competence (Leyton-Armakan et al., 2012). In addition, Randle, Miller, Ciarrochi, and Dolnicar

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(2014) found that adults interested in mentoring had significantly higher self-directedness and were more positive about their problem-solving skills.

Mentors' attunement to the mentee's needs is a critical component of successful engagement with youth (Pryce, 2012), including being attuned to cultural similarities and differences between mentor and mentee (Sánchez, Colón-Torres, Feuer, Roundfield, & Berardi, 2014); therefore, mentors' cultural sensitivity was assessed using two measures. Cognitive empathy was incorporated based on mentoring research that has identified empathy for another as critical to building successful mentoring relationships (Langstraat & Bowdon, 2011; Rhodes & DuBois, 2006; Spencer, 2007; Stewart & Openshaw, 2014). Cognitive empathy in particular, has also been identified as a salient predictor of interest in being a mentor among a community sample of adults (Randle et al., 2014). Cultural sensitivity to one's own racial/ethnic group was also assessed, given the importance of mentors being able to sensitively navigate issues related to their own race and ethnicity as well as their mentees' (Sánchez et al., 2014).

Using pre- and post-program surveys from college mentors as well as a comparison group not participating as mentors, we sought to examine the following two research questions: (a) are there differences in initial characteristics (GPA, depressive symptoms, autonomy, and cultural sensitivity) of college women who do and do not enroll in a youth mentoring service-learning program and (b) are any of the aforementioned initial characteristics related to mentors' satisfaction. Because youth mentoring relationships are meant to be bidirectional and horizontal in nature, we hypothesized that the students who signed up for mentoring would report higher levels of empathy compared to students enrolled in pre-service teacher education, who might be more drawn to the hierarchical relationship model of teacher and student. Further, we hypothesized that mentors with higher levels of empathy would have higher mentoring

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satisfaction, given the importance of closeness in successful mentoring relationships (Rhodes, 2002), while mentors with more depressive symptoms would report lower levels of mentoring satisfaction, since depression is associated with decreased enjoyment in activities (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) and lower mentee satisfaction (Leyton-Armakan et al., 2012).

### **Young Women Leaders Program**

The college student mentors who were part of this study were participants in the Young Women Leaders Program (YWLP), an 8-month, school-based mentoring program for middle school girls that has trained and supported over 1,500 college students to be youth mentors since its establishment eighteen years ago (Lawrence, Levy, Martin, & Strother-Taylor, 2008). YWLP combines group with one-on-one mentoring and provides ongoing training and supervision for the mentors. Mentors for the program are recruited from a large university in the southeast United States. The mentor application process involves watching a video about program requirements, and completing a written application and an in-person interview. Mentors are paired with a middle school girl in the fall and attend weekly two-hour group mentoring meetings in groups of 6-8 pairs. The group curriculum addresses critical issues facing adolescent girls, such as relational aggression, academics, and body image (Lawrence, Sovik-Johnston, Roberts, & Thorndike, 2009). Each pair also meets for four hours a month in one-on-one time outside of group. Program support is provided to the college women mentors through a required two-semester academic class focused on theory and research on adolescent development and best practices in mentoring. In addition to an hour of didactics each week, the class includes an hour of peer supervision with the other mentors in their mentoring group to problem-solve relational, curricular, and logistical issues for their group.

### **Method**

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## Study Design

In this study, we used a quasi-experimental design as part of an ongoing evaluation of the Young Women Leaders Program (YWLP) across the 2011 and 2012 academic years; all participants provided informed consent prior to participation in the study.

## Participants and Procedures

Participants were college women ( $N = 294$ ) enrolled at a large public, co-educational university in the southeast United States. Demographic information, including ethnicity and year in college, is available in Table 1. The sample was comprised of two groups: (a) college women participating as mentors in YWLP ( $n = 158$ ) as well as a comparison group of (b) college women interested in working with youth (i.e. teaching) but not involved in youth mentoring ( $n = 136$ ). College women in the comparison group were recruited from large undergraduate classes that are part of the university's teacher education program; those also mentoring youth were not included in the study. All participants completed two self-report questionnaires online: (a) a survey at the beginning of the academic year, which included demographic information and measures assessing various areas of academic achievement, mood, and psychosocial development, and (b) a survey at the end of the academic year that included these same measures as well as additional items regarding mentors' mentoring satisfaction for the YWLP participants.

## Measures

**Grade point average (GPA).** On the pre-survey, students were asked to indicate their GPA from the prior semester on a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from *below 2.0* to *3.5-4.0*. We selected this particular method of data collection due to the high correlation between self-report and actual GPA among college students (Caskie, Sutton, & Eckhardt, 2014; Gray & Watson, 2002; Nofle & Robins, 2007).

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**Depression.** The Harvard Department of Psychiatry/National Depression Screening Day Scale (HANDS; Baer et al., 2000) was utilized to measure depressive symptoms. This 10-item screening for depression assesses how often in the past two weeks individuals have experienced depressive symptoms (e.g., low energy, poor appetite, and feeling worthless) Answers are scored on a four-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*none of the time*) to 4 (*all of the time*). This screening instrument has been validated with college student samples (Hudson, Towey, & Shinar, 2008) and has been found to have good internal consistency ( $\alpha = .72$ ) and validity and to perform as well as the 21-item Beck Depression Inventory-II and the 15-item Hopkins Symptom Depression Checklist (Baer et al., 2000).

**Autonomy.** Noom's Modified Version of Becker's Scale of Autonomy (Bekker, 1991, adapted by Noom, 1999) was included to measure students' general confidence about decision making and goal setting. The measure ( $\alpha = .75$  to  $.79$ ) has been validated with college student samples (Leyton-Armakan et al., 2012; Marshall, Lawrence, Williams, & Peugh, 2015) to assess attitudinal autonomy, which is the ability to conceptualize one's options and make a decision (e.g., *when people ask me what I want, I immediately know*), and functional autonomy, which is the ability to develop a strategy to achieve one's goals (e.g., *I go straight for my goal*). Answers are scored on a seven-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*not at all true*) to 7 (*very true*).

**Cultural Sensitivity.** Two measures of cultural sensitivity were included in the study. A modified version of the perspective-taking subscale of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI; Davis, 1983) assessed respondents' thinking about other people, society and the world. The IRI has been widely used among samples of college students (Konrath, O'Brien & Hsing, 2011). Items included: *I strive to see issues from many points of view, I believe there are many sides to every issue and try to look at most of them, I am willing to listen to the variety of views that can*

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*emerge in talking about social issues and problems*, as well as two reverse scored items, *If I am sure about something, I don't spend too much time listening to others* and *I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the 'other person's' point of view*. Answers are scored on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*not at all like me*) to 7 (*very much like me*). Overall scores are calculated using the mean, with higher scores indicating higher empathy. The perspective-taking subscale traditionally includes seven items; however, only the five items listed above were included in the data collected from each of the four cohorts for the present study. This modified 5-item subscale was found to have acceptable internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from .69 to .78, consistent with alpha levels previously reported by studies using the 7-item subscale (Fernandez, Dufey, & Kramp, 2011).

Crocker and Luhtanen's Collective Self-Esteem Scale (1990) is a nine-item scale that assesses respondents' thoughts, feelings, and actions toward the racial/ethnic group that they consider their primary racial/ethnic identification. Items included: *I have a clear sense of my racial/ethnic group*; *I feel a strong attachment toward my own racial/ethnic group*; and *I think a lot about how the group history and traditions of my racial/ethnic group have influenced me*. Answers are scored on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Overall scores are calculated using a mean, with higher scores indicating that students spend more time thinking about and feeling a part of their racial/ethnic group. This measure has been found to have adequate internal consistency ( $\alpha = .7$  to  $.8$ ; Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990).

**Mentoring Satisfaction.** The YWLP Mentor Satisfaction Scale was used to measure the degree to which mentors felt satisfied with mentoring and the mentoring program (e.g., *As a member of YWLP, how often did you feel good about your role?* and *How often did you look*

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*forward to spending time with your little sister?*). Mentors completed this eleven-item measure in the spring, rating each item on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*almost never*) to 5 (*all the time*). Overall scores were calculated using a mean, with higher scores indicating higher mentor satisfaction. Internal consistency was found to be good ( $\alpha = .85$ ).

### Results

Demographics of the sample are shown in Table 1. A chi-square test demonstrated a significant relationship between group and ethnicity, indicating that the mentor sample included a higher proportion of non-Caucasian students compared to the comparison sample. Additionally, an independent samples t-test revealed a significant difference in the year in college, with college women in the mentor group entering an earlier year of college compared to comparisons. In order to control for possible variance due to the uneven distribution of these two variables, ethnicity and year in college were included as covariates, measured at the ratio and interval level respectively, in all comparison models to control for any possible influence on the outcomes that were assessed.

To answer the first research question—whether there are differences in initial characteristics of college women who do and do not enroll in a youth mentoring service-learning program—a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted and assumptions met, with group (mentor vs. comparison) as the independent variable (IV) and initial characteristics (GPA, depressive symptoms, autonomy, and cultural sensitivity) as the dependent variables (DV), controlling for year in college and ethnicity. Group means and effect sizes are reported in Table 2. Significant differences between group means were observed for depression  $F(1, 280 = 8.30, p < .01)$ , autonomy  $F(1, 280 = 9.01, p < .01)$ , cognitive empathy  $F(1, 278 = 4.24, p < .05)$ , and collective self-esteem  $F(1, 278 = 15.71, p < .00)$ ; compared to the comparison

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group, the mentor group reported fewer depressive symptoms and higher initial levels of autonomy, cognitive empathy, and collective self-esteem. The amount of variance explained by group assignment ( $\eta^2$ ) ranged from .02 to .06, which are considered to be small to medium effect sizes (Ferguson, 2009). Differences between group means were not statistically significant for GPA.

To answer the second research question—whether mentors' initial characteristics (GPA, depression, autonomy, cognitive empathy, and collective self-esteem) are associated with end-of-year mentor-reported mentoring satisfaction—partial correlation analyses were conducted to determine the relationship between each of the pre-test measure and mentoring satisfaction (see Table 3). Three out of the five correlations were statistically significant, defined by a two-tailed  $p$ -value of less than .05. Grade point average  $r = .29, p < .001$ , depression  $r = -0.19, p < .05$ , and cognitive empathy  $r = 0.18, p < .05$  were positively correlated with mentor-reported mentoring satisfaction.

To determine how well each of these variables individually predicted mentoring satisfaction, a series of linear regression analyses were conducted. Since neither ethnicity nor year in college was significantly correlated with mentoring satisfaction for this subsample ( $r = -.03, p = .74, r = -.03, p = .76$ , respectively), these variables were not included as covariates in the regression analyses. In the first block, GPA accounted for 8.2% of the variance,  $F(1, 125) = 11.10, p = .001$ . In the second block, cognitive empathy accounted for an additional 2.6% of the variance,  $F(2, 124) = 7.50, p = .001$ . In the final block, depression accounted for an additional 2.2% of the variance,  $F(3, 123) = 6.11, p = .001$ . Although each coefficient was significantly related to outcome, the additional variance explained by cognitive empathy and depressive symptoms was not, as indicated by non-significant  $\Delta R^2$  values at each step. Collectively, all three

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coefficients explained 13% of the variance in mentoring satisfaction,  $F(3, 123) = 6.11, p = .001$ .

### **Discussion**

In comparison to college women interested in working with youth (i.e., teaching) but not engaged in youth mentoring, a relative strength for college women who sign up to mentor youth appears to be their willingness to be empathic about and sensitive to the issues and views of their own and others' racial/ethnic group. Given that the majority of pairings in today's mentoring programs are cross-race (DuBois, Neville, Parra, & Pugh-Lilly, 2002), this is good news. This difference between groups may have emerged due to the inherent differences between teaching and youth mentoring; teaching is a career-choice involving a hierarchical relationship based on didactic instruction with a group of youth, while mentoring is a voluntary decision to build a bidirectional relationship based on collaboration with one youth. College students who are specifically interested in forming a relational bond with someone from a different background may be more likely to engage in youth mentoring. In addition, compared to teaching, which focuses more on providing instructional support rather than emotional support, mentoring allows for deeper connection due to the one-on-one dynamic and emotional focus of the relationship. This would be consistent with prior results that college student mentors are motivated to participate in mentoring by their desire to form a relationship with a youth (Hughes et al., 2009).

Other relative strengths for the college women mentors in this study included higher autonomy and fewer depressive symptoms than the comparison group. This between-group difference in autonomy may also be related to perceived differences between the roles of teacher versus mentor. Teaching follows a relatively pre-determined, prescribed structure, while mentoring offers a wider range of flexibility and greater potential for individual decision making. Therefore, more autonomous college students may have considered mentoring one youth to be

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more appealing than teaching a group of students a prescribed subject matter. Regarding depression, college students experiencing physical symptoms such as low energy or decreased appetite may have had fewer internal resources available to devote outside themselves and thus been less likely to seek out the opportunity to be a mentor. Psychological symptoms of depression, such as feelings of worthlessness, could also decrease students' motivation to engage in new relationships (APA, 2013). This could also help explain why mentors with higher depressive symptoms had lower mentoring satisfaction, which aligns with existing evidence (Leyton-Armakan et al., 2012). Symptoms such as low energy may have inhibited mentors' ability to successfully engage with their mentee, while feelings of worthlessness may have hindered mentors' sense of self-efficacy; both of these could result in lower mentoring satisfaction.

That college women who sign up for mentoring have fewer depressive symptoms and higher grades than a comparison group of women interested in working with youth bodes well for mentoring programs interested in using college students as mentors. Unlike teaching, which is a career choice with associated pre-service academic courses, mentoring is not a career choice and likely requires college students to make a commitment that is in addition to their regular academic load. We found that among the students interested in working with youth, those who sign up for mentoring may have available time and energy to commit to developing a relationship with youth. On the other hand, that college women mentors were higher than the comparison women on autonomy might be something mentoring programs need to consider, given the recent finding that higher mentor autonomy was predictive of lower mentee satisfaction (Leyton-Armakan, et al., 2012).

### **Implications**

What are the implications of these findings for mentoring programs that recruit college students as mentors? First of all, mentoring programs should consider the particular strengths and needs of this population of mentors when they are designing mentor training and support. Mentoring relationships are two-sided. In order to have mentors who are consistent and will follow through on their commitment, programs must consider the mentors' ongoing needs for support just as much as the mentees' needs. Part of this is identifying which mentors are in greatest need of support to be successful mentors, especially when faced with the relational challenges that are a normal part of any close mentoring relationship (McGill, 2014).

We found that college student mentors coming in with a low GPA or elevated depressive symptoms may need more support and monitoring in order not to "drop out" of the mentoring relationship over time. While one theoretical solution for mentoring programs could be to utilize a screening process that weeded out students with a cut-off for low grades or the presence of depressive symptoms, given the ongoing shortage of mentors and that, collectively, these variables only accounted for 13% of variance, this seems unwarranted. Instead, providing resources for these mentors that were useful for their own and their mentee's development may result in personal growth for both. For college students with lower GPA or indications of depression, this might include more frequent monitoring on how they are managing their mentoring duties, as well as specific training and support on strategies related to asking for help, time management, and studying effectively; these are tools that would likely be useful for their mentees as well as the mentors.

Another way that mentoring programs might improve their training for college student mentors is by adopting a strengths-based approach, similar to that proposed by advocates of

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positive youth development for supporting youth (Larson, 2000) and strengths-based teacher education (He, 2009; Lopez & Louis, 2009). Training for college student mentors might applaud their strengths relative to their peers in independent decision-making (autonomy) and cultural sensitivity (cognitive empathy and collective self-esteem) from the outset while also highlighting how these strengths may or may not be applicable in developing a mentoring relationship with at-risk youth. For example, since higher mentor autonomy has been found to predict lower mentee satisfaction (Leyton-Armakan et al., 2012), mentoring programs might want to train college student mentors on using their existing skills in cultural sensitivity to temper their natural inclination to make relationship decisions independent of their mentee. They may need targeted support on engaging with their mentee *where they are* rather than focusing on changing them (Spencer, 2007). Similarly, given that most college student mentors are likely to have achieved academic success (i.e., how they got to college), they may need specific training on how to sensitively scaffold what they know about studying and school success to better meet the needs of their mentees, who may be less academically focused. Again, the emphasis may need to be on how to develop a more horizontal than hierarchical relationship by engaging and collaboratively setting goals with one's mentee rather than giving advice (Pryce, 2012).

An example of this kind of training designed specifically for college student mentors can be found in the Young Women Leaders Program (YWLP). YWLP has incorporated a strengths-based training focus for their college student mentors through an academic class mentors enroll in while they are mentoring. The class focuses on theory and research on best practices in mentoring and adolescent development (Lawrence et al., 2008). In addition to class readings and discussions, two strength-based assignments—one group and the other individual—invite the college students to use their existing skills to address the challenges of mentoring, including

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reflecting on areas of relationship building in which they are less strong. For both assignments, students are encouraged to approach mentor challenges with a growth versus a fixed mindset (Dweck, 2006), that is, that challenges in the mentoring relationship are an opportunity to learn rather than an indication of failure. This approach to training college student mentors has also been suggested by McGill and colleagues (2014).

The group assignment used in the class associated with YWLP training involves exploring mentoring *sticky situations* as a group. This practice is similar to “practitioner dilemma situations” used by Larson and Walker (2010) as a research tool to gather data on youth workers’ problem-solving strategies (p. 347). The sticky situations used in YWLP training are real-life mentoring dilemmas (e.g., mentee is not returning phone calls, mentee plans to get in a fight at school) and mentor groups are asked to identify the possible underlying issues, develop a solution collaboratively, and share their thinking with the class. Steps to this activity build on the mentors’ strength in cultural sensitivity by asking them to consider various stakeholders’ perspectives and values (mentee, mentee’s parents, mentor’s) first before using their problem solving skills (i.e., autonomy) to generate possible solutions. These solutions are discussed in class, providing additional opportunity to reinforce the value of multiple perspective taking and collaboration when generating solutions to mentoring challenges. This training activity allows the college women to be both students and teachers of mentoring problem solving.

Another strength-based mentor training assignment used in the class associated with YWLP is individual structured written reflection about the mentoring experience. Students complete these five times over the course of the year. A primary goal of service learning is to help college students. Research shows that a process of structured reflection helps students make rich connections between academic content and hands-on service experience and develops their

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skills in critical thinking (Davidson, Jimenez, Onifade, & Hankins, 2010; Hughes et al., 2012; Naudé, 2015). The structured reflection assignment used in YWLP training asks the college students to consider a specific mentoring challenge for them, identify the relevant YWLP mentoring competency that is applicable to the experience, and evaluate both the situation and their response to it in light of the competency. The five mentoring competencies YWLP has conceptualized as associated with mentoring success are having a positive attitude (zest), collaborating (teamwork), utilizing empathy and attunement (heart), showing initiative and perseverance (grit), and applying mentoring knowledge (brains; E. Lawrence, personal communication, January 18, 2015). These structured reflections about their mentoring competencies in these areas provide mentors an opportunity to enhance their critical thinking about both their strengths and areas for growth in the mentoring processes YWLP conceptualizes as important. YWLP's group sticky situations and structured individual mentor reflections may be useful models of strength-based training for other programs working with college students as youth mentors.

### **Limitations**

The first limitation of this study is the generalizability of these findings to a broader sample of college students or alternatively structured programs for youth mentoring. Given that the sample was all female, results may not fully translate to service-learning youth-mentoring programs involving a different college population (e.g., male mentors). Additionally, the YWLP structure of combined one-on-one and group mentoring in a middle school setting and year-long mentor training through an academic learning class all mentors in YWLP take is unique and results from this study may not translate to mentoring models employed by other programs using college students as mentors. In addition, these data were collected from college women who

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applied and were selected as mentors, as opposed to all women who were interested in mentoring; therefore, results may have looked different for women who were interested in mentoring but did not apply or were not selected. Further, the measures were self-report, which invites the potential for social desirability bias (Dobbins, Farh, & Werbel, 1993). College students may have responded more or less favorably to particular items depending on what they perceived to be the *right* answer. A final limitation of the present study is the comparison group design. While these students were also interested in working with youth (i.e., teaching), participants were not randomly assigned to the mentoring condition.

### **Conclusion**

College students are increasingly interested in service-learning opportunities like youth mentoring. We found that initial characteristics of college students account for only a small portion of the variance in their mentoring satisfaction. These results are good news for youth mentoring programs using college students as mentors because the majority of variance in mentors' satisfaction with mentoring were not associated with incoming mentor traits. The remaining unexplained variance reinforces the importance of program-related factors associated with mentor satisfaction, including match and mentor training and support (Dubois et al., 2011). For mentoring programs that use college students as mentors, developing training and support that reflects an understanding of this population's particular strengths and areas for growth may be critical to their success mentoring youth. Further research is needed on how taking a developmentally appropriate, strengths-based approach might enhance the mentoring experience for both college student mentors and their mentees.

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Table 1

*Study 1 Descriptive Statistics by Group*

Ethnicity <sup>a</sup>	Mentors		Comparisons	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
White/Caucasian	83	53	110	86
Black/African-American	39	25	5	4
Asian/Pacific Islander	12	8	9	7
Mixed race	9	6	2	1.5
Hispanic/Latina	7	4.5	1	1
Other	5	3	1	0.5
Native American	1	0.5	0	0

  

Year in college <sup>b</sup>	Mentors	Comparisons
2	70	4
3	63	80
4	25	52

*Notes.* <sup>a</sup> Distribution of ethnic categories varied significantly across groups,  $X^2(6, N = 294) = 40.74, p < 0.00$ . <sup>b</sup> There was a significant difference in year in college for the mentor ( $M = 2.72, SD = 0.72$ ) and comparison ( $M = 3.35, SD = 0.538$ ) groups;  $t(292) = -8.46, p < 0.00$ .

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Table 2

*Estimated Marginal Means of Initial Characteristics by Group*

Measure	<u>Mentors</u>	<u>Comparisons</u>	$(\eta^2)$
	<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>	
GPA	3.36	3.41	.005
Autonomy**	5.11	4.81	.032
Depression**	1.31	1.44	.030
Cognitive Empathy*	5.51	5.25	.015
Collective Self-Esteem***	4.08	3.34	.055

*Notes.* \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$

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Table 3

*Partial Correlations Among Initial Characteristics & Mentoring Satisfaction*

Measure	1	2	3	4	5
1. Mentoring Satisfaction	—				
2. GPA	.29**	—			
3. Autonomy	.06	-.04	—		
4. Depression	-.19*	-.11	-.32***	—	
5. Cognitive Empathy	.18*	.07	.08	.04	—
6. Collective Self-Esteem	.07	-.08	.24**	-.08	.05

\* $p < .05$ , two-tailed. \*\* $p < .01$ , two-tailed. \*\*\* $p < .001$ , two-tailed.

Mindfulness and Mentoring Satisfaction of College Women Mentoring Youth:

Implications for Training

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## MINDFULNESS TRAINING FOR COLLEGE STUDENT MENTORS

### Abstract

College students who mentor at-risk youth face a variety of challenges and unexpected dilemmas (McGill, Adler-Baeder, Sollie, & Kerpelman, 2014). Mindful awareness practices (MAPs) offer a promising strategy for stress reduction and enhanced relationship satisfaction for college students (Oman, Shapiro, Thoresen, Plante, & Flinders, 2008), counseling students (Shapiro, Brown, & Biegel, 2007), parents (Duncan, Coatsworth, Gayles, Geier, & Greenberg, 2015), and teachers (Jennings, Frank, Snowberg, Coccia, & Greenberg, 2013), yet the potential benefits for college student mentors remain largely unexamined. This quasi-experimental study analyzed survey data from college student mentors who received a MAPs-based intervention ( $n = 59$ ) and a comparison group comprised of mentors who received the same mentor training and group mentoring curriculum, but without the added mindfulness component to examine the following research questions: (a) is the addition of a mindfulness component to college student mentor training associated with mentors' mentoring satisfaction; (b) does this help them enhance their ability to be empathic in challenging situations; and (c) does this help them shift their inclination for autonomous decision-making and prescriptive mentoring toward a more collaborative, youth-centered approach. Relative to the comparison group, mentors who participated in mindfulness training reported significantly higher mentor satisfaction, greater increases in empathy, and greater decreases in autonomy. Results provide youth-focused programs with new knowledge regarding additional avenues for supporting college students working with youth.

*Keywords:* youth mentoring, college student mentors, mentor training, mindfulness

### **Introduction**

Mentoring programs are increasingly recruiting college students to serve as youth mentors. Findings from the Big Brothers Big Sisters school-based mentoring study indicate that 31% of their total mentors are college students (Herrera, Kauh, Cooney, Grossman, & McMaken, 2008). Indeed, there is growing interest in youth mentoring as a form of service-learning among the college student population (Dote, Cramer, Dietz, & Grimm, 2006; Wasburn-Moses, Fry, & Sanders, 2014). This population's motivation to serve as youth mentors is good news for the mentoring field, given their numbers and that there continues to be a nationwide shortage of adult mentors (Manchir, 2011; O'Connor, 2006). In addition to their motivation to work with youth, multiple characteristics of college students make them well suited to mentor community youth, including their flexible schedule, developmental level, and academic values, (Tierney & Branch, 1992).

College students' schedules may offer unique benefits to the development of a mentoring relationship with youth. Since the majority of college students do not work full-time (Davis, 2012), they may have more availability for mentoring during after-school hours and weekends than older adults who are more likely to work full time. In addition, college students may have fewer competing demands from their family compared to older adults, since college students are less likely to be parents, grandparents, or guardians. Taken together, college student mentors may have more "free time" to commit to the mentoring relationship than adult mentors not in college.

Traditional college students' age and developmental level may also offer unique benefits for their engagement in a mentoring relationship with youth. Compared to older adult mentors, college students are closer in age to youth mentees. As a result they may

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be more familiar with and better prepared to discuss youth interests related to popular culture. In addition, college students and adolescents deal with similar developmental issues, such as identity exploration and navigating growing independence (Arnett, 2000; 2014). These shared experiences are potentially powerful contributors to an enhanced sense of mutual understanding within the mentoring relationship (Rhodes, Spencer, Keller, Liang, & Noam, 2006).

The third characteristic that supports the use of college students as youth mentors is college students' academic values. Poor academics or behavioral performance at school is a major reason youth are referred for mentoring (Chan, Rhodes, Howard, Lowe, Schwartz, & Herrera, 2013); given college students' own investment in academic success, they are well-prepared to share useful study skills with their mentees. Perhaps more than older adult mentors, college students may feel a natural inclination to assist mentees with homework (Holmes, Redmond, Thomas, & High, 2012). For the mentee, getting to know a college student and spending time on a college campus can spark greater interest in higher education (Herrera et al., 2007). For mentees who want to go to college but are uncertain of where to start, college student mentors can offer step-by-step guidance to demystify the process, having recently navigated college applications themselves (Malone, 2006). Overall, youth mentees may derive additional academic gains when their mentors are college students.

In addition to these benefits, however, issues related to college students' schedules, developmental level, and academic values also can lead to challenges (McGill, Adler-Baeder, Sollie, & Kerpelman, 2014). First, certain logistical factors related to college students' schedules may reduce the amount of time they have available to spend

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with their mentee; college students' extended vacations and changing class schedules each semester also may make it difficult for a mentoring pair to establish a consistent pattern of regular meetings (Jekielek, Moore, Hair, & Scarupa, 2002), which can inhibit the development of a successful mentoring relationship (Rhodes & DuBois, 2006). On top of this, many college student mentors must coordinate transportation for themselves in order to meet with their mentee, which requires additional time management and planning skills. Separate from university calendar issues, college student mentors who commit to too many extracurricular activities in addition to mentoring may have difficulty balancing the development of their mentoring relationship with their other responsibilities; thus, it is not surprising that time management issues have been linked to lower mentor satisfaction among college student mentors (Weiler, Zarich, Haddock, Krafchick, & Zimmerman, 2014a) Taken together, these logistical factors can create additional stress and reduce satisfaction among college student mentors (McGill et al., 2014; Weiler et al., 2014a).

College students' developmental level is also associated with mentoring challenges that are unique to this population. As an example, although autonomy is considered to be a positive trait for college students' own development (Arnett, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Frederick & Grow, 1996), being overly autonomous might make it more difficult for mentors to accept direction during training and work collaboratively with their mentee. Overly autonomous mentors may resort to a prescriptive approach to mentoring, which is less beneficial for mentees (Tierney & Branch, 1992); too much structure or direction imposed by the mentor can lead to mentees feeling a loss of ownership in the relationship (Larson, 2006). In fact, having a highly autonomous college

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student mentor has been associated with negative mentee outcomes (Leyton-Armakan, Lawrence, Deutsch, Williams, & Henneberger, 2012). Given that college students who apply to mentoring programs report higher levels of autonomy compared to their non-mentoring peers (Foukal, Lawrence, & Williams, 2016), this population may benefit from training that emphasizes skills such as perspective taking, empathy, and self-regulation; these skills may support their ability to make decisions collaboratively and form horizontal relationships with youth mentees (Pryce, 2012).

As part of their academic values, college students are accustomed to setting goals and reaching measurable, positive outcomes (i.e., high grades.) However, attaining mentoring success is far less tangible than achieving academic success and this may be hard for college student mentors to appreciate (Evans, 2005). College students' focus on achievement and evaluation may, inadvertently, cause them to strive for perfection as mentors, putting undue pressure on both them and their mentees to develop *ideal* mentoring relationships, ultimately leading to lower satisfaction (Rhodes & DuBois, 2006). Perhaps more so than other adults, college student mentors may also enter their mentoring relationship expecting that they are going to "change their mentee's life forever" (McGill et al., 2014, p. 12). Consequently, college student mentors may become frustrated or have difficulty empathizing if their mentee's academic values do not mirror their own (McGill et al., 2014). Thus, college student mentors may benefit from training that helps them respond to mentoring challenges by pausing to consider how they can be empathic toward their mentee, instead of reacting by worrying about how the challenges could reflect on their own "success" as a mentor (Rhodes & DuBois, 2006). Further,

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skills that foster acceptance may help college student mentors feel less judgmental of the progress of their mentoring relationship, thereby helping increase their satisfaction.

As in all personal relationships, mentoring relationships are more successful when both parties are satisfied (Rhodes, 2002). Unfortunately, this is not always the case; approximately 55% of all mentoring relationships end prematurely and such early termination can have detrimental effects on mentees (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). Therefore, training strategies that can improve mentor retention are critical to program success. One indication that a mentor will stay in the relationship is his or her level of mentoring satisfaction (Weiler, et al., 2014a). Recent research has found a positive association between college student mentors' levels of mentoring satisfaction and their levels of empathy upon entering the program eight months earlier (Foukal et al., 2016). This is not surprising since empathy is thought to be critical in the development of a successful mentoring relationship (Rhodes, 2002). Based on these findings, mentoring programs seeking to enhance college student mentor satisfaction should consider incorporating training that supports ongoing cultivation of their empathy.

Mentoring programs that engage college students as mentors might address these concerns by incorporating training in mindful awareness practices (MAPs). Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) have been shown to enhance relationship satisfaction in couples (Atkinson, 2013; Carson, Carson, Gil, & Baucom, 2004; Gillespie, 2013) and parent-child relationships (Bailie, Kuyken, & Sonnenberg, 2012; Coatsworth et al., 2015). MAPs have been associated with lower stress levels and greater forgiveness among college students (Oman, Shapiro, Thoresen, Plante, & Flinders, 2008) and increased self-reported empathy among counseling students (Shapiro, Brown, & Biegel,

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2007). MAPs promote nonjudging and acceptance, which may prove useful for college student mentors who feel compelled to try to change their mentee or to achieve a *perfect* mentoring relationship. Similarly, MAPs may help college student mentors cultivate greater empathy toward their mentees despite mentees' difficulties and challenging behavior (Bailie et al., 2012). Research has shown that mentors who accept their relationship as it is are more likely to celebrate the small moments of joy with their mentee, and experience greater mentor satisfaction (Bihari & Mullan, 2014; Evans, 2005). Finally, there is strong evidence that MAPs strengthen the ability to stay present with unpleasant sensations or feelings, instead of avoiding them or actively pushing them away (Kabat-Zinn & Hanh, 2009), which might help college student mentors stay committed and present with their mentees and not shy away during periods of relational difficulty. Taken together, these findings suggest that MAPs offer great potential for helping college student mentors cope with the unique scheduling, developmental, and academic challenges they face while mentoring.

Although there are no studies to date on mindfulness training for mentors, a growing number of studies have examined conceptual and theoretical models of how educational outcomes are enhanced through engagement in contemplative practices (Roeser & Peck, 2009). Several studies have documented the efficacy of mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) for supporting teachers, who deal with challenges that are somewhat similar to those experienced by mentors. For example, an MBI called Cultivating Emotional Balance reduced teachers' stress and improved teachers' ability to recognize others' emotions (Kemeny et al., 2012). Another mindfulness-based professional development curriculum designed specifically for teachers, called

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Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE), promoted well-being (Jennings, Frank, Snowberg, Coccia, & Greenberg, 2013), self-awareness, and lower emotional reactivity (Schussler, Jennings, Sharp, & Frank, 2016). Mindfulness researchers have identified potential mechanisms through which MAPs may enhance the relational aspects of education; Jennings and Greenberg (2009) proposed the prosocial classroom model, which posits that high levels of social and emotional competence help improve teachers' well-being and promote resilience in responding to the multiple factors that impact their perceptions of stress. Roeser, Skinner, Beers, and Jennings (2012) theorized that MAPs training enables teachers to establish and maintain more supportive relationships with students due to the increased health, well-being, and professional engagement the experience. These findings demonstrate the value of MBIs for supporting teachers' social emotional competence and their management of stress, and suggest that MAPs training may offer similar advantages for college students who face similar challenges working with youth in the context of youth mentoring.

Despite the separately burgeoning research on the benefits of MAPs and the benefits of youth mentoring, there is a dearth of research examining MAPs in the context of youth mentoring. One study examined the effects of MAPs on mentee's self-regulation (Johansen, 2014) and reported that mindfulness had a moderating effect on sensation seeking and impulsivity in relation to risk-taking behavior among mentees. However to date, no study has examined possible associations with mentor outcomes. Given that mentoring programs can support mentors' satisfaction by tailoring mentor training to their specific challenges, strengths, and needs (Evans, 2005; Foukal et al., 2016);

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programs working with college student mentors might incorporate MAPs into mentor training.

The present study sought to examine the potential value of teaching MAPs to college youth mentors. Specifically, we aimed to answer the following research questions: (a) is the addition of a MAP component to college student mentor training associated with mentors' mentoring satisfaction; (b) does the introduction to MAPs enhance the college mentors' ability to be empathic; and (c) does the introduction to MAPs decrease the college mentors' inclination for autonomous decision-making. Because MAPs are believed to promote a sense of felt trust and closeness with others, as well as an enhanced ability to approach stressful personal events as challenges rather than threats (Kabat-Zinn & Hanh, 2009), we hypothesized that college students' participation in mentor training that involves MAPs would be associated with higher mentor satisfaction post-program when compared to college student mentors who have not received MAPs.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

The college student mentors who participated in this study were enrolled in the Young Women Leaders Program (YWLP), an 8-month, school-based mentoring program for middle school girls that has trained and supported over 1,500 college women to be youth mentors since its establishment eighteen years ago (Lawrence, Levy, Martin, & Strother-Taylor, 2008). College students from a large university in the Southeast United States were paired with a middle school girl in the fall for a year and attended weekly two-hour, after-school group mentoring meetings in groups of 6-8 pairs. Program support

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and training were provided to the college women mentors through a required two-semester academic class focused on theory and research on adolescent development and best practices in mentoring. In addition to an hour of didactics each week in the fall semester, the class included an hour of peer supervision with the other 5-7 mentors in their mentoring group both semesters to problem-solve relational, curricular, and logistical issues for their group and mentoring relationships.

Utilizing a quasi-experimental design, the present study was conducted as part of an ongoing evaluation of YWLP; mentors provided informed consent prior to participation in the study. The sample was comprised of four cohorts of college women participating as mentors in YWLP ( $N = 282$ ) during the 2011-2014 academic years. The cohort of mentors from the 2014 academic year ( $n = 59$ ) participated in mentor training that included MAPs (described in procedure section). The comparison group was comprised of mentors who received the same YWLP training, but without the mindfulness components. It included mentors from the 2011 ( $n = 85$ ), 2012 ( $n = 73$ ), and 2013 ( $n = 65$ ) academic years.

### **Procedure**

MAPs were incorporated into YWLP via two different components. First, three specific mentor-only MAPs training sessions were designed to provide mentors with instruction and an opportunity for reflection and discussion about MAPs. Second, MAPs-based activities were added to the existing YWLP group mentoring curriculum that mentors used to lead their weekly after-school group mentoring meeting. Table 1 provides an overview of the three mentor training sessions and twelve group mentoring

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meetings to which MAPs-based activities were added. Additional details regarding each component are discussed below.

MAPs were introduced at a half-day mentor training retreat that all mentors attended at the beginning of the program, during which mentors were led through a guided meditation and taught the theoretical underpinnings of mindfulness. Mentors received ongoing instruction surrounding MAPs as part of their academic service-learning course, including subsequent class reading assignments (Broderick, 2013, p. 14-26; Broderick & Jennings, 2012), in-class discussions, and a guest lecture from a contemplative education expert. In total, mentors in this cohort received three hours of formal training on mindfulness research, application, and practice. The comparison group participated in the same half-day mentor training retreat, academic service-learning coursework, and YWLP group mentoring curriculum, but without any mindfulness components. Instead, these cohorts engaged in additional group activities and connecting “energizers,” such as musical chairs and making friendship bracelets.

The YWLP group mentoring curriculum addresses critical issues facing adolescent girls, such as relational aggression, academics, and body image (Lawrence, Sovik-Johnston, Roberts, & Thorndike, 2009). With permission from the author, activities from the *Learning to BREATHE* (L2B; Broderick, 2013) curriculum were adapted and integrated into the existing YWLP group mentoring curriculum. L2B was chosen because research has shown that the program is a promising approach for promoting positive youth outcomes among adolescents and college students (Metz et al., 2013). The adapted YWLP curriculum included MAPs designed to foster mindful listening, eating, and emotion regulation skills, which the mentors used to teach

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mindfulness strategies to their mentees and practice mindfulness as a group over the course of the year (Lawrence, Foukal, Trevett-Smith, & Peifer, 2015; Table 1). In total, MAPs-based activities were added to twelve of the twenty weeks of structured group mentoring curriculum and accounted for approximately 10% of the total YWLP group mentoring activities in the curriculum.

### **Measures**

Each of the four cohorts of mentors completed two self-report questionnaires online: (a) a survey at the beginning of the academic year, which included demographic information and measures assessing various areas of academic achievement, mood, and psychosocial development, and (b) a survey at the end of the academic year that included these same measures as well as additional items regarding mentors' mentoring satisfaction. Since survey measures varied slightly from year to year, the specific measures completed by each cohort are described in the measures section and in Table 2. In addition, comparison between groups (mindfulness vs. comparison group) was only possible for measures that had been previously administered to at least one of the cohorts in the comparison group. As a result, certain outcome measurements of interest (i.e., perceived stress and time pressure) were not included in the present study because there were no data available from the comparison group. These two aspects of study design are discussed further in the limitations section.

In order to evaluate the association between MAPs for college student mentors and their mentoring satisfaction, empathy, and autonomy, three measures were used in the study. Satisfaction data was not available for the cohort from the 2013 academic year and autonomy data was not available for the cohorts from the 2011 and 2012 academic

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years (Table 2). However, the fact that data was missing was unrelated to the actual value of the missing data. Instead missing data resulted from earlier cohorts not being administered every survey measure completed by the cohort from the 2014 academic year. Therefore, missing data were considered to be missing at random and were handled by conducting the analyses based on available data.

*Mentor Satisfaction.* The YWLP Mentor Satisfaction Scale was used to measure the degree to which mentors felt satisfied with mentoring and the mentoring program (e.g., *As a member of YWLP, how often did you feel good about your role?* and *How often did you look forward to spending time with your mentee?*). Mentors completed this eleven-item measure in the spring, rating each item on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*almost never*) to 5 (*all the time*). Overall scores were calculated using a mean, with higher scores indicating higher mentor satisfaction. Internal consistency was found to be good ( $\alpha = .85$ ). Mentors from the 2011, 2012, and 2014 academic years completed this measure (Table 2).

*Empathy.* A modified version of the perspective-taking subscale of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1983) assessed respondents' thinking about other people, society and the world. Items included: *I strive to see issues from many points of view, I believe there are many sides to every issue and try to look at most of them, I am willing to listen to the variety of views that can emerge in talking about social issues and problems*, as well as two reverse scored items, *If I am sure about something, I don't spend too much time listening to others* and *I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the 'other person's' point of view*. Answers are scored on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*not at all like me*) to 7 (*very much like me*). Overall scores were

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calculated using the mean, with higher scores indicating higher empathy. The perspective-taking subscale traditionally includes seven items; however, only the five items listed above were included in the data collected from each of the four cohorts for the present study. This modified 5-item subscale was found to have acceptable internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from .69 to .78, consistent with alpha levels previously reported by studies using the 7-item subscale (Cronbach, 1951; Fernández, Dufey & Kramp, 2011). Mentors from all cohorts completed this measure.

*Autonomy.* The autonomy subscale of the Basic Needs Satisfaction in General Scale (BNSG-S; Johnston & Finney, 2010) is a seven-item, one-factor measure of the degree to which respondents perceive themselves to be autonomous decision-makers (e.g., *I feel like I am free to decide for myself how to live my life*). Three items are reverse-scored, including *In my daily life, I frequently have to do what I am told* and *There is not much opportunity for me to decide for myself how to do things in my life*. Answers are scored on a seven-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*not at all true*) to 7 (*very true*). Internal consistency was found to be acceptable for this measure ( $\alpha = .71$  to .74) and consistent with alpha values previously reported by Ntoumanis (2005). As this scale was not added to the larger study of YWLP until 2013 only mentors from the 2013 and 2014 academic years completed this measure (Table 2).

### **Data Analyses**

Separate chi-square tests indicated no significant relationship between group (mindfulness vs. comparison) and ethnicity (Table 3) and that distribution of ethnicities did not vary significantly across cohorts. However, an independent samples t-test revealed a significant difference in the year in college (Table 3), with college women in

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the mindfulness group entering an earlier year of college compared to comparisons. Additionally, a chi-square test revealed that the distribution of year in college varied significantly across cohorts. In order to control for possible variance due to the uneven distribution of this variable, year in college was included as a covariate in all comparison models.

To answer the first research question—whether the addition of a MAPs component to college student mentor training is associated with mentors' mentoring satisfaction—a one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted to compare the mean mentor satisfaction between the two groups, controlling for year in college. For this analysis, the independent variable was MAPs participation, the dependent variable was mentor satisfaction, and the covariate was year in college. In order to gain a better understanding of the association between mindfulness training and mentor satisfaction among college students, post hoc analyses were conducted. These analyses examined the association between MAPs training and responses at the item-level for mentor satisfaction, controlling for year in college. Separate one-way analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) were conducted with participation in mindfulness training as the independent variable and each item from the mentor satisfaction scale as the dependent variable, and with year in college as a covariate.

To answer the second and third research questions—is incorporating a MAPs component in mentor training associated with increased mentor empathy or decreased mentor autonomy—separate repeated measures general linear models were conducted, controlling for year in college, to determine whether participation in mindfulness training was associated with a change over time in mentors' empathy and autonomy scores. Post

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hoc analyses were also conducted to examine how training in MAPs was associated with item-level changes in empathy and autonomy scores over time; separate repeated measures general linear models were conducted for each of the items on the two scales, controlling for year in college.

### Results

Demographics of the sample are shown by group (mindfulness vs. comparison) in Table 3 and by cohort in Table 4; means and standard deviations by group and item are presented in Table 5 for mentoring satisfaction and Table 6 for cognitive empathy and autonomy. Results of the one-way ANCOVA revealed that relative to the comparison group, mentors who received mindfulness training reported significantly higher mentor satisfaction  $F(1, 185 = 5.57, p < .05, R^2 = .030)$ , although the effect size is considered small (Cohen, 1988). Participation in mindfulness training explained 3.0% of variance in mentoring satisfaction. Results of post-hoc analyses revealed that five out of eleven items were significantly different between the two groups. Relative to the comparison group, mentors who participated in mindfulness training reported significantly higher satisfaction on the following items: *As a member of YWLP, how often did you... feel good about your role*  $F(1, 184 = 4.84, p < .05, r = .03)$ ; *...look forward to your group*  $F(1, 185 = 10.57, p < .01, r = .06)$ ; *...feel like a leader*  $F(1, 185 = 4.07, p < .05, r = .03)$ ; *...look forward to spending time with your mentee*  $F(1, 174 = 4.09, p < .05, r = .02)$ ; and *...feel your mentee looked forward to spending time with you*  $F(1, 176 = 3.81, p = .05, r = .02)$ . The strength of relationship between mindfulness participation and satisfaction reported on these five items, when controlling for year in college, ranged from  $r = .02$  to  $.06$ , which are considered to be small effect sizes (Cohen, 1988). Participation in mindfulness

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training was not associated with mentors' responses to the items ...*share your ideas and thoughts in meetings* ( $r = .00, p = .85$ ), ...*think the group seemed really interested in you and the things you were thinking about* ( $r = .002, p = .56$ ), ...*think the group was making fun of you or disrespecting what you said* ( $r = .002, p = .50$ ), ...*feel supported by others in YWLP* ( $r = .008, p = .22$ ), or ...*feel close to other YWLP members* ( $r = .002, p = .57$ ).

Significant effects were also observed regarding the second and third research questions investigating changes in empathy and autonomy. Results of the first repeated measures analyses revealed a significant effect of MAPs participation on change in empathy over time  $F(1, 227 = 6.92, p < .01)$ . Mentors who participated in training with mindfulness showed an increase in cognitive empathy over the course of the year, while the comparison group showed a decrease in cognitive empathy. The effect size for the relationship between mindfulness participation and empathy was  $\eta^2 = .03$ , which is considered to be small (Cohen, 1988). There was also a significant effect of mindfulness training on change in autonomy over time  $F(1, 98 = 108.217, p < .01)$ . The mindfulness group showed a decrease in autonomous decision-making over the course of the year, while the comparison group showed an increase in autonomous decision-making. The effect size for the relationship between mindfulness participation and autonomy was  $\eta^2 = .53$ , which is considered to be large (Cohen, 1988).

Regarding post-hoc analyses on the empathy scale, mentors who participated in mindfulness training reported a significantly greater increase in their responses to *I strive to see things from many points of view*  $F(1, 227 = 25.34, p < .00, \eta^2 = .10)$ , *I believe there are many different sides to every issue and try to look at most of them*  $F(1, 227 = 27.26, p < .00, \eta^2 = .11)$ , and *I am willing to listen to the variety of views that can emerge in*

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*talking about social issues and problems*  $F(1, 223 = 21.29, p < .00, \eta^2 = .09)$ . Effect sizes ranged from .09 to .11, which are considered to be small (Cohen, 1988). Regarding autonomy items, mentors who participated in mindfulness training reported a significantly greater decrease in their responses to *I feel like I am free to decide for myself how to live my life*  $F(1, 98 = 87.39, p < .00, \eta^2 = .47)$ , *I generally feel free to express my ideas and opinions*  $F(1, 98 = 98.78, p < .00, \eta^2 = .51)$ , *People I interact with on a daily basis tend to take my feelings into consideration*  $F(1, 98 = 157.22, p < .00, \eta^2 = .62)$ , and *I feel like I can pretty much be myself in my daily situations*  $F(1, 98 = 70.51, p < .00, \eta^2 = .42)$ . Effect sizes ranged from .42 to .62, which are considered to be large (Cohen, 1988).

### Discussion

As the youth mentoring field continues to mature, increased consideration should be given to adapting mentor training to more specifically address the needs of different populations of mentors as well as different populations of mentees (Evans, 2005; Weiler et al., 2014a). College student mentors have unique scheduling, developmental and academic challenges that, if not addressed, might interfere with their effectiveness as youth mentors. Results from the current study suggest that the addition of mindfulness training may have helped this population of mentors feel more satisfied with their mentoring, empathic to differing views, and collaborative in their decision-making.

Results from the present study suggest that specific aspects of mentor satisfaction for college students, such as looking forward to group and spending time with the mentee, feeling good about one's role, feeling like a leader, and perceiving the mentee as looking forward to time together, were significantly associated with participation in MAPs. At the same time, other aspects of mentor satisfaction for college students,

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specifically those items related to group dynamics, did not appear to change with the addition of the MAPs component. How mindfulness may or may not influence each of these aspects of mentor satisfaction and implications for mentoring programs using college student mentors are discussed in the following section.

College student mentors who participated in mindfulness training in this study reported significantly higher rates of looking forward to their group. This item had the strongest association between MAPs participation and satisfaction. It could also be that college student mentors who participated in MAPs were less likely to spend time worrying about their weekly group mentoring meeting and more able to just be present during them. The college students who were introduced to MAPs may have also been less likely to experience demanding situations as threatening, such as mentoring challenges within the group or with their mentee, and more likely to cope in active, adaptive ways (Weinstein, Brown, & Ryan, 2009). Support for this interpretation comes from neuroimaging research, which has shown that dispositional mindfulness is associated with structural differences in the brain that suggest lower threat-based appraisal (Way, Creswell, Eisenberger, & Lieberman, 2010). As a result, college student mentors may have experienced greater levels of positive anticipation and warm feelings about upcoming group meetings, despite the inevitable difficulties that arise in mentoring (Spencer, 2007).

College student mentors who participated in MAPs training also reported significantly higher ratings of feeling good about their role as a mentor and feeling like a leader. These findings suggest that these college students were able to develop a more affirmative view of themselves as mentors than college student mentors without

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mindfulness training. MAPs promote the adoption of a nonjudging attitude, which may have helped the college students become less evaluative and critical of their performance as a mentor. MAPs minimize the use of labels such as *good* or *bad* and encourage taking multiple perspectives. Perhaps they felt less pressure or anxiety about responding in the *right* or *wrong* way during different conversations or expecting the relationship to be a particular way. Conversely, they may have viewed relationship challenges as a leadership opportunity to practice the mindfulness-based stress management techniques they learned (e.g., taking three deep breaths; Haddock et al., 2013). Further research is needed in order to better understand the specific ways in which mindfulness training is helpful to college students in the process of mentoring youth.

Regarding the mentoring relationship, training in MAPs was significantly associated with how much college students looked forward to spending time with their mentee as well as their perception of how much their mentee looked forward to spending time with them. One possible explanation for this result is that mindfulness helped this population of mentors be less judgmental of their mentee. Instead of focusing on trying to change their mentee, these mentors may have assumed a more accepting stance and been more likely to engage with their mentees' existing interests. Again, future research should examine if, in fact, mindfulness training for college student mentors is associated with their mentee's being more likely to look forward to spending time with them as well.

There were no significant differences between groups in how often mentors reportedly shared their ideas and thoughts during group meetings, felt that group members respected and were interested in their ideas, or felt close to or supported by others in YWLP, the mentoring program in which both the intervention and comparison

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group participated. Recent studies have linked peer support and the utilization of mentor families to satisfaction among college student mentors (McGill et al., 2014; Weiler, Zimmerman, Haddock, & Krafchick, 2014) and both of these components are built into the structure of YWLP. Therefore, it is not surprising that mentors from both conditions reported high satisfaction on these items. The consistency in scores across groups on these particular items suggests that feeling respected by and close to others in one's mentoring group is an established norm for college mentors in YWLP and YWLP's combined group and one-on-one mentoring format may be a useful strategy for other programs using college students as mentors.

Findings from the present study suggest that the addition of a MAPs component to college student mentor training is associated with increased mentor empathy. College student mentors who participated in mindfulness training reported a greater increase in their ability to take the perspectives of others, especially to *strive to see things from many points of view* and *believe there are many sides to every issue and try to look at most of them*. This finding is consistent with reports that engagement with MAPs is associated with improvements in communication, including increased empathy and perspective-taking ability (Bihari & Mullan, 2014; Birnie, Speca, & Carlson, 2010; Shapiro et al., 2007). Results are also consistent with reports from couples and family therapy research that MBIs may have the potential to improve empathy, communication, emotional regulation, and relationship well being (Gambrel & Keeling, 2010). Furthermore, recent neuroimaging research indicates that MBIs promote structural and functional changes in neural circuits that enhance or inhibit an individual's capacity for empathy (Atkinson, 2013), although the level of mindfulness training mentors received in this study is far less

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than participants received in these studies. MAPs may support the development of interpersonal attunement, or one's ability to focus on another's internal state with kindness and compassion (Siegel, 2015). College student mentors who learned mindfulness practices may have been more likely to slow down and focus more closely on their mentee's internal state, thus becoming more acutely attuned to the mentee's emotions and needs. In doing so, these college student mentors may be moving more closely toward what Pryce (2012) has described as a "highly attuned mentor," which is associated with mentee satisfaction (p. 293). Highly attuned mentors consistently attend to the mentee, utilize the mentee's verbal and nonverbal communication and are able to more adeptly pick up on subtle preferences or concerns, which other mentors might glance over.

Finally, college students' participation in mentor training with the MAPs component was associated with a shift in their decision-making style. College student mentors who received mindfulness training responded to autonomy items in a pattern that suggested a shift away from autonomous decision-making and toward a more horizontal, collaborative process. For example, mentors who participated in mindfulness training showed a significant decrease in their responses to the items, *I feel like I am free to decide for myself how to live my life* and *I feel like I can pretty much be myself in my daily situations*. Although the desirability of this outcome might not be readily apparent at first glance, it may represent an increased inclination among college student mentors to invite input from their mentees before making a decision. Similarly, this change could suggest an enhanced tendency to pause and reflect before making a decision. It may be that mindfulness training encouraged college student mentors to reflect more deeply on

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how their actions might impact their mentee, instead of just focusing on their own needs and desires. This finding has promise for mentoring programs that use college students as mentors, given that high mentor autonomy among the college population is associated with negative mentee outcomes (Leyton-Armakan et al., 2012). Again, further qualitative research is needed to determine what specifically college students found useful about mindfulness in relation to mentoring youth.

Mentoring programs may benefit from incorporating a MAPs component as a strategy to support the specific strengths and needs of college student mentors. College student mentors are likely to encounter stressful situations when working with youth, such as natural dips in the mentoring relationship (Deutsch, Futch, Varga, & Fox, 2015; Haddock et al., 2013) and adolescent impulsivity (Larson, Rickman, Gibbons, & Walker, 2009; Strauch, 2003). Because mentoring dilemmas are often novel and unstructured, mentor training that utilizes a rule-based, *if \_\_, then \_\_* format may not provide mentors with the necessary ability to think flexibly when faced with a challenging situation. The addition of mindfulness training may help college mentors to pause and reflect on the multiple perspectives (i.e., mentor's, mentee's, parent's, program staff's) that may be present when facing a particular issue. This technique may help lessen college student mentors' evaluative style of thinking and foster more flexible problem solving. Mentoring programs can also teach mentors simple MAPs such as progressive muscle relaxation to facilitate their own stress relief during more difficult periods of academic stress at college.

Mentoring programs can introduce the inherent values associated with MAPs such as nonjudging, acceptance, and self-compassion as a way of helping college student

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mentors relieve some of the stress they put on themselves to be a *perfect* mentor or to respond to a difficult situation in the *perfect* way. These values can also be taught within the context of the mentoring relationship to help mentors accept their mentees exactly as they are. Programs can remind mentors that their job is to accept and be present with their mentee, not to change or *fix* their mentee (Spencer, 2007). This may help reduce the undue pressure that college student mentors may put on themselves to be A+ mentors. By teaching acceptance and nonjudgment, programs can help college students experience greater satisfaction with their performance as a mentor.

Since autonomous decision-making is developmentally appropriate for college students, mentoring programs face the challenge of designing mentor training that redirects college students' propensity toward autonomy in a developmentally supportive way (Foukal et al., 2016). This can be tricky, given that college students can be hesitant to let go of their recently gained autonomy. However, results from the present study suggest that college student mentors are receptive and responsive to the need for collaborative problem solving in the mentoring relationship when this is taught within the context of mindfulness. Programs can invite college student mentors to practice applying mindfulness as a mechanism for being psychologically present and collaborative with their mentee, rather than making decisions independently without consulting their mentee. As was found with mindfulness training for mentees (Johansen, 2014), this type of training for college student mentors may actually increase their ability to self-regulate, but in collaboration with their mentee and not in isolation.

### **Limitations**

Given the exploratory nature of the present study, several limitations exist related to study design; nevertheless, these offer possible directions for future research. First, a major limitation of the present study is that it did not involve the randomization of participants. The comparison group included mentors from three previous cohorts and was much larger than the MAPs group. Although data was collected over four years, the core curriculum for group mentoring and mentor training was consistent across all four cohorts, except for the addition of MAPs training, and key program staff, including the director, assistant director, and academic course instructor, did not change. While the increase in mentor satisfaction in the MAPs cohort could have conceivably come from increased program staff experience, that is unlikely given that the director and academic course instructor has over eighteen years of experience running YWLP, and mean program satisfaction varied between comparison group cohorts but did not show any evidence of increasing year to year.

Related, in order to compare the outcomes of mentors who participated in mindfulness training with those who did not, consistent measurements were needed from both the mindfulness and comparison groups. However, not all cohorts completed all the study measures. Two cohorts from the comparison group (2011 and 2012) did not complete the autonomy scale and the 2013 cohort did not complete the mentor satisfaction scale (Table 2). Although this is a limitation, it did allow for more equal *n*'s between the mindfulness and comparison groups on all measures. Furthermore, between-group differences could only be examined for measures that had been previously administered to at least one of the cohorts included in the comparison group. Given that

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there were no data available regarding perceived stress and time pressure among the comparison group, these outcome measurements were not included in the present study. Future studies might include these and other related measures to determine their association with the addition of MAPs components.

A final major limitation is that there were no data reported on processes related to implementation. Consequently, how mentors received and used the different added MAPs components remains largely unexamined. In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the results of the present study, future research might utilize qualitative data, such as focus groups, interviews, or written reflections, to examine mentors' experiences and application of MAPs. Qualitative methods may also help separate the effects of the mentor training model from those of the group mentoring curriculum additions, as the present study is not able to do this. Similarly, given that training in mindfulness cannot be equated with the adoption of mindfulness practices, future qualitative research might investigate whether mentors experienced benefits simply from being exposed to MAPs or if subsequent practice of MAPs was necessary for mentors to report meaningful outcomes.

The application of mindfulness in the mentoring relationship is a nascent field of literature (Johansen, 2014) and there are many possible directions for future research in this area. Further qualitative research is needed that more closely examines how college student mentors apply these mindfulness skills, both within the context of their mentoring relationship as well as their everyday lives. This will provide greater understanding of the specific pathways through which mentor training including MAPs is associated with mentor satisfaction. Identifying the specific scheduling, developmental, and academic

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challenges with which college student mentors find MAPs most useful will provide mentoring programs with valuable knowledge about which aspects of mindfulness training to emphasize for this population of mentors.

### **Compliance with Ethical Standards**

*Funding.* Funding for this work was provided by grants from the University of Virginia Contemplative Sciences Center and the Alcoa Foundation.

*Ethical approval.* All procedures performed in this study were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

*Informed consent.* Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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Table 1

*Overview of MAPs Training and Additions to Group Mentoring Curriculum*

Component of Intervention	Activities Added	Duration (min)
Mentor Training Session 1	Introduction to mindfulness Breath-awareness practice Overview of research findings	60
Mentor Training Session 2	Mindfulness for adolescents MAPs activities for youth Emotion regulation outcomes Being mindful of mentoring expectations	60
Mentor Training Session 3	Snow globe demonstration Emotions and the brain Wheel of awareness Interpersonal mindfulness Passing the bell activity Mindful listening	60
Group Curriculum Session 1	Introduction to mindfulness Mindful listening Mindful problem-solving	20
Group Curriculum Session 2	Mindful appreciation Deep breathing for relaxation	20
Group Curriculum Session 3	Passing the bell activity Paying attention to present moment	20
Group Curriculum Session 4	Identifying emotions Being present with unpleasant feelings	20
Group Curriculum Session 5	Progressive muscle relaxation Noticing negative thoughts	20
Group Curriculum Session 6	Mindfulness check-in in pairs	15
Group Curriculum Session 7	Mindful attention	20
Group Curriculum Session 8	Mindful eating	20
Group Curriculum Session 9	Connecting thoughts, feelings, behaviors	20
Group Curriculum Session 10	Mindful noticing	20
Group Curriculum Session 11	Passing the bell activity Paying attention to present moment	15
Group Curriculum Session 12	Deep breathing for relaxation	5

*Note.* MAPs were incorporated via two different components: specific mentor-only training sessions and the YWLP group mentoring curriculum for weekly after-school meetings in groups comprised of six to eight mentor/mentee pairs.

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Table 2

*Measures Completed by Cohort*

	<u>Comparison</u>			<u>Mindfulness</u>
	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
Mentoring Satisfaction Scale	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Cognitive Empathy Scale	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Autonomy Scale	No	No	Yes	Yes

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Table 3

*Demographics by Group*

	<u>Mindfulness</u>	<u>Comparison</u>
<u>Ethnicity<sup>a</sup></u>		
White/Caucasian	36 (64.3%)	123 (55.6%)
Black/African-American	5 ( 8.9%)	47 (21.3%)
Asian/Pacific Islander	7 (12.5%)	21 ( 9.5%)
Mixed Race	5 ( 8.9%)	14 ( 6.3%)
Hispanic	2 ( 3.6%)	10 ( 4.5%)
Other	1 ( 1.8%)	5 ( 2.2%)
Native American	0 ( 0.0%)	1 ( 0.5%)
<u>Year in college<sup>b</sup></u>		
1 <sup>st</sup> year	5 ( 8.9%)	2 ( 1.0%)
2 <sup>nd</sup> year	28 (50.0%)	97 (43.5%)
3 <sup>rd</sup> year	16 (28.6%)	78 (35.0%)
4 <sup>th</sup> year	7 (12.5%)	46 (20.5%)

*Notes.* <sup>a</sup>Distribution of ethnic categories did not vary significantly between groups,  $X^2(6, N = 277) = 5.43, p = 0.49$ . <sup>b</sup>There was a significant difference in year in college for the mindfulness ( $M = 2.45, SD = 0.83$ ) and comparison ( $M = 2.76, SD = 0.80$ ) groups;  $t(277) = 2.59, p < 0.01$ .

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Table 4

*Demographics by Cohort*

	<u>2011-2012</u>	<u>2012-2013</u>	<u>2013-2014</u>	<u>2014-2015</u>
<i>Ethnicity<sup>a</sup></i>				
White/Caucasian	45 (52.9%)	38 (52.1%)	40 (61.5%)	36 (61.0%)
Black/African-American	24 (28.2%)	15 (20.5%)	8 (12.3%)	5 ( 8.5%)
Asian/Pacific Islander	6 ( 7.1%)	6 ( 8.2%)	9 (13.8%)	7 (11.9%)
Mixed Race	4 ( 4.7%)	5 ( 6.8%)	5 ( 7.7%)	5 ( 8.5%)
Hispanic	3 ( 3.5%)	4 ( 5.5%)	3 (4.6%)	2 ( 3.4%)
Other	1 ( 1.2%)	4 ( 5.5%)	0 ( 0.0%)	1 ( 1.7%)
Native American	1( 1.2%)	0 ( 0.0%)	0 ( 0.0%)	0 ( 0.0%)
<i>Year in college<sup>b</sup></i>				
1 <sup>st</sup> year	0 ( 0.0%)	0 ( 0.0%)	2 ( 3.1%)	5 ( 8.5%)
2 <sup>nd</sup> year	35 (41.2%)	35 (47.9%)	27 (41.5%)	28 (47.5%)
3 <sup>rd</sup> year	32 (37.6%)	31 (42.5%)	15 (23.1%)	16 (27.1%)
4 <sup>th</sup> year	18 (21.2%)	7 ( 9.6%)	21 (32.3%)	7 (11.9%)

*Notes.* <sup>a</sup>Distribution of ethnic categories did not vary significantly across cohorts,  $X^2$  (18, N = 277) = 21.44,  $p = 0.26$ . <sup>b</sup>Distribution of year in college varied significantly across cohorts,  $X^2$  (12, N = 279) = 31.88,  $p < 0.01$ .

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Table 5

*Mentoring Satisfaction Means by Group and Item*

	<u>Comparison</u>		<u>Mindfulness</u>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Mentoring Satisfaction*	3.89	.67	4.13	.46
As a member of the YWLP community, how often did you:				
...feel good about your role*	3.79	.89	4.08	.70
...look forward to your YWLP group**	3.65	1.02	4.12	.80
...feel like a leader*	3.70	.96	4.04	.83
...think the group seemed really interested in you and the things you were thinking about	3.81	1.02	3.90	.95
...share your ideas and thoughts in meetings	4.29	.78	4.32	.65
...think the group was making fun of or disrespecting what you said <sup>a</sup>	4.64	.93	4.60	.93
...feel close to other YWLP members	4.17	.94	4.14	.81
...feel supported by others in YWLP	4.24	.98	4.46	.68
...look forward to spending time with your little sister*	3.75	1.05	4.00	.86
...feel you made a difference for your little sister	3.38	1.22	3.64	.96
...feel your little sis looked forward to spending time with you*	3.69	1.22	4.07	.90

*Notes.* <sup>a</sup> denotes reverse-scored items.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$

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Table 6

*Cognitive Empathy and Autonomy Means by Group and Item*

		<u>Comparison</u>		<u>Mindfulness</u>	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Cognitive Empathy**	Pre	5.51	.91	5.78	.69
	Post	5.42	.95	5.82	.79
I strive to see issues from many points of view.**	Pre	5.74	1.17	6.57	.78
	Post	5.60	1.21	6.39	1.00
If I am sure about something, I don't waste too much time listening to other people's arguments. <sup>a</sup>	Pre	5.02	1.47	4.47	1.57
	Post	5.02	1.45	4.98	1.42
I believe there are many sides to every issue and try to look at most of them.***	Pre	5.68	1.21	6.39	.78
	Post	5.53	1.13	6.41	.92
I am willing to listen to the variety of views that can emerge in talking about social issues and problems.***	Pre	5.86	1.08	6.53	.88
	Post	5.63	1.14	6.45	1.01
I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the "other person's" point of view. <sup>a</sup>	Pre	5.26	1.37	4.92	1.48
	Post	5.27	1.29	4.88	1.42
		<u>Comparison</u>		<u>Mindfulness</u>	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Autonomy***	Pre	4.80	.68	3.87	.54
	Post	4.93	.68	3.83	.46
I feel like I am free to decide for myself how to live my life.***	Pre	5.86	1.29	4.22	.71
	Post	5.94	1.08	4.16	.68
I feel pressured in my life. <sup>a**</sup>	Pre	3.38	1.96	2.96	1.05
	Post	3.52	2.18	2.92	.97
I generally feel free to express my ideas and opinions.***	Pre	5.60	.99	4.16	.74
	Post	5.82	1.01	4.14	.64
In my daily life, I frequently have to do what I am told. <sup>a</sup>	Pre	3.32	1.71	3.06	.98
	Post	3.52	1.72	3.32	.91
People I interact with on a daily basis tend to take my feelings into consideration.***	Pre	5.78	.91	4.28	.70
	Post	5.82	.85	4.00	.73
I feel like I can pretty much be myself in my daily situations.***	Pre	5.72	1.20	4.20	.83
	Post	5.80	1.29	4.20	.76
There is not much opportunity for me to decide for myself how to do things in my life. <sup>a</sup>	Pre	3.94	1.10	4.20	.88
	Post	4.04	1.28	4.06	.84

Notes. <sup>a</sup> denotes reverse-scored items.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$

College Women Mentors' Experience and Application  
of Mindful Awareness Practices Training

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### Abstract

Preliminary evidence suggests that training mentors in Mindful Awareness Practices (MAPs) is associated with increased mentor satisfaction, empathy, and more collaborative decision-making among college women mentors (Foukal, Lawrence, & Jennings, under review). This study explored: (a) how college women mentors describe their experiences and application of MAPs in the context of their mentoring relationship with an adolescent girl and (b) whether reflections of mentors with high dispositional mindfulness differ from those of mentors with low dispositional mindfulness. Data consisted of 30 reflections written at about one month intervals (T1, T2, T3) over the course of a semester by 10 college women mentors who received MAPs training and reported either high or low post-program dispositional mindfulness. Thematic analysis suggested five themes related to mentors' discussion of mindfulness: 1) instances when they "should have" practiced mindfulness; 2) planning to practice mindfulness; 3) practicing mindfulness; 4) teaching their mentee mindfulness; and 5) their mentee practicing mindfulness. An additional theme of self-judgment was observed among reflections of low mindfulness mentors; however some cited their knowledge of developmental issues as helpful in reducing this. Ad hoc analyses revealed that most high mindfulness mentors described initiating difficult conversations with their mentees at T3, while low mindfulness mentors described avoiding them. Results of this exploratory study demonstrate that both MAPs training and instruction on developmental issues may help college women mentors engage more fully with their adolescent mentees.

*Keywords:* College student mentors, mindfulness, youth mentoring

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There is growing interest among the college student population in youth mentoring, with mentoring programs seeing an increase in the number of college students who sign up to be youth mentors (Dote, Cramer, Dietz, & Grimm, 2006; Wasburn-Moses, Fry, & Sanders, 2014). This increase in available mentors is good news for mentoring programs since there is a nationwide shortage of adult mentors (Manchir, 2011, O'Connor, 2006). However, research suggests that college student mentors may face programmatic, relational, and individual issues that are unique for their age group (McGill, Adler-Baeder, Sollie, & Kerpelman, 2014). Indeed, youth mentoring is not always easy and mentors, including college students, can enter the relationship with unrealistic expectations for their mentoring experience (Spencer, 2007).

Unexpected dilemmas often arise when working with youth, such as difficult conversations concerning sensitive subjects (Larson, Rickman, Gibbons, & Walker, 2009) and the stressors of youth mentoring may cause some mentors to feel unprepared or overwhelmed (Haddock et al., 2013; McGill et al., 2014). For example, discussions about vulnerable topics can be challenging for mentors to navigate (Allen & Eby, 2003). As a function of their age, college students are likely to have less life experience working with youth than older adult mentors and may need specific training in order to successfully navigate the challenges inherent in developing a mentoring relationship with youth.

One contributing factor to the development of a successful mentoring relationship is the mentor's ability to refrain from making harsh judgments (Hendry, Roberts, Glendinning, & Coleman, 1992). Grossman and Johnson (1998) have reported benefits associated with mentors taking a less judgmental stance with their mentee. Equally

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important is the mentor's ability to assume a nonjudgmental stance toward herself, since mentor self-efficacy predicts more positive experiences in the mentoring relationship (Parra, DuBois, Neville, Pugh-Lilly, & Povinelli, 2002). By providing consistently warm and accepting interactions, mentors can challenge negative views that youth may hold of themselves or of relationships with adults (Rhodes, Spencer, Keller, Liang, & Noam, 2006). Having a nonjudgmental mentor can also help youth feel more comfortable opening up in the mentoring relationship, ultimately deepening the bond between the pair (Rhodes, 2002).

### **Mindful Awareness Practices (MAPs)**

Over the past two decades mindful awareness practices (MAPs) have become increasingly popular as an approach to reducing stress and improving well-being. Instrumental to the development of MAPs is the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn (1982) and the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program. Mindfulness is defined as a state of awareness that emerges through focusing attention in the present with a curious and nonjudgmental attitude (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). MAPs involve the practice of mindfulness through participation in a particular activity such as yoga, meditation or mindful listening. MAPs are thought to enhance the individual trait of dispositional mindfulness or one's tendency to be mindful while going about daily activities such as washing dishes or commuting to work (Brown & Ryan, 2004). The present study focuses on the potential benefits of the practice of mindfulness for relationship development, specifically examining the association between adding MAPs to college women mentor training and their development of a relationship with their mentee.

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MAPs are well documented throughout the literature as an effective stress reduction strategy (Chiesa & Serretti, 2009). Among college students, MAPs are associated with numerous mental and physical health benefits, including increased relaxation and decreased negative affect (Vinci et al., 2014), increased forgiveness and decreased rumination (Oman, Shapiro, Thoresen, Plante, & Flinders, 2008), decreased perceived stress and sleep problems and increased self-compassion (Greeson, Juberg, Maytan, James, & Rogers, 2014), and healthier eating habits (Bahl, Milne, Ross, & Kwong Chan, 2013). These positive outcomes can meet a variety of needs for students during college and findings from recent studies have begun to recommend MAPs for specific subgroups of college students, including collegiate athletes (Baltzell, Caraballo, Chipman, & Hayden, 2014), at-risk college student drinkers (Bodenlos, Noonan, & Wells, 2013), and students with executive functioning deficits (McCloskey, 2015). MAPs have also been found helpful for individuals in helping roles, such as counseling students (Christopher, Christopher, Dunnagan, & Schure, 2006; Schure, Christopher, & Christopher, 2008), nursing students (van der Riet, Rossiter, Kirby, Dluzewska, & Harmon, 2015), medical students (Greeson, Toohey, & Pearce, 2015), and psychologists-in-training (Moore, 2008). Indeed, many of these students report positive physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and interpersonal changes and improved counseling skills after learning self-care and MAPs (Newsome, Christopher, Dahlen, & Christopher, 2006). Given the potential overlap in some of the role demands for college students mentoring at-risk youth and helping roles, it is worthwhile to consider how training in MAPs may lead to similar outcomes among college women youth mentors.

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Indeed, preliminary evidence supports the addition of training in MAPs for college women mentors. Results from a pilot study demonstrate that participation in MAPs training is associated with enhanced outcomes for college women involved in youth mentoring (Foukal, Lawrence, & Jennings, under review). Specifically, college women mentors who received instruction in basic MAPs (i.e., breath awareness, body scan, mindful listening) and nonjudgmental awareness as part of 1) mentor training and 2) opportunities to practice MAPs with their mentee in a group mentoring curriculum reported significantly higher mentor satisfaction compared to mentors who received the same training and group curriculum but without a mindfulness component (Foukal et al., under review). Furthermore, mentors who learned MAPs reported significantly greater increases in empathy and decreases in autonomous decision-making, which suggests that MAPs may support college women mentors in developing a more horizontal mentoring relationship with the youth they are mentoring. However, this study's quantitative design limits our understanding of the processes by which these changes occur. Therefore, future qualitative research that explores mentors' experience with MAPs is needed in order to develop a more comprehensive theoretical model of the contributions MAPs make to supporting college women mentoring youth.

### **Theoretical Models of Mindfulness Training**

Brown, Ryan, and Creswell (2007) discuss theoretical foundations for mindfulness and outline key processes that may explain the positive outcomes associated with mindfulness training. One important process identified is the development of insight that one's perceptions do not necessarily reflect reality and do not need to be acted on. Changes associated with mindfulness training may stem from learning a decentered

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perspective that thoughts are *just* thoughts and feelings are *just* feelings not necessarily a reflection of reality (Hayes, 2004). Another key process is the adoption of openness, rather than avoidance, to unpleasant or challenging events (Bishop et al., 2004).

Mindfulness training encourages staying present with unpleasant sensations or feelings, instead of avoiding them or actively pushing them away (Kabat-Zinn & Hanh, 2009), which may lead to reduced emotional reactivity and increased tolerance for unpleasant experiences. Acceptance of the way things are, or nonattachment, is a third process hypothesized to contribute to the positive changes associated with mindfulness training (Coffey, Hartman, & Fredrickson, 2010). This mechanism eases the compulsion to identify things as *good* or *bad* and helps reduce the desire to change things (Kabat-Zinn & Hanh, 2009). Finally, the techniques taught in mindfulness training are thought to contribute to more effective processing of stress and enhanced mind-body functioning (Brown et al., 2007). Ultimately, the overarching theme of these processes is a disengagement from self-concern that, in turn, facilitates greater engagement with the experience itself (Brown et al., 2007).

An increasing number of studies have demonstrated how MAPs training for teachers can enhance educational outcomes (Roeser, Skinner, Beers, & Jennings, 2012) and several theoretical models have emerged related to these outcomes. For example, Jennings and Greenberg (2009) proposed the prosocial classroom model, which posits that high levels of social and emotional competence help improve teachers' well-being and promote resilience in responding to the multiple factors that impact their perceptions of stress. Roeser and colleagues (2012) theorized that MAPs training enables teachers to establish and maintain more supportive relationships with students due to the increased

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health, well-being, and professional engagement the experience. Given that teachers face a variety of challenges similar to those experienced by mentors, these models offer a pertinent framework and helpful reference point for researchers beginning to explore and conceptualize MAPs training within the context of youth mentoring.

Findings from the literature on mindful parenting may also shed light on the mechanisms of MAPs within the context of an adult-youth relationship (Coatsworth et al., 2014; Coatsworth, Duncan, Greenberg, & Nix, 2010). Duncan, Coatsworth, and Greenberg (2009a) offer a model for mindful parenting based on the practices of listening with full attention, nonjudgmental acceptance, emotional awareness, self-regulation, and compassion for self and child. College women mentors in the current study who received training in MAPs were introduced to very similar skills. Therefore, this model may offer a preliminary theoretical framework for the mechanisms through which changes occur among college women mentors who receive training in MAPs. Mindful parenting researchers hypothesize that MAPs result in positive outcomes, in part, by reducing parental stress and resulting parental reactivity, improving parental executive functioning in impulsive parents, and increasing self-nourishing attention (Bögels, Lehtonen, & Restifo, 2010). In addition, outcomes such as increased empathy have been associated with MAPs training in samples of college women mentors (Foukal et al., under review) as well as parents (Bailie, Kuyken, & Sonnenberg, 2012). Nevertheless, the relationship dynamics between a parent and child are undoubtedly different from that of a mentor and mentee. Thus, it is unclear how the hypothesized processes of mindful parenting may translate to youth mentoring by college women trained in MAPs. Research is needed to

determine how college women mentors experience and apply MAPs during the process of developing a mentoring relationship with youth.

### **Qualitative Investigation of MAPs**

The unique flexible nature of qualitative research enables this approach to capture the complexities of phenomena that quantitative research is unable to fully examine (Marshall & Rossman, 2014) and is particularly well-suited for understanding individuals' experience with MAPs. Indeed, findings from qualitative studies of mindfulness in non-college samples convey a certain degree of person-centered insights that go beyond standard statistical results. These emerging themes have included individuals' experiences of frustration and the challenges of practicing mindfulness (Bermudez et al., 2014; Irving et al., 2014; van der Riet et al., 2015), as well as outcomes, including enhanced self-care, greater self-compassion, and recognition of own needs (Bailie et al., 2012; Christopher et al., 2006; Greeson et al., 2015; Morgan, Simpson, & Smith, 2015). All in all, the multi-faceted nature of these findings demonstrates both the level of detail and variety that can be captured by using qualitative methodology in mindfulness research.

Two recent articles have attempted to synthesize the literature of qualitative studies of MAPs. Morgan and colleagues (2015) conducted a review of ten qualitative studies on the experiences of healthcare workers who participated in mindfulness training. Two main emerging themes were identified across these studies: shifting one's focus from caring for others to self-care and enhanced presence when relating to others. Cairns and Murray (2015) conducted a meta-synthesis of seven qualitative studies of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) and identified several major themes,

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including taking control through understanding, awareness and acceptance, feelings towards the self, and the role of expectations. Taken together, these two meta-syntheses document the growing interest in qualitative analysis among those in the field of mindfulness research. At the same time, they highlight the need for research that looks beyond these specific populations and extends to new samples, such as college students in helping roles.

Two qualitative studies of mindfulness training for college students have provided more detailed information about this population's experience with mindfulness training. Baltzell and colleagues (2014) used thematic analysis of transcripts from interviews with female college athletes who participated in a mindfulness meditation-for-sports program. This study reported that while college students described a sense of perceived difficulty understanding the process of meditation when they first started, they also reported an enhanced ability to accept and experience a different relationship with their emotions, both on and off the field. These findings suggest that college women mentors may experience associated benefits of MAPs, both in and outside of their mentoring relationship. In another study, Sears and colleagues conducted a content analysis of the written reports of 65 college students who practiced mindfulness meditation over the course of a semester (Sears, Kraus, Carlough & Treat, 2011). The majority of college students reported at least one cognitive, emotional or spiritual benefit. The authors noted that many of the benefits expanded beyond that which would be captured by traditional quantitative methods. Findings also included students' expression of doubts involving difficulty finding time and motivation to meditate outside of class sessions, as well as questions about the efficacy of meditation and their own self-efficacy to engage in it

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(Sears et al., 2011). While this qualitative method of analyzing college students' written reflections is used throughout the mentoring literature as well (Banks, 2010; Davidson, Jimenez, Onifade, & Hankins, 2010; Hughes, Boyd, & Dykstra 2010; Weiler, Zarich, Haddock, Krafchick, & Zimmerman, 2014), no studies to date have examined college students' perception about MAPs as part of their training to be mentors.

### **The Present Study**

The present study builds on current research on the benefits of mindfulness training for adults and addresses the dearth of research on mindfulness training for mentors. Findings from the literature demonstrate that MAPs are associated with positive outcomes among various subgroups of college students (e.g., athletes, at-risk drinkers) and individuals in helping roles. However to date no study of MAPs has investigated the experience of college students involved in the helping role of youth mentoring. Second, parents who receive training in MAPs report improved emotional reactivity and regulation, empathy and acceptance, emotional availability, and recognition of own needs (Baillie et al., 2012). Mentors who receive MAPs training may experience similar benefits, but this area of research has not yet been explored. In particular, there is a need for qualitative research that investigates the experience of college student youth mentors who receive training in MAPs and its association with their mentoring relationship and everyday life.

The present study is a thematic analysis of college women mentors' written reflections. Two specific research questions were addressed: (a) how do college women mentors describe their experience and application of MAPs in the context of their mentoring relationship with an adolescent girl and (b) are there differences between

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reflections of college women mentors who report high dispositional mindfulness after a semester of training in MAPs, compared to those who report low dispositional mindfulness. Results of this exploratory study will contribute to the literature by furthering our knowledge of how MAPs may be helpful for college women mentoring youth.

### **Methods**

#### **The Young Women Leaders Program**

The present study was conducted as part of an ongoing evaluation of the Young Women Leaders Program (YWLP); college women mentors provided informed consent prior to participation in the study. YWLP is an 8-month, school-based mentoring program for middle school girls that has trained and supported over 1,500 college women to be youth mentors since its establishment nineteen years ago (Lawrence, Levy, Martin, & Strother-Taylor, 2008). YWLP combines group with one-on-one mentoring and provides ongoing training and supervision for the college women serving as mentors. Mentors for the program are recruited from a large university in the southeast United States. The mentor application process involves watching a video about program requirements, and completing a written application and an in-person interview. Mentors are paired with a middle school girl in the fall for a year and attend weekly two-hour, after-school group mentoring meetings in groups of six to eight mentor/mentee pairs. The group curriculum addresses critical issues facing adolescent girls, such as relational aggression, academics, goal-setting, and body image (Lawrence, Foukal, Trevett-Smith, & Peifer, 2015). Each pair also meets for four hours a month in one-on-one time outside of group. Program support and training are provided to the college women mentors through a required two-

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semester academic class focused on theory and research on adolescent development and best practices in mentoring. In addition to an hour of didactics each week during the fall semester, the class includes an hour of peer supervision with the other five to seven mentors in their mentoring group each week both semesters to problem-solve relational, curricular, and logistical issues for their group and mentoring relationships.

### **Procedures**

During the 2014-2015 academic year, YWLP piloted a MAPs training program for mentors and added new mindfulness components to the group mentoring curriculum. . An overview of the added training and curriculum is available in Table 1. The overarching aim of these additions was simple, to introduce mentors to mindfulness concepts. Thus, the primary goal was *not* for mentors to establish a mindfulness practice, as this specific outcome would require greater levels of support and instruction than those added as part of this pilot intervention (Greeson et al., 2014). MAPs were introduced during a half-day mentor training retreat at the beginning of the program that all mentors attended, as well as during subsequent class assignments and meetings of the mentors' academic service learning course. In total there were three hours of formal training on mindfulness research, application, and practice. MAPs designed to foster mindful attention, listening, eating, and relaxation and emotion regulation skills were also incorporated into the YWLP group mentoring curriculum, (Lawrence et al., 2015). The mentors used the activities in the curriculum to teach mindfulness strategies to their mentees and practice mindfulness as a group over the course of the year. As part of the assignments for the academic service-learning course for YWLP, mentors wrote three reflections on their mentoring experiences over the course of the fall

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semester, approximately a month apart. (T1 = October 2014, T2 = November 2014, T3 = December 2015). The prompt to which mentors responded did not ask them to write about mindfulness or their experience with MAPs. Thus, mentors who discussed mindfulness brought it up spontaneously. At the same time, mentors who did not talk about MAPs in their reflections may still have been applying these skills; they just did not write about it. For each reflection, mentors responded to the following:

*Identify and explain a situation in YWLP in which you used or wish you had used one of the YWLP mentoring competencies (empathy/attunement, collaboration, initiative/perseverance, positive attitude). Include (a) your understanding of this competency and its relevance; (b) how your values, beliefs, strengths, and/or weaknesses may have affected this situation; (c) the perspectives of the others involved; (d) what you learned in YWLP (e.g., class, readings, retreat, or group) that informs your understanding of this situation and the need for this competency; and (e) how you would respond to a similar situation in the future.*

Each reflection was approximately 1,200 to 2,200 words in length. After the course instructor completed grading, reflections were given to the researchers. All identifying information was removed from the reflections and mentors' names were replaced with a unique and confidential identification number. Once de-identified, all reflections were uploaded and stored securely using the online qualitative research software platform, *Dedoose*.

In addition to writing reflections, all mentors completed the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS; Brown & Ryan, 2003) at the start and end of the program year. The MAAS is a 15-item self-report survey that measures dispositional mindfulness, or

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the extent to which one is generally conscious and nonjudgmental of whatever is occurring in the present moment. This measure has been validated with 14 independent samples of college student populations and factor analyses have confirmed a single factor scale structure, with internal consistency levels (Cronbach's alphas) ranging from .80 to .90 (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Mentors completed fifteen items, shown in Table 2, using a 6-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*Almost Always*) to 6 (*Almost Never*). Overall scores were calculated using the mean, with higher scores indicating higher dispositional mindfulness.

### **Sample**

Because the present study was exploratory in nature, MAAS scores provided an initial method of categorization and a way to begin examining potential differences in mentors' reflections. We used purposeful sampling of participants so that we could compare mentors with high and low dispositional mindfulness and examine whether these two groups differed in their experiences and application to MAPs. Selection criteria for the present study were based on mentors' post-program MAAS score; Mentors with the five highest and five lowest post-program MAAS scores were selected for inclusion and assigned to either the high mindfulness group or low mindfulness group. Mean ( $M$ ) MAAS scores varied greatly between groups (see Table 3). The high mindfulness group ( $M = 4.99$ ) was more than one standard deviation ( $SD$ ) above the normative mean for college students (Brown & Ryan, 2003), while the low mindfulness group ( $M = 2.96$ ) was more than one  $SD$  below the normative mean.

### **Data Analyses**

Written reflections provide a rich source of qualitative data from which emerging themes can be identified using thematic analysis (Creswell, 2007). Data analysis for the present study utilized inductive coding of new emerging themes and coding took place in two distinct stages. Open coding in the early stages of analysis, done by the first author, identified initial concepts present in the raw data. This first round of open coding was the only time during which the researcher was aware of group assignment; all subsequent coding and analysis were conducted with the researcher blinded to whether a reflection came from the low or high mindfulness group. Once open coding reached a saturation point (i.e., no new codes could be generated), the researcher went back through all of the data again to ensure that all codes were applied correctly and uniformly throughout each reflection.

After this phase of coding was complete, the researcher returned to the raw data and composed a narrative summary for each reflection that included an overview of the content, key themes, and representative quotes and passages. This process of “stepping back” allowed the researchers to study each reflection more holistically, facilitating the recognition of broader overarching concepts (Beal, 2013). These concepts, or “key themes,” were then coded during a final round of coding. In the final step of analysis, the researcher went back to the raw data again and created a shorter “executive narrative summary” for each reflection that synthesized the reflection’s key themes and basic content. These executive summaries were then placed in a table that situated each mentor’s T1, T2, and T3 summary in a single row. (See Table 7 for an example of a

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similarly formatted table.) This allowed the researcher to continue to examine individual patterns over time, as well as to compare patterns both within and between groups.

### **Trustworthiness**

Several tactics were employed to ensure trustworthiness across the study design. The first series of these strategies focused on enhancing reliability and validity of mentors' written reflections. Participation in the study was voluntary and mentors were assured that their decision would not affect their standing in YWLP. In addition, mentors were informed that all identifying information would be removed from their reflections and that names would not be attached to the data being analyzed. Since reflections were a graded assignment for an academic course, specific measures were taken to ensure trustworthiness related to this aspect of data collection. Mentors were reminded that members of the research team operated independently from program staff and would not be involved with any aspect of grading. At the same time, the instructor's grading was based entirely on written communication skills and depth of reflection, not strength of the mentoring relationship developed between the mentor and mentee or particular strategies used in the development of the relationship. This aspect of grading was included in the directions mentors received for the assignment: *We want you to be honest about your experiences as a mentor or facilitator, the challenges you are facing... Writing about a frustration with YWLP or time when you don't think you responded well is appropriate and will not impact your grade negatively.* Overall, these measures aimed to encourage authenticity and reduce desirability bias among mentors.

Additional technical procedures were used during the coding stages to strengthen the overall rigor of study design. First, as previously described, the majority of coding

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and analysis (including composition of narrative summaries) was performed blind, with the researcher not knowing whether a reflection was written by a mentor in the high or low mindfulness group. The only time the researcher was aware of group assignment was during the initial round of open coding. To check for accuracy of initial codes, a different researcher and a research assistant each coded a subset of reflections a second time at the completion of data collection. All code checking was performed blind. Finally, to ensure agreement, a team of four researchers discussed emerging themes and looked for disconfirming evidence to challenge the themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

### **Findings**

#### **Mentoring Competencies Discussed**

As previously noted, reflections responded to a prompt asking mentors to discuss a particular mentoring competency they had used or wished they had used in a situation in YWLP. The competencies discussed by each group in their reflections at T1, T2, and T3 are presented in Table 4. Among the high mindfulness group, the most frequently identified competency was initiative and perseverance, followed by collaboration, and then empathy and attunement. Among mentors in the low mindfulness group, the most commonly discussed competency was empathy and attunement, followed by initiative and perseverance, and then an equal number of collaboration and positive attitude. Mentors talked about mindfulness in their reflections about initiative and perseverance, empathy and attunement, collaboration, and mentoring knowledge, but none of the reflections on positive attitude mentioned mindfulness. However overall, no major trends were observed regarding an association between mentoring competencies and group assignment or discussion of mindfulness.

### **Mindfulness Themes**

Three of the five mentors in the high mindfulness group discussed mindfulness in their reflections. Among these, one mentor, Meera, mentioned mindfulness in her T3 reflection. The other two mentors, Tina and Martica, mentioned mindfulness in all three reflections and discussed multiple mindfulness themes (i.e., mentor described both practicing mindfulness and teaching her mentee mindfulness) in their T2 reflections. Two mentors in the high mindfulness group, Alice and Sarah, did not discuss mindfulness at all. Among the low mindfulness group, two mentors talked about mindfulness: Jane, at T1, and Mia, at T2.

Five main themes emerged from mentors' discussion of mindfulness: 1) identifying a specific past experience during which one "should have" practiced mindfulness; 2) planning to practice mindfulness; 3) practicing mindfulness; 4) teaching one's mentee mindfulness; and 5) one's mentee practicing mindfulness. First, mentors identified experiences with their mentee during which they "should have" mindfulness. For example, Jane noted, "This situation made me think of mindfulness and how it would have affected my response if I had been focused on the concept. I wish that I had practiced it more often." We believe this theme represents mentors' "buy in" to the practice of mindfulness, such that they recognized its potential to enhance their mentoring relationship and foster personal growth. Mentors also discussed planning to practice mindfulness in the future, explaining how it could support their mentoring relationship. Tina identified mindfulness as a way to cultivate greater empathy and perspective-taking with her mentee, "In the future, I will use mindfulness as a tool to help me be empathetic to my mentee...to make sure that I completely understand what my

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mentee is saying to avoid miscommunication.” Of note, Tina and Martica, both mentors who expressed plans to practice mindfulness at T1, went on to describe practicing mindfulness in their subsequent reflections at T2 (Table 5).

Other themes included practicing mindfulness to calm down and teaching mentees about mindfulness. Martica described using her breath to help her reign in her impulses, “Even though I wanted to reprimand [mentee] for lying and causing so much stress, I remembered to take a breather. This actually helped me calm down and think of the best way to talk to [her].” This mentor later described teaching this skill to help her mentee with emotion regulation, “I explained to her the concept of mindfulness to help her keep her cool in situations. Mindfulness has been shown to increase ability to use attention to regulate emotions which would really help [mentee] control her temper.” Another mentor, Meera, discussed how she and her mentee both practiced mindfulness in nature and described her mentee’s utilization of the breath, “We chose to go outside for some fresh air during our sister time. Weeks before, we had discovered that the other also found fresh air and a cool breeze a very calming duo. She took a deep breath and began to disclose events of her stressful last few days.” Of note, this mentee practiced mindfulness similarly to how it was presented in the mentor training and group mentoring curriculum and how the mentors described practicing mindfulness in other reflections (i.e., by taking a deep breath before beginning to speak).

### **Self-judgment**

Mentors’ descriptions of practicing mindfulness and instances when they “should have” practiced mindfulness differed between groups (Table 6). Mentors in the high mindfulness group discussed mindfulness as a strategy to support their interactions with

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others, whereas those in the low mindfulness group described mindfulness as a way to manage self-judgment. For example, Martica, the high mindfulness mentor who “remembered to take a breather” noticed her impulses without acting on them, which allowed her to move beyond herself to consider the needs of her mentee. This is consistent with findings from pilot studies of mindful parenting, in which parents reported an increased rate of stopping and thinking before reacting in stressful situations with their children (Duncan, Coatsworth, & Greenberg, 2009b). Similarly, another high mindfulness mentor took an observational stance as she reflected on a past situation in her mentoring group. She did not evaluate or worry about her performance but recognized how mindfulness could have supported group dynamics. On the other hand, Mia, a mentor in the low mindfulness group, used breathing to manage her concerns about others’ opinions of her while Jane, another low mindfulness mentor, judged her individual response to a situation.

We also observed that mentors in the low mindfulness group expressed self-judgment surrounding the themes of outside time (the YWLP term for one-on-one time between mentor and mentee outside of group), transportation, and interactions with their mentee’s parents. One mentor, Jane, described automatically experiencing feelings of self-blame after finding out that the place she and her mentee had planned to go for outside time together was closed, “Everything was going according to schedule until we got there and realized it was closed for a training day. I immediately felt guilty for taking 20 minutes out of [mentee’s] day to drive somewhere.” Another mentor, Wendy, felt guilty asking other mentors for a ride for her and her mentee, “It was hard...to ask another mentor in my group to drive us all the way to the mentee’s house, because I knew

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it was inconvenient... For the other mentors in our group, my transportation situation...should not be a priority...and they should not have to deal with my ride issues.” For Mia, asking her mentee’s mother for a ride, “made me feel a little uncomfortable. I preferred not to do so because it would have inconvenienced their family, and I felt that as the mentor, I should have been capable of finding my own transportation... [I felt like] a burden.”

Low mindfulness mentors’ self-judgment of being an “inconvenience” were also present in descriptions of interactions with parents. This finding is particularly concerning given that parent involvement has been identified as an important factor in the development of successful mentoring relationships with youth (Spencer, Basualdo-Delmonico, & Lewis, 2011). One mentor, Wendy, described feeling like a nuisance, “I expect my mentee’s mom to be annoyed or bothered by some of my questions and concerns” and limiting their communication “so that she does not have to deal with pesky, logistical texts from me.” We recognize that some readers may be curious as to whether these quotes we identify as self-judgment would have been coded differently or interpreted more positively (i.e., as perspective-taking) had they been written by a high mindfulness mentor. As a preemptive response, we offer the reminder that the majority of coding was performed blind and highlight the negative connotation of the word “pesky.” In addition, we compare how a high mindfulness mentor, Meera, was able to examine the situation objectively, without judging herself: “After I got [mentee’s mother]’s voicemail both times I called, I could have taken things personally, but I understood that just because she couldn’t get back to me right away didn’t mean that she wasn’t interested in me, her daughter, or the program.”

### **Knowledge of Developmental Issues**

Finally, some low mindfulness mentors cited their knowledge of developmental issues as helping them be less judgmental of themselves and their mentees. One low mindfulness mentor, Anne, noted:

This situation could have easily upset me...However, I surprised myself in this situation. Instead of being angry with myself...or being upset with my mentee, I remembered everything we have learned so far in class about adolescence...Just knowing [researcher's] messages helped me to keep my calm and remember that I had not been a bad mentor; adolescence is just a sensitive and stressful time.

Similarly, Mary described how a specific reading for the YWLP service-learning course had helped her recognize that she was not necessarily the cause of her mentee's mood swings, "I think that without this reading...I would have been unsure of whether I was the one upsetting her, simply by being there." Discussion of course material was not limited exclusively to low mindfulness mentors; high mindfulness mentors also highlighted various aspects of the academic class as being helpful. One explanation for this is the prompt's directions to include *what you learned in YWLP (e.g., class, readings, retreat, or group) that informs your understanding of this situation and the need for this competency*. However, while the prompt may have encouraged mentors to discuss aspects of YWLP they found helpful, mentors could have cited components other than articles/assigned readings (i.e., retreat or group) or course topics other than developmental issues (i.e., relational-cultural model or strategies to support goal-setting and study skills). However, low mindfulness mentors identified specific course material, learning about developmental issues, and specific outcomes becoming less judgmental,

suggesting that this particular training approach may help mentors with lower dispositional mindfulness achieve this particular outcome.

### **Difficult Conversations**

An additional ad hoc analysis was completed in response to themes that emerged from the data regarding difficult conversations. Nine out of ten reflections at T3 discussed a situation that posed the opportunity for a difficult conversation, which can occur “anytime we feel vulnerable or our self-esteem is implicated, when the issues at stake are important and the outcome uncertain, when we care deeply about what is being discussed or about people with whom we are discussing it” (Stone, Patton, & Heen, 2010, p. xxvii). This finding suggests that difficult conversations are likely to arise between mentor and mentee as mentoring relationships progress. This is consistent with findings from Deutsch and colleagues that identify *dips* as a natural part of the mentoring relationship from which many, but not all, relationships recover (Deutsch, Futch, Varga, & Fox, 2015). Our findings regarding between group differences in difficult conversations at T3 may help explain why some mentoring relationships appear to recover after a dip while others do not.

An overview of individual mentors’ responses to the opportunity for difficult conversations at each time point is available, arranged by group, in Table 7. We observed a salient pattern that differed between groups, such that mentors in the high mindfulness group were more likely to initiate a difficult conversation at T3, while those in the low mindfulness group were more likely to avoid a difficult conversation at that time point. Four out of five mentors in the high mindfulness group reported having a difficult conversation with their mentee at T3, compared to only two out of five mentors

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in the low mindfulness group. Moreover, three of the five mentors in the low mindfulness group described avoiding difficult conversations at T3, versus none of the mentors in the high mindfulness group. Interestingly, prior to T3, the high mindfulness group had a slightly higher number of reflections that reported avoiding difficult conversations, compared to the low mindfulness group (three vs. two, respectively). In addition, only one reflection from the high mindfulness group described initiating a difficult conversation prior to T3. Thus, both groups started out with a relatively similar tendency to avoid difficult conversations, but the mentors in the high mindfulness group overcame this inclination to avoid and went on to engage in difficult conversations with their mentee.

Mentors who avoided difficult conversation cited their concern about how others would react as a chief reason for their avoidance. Wendy, described this, “Often, I will not ask my mentee’s mom or my mentee a question because I am afraid of their reactions. I do not want to seem too pushy.” Another mentor, Mary, voiced similar apprehensions, “Unfortunately, I sometimes get uncomfortable asking [mentee] questions that she clearly does not want to talk about.” The third mentor, Mia, confessed her “concern that [mentee] does not feel comfortable enough to talk to me about situations that are concerning her.” Nevertheless this mentor described going along with her mentee’s report of a problem-free life because it felt more comfortable for her as a mentor, “From her descriptions, everything in her life was going well, which seemed suspicious...[but] by telling me that everything was okay, she made me feel at ease.” Stone and colleagues have highlighted the role of avoidance in difficult conversations, “these are the interactions we put off when we can” (Stone et al., 2010, p. xxviii) and this fits with these

mentors' descriptions. Furthermore, experiential avoidance has been associated with self-judgment (Santanello & Gardner, 2007), the other key theme identified among the low mindfulness group, which we discussed in the prior section.

### **Discussion and Implications**

Only half of the mentors included in the present study discussed mindfulness in their reflections. Though several mentors were extremely responsive to MAPs, these techniques were not universally adopted. While MAPs are simple strategies, previous research suggests that college students may need targeted training on how to apply them (Greeson et al., 2014). The results of our exploratory study confirm this and begin to identify specific ways college women mentors might apply MAPs in their relationship with their mentee. Mentoring programs interested in introducing MAPs training and activities as a way of supporting mentors' non-judgmental stance toward self and other might find these themes useful as a foundation for teaching the application of MAPs to mentors.

Our results suggest five applications that college women mentors might use when MAPs are included in mentor training and mentoring activities: 1) identifying a specific past experience during which one "should have" practiced mindfulness; 2) planning to practice mindfulness; 3) practicing mindfulness; 4) teaching one's mentee mindfulness; and 5) one's mentee practicing mindfulness. It is useful to conceptualize the trajectory of these themes through the lens of the stages in the transtheoretical model (TTM) of change (Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992). These stages are contemplation, preparation, and action. Mentors who stated they "should have" practiced mindfulness may be in the contemplation stage of change. This stage occurs when individuals have

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engaged in serious consideration of problem resolution but not yet made a firm commitment to take action (Prochaska et al., 1992). These mentors engaged in a process of reflection and acknowledged mindfulness as a potentially helpful strategy but did not express a commitment to incorporate these strategies in the future. On the other hand, mentors who discussed their plans to practice mindfulness might be in the preparation phase of change. This stage is characterized by the intention to take action in the very near future (Prochaska et al., 1992). Mentors planning to practice mindfulness were preparing to do so in the near future and therefore had progressed to this next stage of change. Finally, mentors who successfully followed through on their intention to practice mindfulness might be in the action stage of the TTM (Prochaska et al., 1992). Two of the high mindfulness mentors, Tina and Martica, followed this particular change sequence. These mentors discussed in their reflections planning to practice mindfulness at T1 and then practicing mindfulness at T2. Mentoring programs might support college women mentors' use of MAPs by following a similar stage format in training. Following the initial introduction of MAPs, programs might provide mentors an opportunity to reflect on where they might apply practicing mindfulness while mentoring and then later, encourage mentors to reflect on how they actually applied them.

Mentors in this study applied MAPs as a way to calm themselves or support their mentees learning to calm themselves. One of the ways in which they did this was by focusing on breathing. This strategy appeared to help mentors and mentees reduce feelings of self-judgment and criticism of others and to set their intentions before difficult conversations. Although learning to focus on one's breathing to calm down and focus attention requires significant practice, brief mindfulness-based interventions that

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teach this skill and provide short periods of silence for practice are generally feasible to deliver (Duncan et al., 2009b). Therefore, mentoring programs interested in supporting mentor and mentee stress reduction might incorporate instruction on breath exercises into both their mentor training and mentoring activities without making major changes to existing training curriculum.

It is important to note that the mentors in our study varied in their level of both dispositional mindfulness post intervention and their use of MAPs despite receiving the same MAPs training and opportunity to practice MAPs in their mentoring groups. While this suggests mentors would benefit from more intensive and supportive training on MAPs than the protocol used in this study, it is also worthwhile to consider alternative strategies mentors might use to calm themselves and be less self and other-judging during challenging mentoring situations. Consistent to extant research on MAPs training, results from our study suggest that some mentors may not find MAPs useful. However, our finding that some low mindfulness mentors cited their knowledge of developmental issues as the stimulus for their self-compassion and initiation of difficult conversations has important implications for mentoring programs working with college students. These results also suggest that teaching mentors about issues related to their mentee's development may be an additional way to help mentors be less judgmental of self and others and engage in difficult conversations. Given how important it is for mentors to be non-judgmental and open to difficult conversations with their mentee (Rhodes, 2002; Spencer, 2007), mentoring programs should consider training mentors about key developmental issues for their mentees as well.

### **Limitations**

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It is important to keep in mind that the present study was exploratory. Our goal was to begin to explore how college student mentors experience and apply MAPs, not to quantify results or conduct a randomized control trial. Thus, the majority of limitations are design-related. Nevertheless, these offer possible directions for future research.

One major limitation of the present study was its relatively small sample size. The sample included ten participants from the YWLP mentor cohort of 2014-2015, the pilot year of MAPs training and mentoring curriculum additions. Multiple factors contributed to the researcher's decision regarding sample size. First, selection criteria for the present study were intentional; mentors were carefully selected based on their post-program MAAS scores in order to create two groups that were notably different in dispositional mindfulness. Thus, increasing the sample size would have decreased the variability in MAAS scores between the two groups, potentially reducing the researcher's ability to draw between-group differences. Another factor to consider was the researcher's commitment to pursuing quality, in-depth analysis combined with the finite reality of the project timeline. Given the number of work hours devoted to each of the thirty reflections, increasing sample size would have required a significant extension of project duration, most likely exceeding the resources available to the researcher. Finally, data was only available from three time points during the first four months of mentoring. Future studies could have participants submit written reflections weekly, which would allow researchers more data points over which to observe more subtle changes from week to week as well as reflections written over the course of the entire mentoring relationship.

Another limitation is that data were self-report, which creates the potential for desirability bias (Fisher, 1993). Mentors wrote reflections as a graded assignment to be

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read by their course instructor. As noted in the trustworthiness section, mentors were explicitly told that reflections would be graded based on writing skills and depth of reflection and not specific content. Despite this, mentors may have portrayed themselves and/or their mentoring relationships more favorably in their reflection, depending on what they perceived to be the *right* response. To reduce this potential for desirability bias, future studies may employ several investigative methods, such as interview, focus groups, and observation, which would allow for triangulation of qualitative data from multiple sources.

### **Conclusion**

This is the first qualitative study of its kind to examine the experience and application of MAPs training for college student youth mentors. While future research is needed to determine if there is an association between mindfulness training for mentors and mentee outcomes, including mentoring relationship satisfaction, results from this study suggest that mentors who hold a mindful disposition may be more likely to practice self and other compassion and initiate difficult conversations with their mentee than those with lower dispositional mindfulness. The field of mentoring research has established that the quality of mentoring relationship, including mentors' ability to provide mentees a context of mutuality, trust and empathy, is critical to positive youth outcomes (Rhodes, 2002; 2004). However our understanding of what mentors need in order to be able to provide this kind of mentoring, even in the face of relationship challenges, is still nascent. For mentoring programs using college students as mentors, incorporating MAPs in mentor training and mentoring activities has promise as a strategy for promoting their nonjudgmental and empathic engagement with youth.

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Table 1

*Overview of MAPs Training and Additions to Group Mentoring Curriculum*

Session	Activities	Duration (min)
Mentor Training Session 1	Introduction to mindfulness Breath-awareness practice Overview of research findings	60
Mentor Training Session 2	Mindfulness for adolescents MAPs activities for youth Emotion regulation outcomes Being mindful of mentoring expectations	60
Mentor Training Session 3	Snow globe demonstration Emotions and the brain Wheel of awareness Interpersonal mindfulness Passing the bell activity Mindful listening	60
Group Curriculum Session 1	Introduction to mindfulness Mindful listening Mindful problem-solving	20
Group Curriculum Session 2	Mindful appreciation Deep breathing for relaxation	20
Group Curriculum Session 3	Passing the bell activity Paying attention to present moment	20
Group Curriculum Session 4	Identifying emotions Being present with unpleasant feelings	20
Group Curriculum Session 5	Progressive muscle relaxation Noticing negative thoughts	20
Group Curriculum Session 6	Mindfulness check-in in pairs	15
Group Curriculum Session 7	Mindful attention	20
Group Curriculum Session 8	Mindful eating	20
Group Curriculum Session 9	Connecting thoughts, feelings, behaviors	20
Group Curriculum Session 10	Mindful noticing	20
Group Curriculum Session 11	Passing the bell activity Paying attention to present moment	15
Group Curriculum Session 12	Deep breathing for relaxation	5

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Table 2

*Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS; Brown & Ryan, 2003)*

Below is a collection of statements about your everyday experience. Using the 1-6 scale below, please indicate how frequently or infrequently you currently have each experience:

1. I could be experiencing some emotion and not be conscious of it until some time later.
2. I break or spill things because of carelessness, not paying attention, or thinking of something else.
3. I find it difficult to stay focused on what's happening in the present.
4. I tend to walk quickly to get where I'm going without paying attention to what I experience along the way.
5. I tend not to notice feelings of physical tension or discomfort until they really grab my attention.
6. I forget a person's name almost as soon as I've been told it for the first time.
7. It seems I am "running on automatic," without much awareness of what I'm doing.
8. I rush through activities without being really attentive to them.
9. I get so focused on the goal I want to achieve that I lose touch with what I'm doing right now to get there.
10. I do jobs or tasks automatically, without being aware of what I'm doing.
11. I find myself listening to someone with one ear, doing something else at the same time.
12. I drive places on 'automatic pilot' and then wonder why I went there.
13. I find myself preoccupied with the future or the past. I find myself doing things without paying attention.
14. I snack without being aware that I'm eating.

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Table 3

*Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) Scores by Group*

High Mindfulness	Post	Low Mindfulness	Post
Tina	5.29	Mary	3.00
Martica	4.79	Wendy	3.14
Meera	5.14	Mia	2.64
Alice	4.86	Anne	2.86
Sarah	4.86	Jane	3.14
<i>M<sub>group</sub></i>	4.99	<i>M<sub>group</sub></i>	2.96

*Note.* MAAS college student norms:  $M = 3.83$ ,  $SD = .70$  (Brown & Ryan, 2003)

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Table 4

*Mentoring Competencies Discussed in Reflections*

	High Mindfulness				Low Mindfulness			
	<u>T1</u>	<u>T2</u>	<u>T3</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>T1</u>	<u>T2</u>	<u>T3</u>	<u>Total</u>
Initiative and Perseverance	2*	2*	1	5	1	1*	2	4
Collaboration	1	1	2**	4	0	0	3	3
Empathy and Attunement	1*	2*	0	3	3*	2	0	5
Positive Attitude	1	0	1	2	1	2	0	3
Mentoring Knowledge	0	0	1*	1	0	0	0	0

*Note. \* denotes 1 reflection discussing mindfulness; \*\* denotes 2*

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Table 5

*Mindfulness Themes by Reflection*

High Mindfulness				Low Mindfulness			
<u>ID</u>	<u>T1</u>	<u>T2</u>	<u>T3</u>	<u>ID</u>	<u>T1</u>	<u>T2</u>	<u>T3</u>
Sarah	-	-	-	Mary	-	-	-
Tina	Plan	Practice Plan	“Should have”	Anne	-	-	-
Alice	-	-	-	Wendy	-	-	-
Meera	-	-	Mentee practice	Jane	“Should have”	-	-
Martica	Plan	Practice Teach	Teach	Mia	-	Practice	-

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Table 6

*Cross-Group Comparison of Excerpts with Similar Themes*

Theme	High Mindfulness	Low Mindfulness
Practicing mindfulness	<i>“Even though I wanted to reprimand [mentee] for lying and causing so much stress, I remembered to take a breather. This actually helped me calm down and think of the best way to talk to [mentee]”–Martica, T2</i>	<i>“I was worried that by the time I got there, [mentee] and her step-mother would have been bored and annoyed... but slowing down and taking a breath helped to settle my worries about disappointing my mentee.”–Mia, T2</i>
“Should have” practiced mindfulness	<i>“To breathe, we should have used mindfulness as our guide in order to calm down because things were getting really heated among the mentees and the mentors were just anxious on what to do next.”–Tina, T3</i>	<i>“This situation made me think of mindfulness and how it would have affected my response if I had been focused on the concept. I wish that I had practiced it more often.”–Jane, T1</i>

Table 7

*Difficult Conversation: Group Patterns Over Time*

High Mindfulness: Pattern Toward Initiation			
<u>ID</u>	<u>T1</u>	<u>T2</u>	<u>T3</u>
Tina	-	Avoidance	Initiation
Martica	-	-	Initiation
Meera	-	-	Initiation
Alice	Avoidance	-	Initiation
Sarah	-	Avoidance	-
Low Mindfulness: Pattern Toward Avoidance			
<u>ID</u>	<u>T1</u>	<u>T2</u>	<u>T3</u>
Mary	-	Avoidance	Avoidance
Wendy	-	-	Avoidance
Mia	-	-	Avoidance
Anne	Avoidance	-	Initiation
Jane	-	-	Initiation

*Note.* Reflections that did not discuss initiation/avoidance are intentionally left blank.