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PRANA IN PRISON: AN ANALYSIS OF TEACHER-STUDENT DYNAMICS IN THE
TEACHING OF TRAUMA-INFORMED, MINDFULNESS-BASED YOGA TO
INCARCERATED YOUTH IN ATLANTA, GEORGIA

by

VLADIMIR TCHAKAROV

Under the Direction of Kathryn McClymond, PhD

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of the Arts

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ABSTRACT

At the height of its popularity in our society, the teaching of modern transnational postural yoga is entering a new space. A team of researchers and yoga teachers have developed a therapeutic, trauma-informed and trauma-sensitive postural yoga practice. This adapted postural yoga practice, which was specially designed as a supplemental somatic therapy to traditional cognitive psychotherapies for populations coping with complex trauma, is currently offered as an optional therapeutic modality to incarcerated juvenile males in regional youth detention centers in Atlanta, Georgia. In this article I will explore some unique changes, developments, questions and issues that arise from, surround and potentially transform the teacher-student dynamic in the teaching of trauma-informed, mindfulness-based postural yoga within the unique context of incarcerated youth. I will argue that the effects of the intersections of adolescence, complex trauma, incarceration, race and ethnicity, present new and significant challenges that have changed how yoga is taught.

INDEX WORDS: Yoga, Mindfulness, Incarcerated Youth, Complex Trauma, Department of Juvenile Justice, Juvenile Detention Center, Teacher-Student Dynamics.

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2021

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DEDICATION

I dedicate my thesis work to my loving wife, my parents, my teachers, my students and my many friends. I express deep gratitude to my wife, Megan Tchakarov whose unwavering support and many words of encouragement kept me pursue this project to the end. I offer a special appreciation to my loving parents, Vesselina Lukanova and Zhivko Tchakarov (deceased), who made tremendous personal sacrifices to ensure a good education and many life opportunities for me, and have always believed in me.

I also dedicate this to my teachers, especially Yoganand Michael Carroll, William Huffshmidt and Gary Mitchell, among many others who taught me courage and perseverance in the face of life's challenges and helped me navigate this long and arduous process.

Finally, I dedicate this work to the many young men whom I have had the privilege to meet and work with at juvenile detention centers in Atlanta. I am grateful for their efforts and willingness to participate in the activities that ultimately led me to the pursuit of this thesis.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CY – Centering Youth
DJJ – Department of Juvenile Justice
GSU – Georgia State University
HYP – Hatha Yoga Pradipika
NIH – National Institute of Health
RYT – Registered Yoga Teacher
TCTSY – Trauma Center Trauma-Sensitive Yoga
TIMBY – Trauma-Informed Mindfulness Based Yoga
TSY – Trauma Sensitive Yoga

INTRODUCTION

The current boom in yoga's popularity around the globe has prompted new and exciting scholarly works on the subject. An effort to study the origins of the tradition identified as yoga by the average Westerner has produced intriguing books and articles. These writings sometimes challenge the notion that this modern form of postural yoga is firmly rooted in older Indian traditions going back as far as the Vedas. By postural yoga I am distinguishing what most Westerners know as yoga from older pre-modern Indian traditions that are also called yoga but have little in common with the postural practices that stretch and strengthen the body used today. In my work I will explore an even more recent form of yoga stemming from the modern postural yoga tradition in the United States. This form of modern postural yoga is called trauma-informed mindfulness-based yoga (TIMBY), and it is a practice currently taught inside juvenile detention centers in Atlanta, Georgia, to incarcerated adolescent males. I will specifically focus my attention on the power dynamics between the yoga teachers who enter the juvenile detention center and the participants in their class. I will examine how these power dynamics are affected by various contexts: the history of modern transnational postural yoga; the emerging field of trauma-sensitive yoga (TCY); the space where TIMBY is taught (the juvenile detention center), the history of the juvenile justice system in the US; the role of race, age and socio-economic status; and the history of the guru-disciple and teacher-student relationship in older yoga traditions and modern yoga respectively. The main argument of my thesis is that by exploring these contexts surrounding and informing teacher-student power dynamics we can observe certain trends in yoga's history. These being, the traditional *guru/shishya* (teacher/disciple) dynamic, modern-postural yoga's teacher/student dynamic and TIMBY's facilitator/participant

dynamic. Analyzing these dynamics can help draw some conclusions about why and how have yoga traditions been adapted and reinvented by multiple actors and societal structures.

The term yoga is applied to an immense number of practices and traditions that have proliferated and developed in a multitude of cultural and societal contexts. Even within the current modern transnational postural yoga industry, there are countless schools and teachers. Some of these lay claims to lineages connected to a guru and originating in India, and some may have originated from a brand-new teacher training developed by a Western teacher not in any way affiliated with Indian religion or a guru. Unlike organized religions modern yoga schools and teachers have no centralized governing body to answer to. The closest thing to a governing body that sets standards for teacher trainings in the United States is the Yoga Alliance (YA). The Yoga Alliance is a national registry for yoga teachers and yoga schools. By paying the fee and sending an outline of their yoga teacher training, yoga schools can obtain a Yoga Alliance registration and ensure that their graduates are registered yoga teachers (RYT). The curriculum requirements yoga schools must meet are incredibly vague. There is currently no process in place to verify whether a school is adhering to those requirements aside from stating so in their application. There are also plenty of yoga schools that simply decide not to join the YA since it is not necessary to join in order to train an individual and call them a yoga teacher, or in fact to call yourself a yoga teacher (Yoga Alliance, 2021). In this current context, anyone can call themselves a yoga teacher and any number of practices can be called yoga. This is not very different from the way yoga traditions have operated for many centuries in Asia as well. Therefore, it is very challenging to create working definitions for this multitude of practices. In order to write about the historical developments, I have researched, I have had to make some necessary generalizations to distinguish older yoga traditions from modern yoga modalities.

In chapter one I present a short history of modern yoga. This historical overview serves to contextualize the relationship between teachers and students. The goals and methods of transmission of yogic practices have continuously shifted and adapted to the cultural contexts in which yoga traditions have made their way. Therefore, to understand the causes and scope of change in the teacher student power dynamics from pre-modern Indian yoga to modern postural yoga, it is necessary to study yoga's transition between these cultural contexts. There we can find clues about the hopes and goals of the influential individuals and social movements that have directed the evolution of teaching and transmitting yogic practices.

I have drawn upon the work of notable modern yoga scholars Mark Singleton and Elizabeth De Michelis, who argue that from the end of the nineteenth century onward a new yoga evolved from an amalgamation of Western physical culture modalities and esotericism and a specific selection of Indian religious thought. This yoga that Singleton calls modern transnational postural yoga has little in common with the medieval *hathayoga* tradition, which is contrary to how it has been presented and marketed to the wider public since its inception. I will also discuss the push, by both Indian and Western teachers, to present yoga as scientific and connect this trend to the current developments of scientifically grounded trauma-sensitive yoga modalities and eventually the trauma-informed mindfulness-based yoga intervention taking place in juvenile detention centers in Atlanta, Georgia today.

In chapter two I will draw upon the work of David Emerson and Bessel Van der Kolk to present an overview of Trauma-Sensitive Yoga (TSY) and the research into the science of complex trauma and its treatment that has served as a basis for TSY methodology. This is important for this thesis because TSY informs the TIMBY approach to teaching yoga. Emerson and Van der Kolk's work in coordination with a number of scientists and yoga teachers at the

Trauma Center of the Justice Resource Institute has been incredibly influential in the new and expanding field of yoga therapy. Yoga therapy is a distinct form of modern yoga that is described as follows by its governing body, the International Association of Yoga Therapists (IAYT): “Yoga therapy is the professional application of the principles and practices of yoga to promote health and well-being within a therapeutic relationship that includes personalized assessment, goal setting, lifestyle management, and yoga practices for individuals or small groups (International Association of Yoga Therapists, n.d.)” The current scientific understanding of complex trauma and adverse childhood experiences play an important role in the development of TSY and the introduction of TIMBY in juvenile detention centers. Most importantly for my thesis, trauma theory and TSY have reshaped the role of the yoga teacher in a TIMBY session from the teacher’s role in traditional yoga. The understanding of trauma’s effects on the body and mind of a trauma survivor and the experiences of powerlessness associated with that have caused a continuing examination and adaptation of the power dynamic between teachers and students. This has resulted in a rejection of traditional guru/disciple models and – perhaps more surprisingly – a move away from modern yoga teacher/student model to a new facilitator/participant dynamic that is designed to promote a sharing and a shifting of power and agency from the facilitator to the participant, during the yoga session.

In chapter three I will shift my attention to the trauma-informed mindfulness-based yoga (TIMBY) intervention currently taking place in Atlanta juvenile detention centers. I will describe the history of Centering Youth, an Atlanta-based non-profit organization that provides trauma-informed yoga classes to marginalized populations, that was instrumental in bringing yoga into Atlanta’s Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ). Then I will present a detailed description of the structure, the facilitators and participants in the yoga class, the physical space

in which it takes place and the additional individual actors and larger bureaucratic machinery of the DJJ. To achieve this, I will draw upon my own experiences of teaching inside the detention center. I will also use the current TIMBY yoga class protocol which was developed for a National Institute of Health (NIH) funded feasibility study, currently carried out by a team from the Georgia State University's department of public health and led by Dr. Ashli Owen-Smith. Finally, I will draw upon notes from meetings and trainings with David Emerson, CY teachers, and GSU and DJJ staff. This new context in which yoga classes are being led has informed the power dynamics between teachers and students in new ways and that has resulted in further adaptations and adjustments. Yoga teachers who enter the DJJ have new responsibilities and must navigate novel social and institutional contexts. New actors and stakeholders have become involved in the implementation of the yoga class inside the DJJ. These being the correctional officers and/or mental health professionals who must be present and monitor the class. The adolescent participants in the class are often completely new to yoga and come to that experience from a different social and ethnic background than most modern yoga practitioners in studio classes. The goals and values within this new context are also different from those of both older yoga traditions and modern yoga. All these factors create increasingly complex power dynamics that expand beyond the relationship between teachers and students and outward within the microcosm of the DJJ.

In chapter four I will dive more deeply into the history of Juvenile Justice in the United States. To fully understand how holding yoga classes inside the DJJ detention center informs power dynamics between yoga teachers and students it is necessary to explore how the institution of the DJJ was formed and what did the people who conceived it have in mind when they decided to incarcerate minors. My work will situate the DJJ and its detention centers within the

complicated history of the United States criminal justice system and its legacy of white supremacy and institutional racism. I will also touch on the greater social context of racism, discrimination, and fears of juvenile “super-predators” in the United States that caused government institutions to draft and implement policies and laws which led to the disproportionate criminalization and incarceration of young people of color. Social justice movements involving activists, social workers, academics and journalists have worked towards bringing these inequities to light and have put pressure on governments, both on the local and federal level, to address these issues. This has resulted in the creation of commissions and the funding of studies, paving the way for interventions like TIMBY. Having knowledge of this history can help us understand who the stakeholders are and who stands to gain something from the implementation of a yoga program in juvenile detention centers.

The last chapter of my thesis I have constructed a spectrum spanning the power dynamics between gurus and disciples in medieval *hathayoga*, teachers (sometimes gurus) and students in modern transnational postural yoga, and facilitators and participants in TSY and TIMBY. While it is impossible within the scope of this work to fully describe the multitude of variations, subtle nuances, and individual differences in how the transmission of various yoga practices has taken place, I have used these three broad categories to illustrate some general trends in those power dynamics. On one end of this spectrum, the guru wields authority and power over their disciples and directs their actions. The guru’s authority may even extend to their disciples’ lives outside the practice of yoga. In the middle of the spectrum, I locate the modern yoga teacher and their students. Power and authority flow back and forward between teachers and students. Teachers instruct students on the proper execution of yoga techniques but only offer choices and options; students are not expected to obey every command, and the authority of the teacher is confined to

the yoga class. On the other end of the spectrum, where I locate TIMBY, the facilitator recognizes that the social contexts within which they lead the yoga session automatically place them in a position of power. In an ideal session, instead of using this power to instruct the participants from a place of authority the facilitator seeks to continually share and shift power and agency towards the participants, never coercing, always inviting the participants to explore techniques, and asking what kind of actions they would like to engage in. By contrasting and observing how these power dynamics are formed and implemented we can learn valuable information about how societies' cultural, religious, and social contexts shape how yoga techniques and teachings have been transmitted and raise some interesting questions about what contexts and political or individual actors have been overlooked in our understanding of older yoga traditions.

1 ORIGINS OF MODERN YOGA

According to the “2016 Yoga in America Study” (Yoga Journal and Yoga Alliance, 2016), more people identify yoga as a “practice of the body” or a “physical activity designed to increase flexibility” than as a religious practice or a form of meditation. The roots of *asana* (posture) practice in yoga can be traced with certainty to the medieval Hatha yoga tradition, but according to Mark Singleton, many of the postures characteristic of the modern postural yoga tradition were never a part of earlier Indian yoga practices (Singleton, 2010, p.3). In fact, what Singleton classifies as “modern transnational postural yoga” is, as the name implies, much younger and heavily influenced by the Western modalities of physical fitness culture that became popular in the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. Singleton argues that in older, pre-modern traditions, the practice of *asana* as an important and central feature of yoga is simply absent. To back up his argument he points out to the fact that yoga texts that are more than a century old simply do not contain references to the postures emblematic of yoga practice today. For example, there are only thirty-two postures described in the medieval hatha yoga text *Gheranda Samhita*, which scholar James Mallinson describes as “the most encyclopedic of all the root texts of Hatha Yoga” (2004, p. 9). These poses constitute only one of seven chapters and are only included as a purificatory step in a progression towards the more internal and esoteric practices described in the following chapters. *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, which is often hailed as the preeminent text on yoga in modern postural yoga traditions, contains only one mention of *asana* in the sense of the posture one should assume for meditation, stating that it should be steady and comfortable. There is no mention of the complex physical poses one associates with yoga today (White, 2014).

The first instances of postural practice as the central, distinctive feature of yoga, according to Singleton, occur in the early twentieth century and bear a striking resemblance to Western exercise modalities. Both Singleton and Elizabeth De Michelis, another scholar of importance on this topic, have presented a strong argument that the popular form of postural yoga practiced in the United States and around the world today is very young and different than older pre-industrial traditions. In stark contrast to the lack of evidence of postural practice in older yoga traditions, both De Michelis and Singleton observed that there is ample textual and photographic evidence in physical culture magazines and journals from the early twentieth century to support the argument that modern transnational postural yoga is a recent historical development. Both argue that the postural elements and the esoteric philosophies characteristic of modern yoga constitute a hybrid tradition, a product of Indian and Western popular physical culture and Indian and Western esoteric modalities. In their work Singleton and De Michelis are not seeking to discredit modern yoga in contrast to some older, more authentic and pure form of yoga, but rather to argue that yoga traditions have always been subject to adaptation, innovation, and fragmentation. The history of modern postural yoga offers interesting insights into these processes, specifically how teacher-student dynamics have changed and continue to change in modern Western society.

One important trend in the history of modern yoga in particular sheds light on the current movement towards scientific research of the various effects of yoga on practitioners. Both Mark Singleton and scholar David Gordon White have presented strong arguments that until the end of the early twentieth century, yogis in India and their practices were considered heterodox, impure, and dangerous. In his book *Sinister Yogis*, White recounts many instances in Indian folk tales where “Yogins” are portrayed as villainous sorcerers driven by desire for power, greed and lust.

White cites the British Imperial census from 1891 that categorizes Yogis as “miscellaneous and disreputable vagrants.” British accounts of the Nath yogis, who are closely tied to the medieval Hatha yoga tradition, call them “vagabonds” and “impure” beggars engaging in what the British saw as lowly superstitious magical practices among rural peasants (2009, pp. 240-241).

In a similar vein, Singleton writes about the Indian religious scholar and translator of sacred texts Rai Bahadur Srisa Chandra Vasu, who translated the *Gheranda Samhita* and published it in India and the West. He did so through the Theosophical Society and Open Court, a company which sought to reconcile religion and science. Singleton argues that in fact S.C. Vasu’s work “should be seen as a part of an international effort to reconcile (medical) science with religion.” C.S. Vasu describes *hatha* yogis as “those hideous specimens of humanity who parade through our streets bedaubed with dirt and ash-frightening the children and extorting money from timid and good-natured folk.” Vasu then proceeds to describe *hatha* yogis as “a great stumbling-block to the progress of this science [of Yoga]” (2010, p. 44-47). The ideal yoga practitioner according to him is one “informed by the scientific, rational, and classical” values of the day. Yoga, implores Vasu, must be looked upon as a legitimate science and should not be disdained by the (Western) scientific community.” This yoga reformation was also taken up by Sri Yogendra and Kuvalayananda, two influential teachers who sought to use scientific experimentation to prove yoga’s medicinal value (p.50).

Through these and many other examples, Singleton concludes that educated Hindu scholars who translated yoga texts and collaborated closely with Western esotericists, formulated a sanitized view of yoga that condemned the elements of the tradition that offended Western sensibilities and Neo-Vedanta ideals and, ironically, sought to present an older and more “pure

and classical” yoga tradition, which was supposedly in line with and maybe even ahead of modern Western science.

To understand the influence of Neo-Vedantic religiosity on modern yoga, it is important to explore the role of Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), who was an instrumental figure in the process of sanitization and Protestantization of yoga in his attempts to make it more palatable to both his Western and Western-educated Neo-Vedantin Hindu audiences. In her book *A History of Modern Yoga*, Elizabeth De Michelis examines the pervasive influence of Vivekananda’s thought and teachings on how both Hindu and Western audiences began to view yoga at the turn of the twentieth century. She writes about him:

Swami Vivekananda did indeed play a pivotal role in the context of Neo-Vedantic Esotericism and of Modern Yoga. Not quite a Neo-Hindu Philosopher, not quite a militant nationalist, he nevertheless became a cult figure and popular ideologue in both fields. Most of all, however, he was the first Indian to succeed in acting as an effectual bridge-builder between Eastern and Western esoteric milieus, much as Unitarians and Theosophists had done the other way around. (2005, p.92)

Vivekananda’s success at the Parliament of World’s Religions in 1893 established him as an authoritative voice of Indian esotericism and yoga in the West. In her book De Michelis examines how Vivekananda’s teachings evolved from his education, both as the Western-educated child of a Brahmin and his brief study under the Hindu saint Ramakrishna. She examines how his teachings were influenced by and in turn influenced Western Esotericism. Her close look at Vivekananda reveals that he was transformed into a religious authority figure virtually overnight, with very little experience and training, who was often prompted to lecture unexpectedly and with little preparation. In fact, based on the historical evidence, De Michelis

concludes that “one thing is certain: Ramakrishna never formally initiated the future Vivekananda” (p.104). Because of his popularity in the West, what he called Raja Yoga became very popular back in India, informed the discourse on yoga there, and created a shift in the image of yogis from that of impure vagabonds into forest-dwelling, self-realizing ascetics who lived in alignment with Vedantic purity laws. The early twentieth century’s worldwide rise of religiously flavored physical fitness and exercise culture led to the formation of an interesting marriage between Vivekananda’s purified interpretation of yoga, and calisthenic exercises appropriated and adapted from Western modalities. These are the origins of what eventually grew and became what most modern Westerners understand as yoga today.

To distinguish the practice most people in the West understand as yoga from older yoga traditions, I will borrow Mark Singleton’s term “modern transnational postural yoga” and for brevity refer to it as modern yoga hereafter. Traditional yoga models, and the *hatha yoga* tradition, favored renunciation and complete surrender to the authority of the guru. In the enormously influential Krishnamacharya lineage of modern transnational postural yoga, which includes yoga superstar teachers like K. Pattabhi Jois and B.K.S. Iyengar, this guru-disciple dynamic manifested in several ways, including the attribution of healing powers and the surrender of one’s body to the teacher’s often intense physical manipulations and adjustments. Additionally, several high-profile cases of sexual abuse by some teachers have come to light, the most famous being Bikram Choudary whose abuses of multiple students are described in the Netflix documentary *Bikram: Yogi, Guru, Predator*. These cases have influenced perceptions of gurus in modern society. The instances of guru misconduct are important to consider when I examine the shift in the teacher-student dynamic, particularly when we examine the application

of modern postural yoga in the treatment of trauma and the importance of understanding power dynamics in this new context.

During the last few decades in the United States, the instances of guru misconduct and/or abuse have lead teachers and practitioners to question the need for gurus. In addition, they have caused many teachers and organizations in the yoga community to examine what constitutes appropriate boundaries between teachers and students, and what ethical and moral norms should teachers abide by. Yoga in the United States also has strong roots in the counterculture movements of the sixties and the seventies. Many of the original Western yogis, such as Ram Das, identified as hippies, and in this cultural context social justice initiatives and activism played an important part. Yoga, counterculture, and social justice became intertwined, with yoga becoming an alternative to the dominant religious traditions. The Poet Alan Ginsberg famously chanted Om to calm protesters at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago and then again while taking the stand at the Chicago conspiracy trial (Lukas, 1969). When Angela Davis spoke at Emory University in 2018 she was asked about her experience of being imprisoned, and as part of her response she said “I found my yoga practice there” (Theology, 2021). Similar to Ginsberg, Davis used yoga as a coping mechanism to help her persevere when confronting the establishment and through the experience of being incarcerated. It is not surprising then that modern yoga teachers who have a passion for social justice have sought to share yoga with parts of the American population that for a variety of reasons have been unable to gain access to its practices. Service or *seva* is also a part of Indian religious traditions. It denotes the performance of selfless actions without expectation for reward as a form of religious practice. This often manifests as serving the most vulnerable individuals in a community. The prioritization of service has led to the formation of an organization formerly known as the Yoga Service Council

and currently named Yoga Service Collective. This organization's mission is to "support individuals and organizations to make yoga and mindfulness practices community-centered, culturally-sensitive, and inclusive for all" (Shukla et al., n.d.). It is in this current context of modern yoga as a vehicle for social justice and community service that we find organizations like Centering Youth, and interventions like Trauma Center trauma-sensitive yoga (TCTSY) and trauma-informed mindfulness-based (TIMBY) yoga at detention centers in GA. I will explore TCTSY and TIMBY in the following chapters.

2 WHAT IS TRAUMA CENTER TRAUMA-SENSITIVE YOGA

Modern postural yoga practice has recently entered a new and interesting space in society. A specially adapted form of postural yoga, designed by the yoga teacher David Emerson to complement clinical treatments for trauma, is taught at The Trauma Center in Brookline, MA. This method of teaching yoga to trauma survivors, called Trauma Center Trauma-Sensitive Yoga (TCTSY), is presented as grounded in the current scientific research into the neuroscience and psychological understanding of trauma. In order to describe how TCTSY differs from modern transnational postural yoga, I will draw heavily on David Emerson's book *Trauma-Sensitive Yoga in Therapy: Bringing the Body into Treatment*. In the opening chapter of his book, titled "How does TSY differ from regular yoga," Emerson outlines his understanding of yoga as follows:

Yoga is composed of a vast multitude of practices that have a rich, complex, and ancient history. Because yoga as a phenomenon is so convoluted, it would be folly to attempt a concise definition. It is more accurate to say that yoga is supple enough to be many different things to many different people. However, in an effort to find a common denominator, I would suggest that people practice yoga because they want to live more fully. Yoga practitioners are curious about the potential that being alive affords them. So whether the practices are more mystical and esoteric in nature or are more grounded and physical, those who take up a yoga practice, whether they are seekers in ancient India or young women in modern-day New York City, share a common bond, which is to know more about themselves and about what it means to be human. (Emerson, 2015, p. 2)

In short Emerson proposes two goals that he perceives as shared among multiple yoga traditions throughout history. These goals are living more fully and self-knowledge. It is safe to say that by “regular yoga” Emerson is referring to Singleton’s modern, transnational postural yoga, and the techniques used to achieve these goals in TCTSY are derived from the modern, transnational postural yoga tradition as described by Mark Singleton. Singleton emphasizes both the predominance of postural practice in modern yoga as well as the efforts on the part of several generation of teachers, to present the tradition as scientifically grounded. In order to present yoga as compatible with science its proponents sought to demonstrate that yoga techniques can be studied in a controlled setting. These efforts to prove that yogic practices produce tangible, measurable and replicable effects on the human organism were made in order to align yoga with the latest scientific advances in the quest to understand human physiology and psychology. In this sense Emerson’s TCTSY is similar to and in line with earlier movements in the modern postural yoga tradition that sought recognition and validation from the scientific community, especially the from the medical field. In the previous chapter I mentioned the early twentieth century efforts on the part of C. S. Vasu, Sri Yogendra, and Swami Kavalayananda to establish yoga as a scientifically tested practice which resulted in positive health-related outcomes for the practitioner that can be reliably measured. Therefore, the establishment and positioning of TCTSY as scientifically informed, compatible with modern Western medicine, and clinically tested is not new. What is new in TCTSY is that the developments in the scientific understanding of trauma have led to a re-examination of multiple aspects of modern yoga practice, the central one being the dynamic between teachers and students (or in the case of TCTSY facilitators and participants.) In the introduction of his book, David Emerson states:

My basic argument throughout this book is that if we want to treat people who have experienced interpersonal trauma effectively we must use the clinical knowledge available to us and be open to new interventions that recognize the deep and complex nature of these traumatic experiences and not reduce trauma to a set of symptoms that can be medicated away, or for which a simple change in cognitive or behavioral patterns will suffice. Our treatments must match the complexity and nuance of trauma itself, and one aspect of the whole person that must not be overlooked or minimized is the experience of being embodied. For it is the body, the result of billions of years of evolution, that ultimately defines us as being human. (2015, p. xxii)

Through this statement Emerson seeks to establish TCTSY as both informed by and complementary to modern medical science. While earlier efforts to demonstrate the scientific validity of yoga were focused on confirming the efficacy of already existing techniques, TCTSY seeks to innovate new methods based on “the clinical knowledge available to us” (p. xxii) From this foundation he proceeds to explain that what distinguishes TCTSY from “regular yoga” is not the necessarily the postures and the breathing techniques (although those are modified as well), but how the various techniques are presented and led or, in other words, how the transmission and interpersonal interactions between facilitator and participants take place. What is of particular importance for my argument is that the experience of interpersonal trauma, which is what TCTSY is designed to address, is based in a power dynamic between perpetrator and survivor. The structure of a TCTSY session is designed to address what is seen as an inherently unequal power dynamic between the facilitator of the TCTSY session and the participants. I will explore the various aspects of this power dynamic later. For now it is important to mention that

the necessity to address it in TCTSY is related to the psychological understanding of interpersonal trauma, namely that traumatic experiences always contain an element of powerlessness.

It is also important to note here that in TCTSY the person leading the session is referred to as “facilitator” versus “teacher” or “instructor,” which are the titles normally used in modern yoga. One reason for this is that by “facilitator” Emerson does not exclusively refer to trained yoga teachers. While the term “facilitator” carries less baggage as opposed to “teacher,” which for many automatically carries a certain measure of authority and power, Emerson also makes a clear note at the very beginning of the book that no prior yoga experience is required to be able to lead a TCTSY session. He specifies that his targeted audience includes “qualified mental health clinicians or the equivalent” (p.xxvii). This is a significant and important departure from the norm for both pre-modern and modern postural yoga traditions. I will explore more deeply the historical trajectory of this major shift in what qualifies an individual to guide someone else through a yoga practice in chapter five. The fact that TCTSY facilitators who have clinical expertise but no formal yoga training are seen as qualified to lead a session, again points to the central role scientific research and clinical credentials play in determining who is qualified. This positions yoga in a category of complimentary practices which licensed therapists can employ at their discretion, within the therapeutic setting. In essence, Emerson presents TCTSY as a clinically informed practice directed towards therapeutic goals in which the facilitator’s focus is on addressing the inherent power inequalities between them and their students.

The facilitator uses several strategies to create opportunities for participants to practice finding agency and empowerment through bodily movement. This contrasts with the teacher-student dynamics in both pre-modern and modern postural yoga traditions. In older yoga the

disciple is a spiritual seeker and total surrender to the methods and authority of a guru is required for the achievement of yoga's metaphysical goals. In modern yoga, students are consumers or clients and adherence to the instructions of the teacher is encouraged but there is space for choice-making or modifying the practice to one's physical ability. That said many students view themselves as spiritual seekers who expect some of old yoga's goals and methods to be included in a studio class, and therefore modern yoga goals can fluctuate between the metaphysical, such as spiritual growth and enlightenment, and the mundane such as physical and psychological health. In TCTSY the facilitator is a therapist and a non-coercive guide and the participant is a client (but not always a consumer) who is seeking healing in the context of trauma. In TCTSY, yoga becomes a therapeutic modality through which the participant can practice making choices about their body and what to experience and feel or not to, in order to heal from trauma.

At the center of TCTSY is the understanding that complex trauma often involves an experience of lacking power and agency. An example of this can be the experience of being physically overwhelmed in the case of physical abuse, or not having the power to leave an emotionally abusive environment, as in the case of a child suffering from parental abuse who depends on their abusive caregiver for survival. This inability to prevent, avoid, or escape a traumatic experience has broad and long-lasting effects on the trauma-survivor's life. In order to understand the methodology of TCTSY and how leading a yoga session using its methodology differs from modern yoga, it is necessary to examine a specific scientific movement in the clinical study of interpersonal trauma, led in part by neuroscientist Dr. Bessel Van Der Kolk. His research and 2014 book *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind and Body in the Healing of Trauma* have been incredibly influential in the burgeoning field of body-centered approaches to treating trauma, and most notably Yoga Therapy. It is also important to consider some

classifications for trauma which are being used by Van Der Kolk, his colleagues, and the rest of the medical community (who are not always in agreement.) Finally, a basic understanding of the theories in the current scientific research into the effects of trauma is essential in order to understand the rationale behind the structure of TCTSY. It is also important to note that for my purpose of examining the application of certain TCTSY methodologies in Juvenile Detention centers, I will focus on trauma in children and adolescents.

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTS), an organization funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), offers the following definition of complex trauma:

Complex trauma describes both children's exposure to multiple traumatic events—often of an invasive, interpersonal nature—and the wide-ranging, long-term effects of this exposure. These events are severe and pervasive, such as abuse or profound neglect. They usually occur early in life and can disrupt many aspects of the child's development and the formation of a sense of self. Since these events often occur with a caregiver, they interfere with the child's ability to form a secure attachment. Many aspects of a child's healthy physical and mental development rely on this primary source of safety and stability. (Peterson, *Complex Trauma* 2018)

As the name suggests, the span and effects of complex trauma present a challenge for the medical community to diagnose. Van Der Kolk uses the term Developmental Trauma Disorder (DTD) to refer to the cumulative effects of childhood trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACE). Throughout his book *The Body Keeps the Score*, Van Der Kolk argues that a number of modern diagnoses among adolescents (Bipolar Disorder, Intermittent Explosive Disorder,

Oppositional Defiant Disorder, ADD and ADHD, Substance Abuse Disorder and more) included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) can be traced to a common root, complex trauma and ACEs. Van Der Kolk is critical of the American Psychological Association (APA) and the approach of the DSM-5, which he calls “a veritable smorgasbord of diagnoses” (2014, p.164). As a response, a group of notable scientists are currently campaigning to establish DTD as an accepted clinical diagnosis, and Van Der Kolk has included its outline in the appendix of his book. While diagnosing complex trauma and accepting DTD as a valid diagnosis into the DSM is still a topic for debate and division among scientists, they agree that there are deep and far-reaching effects resulting from trauma that have a profound impact on people’s physical and psychological health and well-being. With advances in neuroscience, attempts have been made to map the physiological processes of the effects of complex trauma, especially how trauma affects and moves through the nervous system. Complex trauma impacts the development of the nervous system and can cause chronic dysregulation which can lead to a long list of negative effects on a person’s life. Among the list of complex trauma effects presented by NCTS are difficulties forming friendships, romantic relationships, and problems with authority figures (such as police officers and teachers), difficulty with the regulation of the stress response and body dysregulation which can then lead to risky behaviors (smoking, substance abuse, poor diet), depression, “difficulty identifying, expressing, and managing emotions, and may have limited language for feeling states,” dissociation from the physical body, gaps in memory, appearing as spaced out and not paying attention (resulting in poor performance in learning institutions), impulse control and poor consequence assessment abilities leading to an increased likelihood for criminal activity and entering a juvenile institution

(Peterson, 2018). These are only a few of a long list of negative outcomes that result from complex trauma.

Because of complex trauma's deep roots in the body and the nervous system, Emerson, Van Der Kolk and a number of scientists began to look into and test the implementation of what Van Der Kolk calls a "bottom-up" approach to the treatment of trauma. "Bottom-up" regulation is achieved by calibrating the autonomic nervous system (ANS). ANS is accessed "through breath, movement or touch" (p. 64). A bottom-up approach allows the individual in treatment to address dysregulation on a non-verbal, sensory level. It is in this category of trauma treatments where we find trauma-sensitive yoga. Interestingly, modern yoga's emphasis on the body and its evolution into a body-centered practice has positioned it to fit the parameters of these new trends in trauma treatment. But to be fully integrated into this new context, modern postural yoga has had to undergo another adaptation – the role of the teacher. It is the new teacher-student power dynamic that transforms regular yoga into TSY.

Since all trauma contains, or stems from, experiences of powerlessness, the facilitator of a TCTSY session aims to empower the students to make choices about how to connect their body and how to respond to their individual experience. According to Emerson, in TSY the question of why a particular physical, mental or emotional experience occurs in the awareness of the practitioner is not the focus of the practice. The focus of TSY practice is to "have and to notice the experience as it is right now, to choose what to do with it once it is felt and to take action based on your choice" (Emerson 2015, p. 13). The basis of the teacher-student dynamic in TSY is based on the awareness that there is an inherent power dynamic, since the teacher is automatically in a position of power as a result of being the yoga expert, the one doing most of the talking and leading the experience, and because of all the social conditioning both students

and teachers bring to the practice (e.g. experiences in educational settings and with figures of authority). In the context of power dynamics, TCTSY is a practice in which the facilitator is using a set of guidelines and methodologies to continuously shift power and agency to the participant(s). It is this approach to yoga that has been most influential and central to the development and application of the Trauma-Informed Mindfulness-Based Yoga intervention in youth detention centers in Atlanta, Georgia.

3 TIMBY CLASSES AT YOUTH DETENTION CENTERS IN ATLANTA, GEORGIA

Teachers who are members of Centering Youth (CY) lead Trauma-informed, mindfulness-based yoga (TIMBY) classes at three juvenile detention centers in and around Atlanta Georgia. Centering Youth is an Atlanta based 501(c)(3) non-profit yoga service initiative whose proclaimed mission is to bring “Yoga and Mindfulness to young people in the juvenile justice system, and to those who have been sexually exploited, abused or are homeless” (*Our Vision*, n.d.) Centering Youth was founded by Atlanta yoga teacher Holle Black, and a retired lawyer and yoga teacher named Bob Altman. They began providing classes to disadvantaged populations in 2012, and in 2013 they invited me to join their organization as a teacher to lead classes at the Fulton County Juvenile Court as part of a community diversion program called The Learning Club (TLC). TLC included yoga among other activities and is led by Samuel Johnson, the deputy chief juvenile probation officer (Fulton County Juvenile Court, n.d.). At this stage classes were not yet classified as TIMBY or part of the current study.

The outline of the general format and features of a TIMBY session that I present in this chapter is sourced from the protocol drafted in 2020 for an ongoing National Institute of Health (NIH) study led by Georgia State University’s School of Public Health professor Dr. Ashli Owen-Smith. In addition to drawing this protocol, I will draw on my own experience leading yoga sessions in youth detention centers and that of other teachers who have facilitated yoga classes within the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ).

Centering Youth classes are currently offered at four Georgia detention centers: DeKalb Regional Youth Detention Center, Atlanta Youth Development Campus, Marietta Regional Youth Detention Center and Marta K. Glaze Regional Youth Detention Center. Classes (or groups as they are called within the facilities) take place once or twice a week on weekdays

between three and six o'clock in the afternoon. The sessions are one hour long. The number of participants varies from week to week, but usually ranges between four and eight adolescent males who are predominantly African American and Hispanic. The age range is thirteen to twenty-one years old. The facilitators are all Yoga Alliance certified yoga teachers. They include Amelia Reiser Solodkin, a white woman, Ian Elmore-Moore, an African American male, both from the United States, and Vladimir Tchakarov, a white male and Eastern European immigrant. In addition to their Yoga Alliance certification, these teachers have received and continue to receive specialized instruction in TCTSY from David Emerson and Holle Black. All teachers are registered as volunteers with the DJJ and as such have had to go through all the mandatory procedural trainings and background checks required of volunteers by the DJJ. All the teachers receive financial compensation from funds provided by Centering Youth, which has a paid contract with the DJJ, and Georgia State University (Owen-Smith & The National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, 2020). Classes usually take place in a small education room that accommodates around ten people, but sometimes sessions may be moved to a gymnasium, or to a smaller room used for education or games. The facilities are often understaffed, and this can result in delays in escorting youths from their rooms to yoga classes on time or, in some cases, at all, and a session may get cancelled. The facilitators frequently have to wait inside the facility for the students to be gathered and escorted to class space. A guard must be present when the class is taking place, and a mental health professional is also present in the room in most classes although not always. The DJJ correctional officers (who observe the class but do not participate) can present additional challenges to the yoga instruction. There have been instances when guards yell instructions to participants during a session to force a higher level of participation and involvement, which is in direct conflict with the voluntary and non-coercive

methodology of TIMBY. Due to the staff shortages, the yoga instructors have sometimes been left alone in the room with the participants. It is important to note that this detention center setting also presents novel challenges for the facilitator, the participants in the yoga session, as well as for the staff in the facility, who may have little to no understanding of TIMBY or whose understanding of yoga may be informed by popular culture portrayals. An example of this may be the expectation that a TIMBY session's efficacy is measured by how relaxed and subdued the behavior of the participants appears to be at the conclusion of a session. In TSY however, the efficacy of a yoga session is based on how effectively the facilitator applies the four themes of making choices, taking effective action, present moment awareness and rhythms. The application of these themes does not necessarily lead to an experience of being relaxed and peaceful, and TSY often involves experiencing and facing uncomfortable emotions and sensations. Bob Altman, the afore-mentioned founder of Centering Youth who used his law practice experience and connections to bring yoga inside detention centers, wrote the following about the detention center bureaucracy:

It is hard to get a yoga class going in detention centers and prisons in most places in the United States. To do so requires an understanding of the bureaucracy and culture in which classes will take place. Yoga teachers often encounter a general disinterest and suspicion on the part of government administrators about bringing yoga into detention centers and prisons. Sometimes this is rooted in lack of knowledge, lack of interest, bureaucratic inertia or outright suspicion that yoga is a subversive or an anti-Christian activity. Most often, succeeding in bringing yoga classes into a detention center or prison must be facilitated by an administrator on the inside who takes up the cause and works hard to maneuver through the

bureaucracy to make the class happen. Even with such a person advocating for the class, unless s/he is a top decision maker, someone in the hierarchy above our ally can prevent the class from happening, just because they say so. (Altman, 2016)

This offers a glimpse into all the additional forces and power dynamics teachers are subjected to and must consider when they undertake teaching in DJJ detention centers.

The juvenile detention setting represents a very different environment compared to commercial settings where yoga teachers in the United States normally operate such as yoga studios, athletic clubs, or retreat centers. In a more common yoga class setting, the teacher holds the sole leadership position, exerts the most power in the room, and directs the flow of the class, and it is very rare to experience any interference from students or staff. This is especially true in the case of yoga studios, which are often seen by teachers and students as more than just a place for exercise, often as a sacred space where spiritual growth happens. Shoes are taken off before entering the practice space and people converse in hushed voices. In the detention center there are always DJJ employees - correctional officers, social workers or mental health professionals – who observe the class or at times interact with youth. In addition, other employees may walk through the room where yoga is held, disrupting the session through talking, opening and closing doors, and at times engaging with the participants. In these instances, the yoga teacher who is facilitating the class doesn't have much choice but to patiently wait for the disturbance to pass. Bob Altman points out that the bureaucracy of the detention center may be distrustful and suspicious, and it is best to stay on administrators' good side, because a person in a position of authority may decide to discontinue the class. In this sense a teacher operating within the detention center must let go of power and control both in relation to the students and the

institution, and this can be very difficult. In dealing with the bureaucracy and the institution there is currently no map or guidelines on how to proceed, and teachers must adapt intuitively as best as they can. In the case of the TIMBY class structure (the sixty-minute session taking place inside the detention center) there is a detailed protocol in place. The structure of the yoga class currently follows a protocol designed through a collaboration by Holle Black, David Emerson and Dr. Ashli Owen-Smith for the Georgia State University based study titled *Trauma-Informed Mindfulness-Based Yoga Intervention for Juvenile Justice-Involved Youth*. According to the protocol, “The objectives of this mixed-methods investigation are to (1) refine and pilot a trauma-informed, mindfulness-based yoga (TIMBY) program, (2) conduct a feasibility trial in order to assess the preliminary impact of this program on youth behavioral and psychosocial outcomes and (3) test key aspects of the study design to inform the design of a subsequent full-scale randomized trial” (Owen-Smith & The National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, 2020, p. 9). The participants are provided with yoga mats that have been donated to Centering Youth by yoga studios, private individuals, and yoga clothing companies. Some of the other available props are decks of yoga pose cards, yoga blocks, eye pillows, and singing bowls, although the availability of these varies from one location to another and from one teacher to another. The yoga class usually begins with the participants selecting poses from a deck of yoga pose cards. Once the poses for the day are selected, the class begins with a check-in. The check-in consists of each participant and the facilitator taking turns sharing their name and how they feel that day. After the check-in the facilitator spends a moment discussing which theme will be the focus of that day’s class. Four themes are specially selected for the intervention, and they come directly from David Emerson’s TCTSY. The four themes are: 1) Practice making choices, 2) Present moment experience 3) Taking effective action, and 4) Rhythms (2020, p. 12-13). While one theme is usually chosen by the facilitator as the focus of the practice that day, all four themes are

interwoven and integrated throughout the session. Sometimes the themes are verbalized and named explicitly. The facilitator might say something like: “when you lowered your arms before everyone else you made a choice and took effective action” Sometimes the themes are carried out just experientially without being named in the bodies of the participants. An example would be when the teacher offers three versions of the pose and invites the participants to select and enter the version they chose. These themes are a central and distinguishing feature of both TCTSY and TIMBY sessions. After the discussion of the central theme for the class, participants are led into warm-up movements.

Beginning the class with warm-up movements differs from traditional yoga studio classes where yoga teachers usually begin with guided meditation and breathing exercises. There is consensus among the yoga teachers leading TIMBY that the standard approach of leading meditation and *pranayama* (breath control) in the beginning of a session has not been particularly effective in engaging the often restless, lethargic, suspicious, or disinterested teenage male participants, while immediately engaging in simple and familiar body movements seems more effective. Effective in this case means the activity is engaging and easier to comprehend and follow. Meditation and *pranayama* are not immediately visible and can be more subtle and internal compared to simple bodily movements which most Western students have likely encountered in physical education classes. After all, the history and popularity of modern transnational postural yoga is a prime example of that same adaptation. Facilitators lead the warm-up, and sometimes participants are given the choice and opportunity of selecting and leading these movements. The facilitator offers some verbal safety suggestions when a movement introduced by a participant poses a physical injury risk. After the warm-ups, the class continues with the yoga poses selected by the participants. In both TCTSY and TIMBY the term

“pose” is replaced with “form,” because the word “pose” may carry a potentially triggering meaning for a trauma survivor (as in “posing” for the perpetrator in a case of sexual abuse or exploitation). These forms range from the most common poses in modern postural yoga to special variations that may be suggested by the individual facilitator. At times the participants are invited to step into the role of a facilitator and lead the group into a form. The sequence of forms ends with a seated meditation, which often includes *pranayama*. The class concludes with a relaxation element in which the participants have the option of lying down and engaging in one or more relaxation techniques (e.g. body scan).

As I mentioned before, practicing the four themes (practice making choices, present moment experience, taking effective action and rhythms) is the central distinguishing feature of the TIMBY session. The first theme, “Practice making choices,” stems from the understanding that traumatic experiences often involve not having a choice. The example David Emerson presents here is of an infant born in a violent and neglectful home, not receiving the nurturance and care he or she needs and yet unable to leave that home or choose a different life circumstance (Emerson 2015, p.63). In this context TIMBY serves as an opportunity to explore making choices. The choices that students are invited to make in this context are centered on their bodies and their immediate somatic experience in the present moment. The practice of making choices in TIMBY is about how to move and experience one’s body. This is achieved through the teacher’s use of invitational language. This entails invitations to explore different movements or forms rather than commands.

The second theme, “Present Moment Experience,” addresses the understanding, based on the work of neuroscientist Bessel Van Der Kolk, that trauma survivors have trouble staying connected to their body. Van Der Kolk observed that many of his patients could not distinguish

between items he placed in their hands, such as car keys, coins, or tools, without looking, concluding that their “sensory perceptions simply weren’t working” (2014, p. 89). In addition, research shows that trauma survivors experience disruptions in self-regulation. This means that while people who do not suffer from the effects of complex trauma can effectively regulate their stress response, (if, for example, after being triggered by an experience they realize that the trigger presents no danger (false alarm), individuals who are trauma survivors may not be able to do the same. Bessel Van Der Kolk defines mindfulness as the ability “to hover calmly and objectively over thoughts feelings and emotions” (2014, p. 62). TIMBY uses breath control and mindfulness meditation as tools to assist students in developing their ability to connect to present moment experience.

The third theme, “taking effective action,” is used to address the likelihood that trauma survivors may have experienced an inability to act in order to avoid a traumatic event or environment, and may as a result experience helplessness, an inability to take actions according to their needs or goals. In a TIMBY class the yoga teacher creates opportunities for students to take effective action. For example, if a pose causes discomfort, the student is encouraged to first make a choice about what they wish to experience (stay with discomfort or change the experience) and then take effective action in staying with the experience or changing something about the pose in a way that effectively achieves the choice the student has made. According to the TIMBY protocol this can assist the student in achieving “a sense of self-efficacy and personal agency.”

The fourth theme, rhythms, addresses the disconnect from the physical body that trauma survivors often experience. It provides an opportunity for the student to experience a sense of somatic connection and continuity over a period of time through sustained movement and breath.

This is also an opportunity to match their movement to their breath and to match both of these to the movement and breath of others. David Emerson identifies three aspects of rhythm in the practice of TSY: “(1) immobilization versus movement, (2) passage of time, and (3) isolation versus connection with others” (Emerson 2015, p.136). Each of these refers to a particular impact of trauma. Immobilization refers to the limiting effect of trauma on people. Trauma survivors often avoid situations or experiences that are reminiscent of traumatic experiences or triggering. This experience of being frozen and unable to move in certain ways, to go certain places or perform certain actions, can be addressed through the therapeutic use of rhythms. Trauma can also disrupt an individual's sense of time. Emerson argues that based on Van Der Kolk's research, traumatic experiences that happened in the past do not necessarily end for the trauma survivor. In fact, their life and experiences could in many ways be continuously oriented around the traumatic events they have gone through. In Emerson's words, “trauma is so compelling on an interpersonal and neurobiological level that it never ends; it is like having the same song stuck on replay” (2015, p.136). The practice of performing various physical movements that have a distinct beginning and an end can help students find a sense of agency and develop their ability to end a particular experience and begin a different one. The aspect of isolation versus connection addresses the experience of isolation which often accompanies trauma. Performing movements together in a TSY creates a sense of shared experience and connection (2015, p.144.)

The use of these themes in TCTSY and TIMBY points to a practice that is oriented towards different goals and values than those of both older yoga traditions and modern yoga. In older yoga traditions, the goals were religious and esoteric. Renunciation, discipline, self-control and strict adherence to the instructions and methods of a guru were presented as the ways for

obtaining these goals. The values of these traditions usually reflected the religious context in which a particular yoga tradition was practiced. In modern yoga, the goals are oriented towards meeting the demands of consumers. If people come to a yoga studio to stay healthy and fit, to feel relaxed and obtain respite from the pressures of careers and family life, that is what teachers strive to offer through a mixture of physical and religious elements (these are usually referred to as spiritual and not religious by teachers and practitioners) in fluctuating proportions depending on the audience. The consumer can exert power and shape how yoga is taught and practiced through their financial support. Some teachers prefer to settle into a “niche” in which to build their student base based on economic factors or personal preference. For example, Acro Yoga is a specialized niche in the Atlanta yoga community where practitioners work with a partner to perform complex acrobatic maneuvers, akin to a circus performance (*Acro Yoga Atlanta Acroyoga*, n.d.) Teachers who have made a career in yoga often cater to popular demand, while those who teach as a hobby or for fun may base their classes on what they enjoy teaching the most. Other teachers prefer to take on a variety of settings and student populations. In TCTSY and TIMBY the facilitator is there to share power with participants who are presumed to be the survivors of trauma. The goal of the protocol is to develop and apply objectively effective techniques, tested through secular, scientific, and clinically acceptable methods, which create opportunities for the participants to feel in control of their body, for the purpose of healing trauma. The values of this practice are oriented towards a clear understanding of how trauma informs power dynamics in interpersonal relationships and then to strategically use this understanding to empower individuals. The facilitators play the central role in this process. Since they have now entered the context of the DJJ detention center and chosen to work with

incarcerated youth, yoga teachers are placed in a novel situation where several new factors inform the power dynamics between them, the youth and the staff in the facility.

4 THE HISTORY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE JUSTICE AND HOW YOGA WENT BEHIND BARS

It is essential to examine the historic and social context of the Juvenile Justice system to gain a more complete understanding of why and how teaching and practicing yoga has found its way into the DJJ and how it has been shaped by that institution. As I have explained in the previous chapters, the various incarnations of yoga have always been molded by teachers and practitioners to fit into the current social and cultural milieu. The yoga class in the environment of the juvenile detention center is a microcosm that is physically and demographically very different from the better-known commercial yoga studio today. In chapter one I presented a picture of modern postural yoga in the United States as a commodified practice predominantly involving mostly white, mostly female, middle and upper-class people. Yoga businesses and teachers strive to present a form of yoga and a space that appeals to these consumers and aligns with their social and cultural context and needs. In the detention center, by contrast, the teaching and practicing of yoga is significantly informed by the institution and the juvenile population. Note that in this context, the participants differ markedly from the consumers who enter commercial yoga studios. I have chosen to examine four important factors that affect and inform the facilitator-participant dynamic in TIMBY within DJJ detention facilities, elements that present a departure from commercial modern yoga contexts. These are age, race, socio-economic status (SEC), and the juvenile justice system. My work is focused on males, but there are also incarcerated and juvenile justice-involved young women who practice yoga. Their experiences and needs are different and warrant a separate discussion. My discussion will focus on young males because the current NIH study and the current classes taking place in the detention center are comprised of all male participants. Since one of the main goals of both TCTSY and TIMBY

is to address the power dynamic implicitly or explicitly between the teacher-student or facilitator-participant during the yoga class, I will discuss the role of age, race, socio economic status and incarceration.

The implications of age difference (every participant in the yoga session is a minor and every facilitator an adult) may be more obvious in the context of power relations. The age difference leading to arbitrary categorizations such as “minor” and “adult” immediately positions the facilitator in the role of a grown-up and a source of authority. While being seen as an authority figure may be desirable for the teacher in the context of the yoga studio, in the context of a TIMBY class in the detention center it can trigger negative associations for the participant (For a discussion on complex trauma and ACEs in youth and perceptions of authority refer to chapter 2.)

Race plays a significant role in shaping the lives of youth, in ways that are not always immediately observable or easily understood. The impact of discriminatory policies is especially severe among Black youth. The notable Georgetown law professor Kristine Henning writes:

As to be expected, black youth have disproportionately borne the brunt of this legislative fallout. For example, data from a 2005 Human Rights Watch report indicated that although black youth made up only sixteen percent of America’s youth population, they accounted for sixty percent of all youth serving life sentences without parole in adult courts. Similar disparities are still evident at all stages of the juvenile justice system. In 2014, for example, black youth were just sixteen percent of all minors ages ten to seventeen nationally but accounted for forty-two percent of all detained youth, thirty-seven percent of all adjudicated

youth, and fifty three percent of youth waived into the adult system (2018, p. 1622).

The history and ongoing presence of racism and white supremacy in the United States has led to the implementation governmental policies that disproportionately affect minority youth, with African American youth having the highest risk of juvenile justice involvement and incarceration. In addition, research shows that DJJ staff, facilitators and the youth may hold negative perceptions about race and certain associations of race and criminality. A 2019 article titled “Race and Stereotypes Matter When You Ask About Conduct Problems: Implications for Violence Risk Assessment in Juvenile Justice Settings” in the *Journal of Black Psychology* discusses the implications of racial stereotypes on perceptions of conduct problems and violence risk assessment in DJJ settings. In the article the authors argue that the “characterization of the African American as a criminal has been a societal archetype” (J. R. Andretta et. Al. p. 29) in American culture since colonialism. It has been promoted through fictional film, television and popular culture portrayals in the modern era, resulting in perceptions of black people as more dangerous. These negative stereotypes affect black youth’s self-perceptions and may result in increased self-reporting of severe conduct problems even when black youth is no more prone to such behaviors than white teenagers (p. 27). Another article on “being black” in the juvenile justice system presents the prevalence of serious biases among DJJ staff that result in harsher social controls and adjudications for black youth (Peck, Jennings 2016, p. 220). Yoga teachers themselves are also subject to these societal conditionings and bring them in their classes. All these power relations come into play in the shaping of the facilitator participant power dynamic and what takes place in during the yoga session.

Finally, economic inequalities and poverty greatly increase the risk of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and complex trauma, and significantly increase the likelihood of contact with law enforcement, the DJJ, and incarceration. It is a well-established fact that most of the youth in DJJ detention centers come from low-income households and have experienced poverty. For example, in Tennessee almost sixty percent of the youth involved in the juvenile justice system were either dependent on public assistance funds or came from a household with an annual income below the poverty line. In addition, court officials purposefully refer low-SES youth to the DJJ, with the reasoning that this will provide the structure and discipline delinquent youth need, to develop into productive adults (Birckhead, 2012, p. 59). Once low-income youth are incarcerated it is more difficult for them to get out. Many of the pathways out of incarceration involve fees and restitution payments. Diversion and community service programs also involve access to transportation, stable living arrangements, time, and resources, without which the judicial process for youth is negatively impacted (Kim et. Al. 2020, p. 6-8).

Because of the high percentage of youth from such disadvantaged populations in DJJ detention centers in Atlanta, GA, every TIMBY class is affected by and takes place within these social contexts. The structure, organization, and operation of the DJJ and youth detention centers further complicates the functionality and implementation of rehabilitative modalities. Treatment of complex trauma requires a stable, predictable environment, experienced and well-trained staff who understand the behavioral impacts of trauma, and opportunities for choice-making and feeling in control of one's body and experiences. Two recent articles describe widespread systemic problems plaguing Georgia detention centers. An April 2021 Georgia Public Broadcasting article exposed low wages, severe staff shortages, and a 97% turnover rate among new correctional officers. This has resulted in detention centers that are understaffed and

operated by inexperienced and overworked employees (Dunlap, 2021). Two other articles written by investigative reporter Alan Judd for the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* (AJC) detail multiple incidents of violent attacks by correctional officers against incarcerated youth and include photographic and video footage of the incidents. Judd writes, “The agency has long operated under a militarylike hierarchy, with top officials far removed from the chaotic environment of the facilities where it confines young offenders. At the same time, the state’s punitive juvenile justice laws are mirrored in the harsh treatment of juvenile prisoners” (2019). Studies on the rehabilitative value of the current system have highlighted its inefficiencies and failures to address the prevalence of trauma among incarcerated youth, showing that in fact detention centers may be sources of trauma that further negatively impact the development and lives of adolescents. This vicious cycle of complex trauma, incarceration, further traumatization, and higher risk of adult incarceration is known as “the school to prison pipeline.”

Some of the history, issues, inefficiencies and needs for reform in the American Juvenile Justice System are outlined by UCLA scholar Laura S. Abrams in her article “Juvenile Justice in a Crossroads: Science, Evidence, and Twenty First Century Reform” (2013). Abrams writes:

Mounting concern that juvenile detention and incarceration are overused and ineffective (Mendel 2011); reports of abuse, violence, and substandard care in correctional facilities housing minors (Ziedenberg and Schiraldi 1997; Vera Institute of Justice 2009); the disproportionate involvement of children of color and poor children at all stages of juvenile justice processing (Armour and Hammond 2009); high rates of recidivism (Mendel 2011); and the high costs of confinement have all contributed to a heightened perception that the juvenile justice system is in dire need of far-reaching reforms. (2013, p. 726)

She also observes that since its inception in the beginning of the twentieth century, the Department of Juvenile Justice has undergone significant changes, and it has drifted away from its original mission of offering rehabilitation opportunities to youth. In its formative years (from the 1890's to 1920's) the Department of Juvenile Justice evolved out of the belief among its founders that adolescents are developmentally behind adults in their ability to make good life choices and that they may be under the influence of larger systemic factors (family and communal issues, lack of resources, neighborhood blight etc.). Therefore, adolescents could not be held fully accountable for their actions in the same way that adults could. The solutions for dealing with criminal offenses among adolescents reflected this understanding. Solutions initially involved community programs focused on changing the socio-economic environment of the youth with court-ordered out-of-home programs, moving juvenile offenders to dormitories or camps resembling an army base where they would be rehabilitated through "moral character building." Abrams calls this the "ecological approach" towards solving juvenile delinquency. According to this approach, moral character is shaped by the socio-economic environment of a young person, therefore in order to better their moral character their body must be relocated to a different environment than the one that caused the deficiency in the first place. This view of course fails to address the larger systemic societal issues that contribute to unstable, economically disadvantaged environments.

The shift towards punishment, which started in the 1980s, resulted from a series of reforms that pushed for "adult time for adult time laws" and presented incarceration as a fix-all solution for rising crime rates. Most notably this includes Reagan's "war on drugs," which disproportionately affected African-American males. The policies enacted in the eighties and nineties also transferred more power from judges to prosecutors to decide whether a minor

should be charged with a crime. Ironically, the same understanding that adolescents are developmentally different from adults was used by political scientist John Dilulio, who is credited with the term “superpredator,” to paint juvenile delinquents as a dangerous other, devoid of morals, empathy and impulse control. In addition to entering the juvenile justice system for adult crimes, juveniles can also be prosecuted for acts that are not considered criminal when committed by adults, such as underage drinking, truancy and running away from home. The Juvenile Justice Courts have the power to clear a path towards prosecution as an adult or to move towards adjudication (same as a trial in the adult system). The judge can then determine a disposition (equivalent of a sentence in adult system). Since the DJJ does not impanel juries, the presiding judges have the final say on the punishment (Kim et. Al. 2020, pp.4-5). In his article “The School to Prison Pipeline: A Critical Review of the Punitive Paradigm Shift,” Christopher Mallet also addresses the changes in school systems and juvenile justice systems across the country resulting from the policies passed in the 1980’s 1990’s. This time period “spawned fears and media reports of young people, often minorities, committing horrific crimes, ‘wilding’ events, and concern for the emergence of the ‘juvenile superpredator.’” Mallet argues that such public perceptions and fears were “completely disproportionate to the reality of youth violence. Despite this, the legislation passed in the 1990’s and 2000’s by state and federal governments shifted considerably towards punishment and away from rehabilitation. A major development resulting from this shift towards punishment are the so called “zero tolerance policies” enacted through a large percentage of schools nationwide. According to Mallet’s data the percentage of schools enacting such policies since 1996 “has never fallen below 75% with some estimates as high as 90%.” (2016, p. 18)

Parallel to the changes in school policies, laws, and sentencing for juvenile offenders, there has been a shift in the structure and inner workings of juvenile detention facilities. Abrams writes:

Juvenile detention and correctional facilities also gradually began to resemble the more punitive, rank-and-file orientation of adult jails and prisons (Krisberg 2006). Although the harsh conditions and punitive aspect of juvenile facilities were not novel, the more overwhelming emphasis on punishment in juvenile facilities represented a dramatic shift from the historical tenor of morally-focused reformatories. Currently, the uneasy coupling of punitive and rehabilitative aspects of the juvenile justice system is seen most acutely in youth correctional institutions, which often try to blend aspects of residential group homes with the rank and file mentality, physical structure, and punitive orientation of adult penal facilities. (Abrams, 2013, p. 733)

The adoption of the adult penal facility model in juvenile justice is especially disturbing considering the racist history of the adult US prison system. The “superpredator” narrative I mentioned earlier, combined with media fear campaigns, portrayed juvenile offenders as a subhuman danger. This racist rhetoric led black youth to become disproportionately represented in the juvenile justice system (Kempf-Leonard, 2007).

In her book *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, scholar and activist Angela Davis examines the origins of the modern prison industry and its white supremacist roots. Davis points out the substantial similarities between the system of slavery and the prison system. Both involve deprivation of individuals of rights, the total dependence of slaves and prisoners upon an

authority figure with power over them for the basic needs of life such as food and shelter, and the consignment of their physical bodies to a confined space. Davis writes:

Particularly in the United States, race has always played a central role in constructing presumptions of criminality. After the abolition of slavery, former slave states passed new legislation revising the Slave Codes in order to regulate the behavior of free blacks in ways similar to those that had existed during slavery. The new Black Codes proscribed a range of actions—such as vagrancy, absence from work, breach of job contracts, the possession of firearms, and insulting gestures or acts—that were criminalized only when the person charged was black. (2003, p. 28)

These “Black Codes” in former slave states essentially criminalized being black and served to perpetuate white supremacy through incarceration and sentencing to hard labor, effectively circumnavigating the 13th amendment (Davis, 2003, pp.27-28). This history of criminalization on the basis of race is obviously at work in the DJJ, where minority youth are disproportionately represented and multiple studies have found that black youth are more likely to face incarceration and harsher sentences than white adolescents, for the same offences (Kim, et. al. 2020). The stated original goal of the DJJ, to rehabilitate minors, is then called into question as in practice it seems the purpose of the DJJ has been to assuage the fears of the white majority by removing the dangerous minority youth from communities and rendering them docile through punishment. In the case that they prove unredeemable they are passed on to the adult penal system for what is essentially a life behind bars. This is not surprising considering the history and evolution of the modern prison.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault observes that in the evolution of the modern prison system, the focus of the penitentiary apparatus shifted from one of simply exacting the adjudicated punishment on the “offender,” to a focus on re-education and transformation of the “delinquent.” Foucault defines the offender as the individual responsible for the crime and the delinquent as an aspect of the individual characterized by their entire life and “defined by variables which at the outset at least were not taken into account in the sentence, for they were relevant only for a corrective technology.” This process of re-education is accomplished through total control of the delinquent’s body. This entails a surveillance not only of their activities in the penal facility but also of their life before incarceration. Then control is exerted on their body and person by the partitioning and organization of their time. In this way delinquency is reduced to a problem existing on an individual level, which can be resolved through discipline and scientific and moral interventions. The social history of the delinquent is acknowledged, but only to the extent that it informs and makes more efficient the disciplinary technologies of the prison. These technologies are designed to disempower the individual and produce a docile body, an obedient subject suitable for productive labor and integration into the neoliberal social fabric (1977). This reflects the shift from seeking to solve the social conditions contributing to delinquent behaviors and actions in individual youth to a simplistic solution of punishment, incarceration, and delegation of rehabilitation to a carceral system that is ill equipped and, some will argue, structurally incapable of meeting the needs of adolescent offenders. This is especially true in the context of complex trauma. In an article on traumatic experiences, behavioral issues and staff controls (methods of disciplining youth), Ashleigh I. Hodge and Jamie R. Yoder write:

The goals of juvenile justice have long been deliberated (Gottfredson, Taylor, National Institute of Justice, & Johns Hopkins University, 1983;

Monahan, 1981); a system that balances punishment with rehabilitation is an ideal model for responding to youthful offending (Howell, 2003). Juvenile justice-involved youth have higher rates of early life abuse than the general population (Coleman, 2005; Coleman & Stewart, 2010; Ford, Chapman, Connor, & Cruise, 2012). However, very few carceral settings are trauma-informed or comprehensively screen for trauma (Crosby, 2016; Donisch, Bray, & Gewirtz, 2016; Yoder, Whitaker, & Quinn, in press). Therefore, staff controls can be applied to youth without consideration of early life abuse experiences. Some correctional settings have protocols that permit infliction of harm, other physical punishments, or psychological measures directed toward youth to maintain control and order within facilities and to prevent behavioral disruptions. (2017)

The article goes on to outline the relation between childhood abuse and early childhood trauma and behavioral problems among juvenile youth: “Emotions such as anger and frustration can showcase themselves as behaviors including, but not limited to, fighting, stealing, destruction, or refusal to follow rules.” When youths with these behavioral issues enter the detention center they tend to be subjected to the archaic, punitive, disciplinary technologies of the prison. These technologies are not trauma-informed and, in fact, they exacerbate the problem and are in themselves oftentimes violent, traumatic experiences. Ultimately, the practices that dominate the prison system perpetuate the cycle of trauma, behavioral issues, and punishment.

When we combine the developmental aspects of adolescence with the psychological and physiological effects of complex trauma, the stigma of incarceration, and the disadvantages of race and socio-economic status with the severity and authoritarianism of the adult penal system, it is hardly surprising that the DJJ has shifted very far from its original goal of rehabilitation. The

onset of neuroscientific advances and research into the functions of the brain and the differences between adolescent and adult brains, scientific evidence about the higher rates of complex trauma among minority and low socio-economic status kids, and the link between complex trauma and negative outcomes for adolescents have resulted in new pressure and calls from activists, advocates and professionals involved in Juvenile Justice, to move away from the punitive side of the spectrum and back towards the stated original mission of rehabilitation. This has led DJJ officials on a search for new rehabilitative modalities that lie outside the system. In a 2019 article for the Atlanta Journal Constitution on the then newly appointed Georgia juvenile justice commissioner, Tyrone Oliver, states that the system is short staffed and underfunded, and “Oliver wants help from nonprofit organizations, community groups and others to mentor youths in and out of the department’s facilities, to help them find jobs, to show them that life outside gangs can be fulfilling (Judd, 2019).” This attitude among DJJ officials has made it possible for TIMBY facilitators to enter detention centers.

The process of entering the space of the detention center is much more involved than entering a yoga studio. Yoga teachers must go through mandatory background screenings, fingerprinting, and procedural trainings. In addition to following the TIMBY class protocol, they must fill out an online report in the Juvenile Tracking System (JTS) after each session. The report consists of details about the number and names of the participants, structure, flow, time (approximate times yoga poses and meditation techniques lasted), and any adverse experiences. Thus, the yoga teachers become agents in the total surveillance of the incarcerated individual. In exchange for this participation in the carceral apparatus, TIMBY facilitators are allowed access to the incarcerated juveniles and given the ability to provide a small window of time and space for the inmates to engage in an activity that falls outside the norm of the prison. The institution

can use the yoga classes it has allowed on its premises as a testament to the reform efforts it is pressured to enact. The youth in the detention center also stand to gain something in the form of relief from the tedium and routines of the prison. In addition, participation in groups may gain them favor with the staff of the facility, and at times material rewards (snacks, hygiene items, access to a hair stylist, or a move to a better room within the facility). Yoga teachers may gain legitimacy in the eyes of their educated, middle-class students through their involvement in a government sanctioned application of yoga that is the subject of a scientific study. More important for teachers, however, is the opportunity to bring what they undoubtedly view as the positive healing benefits of yoga to a marginalized population. After all, the idea of adapting one's teaching to new contexts and populations has been the prerogative of gurus and teachers for many centuries. The willingness to share authority and power in the context of teaching yoga in the detention center is the prerequisite to share and spread yoga there.

5 FROM GURUS TO FACILITATORS

In the previous chapters I described a contemporary context for the teaching and practice of yoga, the juvenile detention center, with power dynamics as the focus of my analysis. I use the term power dynamics to refer to a broad array of interpersonal exchanges that occur during and around yoga practice. The main exchange is the one taking place within a guru-disciple, teacher-student, or facilitator-participant relationship, but there are also others (including interpersonal exchanges with yoga studio owners, DJJ correctional officers and mental health workers). I have argued in the previous chapters that the expanding variety of ways in which authority and decision-making flow in the teaching of yoga reflects the growing diversity of available practices. In this chapter I have chosen to compare how power dynamics manifest in three specific traditions, all of which contain a postural, body-centered component. These are medieval Indian Hatha Yoga, modern transnational postural yoga, and trauma-informed mindfulness-based yoga (TIMBY.) While the power dynamics vary from one specific lineage to another and from one teacher to another, some general patterns have emerged in each tradition. For example, in the case of a traditional guru-disciple model, the guru may be credited with esoteric knowledge. This means disciples may have to strive in their practice to obtain initiation into a deeper level of that tradition, and if the guru deems a disciple unworthy, they have the power to withhold the secrets of that lineage. A traditional guru may also be credited with special spiritual powers through which they can speed up the progress of a disciple or demonstrate the potency of their teachings. On a mundane level a guru could be the head of a religious hermitage or a monastery and be in control of the disciple's basic needs such as shelter and food. This means that displeasing the guru could be perceived as being dangerous for one's survival. In modern yoga, power can manifest as authoritative expertise in the proper execution of postural alignments and breathing

techniques as well as understanding of the philosophy and history of yoga. The power differential in the facilitator-participant dynamic in TIMBY and TCTSY manifests in less explicit ways. The facilitator may have access to personal information about the participant and may, in the case of TIMBY in a detention center, decide that a participant is negatively affecting the experience of other participants and ask that they be removed from the group.

In this chapter I will look at power dynamics as a spectrum. On one end of this spectrum lie traditional Indian notions of the total surrender of the spiritual aspirant to an enlightened and often divinely imbued guru. In the middle is the modern postural yoga teacher in the blurred and ambiguous position of a quasi-spiritual life-coach with dual expertise in mental and physical techniques of self-cultivation, who can either endorse or reject guru-like devotion from their students. At the end of this spectrum is the facilitator of TCTSY and TIMBY, a secular figure whose main goal is to continually shift power in the form of choice-making and agency to the individual participant, who then also becomes an actor in the power dynamics of the detention center. As I discussed in Chapter three, the yoga being taught in detention centers in Atlanta and the way it is presented to the participants has adapted in response to being dominated by various assertions of power and the experiences of complex trauma.

To better understand the process of adaptation that shifted from gurus to facilitators, I will examine how the relationship and power dynamics between teacher and student have varied through time by mapping a historic trajectory from the medieval traditions of *hatha* yoga, through modern transnational, postural yoga and to TCTSY and TIMBY in juvenile detention centers. While the term guru is not at all exclusive to the *hatha* yoga or the postural yoga tradition, these traditions will be the focus of my discussion. I will begin my analysis by

exploring commentaries on the role of the guru in the context of medieval *hatha yoga* and how medieval *hatha yoga* texts describe the relationship between gurus and disciples.

As yoga and gurus moved west, the new cultural context informed guru-disciple dynamics, and teachers strove to adapt both the content and approach of their teaching. Some gurus were more successful than others and trained many Western disciples, who further adapted their methods. Some gurus and teachers, Indian and Western, including a few very successful ones, got into trouble, and their actions sparked debates in the yoga community about power dynamics, gender dynamics, and raised questions about the need for the guru model in modern yoga. As a result, in most yoga studios in the West there are no gurus. People who lead classes are called “teachers” or “instructors,” and those taking the class are usually called “students” or “clients,” reflecting the shift from yoga’s religious roots to a secular exercise commodity. Yoga schools who train modern postural yoga teachers design increasingly lengthy and thorough codes of ethics akin to corporate business protocols that govern the yoga instructor’s behavior.

In TCTSY and TIMBY the person leading the class is referred to as a “facilitator” specifically to address the baggage that comes with words like “guru” and “teacher.” This baggage comes attached to the word “guru” in two forms. The first is that of the Indian religious connotations, which the department of juvenile justice finds incompatible with the U.S. laws that separate religion and state. Since the majority of residents at the detention centers come from a Christian or at times Muslim religious backgrounds, the use of Hindu religious terminology can be problematic for the institution. The second is the inherent power differential between guru and disciple, which is problematic for the implementation of TIMBY. The title of teacher, on the other hand, may hold negative associations with adverse experiences in the education system for juvenile youth, especially considering the central role many school systems play in referring

youth to the DJJ. To better understand the purposes for and necessities of these shifts, we must consider how social context and physical space have shaped the power relations between gurus/teachers/facilitators and disciple/student/participants. It is important to note that these shifts and adaptations do not necessarily unfold in a linear historical progression but rather emerge as a broadening spectrum of ways in which yoga is practiced and taught. There are still plenty of “old school” gurus living and teaching both in India and in the West, who operate side by side and at times in partnership with modern postural yoga teachers and businesses.

In textual evidence from pre-modern yoga traditions gurus transcend the role of mere teachers who pass knowledge. They are described as god-like figures who are the most important and essential ingredient for reaching the goals of these traditions. In the context of power dynamics, gurus are not only wielding power over their disciples but are in fact the source of a yoga tradition’s power. In the introduction to chapter two of their collection of translated primary texts on Yoga titled *The Roots of Yoga*, Mark Singleton and James Mallinson write about the importance of initiation by a guru for the successful practice of yoga. They observe that “with the advent of the *hatha* texts a non-sectarian ethos emerged in which adherents of all religious traditions were deemed eligible for yoga. Nevertheless, in practice one would still need to be initiated into a particular sect in order to practice yoga with a guru” (2017, p. 48). Then they proceed to contrast the role of initiation with the modern yoga paradigm: “The universalism of many popular forms of globalized yoga today – in which initiation, guru and indeed lineage may be altogether absent – thus represents a significant departure from traditional modalities” (p.49). Examples of these traditional guru-disciple modalities the authors refer to pervade the translations of medieval Yoga texts. Verse 3.8.15 of the *Jivanmuktiviveka* recommends the following as part of a daily schedule for the aspiring *yogin*: “For twenty-four minutes, according

to his ability, he should practice yoga. Then for forty-eight minutes he should attend to his guru, either by listening to [his exposition of] the scriptures or by serving him” (Mallinson & Singleton, 2017, p. 65). The following verses in the third chapter of the *Shivasamhita*, a seminal medieval text on *hatha yoga*, describe the importance of the guru and how a disciple should behave towards one’s guru:

(11) If it comes from the guru’s mouth wisdom is potent. If
it does not it is barren and impotent and brings great suffering. (12)
He who zealously makes his guru happy and practices his
teachings quickly gains the reward of those teachings. (13) The
guru is the father, the guru is the mother, the guru is god. [In this]
there is no doubt. For this reason, disciples serve him with their
actions, thoughts and words. (14) Everything that is good for the
self is obtained through the grace of the guru, so the guru is to be
served constantly or else no good will happen. (Mallinson, 2007b)

In both the *Jivanmuktiviveka* and the *Shivasamhita*, serving one’s guru and adhering to his (in both instances the guru is male because yoga, like the Indian society it operated in, was rigidly patriarchal) wisdom is an integral part of yoga practice. The *Shivasamhita* also equates the guru with parents and god. Besides reverence, service, and adherence to the guru’s teachings, many yoga texts emphasize the importance of initiation for correct and successful yoga practice. Verse 4.6 of the *Malinivijayottara* states, “There is no right to [practice] yoga, without initiation. (Mallinson & Singleton, 2017)” In these examples the guru is presented as the central and most important catalyst for success in yoga. The guru is to be served and honored as a parental (fatherly or motherly) figure, which is reflected in the adjectives by which gurus are often

referred to: *dadaji*, *babaji*, *bapuji* meaning “father” or “grandfather,” and *amma* meaning “mother” in the case of female gurus. This implies an extremely close relationship both socially and also spatially in that the aspirant often occupied the same village and, in the case of renunciates, the same hermitage or monastery as the guru. With the emergence and spread of *tantra*, the tradition from which medieval *hatha yoga* grew from, gurus took on divine attributes and *siddhis* (supernatural powers). The process of initiation (*shaktipat*) the *Malinivijayottara* refers to is not just a simple intellectual transmission of the guru’s knowledge and wisdom but also an energetic transfer of a spiritual force called *shakti* that takes root in the body and consciousness of the practitioner and in time (or sometimes instantaneously) brings about the fruition of the goal of that tradition. The importance of this transmission of *shakti*, which is often translated as “power” in medieval yoga texts, establishes a clear power dynamic in which the disciple can only obtain success through the grace of the guru. In order to obtain this grace, the disciple must surrender all agency and demonstrate total obedience to the instructions of the guru. According to scholar Amanda Lucia, this authoritarian dynamic in the guru-disciple relationship is what has led to the prevalence of abuse among what she calls the “headline stealing hyper-gurus of Global Hinduism.” In her article “Guru Sex: charisma, proxemic desire and the haptic logics of the guru-disciple relationship,” Lucia states:

Many devotees believe that the guru has the power to transmit his or her *śakti* at will, and this penetration can effect powerful mental and physiological transformations in the disciple. Based on an understanding of the porous nature of the self, physical encounters with the guru contain the potential for the transmission of affect and energy. Believing in the physical body of the guru as a

vortex of cosmic spiritual power, devotees clamor to be in proximity, and ultimately in physical contact with the guru. (2018, p. 970)

While this guru-disciple dynamic is still prevalent in the yoga world today, especially in India, professional Western modern postural yoga teachers tend to shun the title of guru. Most teachers in gyms and yoga studios do not identify as a guru for economic, cultural and social reasons specific to the modern, Western, capitalist context in which they teach. Two prominent yoga teachers in the US, Wah and Shunya (Wah is woman from the US and Shunya is an Indian woman from a lineage of gurus), both argue that the title of guru should be dropped. In an article in *Yoga Journal* titled “Do Modern Yoga Students Need a Guru?” they argue that the role of the guru was part of a larger communal and cultural context in India. Wah says, “The guru was like the grandfather who created a safe spot for everybody to be able to grow. They watched over everybody, and would bring those who had spiritual inclination into spiritual training. The community put pressure on the guru to bring forth the best result, and could hold the guru accountable if something went wrong” (Yoga Unify, 2021). While this may be an idealized perspective of an older and “more authentic” yoga, it does raise point to the fact that the role of guru was transplanted from one cultural context to another and that has consequences.

In addition to dropping the guru-disciple model, many teachers and businesses try to conceal or refute associations of yoga and religion. Scholar Andrea Jain explores “yogaphobia” and the argument made by both Hindus and Christians that yoga has an Indian origin and therefore it is not a secular practice compatible with Abrahamic traditions (Jain, 2014). My experience with yoga studios, both as a teacher and a student, is that each one has a distinct atmosphere that involves a greater or lesser presence of Indian religious and cultural imagery. Some have a more secular feel with little or no Indian statuary and art; the teachers use secular

language and classes focus on the physical dimensions of practice. Other studios have elaborate altars, bedecked with Hindu gods, and classes may include chanting of Vedic mantras. The Kashi Urban Yoga Ashram in Atlanta even has a resident guru by the name of Ma Jaya Devi who performs pujas and other religious rituals, and the teachers have Sanskrit names.

Regardless of where teachers fall on this spectrum, they often cultivate a following of long-term students, in their town or city, and often within the community of a particular studio. It is a common saying among yoga teachers and studio owners that students are loyal to teachers and not studios. This implies a dynamic between teachers and students that seems to transcend the transactional business relationship and to a lesser or greater degree contains elements of spiritual guidance or life-coaching. While this is not unique to yoga instructors (hairdressers, massage therapists and other professionals can take on a similar role), yoga teachers are often perceived as role models by their students. The ideal yoga teacher is not only disciplined in their “on the mat” practice but also seen as a highly moral and ethical person, someone a student can aspire to emulate. Yoga teachers often talk about *yamas* and *niyamas* in classes and workshops. The *yamas* (rules) and *niyamas* (observances) are a set of precepts outlined in several yoga texts, most notably for modern yoga, as two of the eight limbs of yoga in Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutra*. The most common set of *yamas* includes *ahimsa* (non-violence), *satya* (truthfulness), *asteya* (non-stealing), *brahmacharya* (celibacy), *aparigraha* (non-grasping). The *niyamas* are: *saucha* (purity), *santosha* (contentment), *tapas* (discipline), *swadyaya* (scriptural study), and *ishvarpranidhana* (surrender to god or guru). This leads many students to assume that their teachers strive to live by these to a greater or lesser degree.

While surely there are sincere teachers who may very well be good role models, the opposite is also true, as seen in the now many fallen gurus and teachers, both Indian and

Western. In a yoga studio these perceptions inform the dynamic between teachers and students. Students seeking a more secular yoga experience could be repelled by a guru-like teacher, while others could be attracted. Either way the teacher is established as an authority figure, and almost always students will follow their instructions for the duration of the class, even if they decide not to come back. In the TIMBY detention center session, the participants, not having prior yoga experience or knowledge of gurus, may not ascribe the same level of authority and power to the facilitator. In the context of trauma treatment this is a desirable feature of the power-dynamic, since at its core the interpersonal facilitator-participant relationship is about leveling the field and sharing power.

Scholar Farah Godrej explores this ambiguous teacher student dynamic through the lens of Foucault's biopolitics. In her article "The Neoliberal Yogi and the Politics of Yoga," she presents the argument that because yoga is a "polyvocal tradition" that "offers an abundance of interpretive possibilities" it can serve a wide variety of goals and purposes. Godrej discusses modern postural yoga teachers and practitioners as subjects in a neoliberal, capitalist society whose understanding of yoga is often informed by these systems, and therefore they often select teachings that resonate with neoliberal goals. Godrej presents the following definition of neoliberalism:

When "deployed as a form of governmentality," neoliberalism entails a mode of control "achieved through formation rather than repression or punishment," which "orchestrat[es] the subject's conduct toward him or herself . . . lead[ing] and control[ling] subjects without being responsible for them." It convenes a "free" subject who is controlled through his or her own freedom: an "entrepreneur" in every aspect of life, rationally deliberating about courses of

action, making choices, and bearing full responsibility for their consequences. Its methodology, Sam Binkley notes, is uniquely minimal: “without acting directly on subjects, neoliberal governmentality seeks to incite a set of specific transformations through the intentional curtailing of the apparatus of government itself, thereby effecting an indirect manipulation of the background conditions for individual conduct. (2017, pp.778)

In this context the yogic principles that resonate most with modern postural yoga teachers and practitioners are self-mastery and self-discipline. These themes often show up in classes and in the way studios operate, offering students discounted rates if they commit to regular attendance (which is also of course good for business). Teachers often use self-congratulatory language, such as “offer gratitude to yourself for getting on the matt today” or “give an appreciation to your body.” Regular practice is extolled and encouraged. At the same time, teachers often offer abundant language encouraging students to modify and adapt the practice to their body’s ability and needs, choosing an easier version of a posture or even substituting or skipping a pose. In other words, modern postural yoga teachers tend to encourage individual choice-making but also a commitment to regular practice. These are both in alignment with neo-liberal, capitalist objectives. (After all, regular customers are good for business). This emphasis on individual choice may seem somewhat at odds with the guru-disciple dynamics in the more traditional, India-based teaching methods of other postural yoga teachers such as Bikram Choudary, B.K.S. Iyengar, and Patthabi Jois, who have been known to make intense and invasive physical adjustments, and slap and shout at students (Godrej, 2017 pp. 782).

TIMBY facilitators are drawn from the ranks of modern yoga teachers but enter a context that is very different from the one they are accustomed to and have trained for. Modern postural

yoga teachers who move into the space of the detention center to facilitate TIMBY have cultivated and developed their skillsets in the cultural and social contexts I have described. Therefore, the approach and methods they bring can be as varied as the modern yoga world. As they enter that space, however, they are faced with a new context that is different and sometimes at odds with what they are accustomed to. Instead of a mostly white, mostly female, mostly middle-class group of individuals who have made the choice to come to yoga and engage in an enterprise of self-cultivation, TIMBY facilitators find themselves in front of a group of adolescent minority males, from mostly low-income families, who likely have a history of abuse, who most likely do not want to be there (but coming to yoga beats sitting in a cell). While all TIMBY facilitators undergo a training on trauma-informed yoga, there is no training on racial sensitivity, critical race theory, poverty in America, or working with adolescents. This can make it difficult to connect to the participants for some facilitators, especially if they come from a white, middle-class background.

Facilitators are often faced with participants who do not follow along with them or the group. In the studio this is very rare and in an older, Indian guru-disciple model failure to follow the instructions of the guru is synonymous with failure in yoga. In TIMBY however, choosing to not to engage in a posture or meditation is a completely acceptable course of action. The participants in TIMBY at the DJJ also often talk to each other and at times may completely ignore the facilitator, and this is also very likely a new experience for a yoga teacher who is probably accustomed to an engaged, attentive audience. For the participants in the class, yoga is often a novel experience. Many of them have never participated in a yoga class and have no context to place it in outside their immediate experience of it as something you do while in detention. In this way the novelty of the detention center as a space where yoga happens, and the

interpersonal experiences of the facilitator and the participants are informing how and why yoga is practiced.

The process of facilitating TIMBY often involves trial and error and constant adaptation, innovation and experimentation are a part of the process. TIMBY facilitators share their experiences with each other and with Centering Youth management and discuss what worked and what didn't in meetings. The experiences of teaching inside detentions centers are causing some yoga teachers to examine their teaching methods and blind spots and to engage in trainings and study that would help them serve that population in that setting more effectively. That creates the opportunity to collectively develop strategies for connecting to youth. For example, one of the facilitators, Ian Moore, shared that he always asks participants their names and what they want to be called (this can be their first name or a nickname). That may not seem very significant, but it happens to be very important to the participants that their names are remembered and that they get to choose how they are referred to as opposed to the institutional practice of being called by last name (I. Moore, personal communication, June 1, 2020). Amelia Reiser Solodkin shared some of her experiences of correctional officers interfering in the class by coercing students into participation or even hitting them while they are lying on the ground with eyes closed (A. Solodkin, personal communication, March 2, 2020). Based on my own similar experiences and those of the other two teachers, I would argue that our teaching is shaped in reaction to the established power dynamics within the institution. Non-coercion, using preferred nicknames, and allowing choice and agency are all contrary to the regimentation and disciplinary nature of the prison. This may come as a surprise to some of the institution's staff. After all yoga in many of its modern postural forms is a regimented practice of intense discipline. Two of the most popular forms of modern yoga, Ashtanga and Bikram, consist of a

predetermined list of poses performed in the exact same sequence and within the exact time frame every class (in the case of Bikram in a 108-degree heated room). Modern yoga's image of an exercise modality, which promotes mental and physical health through regimented discipline may be precisely why it is allowed to operate within the prison.

CONCLUSION

In chapter one I discussed how the term yoga has been used throughout history to describe a great multiplicity of practices and religious traditions. The medieval hatha yoga traditions introduced physical techniques including a small number of *asanas*, a number of *pranayamas*, and more internal and esoteric techniques called *bandha* (lock or seal) and *mudra* (which translates as “secret”), referring to internal body contractions. The stated goal of this stream of yoga in the literature was to harness a mythological nectar of immortality produced inside the human body and to use it to enhance longevity and vitality and to enter states of deep meditation. The speedy evolution and proliferation of modern, transnational, postural yoga in the world and the United States has resulted in an increase in the number and diversity of traditions and modalities that have been molded and shaped specifically by the Western contexts in which they have been developed. One such modality is trauma center trauma-sensitive yoga (TCTSY). The developers of TCTSY, like their late nineteenth and early twentieth century predecessors, have sought to establish this variation of postural yoga as a scientifically verified therapeutic modality that produces tangible, measurable therapeutic effects on the practitioner. Advocates of TCTSY differ in their approach from the early proponents of scientific yoga like Vivekananda, C.S. Vasu, and Kuvalyananda. For these early pioneers in the movement to reconcile yoga and science, the goal was to demonstrate that age old yogic concepts and practices were scientifically sound and therefore a testament to the depth and wisdom of Indian society and culture. What was at stake for them was to demonstrate that India had valuable knowledge to offer to the world that rivaled that of the West. The teachers and scientists who developed TCTSY sought to build a new yoga with scientific understandings of trauma, anatomy, and physiology as its foundation. That scientific foundation led to an increased awareness and scrutiny of the power dynamics

between teachers and students. This feature of TCTSY runs contrary to earlier guru-disciple models and has resulted in some significant departures from the modern yoga teacher-student model. I will explore these changes in the following pages.

The introduction of the TCTSY-inspired trauma-informed, mindfulness-based yoga (TIMBY) sessions in juvenile detention centers in Atlanta, Georgia adds several complexities to teacher-student dynamics. The detention center staff, the intricate inner workings of the juvenile justice system, the physical spaces within the prison where yoga takes place, and the age, race, ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic make-up of the group (detention center staff, facilitator and participants) are all influencing, shaping, and informing the purpose, transmission, and practice of yoga. The participants in the yoga class in Atlanta youth detention centers are always the youngest people in the room and they are minors. In chapter four I discussed how age and being a minor affect how the United States justice systems views and treats that individual. In the context of power dynamics, the fact that the participants are the youngest people in the room where the yoga session takes place means that they are also the ones with the least amount of power compared to the facilitator and the DJJ staff, who are all adults. The majority of the participants in the yoga session are people of color, while two out of the three instructors of TIMBY are white (one male and one female) and one is African American and male. The detention center staff is also predominantly African American except for some of the mental health professionals. Considering the issues surrounding the United States justice system's history of institutional racism, the racial and ethnic make-up of the yoga group could make it challenging for everyone involved to implement the strategies of TIMBY to transfer agency to the participants. The participants may be slow to trust a white person, when they may have suffered the effects of institutional racism in the DJJ. The participants' perception of the teacher

may also inform the level of power and authority they ascribe to them and the behavior they exhibit towards them, resulting in a performance dynamic. It is also a challenge and maybe even impossible for a white facilitator (or mental health worker) who has no experience of what it is like to be a person of color in America to fully understand some of the experiences the participants have gone through in their lives. Being a white facilitator in the context of teaching TIMBY to a majority BIPOC group in this sense creates a challenge in terms of the process of shifting power and agency to the participants. That said, an argument can be made that if a shift and a sharing of power and agency between a white facilitator and participants of color is accomplished, that may create an opportunity for some healing of traumas related to racism. Another potential outcome of this dynamic is a chance for the facilitator to acknowledge and confront their implicit or explicit racial biases and prejudices.

While environmental predictability and stability is a highly desirable if not mandatory feature of TCTSY, it is impossible to maintain in the often unpredictable and at times chaotic environment of the detention center. Classes can be canceled abruptly due to a disturbance (e.g. a fight has broken out) or staff shortages. The room in which the yoga session normally takes place may be unavailable, and the class may be moved to a new, louder, and more exposed space where the participants may be watched by other residents or staff. Amid all these challenges, the facilitator and participants attempt to engage in a therapeutic modality that promotes agency and choice-making, when the organization of the detention center is constructed around removing the detainees' freedom to make choices about many of their bodies' most basic functions. These basic choices about elements of daily life, such as freedom of movement through the physical space of the detention center, when to eat, to sleep, to bathe, to exercise, or rest, are all

regimented and dictated by the power structure of the detention center and implemented to various degrees of efficiency or inefficiency by the staff.

By contrast, the yoga teachers who work in this environment are outsiders who have been given a measure of power within the system. As described in chapter three, TIMBY facilitators use a number of methods to transfer agency and power to the youth participants in the session. This is accomplished through offering the participants decisions about the forms and breathing techniques practiced in the class, how long postures are held, how quickly or slowly to move, how much to engage or relax muscles, and opportunities to step into the role of the facilitator and lead the group through a form. The facilitators have also at times become participants in the detention center economy where “bucks” (signed papers of attendance with a certain point value) are awarded for participation in the yoga session and can later be used to “purchase” haircuts, hygiene items, and other small perks. In addition, facilitators award signed certificates to regular attendees that are stored in the attendees’ files. These certificates can later be presented before a judge as an example that during their time in the detention center, the detainees have engaged in and completed a group rehabilitation program. This potentially helps their case if they apply for parole or early release. After each session the facilitators are required by both the DJJ and TIMBY protocol to enter progress reports in the Juvenile Tracking System (JTS), an online database “where GA DJJ, and some of the independent courts in GA, maintains case records on all youth that have become involved in the juvenile justice system” (Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice, 2014). Any adverse events, altercations or unusual activity must be reported in both JTS and TIMBY’s own independent online database, which is part of the NIH funded study. In this way the detention center power structure coopts the TIMBY facilitator as both a provider of certain limited opportunities for choice making and agency for the detainees, but also a

participant in the surveillance apparatus and the reformatory and experimental project of the carceral institution.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault explores these features of the prison at length. He argues that one of the major developments in legal punishment in Western society is the idea that the punishment for a criminal act is also a reformatory process. He observes a distinction in how our institutions see and treat an “offender” (someone who has committed a crime and has been convicted) and “delinquent” the individual who is now handed to the penitentiary and whose life will be examined to an extraordinary depth in order to effectively carry out the project of rehabilitation. Ironically this examination of all the factors that may have contributed to the behaviors and actions of the individual are “variables which at the outset at least were not taken into account in the sentence for they are relevant only for the corrective technology” (p. 251). About observation, Foucault writes, “The observation of the delinquent should go back not only to the circumstances, but also to the causes of his crime; they must be sought in the story of his life, from the triple point of view of psychology, social position, and upbringing, in order to discover the dangerous proclivities of the first, the harmful predispositions of the second and the bad antecedents of the third” (p. 252). While Foucault’s observation lacks the added complexities of race relations and considerations of gender, he does make an interesting point. The life history of an individual (outside their criminal record) becomes important when they are incarcerated. It is important because it may hold clues as to how this person’s life may be “corrected.” The modern DJJ has observed and studied juvenile offenders for many years now, and there is ample data that adverse childhood experiences and complex trauma play a major role in delinquent acts. It is not hard to see that in this context the harsh environment of the prison is contrary to the proclaimed purpose of the system, which is a transformation of the individual into

a productive and law-abiding citizen. Based on current research on trauma, some researchers have concluded that the “complete and austere institution” Foucault describes can only serve to perpetuate it. One result of this conclusion is an attempt by the DJJ to bring new trauma treatments inside the prison and to conduct experiments in order to assess the efficacy and rehabilitative value of these treatments. Interestingly, TCTSY and TIMBY’s methods conflict with the structure and organization of the prison. The power dynamic that a facilitator is trying to achieve is in direct opposition to the power dynamics which the DJJ has established. The yoga facilitator stands at the intersection of these oppositional dynamics.

In outlining the trajectory and historical development of power dynamics between *gurus/shishya* (disciple), teacher/student and facilitator/participant, I have had to make some generalizations. Traditional yoga, modern yoga, and trauma sensitive yoga are all parts of an incredibly diverse field of practices, with a vast number of texts and practitioners from many cultures and geographical regions spanning many centuries. That said, there are certain dominant trends that are characteristic of each of those fields. In traditional yoga *guru/shishya* models, the guru is perceived as the most important catalyst for the transformation of the disciple. The guru is seen as someone capable of channeling and transmitting a mystical power that overtime matures inside the disciple and can lead them on a path towards a goal. In this case this goal is *moksha, nirvana, samadhi* or self-realization (realizing that one is the same as *Atman*). The guru’s qualifications can come from a lineage of gurus and/or from their own real or perceived accomplishment of yoga’s goal. The power dynamic is very clear. To progress on the path of yoga the disciple must obtain a transmission of knowledge or *shakti* (power). To obtain the guru’s blessing, transmission of spiritual power or their knowledge, the disciple must submit to them and serve them. In modern postural yoga in the West, the authority of the guru has slowly

faded just as the more esoteric internal practices have been replaced by athletic exercises, and modern yoga practitioners' goals have for the most part shifted away from achieving rarified states of consciousness and enlightenment. The modern yoga teacher in the West undergoes a very brief training that is predominantly focused on leading groups of people in the correct execution of sequences of postures and developing anatomical knowledge. Yoga's religious roots and its philosophies are often reduced to a two-minute intention setting at the beginning of a class. The students cede power to the teacher so they can be led through the class and obtain its purported benefits. These vary among different teachers and students. Some practitioners are only interested in a healthy body and maybe some stress relief, while others want to pursue spiritual goals and may sign up for meditation retreats and immersions. The power dynamic between teachers and students in this context is ambiguous and fluid, and the average teacher will most likely try to meet their students where they are and generally avoid coming off as an authoritative guru (possibly because of the ever-growing number of fallen gurus in the news). TCTSY goes even further from traditional guru models and discards even the title of teacher. The use of "facilitator" instead indicates the power-sharing aspect of TCTSY. While yoga teachers can be TCTSY facilitators, having a yoga teacher training certification is not mandatory. In the introduction of his book David Emerson clearly states: "you do not need to be a yoga teacher, or really have any prior experience with yoga for that matter, in order to incorporate TSY into your practice. In fact, this book assumes that most readers are not yoga teachers but are approaching the material as qualified mental health clinicians or the equivalent" (p. xxvii). This major shift in who is qualified to lead a yoga session indicates two important features of TCTSY. It is more important that the facilitator understands trauma theory, and one's level of proficiency with yoga practices is not an issue when it comes to the goals of TCTSY. In the TIMBY

intervention currently taking place in Atlanta Juvenile detention centers all facilitators are certified yoga teachers who have gone through additional trainings led by David Emerson focused on the trauma aspect of the practice. This brings the question of why yoga teachers are going inside detention centers instead of simply providing trauma-sensitive yoga training for the mental health workers on staff? Throughout this work I have attempted to present a description of the power dynamics in the TIMBY intervention that is not limited to just the facilitator and the participant. The power dynamics are included and are informed by other actors the bureaucracy of the prison being an important one. To the DJJ staff, the yoga teachers Center Youth provides are still referred to as “yoga teachers” or “instructors.” In TCTSY there is a facilitator instead of a teacher in front of the participants because trauma survivors may have negative associations with authority figures or education settings. However, for the bureaucracy of the DJJ, the associations change and a teacher or an instructor is more valuable precisely because these titles carry with them an implication of credentials and authority. Another central motive for allowing yoga in detention centers is the fact that the Department of Juvenile Justice has been under increasing pressure by social scientists, activists and politicians to confront its history of racism, disproportionate incarceration of minorities, and harsh treatment of incarcerated youth. In Atlanta Georgia, the DJJ has experienced public relations crises as a result of the investigative work by Atlanta Journal Constitution journalist Alan Judd I described in chapter four. For an underfunded and somewhat desperate institution, a mindfulness-based trauma-informed yoga intervention led by teachers compensated by a non-profit can be a great way to demonstrate that reforms are being made and new modalities are explored. This is made possible because of modern yoga’s polarity and success in becoming a permanent feature of the Western cultural landscape. In a reciprocal manner, going into the DJJ and working in conjunction with

governmental institutions and clinical and social scientists gives legitimacy and credentials to yoga teachers and by extension to modern yoga. After all, since the early twentieth century, yoga teachers have sought to align themselves with science and governmental institutions.

Krishnamacharya's influential yoga school, which gave rise to the hugely successful modern postural yoga guru super-stars Patthabhi Jois and B.K.S. Iyengar, was a government initiative aimed at creating an Indian national exercise program, superior to British and Western modalities, that could be taught in the schools. Looking back on pre-modern yoga traditions, we can use these modern developments to form interesting questions about who the stakeholders in those instances of guru-disciple dynamics were, and what have scholars missed or not considered previously.

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