Exploring the Healing Effects of Yoga for Trauma in Children and Youth: The Stories of Yoga Instructors

By:

Sarah Bonnell

BA, University of Victoria, 2009

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Supervisory Committee

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Dr. Daniel Scott, School of Child and Youth Care
Supervisor

Dr. Marie Hoskins, School of Child and Youth Care
Department Member

Abstract

Dr. Daniel Scott, School of Child and Youth Care
Supervisor

Dr. Marie Hoskins, School of Child and Youth Care
Department Member

Yoga as a therapeutic modality for treating trauma is currently emerging as an important topic of research with several new studies being produced to analyze its effectiveness on varying populations of traumatized individuals. Research is beginning to demonstrate that individuals who suffer the effects of trauma have often experienced several negative events that accumulate over the course of one's lifetime. It has been displayed that when treated early, the adverse effects of trauma may be much less debilitating. Recent studies indicate traumatic memories are often stored within the body and are difficult to recall through cognition alone. Therefore, somatic therapies such as yoga are proving to be an effective means of working through this unresolved trauma. Using a constructivist and postmodernist lens with a narrative methodology, this study explores the impact of yoga on children and youth who have experienced trauma as witnessed by yoga instructors teaching to these populations. Seven participants who reside in British Columbia, volunteered to share their stories and experiences through individual semi-structured interviews. The narratives highlight a potential pathway to healing trauma through several shared factors. These common threads indicate that yoga can provide children and youth a safe space to explore their bodies, develop a sense of community and belonging among peers, as well as engage in a mindfulness practice that incorporates several healing factors such as asana (the physical postures of yoga) and pranayama (connecting to one's breath). Opening to vulnerability was another common thread indicated as a necessary component to healing that

occurred for many children and youth throughout the practice of yoga. This study contributes to the growing research of yoga as a therapeutic modality for healing trauma in children and youth.

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Acknowledgements

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all of the brilliant yoga teachers that inspired this research.

Chapter 1: Introduction

> Human beings are tender creatures. We are born with our hearts open. And sometimes our open hearts encounter experiences that shatter us. Sometimes we encounter experiences that so violate our sense of safety, order, predictability, and right, that we feel utterly overwhelmed—unable to integrate and simply unable to go on as before. Unable to bear reality. We have come to call these shattering experiences trauma. None of us is immune to them. (Stephen Cope as cited in Emerson & Hopper, 2011, p. xiii).

This study investigates the impact that yoga can have on children and youth who have experienced trauma and suffer from the residual effects that trauma can have on the mind, body and spirit. Yoga has been applied in the treatment of mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, fatigue, stress (Bussing, Michalsen, Khalsa, Telles & Sherman, 2012) and psychosis (Sistig, Lambrecht & Friedman, 2014). The effect of yoga on individuals with trauma related disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is currently a topic of great interest. In less than a decade, several studies have begun to emerge displaying how yoga can help one to heal from trauma. Prior to the advent of Trauma-Sensitive Yoga (TSY), there were few studies of the healing effects of yoga for trauma in survivors of natural disasters and war (Telles, Singh & Balkrishna, 2012; Pence, n.d.). As studies have begun to demonstrate that traumatized individuals more often have experienced several traumatic events over a lifetime, rather than one single major event, researchers have come to realize that these cumulative traumatic events are related to symptom complexity throughout both childhood and adulthood (Cloiter, Stolbach, Herman, van der Kolk, Pynoos, Wang & Petkova, 2009). This study focuses on trauma in various forms, including, but not limited to, PTSD.

In recent years, approaches to trauma therapy have begun to shift. With an enhanced understanding of how trauma affects people, therapists such as Dr. Bessel van der Kolk, are discovering that traumatic memories can be "stored" in the body for long periods of time after the traumatic event occurred (Emerson & Hopper, 2011). He also asserts that,

> Describing traumatic experiences in conventional verbal therapy is likely to activate implicit memories; that is, trauma-related physical sensations and physiological hyper- or hypo-arousal which evoke emotions such as helplessness, fear, shame and rage. When this occurs, trauma victims are prone to feeling that it is still not safe to deal with trauma. (p. 17)

Newer therapies focus on working with the body in trauma treatment. Several movement based therapies integrate mind and body in healing, such as dance, music, tai-chi, qigong and art. Yoga is another movement-based method which enables individuals to connect the body and the mind through breath and patterned movement helping trauma survivors to build physical and mental strength, as well as an awareness of bodily sensations through interoception, which is the process of becoming aware of one's internal state by focusing on the interoceptive pathways, or nerve fibers that run from the tissues of the body to the brain. This process helps one to understand how the body feels, the ways in which we act to deal with the internal sensations and how this affects one's mood (Emerson & Hopper, 2011, p.18).

Trauma-Sensitive Yoga was developed in response to emerging literature that demonstrated the importance of helping traumatized individuals begin to deal with symptoms of dissociation and dysregulation (Emerson & Hopper, 2011) through body based therapy that would be sensitive to the needs of trauma survivors. The main objectives of TSY are to notice what one feels in the body and to make choices about what to do with it (Trauma Center at

Resource Justice Institute, 2007). While TSY has prepared a guideline to teach yoga to individuals with trauma histories, the practice of yoga, historically, has always been part of an ancient system meant to address human suffering (Emerson & Hopper, 2011). Therefore, while this study often does refer to TSY, it is not the sole style of focus.

Much of the literature in this study is based on the work of David Emerson and Dr. Bessel van der Kolk, as well as several studies that have come out of the Trauma Center in Boston Massachusetts. David Emerson is an accomplished yoga instructor, trainer, and founder of a non-profit organization dedicated to teaching yoga to people who have experienced trauma. He also partnered with The Trauma Center, forming The Trauma Center Yoga Program which he directs. Dr. Bessel van der Kolk is the founder and medical director of the Trauma Center in Brookline, Massachusetts, as well as a professor of psychiatry at Boston University School of Medicine and director of the National Complex Trauma Treatment Network. The Trauma Center is a program of the Justice Resource Institute, a non-profit program dedicated to helping children and families who may not have the means to afford treatment.

This study builds on the currently existing literature about yoga and trauma. It provides the perspectives of several teachers who have taught to varying populations of children and youth. Their experiences and stories provide individuated and personal perspectives of how children and youth heal from trauma through the practice of yoga. As well, it provides an overarching, common narrative as many similarities and experiences were shared and contributed by the teachers. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how yoga can provide a pathway to healing for children and youth, as well as provide tools and strategies for self-regulation that can be used throughout one's lifetime. It is my hope that this study will bring greater awareness to the possibilities that yoga can provide children and youth who struggle with

symptoms of trauma, as well as co-occurring mental health issues that are linked to trauma. As yoga becomes more recognized and as more studies are conducted, the application of yoga as a treatment for trauma as well as other mental health issues will gain greater credibility and recognition.

Terms and Definitions

Asanas: The various forms (poses) of yoga, used to stretch, strengthen, energize, calm and purify the body and balance the mind.

Ashtanga Yoga: A physical form of yoga in which asana forms are linked with breath. This style of yoga is used to strengthen, stretch and cleanse the mind, body and spirit.

Bandhas: A term for body locks in Hatha yoga.

Brahmana: Expansion. A Brahmana yoga practice is created to build energy in the body.

Hatha Yoga: Yoga of the physical body. In Sanskrit, "ha" means sun and "tha" means moon. The contrast of sun and moon represents the opposites in life. Hatha yoga allows one to balance the body, releasing tensions and traumas and creating space for growth.

Interoception: Interoception is our awareness of what is going on within the boundary of our own skin; it is intra-organismic awareness.

Langhana: Reduction. A Langhana practice is created to promote calming and grounding.

Mantra: Sacred sound, thought or prayer.

Mindfulness: Paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.

Nadi Shodhana: Clearing the channels of circulation through alternate nostril breathing.

Pranayama: Rhythmic Yogic breathing during asana and meditation.

Sanskrit: Ancient language of India used in Hindu scriptures and poems.

Rajas: Impulsive or chaotic thought; the aspect of movement in nature; one of the three gunas (qualities of nature).

Samskara: Subconscious imprint.

Savasana: A state of total relaxation at the end of a yoga session, lying on one's back, palms open at sides, eyes closed.

Svadhyaya: A Sanskrit term for "self-study."

Yin yoga: A slow-paced style of yoga with poses, or *asanas*, that are held for longer periods of time—five minutes or more per pose is typical.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Yoga is a practice that originated in India approximately 5000 years ago (Emerson & Hopper, 2011; Kaley-Isley, Peterson, Fisher, & Peterson, 2010), and finds its roots in various philosophies such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism (Emerson & Hopper, 2011; Stephens, 2010). Yoga, meaning "to yoke" or "to make one" (Stephens, 2010), encompasses several disciplines that are believed to ultimately lead toward "a union of the human individual and transcendent existence" (Khalsa, 2004). The earliest writings of yoga can be traced back to the Indus and Sarasvati Valleys, in what are now Pakistan and India. These ancient writings, known as the Vedas and the Upanishads, describe yoga as a practice that calms the "chitta vritti nirodaha" or the fluctuations of the mind, (Stephen, 2010; Iyengar, 1993) and sheds worldly constraints and limited consciousness by joining the mind, body and spirit with the divine, achieving contact with one's true self (Stephen, 2010; Yardi, 2001).

Within the Yoga Sutras, yoga is described as an eight-limbed path that leads one toward enlightenment and self-realization (Iyengar, 1993; Stephen, 2010). The eight-limbed path is comprised of yamas (universal morality), niyamas (personal observances), asana (physical postures), pranayama (controlled intake and outflow of breath), pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses), dharana (focused concentration), dhyana (meditation), and samadhi (union with the divine).

Asana, the physical postures of yoga, require effort, concentration and balance. Holding the postures encourages the practitioner to focus on the present moment. These postures are believed to adjust the flow of energy in the major energy channels of the body known in yogic philosophy as ida, pingala and susuamna (Iyengar, 1993). Pranayama is the controlled intake and outflow of air through the lungs and must be regulated through mindful attention. In its

simplest form, it includes three parts, inhalation (puraka), exhalation (rechaka) and oxygen retention (kumbahaka) (White, 2009; Jarath, Edry, Barnes & Jarath, 2006). Early practitioners noticed that when the breath is slowed, the mind and body relax (White, 2009). Pratyahara, a practice in which one turns inward, withdrawing from the senses, helps one to clear the mind and prepare for meditation. A clear mind allows one to draw closer to a true sense of self (Iyengar, 1993).

Over the last two decades, the practice of yoga has gained an increasing popularity and attention in Canada and the United States. In 2008, it was estimated that 15.8 million people practiced yoga, and that 5.7 billion dollars a year are spent on yoga classes, equipment, videos, vacations and media (Emerson & Hopper, 2011). Yogis such as Swami Vivekananda , transcendentalists such as Henry David Thoreau, and spiritual leaders such as Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and Annie Besant helped bring these ancient teachings to the Western world. Throughout the last century, classical hatha yoga practice has inspired the evolution of various forms of yoga such as Ashtanga, Bikram, Iyengar and Vinyasa (Stephens, 2010). During the 1990's, much attention began to focus on the relationship between yoga and the body, sparking interest in the medical and psychological benefits that yoga can provide (Douglass, 2007). Many forms of modern yoga now reflect and address current health issues such as fitness, stress management and psychosomatization (White, 2009). Stephen Cope, founder and director of the Kripalu Institute for Extraordinary Living explains, in his book, *Yoga and the Quest for the True Self*, that, with regular practice, many benefits of yoga can be noticed almost immediately. Regular yoga practitioners have described experiencing many more subtle transformations such as increased focus and clarity, heightened perception and intuition, a deeper connection to the self and a profound sense of well-being (Cope, 1999).

Recently, several new studies have sought to analyze how yoga can be an effective therapy for several mental health conditions, including PTSD, complex trauma, developmental trauma, and other trauma related disorders. Traumatic experiences can be situations which are overwhelming, uncontrollable, or where one is left feeling helpless (van der Kolk, 1994). The traumatic situation can include a catastrophic event, or something seemingly commonplace to most individuals. What separates an uncomfortable event with one that is traumatic is the way one's body reacts to the situation (Caplan, Portillo, & Seely, 2013). As stated by Peter Levine:

> Traumatic symptoms are not caused by the "triggering" event itself. They stem from the frozen residue of energy that has not been resolved and discharged; this residue remains trapped in the nervous system where it can wreak havoc on our bodies and spirits. (as cited in Caplan et al., 2013, p. 147).

PTSD affects the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, creating a maladjusted "fight or flight" response, and is commonly caused by some form of exposure, either personally or vicariously, to one or more traumatic experiences (Emerson & Hopper, 2011; Spinazzola, Rhodes, Emerson, Earle, & Monroe, 2011). According to the DSM-IV-TR, PTSD is "characterized by persistent re-experiencing of the traumatic event (intrusion), persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma, numbing of general responsiveness, and persistent symptoms of increased physiological arousal" (Emerson, Sharma, Chaudhry & Turner, 2009, p. 123). Some of the long term effects of trauma include generalized hyper arousal, difficulty regulating internal systems, fear response to reminders of trauma, loss of trust and hope, difficulty in social situations, and lack of agency (Telles, Singh & Balkrishna, 2012).

In the book, *Overcoming Trauma through Yoga*, Emerson and Hopper (2011) explain that, many of us face multiple threats to safety over our life span. According to the National

Incident Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS), nearly 3 million children in the United States experience direct physical, sexual or emotional abuse, while more than 2 million experience significant neglect. When a child reaches the age of 18, there is a 1 in 4 chance that they will have experienced direct abuse with the effects of such occurrences not affecting them until adolescence or adulthood (Emerson & Hopper, 2011).

When left untreated, trauma can produce various physical and mental health symptoms and conditions (Caplan, Portillo & Seely, 2013; Emerson & Hopper, 2011; Emerson, Sharma, Chaudhry & Turner, 2009). Trauma occurring in childhood contributes to negative effects that can occur later in life such as an increased risk of substance abuse, cancer, heart disease, obesity, suicidality and depression (Emerson & Hopper, 2011). A study conducted in the United States showed that 88% of people with PTSD were estimated to have concurrent disorders (Emerson, Sharma, Chaudhry, & Turner, 2009). When one survives trauma, but does not successfully treat it, the body adjusts to the prolonged maladaptive responses. The habits one has developed to survive and compensate for the traumatic event may become deeply engrained and difficult to extinguish (Bell, 2001), causing adverse consequences and allostatic load (a state in which one experiences chronic imbalance in the nervous system, resulting in adverse consequences) (Charmandari, Tsigos, & Chrousos, 2005).

Not all trauma disorders can be classified as PTSD. For example, Psychological Maltreatment (PM), a form of child abuse and neglect, has been theorized to produce adverse developmental consequences such as aggression, noncompliance and delinquency and has been linked to internalizing symptoms such as anxiety, depression and PTSD (Spinazzola, Hodgon, Liang, Ford, Layne, Pynoos, Briggs, Stolbach & Kisiel, 2014). Another example, Complex Trauma, which results from the experience of multiple or chronic traumas at various periods

throughout development and into adulthood, can cause greater symptom complexity and impairment (Vedat, 2011). While PTSD is generally associated with a single major event eliciting a major anxiety response, researchers are lobbying to change the conceptualization of PTSD to include a maladaptive, long lasting and multi-dimensional consequence of chronic, early and interpersonal traumatization (Vedat, 2011). This type of trauma has been shown to cause impairment in seven main areas including attachment, biology, affect regulation, dissociation, behavioral regulation, cognition and self-concept (Cook et al., 2005 as cited in Caplan, Portillo & Seely 2013). It can also result in poor impulse regulation and attention, as well as difficulties in relationship to self and others, and challenges with systems of meaning (Kisiel, Torgersen, Stolbach, McClelland, Griffin & Burkman, 2013).

Yoga and Trauma

Leaders in the field of trauma are beginning to recognize that trauma symptoms must be treated not only with talk therapy, but with somatic therapies that deal with the physiological response as well (Emerson & Hopper, 2011). Van der Kolk believes that traumatic experiences are stored within the body, and therefore must be treated by working with the body in order for the effects of trauma to be resolved, sharing this sentiment: "Trauma has nothing to do whatsoever with cognition…it has to do with your body being reset to interpret the world as a dangerous place…it's not something you can talk yourself out of" (Interlandi, 2014, para. 14). Similar to this sentiment, Gerbarg and Brown (2011) state:

> While talk based therapies and cognitive therapies can be of great benefit, there are situations in which mind-body approaches…can be extremely beneficial and sometimes necessary for full recovery…learning how to use the body to speak to the mind circumvents the prohibition against talking and can be more effective

> than relying solely on verbal, cognitive, or intellectual approaches. (p.148 in Caplan, Portillo & Seely, 2013)

A study of women with chronic treatment-resistant trauma showed that yoga significantly reduced PTSD symptomatology as well as depression scores. Compared to the control group, the yoga group's depression scores continued to improve over time (van der Kolk, Stone, West, Rhodes, Emerson, Suvak & Spinazzola, 2014).

Yoga based approaches to healing trauma incorporate practices that allow one to become connected to both the mind and body - to learn to tolerate the inner experience and build a relationship with the body (Emerson & Hopper, 2011). As stated by van der Kolk (2006, in Caplan, Portillo & Seely, 2013), "Clinical experience shows that traumatized individuals have greater difficulty attending to their inner sensations and perceptions - when asked to focus on internal sensations, they tend to feel overwhelmed or deny having an inner sense of themselves" (p. 148). Therefore, yoga based approaches may help bridge these connections. In a study conducted on youth that had been sexually abused, it was reported that:

> In order for trauma work to be truly processed at a deeper level, kids have to be able to be present both emotionally and physically. The yoga helped them to feel safer in their bodies and more mindful about their environments. Ultimately, they can then be present for the difficult processes to occur. (Lilly & Hedlund, 2010 p. 127)

When faced with a traumatic event, several physiological events occur, affecting nearly every major system of the body (Interlandi, 2014). These functions help to protect us from a potentially harmful situation. Studies (Charmandari et al., 2005) show that activity in the

sympathetic nervous system (SNS) increases as activity in the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS) decreases, causing the autonomic nervous system to become imbalanced. When this occurs, the gamma-amino butyric acid (GABA) system becomes underactive while allostatic load increases (Charmandari et al., 2005; Streeter, Jensen, Perlmutter, Carbral, Tian, Tervine, et al., 2007). When the traumatic situation resolves itself, one may return to a state of balance. However if the situation persists, the amygdala continues to be stimulated causing harm to the body (Interlandi, 2014).

Polyvagal theory.

According to the polyvagal theory (Porges, 2001) the human nervous system attempts to keep one safe through a hierarchy of strategies, beginning with social engagement regulated through the myelinated branch of the vagus nerve. This means that humans rely on others to stay safe and secure. According to Bloom (1999) human survival strongly depends on the ability to attach to others. When this is disrupted, when one does not have secure attachments to others, especially in childhood, damage can occur to developmental systems. Gergen (2009) recognizes that rather than viewing the self as a bounded and fixed entity, one's identity is an interpersonal construct that changes in relation to others. These two statements suggest that, as we create attachments to others, we begin to form a personal identity. Secondly, according to Porges (2001), the nervous system relies on a system of "fight or flight" (as previously mentioned), a mobilization response regulated by the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) in the face of threat that impacts all of the organ systems in the body (Bloom, 1999). Thirdly, one's nervous system relies on immobilization, a form of self-protection in which one 'freezes' or 'shuts down' in order to stay safe- this is the most primitive response used as a strategy to keep safe from danger (Porges, 2001). In mammals, according to the polyvagal theory, the myelinated vagus nerve may

act as a brake, enabling rapid control of the heart rate. The myelinated vagus also promotes self-soothing strategies and calm states (Porges, 2001, p 130, Streeter et al., 2012). According to this theory, if the 'vagal brake' isn't functioning properly, the nervous system may come to rely mainly on lower system responses, such as the SNS (Porges, 2001). Every time one faces danger or is impacted by trauma, one becomes more sensitive to imposing threats. Children are especially vulnerable to the effects of trauma, and when faced with multiple dangers or threats, can become easily triggered emotionally, physically and mentally (Bloom, 1999). As these threats continue to happen, a network of connections form, making it increasingly easier for a trigger response to occur as this network creates a built-in protective response to danger (Bloom, 1999). Over time, this could produce several health and behavior related issues (Porges, 2001; Streeter et al., 2012), such as depression, autoimmune disorders, depression, substance abuse and cardiovascular disease (Ross & Thomas, 2010).

Yoga postures, breath and meditation have been shown to oxygenize the body, activate the endocrine glands, increase energy (Dale, Carroll, Galen, Schein, Bliss, Mattison, & Neace, 2011) and regulate the involuntary workings of the body by calming the SNS and the PNS as well as reducing allostatic load (Salmon, Lush, Jablonski, & Sephton, 2008; Sistig, Lambrecht, & Friedman, 2014; Streeter et al., 2012). It has also been hypothesized that practicing yoga asanas stimulates the vagus nerve, causing a shift toward parasympathetic dominance (Ross & Thomas, 2010). The physical postures of yoga have also been shown to influence various neurotransmitters including melatonin, GABA, dopamine, serotonin and cortisol (van der Kolk, 2006). One study conducted on incarcerated female youth, showed increased GABA levels in youth who participated in a 60 minute yoga practice three times per week which created improved moods and decreased anxiety in the youth (Telles, et al, 2012).

Another method to regulate and balance the SNS and PNS, as well as pace the physical movements of asana, is through controlled breath. Slowing the breath helps the body and mind to accept that it is safe and not under attack (Salmon et al., 2008). Controlling one's breath through pranayamic yoga practices helps to calm and "anchor" the mind in meditation. As stated by Fontana and Slack (1997) meditation is "a very special kind of sitting quietly doing nothing, in which the mind is clear and alert and watchful, and free from losing itself in thinking" (as cited in Fisher, 2006, p. 147). Yogic philosophy describes meditation as a tool to access pure wisdom. It can also be described as a way to simply still the mind and free it from clutter (Fisher, 2006). Mediation has been shown to induce physiological changes in oxygen consumptions, heart rate, skin resistance, certain EEG frequencies and heart rate variability (HRV) (Tang, Ma, Fan, Feng, Wang, Feng et al., 2009; Telles, Nrendran, Raghuraj, Nagarathna, & Nagendra, 1996). One study using Integrative Body Mind Training (IBMT) which incorporates meditation and relaxation exercises, showed that after 5 days of IBMT training, heart rate lowered, belly respiratory amplitude increased, and chest respiratory rate decreased from ANS regulation and body relaxation (Tang et al., 2009).

In a recent study (Rhodes, 2015) conducted on 60 traumatized women between the ages of 18 and 58 who took part in 10 weeks of TSY, several promising outcomes were noted. The study revealed a core meaning of participants' experiences as a multidimensional process in which the women, over time, claimed a sense of 'peaceful embodiment', and a sense of ownership over their thoughts, emotions and bodies. As they moved through this process toward peaceful embodiment, they began to leave behind the story of trauma that plagued their lives as they focused on the present moment and experienced a sense of well-being. This sense of peace

included feelings of safety, calmness, groundedness, presence, inner strength and self-confidence.

Regulation.

In a study (Cloitre, Stolbach, Herman, van der Kolk, Pynoos, Wang & Petkova, 2009) of the treatment of complex PTSD, several symptoms of the disorder were observed, such as: avoidance, re-experiencing, hyper-arousal, relationship disturbances, disturbances in systems of meaning and affect dysregulation (2009). Along with affect dysregulation, impulse control is also a major factor in trauma related disorders (Warner, Spinazzola, Westcott, Gunn, & Hogdon, 2014). Studies have also indicated that complex trauma, as experienced by children, often results in regulatory difficulties (Spinazzola et al., 2005 in Warner et al., 2014). Such disturbances in self-regulation could include over-activation or deactivation of emotions and behaviours, for example, hyper-arousal versus emotional numbing and dissociation, all of which are recognized symptoms of trauma disorders (Cloitre et al., 2009) These difficulties could lead to further issues such as visceral problems, sleep disturbances, heightened fear response, mood disorders, anxiety, self-harming behaviours and substance abuse (Spinazzola et al, 2011). As suggested in Porges (2001), in accordance with polyvagal theory, when one is unable to access the "vagal brake", there is often greater reliance on the SNS as the vagus nerve is not able to filter incoming threats causing both health related and behavior related dysfunction (Porges, 2001). When discussing dysregulation and PTSD, van der Kolk (2002) states:

> Once people are traumatized and develop PTSD, their ability to soothe themselves is compromised. Instead they tend to rely on actions, such as fight or flight, or on pathological self-soothing, such as self-mutilation, bingeing, starving, or the

> ingestion of alcohol and drugs to regulate their internal balance. (as cited in Caplan, Portillo & Seely, 2013, p. 148)

According to Warner et al (2014) "a potentially integral, but understudied and underutilized approach to building self-regulatory capacity is building interoceptive awareness of, attunement to, and skills for shifting physiological arousal (n.p.). This suggests that a somatic treatment that helps one gain autonomy over one's regulatory capacity could be beneficial in helping children and youth heal from trauma (Spinazzola et al, 2011). It may be especially beneficial for individuals who have difficulty with language-based approaches to treatment (van der Kolk, 2014 in Warner et al., 2014).

Interoception

According to van der Kolk (2006), there are three main aspects integral to healing trauma:

> 1) increasing one's capacity to recognize one's internal feelings through interoception in order to begin to tolerate sensations as they occur,
>
> 2) learning to regulate arousal and,
>
> 3) learning to take effective action after one experiences physical helplessness (Caplan, Portillo & Seely, 2013).

Effective therapy should promote lessons on self-awareness and self-regulation.

A neurologist in Rhodes (2015) explains that the concept of interoception "constitutes 'the material me' and relates to how we perceive feelings from our bodies that determine our mood, sense of well-being and emotions" (p. 251). As recently stated, somatic approaches to

treating individuals with trauma, helps build an internal awareness of bodily sensations. This budding awareness may help one begin to exert control over his or her internal experiences, which in turn, will help one begin to regulate the dysregulated systems of the body.

Both measurable and narrative data have been collected that illustrate the usefulness of yoga. The narratives from clients who have participated in yoga tell the personal stories of how yoga helped them overcome trauma. In a recent pilot study, after completing ten weeks of yoga, one client stated "I feel like I deserve life more. The study kicked in a connection to my body". Another participant stated, "I was able to move my body and be in my body in a safe way without hurting myself or being hurt" (Douglass, 2012, p. 24).

Post Traumatic Growth

Rhodes' study (2015) displayed findings that reflected the concept of post traumatic growth (PTG), or the ways in which people are able to surmount the experience of trauma and, in effect, benefit from traumatic experience (McElheran, Briscoe-Smith, Khaylis, Westrup, Hayward & Gore-Felton, 2012). Five main domains of PTG are emphasized which include:

1) Personal strength

2) Explore new life possibilities

3) Form meaningful interpersonal relationships

4) Gain appreciation for life

5) Develop spirituality (Calhoun & Tedshchi, 2006 as cited in McElheran et al., 2012).

It is clarified and expressed in McElheran et al. (2012) that although individuals may experience PTG, this does not mean they were not affected by the traumatic event- it means that,

although one may experience negative effects of trauma, he or she may also experience PTG together with the negative effects. The participants in Rhodes (2015) displayed a greater sense of personal strength and self-compassion, greater appreciation for life, and changes in relationships, such as developing a sense of closeness to others. Rhodes stated that each of the participants within the study attributed these changes to the practice of yoga.

Trauma, Spirituality and Yoga

As stated in Khalsa (2004),"While the primary goal of yoga practice is spiritual development, beneficial medical consequences of yoga practice can more precisely be described as positive side effects" (p. 270). According to Mahoney (2003), the meaning of the word spiritual is beginning to change. Once a term used to describe religion, it is now a term often used to describe wisdom. He states in his book, *Constructive Psychotherapy* (2003), that there are six themes people often associate with spirituality: connectedness (relationships), timelessness (present moment, timeless infinity), meaningfulness (finding patterns and connections), gratefulness (joy, appreciation), peace (acceptance, compassions), and hope (active engagement in the process of living) (p. 164). Several of these themes are in line with the five domains of PTG and the participant outcomes as expressed in Rhodes (2015). Similar to PTG, when one embarks on the journey of spiritual growth, it does not mean that one will no longer experience negative feeling or events. Mahoney (2003) explains that spirituality is not an easy or assured path to happiness. The "good life" one seeks through spirituality is not the same as "feeling good", rather, it is the ability to make one's pain more meaningful. Or, in the context or trauma, to transcend and liberate one's self from the negative effects of trauma, creating meaning from one's painful experiences. As stated in Bloom (1999), "confrontation with the spiritual, philosophical, and/or religious context- and conflicts- of human experience is impossible to

avoid if recovery is to be assured" (p. 15). While the practice of TSY has evolved from yoga's original form, rooted in the philosophies of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism and its underlying religious or spiritual undertones, when one reframes spirituality as gaining internal wisdom, rather than ascribing it to religion, one may still experience similar changes in line with Mahoney's themes of spiritual growth.

Teaching Yoga to Vulnerable Populations

Yoga instructors who teach vulnerable populations may work in varied environments such as yoga studios, homes, public schools, community centres, group homes, shelters, prisons and treatment centres. Many clients within these populations are struggling with PTSD, other trauma related disorders, and mental health issues (Stephens, 2010). Not all types of yoga, studios or teachers may be suitable for treating individuals who have experienced PTSD and other trauma related conditions. Emerson & Hopper (2011) suggest that yoga classes may need to be modified for trauma survivors. This idea gave impetus to the development of TSY.

As experts are beginning to understand how PTSD and other trauma related disorders may be treated with yoga, yoga therapy is gaining credibility and approval in healthcare and from clinicians. The voices of yoga instructors working with these populations could provide valuable insight into why and how TSY helps to restore mental health for those involved. In a study conducted on the use of yoga with military veterans suffering from PTSD, one yoga instructor stated:

> Over this three year period I observed veterans' continual search to find peace in their bodies, minds and hearts. I have witnessed them enjoy less pain, benefit from the ability to breath more easily and sleep more peacefully at night, and

> discover new ways to look at their challenges and life. They tell me routinely how beneficial yoga is to them. (Pence, n.d., p. 50)

In another study, instructors observed, as they were working with clients who suffer from mental health disorders, that participants felt safe enough in the group environment to verbally share their experiences of hallucinations as they occurred, and, over time, participants recognized physical discomfort or mental tension and identified asanas that were helpful in relieving it (Sistig et al., 2014).

In *Constructive Psychotherapy*, Mahoney (2003) explains that many therapists express that their own psychological development has been accelerated by their work, stating that, through their careers, they have become wiser, more self-aware, more tolerant of ambiguity, and more capable of enjoying life. Based on this finding, Mahoney suggests that research should study the therapist. Although this current study does not focus on the personal experience of yoga teachers, it does acknowledge that the instructor has a wealth of information and insight into the transformations one may experience through the practice of yoga.

In this study, I intend to examine how yoga can be used as a pathway to healing trauma through the stories told by yoga instructors who teach traumatized and vulnerable children and youth who experienced trauma during childhood or adolescence.

Guiding Questions

1. What information and insights can yoga instructors provide about the effects of yoga on clients whose lives have been impacted by trauma?
2. Through personal experience teaching yoga to populations that have been impacted by trauma, how do yoga instructors envision yoga as a pathway to healing trauma for youth and young adults?

3. How does the practice of yoga continue to impact the lives of youth and young adults who have recovered from trauma?

Chapter 3: Methodology

Theoretical Orientation

As a researcher, I approach this study through a constructivist and postmodernist lens. Constructivist ideas can be traced back to the ancient teachings of the Lao Tzu and Buddhism, that express the fluidity and impermanence of life. Buddhism describes humans as constructors of their worlds through thoughts and fantasies. The five major themes of constructivism hold that human beings are active agents, that we seek to create meaning and order in our lives, that we are continually creating and changing our sense of self, that we relate to ourselves and others through stories and symbols, and that each human life is constantly in a state of flux reflected in patterns and cycles of experiencing (Mahoney, 2003). Constructivism is based on this premise- that humans "construct" or create order in their lives, and that problems arise most often when our categories, the way we organize and make sense of things, are inadequate to our experiencing. However, constructivists also believe that humans possess the strength and ability to reorganize themselves when life has become disorganized (Mahoney, 2003). The path of yoga encompasses much the same perspectives- that each person possesses inner wisdom to restore balance, inner peace and a sense of self.

Post-modernist thinking holds that there are multiple truths, each with its own value. It does not attempt to generalize ideas to the larger system of society (Kirby, Greaves & Reid, 2010). Since trauma will affect each individual differently, each person will have their own experience of trauma and therefore a distinct story to share. While we can group together common symptoms of traumatic stress, they are only guidelines for what one can expect, and, as research continues and new knowledge is acquired, the ideas we currently hold will evolve in relation to new information. New information is obtained through individual cases that, over

time, begin to generate new ideas. I believe in the power and value of the individual story and the multiple truths among them.

Positioning myself as the Researcher

Through self-inquiry and awareness, researchers must understand how their own position, values and interests can have an effect on the research process- from the questions they ask and the participants they choose, to the process of evaluating data (Kirby, Greaves, & Reid, 2010).

> As collaborative researchers, we have a responsibility to talk about our own identities, why we interrogate what we do, what we choose not to report, on whom we train our scholarly gaze, and who is protected and not protected as we do our work. (Fine and Weis, 1996 in Kirby, Grieves & Reid, 2010, p. 41).

In order to maintain reflexivity, I must locate myself within my study to show how my personal thoughts and experiences shape my research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003), I am a 31 year old cisgendered, white female. I grew up in a middle class, nuclear family of four in a quiet, rural community in Manitoba. As far back as I can remember, I have possessed a desire to help people of all ages. From a very young age, I knew I wanted to be a counsellor, and as I grew older my desire to help others has grown and evolved. I still believe counseling is an invaluable tool for helping others. However, as I have developed a relationship to the practice of yoga, I believe that somatic therapies are vital for change on a deeper level.

As a researcher in this field, my opinion on this topic is not neutral. I began practicing yoga nearly ten years ago and I have experienced several positive changes through the physical and ethereal practices. My personal experience influences the way I perceive yoga- if I did not find the practice valuable and healing, I would not choose to research this topic. I am aware,

however, that while many people may share experiences similar to mine, no one will have had precisely the same experience that I have. This awareness is vital to conducting qualitative research, as it is necessary that I acknowledge my biases and how they guided and influenced this study. As stated in Padgett (2008), "the problem is not whether the ethnographer is biased; the problem is what kind of biases exist and how can their operation be documented" (p. 18). As a Youth and Family Counsellor, I have been practicing reflexivity for several years, approaching my work with an objective, neutral, curious and open attitude. As a yoga practitioner, I believe every class is an opportunity to practice self-study, or, according to the yoga tradition, svadhyaya. Svadhyaya helps one tap into the nature of their essential being, guiding one toward a deeper self-understanding (Kraftsow, 2008).

Personal location

My study is motivated by both personal and professional interests. As a researcher, I approached this study with both an insider and an outsider perspective. In the United States in 2003, one study estimated that over 42,000 youth were reported to be in residential treatment centres, and that 71% of these youth had histories of exposure to traumatic experiences (Spinazzola et al., 2011). As a Youth and Family Counsellor, I have worked with children, youth and adults who have experienced several forms of trauma such as abuse, neglect, homelessness, addictions and violence. These clients struggle with self-regulation, focus, depression, anxiety, suicidality, self-harming activities, disordered eating and low self-esteem. The parents of the youth I have worked with often struggled with similar issues themselves. As a witness to the effects that trauma has on lives of children and youth, I felt inspired to devote my research understanding the effectiveness of yoga as a method of healing trauma.

Personally, yoga has helped me work through anxiety and depression stemming from compounding events throughout my lifespan. Since I began practicing yoga, I have developed greater physical and mental strength. I have a healthy relationship with my body, and I have developed a deep respect for what it does. My anxiety has lessened and I feel satisfied and enriched by my life. I have also learned to find value in moments of sadness because yoga has taught me that all things are temporary and that hardships are lessons that help one to grow. I have become more confident, balanced, joyful and present. To me, yoga has become more than a physical practice; it has become a way of life that has developed, and continues to develop through devotion, continual practice, trial and error, and building self-awareness.

Narrative Inquiry Methodology

In order to obtain rich and meaningful data that reflects the nature of my research questions, I utilized a narrative inquiry methodology. Narrative inquiry is a method of study based on the idea that humans live and express their lives and experiences through stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The term narrative inquiry means, to ask about and investigate the story. As a method of research, the researcher is seeking to gain insight into the story and write about the shared experiences. The process of narrative inquiry constitutes a collaboration between researcher and the individual being interviewed. Building a relationship based on mutual trust and clear communication is important to establish as this type of research proceeds. The researcher must listen to and provide space for the participant to tell their story, attempting to deeply understand what is being said. This process becomes collaborative as the story unfolds and both the researcher and the participant contribute to the construction of the narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The process elicits rich stories of experience allowing for an in-

depth understanding of the meanings individuals derive from and ascribe to these experiences (Holloway & Freshwater, 2007; Frank, 2010).

While narrative inquiry is a collaborative process, as the researcher, I was careful to keenly listen to and understand the experiences my participants were sharing. I was cognizant of my approach, being mindful not to manipulate the context or details of the stories, but instead value and affirm their stories, while selectively contributing my personal insights when appropriate.

I believed a single narrative would suffice in shedding valuable and insightful information on how yoga can help children and youth heal from trauma. However, I explored seven individual stories to gain a deeper, more robust understanding of how and why yoga can be effective. While I was interested in exploring the links and diversities among the stories, I was also curious about the unique and invaluable information shared within each individual story. According to Denzin & Lincoln (2003), we cannot understand one case (narrative) without having learned about other cases. I encouraged participants to provide honest and genuine accounts of their experience. Each participant's account was comprised of their own history and context, and included detailed, holistic and meaningful accounts of their personal experience teaching yoga to youth and young adults who have experienced trauma.

As a researcher, it was my intention to delve into the stories and discover the emic meanings held within each (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). I was not seeking to discover one ultimate truth— I was searching to understand the commonalities among multiple stories, while also valuing the unique aspects within each. Paramount to narrative inquiry is the emphasis on experience and temporality. John Dewey, preeminent thinker in education, suggests that

experience is both personal and social, and that humans are individuals that can be understood only in the context of others (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Participant Recruitment

Prior to commencing recruitment, I received approval for the proposed recruitment strategies for this study from the Human Research Ethics Board (HREB) at the University of Victoria. I was initially approved to recruit up to five participants for my study through purposive and snowball sampling.

After receiving approval, I began the process of recruitment by placing posters explaining the study in a local yoga studio, as well as several cafés within the city of Victoria. Initially, I sent emails to three yoga instructors that I personally knew, and who had experience teaching yoga to traumatized or vulnerable children and youth, inviting them to participate in my study. The emails provided a description of the study, participant requirements, and a consent form. All three individuals agreed they would be a good fit for the study and chose to participate. Two more participants were recommended from the volunteers whom I was able to contact through online websites advertising trauma sensitive yoga. I met with all five of the participants prior to the interview to explain the study, and obtain signed consent forms.

I received two more participants in addition to the five I had originally planned for, one who had heard of my study and requested to participate, and another who was referred to my study through a mutual acquaintance. I received ethics approval for each of the additional participants, resulting in a total of seven participants who took part in my study.

The seven participants were all female, between the ages of 25 and 45. Each was a qualified yoga instructor with experience teaching yoga to vulnerable children and youth ages

12-24, whose lives had been impacted by trauma. Six out of the seven teachers had received trauma sensitive yoga training, and one had training in restorative yoga, which focuses largely on individuals with special needs.

Each of the participants contributed their own unique perspective on teaching to these populations, and provided rich descriptions of their experiences. Out of the seven participants, four had experience teaching mainly to male and female youth and young adults ages 16-25, two had experience teaching primarily to male and female children and youth ages 5-18, and one had experience teaching to male youth only, ages 14-19.

Although this study could be considered small with only seven participants, the means of obtaining the data for this study with long, semi-structured interviews in which the participants were given time to speak truthfully and thoughtfully, emphasizes robust quality rather than quantity. While it can be argued that studies with few subjects produce findings that are not generalizable, Kvale (1996) reminds us that the focus on a few intensive case studies has contributed much to of our current knowledge. Examples include Piaget's studies of children's cognitive development, using his own children as test subjects, and Ebbinghaus' experimental-statistical investigation of learning and remembering nonsense syllables in which the subject was only himself. (p. 102)

Confidentiality

In order to protect the identity of the participants and their clients within this study, the names of my participants have been replaced with pseudonyms. Any other identifying information that may have been mentioned throughout the interviews has either been removed or re-named in order to prevent possible identification within the context of environment. I proceeded with the utmost care throughout the entire process, from transcribing the interviews to

finding themes, to remove any identifying features. All personally identifiable information of the participants was removed. Upon completion of this study, all data stored throughout the process of interviewing, analysis and writing will be destroyed within one year.

Limits due to Context

All precautions were taken to protect the identity of the participants and their students. However, because the participants are from communities on Vancouver Island, it may be possible, although difficult, to identify a teacher from the stories shared within this thesis.

Consent

All participants involved in the study are over the age of 19 and provided personal informed consent for themselves. Each participant was informed that if at any time throughout the interview they chose to stop, the interview would end without consequence. They were also informed that they had a right to defer any questions they did not want to, or know how to answer. They were also informed of on-going consent, that at any time prior to completion of the study, they could chose to withdraw consent and terminate participation without any consequence.

Data Collection Procedures

Interview Process

The method of data collection utilized to obtain information was a long, semi-structured interview. According to Kirby, Greaves & Reid (2010) a semi-structured interview consists of a set of questions determined by the researcher in which there may be some variation of the order and format of questions. There is also some "give and take" between the researcher and the interviewee during the interview. I created a set of pre-determined questions for each

interview. However, using the semi-structured format, there was room to expand upon and explore the questions deeply, allowing conversation to unfold organically and spontaneously. The interviews consisted of a set of pre-determined questions that aligned with the guiding questions of my research. The questions were developed from studying the existing literature on yoga and trauma, as well as from my own personal curiosity.

As a researcher I believed the semi-structured interview provided the opportunity for my participants to share their stories, while also providing data that facilitated comparability among participants. According to Barriball & While (1994), the semi-structured interview is well suited to exploring the attitudes, values, beliefs and motives of each participant. It is especially well suited for sensitive topics in which probing from the researcher may be required to gain clarity and understanding of the real meaning behind the participants' words. The long semi-structured format, along with the pre-determined, open ended questions, such as "how" and "why" questions, allowed the time and space for deep exploration of the questions, with room for spontaneous and naturally occurring conversations to unfold, along with information that was useful for comparison among the participants. According to Yin, (1984) how and why questions indicate the study is one of an exploratory nature. The in-person interviews also provided an opportunity to observe body language and tone of voice, which added rich detail to the participants' words.

The interviews took place at various locations including a yoga studio, participant's homes and places of residency during their stay in Victoria, as well as in my home. The locations provided a confidential and easily accessible space of the participants' choosing. Each participant was interviewed one time. The interviews ranged in length from 55 minutes to 105 minutes with the majority of the interviews lasting approximately 90 minutes. The length of the

interview depended on participant availability, time constraints, and the nature of the discussion that ensued between me and a participant. Each of the interviews was audio recorded and four were videoed in order to capture non-verbal language such as nodding or shaking the head, shrugging the shoulders, or making hand gestures to convey meaning.

After each of the interviews, I spent time mentally reviewing the interview, assessing my personal experience and reactions to the interviews, as well as noting any hunches I may have developed throughout the conversation. I recorded notes of anything that seemed particularly salient to me throughout the interview, such as my reactions, observations of the client, or statements that surprised me. This process of reflection helped me remain reflexive and notice my biases throughout the process of transcription and analysis. As well, it helped me further prepare for remaining interviews.

The questions I asked were informed by the literature review, as well as developed from personal experience as a yoga practitioner, teacher and student of trauma sensitive yoga. In order to test the answerability of my questions, I created and implemented a pilot interview with a colleague. Several questions were adapted, refined or removed after the pilot interview. This was a useful process before conducting interviews with my participants.

Approach to Analysis

In order to effectively analyze and make meaning of my data, I utilized a thematic analysis method. Thematic analysis (TA), based on the literature of Braun & Clarke (2006), was the method used to analyze and interpret the transcribed data collected from the semi-structured interviews. According to Braun & Clarke (2006), "thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data" (p. 79). This process of analysis consists of six key phases that include:

1. Familiarizing yourself with your data

2. Generating initial codes

3. Searching for themes

4. Reviewing themes

5. Defining and naming themes

6. Producing the report

A theme is a nugget of information that is relevant to the research questions, or that appears as a pattern throughout the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Integral to conducting TA, is a clear and concise description of the process of analysis including how the researcher came to the conclusions they reached. Many steps are necessary throughout the process of TA, and therefore it is vital that the steps taken are made explicit so that the research can be evaluated and compared to other related studies (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

To begin the Phase 1 of TA, familiarizing myself with the data, I first listened to, and then manually transcribed each interview in a timely manner in order to retain the essence of the interview. Kirby, Greaves & Reid (2010) recommends completing transcriptions in a timely manner in order to vividly capture the impressions, nuances and reflections of the interview. Throughout this process, I carefully and mindfully listened to each interview, recording every word and utterance expressed by each participant. This allowed me to become deeply immersed in the data. As stated in Braun & Clarke (2006), the process of transcription, while time-consuming, can be an excellent way to begin familiarizing oneself with the spoken text. This first step is, in itself, the beginning of analysis. It requires a certain amount of interpretation by the researcher - for example, noting and ascribing meaning to variations in tone and volume of voice, silences and utterances (Kvale, 1996). According to LeCompte (2000):

> Because data are collected by human beings, and because people are interested in certain things and not others, selections are made. People tend to record as data what makes sense to and intrigues them. Selectivity cannot be eliminated, but it is important to be aware of how it affects data collection, and hence, the usefulness and credibility of research results. (p. 146)

Aware of my personal insights, biases and knowledge, I remained close to the data, diligently recording each interview word for word, listening to the recording, pausing to type what I had heard, and then often replaying to check that I had accurately recorded what was said. Through this process of deep listening, the expressions, tones and pauses within each interview helped me make meaning of what they were expressing, rather than simply recording the verbalized data.

Once the transcriptions were completed, I re-examined the transcribed material by listening to the recording while reading the copied transcript. This helped ensure that I had accurately recorded and reflected the interview as literally as possible, taking care to prevent my own biases from affecting what I recorded. Where participants had agreed to allow video recording of the interviews, I also spent time viewing the videos while making notes of the visual gestures or facial expressions that stood out during the interview. For example, one participant made an exploding gesture with her hands beside her head as to express that her mind was blown. I recorded this gesture in brackets in the transcribed material. Once transcriptions were complete, I emailed them to each participant allowing them to read over the recorded material and check for accuracy in my interpretations, as well as give them the opportunity to make changes, or remove any material they did not agree with. Member checks also helped to ensure transparency throughout the process of transcription (Kirby, Greaves & Reid, 2010).

Once each of the participants gave me permission to use the transcribed material, I began the process of Phase 2 by re-listening to each interview twice, both times making notes of items, or bits of information that stood out from the material. I looked for patterns in the data, areas of repetition, units of meaning, information that pertained to the research questions, as well as statements that surprised or intrigued me. I highlighted these sections by circling them and writing notes in the margins of the printed document. After I had generated initial codes manually, I downloaded the transcripts into a software program that allowed me to easily keep track of the codes. This was an efficient way of storing and organizing the data and codes within interviews and find information by searching for specific words and items across the data set.

Once I felt this was complete, I moved into the third phase of TA, searching for themes. In order to do this, I printed the codes from each interview, and then manually cut out each code and began to collate all of the similar codes from each participant, beginning to form themes. At the end of this process, nearly 80 themes were created.

In Phase 4, reviewing themes, I began to compare and contrast the initial themes using Spradley's Sematic Relationships (example: X is kind of Y, X is in place of Y, X is a reason for Y) (Whitehead, 2005). Throughout this process, I was able to see which themes were similar, and which were different. I began to combine and group similar themes together forming categories, drop themes that were redundant, and take note of the differences between the grouped themes. I created several mind maps at this stage- the visual descriptions of each theme helped me see more clearly which themes could be assembled together and which themes could not, and insure that the data within the themes cohered together meaningfully. Once I grouped the themes, I went back to the data, re-reading each interview to make sure the generated themes worked in relation to the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

To commence Phase 5, defining and naming themes, I named my categories, and continued building my mind map, looking for connections within and between the groupings. My final mind map was made with sticky notes: large sticky notes to label the category, and smaller ones to display the sub-themes within each category. With this map, I was able to continue moving themes around to see where they fit best, and create a coherent story. Eventually, three main categories were formed: safe space, belonging and mindfulness. Within these categories, vulnerability is a consistent concern interwoven throughout the narratives.

Finally, Phase 6, producing the report, is the formation of this Master's thesis. Within it, findings from the research are displayed in relation to the literature and the guiding questions of my study, illustrating the stories as told by the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Validity

According to Kvale (1996), validity refers to the truth and correctness of a statement (p236). Qualitative studies must be carried out with integrity. This applies to the methods used to conduct the study, as well as the personal character of the researcher throughout the process of evaluation and analysis, and includes questioning one's personal biases and observations that may influence the outcomes of analysis (Kvale, 1996). Throughout the process of research, conducting interviews, transcription and analysis, I strove to keep an open mind and curious interest in the participants' personal experiences teaching yoga to children and youth who have experienced trauma. As a yoga practitioner I am aware that I possess tacit knowledge pertaining to the practice, how it can affect one mentally, physically and spiritually. Because I hold this knowledge, I took necessary steps to maintain reflexivity throughout by recording an audit trail and documenting, making note of, and journaling my experiences, thoughts, feelings,

assumptions and biases as they revealed themselves throughout the process of obtaining and analyzing data.

When conducting qualitative research, it is vital to ensure credibility and authenticity (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). In order to achieve credibility and authenticity within my study, I aspired to create accurate interpretations of the data as described by the participants. I did this by maintaining an awareness of my personal biases, listening carefully for subtleties and nuances while also observing body language and non-verbal communication during the interviews. I read and re-read the transcribed data several times to thoroughly understand the connection between themes in order to develop ideas and to ensure I had accurately translated into text what was stated by my participants. As previously stated, throughout and after the interviews, I reflected on my personal reactions, making note of anything that piqued my interest. I can recall feeling moments of joy, excitement, inspiration, resistance, confusion, and deep gratitude throughout the interviews and during analysis. I utilized this awareness as an opportunity to check in, question and evaluate the choices I made throughout analysis, being careful to represent the voices of the yoga teachers, rather than my own biased assumptions. According to Kvale (1989), "to validate is to investigate, to check, to question, and to theorize. All of these activities are integral components of qualitative inquiry that ensure rigor" (as cited in Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). These steps helped to ensure credibility in my findings. LeCompte (2000) suggests that, as researchers, we ask ourselves "do I, the researcher, really understand and describe what I am studying in the same way that people who live it do? Did I really get it right?" While I cannot know precisely the intentions of my participants, I am confident that, through reflexive, careful documentation and analysis, I was able to closely portray each of the participants, allowing their spirit and passion to flow through and saturate the

findings in this study. I believe this study, which focuses on individual perceptions and knowledge, will help to build upon current research, adding a rich and relational aspect to what is currently known.

Chapter 4: Participants

Trista

Trista has been teaching TSY to individuals in recovery from addictions and trauma since 2008. When she began teaching these populations, there was very little in the way of literature on the subject of yoga for trauma survivors. She began teaching from a place of genuineness, personal experience, intuition and an in-depth knowledge of yoga.

Aware that she wanted to teach yoga to individuals with addictions, she received a 200 hour YTT certificate and began volunteer teaching at a detox facility to individuals who were new to detox. Several of her students were using drugs and alcohol as a way to cope with the underlying trauma they had experienced. At that time, she had no specific training in trauma-sensitive yoga and had to learn through experience. Relating how she learned to teach to populations in recovery, she stated:

> "Trial and error, I definitely learned the hard way, I learned the hard way doing things wrong over and over again. Having students triggered in class, or having…you know, in the moment, you figure out what to do."

When Trista began teaching in 2008, she was aware that language would be an important factor in teaching to this population, stating that she did not want to say anything that could potentially trigger her clients to want to use substances. She also recognized that her classes needed to be slower paced, and that she must integrate choices and the freedom to leave class at any point in order to minimize triggering and increase attendance. Trista shared several stories of her early work, expressing that, at times, she felt overwhelmed and unprepared for the experiences she was witnessing. However, she stated that despite her doubts, she began to see positive changes in her students. Trista stated:

> "I was like, what have I done, I'm in way over my head, but even through all the chaos that was happening throughout class, people swearing at each other, people throwing things at each other, people snoring, getting up to smoke, I did see the benefit after a class, 'cause they would stick it out…A lot of them pretended they didn't want to be there, but they did want to be there, 'cause they didn't have to be there, they could have got up and left, and I … started to see the benefit after just one class, even if they just connected with their breath for one moment, the ease that they felt…So I kept going back, and they kept coming back, and eventually it turned into this really beautiful community."

Over the years, Trista searched for books and trainings on how to teach yoga to populations dealing with addictions and trauma. Trista realized that, although she was dealing with people with addictions, most of her students were also dealing with histories of trauma. In 2011, Trista found a centre that educated yoga instructors on how to teach yoga to individuals with addictions. Not long after, she discovered yoga training for individuals who have experienced trauma.

Eventually Trista began renting a space at a local yoga studio to teach yoga classes to people in recovery. In the beginning, she stated that she was lucky if she had one student come, but over time, as she began to adapt the classes to the needs to the students, more and more people came, and eventually, Trista began hosting yoga retreats for individuals in recovery.

From her experience, Trista had an abundance of knowledge and experiences to contribute to this study.

Kris

Kris works with marginalized populations and individuals 18 and older who have experienced trauma. She has taught over-seas, in private settings, and within a yoga studio. She also trains people to become yoga teachers and incorporates a trauma-sensitive component into the trainings. Kris came to the practice of yoga with her own experience of trauma, and found the practice to be invaluable. She believes that, without tapping into the body, a huge part of healing from trauma is missing.

Kris lived in India for two years where she studied many different forms of healing through yogic practice. She has been teaching yoga for a decade, and trauma-sensitive yoga for the last four years. Kris believes that incorporating traditional yogic healing techniques into trauma-sensitive yoga can be invaluable. While she recognizes that this is not common in trauma-sensitive work, she has witnessed for herself the healing that many people experience from traditional techniques such as chanting and mantra.

Kris believes that trauma-sensitive yoga is for everyone. She states that people often come to yoga unaware that they are dealing with trauma, but as they begin to work with their bodies, the stories of their past start to reveal themselves.

Rory

Rory teaches yoga within a studio, and teaches a specialized trauma-sensitive yoga class to women who reside in a shelter and are referred to the class which is free of charge. Rory stated that one-third of the women she teaches are between the ages of 19 and 30. She also teaches to several children and youth who attend the classes with their

mothers. Most of the women she teaches have experienced domestic abuse or sexualized violence.

Rory has always been interested in social justice, and has worked in a counselling capacity for several years. Nearly 10 years ago, she took a TSY training course. She believes that talk therapy is highly effective but that it only takes people so far in their healing. She states that, *"I always knew that yoga would be so good for the clients I work with, but I just didn't know why it would be until I learned…exactly why yoga is so useful for healing trauma in people's lives."* While talk therapy can help individuals process and understand events that have occurred in their life, yoga allows individuals to focus on their body and work through trauma that has been stored within it. She stated that she can *"see a tangible change in people after they have an experience practising yoga in that capacity and learning to gain control over their breath and reactions in their physical body."*

Julie

Julie taught yoga to youth and adults in her community, as well as male youth in custody between the ages of fourteen and nineteen. Although she had no specific training in TSY, she explained that there was a strong component in her teacher training that focused on creating safe space for vulnerable populations.

Julie taught at the youth custody centre for nearly five months before her contract ended, and during that time, witnessed the boys move from a place of isolation and profound vulnerability to a place in which they felt more confident in themselves and began developing relationships with one another. Julie's experience challenged the

concept of what trauma-sensitive yoga should look like. As soon as she met the boys in custody, she realized very quickly that they would not enjoy a slow paced class or the usual "yoga music", and that she would have to earn their respect before they would buy into yoga. Every class she taught had to be adapted to meet their needs in order for them to trust her enough to let go of fear, and essentially experience their bodies.

Amy

Over the last few years, Amy has worked with several community centres and organizations teaching yoga to children, youth and people of all ages. Most of the individuals she works with are affected by trauma.

Amy has a strong foundation in yoga. Both her parents are yoga teachers, so as a young child, Amy was introduced to the practice. She was also raised with a strong sense of duty toward karma yoga, the practice of giving to others, and has spent much of her life volunteering in several capacities.

Amy completed yoga teacher training after having two children of her own. Her yearning to maintain a strong connection with her children inspired her to take yoga teacher training specifically for children and youth. Eventually, she saw an offering of trauma-sensitive yoga training, and, desiring to learn more about creating an inclusive environment within her classes, she decided to take it. Amy had experienced several uncomfortable situations in her personal yoga practice with teachers who were insensitive with their language and actions, and wanted to avoid creating discomfort for her own students. Amy's main goal in teaching yoga is to provide her students with a safe space to rest their bodies.

Nora

Nora has a master's degree in yoga therapy studies and has completed a 40 hour training in trauma-sensitive yoga with David Emerson, author of *"Overcoming Trauma through Yoga"* and *"Trauma-Sensitive Yoga in Therapy."* She has experience teaching trauma-sensitive yoga in several capacities, such as mental health and addictions, at non-profit organizations, and within her own private practice. She has worked with children, but most of her clients are 19 and older. She also trains yoga teachers to work with heavily traumatized populations, and is developing a 60 hour college course called therapeutic yoga for trauma resilience.

Nora came to the practice of yoga in her early 20's after experiencing a violent sexual assault. Before coming to yoga, she was using drugs and alcohol to cope with the symptoms of trauma she was experiencing. Yoga assisted her recovery from trauma helping her to feel powerful, confident and effective in the world. It gave her the tools to regulate her body which helped her to discontinue using drugs and alcohol.

Sandy

Sandy has a 200 hour YTT certificate with a trauma-sensitive aspect to her training. She has also taken special training in teaching yoga to children through Rainbow Yoga. Since receiving her training, Sandy has taught yoga for children and youth between the ages of 5 to 21 years old. She has taught drop-in classes to youth with mental health issues, as well as youth on probation, youth in the school district who are struggling with various issues and have been referred to her through the youth and family counsellor, as well as with the Boys and Girls Club program.

Many of the youth that Sandy works with are survivors of trauma and have experienced healing and relief from various trauma symptoms through the practice of yoga. Sandy has found that many of the youth she teaches are looking for a way to relax and calm themselves, and through their practice, have learned how to connect with their breath and calm their nervous system.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Findings

Safe Space

> "I think the first way in which it [yoga] can help a trauma survivor change their relationship to their body is by, first of all, supporting the person in having a safe experience of even having a body." Nora

The literature reveals that the practice of yoga, including the breath, the asanas and meditation can have several beneficial effects on the body and nervous system, such as calming the nervous system and reducing allostatic load (Salmon et al., 2008; Sistig, Lambrecht, & Friedman, 2014; Streeter et al., 2012), helping the mind and body to feel safe and not under attack (Salmon et al., 2008), and clearing the mind (Fontana & Slack, 1997 in Fisher, 2006). For individuals who experience trauma, feeling into the body and noticing sensations may be a terrifying experience (Sparrowe, 2011). Yoga practice provides an opportunity in which a person can begin to explore and connect with his or her body, however, the person must first feel safe to do so, and as stated by Nora above, the yoga class can provide that safe space.

Unanimously, each teacher agreed that safety within the environment was imperative to healing, and in some regards, more important than the physical forms of the yoga practice itself. As stated by Nora:

> "I was trained that…with the understanding that the creation of safe space was…paramount. Judith Herman says that… the first step toward healing from trauma is the establishment of social safety, and that can't happen in isolations, that it actually has to happen in groups…I think of my yoga class as that group where bodily and social safety get reestablished."

This statement coincides with the idea that human survival strongly depends on the ability to attach to others (Bloom, 1999). Therefore a space in which social safety can be established is a necessary first step

toward healing from trauma. Sandy believes, *"It's almost more about the environment and the energy you create for them within that room, in that space- far more than the poses you do."* Although the asanas are an integral part of the yoga practice, Sandy is suggesting that a safe environment and atmosphere may be more important than the poses themselves in helping individuals recover from trauma.

According to Amy and Nora, creating a safe space also means creating a space where one can separate from the residual experiences of trauma as revealed in the following statements:

> "I think yoga has the ability to bring people to their breath and to their body…like a savasana gives you like a really safe healing moment…People don't always have that, like even when you're sleeping, they may not have a really, you know, safe happy home…So give that moment of rest where your body is safe and you're safe." Amy

> "If you're in a story, or an event has seriously impacted your day and you're reliving flashbacks…being able to come into your body and create a space and a moment that's in and of itself not related to your trauma or your worry…" Amy

> "One of the things that I hear…I was working with a woman privately who…was also a survivor of childhood abuse…sexual and physical and psychological and I remember that she said to me at one point, 'this is the only time I can ever remember feeling safe in my body'." Nora

Each of the teachers spoke of ways in which safety is established within the yoga class. They included the dynamics of the physical and social surrounding, cultivating a comfortable environment of inclusion, establishing boundaries governed by the need for flexibility and choice, and by holding space that can support the emotional peaks and depths that can arise throughout a class that is geared toward a traumatized population. Within this safe space lies the potential for traumatized children, youth and

young adults to begin opening to vulnerability and experience the psychosomatic sensations within. As Nora states*, "there's just this experience of being safe enough to be vulnerable."*

Physical Environment.

The space in which the yoga class takes place will preferably provide an inviting atmosphere that separates the space as a self-contained area dedicated to practicing yoga and an area in which one is able to feel comfortable. Several teachers mentioned soft lighting, a comfortable temperature, as well as neutral décor and calm music in order to inhibit strong reactions from students.

> "Watching the lighting, not playing music that's distracting or has chanting." Nora

> "You want to have sort of a natural and organic environment as possible." Julie

> "You want to remove as many things as you can that people could make a strong judgment, like, I hate this music! But if you play something neutral, it's kind of like, ah, I kind of don't feel either way about it or, um, same thing with the space and things you say." Rory

> "When students first walk into the yoga room, it's a completely different space than the rest of the institution. It's like, it smells good, there's art on the walls…it's got a thin carpet, there's soft music, there's no florescent lighting…The lighting's very soft…" Julie

The neutral atmosphere of the yoga space is helpful for students who are easily distracted and hyper-vigilant about their surroundings. A space that considers areas of potential discomfort, such as distractions and temperature, contributes to an ambiance in which participants can feel calm and able to focus on themselves- their body and breath, rather than what is happening in the

periphery. For other students, simply having a space dedicated to practicing yoga could be an important aspect of the trauma sensitive yoga class:

> "I have had that experience with um, students who are staying in a shelter, have had issues with drugs or alcohol but are in recovery, but they don't have a lot of friends or family members that are living a positive, healthy lifestyle, so…that's a real gift for someone to come to an environment where that's what everyone is doing here and I think that's what's really positive about the environment, like practicing in a space that's dedicated to that." Kris

Although preferable, a comfortable and well decorated environment is not always possible. In Julie's situation, she wasn't able to alter the physical environment such as the florescent lighting and the appearance of the gymnasium, so she had to be especially creative when establishing safety within the space through music, a light-hearted approach to teaching, and exercising her intuition and flexibility in order to meet the students' needs and create a welcoming positive space.

> "I think…the environment was essential… because I mean it was just brutal. It was in a hideous gym in florescent lighting like there was nothing, and literally sometimes two guards standing with guns; always one. So it's a different, but I think, and this is where again, you can only be who you are, my style of yoga is fairly light hearted. I...personally will play like, Metallica… and I tend towards a more vigorous style…You know like, I don't think there's a single guy in this that wants me to put on like whatever, they wanna hear Eminem and they loved it…I think, was a very um, positive place and…they were able to have fun, and be in their bodies, and try different things." Julie

Julie explains that for her group of youth, she did not believe that they would relate to the music typically played in a yoga class. This was partially due to her own perception, and also due to the effect it had on her students as they appeared to have fun and be curious about their bodies and abilities.

When teaching to traumatized populations, creating safety within the space is essential (Pence, n.d). It was also emphasized that safety within the yoga space is established in the way that the area is arranged- considering arrangement and proximity between the students, as well as proximity to the exit.

> "Ah, another way that I create safety is the way that I set up the room, you know, trying to make sure that the students don't have another student behind them, letting students know how to leave the room, or that it's ok to leave the room if they need to." Nora

> "…and then, I don't block, I would never be in between the class and the door so that they always feel comfortable, if they need to go out they can go out, it's not like going in-front of an entire class and walking past me, it's not this big thing." Rory

As the participants have claimed, the physical environment should be a place in which one feels secure and comfortable. They provided several suggestions as to how to make the space welcoming for students, such as an enclosed space, soft lighting, neutral décor and music, and when possible, a space that is dedicated solely to practicing yoga. However, it is not always possible to have perfect conditions when not teaching in a studio that can easily be manipulated to create the desired atmosphere. While the appearance of the space can have an impact on the

students' level of comfort and ability to focus, the more vital component to the class is that it provides a positive atmosphere with a light hearted and inclusive attitude. As Rory mentioned, *"trauma can feel heavy- practicing yoga doesn't have to."* It is simply a time to be still and experience one's body.

Rules and Boundaries.

Rules are established to create safety within the yoga space. As stated by Rory and Amy, relaying clear and concise rules in a light hearted way helps to establish boundaries that create safety and a sense of well-being for everyone in the class. As one teacher mentioned, strongly enforced rules may deter youth from attending classes. However, rules are necessary as the comfort and safety of the group must be paramount.

> "Youth who are chattier more often…so like, not like having a lot of rules. They might be, like have quite a strong aversion to rules, so…you want them to feel like they're making choices and feel engaged, feel like they want to be there, but also they need to follow enough guidelines that they're not disturbing the other participants." Rory

> "So establishing clear…guidelines or boundaries at the beginning of the class- you know, if you need to step out and go have water or whatever, you can go do that." Amy

Allowing students to come and go as they please may also help students to feel less confined in the class as that could trigger anxiety and traumatic memories to recur. The freedom to come and go allows students to feel safe to participate as much or as little as they like and that the class is always a welcome place for them to be.

> "For instance, at the centre, I had a student who literally throughout the year was like, she'd come to the class and stay for a couple minutes and then leave. And then she'd come again and she'd stay for a few more minutes and then leave and then, you know, she just kept- but what was important for her was the establishment that it was ok for her to come and go." Nora

Consistency.

Several of the teachers discussed the need for consistency within the class in order to create a feeling of safety. When students are able to anticipate and predict the structure of the class, it can alleviate extraneous anxiety that may plague the trauma survivor and hinder their ability to become present. As stated in Perry (2007), factors that provide structure, predictability, nurturing and sense of safety will decrease susceptibility to the effects of trauma. Similarly, Emerson & Hopper (2011) state that offering students a sense of control over their experience is an essential component to healing.

> "Gives them a bit of a map and I'll say…we're going to do a couple more postures, were going to do this because it's, that's part of what, what I learned in teaching trauma-sensitive yoga is, you don't leave things unknown, like even if you're holding a posture, like we're in this posture for five breaths and you count down from five. So there's not ever like, when is this going to end? …like if you can get people out of their heads…they've been given all the information they need…she said we were going to do eight postures, we've done a couple, we're probably almost done these, you know…you want to give them the least amount

> of space for worrying or anticipation…it helps people feel more relaxed…you're just like, trying to make it simple and so they know what to expect." Rory

> "The anxiety, the fidgeting, the… resistance to change…I definitely see a lot of students that have their spot, if I switch something up, they'll be like, 'Whoa! You did something different! So trying to keep the class, not the poses as consistent as I can, but what I do as consistent as I can, so just what I've…developed is I'll just share a reading in class either at the beginning or end, and one class I focused on, I think it was stillness…I decided I'm not going to do a reading [at the end], I'm just going to have like a few moments of…quiet meditation…and at the end of the class they were like 'whoa!, where was the reading?' They were genuinely like, not upset, but they were…confused, like, I don't think the class is done yet cause you haven't done....so I just…realized like whoops, like keep it as consistent as you can…" Trista

Knowing what to expect allows survivors to relax and become present in the mind and body in the moment. As stated by Rory, when teachers provide traumatized students with a "bit of a map" by discussing what the class will look like before beginning, as well as counting down so that students know how long they need to hold an asana, it leaves less space for worry and anticipation. When students are able to anticipate the ending of a pose, they may be better able to stay with the momentary experience mentally and physically, knowing that there is an end in sight, building tolerance to discomfort or feelings of distress (Emerson & Hopper, 2011). Learning how to stay calm when feelings of discomfort arise within the class may help individuals who have survived trauma handle similar feelings of distress in other areas of their life. As cited in Rhodes (2015),

when participants are in a safe setting with a supportive teacher, they are better able to recognize that they are safe in the present moment and safe to experience the body even when uncomfortable physical or emotional experiences arise. Van der Kolk (2006) suggests that traumatized individuals must learn to explore and accept internal feelings and sensations through the process of interoception and recognize that such sensations are only temporary and will pass with time.

Choice.

> "Students get to choose moment to moment what they do with their bodies, which is really antithetical to the experience of a traumatic event in which choice around what's happening with one's body is often taken away." Nora

Choice is an integral element to a yoga class when teaching to traumatized populations (Emerson & Hopper, 2009). The importance of providing choice was mentioned by each participant a number of times throughout the interviews. As stated above, providing traumatized individuals with choices such as the option to stay or leave the class, the option to participate in a physical movement, or to take another form, helps to create an environment of trust and a feeling of safety in which one is not being forced or shamed into doing something they don't feel comfortable doing. As previously mentioned, students are given the choice to participate in the classes as much as they like, and leave when they like. In situations in which the students have been told they must attend yoga classes, such as for Julie who taught at a youth custody centre where her students were informed they must attend the classes or they would face consequences, Julie provided her students with the option to participate or to sit out and watch.

As stated in Emerson & Hopper (2011), it is vital to support students' autonomy to choose whether or not to participate in a yoga class. During a traumatic experience, trauma survivors were prevented from making choices on their own behalf, which can create feelings of fear and helplessness in the future. Fundamental to healing trauma, is the opportunity to begin making choices for oneself in a safe, supportive environment. This helps trauma survivors to feel empowered to make choices that suit the needs of his or her own body, and ultimately begin to build and restore a relationship to the self. The following quotes display examples of how choice can be provided in the yoga class, and how it can elicit healing in traumatized individuals.

> "Students choose to do stuff, or not do stuff all the time…and that may just be choosing to lie down, it may be choosing to leave the room, it may be choosing to do something else with their bodies." Nora

> "It was always her choice to stay in a pose or not, and either way was fine and when someone's been through a really traumatic event, they can almost feel like they don't have a choice- like something has happened to them and they didn't have much of a choice over it…so to just give them the choice back. 'Oh if it feels uncomfortable, I don't have to do it'." Sandy

> "My first few classes when I met the boys I said…if you're not into it, no problem, give it a try, but if you need to sit out, sit out. The first couple classes I taught, kids sat out every time, and then you know, within a few minutes they're back in and they're out again and then they're back in." Julie

> "She was 15. So she'd suffered, like she had major PTSD. She'd been abused by her dad for most of her life, so up until about the age of 13, and she had been very

> isolated from society as well so there was a lot of stuff around social interaction that she was just…learning, so it was great to just see her…stay in a pose, or if she didn't want to stay in a pose, she could just stay on her mat and she was completely fine just being there and just being still and comfortable in the room- that's great." Sandy

> "The first yoga class she just took it really easy, she didn't stay for savasana, which I let her know that, if you need to leave at any point, please do. She stayed for the whole class, she did all the poses…but she didn't stay for savasana the first class. She was um…she was kind of isolating, I was just trying to, you know, give her space while being there for her so she didn't isolate too much. Second yoga class, same thing, she did the poses but she didn't stay for savasana, which I do find a lot of people with PTSD, they…try to keep it as short as they can, but…so third yoga class though, she stayed for half savasana. Fourth yoga class she stayed for the full savasana. Fifth yoga class, she actually fell asleep and stayed past savasana." Trista

These findings display the power of giving one choice and the empowering effects it provides. It appears that when one is given choice, such as how one moves his or her body, choice to stay in an asana, choice to stay in or leave the class, he or she can take, what Emerson & Hopper (2011) describes as "effective action"; something you do with your body that you notice results in feeling physically better. Students were able to make choices that helped them discover what felt best in the moment- sometimes this resulted in students leaving the class. However, it appears that when given the choice to leave, students often return and may even stay for entire classes.

Language.

When teaching to traumatized populations, choice is offered not only through the freedom to participate, but also through language. Invitatory language fosters choice in statements such as: "If you like, you may draw your shoulders back" or, "You may choose to deepen your posture." As stated by Trista, invitatory language invites traumatized individuals to experience their bodies as they need rather than telling them how they should feel:

> "Invitatory language- um that is big, so giving them lots of choice, giving them lots of options and having them experience how it feels in their body instead of telling them how it should feel in their body." Trista

All of the teachers agreed that, essential to creating a safe environment for traumatized children and youth, is careful use of language. As explained by Nora:

> "Safety arises in many ways. Primarily safety arises…in language. So as a yoga teacher, I move from a place of demand, to a place of invitation and inquiry in my teaching"

Language should not be demanding- instead it should invite students to participate if it feels right for them. Invitatory language allows the students to decide what to do with his or her body (Emerson, 2015). Language used by the teacher should also be sensitive to potential triggers, removing any words that could cause discomfort within the class, for example, Trista states:

> "I don't want to say anything that's going to trigger these people to want to use [substances], because sometimes the language that we use can be triggering for people that are overcoming addictions so, at that time, I was just thinking, don't

> say 'what is your body craving right now?'…there are cues that I have read, or that I have heard teachers use that I was like, don't do this."

Inclusivity.

While the practice of yoga is steeped in spiritual and religious affiliations, it may be prudent not to incorporate overtly spiritual aspects into a yoga class for traumatized individuals. In building an environment of inclusivity, the absence of cultural or religious undertones or representations, such as the use of Sanskrit, or religious representation through idols may help contribute to a space in which the majority of the class can feel accepted and comfortable.

> "It's kind of an interesting thing, because, you know, because there can be in yoga studios, often times, a feeling of separateness, like almost with like cultural identification in a way too, where it's like, you know, if there's like a huge ah, Shiva in the middle of the room…that can be a bit off-putting to people too if it's too much... and then there's kind of this separatism, um, so I think the space as well needs to be very neutral." Kris

> "I think having a really neutral environment is important…too because a lot of people attribute yoga to like spirituality um, and religion, things like that too, so you are trying to remove anything that can be, that will remind people of something, or they'll think it's about something else…" Rory

Another aspect of inclusivity is an environment that promotes self-acceptance without an underlying message that one should strive to be something or someone else. The safe environment of the yoga class should not promote competition and care should be taken to eliminate sexual undertones. As Nora states:

> "I think the other thing is to just distinguish a trauma sensitive environment from an average yoga studio environment…you know, I, my experience in a lot of yoga classes these days is that there's a very highly sexualized acrobatic um, beauty-centered environment, which for a lot of people isn't very safe. So that makes a huge difference, is really creating, you know, a space of acceptance, that's not sexualized and that doesn't have to do with what you look like in your pants…that non-competitive, non-sexualized environment is super important for trauma survivors."

It appears from these statements, that in order to make the yoga class feel like an inclusive, positive environment, anything that could apparently cause feelings of isolation and discomfort should be removed, such as symbols, religious undertones, overt sexuality and anything that creates a competitive atmosphere.

Another element to consider may be the way the yoga instructor, teaching to populations of children and youth who have experienced trauma, presents him or herself. As stated by Amy:

> "When…going to teach in different places, like juvenile detention centers or…programs for youth that are having challenges…how should you dress? Does that affect…your teaching at all?

Here, Amy is presenting the question as to how the teacher's appearance can affect their students. As stated in Douglass (2009), Dr. Kelly Gunderson states, "I have found that when I take yoga classes you are looking at a teacher who has a perfect body and it is intimidating." (p. 133). Teachers should be mindful, when teaching to these populations, of how the way they dress and present themselves, can affect the students they teach.

Meeting student's needs.

> "Be lighthearted about things because… it's serious what's happening, you know, because people have trauma at a very deep level, they're maybe suffering from PTSD on a daily basis, maybe they're lives are very challenging, but for this hour, we're…stretching, breathing, and yeah, like that's all we're doing, and so I think um, just not making it seem so serious so people can relax a bit more." Rory

Several common threads appeared throughout the interviews giving light to several strategies for delivering a yoga class to traumatized individuals. However, despite these commonalities, it was also firmly stated that the needs of the students trump any carefully laid plans, agendas or strategies. As the teachers shared their stories and experiences about teaching to these populations, it was apparent that what worked for some students, did not work for others. There were several variables that appeared to play a role in how the class was taught such as age, gender, setting and individual preferences. For example, younger children seemed to benefit more from a playful approach in which they were taught how to move and use their breath through asana forms, games and dance.

> "…using things like sound and breath, and doing things like a yoga flash dance or something where it's like, ok, do whatever you want and be really crazy and get out all your energy, then when the music stops or you hear this bell, you have to be really still. And so kids will dance and run around and then you know, hit a bell, turn off the music depending on the situation, and then they pull themselves in and you're like ok, take 5 deep breaths. So it's…that training to go from one extreme to another and then realizing that they're separate and there's transitions, that it's possible." Amy

In this statement, Amy describes what a typical yoga class for younger children that she teaches could look like. She also touches on physical and emotional regulation when she states, *"it's…that training to go from one extreme to another and then realizing that they're separate and there's transitions- that it's possible."* This describes how the yoga class can teach children how to calm themselves after an episode of excitement through breath and the movement of their bodies. Self-regulation will be further described in the chapter under the heading "mindfulness."

In the following comments, Sandy and Amy describe how an element of play was a necessary component to the yoga class with younger children at a level appropriate for their developmental age and their ability to comprehend what was happening in their bodies:

> "With kids yoga, 12 and under, you're playing games and you're kind of like, mixing the poses into the games and then you do like acro yoga, so it's like partner yoga, they love that…it's definitely more about making yoga fun and you're playing games and you're like constantly switching it up." Sandy

> "And doing pranayama, doing different…with kids, like bunny breath and making it fun, but teaching, literally teaching them how to use their breath." Amy

Although this would not look like a typical trauma sensitive yoga class, the elements of yoga are present here. Children are able to play and socialize, as well as learn techniques that create rhythms in their bodies, using dance and movement to create energy, and then slowing the breath to help the body and the mind to relax. This is in line with research that indicates play therapies are developmentally appropriate for young children with linguistic limitations (Warner et al.,

2014). Through movement and breath, yoga may provide an outlet for children who are not yet able to articulate their experiences, and also provide a method for improving self-regulation.

Play also appeared to be an important element in teaching yoga to teenagers. Julie contributes several comments in which she emphasizes the importance of play and fun:

> "You know, those boys were able…to get into playfulness, you know?"
>
> "Come out, you know, have fun! …So I think that for them…I think it was a very positive place and…they were able to have fun and be in their bodies and try different things"
>
> "And we had another time with Eminem doing goddess pose and then they were all rapping to it! I was like, yeah, you hold goddess for as long as you know the words and, it was just fun!"

Essentially, Julie had to adopt a playful approach to teaching her class in order to earn their trust and respect:

> "And so they came in and this was class after class, but, even though they were relatively speaking, quite nice, they came in all swagger and like, 'fuck yoga', and all, you know, 'this is bullshit'. And yeah, so, and I can see you know, they've been hitting the gym, so most of them were…pretty fit, so it, I had to go a bit alpha on them in a way, like, and be like, 'Ok boys we're starting in plank!'"

Julie recognized that attempting to teach a rather calm and gentle yoga class would have been futile and discount the needs of that particular group. In that moment when Julie was able

to provide those youth with what they needed, she established the beginning of a relationship with those boys, which ultimately creates a community of trust, acceptance and safety.

There were some conflicting messages regarding the best way to teach yoga to teenagers who had experienced trauma. Many teachers suggested a stronger, more vigorous flow in which students were constantly engaged, while one teacher stated that in her experience, teenagers were more interested in a slower, hatha or yin style class in which they could relax. These conflicting statements display the need for adaptability in the yoga class, and the ability to meet the needs of the students, which, may be different for each group or individual. As stated in Douglass (2009), while some individuals will enjoy a slower paced class, for others, this slow pace could feel excruciating, and for some, relaxation can provoke feelings of anxiety.

> "… if they're teenagers…they might kind of do a class that's ah, a lot physically based, you're kind of like doing kind of these cool things…like a lot of arm balances or break dancing moves." Kris

> "I might have the pacing be a little different. I might have the practice be, I might offer them forms that are a little more rigorous or challenging, but you know again, it's always offering them choice." Nora

> "If I was teaching to people that were a bit younger, I would try to be even less serious and like…maybe I would alter my music…you want to meet people where they're at you know, so I think that you can make it seem very serious and calm and quiet, and for a group of youth, depending on where they're at, that might not appeal to them. So you really, it's really important to read your audience and

your students…if you're working with a group of youth that are a little less serious." Rory

"With teenagers and…young adults, it's more of a…hatha, yin, restorative style of yoga, so it's definitely not…a vigorous flow, it's very much more about gentle and more grounding and slowing things down." Sandy

While six of the seven teachers were trained in trauma sensitive yoga, their stories indicate that the classes they teach sometimes diverge from the intended structure originally developed for trauma-sensitive yoga. However, key elements of the training are still implemented such as emphasizing choice and using strategies to connect breath and body. The variation in these teachers' answers indicates the importance of a flexible class structure that is sensitive and adaptive to the varying needs of the students. The discrepant statements also bring to light a query. Is it the approach of the instructor and the relationship between the teacher and students, the student's personal preference and outcome goals, or the asana's that that impacts and shapes the student experience and journey toward embodiment and healing?

Safety within the Body.

The establishment of physical and social safety forms a foundation from which one can begin to explore the internal landscape, the physical body, and the effects of the trauma within the emotional and psychic realm of the self. For a trauma survivor, experiencing the body can be a terrifying experience. Often trauma survivors have created a separation with the body in order to feel safe- a method called disassociation (Emerson & Hopper, 2011). So when one begins to heal from trauma, experiencing the body is an essential, but often, difficult task. In the process

of reacquainting oneself with the body, there is a possibility for residual trauma to resurface. A yoga class that is taught with an awareness of trauma, or a trauma-sensitive perspective offers a gentle approach to connecting to, and establishing safety within the body in a safe environment.

Community

> "It's a group of like-minded people coming together and you're witnessing other people moving through the same stuff as you, which is healing" Amy

One of the hallmark symptoms of trauma is isolation and a lack of sociability and trust in others (Telles et al., 2011), and as noted by Judith Herman, trauma survivors typically feel deeply alienated from society (Emerson, 2015). Therefore, establishing community and a sense of belonging is important in the process of healing from trauma. As stated by Nora,

> "I think primarily there's first of all, this idea of connection which is the antithesis to isolation and isolation is the hallmark of trauma….So I think that connection's a big piece of healing."

This comment coincides with literature written by Dr. Bessel van der Kolk (2014) who states that being able to be safe and have safe connections with others is likely the single most important aspect of mental health. Being seen and heard by those around us can help combat the isolation that trauma can make one feel (p. 79). With this sense of safety established, children and youth may feel more secure to reach out to others and develop a sense of connection and belonging and reduce feelings of isolation and ostracism. To add to this, Dr. Gabor Maté (2003), in his book, *When the Body Says No,* confers the importance of attachment and connection as a vital component to healing. He writes that "study after study concludes that people without social contact- the lonely ones- are at greatest risk for illness. People who enjoy genuine emotional

support face a better prognosis, no matter what the disease" (p. 277). This statement suggests that, children and youth who experience trauma, and trauma related effects, may experience healing effects simply from being within a supportive community atmosphere, such as the environment of the yoga class.

Each of the teachers spoke about the important role that community plays within the yoga setting and its contribution toward healing. The main themes incorporated into community as discussed by the teachers include support, connection, vulnerability, building relationships, normalizing experience, and creating safety.

> "I think…not feeling alone…you're in a space with other people, and you know that they all have their own stories like you, so you have your anonymity of the story, but you have the shared space of knowing there's lots of people that have been there longer and…over time, seeing other people change…can help you change and help you realize change is possible…it's easier for somebody to move forward and to heal…for someone to…witness that as a pathway…'cause some people have a much harder time…believing it's possible for themselves to get over things." Amy

As Amy states, healing trauma can be a difficult process. The experience can feel so challenging, one may believe they can't heal. However, when people are surrounded by others who have experienced similar stories to theirs, and they witness changes occur in others, they may begin to believe that healing is also possible for them. Amy continues to say that the safety within the group is, in itself, a healing experience. Having other children or youth to share in the experience together, can be helpful in creating change and moving forward.

> "It can be a really healing experience for kids to be with other kids, or youth to be with other youth…to create a shared sense of value and worth…having a shared space in and of itself, gives…a sense of healing…to be in a safe place with other people…is healing…you're in a group and to see…that there are…safe groups of people dealing with things that you're dealing with…just that environment of the class and shared space and…shared experience. Wanting change, wanting to be healthy, wanting to be happy…wanting to…move forward a little bit…it's a…positive experience." Amy

Belonging to a community of like-minded individuals and normalizing one another's experiences provides support in which one no longer has to carry the weight of their trauma in isolation. It also provides energy and encouragement to move forward and continue healing. According to Dr. Bruce Perry, humans are neuro-biologically connected to one another, and in order to survive we must be able to form and maintain successful relationships with others (Perry, 2006). Therefore, the social atmosphere and sense of belonging one experiences within the yoga class is beneficial for children and youth who are working to overcome the effects of trauma. One may also feel safer in a supportive group of individuals to explore the internal landscape of his or her body, noticing the subtle sensations, areas in which he or she feels tension, and the parts of the body where the emotions settle. As discussed in the literature review section, van der Kolk believes that traumatic experiences are stored within the body and the body must be treated in order for the imprinted traumatic memories that are experienced as physical disruptions, to be resolved. The areas one has rejected or ignored can begin to become integrated back into one's identity (van der Kolk, 2014).

Nora makes a similar statement to Amy in which she affirms the importance of connection in healing trauma, first to community creating a safe and nurturing environment, and then to the mind, body and spirit as one begins the process of re-structuring the somatic experience:

> "Isolation…stops bodily and social safety from being established. So…connection is one of the primary ways that yoga can be helpful as a complementary therapy for working with trauma…psychologically, physically, emotionally, spiritually…the self gets fractured during trauma…for survival…if the body is an unsafe place to be, it makes sense to disassociate, but at some point that connection needs to be re-established, so I think that connection's a big piece of healing." Nora

As discussed in Bal, Crewe & Spitzer (1999) traumatic memories are linked to the body somatically. So trauma, not only fractures one's sense of self by "blurring the mind-body distinction" (Bal, Crewe & Spitzer, 1999, p. 42), but it also severs the sustaining connection between one's sense of self and the rest of humanity. Yoga, as stated by Nora, provides an opportunity to reestablish a connection to humanity as well as repair the disconnected self.

Within the group, there is a level of acceptance and understanding that provides support for individuals to go through what they are experiencing:

> "I think that's one of the healing parts about being in a group, is that although it's unspoken, there's a level of acceptance…we've all been down a similar path and

> my presence supports your healing…my presence is part of the container that holds space for you to go through what you go through…" Nora

By simply being present with her clients as they move through trauma, Nora is providing support and safety for them to journey through healing.

As stated by Rory, trauma and its effects can be an isolating experience,

> "When individuals have had the experience of trauma and are feeling like their experience is so much different, and they learn it's not so different, it builds…a connection…not being alone, which is ultimately what everybody wants is to feel connected."

Connection.

Yoga provides an opportunity for individuals to connect to others on both an overt and subtle level through breath, movement and parallel practice. This helps one to combat symptoms of isolation and feeling less anomalous.

> "…everyone's had somewhat of a similar experience…and then doing these partner exercises, the idea behind it is to kind of build that connection…where your students are breathing at the same time and doing movements at the same time, mirroring each other…that feeling of like following someone else's breath, someone following your breath and that feeling of connection with another person." Rory

What Rory is describing here is the notion of synchronicity and reciprocity with another human (van der Kolk, 2014). Sandy makes a similar point by stating:

> "I feel like in today's society everyone isolates themselves a lot…we do a lot of things…on our own…more and more now. So to do something with a group…not actually having to interact with each other is great, 'cause there is that kind of subtle connection of 'oh we're doing this together…we don't necessarily have to be experiencing the same thing…but you're not alone…so you are developing…connections but in a really safe way."

Nora's experience explains the idea of a subtle connection between students and teacher, as well as the connection one makes to the self.

> "There's the connection between the student and the other students in the room whether or not they're speaking. There's the connection between the student and the teacher, even if it doesn't seem like there's a lot of interaction going on there. There's the connection of the student, I think most importantly, to themselves."

When one begins cultivating a connection to the self, and building self-relationship skills, one creates capacity for gentle self -witnessing, non-judgmental acceptance, and easier transitions through change (Mahoney, 2003). This subtle connection, or reciprocity, does not need to occur on an overt level. The subtle interactions can be very connecting for students within the yoga class as stated by Rory and Nora.

While a major factor in healing, connecting with others is not always free of adverse consequences. In the following comment, Kris alludes to the fact that there may be times when sharing group energy can be upsetting.

> "…we're sharing group energy. I mean, it can be very healing, sometimes it can be upsetting too. But I think it's that…dynamic of being with a group of people in a safe environment, where…you're with other people but you're focusing on yourself…especially when you're starting…with a practice, it's extremely helpful to be with a group dynamic…I mean now and then…having other people around, we are catching others baggage. Like it can be upsetting too. But more helpful than upsetting." Kris

When we are around others, in sync with one another's movements and emotional states, there is the potential to pick up on one-another's emotions including feelings of depression (van der Kolk, 2014). Mirroring one another, as discussed previously by Rory, allows us to connect to one another. On one hand, this process allows traumatized individuals to connect to one another, and decrease feelings of isolation, but on the other hand, there is the risk of picking up the undesirable feelings of others. To counter this, van der Kolk states that treatment needs to reactivate the capacity for connection, while also teaching traumatized individuals to resist being drawn in by one another's negativity (van der Kolk, 2014).

Another important aspect of connection and community is the idea of "being seen." Nora shares this story of a client:

> "I have a client…right now…in my private practice and…I've really watched her…over the course of 4 months, go from being completely shut down and closed off and…stuck….sort of just pin-balling back and forth from disassociation to immobilization, to…triggered, tremoring, crying…to…being able to look me in the eye and have a conversation with me…sit up in a tall

> relaxed manner…ask for what she needs, move her body and come into forms that…she would not have even thought of in the past, and she's very acknowledging of those changes. Essentially I think that she's become more regulated… and she's another person who's…said… [there's] something very powerful for her in being seen…"

The idea of "being seen" can be likened to the concept of reciprocity; when one feels supported and cared for by another, and held in another person's heart and mind, we begin to physiologically relax (van der Kolk, 2014). Although this is a private client of Nora's, belonging can occur in a group, or simply between the teacher and the student. Some individuals, when they begin the process of working through trauma, are not ready to be with a larger group of people. This student in particular was struggling with several severe symptoms of trauma that potentially could have been quite difficult to manage in a larger group setting, however, being in the presence of just one other individual who provided care and support, allowed this woman to feel seen. As Nora commented earlier in the interview, in speaking about a separate student who was portrayed earlier, she states:

> "I said earlier…quoting Judith Herman…we can't establish safety alone. It's almost like somebody has to bear witness to it. And I think that's what made a big difference, was having somebody bear witness to her existence, her struggle."

Normalization.

Establishing a sense of belonging and community may help one to feel less ostracized by their trauma. When one discovers that their stories and experiences are not completely

unfathomable, and that in fact, others have experienced their own, very similar situations, it helps individuals to feel less anomalous and more connected to others.

> "When individuals have had the experience of trauma and are feeling like their experience is so much different, and they learn that it's not so different, it builds…a connection…not being alone which ultimately, what everybody wants, is to feel connected." Rory

Trista shares a similar experience through her teachings:

> "I think that even if they're not going through the same thing, just realizing that everybody's…going through something and they're not alone in that."

Amy also explores the benefits of having shared experiences, and further suggests that, aside from yoga postures and breath-work, simply having an experience of feeling normal can, in and of itself, be healing:

> "To see...safe groups of people dealing with things that you're dealing with, separated from the yoga and the healing of the yoga and the meditation and the breath work, just that environment...and shared space and...shared experiences. Wanting change, wanting to be healthy, wanting to be happy...it's a...positive experience."

Other ways in which the yoga community helps to 'normalize' one's experience with trauma is through the release of emotions- recognizing that it's ok to have emotional responses and reactions to the trauma they endured:

> "…they're having similar experiences to other people and they feel connected, like this is a normal thing that happens and this is the way it's supposed to happen. It's not strange that I'm crying in class, I'm having these experiences." Rory

Nora recalls a story of a time in which one student verbally proclaimed that she would cry throughout the class:

> "I was running…a trauma sensitive yoga class for women…it was the first class, and I remember this one woman…raised her hand and she said, 'I just want to let everybody know that I'm going to get triggered in this class and I'm going to cry, but then I'm really ok', and everybody nodded…and said 'yeah, yeah', and for me it was a perfect illustration of the awareness…the courage, the determination of my students…"

This story depicts the strength of the community within a trauma-sensitive yoga class. One woman, brave enough to share openly with everyone that she would become triggered and she would cry in class, was received by the group with nods and approving responses. This woman acknowledged that her trauma would cause her to experience an emotional reaction when she participated in the yoga class, and then clearly stated that it was OK. She gave herself permission to have an emotional release, and by sharing her acceptance of this with the rest of the students, she displays to the group that it's OK if they too have emotional reactions and experiences. Nora describes her students as courageous and determined- recognizing that woman's openness, personal awareness, and ability to share as an act of courage, and speaks to the tone of the yoga community.

Support.

Underpinning the idea of connection and normalization, the yoga community provides a network of support for individuals in the process of working through and healing from trauma. To display the power of support, the following is a story Trista shares which displays the value of having a community of support to uphold or walk alongside each other through difficulty:

> "She was a girl who…was at our California retreat…she was in the forces, she was sexually assaulted and now she is on disability…not only was having a really hard time coping with the assault, but she was in a mentally abusive relationship with her boyfriend…We got a call when we were on our way to the retreat that Natalie was having a miscarriage as we were speaking. So on top of the assault and this horrible relationship…then she found out that she was pregnant…So Natalie arrives at our retreat, she's 23 and all of these things are happening for her…the first night she was…sick, she was in a lot of pain…I did start to see the changes in between classes when we had our down time. The women would go for a hike on the property, or…just relax…she was starting to engage with the other women and she was actually starting to reach out, which…I find that's the most powerful thing that I see…is…that sense of community and safeness to talk to other women that possibly have been through what you've been through…Even if they haven't, they…love you and they're there for you and they wanna help you and support you- so I was just witnessing her starting to feel safe to

> open up about what was happening with…these women, and they just embraced her…"

In this anecdote, Trista describes the experience of a young adult female who suffered from a multitude of traumatic experiences, some that had been occurring for a while, and others that were happening as she made her way to the yoga retreat. Once there, she was given the space and freedom to participate in the classes as much or as little as she liked, and over the course of a few days, was able to complete savasana- an asana in which many students who have experienced trauma feel uncomfortable holding. From what Trista described, it appears that in the presence of several other women who had also lived through similar experiences, Natalie was able to feel safe and supported enough to reach out and build a community around her.

Trista describes another situation in which she was teaching yoga to individuals recovering from addiction to drugs and alcohol:

> "They were really encouraging and supporting each other…they were…taking 12 step meetings together and finding other different recovery support groups…they were in it together and they were truly inspiring each other, encouraging each other to stay clean and keep going…"

This statement describes another situation in which the role of the community continues to play a vital part in the journey to healing- the individuals within the classes supported and encouraged one another to stay clean and look for supports within the community to help them stay on track.

Julie provides stories which also depict a blossoming community through yoga. The students Julie taught were incarcerated in a youth custody center. Although difficult at first, over

time a welcoming and supportive community was formed between Julie and the boys, the boys with each other, and even the staff at the custody centre. In the following excerpts, Julie describes an interaction between a guard, a counsellor, and the boys at the center:

> "He [the guard] sort of stood there…he didn't give you much. He was just there to…watch them for that hour. And then…after one of the handstand classes…he came right up to them, and he was like 'Boys that was phenomenal!...I'm so proud of you!' And of course they got all tough in response, but you could just see they loved it. He was…so inspired by it and then the next week he tried a handstand."

Julie continues the story later in the interview stating:

> "One of the counsellors came in, in her jeans and started doing yoga with us. She's like 'I heard what you guys are doing…can I join in?' and they were like 'yeah, sure!'…and then they started showing her stuff."

These stories illustrate the positive influence of establishing community.

Building relationship.

At several points throughout the interviews, the teachers spoke about building relationships in various capacities, within the yoga class to one another and to the self, as well as developing relationships that extend "off the mat" and into the rest of one's life. As expressed by Rory, the positive and safe environment of the yoga class provides a setting in which like-minded individuals are able to meet, connect and potentially build a relationship.

> "So you're… hopefully providing an opportunity where they're coming to a positive environment to do something positive, meeting other people that are also trying to do those things in their life, and then making a connection with that person and…maybe developing a friendship with them."

Throughout Julie's interview, she shared several instances in which the boys bonded with one another. At one point they were beginning to practice yoga together outside of the classes:

> "They would get together to work out and they would get a couple of yoga mats and try to remember stuff we'd done…so definitely…the physical benefit and then…I think relationships, like their relationships changed to themselves and to each other and to the people charged with their care."

In the beginning, Julie stated that the boys would hardly look at each other and would not feel safe enough around one another to close their eyes. By the end of four months practicing together, Julie stated that:

> "They went from guys that would not touch each other…and then by the end they're helping each other…they've got their hands on…someone's hips…helping…if I had told any of them on Day 1, 'you're going to be holding each other's hips in handstand',…they would have never…They just came to it…in their practice…and made it possible."

She continues to say that:

> "They became less like prison buddies and more like friends…it seemed they…changed with each other."

> "I saw, in far more boys than I didn't…a positive arc to the experience. Like they just changed from being so defended with me and with each other…to guys that helped each other…"

From a constructivist perspective, during times of disorder, humans can exhibit symptoms of rigidity (stereotyped behavior or frozen passivity) or variability (flexibility, expression). In safe relationships and a safe environment, one may be more apt to experiment with variability, and more functional and fulfilling behaviors and expressions may emerge (Mahoney, 2003, p. 258). As the boys began to trust one another, it appears that they were able to partake in yoga both during and outside of the classes Julie taught. Greater expression began to emerge and friendships began to form. As stated in van der Kolk (2014), relationships one builds within the supportive network helps one to tolerate and process the reality of their experiences.

Kris provides another story of change, about a young woman to whom she taught yoga in South America.

> "…She originally came because she wanted to work on asana technique…learning more about the yogic culture and…we…started that way, everybody kind of does. They want to know…poses…but the more that we got into it, the more that we kind of got into her story…she was robbed at gun point and her husband was actually shot…the reason she was coming to yoga, which didn't come out for a long time, was because she was trying to deal with the repetitive thought patterns that were living in her body, and interesting, even the way that she would talk, you could see the physical structure of her body was being affected by carrying…this mental weight. So through working with her as this…came out, we were

> able to…delve a lot deeper into understanding where…the trauma was living in her body and then working with postures from there which was…really amazing…because I could physically see where she was holding and where she was protecting…"
>
> "…She had quite a rough exterior. She was very…harsh and I think…people didn't really get that close to her because of how harsh she was, and I knew her personally in the town…so over the months I really noticed…her…being able to connect to herself, which ultimately made it easier for her to have the relationships that she had in her…life. There was a lot more empathy…in her interactions. She owned a business in town too so…you would see her talk to her employees and [at first] you'd be like 'ugh!', then after working for a couple of months with meditation and yoga techniques…it seemed like her behavior was…much lighter and it had everything, I think to do with the fact she was able to actually connect with herself and drop some of that fear that was holding up that boundary…between…the external world and herself."

Kris's story describes the traumatic situation experienced by one young woman in her past. She sought out yoga in order to help release negative thought patterns plaguing her life. Through the practice of yoga, over time, she was able to release stored trauma in her body and she began to build a relationship with herself which in turn helped her to connect and build relationships with the people around her.

Establishing a sense of belonging and community is not necessarily an easy process. For some people, participating in a group activity geared toward embodiment may feel

overwhelming. For example, Nora expressed that some of her clients were not ready to participate in a group yoga class, however, the connection between herself and the student still provided those specific individuals with a safe and supportive relationship in which the student could begin exploring the internal workings and sensations of his or her own body in the presence of another person, providing the same healing effect as a group, but in a way that feels safe for the individual. There is also the potential, as explained by Kris, that at times, sharing group energy can be upsetting. Students are practicing in the midst of each other's most difficult struggles. While it did not seem to be a critical issue for the teachers, it seems that if it were to come up in class, it would be imperative that the teacher be competent in holding space for the emotions to arise and know how to deal with such situations to keep the environment safe.

Despite the sometimes tenuous journey, building and establishing community and a sense of belonging to others is an important step toward healing for traumatized individuals. Within the nurturance of a trauma sensitive yoga class, bonding and connection may be easier to achieve.

Mindfulness

> "What yoga can do is bring us into the present moment, to experience the mixture of suffering and beauty that is the human experience" (Douglass, 2009).

According to Jon Kabat-Zinn, (1994) "mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally" (in Emerson, 2015, p.7). In yoga, one practices mindfulness by experiencing the body, mind and emotions in the present moment through asana, breath and meditation (Emerson, 2015). In order for children and youth who have experienced trauma to embark on this journey to mindfulness, one must first feel safe

and supported in their physical and social environments. This sets a foundation for students to begin safely exploring the internal world. Individuals who experience chronic or repeated traumas, especially as children are often affected holistically: mentally, physically and spiritually (Emerson & Hopper, 2011). Therefore when working with trauma, one must integrate all three aspects of the self into healing. The practice of yoga, especially one that is trauma sensitive, has the ability to address all three of these areas simultaneously, working to bring the individual closer to establishing a healthy identity in relation to the self and one's environment. As this happens, one may begin to create and form a connection to the body, deepening the relationship to one's self (Emerson & Hopper, 2011). The interviews indicated that, through mindfulness, as well as asana and pranayama practices, an individual can begin to let go of the story of trauma and become more present and embodied, releasing stored trauma and learning to regulate the nervous system.

Becoming present.

> "I think one of the biggest effects that yoga gives people that have experienced trauma…is the ability to come back into their bodies and therefore separate themselves from the future or from the past which is where…our anxiety or our depression kind of stem from…" Amy

According to this teacher's comments, yoga can bring people into the present moment- a moment in which one is not influenced by the past or future. One way to be in the present moment is by fully experiencing and feeling the body- no longer detaching from it. When one can experience the present moment fully, feelings of anxiety and depression may lessen or disappear. As stated in Rhodes (2015) yoga helped traumatized individuals feel a sense of calm. One participant in Rhode's study stated, *"The yoga kind of made my brain relax a little bit and*

not worry so much about every little particular detail and then I wouldn't so much have to kind of dissociate which I usually do when I'm overwhelmed" (p. 250). This statement displays the calm one can feel when he or she become present focused.

> "Yoga pulls people into the moment and it gives them the opportunity to feel strong or feel safe, or feel happy, which just…gives them that opportunity to move forward." Amy

As further stated by Amy, living in the present moment not only presents a myriad of positive effects, it also allows one to begin to move forward. When one is able to remove him or herself from the experiences of the past and the worries of the future, the moment provides a sense of rest. This helps someone suffering from trauma, begin to heal.

> "If you're very stuck in the past somehow and that's really recurring, that idea of just accepting, like leaving the story behind and being in your body and even spending an hour or maybe only…10 minutes…That could be such a reprieve…" Kris

Letting go of the story.

Becoming present and mindful is not an easy task. As described by several teachers, including Kris, Amy and Rory, it can be a difficult journey to undertake. The process of becoming present can be agonizing and therefore met with resistance. As Kris describes, we all have a side to ourselves that can be tough to face, but through the process of yoga, we can begin to change the perception of who we are and set ourselves on a path to healing:

> "You're driving through all these conditioned patterns to get to a cleaner pathway to your truth and that's hard. So I think…of course we're met with resistance because we all have dark sides of ourselves that we don't want to look at."

In a similar comment, Kris explains that, as well as changing the way we see ourselves, we may also begin to change our perception of the world:

> "…the very nature of the practice in itself is…about re-conditioning the mind and what we have come to believe about…ourselves and about the world…"

Amy makes a similar statement, which describes why one's perception of the world changes as one begins to govern the mind:

> "So yoga's that training…to learn to control your mind and when you're controlling your mind, you're sort of controlling your reality…" Amy

Bringing awareness to one's thoughts, helps one begin to recognize his or her patterns of thinking. With this awareness, one has greater ability to control whether or not one wishes to continue with a certain thought pattern or not. When one begins to acknowledge his or her thoughts and feelings, she or he can begin to detach from the stories that no longer serve them.

> "…teach kids or young adults that…you can acknowledge your feelings and acknowledge what's happening and separate that from…completely overtaking your whole mind and your whole day and your whole body…"

Rory expresses a similar statement, in which she describes "dropping the content" as an important aspect of trauma sensitive yoga. She also acknowledges the challenge of becoming present and mindful.

> "It's challenging in meditation or any yoga class to get people to be present and mindful, but in a class where people have…had these experiences…they've got a lot of uncomfortable material and memories to draw from…one of the most important things in a class is…helping people to…drop the content so that you have an emotion, you have a feeling…notice it, but we don't have to attach content to it…"

When one can recognize and become aware of his or her thoughts, one may begin to simply observe them, noticing they are there, rather than allowing them to hijack one's mind and mood.

Embodied.

When one experiences trauma, the body can feel disconnected from the self and feel like an unsafe place to be (Emerson & Hopper, 2011). Embarking on a healing journey through embodiment, therefore, can raise a considerable amount of discomfort as one begins to reconnect with the body and mind. This is why it is necessary to first establish a safe space within the physical and social environment in which this journey to self can proceed. Yoga is a way for someone to become reacquainted with his or her body and begin to notice sensations that occur in the various parts of the body in relation to thoughts or emotions.

> "This therapy is about, where do I feel this in my body? I feel it in my back, ok-noted. I don't need to do anything about it, but that is the first step of just…understanding the impact life has on the body and understanding that you have a body." Kris

Rory shares a similar idea to Kris. Yoga helps one to feel and notice the body- recognizing how it feels in time and space and within the environment.

> "So, the first thing is…feeling their body, noticing their body… what does their body even feel like? What do their aches and pains feel like?...What is the feeling of their feet being on the ground?" Rory

As expressed by Rory, imperative to recovery is noticing the body and how it feels- even one's aches and pains. When one experiences trauma, he or she may become detached from his or her body and become numb to bodily sensations, making it difficult to experience and understand the interoceptive signals and cues their body is producing. Becoming present with one's self allows one to recognize internal rhythms and fluctuations of the body (van der Kolk, 2014). Through interoception, one begins to explore and understand the internal sensations of the body and over time, build a relationship to the body (Emerson & Hopper, 2011).

Nora describes how one begins to build a relationship to one's body through yoga stating:

> "It's done through grounding; it's done through…body awareness techniques, it's done through the physical forms of yoga; it's done through certain, sort of mindfulness practices, it's done through rigorous physical forms, soft physical forms…just moving the body in all these different ways and experiencing the body in all these different ways, but it's a slow process." Nora

While this process may not provide instant healing, Julie believes that the journey can be mutually enjoyable and therapeutic. When discussing the youth she taught, she states:

> "They were able to have fun, be in their bodies and try different things."

Julie also described how the asanas provided tangible indicators of one's focus and presence.

> "…especially with balances, the more you are up here (points to head), like you really have to drop into your body…I can't do dancer [asana] and be thinking about…my drive home, or something that's stressing me out."

Julie stated that as her students began to build relationships with their bodies as well as learn to let go of the narratives that controlled their lives, many of them experienced improved physical balance.

Re-establishing this relationship with the body allows one to become re-acquainted with one's bodily sensations, feelings and emotions, helping one to better understand how images, thoughts and emotions create certain reactions in the nervous system (Emerson, 2015), and how to better tolerate and deal with the sensations. Interoception can also help individuals locate areas of stored tension which one can begin to release both physically and emotionally. The process of interoception and becoming embodied in the yoga class can be used as a meditative practice in itself in which one arrives in the present moment, noticing the body, and detaching from the cognitive processes that keep one living within the story of trauma (Emerson, 2015).

Grounding.

Grounding was a term also used several times by the teachers, *Grounding into the body* is a term often used in yoga to describe an experience of settling into the body.

> "I could see the change in her in terms of…when she would come into the class and sit down and…not as much looking around at what other people are doing. More being…a little more grounded and a little more focused on…what they're doing and, yeah, almost just… less nervous." Rory

In this example, Rory describes a change in one of her students in which she has become less hyper-vigilant, less nervous, more focused and grounded. Nora makes similar statements about her students, also describing them as becoming more grounded. When asked what grounded looks like, Nora stated:

> "Well, I mean a softening in the body, a slowing down of movement and speech, often students will verbalize that they felt really good, 'I feel so relaxed, I feel so calm.'"

Breath.

Often, part of grounding and becoming embodied involves establishing a connection to one's breath. Each teacher discussed yoga's ability to bring students to his or her breath, and the importance of connecting with the breath was discussed at various points throughout each of the interviews. Breathing is one of the only bodily functions that is controlled both unconsciously and consciously (Streeter, et al., 2012). Without having to be consciously aware, one's body automatically carries out the function of breathing. The qualities of one's breath are impacted by the environment, nervous system and emotions. When one senses danger, the sympathetic nervous system activates and increases the rate of one's breathing and heartbeat. This prepares the body for action. Individuals who live with unresolved trauma, may dwell in a state of increased sympathetic arousal, or may be easily triggered into increased arousal when they are presented with a reminder of the trauma- real or imagined. When one controls the depth and length of the inhalation and exhalation, one can calm the sympathetic nervous system, increase parasympathetic arousal, and reduce symptoms of panic (Hanson, 2007). Controlling one's breath is useful in controlling the regulatory systems of the body. Studies show that yoga breathing interventions, such as alternate nostril breathing, increases HRV (the changes in the

heart's beat-to-beat intervals) and promotes stress resilience (Streeter et al., 2012). Many of the students the teachers worked with remarked that they had not noticed their breathing before. Yoga gives people an opportunity to connect to the breath and learn how to use it in order to calm and regulate the body and become still and present, free from the traumatic memories of the past and worries of the future.

Sandy describes a situation with a female youth who, once she was able to connect with her breath, noticeably began to fidget less, and was able to calm herself and remain still in a pose. This is a similar reaction to Nora's previous description of grounding.

> "…there was this one girl that comes in to the Wednesday class pretty regularly and she would always struggle to be in a pose…even though she'd been coming for ages, she would always…fidget after a certain amount of time and then with the…breath exercise, she was just completely still and then even stayed in the same posture for savasana, so she stayed in the same pose for…10 minutes, which I'd never seen her do before, and it was, I think…the breath exercises just really…calmed her down and got her to this place…of being completely…relaxed." Sandy

Like grounding, the breath serves as a tool to regulate the nervous system and act as a tether for one's awareness. When Nora was asked how one of her students was able to begin tolerating sensations in her body that were previously triggering to her, she stated:

> "When she's dysregulated, her sympathetic nervous system is activated so she can use her breath… to activate her parasympathetic nervous system to impact her brain stem, to serve as a locus or a focal point for her attention…she can

> also…practice certain styles of breath, like bhramari breath for instance, to stimulate the vagus nerve, the myelinated branch of the vagus nerve."

This student used her breath to create regulation within her body. As Nora mentioned, when the vagus nerve is stimulated, it sends signals to the heart and lungs, slowing the heart rate and increasing room for more oxygen to flow in the lungs. This helps one to feel safe and calm (van der Kolk, 2014).

Rory, Trista, Kris, Nora and Julie, discussed a common reaction of many students new to yoga, in which they "find their breath" or recognize that they are breathing. Two examples of students finding their breath are described:

> "This woman…told me that she…just…hadn't noticed she was breathing in years, and I feel this was…very profound because she…had such a separation between her mind and her body…that literally…when we started talking about breath in class, she was like, 'I didn't even…know. I've not heard my breath in years." Rory

Trista describes her experience with traumatized students at the retreats she offers:

> "…that's always the first thing that I find. Students that come to these retreats, especially people that are overcoming trauma say…I don't know how long I haven't been breathing for. I don't remember how to breathe. And I find that's what we work on the most in the beginning because they find that the most difficult, because they've been in fight or flight for so long…I find…that's the first thing they find challenging…remembering how to breathe, but then they find

> that once they get it, once they have that first feeling of a belly breath, they're like 'wow', and that's what stays with them."

Julie describes a story in which she taught her students *nadi shodhana*, or, alternate nostril breathing, which is a specific breathing exercise that is used to calm and balance the nervous system. After several classes, once Julie established trust and a relationship with the male youth, she felt they would be receptive to learning this breath exercise. In the following excerpt, she describes the reaction of one of her students:

> "We did the alternate nostril and all of them were like, that…was amazing, and at the end, this one guy came up to me and he said, you know, 'that was really helpful for me 'cause…I lose my temper really quickly and I'm gonna try that the next time I start to feel like I wanna punch the shit out of somebody!'…I said, 'wow that's great!...good for you, and you can do that anywhere'…and then this other guy goes, 'well what are you going to do on the street if someone's pissing you off? Are you gonna do your alternate nostril breathing?' and he's like, 'yeah, I am!' and then guy's like, 'well what if someone laughs at you?' and he's like, 'then I'm gonna punch the shit of out them!'" Julie

Julie was able to see the humor in that statement and laughed as she described what the boy had said. The breathing had provided him a tool to work with his anger to help him to remain calm, although remaining calm may not always be the choice he makes.

Nora and Sandy comment on how their students also express that the breathing practices helped them to stay calm and work through trigger responses.

> "I will have students come to me and say, I used the breathing- I was triggered and I used the breathing and it really helped…" Nora

Sandy states:

> "I can see a tangible change in people after they have an experience practicing yoga in that capacity… learning to gain control over their breath and…reactions in their physical body."

From the findings, it appears that participating in yogic breathing requires a level of trust. As Julie described, she waited until she had established a trusting relationship with the youth before she taught alternate nostril breathing. This exercise requires one to be silent and, often with closed eyes, disconnect one's attention from their thoughts and external environment, while listening to and feeling the movement of one's breath.

Depending on the age of the child or youth, breathing exercises may need to be adapted. For example, Amy taught her younger students breathing exercises using games and activities. Teaching children and youth to take a deep breath when they are upset, scared or angry, provides them with a tool to calm themselves. As stated by Kris, this is a tool they can use throughout their lives when they become anxious, angry or dysregulated.

Asana.

As stated in the literature review, asana, one of the eight limbs of yoga, consists of the physical postures which require balance, effort, concentration and focus on the present moment. The forms are designed not only to draw one in to the present moment and strengthen the mind and body, but on some level, are also believed to adjust the flow of energy through channels in the body (Iyengar, 1993). Asana requires integration of both the mind and body, using breath to

connect the two aspects of the self to each other and the present moment. Julie explains that one cannot maintain balance in a posture if his or her mind is wandering. The mind must be calm and focused in order to maintain balance and stay in a pose.

> "Yoga poses are whole body…you're using your whole body and you have to use your breath and you have to use your mind because you have to coordinate all those things, and when you're doing crossover, like where you're using different parts of your body, where you go into revolved triangle…you're really engaged wholly." Amy

In this comment, Amy describes the *asanas* of yoga as a whole body engagement exercise. Asanas, when done correctly, require one to notice and move his or her body, use the breath, and focus the mind. The practice is the epitome of what it means to be mindful- when the mind, body and breath are engaged simultaneously, one is better able to become present- slowing one's breath promotes a sense of calm and relaxation (White, 2009). Many of the asanas require strong concentration and awareness of bodily sensations, as well where the body is in space. This process helps one to begin to re-connect with the body and mind.

Asanas can relax or energize a person by balancing the nervous system (Dale et al., 2011). To contribute experience to this statement, Nora describes how asanas can be helpful in promoting self-regulation. However, in our discussion she made it clear that yoga should not be prescriptive. For many individuals, what some yoga practitioners see as a calming practice may not be calming for someone who has experienced trauma and the practice must be tailored to each individual.

> "Traditionally, back bends are seen as being brahmana in nature, so they're going to be activating the sympathetic nervous system, they're going to be energizing, they're going to be heating. Forward folds are generally seen as being langhana in nature. They're going to be relaxing and sedating and activate the parasympathetic nervous system. So then, you could think…somebody comes…and they're hyper-aroused, that means they're in a rajasic state so I should offer them a langhana practice….they're…heated, they're elevated, their heart rate is going, so they need something to calm them down." Nora

Nora describes backbends as brahmana in nature, meaning energizing and heating, and forward folds as langhana, meaning to calm and cool. If someone were upset or angry, a langhana practice may help to calm the nervous system. Next, Nora explains that the effects of the poses are dependent on the individual and, as previously discussed, that offering choice to students is necessary when presenting asana forms to students.

> "There are certain physiological truths…certain positions that we…put the body in…can…help to slow down the heart rate, or can activate- you know breathing practices that can activate sympathetic arousal and again, it's all very subjective…any physical form can be offered as long as there's choice."

Along with helping one to regulate the nervous system, Kris explains how the yoga asana forms to help move energy and trauma out of the body using an example of the student she worked with in South America:

> "Through working with her as this kind of came out, we were able to kind of delve a lot deeper into understanding where even, trauma was living in

> her body, and then working with postures from there which was a really amazing experience…because I could physically…see where she was holding and where she was protecting."

Through practicing asanas, Kris and her student were able to discover where she was storing trauma in her body and then use specific postures to help her work through it. As stated in the literature review, some researchers now believe that trauma can be stored within the body, and must be treated by working with the body (Interlandi, 2014). Using the body to "speak the mind" can effectively help one to heal from trauma (Caplan, Portillo & Seely, 2013).

Julie explains how asanas allow one to discover the depth of one's possibilities. She provides the example of a handstand in which someone who has been practicing handstand may feel happy with themselves when they finally are able to stay in the posture. However, Julie states that in order for one to be able to do these poses, there is an integration of several elements at play that have united to achieve such a form.

> "I think it really…reveals to you, your limitless potential…for all the best things that you are…like sometimes you think it's because I nailed handstand today, but if you think about it…if you really spend some time reflecting on it, it's like wow…so many things had to be for me to put my feet in the air…it's that mental state of open-mindedness and trust and determination and honesty…that all has to happen to move your body in a certain way, and so when that kind of clicks, it's like, then…you can do anything."

Julie also reiterates this message with the following comment:

> "There is so much more than there is to the posture…so that's really amazing."

This statement explains that there is much more to the asanas than simply a physical form- that in order for one to balance in the posture, one must have a calm mind.

Confidence

Asana helps children and youth to build strength in the body, developing a feeling of power, both physically and mentally. Accomplishing asanas is confidence building. Attempting the more rigorous and difficult forms require strength, flexibility, balance and courage. Gentle asanas also require vulnerability and courage to remain still, engaged and present. Often, traumatized individuals suffer from several adverse conditions, including poor self-concept (Spinazolla et al., 2011). Therefore, the confidence one builds through practice can be the beginning of a healthy relationship to the self as he or she becomes aware of his or her personal strength.

> "I think…this is particularly important for youth and for young adults- the experience of increased self-esteem. I know that this was true for me that, one of the things that I got out of my yoga practice in the early years, was an experience of being physically powerful, and I hadn't felt that in the world in a really long time. And that physical power, so the ability to…move through a very challenging class, or…to achieve a pose that had been challenging for me really translated out into my life. So I started to see myself as someone who was courageous enough to take on something new, who could, not necessarily succeed

> at it and have a good sense of humour and be able to show up the next day…maybe succeed at it and really feel good about that, so I think that's a huge piece of healing is the re-establishment of one's self as powerful and effective in the world." Nora

Here, Nora further describes her personal yoga story. She describes feeling physically powerful in her body for the first time in a long time, and she attributes that feeling to practicing yoga. As she was able to move through a challenging yoga class, she began to see herself as someone who was courageous and her confidence grew. She was able to have a sense of humour about herself, recognizing that it was ok if she was unable to accomplish everything she'd hoped to in one class, and she would continue to show up to her practice. Nora's experience of building self-esteem and confidence throughout her practice reverberated throughout her life. To support Nora's experience, Kris explains that when teens feel physically powerful and strong in their body, it can help them build self-confidence:

> "When we're able to establish a feeling of…almost like a powerfulness in our body, or strength- that can be really helpful. It's confidence building for teens."

Amy describes the experience for children when they begin building strength and obtaining better balance through practice. She describes the sense of accomplishment that children feel when they are able to get into crow, an arm balancing pose. It appears that it is both a matter of both physical and mental conditioning. When a child or youth is able to face their fears and try the pose, they may feel an increased sense of power and self-esteem.

> "It's a little thing, but for a kid over a series of classes…you remember your body…you remember, I couldn't do this pose and to try and try and to

> get…crow…a balance pose…kids feel so powerful! And it's the same with youth. It's powerful and it feels, it feels like you're really strong…for a kid who is 'oh I can't do it, I can't do it' and they're scared and then to be able to hold their whole body up on their hands, it's…like they've climbed a mountain! You know, it's a huge self-esteem booster…" Amy

Trista relates similar reactions from youth and young adults - a sense of accomplishment and pride in self when they are able to stay through an entire yoga class, or accomplish a certain asana. The sense of confidence that they create in their yoga practice, as similarly stated by Nora, seems to reverberate throughout their lives "taking it off the mat" and helping them to create necessary changes.

> "On the mat, they gain confidence in themselves, and that confidence… like 'oh, I just did a warrior pose to down-dog' or, 'oh, I just stayed through a yoga class'- the confidence they cultivate on the mat, I find they take off the mat and they take it into their recovery… whatever they're recovering from, they're like, 'oh, I can do this, I am going to be ok'… and they really use that confidence and that inspiration they've given themselves…to change their lives around…a lot of people that I'm meeting…they are feeling hopeless and helpless and…what have I done to my life? Or a lot of people just think… I'm so traumatized what can I do? So just to see them get some confidence and take it off the mat and make the change." Trista

Julie describes a story in which one of her students came into the yoga class at the custody centre and stated that he hated yoga and didn't need to do it. Once he began, he became easily frustrated and sat out the class. Julie provided him with the choice to re-join if he felt like

it, and eventually, near the end of the class, he did. Over several classes this youth began to progress with his practice, eventually accomplishing the balance pose. This success encouraged him to continue practicing and encouraging others to do so as well because of the sense of pride and accomplishment he felt when he was able to do it.

> "I said, 'Hi! How's it going?' and he's like, 'well I fucking hate yoga!', and I was like, 'oh, have you done it before' and he was like 'nope and I don't need to', but then he still got on the mat and we started doing, I think it was tree, and he was really wobbly and he's like, 'my balance sucks!' and I…just kind of kept coaching and then he tried the other foot and he fell out of it again and, you could see he didn't want to be vulnerable…being…wobbly and falling out of tree made him feel embarrassed in front of his - like he couldn't just separate everyone around even though no one was teasing him, it was just all him, and then he just exploded. He's like 'this is bullshit! I fucking hate yoga!' and he slams off and sits down in a chair and…spends his whole time just tapping his foot on the gym floor and…so I…just left him and was like, 'well come re-join us if you want', and he did! He ended up coming back right before the end of the class, he spent about 10 more minutes. The next time he came in, sat out completely, he's like, 'I'm here, but I'm not doing anything!'…I was like, 'that's ok' and…third class he started participating and then we did…a standing balance and he got it. And then you could just see…as soon as he accomplished something, it really changed it for him and he stuck it out and then he became the guy who was telling the new guys to just stick it out and give it a try."

In discussing youth with a history of trauma, Julia stated that when the boys accomplished something in class, they felt an immense sense of achievement. She compared this to the deep sense of frustration they felt from failure, stating: "The triumphs seemed so much bigger too…like when one guy finally got himself up in handstand…he just lit up…there seemed to be an extra layer of…accomplishment…and just pride in self."

As one continues to move forward in their healing journey, layers of fear and doubt may begin to fall away, opening one deeper to vulnerability. Lying still in a room with other people, often with closed eyes, takes a level of courage, not only to be in a room with others and feel safe, but to be with one's self, experiencing all that comes up in the still silence, a moment for deep interoception. Kris often asks at the end of her yoga classes in studio, when lying in savasana- what is it that is noticing and observing the body? Where does this knowing come from? In the book, *Constructivist Psychotherapy*, Michael Mahoney discusses a practice with his clients he called, "mirror time". During this time, he would have clients gaze at themselves in a mirror and ask them to look beyond the physical appearance. When asked by his clients, "what am I looking for?", his response would be "what you are looking for is what is doing the looking" (Mahoney, 2003, p. 162). This is precisely what Kris is asking her students to discover as well- the self that observes, or the knowing self.

Mind/body connection.

> "…feeling valuable and realizing that your body is strong and capable of healing and is…part of you and…creating a connection between your mind and body is essential to healing trauma…" Amy

In this quote, Amy states that creating a connection between the mind and the body is beneficial for healing from trauma. She also states that in recognizing the strength and capabilities of the body, one can begin to understand its value and worth.

> "Being mindful and having those tools that they learn in trauma-sensitive yoga, they can be a step ahead, or they can notice it just happening and they know what to do to regain control." Rory

When one begins to develop an awareness of their body and its sensations, one can begin to predict bodily occurrences. By learning to observe and endure the physical sensations and effects of trauma, one can begin to safely work through them (van der Kolk, 2014). For example, someone who has experienced a traumatic situation and suffers from panic attacks may be able to recognize the signs of mounting anxiety before it turns into a panic attack, and take preventive measures to reduce the symptoms. In a similar account, Rory states that one can use their body to calm the thoughts:

> "…using the body to calm their thoughts…if you breathe more deeply, if you count your breath…you can calm your mind and you can have more space between your thoughts and yourself…I have had discussions with people about…body as a resource for self-regulation…feeling they can use…their breath and they can use their body to make themselves feel differently."

Kris makes a similar comment:

> "…when we use things in practice, like the bandhas which are….internal engagements….they are…an amazing tool to…continually be present in

> the body…like the mind drifts and you come back to the body…this is very valuable."

In these comments, Rory and Kris describe how one can use the body to regulate, as well as stay focused and present. However, in order to use it as a tool for regulation, one must first become aware of his or her body and the sensations that are symptomatic of, or forewarn of potential psychosomatic issues.

As previously described, connecting the mind and body is a vital part of building a healthy relationship with one's body and establishing it as a safe place to be. The yoga asana forms permit one to experience the sensations of the body through interoception, allowing the mind and body to re-establish a connection within a controlled and safe space. Sandy describes below:

> "…I feel like it's…that reconnection cause often people that have gone through trauma, especially like, sexual abuse, it's that disconnect of the body and mind, cause it's a way to survive. So it's that reconnection of your body and mind and of your body being a safe place to be."

Trista describes the body and mind connection as a domino effect; "*First the breath and then the body*." Trista witnesses her students have moments of understanding and inspiration when they are able to release tension in the body, through stretching or breathing, and then, as a symptom of physical release, the mind begins to relax:

> "…using their breath and using their body in a safe way to, just stretch out...get rid of the tension, cause they know that when their body feels really tense, when

> they can let that go and then the mind can relax too. I just love witnessing them see these aha moments- first the breath and then the body."

Amy describes the importance of creating a mind/body connection for children and youth.

> "…the body, the breath…connecting the body to the mind in a healthy way and…helping kids realize that their mind is really powerful. They need to be taught how to be peaceful and grateful and silent and still. It's…an important part of human development…so if you're… traumatized… that's why I think yoga is so important, because it creates that moment where you can create breath and create stillness and silence."

In this statement, Amy suggests that children need to be taught how to be still and yoga gives them the opportunity to develop this skill by connecting the mind and the body and by using the breath. Especially if one is traumatized as a child or youth, he or she can create these moments within the yoga class, and recognize how powerful the mind is.

Release.

Through conversations with teachers, it appears that, as a step toward healing, one will experience an energetic shift, physically and/or emotionally. In the ethereal sense, many of the teachers used the words "light", "lightness" or "ahh" when describing this shift. For example, Julie states,

> "…the ending energy was always, I would say more sort of, 'ahh', like positive and inclusive than when they came in as like fierce individuals. Yeah, and they left more like a group of guys heading out to spend the day together…"

In the calm stillness produced through the practice of yoga, when one is at peace within the mind and body, it seems that this is when a safe release of emotions can occur. As stated by Amy:

> "Being able to come into your body and create a space and a moment that's in and of itself not related to…your trauma or your worry, or just your daily life, or your stress, whatever…it's a tool and its effect you see on people because they walk out lighter."

In addition, Rory states:

> "Often I see people have…an emotional reaction…when they are very calm and…very relaxed and when they are present, that seems to be the point in which…energy moves in them, because when they're agitated or uncomfortable or tense or thinking, they might feel frustrated and the response they have might come from a place of frustration, which is not necessarily where…healing happens…I had a student, she was very…I noticed she was very calm throughout class and very…present…I didn't notice that she was crying- she wasn't attributing it to anything else and she felt very good afterwards…it felt like…a release…there's a difference between being triggered…and a release…like it's not a trigger, it's like something is arising and when someone's calm and present, they don't resist it because it doesn't feel scary and their body's not tensing and they're not shortening their breath because they're in a relaxed state. So when that emotion…begins to arise in them, they don't resist it…they're not causing themselves all the suffering that comes with resistance."

Rory often witnesses emotional release in class- often through crying. She has noticed that when her clients are able to become still and present, it seems to be in those moments that release is possible. When the body is relaxed and one feels safe, Rory states that commonly triggered emotions can potentially rise and release in a safe way because the body is prepared. When one is not meeting his or her reactions, emotions or sensations with resistance, the emotions, or stored trauma can be released. Through asana, one is working into the deep tissues of the body, and throughout this process, one may come across areas in which one is storing emotions and memories of past trauma. For example, as described in van der Kolk (2014), one of the ways the memory of helplessness is stored is as muscle tension and feelings of disintegration in the head, back and limbs of the body. In yogic philosophy, this stored memory is referred to as samskara- imprints of memory in the mind and body (van der Kolk, 2014). As stated by Kris:

> "…we call it samskara in yoga, like whatever memory or impression we have of all the different experience, they're stored in our consciousness, they're also stored in our bodies. The things that don't really make it through are stored directly in the body, and sometimes that…acts as a coping mechanism that we use, is that we put things in the body and have chronic pain, in the body, um, disease, susceptibility, tightness, rigidity, injury, all of these things."

When one begins to explore and move into the body, there is the potential to uncover, and hopefully release stored traumatic memories. However, there is also the potential for students to become triggered in an open and vulnerable state. The teachers explained that the most common effects of triggering in class are symptoms of dissociation, such as shifting eyes or fidgeting. Although there is the potential for more serious re-triggering effects to occur, the teachers

interviewed for this study had not experienced severe symptoms. Often students aren't aware when it is going to happen. Kris also describes a time in which one of her students did not expect to cry during class:

> "She was like, I really didn't expect to have, to be crying through yoga class she said, it's just been such a long time since I realized I could just be here in this moment."

When one recognizes that he or she does not have to live in the traumatic memories of the past, or the anxiety-provoking expectations of the future, letting go can be a relief.

Amy shares a story in which she describes a young boy experiencing an emotional release in her class:

> "I have had students sob. I had one little boy in child's pose, just start sobbing! And then he was ok. But it was like, he had a moment and…it's…can be really cathartic just to cry and especially for kids....He's a big personality, a lot of energy…and then in child's pose, he was so still for so long and he just released…so it creates an opportunity that would otherwise not be available."

When this young boy gave himself the opportunity to be still, it appears that his body was able to release stored emotion through crying. Amy believes that release was cathartic for that little boy with the big personality. Without yoga, he may not have had the opportunity to experience extended moments of stillness.

Regulation.

As stated by several teachers, when working with traumatized children and youth, yoga based therapy should be part of a holistic treatment plan in which counselling should be incorporated. While studies indicate that cognitive behavioral therapies are effective in reducing symptoms of trauma, evidence shows that during times of stress, attempting to talk one's self out of the stress may be ineffective (Warner et al., 2014). Dysregulation and impulse control are dominating symptoms of trauma in children and youth, and somatic approaches such as yoga may be beneficial, especially for younger children for whom language is a barrier. Therefore, a somatic approach in which one learns to understand and work with the body, can be an effective way to exert control over the body's regulatory functioning and begin healing from trauma. As stated in Spinazolla et al. (2011), "yoga, and other repetitive motion patterns, appear to restore and entrain the rhythmicity of biological functioning that are often disrupted during periods of stress." When one becomes aware of the sensations felt in the body and can begin to connect the sensations with things that he or she sees or experiences in the environment, or memories that elicit certain emotions, and then begin to recognize how the body responds, he or she can use the tools learned in yoga, such as asana, breath and mindfulness, to counteract the symptoms of trauma and regulate the body. Nora describes regulation as:

> "Self-regulation…being able to interpret what's going on internally, be with it and then take effective action in terms of managing it in a healthy sustainable way."

Through interoception one is better able to recognize and make sense of the internal experience by using the body and the breath to control the autonomic responses and reactions. Often without this ability to regulate the body, youth will turn to other often unhealthy mechanisms to cope with a dysregulated system. Rory explains:

> "If you don't feel like you can have control over those things [physical and emotional reactions], your body is not an ally to you…especially for…youth and adolescents, if you don't feel…in control of your body and your body is an unsafe place to exist because you can't control these physiological responses, I think you're a lot more likely to turn to…drugs and alcohol and other…substances to numb that sensation. If you haven't had the opportunity or the experience to learn to use other tools…to make yourself feel better…I think that it's probably safe to say that youth and children who have experienced trauma are at…higher risk of…developing substance use issues later in life."

Nora's personal experience with trauma and a dysregulated system caused her to seek out substances to manage her symptoms of dysregulation:

> "One of the reasons that yoga had made a difference for me in my own life was that it had served as a set of...tools that I could use for self-regulation. So I had experienced a pretty violent sexual assault in my early 20's I had essentially been using drugs and alcohol in order to manage that. Yoga had come into my life and had made a big difference...when I did that training, I really got that connection in myself between yoga and addiction and my own self-regulation."

When Nora discovered yoga, she was able to use the tools she learned, such as breathing techniques and asana to help regulate her nervous system and replace drugs and alcohol.

> "If you practice every day, there are cumulative benefits to that. So increased physical strength and flexibility, increased heart rate variability, a nervous system that is more regulated and therefore able to manage the stresses and trauma of

> everyday life and…the myriad of other benefits people report from practicing yoga on a daily basis."

According to Nora, a regular yoga practice can produce several beneficial effects that act as protective factors from stress and trauma throughout the life span. As stated in van der Kolk (2014), in a study conducted on six women with profound trauma histories, 20 weeks of yoga increased activation in the basic self-system (insula and prefrontal cortex). The participants made statements referring to a greater ability to notice their feelings and make healthy choices for their lives and their bodies.

Amy describes how yoga can be used as a way of teaching children and youth how to use their bodies as tools to self-regulate, and reduce negative cognition:

> "Yoga is a way that kids can just have really simple tools…if you're really sad, that's ok…it doesn't mean you won't be happy. And if you're feeling…really depressed you can come and breathe and sit with yourself…this is just a day and tomorrow is a new day…"

She also states:

> "…with training, with yoga…it's fun to teach kids that…if you breathe really fast it will give you lots of energy! If you breathe really really slow it will calm you down."

Teaching children how to regulate through both energetic highs and lows, helps them build self-awareness and begin to control their inner world. Play allows kids the opportunity to practice reciprocity with other children, and find opportunities for laughter. Laughter indicates relaxation and a feeling of being safe (van der Kolk, 2014).

As expressed previously, breathing can be used as a tool to regulate the nervous system and one's emotions. Giving children and youth these tools may help them throughout their life span. As described by Kris:

> "It's a simple concept but it's very profound…because you can very easily teach a 6 or 7 year old, when they get angry, to take deep breaths…a basic pranayama technique that can be something that will change the relationships that child has for the rest of their lives, the way that they encounter situations because most of the decisions that we make out of anger are ones that we regret- or out of sadness or pain or trauma or whatever, those decisions, when they're split-second decisions of things that come out of our mouth, sometimes all we need to change that around, is five breaths."

When one can feel in control of their physiological responses, he or she can begin to feel that the body is safe. Rory explains below:

> "So when a child or youth or anyone who's experienced trauma…is triggered, they are going to have that same physiological response and…the yoga practice and specifically yoga for healing trauma, teaches people how to have control over those physiological responses, like by breath work and being in their body, feeling grounded, those kinds of tools, so they ultimately…feel embodied- they feel like their body is a safe place to be…"

Not only does yoga help one to regulate the body's responses to triggers, but it may also help one to regulate internal rhythms, such as sleeping:

> "One of the guys I was teaching in the program…he uses the breathing exercises that I taught him in the yoga class to get him to sleep every night." Sandy

> "…they really, they said they love stretching and how it feels, or "I love how child's pose feels, I did it before bed for five minutes…or legs up the wall helped me fall asleep." Trista

Using the tools of yoga can help one begin to modulate the internal rhythms and sensations using the breath and asanas to slow the heart rate and feel calm, reducing autonomic sympathetic activation (Emerson et al., 2009).

Relationship to self.

Through the process of becoming embodied and becoming present, one begins to build a relationship with the body and with the self. When one begins to re-connect with the body, his or her capacity to love one's self deepens. One's desire to take care of him or herself increases and one begins to feel pleasure in caring for the self (van der Kolk, 2014). And, as stated by Nora, as one practices yoga, over time it seems one is able to access a deeper internal resource and discover one's strength.

> "I think that that's another piece about…yoga that I've heard from clients is…they seem to be able to access a strength that they might not have known was there…it seems like there is an access to a deeper inner resource."

Following one's interoceptive pathways to the innermost recesses of the self, allows change to begin (van der Kolk, 2014).

Julie describes the change she witnessed in her students over time as they continued to participate in the yoga classes at the custody centre:

> "What I saw was, what they believed…was possible for themselves changed in some way…you could see the ones that…really came and showed up...You could tell they began to believe they were something bigger. You could see it and you could feel it…it got to bring out a different side of them…the side that is helpful and generous and thoughtful and encouraging and compassionate."

In this example, Julie describes how her students, through their practice, began to believe in themselves and see themselves as more than youth in custody. Once they began to recognize this potential within themselves, they began to display more caring and helpful attitudes toward one another. Julie also describes how her students began to show more kindness towards themselves:

> I think they…got more confidence in their physical abilities…and then…they were easier on their bodies near to the end…[in the beginning] they would pretty much just muscle through anything to keep up and not admit defeat, and by…nearer to the end, they were taking breaks or they would say, 'oh my shoulder's kind of f'd up today'…so I won't do that one, or they would admit, my back hurts today versus they never would have said that coming in. So it seemed like they were certainly treating their bodies kinder…more respect for their own…bodies and a way there is not the bravado swagger that they…came in with."

As the boys continued to practice, and built a relationship with themselves, it appeared that they "dropped the bravado swagger" that they came in with, replacing the 'toughness' with

generosity, kindness and helpfulness to one another. According to van der Kolk (2014), "our sense of ourselves is anchored in a vital connection with our bodies." In establishing a connection to the body, it appears that these boys began to establish a kinder relationship with themselves.

Vulnerability

According to Dr. Gabor Maté, in order for one to heal, one must regain the vulnerability that made him or her shut down emotionally (Maté, 2003, p. 279). Within the community of individuals that comprise the trauma sensitive yoga class, are opportunities for connection, normalization, support and building relationships. As these things occur, one may begin to open once again to vulnerability.

Spending time in safe space and experiencing a level of belonging to others, may help children and youth feel safe to open to vulnerability and relax in the presence of others. According to Dr. Stephen Porges, it is necessary for humans to socially engage with one another while inhibiting sympathetic mobilization (*The National Institute for the Clinical Applications of Behavioural Medicine*, n.d.). This means, it is important that humans can relax in the presence of others. When one feels a sense of belonging and normalization, the ability to let down one's guard and open to vulnerability becomes easier. The following quotes help to illustrate this point:

> "I think…yoga opens up not only our physical bodies, but it opens up our hearts, it opens up our emotions. I think they [the students] are just so open after a class that they just can't help but be open with other people." Trista

> "They just feel so good, they haven't felt this calm or this relaxed, or…haven't felt this safe. They just feel safe to open up." Trista

> "They just seem more…comfortable and relaxed and more…at ease with themselves…people as they get more comfortable in the class, they'll just…chat with me a bit more…and they feel more comfortable just to have that…natural conversation…and they'll interact more with the other people in the class." Sandy

> "to watch these boys…literally reach out and help each other and encourage each other…still in a very tough guy way, but doing it…" Julie

> "by the end…the ones that were long term that knew they were moving [to another facility], they were really sad to go and I…got some really nice…beautiful thank-you's and he was one of them, he came up to me at the end and was like, 'I know I was an asshole at the beginning and I'm sorry, thanks a lot.'" Julie

> "…there's just this experience of being safe enough to be vulnerable, to let down, to let go…that's again, part of creating safe space, is knowing [as the teacher] how to be with that…how to support that. And that experience of vulnerability can also be really terrifying for people and sometimes students get up and they go and they never come back." Nora

Nora's statement expresses how difficult the process of healing trauma can be for many people. The process of arriving in the class and taking the steps to get there can be an enormous feat. One participant told a story in which she had been corresponding via email with a student who was interested in trying yoga to help her heal from previous trauma she had experienced, and that

it had taken several messages back and forth until she finally came to the class. When she did come, she only stayed for a short time and left before the class ended. This student continued to return to the class for several weeks, staying for only a few minutes each time, until eventually she was able to stay for the entire class. This story illustrates the incredibly sensitive nature of working through trauma, the courage that it takes for students to attend a class, either with a group or alone with a teacher, and the need for creating a safe space in which one can begin to remove the protective barriers students have put in place to manage or distance themselves from their experiences. When one can begin to feel safe, one may begin to open up to vulnerability- the place in which the healing journey can begin. In discussion of treatment for survivors of trauma, Dr. Bruce Perry states: "ultimately one hopes for the acceptance of vulnerability and mortality tempered by love and healing as the beginning of wisdom" (Schwarz & Perry, 1994, p. 326).

Chapter 6: Summary and Concluding Remarks

The pathway to healing yoga for children and youth appears to evolve first through the experience of feeling safe in one's body and social surroundings, followed by an experience of connection, belonging and normalization. With safety and connection established, one can begin the process of journeying inward, experiencing subtle physical sensations and re-establishing a relationship to a disconnected and evaded body, while unilaterally, calming the anxious chatter of the mind through breath and asana. Establishing a connection to the self through mindfulness, building confidence through asana, learning to regulate one's nervous system through breath, asana and meditation, helps one establish agency and a trusting and caring relationship to the self which, in turn, helps one build a relationship to others.

Healing is not constructed as an endpoint. Within the findings, healing appears to be something that unfolds throughout the process of yoga. Essential to healing trauma is accepting one's vulnerability and allowing oneself to explore and embrace it. Along this pathway to healing through yoga, it appears that over time, one begins to feel safer to open to vulnerability-shedding the barriers one has put in place to protect one's self from external threats, but which often serve only to further distance one from the self and others.

Using yoga as a method for healing trauma in children and youth, requires an imaginative teacher who is able to tune into the needs of their students, as well as hold space for the myriad of needs and emotions that will arise for each group and each individual student in the class. While some students preferred a slower, relaxed class, others preferred a more rigorous, fast paced class in which they were doing hand stand and arm balances. Some students preferred calm, soothing music, while others preferred rock or rap. Children learned about breathing through games, dance and asanas, while teens and young adults practiced a more

traditional hatha yoga style class structure that was adapted to meet their needs. It appears that, given varying populations with varying needs, the class must be adaptable- a 'one-size fits all' approach is not an effective strategy for working with traumatized and vulnerable children and youth. A skilled and knowledgeable practitioner is essential for demonstrating and describing proper technique in asana, pranayama and meditation (Brown & Gerbarg, 2005) in order to avoid causing harm to the clients both physically and mentally (Forbes, Akhtar, & Douglass, 2011; Leung, 2008). Yoga instructors should be mindful of the potential for re-triggering to occur during class as traumatic memories and feelings may have long been stored within the body. They should be cognizant of, and avoid the poses that are more likely to cause such re-triggering, such as postures where one lies on their back, which could lead to a feeling of vulnerability. An informed and knowledgeable yoga instructor should be able to recognize the severity of triggers when they occur and be capable of providing appropriate support and response to their students (Lilly & Hedlund, 2010, Emerson & Hopper, 2011; Salmon et al., 2008).

There are several other factors of which yoga instructors should be aware when instructing populations struggling with PTSD and trauma related disorders, such as language, presence and appearance. Instructors should be careful to avoid using words or phrases that may elicit memories or connections to a traumatic event, or using physical assists that cause any discomfort. They should also be mindful of their physical presence in the room. Too much movement can be distracting for traumatized individuals who are hyper-sensitive of the environment surrounding them (Stephenson, 2010). Yoga instructors should also be cognizant of the impact their appearance may have and the message it can send to their clients.

Traditional yogic methods

While the majority of the teachers stated that yoga for individuals who have experienced trauma should be free of any religious connotations, one teacher stated that she felt the traditional yogic methods, such as chanting and mantra, could be a major contributor to healing for some students and indicated one student who experienced the most change by the chants she sang. Scientifically, this could be due to the effects that chanting can have on the cardiovascular system as it has been shown to slow and regulate respiration and calm the sympathetic nervous system (Bernardi, Slieght, Bandinelli, Cencetti, Fattorini, Wdowcyzyc-Szulc & Lagi, 2001). One may also associate chanting with healing on a deeper level in which one integrates the body, mind and spirit. Kris's student felt that one specific yogic chant helped her release the fear that she had been storing in her body. Kris believes that chanting allows one to change the internal dialogue and personal narratives that have been deeply engrained into the unconscious and that on a somatic level the body understands the vibrational language of the mantras that the mind does not comprehend. When it comes to releasing and healing from trauma, Kris states:

> "…this…ideal of this ethereal world that exists beyond…the stories that we tell in our heads that has to be tapped into the body, and I think that without that piece, we are missing a huge part of healing when it comes to trauma."

Chanting in Sanskrit, or using mantras as a form of healing, is not discussed in much of the literature on TSY. This suggests that this is a new field in which practitioners are 'learning as they go' as they teach to these populations. Research on this field is rapidly evolving, healing trauma through yoga is still full of unknowns and will require more studies from researchers with differing perspectives on this topic.

Touch

Current literature on trauma sensitive yoga suggests that as much as possible, the teacher not touch their students as it can be trauma provoking for many individuals who have experienced trauma (Emerson & Hopper, 2011, p. 123). The majority of the teachers interviewed stated that they never do hands on adjustments, and that they in fact, were taught not to do them at all. However, one teacher suggested that touch may be very healing for certain students. She noted that many young people who have experienced trauma may recognize touch as unsafe or unhealthy, and it could be beneficial for students to learn what appropriate physical touch feels like. Julie, another teacher who did hands on adjustments and assists, provides another example of when physical assists were helpful at getting her students into handstand. One can question the boundaries of touch, when it is appropriate and when it would be ineffective or even detrimental. Ultimately, touch should be used when considered safe, and if a student has agreed to the adjustment. As stated by Trista, *"Just be careful, if you don't know them, don't touch them."* According to the findings, if a teacher is not yet well acquainted with his or her students, he or she should not touch them. However, once trust and rapport has been established between the student and the teacher, it may be beneficial to offer simple, appropriate adjustments or enhancements, giving children and youth the opportunity to choose.

Embracing yoga

Researcher: Was there anything that you expected to see happen for your students?

Rory. Um…developing the love for yoga.

It became apparent from the data, that over time, many participants begin to embrace the practice of yoga. Several teachers stated that in the beginning, participating in the yoga class could be quite difficult, but in time, it seemed as though many students developed a love for the practice of yoga. This could be for several reasons- belonging to the community, establishing a feeling of calm, releasing tension and stored trauma, playing with poses and building confidence in the body, witnessing change occur in the self and in others or building a relationship to the self and possibly something deeper. Several of the teachers shared their own stories of how they came to love the practice of yoga. Most began practicing to get in shape or become flexible, but over time realized that the practice meant something deeper to them and that it would become a way of living.

Off the Mat

Within the yoga community, there is the notion that with each practice, what one learns, or the changes one experiences remains within, and that the lessons from the practices accumulate. There is some debate as to how long the feelings last after a yoga class- as expressed by Sandy, with her students it seemed that the changes lasted until the next negative experience. However, as one continues to learn yoga, to control the breath, heart rate and nervous system, one may begin approaching and responding to situations differently- like the woman in South America; when she began feeling better about herself, she began presenting a more gentle, kinder side of herself to the people around her. As one continues to practice yoga and gain a deeper understanding of, and relationship to the self and one's internal sensations, one may begin to internalize the practices learned in yoga, and present a different self to others, helping to establish deeper connection to others, as well as to the self.

If treated early, the effects of trauma may be much less debilitating than if one were to ignore its signs and symptoms. As stated in Telles et al. (2011), severe trauma in early childhood can have dramatic consequences affecting one's development, and creating complications in adulthood. The tools and techniques children and youth learn in yoga, can be practiced throughout one's life.

Post Traumatic Growth

Several of the stories shared by the teachers indicate signs of PTG among their students such as building relationships, reaching out to others, showing kindness toward themselves, learning to regulate emotions, such as anger, through breath, experiencing pride and self-confidence, and taking steps toward a healthier life. For example, Trista's student who came to yoga after experiencing a sexual assault in the military, an unhealthy relationship and a miscarriage, appears to begin moving forward in a healthy direction after participating in a yoga retreat geared toward recovery. Trista states,

> "she broke up with her boyfriend, the unhealthy relationship, she's going to yoga classes and looking into her yoga teacher training…the girl that I met was defeated and sad and she just felt hopeless…like nobody understood her and she was scared to reach out and connect and…she…just left the retreat…she just was sitting tall and she was glowing and she was inspired and she…had this list of things she was going to do when she got back home, 'break up with my boyfriend'…she went home, she did them all and she's still doing it all and she's even keeping us accountable for the things we talked about at the retreat…she's just been like our life coach since we've been back…"

This story exemplifies how yoga, connecting with others and feeling a sense of belonging helped one student recover from her trauma, create and accomplish goals for herself as well as embrace yoga and encourage others to move forward with their own recovery.

Gaps

Stated throughout the interviews by several teachers was the premise that yoga should be practiced as part of a holistic healing strategy. Many teachers suggested that one should also be receiving counselling to deal with the cognitive aspects of trauma that may arise during a yoga class. It may also be a good idea for one to have received some counselling prior to attending a class, as mentioned by Trista when she was discussing the intimate experience one can have with his or her self as they practice yoga "...you're forced to look at yourself, your forced to listen to yourself, and you're forced to feel, and if you're not ready for that, it's a scary place to be."

As stated by Kris, Rory and Amy, emotional release and triggers are common occurrences within the yoga class. According to Dr. Bessel van der Kolk (2014), the body stores traumatic memories within the body - 'the issues in our tissues'. So as one moves through a yoga class, he or she may experience emotional reactions as they work certain areas of the body. With this in mind, one could question the ethics of teaching yoga to traumatized individuals who are not receiving counselling. What happens when emotions or memories arise and one does not have the support or capacity to deal with them? How are teachers being held accountable for the work they do with these populations? Should this work be supervised? Should yoga instructors who are teaching to this population require some level of education in counselling, or have resources available for students should the need arise? There is also the question of how to handle a serious trigger response in class. If individuals with trauma are often detached from the

self and have been actively protecting one's self from unpleasant reactions to memories and environmental triggers, there is the potential for a serious reaction to occur. How well informed are children and youth coming into this practice of the potential effects they may experience, and how well prepared are teachers who may have to support them? It may be necessary for yoga teachers working with this population to have a safety plan in place for such situations, proper training of how to deal with such an incident and a working knowledge of the symptoms of trauma.

Given the population that each of the teachers worked with, it was explained that it was not always an easy feat to attend a yoga class. As Nora stated, it "blew her mind" to witness the strength and resiliency of her students to attend each class despite homelessness, addictions, mental health issues and financial barriers. There were students who, as stated by Trista, would leave and never come back, and at other times, it took students several attempts at coming before finally making it to a class. As stated by Rory, she had a student who, through email, stated many times she wanted to attend before actually making it to a class, and it took several classes before she was able to stay for the entire session. Given that it can be such a difficult task, emotionally, physically and financially, to attend a trauma sensitive yoga class, it is necessary that such classes are well advertised, affordable (preferably free) and easily accessible for individuals.

Limitations

This study was small, with only seven participants. All participants were female in their late 20's to early 40's. Although each participant had her own view of teaching to populations of traumatized children and youth, six out of seven participants received the same TSY training, one of whom, was also the teacher of the other five. One of the seven participants received

similar training but in a different context and by different teachers. The teachers, however, did not receive this training together, and they did not all know one another. It was interesting that the teacher who did not receive the same training as the others, related similar accounts of healing with her students. Although the group was relatively homogeneous, the populations each teacher instructed were quite diverse and the stories they shared reflect that. Primarily, the teachers in the study worked with teens and young adults. Two had experience working with younger children, which provided further insight into how yoga can help children of all ages heal from trauma.

Future Research

This study explored the healing effects of yoga for trauma through the stories and voices of yoga instructors who have taught to populations of children and youth who experienced trauma and its effects. The research aspired to discover information and insights from yoga instructors that could provide an understanding as to how yoga can impact this population, how they envision yoga as a pathway toward healing for children and youth, and how the practice of yoga can continue to impact those in recovery. Through several in-depth qualitative interviews, a pathway to healing through yoga began to surface within the shared stories, first through finding safety, moving toward obtaining a sense of belonging, and then building toward a state of mindfulness in which one begins to develop a relationship to the self and others. The effects of yoga on children and youth were shared throughout the findings in several stories and integrated within the potential pathway toward healing. As previously stated, healing is not necessarily an end-point or a destination in which one permanently resides. The process of yoga appears to be an unfolding pathway that provides one with tools to continually arrive back to the present moment, connect the mind and body and regulate the nervous system.

This study portrayed personal and detailed accounts of how yoga can help varying populations of children and youth of a range of ages from diverse backgrounds and life situations, from young children, to incarcerated male youth, to young adults from all over the world. Each account provides detailed insight into how yoga can impact these varying populations. However, further qualitative studies would provide further clarification and understanding as to how yoga can impact children and youth of various ages, backgrounds and ethnicities, who have experienced various forms of trauma during each stage of development. As displayed within the data, there appeared to be several ways in which each teacher taught to their students, indicating that there could be several elements that contribute to healing through yoga such as the style of yoga, the age of the students, the relationship between teacher and students and the varying needs of each student. As previously stated, a one-size fits all approach to teaching yoga to traumatized children and youth may not work. Further research would provide a more thorough understanding of how to adapt the yoga class to meet the needs of gender, varying ages and populations.

As previously stated and expressed by several teachers, often, yoga alone may not be enough to help children and youth overcome trauma. For many students, talk therapy may be extremely beneficial to help students understand the emotions and feelings that arise through asana and from being in the presence of others who have experienced trauma and are releasing emotion or sharing their personal stories. While the yoga class provides the opportunity to release stored emotion, there is also the possibility that one will experience unwanted triggering feelings that, without a strategy in place to deal with such feelings, could be detrimental to the student.

Further studies in which yoga students are interviewed would provide a valuable perspective of yoga as treatment for trauma in children and youth. While the teachers were able to contribute insightful and relevant information about many students and the observed impact of yoga on them, the students will be able to express greater personal details as to how yoga affected them.

The findings indicate that teaching yoga to children and youth requires a teacher that is able to create and hold safe space, maintain an open mind and teach in a way that meets the needs of various populations, as well, one that is knowledgeable about trauma and its effects. In Douglass (2009), the author suggests that yoga teachers working in clinical programs should have 500 hours of training and be registered with the International Association of Yoga Therapists (IAYT), as well as receive clinical supervision. Future studies that explore specifically the experience of yoga teachers who teach to populations affected by trauma would provide more in-depth knowledge of how to work effectively with these populations of children and youth in a multitude of ways that meet the needs of the clients, as well as a level of certification or training the teacher should receive in preparation for working with traumatized populations.

While this study focused on yoga as a therapeutic modality for treating trauma, it was indicated by Kris that other movement based therapies may be just as beneficial as yoga in treating trauma. Further studies comparing yoga to other modalities may provide deeper insights into how movement based therapies help to heal trauma, as well it may indicate the specific effects that yoga provides. For example, the importance of choice was discussed; students may feel more freedom to determine the extent to which they will participate in a TSY session than would be available to them in a dance movement therapy class or tai-chi session, where the

instructor's language might not be as invitatory. The consistency of the yoga class, the countdowns that let participants know when each pose will end – these are two examples of TSY practices that reduce stress for the participant and add to the sensed safety of the environment.

This study brought to life the stories of change for traumatized children and youth through yoga as expressed by yoga teachers in British Columbia. The findings of this research show that yoga for healing trauma warrants a serious look as a therapy for children and youth dealing with trauma's lasting effects- especially those for whom talk therapy alone is not effective.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions for Teachers

1. What is your experience teaching yoga to populations of children/youth/young adults whose lives have been impacted by trauma?
2. From working with this population, how do you see yoga as a pathway to healing trauma for children/youth/young adults?
3. What are some of the effects that you have noticed that yoga has had on the students you have taught that have been impacted by trauma?
4. What are some key ideas, strategies or considerations that must be kept in mind when teaching to this population?
5. Does the environment of the yoga class play a role in eliciting change for your clients?
6. What pertinent or co-occurring symptoms of trauma have you witnessed in your students?
7. What do you notice in your students are they move through a yoga class?
8. Research shows that in order to someone to successfully move through trauma, they must be fully present both physically and emotionally. Have you witnessed yoga helped your students achieve this? If so, how?
9. How can yoga help someone who has experienced trauma change one's relationship to their body?
10. Through your experience, how do you see the practice of yoga continuing to impact the lives of youth and young adults who have recovered from trauma?

Appendix B

Email Script

Dear_____:

You are being invited to participate in a study entitled “Exploring the Effects of Yoga for Trauma in Children and Youth through the Stories of Yoga Instructors”, conducted by myself, Sarah Bonnell, a Masters student at the University of Victoria. This research is part of a Master’s Thesis conducted under the supervision of Dr. Daniel Scott and Dr. Marie Hoskins. Dr. Daniel Scott can be contacted at (250) 472-4770, or by email at dgscott@uvic.ca. Dr. Marie Hoskins can be contacted at mhoskins@uvic.ca.

The objectives of this research are to examine how yoga can be used as a pathway to healing trauma through the stories told by yoga instructors who teach to vulnerable children and youth, ages 12-24 whose lives have been impacted by trauma. Information you may provide would be of great value to this study.

In order to accomplish this, you are being asked to participate in an interview in which you will be asked questions pertaining to your experience teaching yoga to vulnerable populations of youth and young adults, and/or your personal experience of healing trauma through your own practice of yoga. The interview can take place at the University of Victoria, or a private place of your choosing.

If you have any interest in participating in this study please take the time to read the attached letter of consent.

Thank you

Sarah Bonnell

MA candidate

Child and Youth Care

University of Victoria

Appendix C

Consent Form

Exploring the Healing Effects of Yoga for Trauma in Children and Youth through the Narratives of Yoga Instructors

You are being invited to participate in a study entitled "Exploring the Healing Effects of Yoga for Trauma in Children and Youth through the Stories of Yoga Instructors", conducted by Sarah Bonnell, a Masters students at the University of Victoria. This research is part of a Master's Thesis conducted under the supervision of Dr. Daniel G. Scott and Dr. Marie Hoskins.

The objective of this research is to examine how yoga can be used as a pathway to healing trauma for youth through the stories told by yoga instructors who teach to marginalized or vulnerable children and youth whose lives have been impacted by trauma. Trauma can be any situation that occurred in the lives of the youth or young adult that caused an overwhelming and serious negative impact on that person's life and well-being. Trauma, in this case may be self-identified or professionally diagnosed. Information you may provide would be of great value to this study.

A semi-structured interview will be conducted in which you will be asked a set of questions pertaining to your experience. If you agree to participate in this study, a meeting time will be arranged at your convenience at the University of Victoria, or a private setting of your choosing. The interview will take approximately 1 hours to complete and will be audio recorded for the purpose of transcription and analysis. With your consent, the interview may also be video recorded in order to capture any non-verbal language expressed during the interview. Video recording is completely optional and you are welcome to deny consent for the recording at any time. Once the interview is complete, it will then be recorded through transcription. Once transcribed you will have an opportunity to view the materials and make further comment if you so choose.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any-time. If you choose to withdraw after the interview, all electronic recordings and transcribed materials will be removed from the study and destroyed. You confidentiality will be protected and all data will be analyzed and stored at the University of Victoria. Personal identifiers will not be included within the completed project and digital records will be destroyed within 1 year after completion. Only the researcher of this project will be aware of participant's identities. There is a limit to the level of confidentiality based on the small sample size of people being asked to participate in this study, however, all identifying information that may be revealed within the interviews will be altered or removed in order to provide as much protection as possible to the participant and their students.

The finding of this analysis will help to build upon the relatively sparse data that currently exists regarding the application of the benefits of yoga in delivering effective therapy to children and youth who are dealing with the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other trauma related disorders. It will also highlight an alternative therapy to medication for youth who struggle from many of the co-morbid disorders that accompany PTSD as well as contribute to one more step in the direction of evaluating yoga as a viable treatment option. The personal stories from participants will add a rich relational factor to the current data which may be beneficial for individuals experiencing difficulties with trauma.

The results of this research will form a foundation of a Master's Thesis. It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with academics and the general public. If you choose to participate in this study there is a potential for some emotional discomfort to arise during the interview process such as recalling strong emotional events that one has experienced in the past. Participants will be provided with contact information of available support services and should also have a self-care strategy in place in the instance that such feelings do occur. Participants can stop, take a break or request to pass on any questions they do not feel comfortable answering during the interview.

In addition to contacting the researcher and supervisors at the above phone numbers, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, but contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria at (250) 472-4545, or by email at ethics@uvic.ca.

If you wish to participate in this study, please fill out the fields below. I will collect the signed from you at a place of your convenience. This indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher, and that you consent to participate in this research project. Subsequent correspondence will be sent to the email address provided.

_____ _____

Name of participant *Participant email*

_____ _____

Signature (may be typed) *Date*

I_____ agree/disagree (circle one) to be video recorded during the

Signature (may be typed)

interview process.

Appendix D

Recruitment Poster