

A STUDY OF YOGA, ITS HEALTH BENEFITS AND THE TRUE SELF

by

COLLEEN M. MCCOY

(Under the Direction of Su-I Hou)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experience of yoga practitioners, and their search for the true self. The research questions guiding this study were: 1) How does a yoga practitioner describe the concept of the true self? 2) How does a yoga practitioner describe the experience of the true self while engaged in a yoga practice? 3) How does a yoga practitioner describe the experience of the true self in everyday life? I interviewed three yoga practitioners for this qualitative study. The participants were purposively chosen. Heideggerian phenomenology was the method employed to examine the lived experience of the true self. The overall themes that emerged from the data include 1) the value of yoga, 2) the body as a vehicle for the self, 3) relationships, 4) the self versus the true self, and 5) transformation.

INDEX WORDS: Yoga, True self, Self, Phenomenology, Heidegger, Qualitative

A STUDY OF YOGA, ITS HEALTH BENEFITS, AND THE SEARCH FOR THE TRUE
SELF

by

Colleen M. McCoy, B.S.

B.S., The University of Georgia, 2002

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ART

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2006

© 2006
Colleen M. McCoy
All Rights Reserved

A STUDY OF YOGA, ITS HEALTH BENEFITS, AND THE TRUE SELF

by

COLLEEN M. MCCOY

Major Professor: Su-I Hou

Committee: Pamela Orpinas
Talmadge Guy

Electronic Version Approved:
Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
December, 2006

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my family who supported me in every way possible during this time and to my committee for their continuous assistance, patience, and teachings. I extend a great deal of gratitude to the beautiful yogis who devoted hours answering my questions. You are both my friend and mentor. Thank you for teaching me and for making me smarter.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES.....	vii
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
2 LITERATURE REVIEW	
2.1 The health benefits of yoga.....	9
2.2 What happens during meditation.....	23
2.3 Analysis of yoga philosophy and the true self.....	29
2.4 Historical and contemporary views of the self.....	32
2.5 Phenomenological research.....	33
3 METHODS	
3.1 Phenomenology and yoga.....	39
3.2 Research Questions and Research Design.....	42
3.3 Sample Selection.....	43
3.4 Participants.....	44
3.5 Data Collection Procedure.....	45
3.6 Data Analysis.....	46
3.7 Reliability and Validity.....	47

	3.8 Subjectivity Statement.....	48
4	FINDINGS.....	50
5	DISCUSSION	
	5.1 Discussion of Findings.....	77
	5.2 Limitations	82
	5.3 Implications.....	83
	5.4 Conclusions.....	84
APPENDICES		
A	Participant Consent Form.....	87
B	Pre-Interview Survey.....	89
	REFERENCES.....	90

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1.1: The eight limbs of Ashtanga Yoga.....	4
Table 1.2: Positive aspects of the practice of yoga.....	6
Table 2.1: ABC Relaxation Theory Constructs and their meanings.....	16
Table 2.2: The differences between Husserl and Heidegger.....	36-37

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

ATHA YOGANUSAMANAM.

Now the exposition of Yoga is being made.

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the lived experience of yoga practitioners, and their search for the true self. A thousand years before the birth of Christ and for five subsequent centuries, it has been theorized that yoga flourished in cities known today as India and Pakistan (Chaline, 2001). People practiced yoga to become closer to God. Yoga literally means to ‘yoke’ or to be in union (Satchidananda, 1990). According to the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, yoga is the “science of the mind” (Satchidananda, 1990, p. xi). Richard Freeman, a student and teacher of yoga for 38 years, in an interview with Bonnie Horrigan (2004), describes yoga as “a meditative discipline and a way of gaining insight into the nature of the mind and reality.” He believes that “yoga is ultimately freedom or liberation, and its benefit is much more than simply good health” (p. 65). According to Freeman, yoga is the undoing of the harm people do to their bodies as a result of modern living. He states that “we often hold the body or posture the body based on past experiences” (p. 66). Yoga can assist in reversing this postural conditioning.

According to Satchidananda (1990), yoga “is the total transformation of a seemingly limited physical, mental and emotional person into a fully illumined, thoroughly harmonized and perfected being—from an individual with likes and dislikes, pains and pleasures, successes and failures, to a sage of permanent peace, joy and selfless dedication to the entire creation” (p. xiii). Thus, yoga is much more than *asana* (the postures--see a description of the eight limbs of Ashtanga below). Yoga helps a person to gain “understanding and complete mastery over the mind” (Satchidananda, 1990, p. xi). It provides a system to achieve Moksha, or “liberation of the

cycle of rebirth” (Chaline, 2001, p. 44). The four yogic paths include (1) “Jnana yoga, the yoga of wisdom; (2) Raja or Ashtanga yoga, the yoga of meditation; (3) Hatha yoga, the yoga of physical posture; (4) Karma yoga, the yoga of actions; and Bhakti yoga, the yoga of religious devotion” (p. 44). However, these paths simplify the rather complex goal of self-realization through yoga.

Yoga varies by culture. For example, the practice of Hatha yoga originated from India, whereas Trul Khor and T’sa Lung have their beginnings in Tibet (Cohen et al., 2003). Yoga was officially brought to the West by Hindu yogis at the end of the nineteenth century. People in the West primarily practice Hatha yoga, although it is referred to by many different names. Viniyoga, Iyengar, Ashtanga, Shivananda, Integral, Kripalu, Ananda, Bikram, and Kundalini (Chaline, 2001) are actually different forms of Hatha yoga, although each style was developed by a different yogi and bears its own philosophy. For example, Iyengar yoga was developed by B.K.S. Iyengar (who wrote *Light on Yoga*, 1966) and focuses on “low precision performance and the aid of various props, such as cushions, chairs, wood blocks, and straps” (Chaline, 2001, p. 96). Contrastingly, Kundalini was developed by Yogi Bhajan, and “aims to awaken the spiritual energy stored at the base of the spine, by means of postures, pranayama, mantra chanting, and meditation” (p. 97). Ashtanga is based upon the principles of *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* (Satchidananda, 1990 p. 48). This practice was developed by Sri Pattabhi Jois, of Mysore India, and teaches the Sun Salutations (Surya Namaskara) followed by a sequence of postures. However, despite the different names, these styles all define the same concept: focusing the attention inward, guided by the breath in attempts to be absolutely present in the moment (Cohen et al., 2003). This thesis focuses on the style of Ashtanga yoga.

The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, one of the definitive texts in yoga, serves as a document for analysis and as a method to triangulate sources (Satchidananda, 1990). *Sutra* means ‘thread’ and each *Sutra*, originally written in Sanskrit reads like a proverb and serves as a guide to living the yogic lifestyle. According to its translator, Sri Swami Satchidananda, the *Yoga Sutras* is a “practical handbook” to living (Satchidananda, 1990, p. v). *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* is divided into four sections, or books. Each book describes some aspect of the yoga practice: why one practices yoga (*Samadhi Pada*, the portion on Contemplation), how one practices yoga (*Sadhana Pada*, the portion on Practice), the benefits and accomplishments of a yoga practice (*Vibhuti Pada*, the portion on Accomplishments), and the philosophy of yoga (*Kaivalya Pada*, the portion on Absoluteness). All four portions focus in some way on finding the true self. No documented date exists as to when the *Sutras* were written, but it is theorized to be somewhere between 5,000 B.C. to 300 A.D. (Satchidananda, 1990). It is even possible the supposed author, Patanjali, was not one man, but actually a succession of men putting the practice of yoga into writing.

Ashtanga Yoga, according to *of Patanjali*, is composed of eight different limbs, labeled in the ancient Indian language of Sanskrit (Satchidananda, 1990). The first limb is *Yama* (1), referring to ‘ethical relationships,’ such as practicing ‘non-violence’ (Satchidananda, 1990). *Niyama* (2) focuses on internal awareness and cleanliness. *Asana* (3) describes the postures. The fourth limb is *Pranayama* (4), or the breath. *Prathyahara* (5) refers to the withdrawal of the senses. *Dharana* (6) refers to concentration during practice. *Dhyana* (7) describes meditation. Finally, the eighth limb, *Samadhi* (8), describes the transcending of consciousness. A yoga practitioner strives for *Samadhi*, meaning the “absorption into Brahman, the ultimate reality” (Chaline, 2001). In this state, practitioners go beyond the ego (ego-less) and are without thought

(Sinari, 1965). To be without thought is the goal of yoga (Satchidananda, 1990). To emphasize these eight limbs, Table 1 provides a summary.

Table 1.1 The eight limbs of Ashtanga Yoga

1	<i>Yama</i>	Ethical relationships, such as nonviolence.
2	<i>Niyama</i>	Internal awareness and cleanliness.
3	<i>Asana</i>	Physical postures.
4	<i>Pranayama</i>	Breath.
5	<i>Prathyahara</i>	Withdrawal of senses.
6	<i>Dharana</i>	Concentration.
7	<i>Dhyana</i>	Meditation.
8	<i>Samadhi</i>	Transcending consciousness.

As referred to in *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, the tradition of Ashtanga Yoga stresses that each movement is guided by the breath (Satchidananda, 1990). Mysore, Ashtanga yoga is a specific style of Ashtanga yoga which allows practitioners to flow at their own pace using a memorized sequence of *asanas*. There are six series to learn in Ashtanga yoga, where the idea is to practice each series one day of the week, with one day of rest. It can take a lifetime to accomplish all six series and it will take, at least, one lifetime to master them.

The idea behind traditional Mysore Ashtanga yoga is that practitioners move at their own pace, following their breath. In this tradition, the teacher only facilitates the practice, adjusting practitioners as needed. In this way, the teacher uses adjustment to align any incorrect postures. When the practitioner is physically ready to handle learning a new posture, the teacher explains the skill behind it and then it becomes part of the student's daily memorized practice. In this

way, the practice builds upon itself. However, practitioners are only physically ready to move on to a new posture when they feel mentally ready.

Research on the health benefits of yoga often examines the role that neurotransmitters have on well-being (Studd & Panay, 2004). Synthesized from amino acids, neurotransmitters, such as norepinephrine, dopamine, serotonin, estrogen and melatonin, play a role in stimulating electrical activity within nerve cells as a form of communication (Saladin, 2004). In order for one cell to communicate with another, it must release a chemical which, depending on the type of message delivered, could be some type of neurotransmitter (Saladin, 2004). The nervous system consists of approximately a trillion nerve cells, called neurons. When changes occur in the environment or within the body, these neurons respond by sending an appropriate signal to a neighboring cell in order for the body to adapt. Neurotransmitters operate within the body's nervous system which allows for the "rapid transmission of signals from cell to cell" (Saladin, 2004).

Melatonin falls in the hormonal class, monoamines, and is made up of a chain of amino acids called tryptophan (Saladin, 2004). Melatonin and estrogen are often excluded from the definition of neurotransmitters and are described as a type of hormone. These hormones operate within the endocrine system. Overall, the endocrine system seems to respond more slowly to a stimulus, and has a longer lasting effect in the body, and is therefore more persistent compared to the nervous system (Saladin, 2004).

A review of existing literature provides many insights into the direct health benefits of yoga. Through this holistic discipline, a practitioner can lose weight and gain strength and flexibility. Newly-designed programs and theories provide quantifiable ways in which yoga benefits a practitioner. Yoga promotes physical, physiological, mental, and spiritual health. It

improves an individual's cardiovascular system, immune system, and quality and length of sleep. It increases a practitioner's positive affect and control over negative thoughts, as well as decreases blood pressure, depression, anxiety, and stress. The pranayama (the breath) strengthens the diaphragm and intercostals muscles, subsequently strengthening the muscles in a practitioner's lungs, which may explain the improvements in cardiovascular health. Practitioners report that yoga aids them in dealing with difficult situations, such as better navigating their negative emotions. Interestingly, while different styles of yoga vary psychologically, slow-breathing appears to be the common thread between them. Current research makes clear that, physiologically, meditation puts a practitioner into a state similar to sleep. Though technically awake, these practitioners experience a feeling of unboundedness, while being unaware of space, time and even body-sense. They describe their mind as being at peace. Table 2 summarizes the benefits of a dedicated yoga practice.

Table 1.2 Positive aspects of the practice of yoga

Physically	Assists in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weight loss • Increased muscle strength, including lung musculature
Physiologically	Improves: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cardiovascular system • Immune system • Sleep quality and length • Blood pressure • Breathing control Increases: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Melatonin levels • Natural killer cells, which fight the growth of cancer cells
Psychologically	Decreases: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depression • Anxiety • Stress Differs across types of yoga
Emotionally	Aids in:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Control over negative thoughts • Increased positive affect • Management of difficult situations • Healthy expression of negative emotions
Spiritually	<p>Assists a practitioner in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Becoming one with God • “De-embedding” one’s self from thoughts, feelings, and actions • Identifying one’s self as independent of thoughts, feelings, and actions <p>Puts practitioners in a state:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar to sleep • Unaware of space, time, or body-sense <p>Brings a practitioner’s mind to peace</p>

Despite the literature discussing the philosophy of yoga, many in the West are still unfamiliar with the true purpose of yoga. Richard Freeman states that “Most people think that yoga is *yoga asana* (the postures)” (Horrigan, 2004, p. 65). However, research into the health benefits of yoga indicates that yoga is so much more. While the yoga posture is a good place to begin, Freeman believes that “feeling the core body in a new way induces new awareness and new ideas about the body and the world” (p. 66).

Kabat-Zinn (2003) expands upon Freeman’s comment in an article entitled *Mindful Yoga*:

The appeal of hatha yoga is nothing less than the lifelong adventure and discipline of working with one’s body as a door into freedom and wholeness. Hatha yoga was never about accomplishment or perfection, or even about technique by itself. Nor was it about turning one’s body into an elaborate pretzel, although the athleticism that is possible in hatha yoga (if one can manage to steer clear of narcissism) is a truly remarkable art form in its own right....The question is how mindful is it, and is this flowering oriented toward self-understanding, wisdom and liberation, or is much of it just physical fitness dressed up in spiritual clothing?

Many people, including some practitioners, think of yoga as just an exercise (or perhaps just a fad). With the growing obesity rate in this country, coupled with the obsession of losing

weight, it is not surprising that people turn to yoga as a form of physical activity (American Obesity Association, 2002; Chaline, 2001). It is indeed a great way to lose weight and strengthen muscles. I believe, however, that once immersed in the culture of yoga, people can quickly find much more than they originally thought.

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the lived experience of yoga practitioners, and their search for the true self. While research is beginning to examine the lived experience of yoga and the search for the true self, there is still currently less peer-reviewed qualitative literature related to yoga's purpose and philosophy. This thesis focuses on the phenomenological study of the true self based on the Ashtanga Yoga practice. Furthermore, the purpose is to examine the health benefits of yoga as an exercise, as well as the philosophical perspective of the true self. It deals with many aspects of the yoga practice, including mindfulness, meditation, and even certain metaphysical properties. However, I restrict my analysis of data to only the concept of the true self. The following literature review does not focus on one style of yoga practice in particular. My chosen form of practice, which focuses solely on the form of Mysore Ashtanga Yoga, has led me to this analysis of yoga philosophy. The research questions guiding this study were: 1) How does a yoga practitioner describe the concept of the true self? 2) How does a yoga practitioner describe the experience of the true self while engaged in a yoga practice? 3) How does a yoga practitioner describe the experience of the true self in everyday life?

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

YOGAS CITTA VRTTI NIRODHA.

The restraint of the modifications of the mind-stuff is Yoga.

This chapter reviews the literature related to practicing yoga and a practitioners search for the true self. The first section reviews the literature researching different program theories that apply to the practice of yoga. These studies attempt to quantify the benefits of a practice and explain how yoga increases certain aspects of one's health. The word health in this thesis refers to the physical, physiological, mental and/or spiritual well-being. The second section reviews the literature examining what is believed to happen within the body during yoga. These studies measure what, if any, changes take place in the brain and what visuals a yoga practitioner sees while meditating. The last section discusses yoga as a mental science and quest for the true self, as I analyze the interpretations of the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* in regards to the concept of the true self.

2.1 The health benefits of yoga

Through yoga, practitioners experience improved states of well-being, including physically, physiologically, emotionally, and mentally (Harinath et al., 2004). In the West, yoga is popularly viewed as a form of physical activity, as a way to exercise one's physical body and to release the stress of everyday life. The yoga of physical posture is referred to as Hatha Yoga (Chaline, 2000). According to Chaline (2000), Hatha yoga corrects posture; increases flexibility, muscle strength and endurance; and also promotes relaxation. Attending a Hatha yoga class often means following guided instruction in a dimly lit room, accompanied by the aroma of incense, while quiet music plays in the background. However, what visibly occurs during an instructor-led yoga class makes up only one part of the practice. People practice Hatha yoga to attain pure

and total health and enlightenment, as is claimed by the definitive yoga text, *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* (Satchidananda, 1990). But what parts of the body exactly do these practices affect and how do they do it? This literature review attempts to identify what takes place during this period of internal concentration.

As mentioned in the introduction, meditation (*Dhyana*) is the seventh limb of Ashtanga Yoga, and it exists in many forms. Meditation is more than just sitting in a cross-legged position, eyes closed and hands on either knee with a closed forefinger and thumb. Much occurs internally while in a meditative state, beginning with focusing the mind on the third eye (*ajna chakra*)--the space between the eyes. Notably, a practitioner can strive to be engaged in meditation throughout all daily activities; truly, this is much more the aim of yoga.

Because of the increasing popularity of and devotion to yoga practice in the West, researchers in health-related fields are designing new program theories that utilize yoga in some way. These researchers take constituents (limbs) of yoga (i.e. meditation, postures) and reconfigure them into a new style of practice fitting to the language of the west, so people here can understand the benefits. Typically, these reconfigurations of yoga include holding classes over a period of a number of weeks, where the participant engages in guided yoga postures (*asanas*) and meditation (*dhyana*). Researchers monitor the participants over the defined period of time. These program theories focus on increasing well-being. In order to better understand the whole of what exactly yoga affects and how, researchers concentrate on certain parts of and systems within the body. Only in this way can researchers gain some understanding of yoga's power of achieving total health.

Yoga research is having a major impact on the current view of health care. Some of these studies research the validity of yoga intervention programs and theories, which focus on the

aspects of yoga that ameliorate health conditions. I reviewed twenty articles relating to what yoga affects. I divided up the literature review by programs. Each section describes the intervention and its conclusion. The sections are divided up as follows: overarching yoga or meditation, Tibetan Yoga, Inner Resources, Progressive Muscle Relaxation Program and the Attentional Behavioral Cognitive Relaxation Theory, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program, Zen Meditation, and Transcendental Meditation.

Yoga/Meditation

The following studies do not focus on pre-identified constructs as part of the program or theory being tested, but rather on the practice of yoga. One way to describe the benefits of yoga (and thus of meditation) is through physical health, what physically occurs with regular practice. Many researchers are interested in the study of the physical benefits of yoga and meditation. For example, studies often measure the effects that yoga has on the cardiovascular system. Harinath et al. (2004) evaluated 30 army soldiers to demonstrate the effects of Hatha yoga on the cardiorespiratory system, psychological profile and melatonin regulation of the body. These researchers used a form of meditation, called Omkar meditation, which included yoga postures (*asanas*), breathing (*pranayama*), and meditation (*dhyana*). Conducting two separate experiments on two different groups, the authors recorded the participant's brain activity. For three months, the first group of soldiers jogged and practiced different stretching techniques, while those in the second group practiced yoga postures (*asanas*) and breathe (*pranayama*). Omkar meditation consisted of an Om chant and yoga *asanas* varied by the time of day.

The soldiers practicing yoga showed a 'reduction in systolic, diastolic and mean arterial blood pressure'¹ (p. 266). No significant change occurred in the jogging/stretching group. Yoga

¹ Systolic blood pressure is defined as the peak blood pressure during the cardiac cycle. Contrastingly, diastolic blood pressure is when the blood pressure is lowest and lasts longer than systolic blood pressure. Mean arterial

improved functioning in the cardiovascular system through heart rate and blood pressure reduction. The authors theorized that this improvement was due in part to the breath (*pranayama*), as the practice of *pranayama* strengthens the muscles involved with this type of breathing. Electro-encephalograph measurements of brain activity indicated that practitioners went into a state similar to sleep, but remained fully awake. Harinath et al. (2004) measured melatonin, known to influence mood (Saladin, 2004) in the yoga/meditation group. After a practice, the levels in the yoga/meditation group increased, which they reported positively affected their well-being, defined in this study as ‘general health, quality of sleep, mental condition and feelings towards peers and superiors’ (p. 265). The authors conclude that yoga encourages the body’s different systems to maintain homeostasis, and that physiologically, meditation puts the body into a state similar to sleep, even though still awake.

Peng, et al. (2003) examined how the breath affects the yoga practice and how the breath affects a practitioner’s heart rate. The breath (*pranayama*) leads the movements, or the *asanas* (postures) (Scott, 2000). The yoga practitioner is not focused on the *asanas*, but with their breath. These researchers examined three different constructs related to meditation and breathing, *relaxation response*, *breath of fire*, and *bilateral segmented breathing*. In this study, participants practiced Kundalini yoga. For the *relaxation response* group, participants sat in a quiet meditation, breathing naturally, and recited a pre-determined mantra. Participants in the *breath of fire* group concentrated on using rapid, equal parts to their breathing. They kept their focus on the spot in the middle of the brow (Peng et al., 2003), which in yoga is third eye chakra (Chaline, 2000). Participants in the last group practiced *bilateral segmented breathing*, which

blood pressure measures the mean of periodic interval measurements of systolic and diastolic blood pressures (Saladin, 2004).

required them to divide both their inhale and their exhale into eight equal parts. These participants also recited a mantra, although different than that in the *relaxation response* group.

Participant engaged in meditation, while the researchers recorded their heart rates. Results showed that the *breath of fire* marked the highest increase in heart rate and the *relaxation response* and *bilateral segmented breathing* produce a similar dynamic on the heart rate, mostly low frequency oscillations and slow breathing. The authors conclude that “that slow breathing is a fundamental component of these interventions” (Peng et al., 2003, p. 25). Researchers speculate that their findings indicate that heart rate variability responds actively and yet selectively to different forms of meditation (Peng et al., 2003).

The significance of these studies is that yoga improved the physical health of those who practice by strengthening their cardiovascular system, specifically the heart rate and blood pressure, and also the musculature involved in *pranayama* (breath). Yoga increased melatonin levels. Finally, while a practitioner’s heart rate varies between different meditation practices, slow-breathing is the common thread among the different practices (Peng et al., 2003).

Tibetan Yoga

Hatha yoga, the yoga of physical postures, is a common style of practice in the West and comes out of India (Cohen, Warneke, Fouladi, Rodriguez, & Chaoul-Reich, 2003). Tibetan Yoga quite obviously originates out of Tibet, and differs from Hatha in that the practice involves more of a sitting meditation rather than *asanas* and *pranayama*. Cohen et al. (2003) examined two types of Tibetan yoga, namely Trul Khor and T’sa Lung. Tibetan yoga uses “controlled breathing and visualization, mindfulness techniques, and postures”, (p. 2254) and suggests weekly yoga sessions. Cohen, et al. (2003) evaluated the effects of a Tibetan yoga practice on cancer patients in the study entitled *Psychological adjustment and sleep quality in a randomized trial of the*

effects of a Tibetan yoga intervention in patients with lymphoma. The authors argue that yoga benefits current or recovering chemotherapy patients. The authors measured the levels of distress, anxiety, depression, sleep-disturbances, and fatigue of the patients. At the end of seven weeks, patients experienced improved sleep overall, including length and quality, and a decreased need to use sleep medications. All the patients described the Tibetan yoga program as beneficial to them in some way. The study concludes that not only does meditation improve physical and mental well-being in healthy persons, but also with those suffering from disease.

Inner Resources

The studies that examine the positive physical benefits of yoga initially dominated the research on yoga. However, research, like the study by Cohen et al. (2003) now attempts to identify how yoga affects other components of well-being, such as quality of life. In another example, Waelde, Thompson, and Gallagher-Thompson (2004) examined the validity of a psychotherapeutic yoga and meditation intervention for those who provide care full-time to persons suffering from dementia.

Waelde et al. (2004) examined the *Inner Resources* program, which teaches Hatha yoga and meditation techniques and also encourages a home practice. *Inner Resources* involves participants focusing on a single point, guided by the breath, and through the use of imagery and also mantra repetition (Waelde et al., 2004). The idea is to allow thoughts to exit the mind as easily as they enter. In other words, a practitioner lets go of all thoughts and feelings as they arise. This particular intervention was designed specifically to decrease depression. According to the authors, the *Inner Resources* program successfully decreased depression and also anxiety for 70% of dementia caregivers. Moreover, caregivers in this program experienced an increase in perceived self-efficacy for controlling negative thoughts. Not surprisingly, the more the

caregivers practiced, the more their depression decreased and their self-efficacy increased. As with Tibetan yoga, all participants described the program as useful to them in some way.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation and Attentional Behavioral Cognitive Relaxation Theory

New theories are being developed by psychologists and other researchers to study the effects of relaxation techniques. In doing so, these researchers attempt to understand how yoga affects a practitioner's well-being. Past research indicates that these theories are both valid and reliable in predicting positive outcomes with the practice of yoga. The progressive muscle relaxation, for example, is a technique commonly used in the field of clinical psychology. Using this technique, a practitioner continually tenses his/her body, then immediately relaxes it. By using this relaxation technique, practitioners report experiencing positive benefits physically, mentally, emotionally and physiologically (Smith, 1999).

One particular psychological theory, the Attentional Behavioral Cognitive Relaxation Theory, was developed by Jonathan C. Smith at the Roosevelt University Stress Institute. This theory postulates that relaxation is a cycle of self-renewal (Smith, 1999). During this cycle, the body heals and strengthens itself from the pressures of the day. To assist in the healing, practitioners use the relaxation techniques of "sustaining passive, simple focus" (Smith, 1999, p. 4). Smith (1999) suggests that relaxation techniques that appear somatically similar may actually differ psychologically (p. 4).

The Attentional Behavioral Cognitive Relaxation Theory was developed using grounded theory method, where theoretical constructs consist of collated and repeated themes organized from the data. Documenting "an exhaustive catalogue of over 400 words," Smith (1999) examines relaxation and how people define the state of relaxation (Ghoncheh & Smith, 2004, p. 132). This catalogue presents an "evidence-based lexicon of relaxation and renewal," describing

how the method ties in with the theory (Smith, 1999, p. 5). The constructs were developed from the words in this catalogue. Three constructs operating in this theory: 1) relaxation states (R-States), 2) relaxation beliefs (R-Beliefs), and 3) relaxation attitude (R-Attitude). See Table 3 for a summary of this lexicon.

Table 2.1 ABC Relaxation Theory Constructs and their meanings, based on Smith's (1999) ABC Relaxation Theory

R-States	R-Beliefs	R-Attitudes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sleepiness • Disengagement • Physical Relaxation • Mental Quiet • Mental Relaxation • Strength and Awareness • Joy • Love and Thankfulness • Prayerfulness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optimism • Acceptance • Honesty • Taking it Easy • Love • Inner Wisdom • God • Deeper Perspective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I don't have the time to relax" • "I'm afraid I will lose control" • "I refuse to practice this silly exercise" • "Relaxation won't work for" • "I just can't do it"

Relaxation states (R-States) define the states of mind that assist a practitioner in achieving this "passive, simple focus." R-States represent the words that people use to define their states of being when relaxed. Besides to experience relaxation, people practice relaxation techniques to achieve any of the nine identified states, or some other desired goal, such as sleep, focus, or passiveness. R-beliefs describe the effects of a deeper meditation, and situate the R-States" (Smith, 1999, p. 88). They are abstract and concrete and assist in applying relaxation effects to everyday life. They include: "Deeper Perspective, God, Inner Wisdom, Honesty, Love, Taking it Easy, Acceptance, and Optimism" (Gillani & Smith, 2001, p. 840). It is natural, when engaged in meditation to lose focus and experience "distracting or distressing thoughts, images, emotions, or physical sensations" (Smith, 1999, p. 47). Negative relaxation states (N-States)

represent these distracting states of being. Relaxation attitudes (R-Attitudes) abstract practitioners' attitudes toward meditation. Similarly, a practitioner's thoughts may turn towards the negative, which interferes with the relaxation process and makes life more stressful. The "types of irrational and maladaptive negative thinking" appear in psychologically defined terms, such as all-or-none thinking, fortune-telling, mind-reading, thinking with "shoulds," egocentrism, blaming, and overgeneralization" (Smith, 1999, pp. 83-84). According to Gillani and Smith (2001), any experiences as described by the words in the R-States, R-beliefs, R-Dispositions, R-Motivations and R-Attitudes act as negotiators between the healing effects of any relaxation technique, yoga in the case of this thesis.

Studies under the direction of Smith commonly employ the Attentional Behavioral Cognitive Relaxation Theory using the Progressive Muscle Relaxation method. Under the ABC Relaxation Theory, different meditations evoke different R-States (Ghoncheh & Smith, 2004). For example, "[the Progressive Muscle Relaxation program] evokes Disengagement and Physical Relaxation, whereas breathing exercises and yoga stretching evokes R-States energized and aware" (Gillani & Smith, 2001, p. 840). In a recent study, Matsumoto and Smith (2001) examined which R-States the Progressive Muscle Relaxation program evoked compared to just deep breathing exercises. This study operated under the Attentional Behavioral Cognitive Relaxation Theory. The researchers specifically tracked the R-States of Physical Relaxation, Disengagement, Strength and Awareness. Results show that while the breathing exercises and the Progressive Muscle Relaxation program showed no effect on cognitive or physical stress, both improved certain R-States. Participants reported that the Progressive Muscle Relaxation technique, as hypothesized by the researchers, affected the R-state: Physical Relaxation and Disengagement. Those participants who practiced only breathing exercises, however,

experienced the R-states of Strength and Awareness. The researchers also noted that the Progressive Muscle Relaxation program affected two other R-States not included in the study, Mental Quiet and Joy.

In a similar study, Ghoncheh and Smith (2004) compared the effects of the Progressive Muscle Relaxation and Hatha yoga as a replication to the previously mentioned study by Matsumoto and Smith (2001). The participants in the Progressive Muscle Relaxation program experienced the R-States of Physical Relaxation of Disengagement, Mental Quiet and Joy more than did those in the yoga group. However, unlike the participants in the study by Matsumoto and Smith (2001), these participants did not report feelings of Mental Quiet and Joy until the fourth week of the five week study. The group that practiced Hatha yoga experienced the R-State of Physical Relaxation. Furthermore, as indicated by the Attentional Behavioral Cognitive Relaxation Theory, participants characterized different R-States for the Progressive Muscle Relaxation program differently than they did for yoga stretching.

The significance of the Attentional Behavioral Cognitive Relaxation Theory is that it predicts that, even though relaxation techniques appear the same in terms of what the participants are engaged in, these techniques actually evoke different psychological responses. These responses, as defined by the Progressive Muscle Relaxation program (Smith, 2001) can be categorized and broken down into different relaxation states. This program allows researchers to identify what psychological variations occur among meditation practices. Therefore, researchers often pair the Attentional Behavioral Cognitive Relaxation Theory with the Progressive Muscle Relaxation method because this method provides the language not only to back up the theory, but to identify the precise psychological differences among meditations. Research thus far provides

both validity and reliability to the theory that participants experience different psychological responses depending on the type of meditation practiced.

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

In 1979, Jon Kabat-Zinn founded the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. This clinic originally opened as an alternative for patients who were not responding to traditional medical treatments. The Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society opened in 1995 out of the Stress Reduction Clinic. The Center for Mindfulness aims to bring mindfulness yoga and meditation as an accepted practice in standard medicine and healthcare. However, with the continuing success of alternative medicines, this clinic now offers mindfulness training in other areas, such as “education, corporate leadership, the workplace, criminal justice and sports” (Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society, 2005).

Through his research, Jon Kabat-Zinn developed the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program. Using guided instruction and home assignments, this program aims to bring mindfulness yoga and meditation not only into everyday living, and in to standard medicine and healthcare. Through his research, Jon Kabat-Zinn developed this eight-week long program to increase well-being. The program includes gentle yoga postures (*asanas*) focusing on stretching and meditation (*dhyana*). Kabat-Zinn recognizes that meditation cultivates mindfulness, which he defines as staying present in the moment, practicing non-judgment, and “paying attention on purpose” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003b, p. 145). The concept of mindfulness is fairly simple to understand, even though the practice of it is much harder to maintain, “especially when one is little aware of how attached one may be and also, how blind to being caught up in habitual patterns of thinking and emotional expression” (p. 148). What makes mindfulness so effective and at the same time

empowering is that the practicing individual can at any time choose to wake up to these habitual patterns and to live in the present moment. Kabat-Zinn (2003b) describes mindfulness as an “invitation to allow oneself to be where one already is” (p. 148). While mindfulness is rooted in Buddhism, Kabat-Zinn specifically designed the program to help individuals face the difficulties of life, including stress and illness, and not to teach a religion or a philosophy (Kabat-Zinn, 2003b).

In order to evaluate the efficacy of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program, Tacon, McComb, Caldera and Randolph (2003) examined its effects in reducing anxiety in women with heart disease. Participants experiences heart conditions, such as “angina, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and cardiac valve disorders” (p. 27). A case-control study, groups were randomly assigned to either the intervention or the control group. For the control group, researchers placed the names of those who volunteered for the study on a waiting list to receive the intervention. The intervention group participated in both yoga and meditation, focused on their breathing and learned to remain aware and present in the moment. Those in the control group participated only in filling out questionnaires. After the eight weeks, the intervention group reported experiencing a decrease in anxiety over the course of the intervention, while the control group experienced no change at all. Post-test measurements indicated that those in the intervention group continued to express, rather than suppress, negative emotions and even felt better equipped to handle difficult situations. This study strongly suggests that the practice of mindfulness meditation ameliorates certain emotional issues that may arise in patients dealing with heart disease.

Similarly, Robinson, Matthews & Witek-Janusek (2003) used a quasi-experimental, pre-test/post-test, non-randomized with comparison group design to examine the Mindfulness-Based

Stress Reduction program with patients infected with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). The authors found that this program helped to increase the activity and number of natural killer cells in persons infected with HIV. In other words, this form of meditation may help to build the immuno-response of HIV-infected persons. With the increase of these cells, HIV patients may live longer with a better quality of life, or perhaps even fight off completely this virus that leads to acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).

Carlson, Speca, Patel, & Goodey (2004) also examined the effects of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program, but with those suffering from breast or prostate cancer. Pre- and post-tests measured the yoga/stress reducing sessions against the constructs: quality of life, stress symptoms, mood, and the hormonal measures of cortisol, [dehydroepiandrosterone] (DHEA) [and its sulfate] (DHEAS), and melatonin. The adrenal gland produces this steroid hormone, DHEA(S) Cortisol is a stress hormone that is released through the adrenals. Conversely, DHEAS has been shown to improve “immune function and mood in humans” (p. 451). Carlson et al. (2004) studied these two hormones, and melatonin, which is believed to suppress the growth of cancerous tumors. After eight weeks, the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program decreased stress and increased the quality of life for patients suffering from breast or prostate cancer. Participants also reported sleeping better. Hormone levels, however, did not change (Carlson et al., 2004). Perhaps this program produced no effect on the body’s chemicals, but stress and quality of life improved. That the duration of the program was only eight weeks might also be taken into account when considering that no effect was found in hormone levels.

With recent studies indicating the efficacy of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program on stress and depression, Gross, Kreitzer, Russas, Treesak, Frazier, & Hertz (2004)

implemented this program with patients following organ transplant surgery, as this is a stressful time for patients. Following a cohort of 19 people between the ages of 30 and 40, the authors measured constructs such as depression, anxiety, sleep dysfunction, physical and mental health, quality of life and adherence. Each construct used a separate standardized instrument. At study's end, participants reported feeling decreased depression (although eventually stabilizing back to baseline after 3 months), decreased anxiety and a better overall mood. After a three-month follow-up, transplant patients still experienced improved sleep. Similar to Waelde et al.'s (2004) study on *Inner Resources*, the more meditation the patients practiced, the better they slept.

The Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program also may help to strengthen the immune system. Davidson et al., (2002) found that yoga and meditation increases the activity in the left-side anterior portion of the brain, which is known to fire during positive emotion and positive affect. Davidson et al. (2002) tested 25 people for eight weeks. To directly assess the effects of this program on the immune system, researchers monitored antibody activity in the intervention group as a result of receiving an influenza vaccine against those in the control group. The control group received no treatment, but was put on a wait-list to receive treatment. The meditation helped to lower anxiety levels and increase positive affect. Antibody titers rose for those practicing yoga and meditation. As with the study by Robinson, Matthews & Witek-Janusek (2003) the MBSR program may effectively work in improving immune functioning.

The above programs and theories provide quantifiable ways in which yoga benefits a practitioner. Yoga benefits an individual's well-being, such as physical, physiological, psychological, and/or spiritual health. Table 1 in the Introduction provides a collated list of the direct benefits to an individual's well-being. Yoga improves an individual's cardiovascular system, immune system, and quality and length of sleep. It increases a practitioner's positive

affect and control over negative thoughts, as well as decreasing blood pressure, depression, anxiety, and stress. Through a steady practice, the muscles in a practitioner's lungs also strengthen, which may explain the improvements in cardiovascular health. Practitioners also report that yoga helps them to better deal their negative emotions. While the psychological effects of different yoga styles vary, slow-breathing appears to be the common thread between them. The above studies demonstrate the subjective experience of yoga, but what happens from a cognitive standpoint? More specifically, what happens in the brain when someone is engaged in meditation, and how does this compare to brain activity during "normal" activities? In the following section, I review the literature dealing with brain activity during meditation.

2.2 What occurs during meditation

Zen Meditation

People practice Zen-meditation in search of their true self (Yu, Tsai & Hwang, 2003). Zen-meditators sit in a cross-legged position, with their eyes closed for some amount of time. In this position they can access a deep state of meditation by transcending the physical realm to the spiritual. In this deep state, they report seeing an inner light and that the true self is found in that inner light. They describe having stopped all thoughts in this deep state that leaves "only blissful quiet, full of life energy and wisdom power" (Yu, Tsai & Hwang, 2003, p. 500). Lo et al. (2003) describe Zen-Meditation as:

...the *qi* energy starts penetrating, from the corpora quadrigemina (the Wisdom Chakra), through the pineal gland, bridging the energy passage between cerebellum and cerebrum. Gradually the human life system enters a unique state in harmony with nature and the universe (called 'the unification of heaven, earth and human'). In this state one becomes more and more egoless and liberated, i.e. his body and mind are free (without attachment) even though the person is still involved in masses of worldly work. (p. 633)

Zen-meditation practitioners engage in this type of meditation to attain *Buddhahood*.

There are many steps to *Buddhahood*, and each step is difficult to master. Zen-Buddhists believe that “by seeking Zen, one is actually seeking the true energy of life” (Lo et al., 2003; p. 631).

A method to quieting the mind is to focus on the body’s chakra points (Yu, Tsai & Hwang, 2003). Chakras (or wheels) are energy centers located within the body (Chaline, 2001). Beginning with the root chakra buried in the perineum, the seven chakras line up throughout the body, traveling upwards toward the head. Much like the transcendent movement of the physical to the spiritual, “the lower chakras are concerned with the physical plane of existence, while the higher chakras are gateways to the higher realms of the spirit” (Chaline, 2001).

Several studies explore the physical and psychological effects of the practice of Zen meditation (Gillani & Smith, 2001; Lo, Huang and Chang 2003; Yu et al., 2003). Lo et al. (2003) measured the brain electrical activity of practitioners as they were in a deep state of meditation. They then compared the brain activity of practitioners to the brain activity of non-practitioners (control group). In a second experiment, the researchers also observed the brain waves of eight participants (six practitioners, two non-practitioners) of participants, as they were unknowingly *blessed* by a Zen master².

In the first experiment, the authors found that alpha blockage occurred as the practitioners simultaneously reported the experience of an inner light during meditation. Under normal circumstances, alpha brain waves occur while a person is awake, and beta waves occur during mental stimulation (Saladin, 2004). Blocking alpha waves means affecting a person’s waking

²A Zen-master is one who achieved *Buddhahood* or more specifically, “full attainment of Buddha’s three bodies, the emanation body (Nirmanakaya), the truth body (Dharmakaya) and the blessedness body (Sambhogakaya)” (Lo et al., 2003, p. 635).

state, supporting the hypothesis that meditation is similar to the state of sleep (Harinath et al., 2004). Lo et al. (2003) also recorded bursts of beta brain waves from those who entered into meditation/contemplation, or *Samadhi*. If beta waves occur during mental activity, then the presence of beta waves while engaged in meditation is concurrent with *Samadhi*, the highest form of contemplation and the eighth limb of Ashtanga yoga.

During the second experiment, brain activity of the meditators blessed by the Zen master demonstrated alpha blocking during the blessing, however, brain activity of the non-meditators during the blessing remained alpha dominant (Lo et al., 2003). When the meditators reported seeing an inner light, their brain activity simultaneously displayed a decrease in alpha waves and an increase in beta waves. Meditators reported seeing the *inner* light, at the same time, EEG results measured alpha blockage. Lo et al. (2003) predict that this experience of the inner light relates somehow to the idea of the true self. According to yogic tradition, practitioners experience liberation from the physical realm while in this state and are at one with the Source and thus their true self. The authors acknowledge that science may never have the technology to explain anything beyond the physical world, and that “the connection between the spiritual experience and physical phenomenon can be explored via the medium of the human life system” (p. 640).

Gillani and Smith (2001) paired the relaxation states (R-States³) from the Attentional Behavioral Cognitive Relaxation Theory to compare the psychological effects of Zen meditation. The authors questioned which R-States people identified with achieving Zen, in the hopes of designing an intervention tailoring to an individual’s needs. In this study, the meditation took place in a temple and used common Buddhist rituals including the “sounding of a gong, bowing to the instructor and temple altar, sitting on a meditation cushion or chair, instructions to breathe

³ For a description of R-states, see section 2.1, p. 20.

in a relaxed manner, listening to occasional suggestive affirmations (*be peaceful, there is only this moment, be here in the present moment*), brief chanting and listening to a brief concluding spiritual *Dharma talk*” (p. 842) The authors conclude that Zen-meditators were less likely to believe in God, but identify rather with the R-State, Inner Wisdom. Meditators also report experiencing the R-States, Mental Quiet/Relaxation, Love, Thankfulness, Prayerfulness and Reduced Worry.

Some empirical research indicates that Zen-Meditation may reduce the growth of cancer cells. Yu et al. (2003) observed whether this style of meditation could slow *in vitro* prostate cancer cells blessed by a Zen-master in a case/control study. The Zen-master blessed prostate cells contained in a covered cell plate for one minute using only his right hand. Participants in the control group sat three meters away in the same room, but did not receive a *blessing*. Zen Masters are said to have psychosomatic power acquired through Zen meditation. The authors observed a reduced growth of *in-vitro* prostate cancer cells, which they attribute to the psychosomatic energy. Apoptosis (cell death) however did not occur. If the body truly can heal itself, it is not surprising that cell growth among cancer cells also reduced without the use of medication, and with the help of someone who can access their true self beyond the physical realm. The authors conclude that “these three experimental results strongly suggest that emitted psychosomatic power has antitumor effects on human prostate cancer cells” (p. 505).

Transcendental Meditation

For a subjective experience of meditation, Travis, Arenander and Dubois (2004) examined practitioner’s lived experience of meditation. A practitioner of Transcendental Meditation sits quietly with closed eyes to detach from all “thoughts, feelings and perceptions” (Travis, Arenander, & Dubois, 2004, p. 403). During Transcendental Meditation, meditators

achieve a 'simple unity' where the mind becomes at peace and rises above intellect, space and time (Travis & Pearson, 2000). This state is different from a normal waking state. It is the integration with pure consciousness. Pure consciousness is not only part of the states of waking, dreaming and sleeping, but goes beyond them as well (Travis & Pearson, 2000). Certain physiological conditions that occur during a waking state change when in a deep state of meditation.

Travis and Pearson (2000) examined the lived experience of pure consciousness, as well as identify other physiological changes that occur during Transcendental Meditation, by asking 52 college students to describe their deepest meditation experiences during Transcendental meditation. All the participants had been practicing this form of meditation for an average of 5.4 years. Even though awake, the majority of the practitioners became unaware of space, time or body-sense during meditation. A smaller proportion felt peaceful, and an even smaller percentage of meditators experienced unboundedness. Meditators described a feeling of unboundedness as an absence of space, time or body-sense, and an 'unbounded silence' with complete awareness and peace, but without thought.

Travis, Arenander and DuBois (2004) examined how practitioner's, who experience higher states of consciousness or pure consciousness, describe what this experience means to them. The authors attempted to link together concepts of the self from three different groups of a total of 51 participants. The first group, Non-Transcendental Meditation (Non-TM) participants, does not practice meditation and has not experienced pure consciousness. Participants in the second group had been practicing Transcendental Meditation for approximately eight years, with only the occasional experience of pure consciousness (Short-Term TM). Finally, the third group consisted of people well-practiced in TM, meditating for an average of 25 years (Long-Term

TM). In this group, participants reported the experience of pure consciousness consistently during daily life.

From this study, Travis, Arenander and Dubois (2004) developed a continuum, termed the Object-referral/Self-referral Continuum of self-awareness, to describe the differences in perception of self along a spectrum of ways people experience consciousness. The researchers employed five different psychological tests, quantifying constructs such as worldview dimensions, moral reasoning, anxiety and personality. From the tests, researchers concluded that stable states of self-awareness coincided with ‘de-embedding oneself’ from “objects and processes of knowing-thoughts, feelings and actions.” Enlightenment is defined as the higher states of consciousness, moving towards the extreme end of the self-referral mode. Through unstructured interviews and psychological tests, Non-TM identified self with thoughts, feelings and actions, the Short-Term TM identified self as ‘*director*’ of thoughts, feelings and action, while the Long-Term TM identified self as underlying and independent of thoughts, feelings and actions.

What these studies conclude is that meditation puts a practitioner into a state similar to sleep, while actually awake. On a physical and physiological level, Transcendental Meditation program helps practitioners decrease their systolic blood pressure and increase their melatonin levels (Barnes et al., 2004); Solberg et al., 2004). Practitioners report a feeling of unboundedness, while being unaware of space, time and even body-sense, and identify their self as ‘de-embedded’ from their thoughts, feelings and actions, leading to a feeling of independence from thoughts, feelings and actions. Some types of yoga describe this experience as achieving Zen, or finding their true self and becoming one with God.

These studies highlight how people describe their experience of meditation. They are important because they provide a subjective view of meditation, and answer the how's and why's behind the concepts of yoga. After having identified the whole health benefits of yoga, including physically, physiologically, psychologically, emotionally, the following section deals with the spiritual benefits and philosophical nature of yoga as taught by the definitive text in Ashtanga yoga, *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* (Satchidananda, 1990).

2.3 Analysis of yoga philosophy and the true self

Literally meaning 'to be yoked,' yoga has been defined many ways, but at its core is the "true self." *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* claims the goal of yoga is to attain complete mastery over the mind (Satchidananda, 1990). To do this, a practitioner must learn to remain in the present and observe non-judgment. The mastery of the mind is where a practitioner becomes one with God and all things and realizes the true self. Some yoga philosophies refer to this as achieving Zen (Lo et al., 2003). Practitioners seasoned in meditation, who have begun to understand the concept of the true self, identify the self as being 'de-embedded' from thoughts, feelings, and actions; subsequently, describing the self as being independent of thoughts, feelings and actions (Travis, Arenander & Dubois, 2004). Yoga encompasses a person's whole life and addresses topics, such as mental and physical health, the nature of truth, liberation, a person's relationship to God, what and who is God, and the true Self (Satchidananda, 1990). This thesis deals mainly with the true self; however, as these other topics cannot be separated from the concept of the true self, the above topics also are discussed.

Yoga is a 5,000 year old science, not a religion, and is considered a way of life. It is a philosophy and spreads beyond the yoga mat. Yoga philosophy actually defines yoga as the science of the mind, a science named in western culture as psychology. A yoga practitioner

ceases all thoughts to transcend the physical realm and to find the true self. In *Samadhi Pada*, the second, but perhaps most important, *Sutra* says *yogas citta vritti nirodhah* or “the restraint of modifications of the mind-stuff is yoga” (Satchidananda, 1990, p. 3). Seemingly easy, the restraint from thought is the most difficult aspect of yoga, and for most practitioners a life-long struggle. According to Satchidananda (1990), when yoga practitioners successfully still their mind, the true self becomes clear and known.

The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali deals with many aspects of a person’s life and offers a clear definition of the Self (Satchidananda, 1990). According to *Sadhana Pada*, the Self is “the eternal, never changing One” (p. 164). The true self exists beyond the body and thought and stays the same, while the mind changes and creates the differences and the *ahamkara* (the ego). Yoga is letting go of the changes, the differences, and the ego by stopping the mind. The body and the mind change, but the true self remains the same. Moksha (liberation) comes when practitioners allow the changes of the mind to occur without fighting them, nature no longer bounds them (Satchidananda, 1990).

According to Patanjali, yoga philosophy describes the *Purusha* and *Prakriti*. The *Purusha* is the seer, while the *Prakriti* is everything else that is not the seer, much like the subject and the object. According to the third *Sutra* of book one, *Tada Drastuh Svarupe Vasthanam*, or “then the Seer [Self] abides in His own nature” (p. 6). The body comprises part of the self, but the self goes beyond the body. *Sutra 4* in *Samadhi Pada* reveals that all selves are indistinguishable and everything is the same thing, the same energy, the same One. The self is not the body, but rather it exists in and comprises everything and does not change. If something changes, the change occurs in something other than the self. The seer embodies the true self, where, *Prakriti*, otherwise known as nature or the world, represents everything but the self, ‘the

other.’ According to *Sutra* 18 of *Sadhana Pada*, *Prakriti* is intended to be difficult and is not where a practitioner finds happiness (Satchidananda, 1990).

To recognize the *Purusha* is to recognize the *Prakriti*. This union of both *Purusha* and *Prakriti* describes *Samyoga*. Only through the realization of one is the other possible and this realization is all that separated them in the first place. Patanjali explains “*tasya hetur avidya*,” or “the cause of this union is ignorance” (Satchidananda, 1990), because establishing a realization means that what was realized was at first unknown, but in yoga everything was always known, but forgotten through human conditioning. *Samyoga*, in this sense, actually means to remember, which explains why Patanjali claims that the union of *Purusha* and *Prakriti* is ignorance. In the *Sutra* 24 in *Sadhana Pada*, Patanjali implies that coming to the realization of *samyoga* does not mean that *samyoga* was not present all along, but rather that it was forgotten. By realizing *Prakriti*, “we realize we are the *Purusha*” and “if not for the *Prakriti*, we could not know ourselves” (p. 114).

Only through intense study and self-discipline can practitioners find their true self. The Sanskrit word for this kind of study is *svadhaya*. *Sutra* 1 of *Sadhana Pada* says “accepting pain as help for purification, study of spiritual books, and surrender to the Supreme Being constitutes Yoga in practice” (Satchidananda, 1990, p. 79). Study in this case means not only an *asana* practice or sitting meditation, but also a continuous examination of the scriptures, whatever the scripture. Practitioners can experience a new understanding of the true self with each read of these texts for the rest of their lives.

While the study of these texts provides a map to finding the true self, this search requires more than just study. The true self is found through both study and practice. Theoretical and pedagogical concerns do not take the place of doing yoga (Morley, 2001). Satchidananda (1990)

interprets the first *Sutra* in *Sadhana Pada* as “the self cannot be known by theory alone” (p. 82). The realization of the self takes more than theory and philosophy. Knowledge exists beyond the mind. To go beyond the mind is to understand the true self and the One. In order for yoga practitioners, limited through culture, to understand the unlimited, they must transcend their minds.

2.4 Historical and contemporary views of the self

The concept of the self, the concept of consciousness and subjectivity, has been a topic of discussion over the centuries. Disciplines from psychology to philosophy have produced many ideas as to what the self is and these notions have dramatically changed over time (Clarke & Dirkx, 2000). Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung played significant roles in defining the self. Western, contemporary literature of the self, a definition set by Sigmund Freud, refers to the self as the ego (Brookes, 1996). Freud focused much of his attention to the self as being repressed and deceived as a result of strict religious morals during his time. Jung defined the self as “the central organizing and ‘moving’ principle of the psyche itself” and defines the psyche “as the totality of all mental processes” (p. 344). The psyche represents “a constellation of figures or persons that animate our conscious lives, the vast majority of which are beyond our levels of conscious awareness” (p. 110). The psyche is how people present themselves to the world. Jung views the self as hard-wired and “socially and historically constituted” (Clarke & Dirkx, 2000, p. 106).

Philosophically-speaking, a dominant theory of the self (and the theory which informs my participants) is humanistic psychology, which recognizes the self as unitary, as “integrated, rational, authentic, [and] self-conceiving” (Clarke & Dirkx, 2000, p. 101). Within the unitary philosophy, the true self can be uncovered from deep within consciousness by the individual.

This modern model of the unitary self dominates how the west views the self. Modernity defines the self as individual and subjective (Clarke & Dirkx, 2000).

This culture has moved past modernity to post-modernity and beyond, as argued by Clarke and Dirkx (2000). Other frameworks define the self differently, thus contributing to the ever-changing idea of the self. Jung's phenomenological view embraces the paradigm shift considered necessary by Thomas Kuhn. However, western culture still maintains the modern notion of the self, despite the post-modern times (Clarke & Dirkx, 2000, p. 103). In the post-modern world, life has become much more complex with the technological age, and people are much more interconnected. Post-modernism represents a "plurality of voices and positions, creating a vertigo of competing claims to truth" (p. 105) and recognizes alternative notions of the self. The self is "not fixed but always in process" and "an ongoing construction that is both social and personal" (p. 109). Post-modernists argue that the unitary model of the self does not fit in today's world, because "personal identity is not singular but plural (p. 109). This pluralism is evident as people identify themselves through race, culture, gender, political affiliation, religious affiliation, and their theoretical underpinnings (and so on). Post-modern theorists believe the unitary model of the self is flawed (Clarke & Dirkx, 2000). Modern society, however, is resistant to change.

2.5 Phenomenological research

The theoretical framework of this study is phenomenology⁴. Phenomenology is a school of thought that attempts to describe the essence or structure of a particular lived experience. Phenomenology explores "how human beings make sense of experience and transform this experience into consciousness" (Patton, 2002, p. 104). It attempts to discover what the

⁴ Though the humanistic paradigm informs my practitioner's view of the self and how they make sense of their true self, the humanistic paradigm does not inform this thesis.

phenomenon or object is at the moment it appears in consciousness, before the mind makes meaning of it (or constructs it to be). It allows for the opportunity to view a phenomenon before analysis and interpretation, before humans make meaning of it, the phenomenon's natural state.

An epistemology describes "how we know what we know" (Crotty, 1998, p. 8).

Constructionism, the epistemology in this study, states that people interpret the world they see.

People create meaning. Crotty (1998) states "meaning is not discovered, but constructed" (p. 9).

A phenomenon does not exist without human understanding and meaning does not exist without the conscious mind (Patton, 2002). Crotty (1998) states:

Consciousness is always consciousness of something. An object is always an object *for* someone. The object, in other words, cannot be adequately described apart from the subject, nor can the subject be adequately described apart from the object. (p. 79)

While the object or phenomenon is there, it has no meaning. What people do not see has the potential to be anything. Constructionism supports the existence of many truths and many realities (Crotty, 1998).

Phenomenology theorizes that all phenomena have a core (Crotty, 1998). This core is always accessible, but misidentified by cultural and individual differences. Since human beings construct the meaning of the phenomena, the essence of the phenomena is lost in understanding. Pfander's conception of this framework explains the essence in phenomenology as either a "fundamental" or "empirical essence," (as cited in Spiegelberg, 1972, p. 15). Fundamental essence describes what the phenomenon or object of intention actually is and empirical essence describes what humans perceive it to be.

Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger played a significant role in the development of phenomenology. Edmund Husserl was born April 8, 1859, in the town of Prossnitz in Moravia and died in 1938 (Edmund Husserl, 2006). He is considered the founder of pure phenomenology

(Spiegelberg, 1965). Husserl developed phenomenology to generate knowledge outside the positivistic framework, used mostly in the hard sciences. He believed that these sciences were not rigorous enough in their pursuit of the truth, and that phenomenology provided a more rigorous method to scientific research. In lectures, Husserl claimed these “naturalistic philosophies” aimed to identify all knowledge only through “uncritical natural sciences,” such as experimental psychology (Spiegelberg, 1965, p. 120-121). According to Spiegelberg (1965), Husserl concerned himself with pure consciousness. Husserl used phenomenology to examine a number of “fundamental cognitive acts as perception, imagination, image consciousness, memory,...and the consciousness of time” (Spiegelberg, 1965, p. 119).

Phenomenology provided him with a method to examine consciousness. Husserl uses phenomenology to describe the essence of an object and the structure of that essence (Spiegelberg, 1965). He believes that phenomenology identifies how objects are initially presented in the mind and defined it as the “science of intentional consciousness.” The interpretation of a phenomenon by human beings represents intentionality (Spiegelberg, 1965). Intentionality describes directing consciousness towards an object. According to Husserl, conscious intentionality towards an object combined with the human construction of meaning of this object acts actually as a projection of the self onto the object (Spiegelberg, 1965). For example, Spiegelberg (1965) states that “when we perceive a body other than our own as ‘there’ rather than as ‘here,’ we apperceive it at once as the body of an alter ego by way of an assimilative analogy with our own ego, an analogy which, however, is by no means an inference by analogy” (p. 159).

Husserl believed that phenomenology brings the phenomena “back to the things themselves, and not focus solely on theory behind them” (Spiegelberg, 1965, p. 121-122). What

he means by going back to the origins of things refers to the phenomenological reduction.

Phenomenological reduction, or epoche, means reducing the phenomenon to its essence before interpretation. It refers to the suspension of “belief, doubt, or any kind of presupposition about the existence of the worlds and its objects” (Morely, 2001, p. 74). Husserl identified two stages of the phenomenological reduction: a) reducing an object to its essence, and b) the bracketing of beliefs. He believed the world fell into brackets, but not to mean he forgot his beliefs, but rather loosened his relationship with them.

Edmund Husserl’s research focuses on the idea of the life-world, or the lived experience. The ontology of the life-world examines the structures within the life-world, where each has its own style. At the core of each life-world is the experiencing self. Husserl believed this world was not accessible to the average person (Spiegelberg, 1965, p. 160).

Martin Heidegger was as a student of Edmund Husserl. Heidegger was born on September 26, 1889 in Messkirch in south-west Germany and died on May 26, 1976 (Martin Heidegger, 2006). A student of Husserl’s, Heidegger developed a concept of the phenomenological philosophy. Heideggerian phenomenology differs from Husserlian phenomenology in that Heideggerian phenomenology is not simply describing a phenomenon, but finding the hidden meaning in context. Heideggerian phenomenology attempts to find the meaning in a phenomenon as it relates to being (Spiegelberg, 1965). In fact, Heidegger declared himself the first philosopher of the sense of being (Spiegelberg, 1965, p. 284). His analysis supplied new concepts of phenomenological knowledge, such as being, time, and death (p. 284). Table 4 summarizes some of the key differences between teacher and student.

Table 2.2 The differences between Husserl and Heidegger (Spiegelberg, 1965, p. 284-287)

Husserl	Heidegger
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being exists for consciousness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humans experience the world

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subjective consciousness • Influences include: Descartes • Believes that “the wonder of all wonders is the pure ego and pure consciousness” • Believes in “bracketing” to get at the essence of a phenomenon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are “things in being” • Objective being • Influences include: Aristotle and Parmenides • Interested in the meaning and mode of being • Believes that “man along of all existing things...experiences the wonder of all wonders” • Understands themes in context • Humans are in and of the world
---	--

Heidegger was most interested in the study of being, or ontology (Spiegelberg, 1972).

Heidegger believed that ontology was “the only worthy subject in phenomenological philosophy” (p. 290). Rejecting the term philosophy, though, he referred to his own philosophizing instead as “Thought of Being” (p. 290). Heideggerian phenomenology examines the true meaning of being without the intrusion of the thing-in-being, which Heidegger refers to as *Dasein* (Spiegelberg, 1965, p.290). *Dasein* is a term to describe human existence. The study of the thing-in-being is called metaphysics. According to Garva (2006), “Heidegger sought to discover invariant structures of how *Dasein* (a person) exists in relation to its world—its ontological (philosophy of being) structures” (p. 255). The constructs of Heideggerian phenomenology include background, co-construction, pre-understanding, and *Dasein*.

Heidegger concerned his research with being and the modes of being. Being, for Heidegger, is both temporal and historical and is concerned with the being in context. He identifies two kinds of being: (1) the occurrence of the being, and 2) the being-at-hand (p. 287). Being, according to Heidegger, consists of “existence, moods, concern, and ‘being toward death’” (p. 288). For Heidegger, meaning does not exist without the being and that only “human existence can be with or without meaning” (Spiegelberg, 1965, p.285). Humans are “in and of

the world” (p.285). Indeed he believes that the “forgetfulness of being” leads to the “decline and crisis of man’s history on this planet” (p.285).

Phenomenology is well suited to this study as well as to the concept of the true self. The necessity for a paradigm shift, as recommended by Thomas Kuhn (1970), opens up the concept of the self to other frameworks. This thesis is part of the on-going discussion of the self which “is beginning to embrace phenomenological principles” (Brookes, 1996, p. 345). Qualitative studies examining yoga practitioner’s lived experienced of yoga, as well as the experience of the true self presents gaps in the literature. Most of the qualitative work was not empirical or peer-reviewed articles, but opinion pieces in respectful yoga-based journals. I do not deny that more empirical literature exists, but only that I have not located it.

The existing literature focused mostly on Husserlian phenomenology and yoga (see chapter three). Less literature existed that examines yoga and concepts of the self using phenomenology as a framework. This thesis attempts to fill this gap in the literature. In addition, because of my belief that the world cannot be bracketed, the experience of the true self in context is better suited to the lived experience, thus this thesis does not use bracketing as a technique to uncover the essence of the true self. In support of this, Sinari (1965) identifies that the actual act of reflecting on a phenomenon explains the inability to bracket, since the reflective self still remains. For this reason, this study employs Heideggerian phenomenology to study the lived experience of the true self as described by yoga practitioners.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

3.1 Phenomenology and yoga

As well as theoretical framework, phenomenology is the methodology of this study. Phenomenology paved the way for fresh interpretations regarding human existence and consciousness. It has offered new insight into the fields of both psychology and psychiatry, such as human reality, the self and pathologies of the self (Jones, 2001; Spiegelberg, 1972). The self is a common topic in yoga philosophy and many studies employ phenomenology as a method to examine yoga. Edmund Husserl's methodology of phenomenology dominates this research related to yoga.

Yoga and phenomenology are similar in their understanding. They both involve uncovering the essence of an experience or mode of being. The similarity between Husserlian phenomenology and eastern philosophy lies within the connection between consciousness and the mind's intention towards an object (Sinari, 1965; Paranjpe & Hanson, 1988). Husserl (1962, p. 195) believed that the world fell into "brackets," making it "absolute" and "pure" (as cited in Sinari, 1965, p. 218). Husserl uses "radical reflection" to suspend the phenomenon in consciousness, allowing it to be "reconstructed and perceived fundamentally from the position of pure consciousness" (Sinari, 1965, p. 218). This reflecting reveals how consciousness relates to the phenomenon. Similar to yoga, phenomenology is concerned with study of the self. It examines the structure of things, or the "essences" of things acquired by the mind" (p. 217). Husserl's primary concern in phenomenology is to identify the difference between the essence of a phenomenon and the perception of the phenomenon.

The study of pure consciousness is known as transcendental phenomenology.

Transcendental phenomenology describes anything in reality other than consciousness. Husserl identified the “epistemological reduction” as the center of transcendental phenomenology. Epistemological reduction is the act of suspending the object out of consciousness in order to get at the fundamental essence of the object, in others words, separating the conscious mind, with all its constructed knowledge, from the phenomenon. Husserl believed that just like objects in the world, “being” only exists in consciousness and that “being derives its very meaning from consciousness” (Spiegelberg, 1965, p. 144). According to Husserl, it is through transcendental phenomenology that we can get at the lived experience, or life-world.

Bracketing is a method to remove the researcher’s subjective experience out of the phenomenon under study. While Husserl believed the world can be bracketed, “Husserl emphasizes reflection itself is never bracketed, for its relation to all other experiences is such that it goes on ceaselessly as the primary expression of pure consciousness or ego” (Sinari, 1965, p. 218). In suspending the phenomenon, a “certain reflective awareness would remain in function” (p. 218). Sinari (1965) examines whether the inability to bracket or rather the ‘unbracketability’ of the reflective self inhibits the ability to ‘transcend reflection,’ and whether transcending the reflection is similar to that what is strived for in a yoga practice, *Samadhi*.

Samadhi describes what happens when yoga practitioners reach pure consciousness. When a practitioner reaches *Samadhi*, that person is said to be “ego-less.” Letting go of the ego is clearing the mind, or to be without thought. This state of pure consciousness presents the difference between what the phenomenon actually is and what a person subjectively perceives it to be. Going inward to reach *Samadhi* is similar to going back to the phenomenon before the existence of meaning, or “to grasp the object in its bare existentiality” (Sinari, 1965). To reach

Samadhi is to be without thought, where the object presents itself as it actually is, without the interpretation of the mind. Sinari (1965) recognizes that this is not the point of yoga and, in fact, when *Samadhi* is reached, practitioners will desire to remain in their transformed state.

In phenomenology, the suspension of belief, or *epoche*, involves setting aside any preconceived notions of the phenomenon. Morley (2001) clarifies *epoche* as a suspension of “belief, doubt, or any kind of presupposition about the existence of the world tilts objects” (p. 74). Transcendental *epoche* takes an inward examination of the phenomenon to recognize any biases or subjectivities. Sinari (1965) argues that the while seemingly the same, *epoche* and transcendental *epoche* differ “not only of degree and intensity but also of perspective” (p. 220). *Epoche* is similar to the concept of *nirodha*, or the method to clear the mind. *Nirodha* is the goal of yoga and in Sanskrit means suppression (Patanjali, 1990, p. 180).

Husserl defined phenomenology as the “science of intentional consciousness” (Spiegelberg, 1972, p. 13). He identified the concept of ‘intentionality,’ which refers to the directed attention toward an object (Spiegelberg, 1965). He believes that intentionality is present during the examination of consciousness. Sinari (1965) describes this doctrine of intentionality as “‘directedness’ of consciousness.” For Husserl, this subjective intentionality forms the very “existence of the world.”

There are two forms of intentionality, immanent (outer) intentionality and transcendental (inner) intentionality (Sinari, 1965). Husserl uses the terms ‘transcendental subjectivity’ and ‘pure consciousness’ synonymously to denote transcendental intentionality. From transcendental intentionality came transcendental reduction, which states that *in reflecting*, no amount of *reflecting* will make clear that the world actually exists (Sinari, 1965). According to *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, yoga is the “restraint of the modifications of the mind-stuff” (Satchidananda,

1990, p. 3), meaning to stop thought. A yoga practitioner aims to clear the mind, and in doing so, generates a lucidity of the “different modalities of consciousness” (Sinari, 1965, p. 225).

A thorough literature review provides the similarities between phenomenology and yoga. The understanding involved in phenomenology parallels that of yoga. The above review not only shows Husserl’s way of knowing, but that research into the practice of yoga is similar to the methods used under the phenomenological framework and methodology. The article by Sinari (1965) demonstrates that bracketing the world is not possible, because the reflective self is always left behind, or is not bracketed. With the call by many for a paradigm shift (Kuhn, 1970), phenomenology can explore the “human experience and the human psyche” (Brookes, 1996, p. 345). Heideggerian phenomenology rejects the idea of ‘bracketing.’ Following Sinari’s (1965) argument that bracketing is not possible, this thesis employs Heideggerian phenomenology, which does not use bracketing a technique to uncover the essence of a phenomenon.

3.2 Research Questions and Research Design

This study explores the lived experience of yoga practitioners and their search for the true self. The following questions arose, as result of the gaps in the literature:

1. How does a yoga practitioner describe the concept of the true self?
2. How does a yoga practitioner describe the experience of the true self while engaged in a yoga practice?
3. How does a yoga practitioner describe the experience of the true self in everyday life?

While research is beginning to examine the lived experience of yoga and the search for the true self, there is currently less peer-reviewed qualitative literature related to yoga’s philosophy. According to Merriam (1998), “qualitative inquiry focuses on meaning in context”

(p. 1). It “helps us to understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible” (p. 5). Qualitative research is sensitive to the underlying meaning in the gathering of and interpreting data (Merriam, 1998, p. 1). This study does not examine the health benefits of yoga as an exercise, but rather focuses on the philosophical perspective of the true self. It deals with many aspects of the yoga practice, including mindfulness, meditation, and even certain metaphysical properties.

3.3 Sample Selection

For this qualitative study, I interviewed three participants. My participants are Caucasians between the ages 30 to 50. Two are male and one is female. They have all practiced yoga for at least four years and are currently dedicated to the style of Mysore, Ashtanga yoga. The extent and intensity of their yoga practices varied, but all are committed to a life-long practice to yoga. Their practice schedules include anywhere from two times to six times a week. The participants are both well-practiced and well-studied in yoga. The interviews took place in a city in the southeastern United States. Each participant has been assigned a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality.

The participants were purposively chosen. According to Merriam (1998), “purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 61). Purposeful sampling brought information-rich cases to this study (Patton, 2002, p. 230). Participants were chosen based upon Patton’s (2002) strategies to identify information-rich cases. Participants were chosen based on their ability to meet predetermined criterion (p. 238). Their commitment to a life-long practice to the study of yoga ensures a good understanding and a good description of the true self based upon their experiences.

3.4 Participants

John

John⁵ is a student of yoga and has developed a life-long practice. He grew up in the mid-west and was not exposed to any religion as a child. John is an artist, and his preferred medium is music. He works as a retail clerk for a local herbal pharmacy. His job requires him to counsel customers about herbal remedies to alleviate some dis-ease. He is well-educated in homeopathic remedies. He began Ashtanga yoga first as a restorative practice for a lower-back injury, incurred during a chiropractic session. He continued yoga to experience the “additional transformative benefits beyond the physical.”

He has been practicing Ashtanga yoga for over four years. He describes Ashtanga as having made “a very big impression on [him].” He explains that “the logic of it feels innate, does not feel conscious.” I chose to interview John because he has an experience of yoga different than from a teacher’s experience. His story provides a more complete description of the yogic idea of the true self, because besides how my participants search for their true self, I identified similarities and differences of the concept of the true self between the participants who teach and practice yoga to my other participant who practices yoga, but does not teach it.

Cori

Cori is a local yoga teacher. She has been a fitness instructor for over 25 years, but has been teaching yoga for eight. Cori’s family moved all over the United States. She was exposed to the Methodist and Presbyterian religions growing up. She is married with two children. She considers her family the most important aspect of her life. She practices mainly Ashtanga (Hatha) yoga, but teaches Power yoga and Pilates. (Power yoga is another form of Hatha yoga). Her career in fitness instruction led to her to discover yoga. In fact, her first experience with

⁵ All participant’s names are pseudonyms.

yoga was while becoming certified to teach. Her desire to become a teacher became apparent to me during our interview from how passionately she spoke about yoga. Her nature is soft yet strong. She claims that the “yearnings of [her] own heart” contributed to her development of a life-long yoga practice.

Among her many interests, Cori is an avid reader. She spoke philosophically during our interviews. Her knowledge of philosophy greatly contributes to her yoga practice and teaching. She ends each class with an inspirational quote from her current readings.

Tom

Tom considers his whole life a practice in yoga. He grew up in the southeast and was exposed to religion by attending church with his parents. He teaches Mysore, Ashtanga yoga for a living. He has been practicing yoga for over ten years and studied in both India and the United States. He became a teacher through his dedication to a daily practice and considers teaching a part of this practice. His current regime includes “waking up in the morning and chanting...or seated meditation.” After his morning meditation, Tom teaches yoga classes and since morning yoga classes often attract a high attendance, he is often required to teach as early as 6:30 am. His *asana* (posture) practice encourages clarity in his being that he carries throughout his day.

When discussing yoga, he commonly referred to another person’s practice rather than his own, like a teacher would. For example, he would say “your practice,” rather than “my practice.”

3.5 Data Collection Procedure

This study uses qualitative data collection methods. To gain entry into the field and collect data, I followed the procedures set forth by the Institutional Review Board. Upon approval, I began my data collection procedures. I received consent for participation from the interviewees upon the time of their interview (Appendix A). I conducted two, one hour

interviews with each participant, for a total of six interviews. The participants are all dedicated to the practice and study of yoga (See interview guide). Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was audio-taped. Assigned pseudonyms protect my participant's identification. Tapes were destroyed after completion of data analysis. The participants received twenty dollar gift certificates to a local restaurant of their choice for their participation in each interview.

Interview Guide

1. Tell me about your yoga practice.
 - a. How often do you practice?
 - b. How long have you practiced?
 - c. What type (style) of yoga do you practice?
 - d. How committed are you to your practice?
2. In your opinion, what is the value of practicing yoga?
 - a. Some texts claim yoga is thousands of years old, how do you think that contributes to the value of yoga?
 - b. In your yoga practice, tell me about your experience with the true self.
 - c. Tell me about the first time you experienced your true self, what was it like?
 - d. How would you describe this to someone who does not practice yoga?
 - e. How would you describe the physical experience of the true self?
 - f. How would you describe the spiritual experience of the true self?
3. Some people claim to feel connectedness to a higher being, can you tell me about a time when you had an experience like this.
4. How are spirituality and the true self related?
 - a. How is the true self related to a higher being?
5. How were you changed after finding your true self?
 - a. What changes occurred in your life after your experience of finding your true self?

Follow-up Interview Question

6. The last time we talked, we discussed changes in your life due to you finding your true self, can you tell more about this idea of the true self in your everyday life
 - a. How is your true self present in your home-life?
 - b. How is your true self present when you are carrying out daily activities in public?
 - c. How is your true self present in unpleasant situations?

3.6 Data Analysis

According to Merriam (1998), "the aim [of phenomenology] is to arrive at structural descriptions of an experience, the underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is

being experienced...How did the experience of the phenomenon come to be what it is?" (p. 159). I analyzed my data by choosing segments of my interviews which appeared the richest with data and identified what I believed to be the relevant text. Within this relevant text, I located repeating ideas that emerged from the data, which I then coded. From this segmented data, I grouped the repeating ideas into themes. These themes guided my understanding of the true self. I adapted my analysis approach from Auerback and Silverstein's (2003) method to data analysis. The constant comparative method provided an analysis method to identify patterns across participants. According to Merriam (1998), "the constant comparative method involves comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences...the overall objective of this analysis is to seek patterns in the data" (p. 18). I used the analysis of these themes to answer my three stated research questions, and to address my research purpose.

3.7 Reliability and Validity

Reliability describes whether the research gives consistent results, while validity refers to the accuracy of an instrument to measure what it intended to measure (Patton, 2002).

Quantitative research relies on standard instruments of measurement as methods to analyze data.

Qualitative research does not use standard instruments as measurement, but rather attempts to answer the why questions in research through interviews, observation, and document analysis.

Reliability and validity are still defined in the same way, but require different methods to lend credibility to the study. Getting entrée into the setting is the first step towards the validity of the data and involves more than receiving institutional review board approval. In the case of this thesis, entrée was fairly easy, as I practice the same style of yoga as my participants, and we are all students together. I respect all my participants and view them as my equal. I do not place

myself in a position of power, but rather consider them co-researchers in my analysis of the true self.

Triangulation, a method to validate findings, involves double-checking the analysis with a variety of sources with knowledge in the topic of interest. It strengthens the analysis by offering input and correction, if necessary, of the analysis from outside sources (Patton, 2002). I triangulated my sources by cross-comparing the themes of analysis from the interview with the definitive text in Ashtanga yoga, *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. A key informant, knowledgeable in yoga philosophy validated my section on philosophy and the accuracy of my analysis of *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. As a method of member-checking, I allowed my participants to review a summary of my analysis to ensure that I did not misrepresent them.

3.8 Subjectivity Statement

I began studying yoga when I was 21, an undergraduate in college. I chose to try yoga as a way decrease stress and depression. For the first four years of my practice, I attended classes led by a certified teacher and practiced lightly at home for about 30 minutes to an hour, two times a week. In the past year, I started Mysore, Ashtanga yoga. My practice schedule varies, but I practice two to four times a week. I hope to work up to a daily practice of both yoga *asanas* (posture) and *dhyana* (meditation), although I rarely practice *dhyana*. I noticed immediate changes when I began yoga in my physical and mental modes of being, including increased physical strength, decreased stress and depression, and an increased ability to handle anxiety-inducing events. Over the years, as my practiced has developed, yoga has helped my physical, physiological, mental and/or spiritual well-being.

My academic background is in psychology. Both my undergraduate degree and my current degree program operate under the theoretical framework, positivism. I feel inadequate,

yet, in my approach to integrate the phenomenological theory and methodology into my research. I hoped to provide a thick description of how my participants explain their lived experience of the self, as sculpted by their yoga practice. This research, however, makes no claims regarding the concept of the true self under other theoretical paradigms.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This study addressed three research questions regarding the concept of the true self within yoga philosophy. Similarities and differences appeared on the topic of the true self. The overall themes include the value of yoga, the body as a vehicle for the self, relationships, the self versus the true self, and transformation. The section provides examples from each participant for each research question in the appearance of cases (although this is not a case study). The discussion section of chapter 5 provides an overall summary of each research question.

How do yoga practitioners describe the concept of the true self?

John.

John describes the concept of the true self as “everything that we are as soon as we jump out into the world.” John identifies the physical experience of the self similar to a person’s physical expression, which he believes is inhibited by society. He believes his true self is repressed by society and social conditioning. However, his spiritual experience of the self “is a kind of rightness with everything, a kind of acceptance that [he] just felt it all along.” Through yoga, he explains that “then it’s become consciousness.” Just as he does not believe he could ever fully know his true self, he certainly does not believe he could ever know anyone else’s true self. Admittedly, he states, “the true self, for me, is definitely unresolved. I have not settled on something in life at all, I’m very unsettled and the yoga is that way too.” He believes his true self is unknown to him. However, this unknown does not deter John from the practice, if anything it encourages his practice, because of the “rightness” he experiences with it. He explains that yoga is “an invaluable counterbalance to the repression of loads of expression in a societal norm.”

John chooses Ashtanga because of all the body disciplines he has experienced, it “feels innate...does not feel conscious.” His true self is that connection to a higher power. He describes his connection to a higher power as “pure-life energy” and “that’s [his] philosophy of a higher power. It is very much the life-self.” He experiences a difficult time separating a higher power with social conditioning. He believes a person’s true self is caged in by social conditioning.

I just have such a hard time separating higher being, higher power from social conditioning....the things we are taught, monotheistic principles that are just the standard. My feeling about all that is so unconnected to the standard God-concept that I found the God-concept, the monotheistic God-concept to be incomprehensible.

John believes that people are sold the idea of a life they should be living and are conditioned from birth to a certain way of being. He believes the government along with the educational system and mass media are ‘breeding’ people to behave a certain way. He chooses not to be caged in, and so follows his own instinct and intelligence and “breaks out and beyond the conditioning.” He believes that “the only way that we can maintain a relationship with our true physical self is through an idea that we are free to try anything. We are free to express ourselves openly and that’s not really allowed by society.”

John believes that the concept of God is people “maintaining a small relationship to fairy tales.” For him, “God does not matter.” He refers to the monotheistic God as people “anthropomorphisizing...something much bigger.” He refers to his concept of God as the Spirit. He describes his feelings to a higher power as a feeling of groundedness, a “sort of utilitarianism feeling.” He experiences the spirit all the time through what he refers to as the “life-spirit of the world.” He does not believe that humans are the center of anything, but “just the loudest.”

John views the body as a vehicle for the self, metaphorically, as if the true self were the driver of the physical body. John describes this concept through his experience of the true self. He uses the terms true self and soul interchangeably.

Your body is the vehicle of your self. There is no way around it. I can't help but feel that we are, that we do, we move inside, our souls move inside the parameters of our body. It's a set of rules that have been stuck onto your soul. And vice-versa. Your soul puts a set of commands on your body. It's a lifelong discovery and relationship with your soul navigating through this world.

For John there is a dichotomy of self, there his body and there is his soul, or true self. His soul guides the direction his self goes in and the choices that he makes. He accesses this place to find answers to his questions and to connect with his will to accomplish a goal.

John believes that although the true self becomes "caged in by conditioning," perhaps it does change, or that it comes to a new place, where the old place is unrecognizable. In reference to his youth, he explains that he "barely recognize[s] the person [he] was back then, even though it was the same soul." This perhaps contradicts the humanistic idea that the self is never-changing, yet he refers to his soul as the same soul over time. He believes that his self changes, but that he maintains the same soul.

Cori.

Cori perceives the true self as that which connects us to the Source. She explains "your true self is being a part of or coming in contact with or touching that which is beyond us or greater than us or the sum of all of us." She believes that "the more deeply we touch ourselves, than that is the way we touch the Divine, and that is the way we know our true self." For Cori, discovering the true self is like going home, like "coming back to that place of being really present." Cori believes that "the greatest wisdom is within you." She explains "it's knowing yourself well enough, knowing your own ego well enough, knowing your own tendencies well enough." She learns to really listen to herself. The spiritual body resides in her true self and her true self resides in her spiritual body.

...the experience of the true self is always a spiritual one. We might experience it through the body, through the mind, or through the emotions sometimes, I mean, through those avenues. But I think it is a spiritual experience.

She does not believe that she knows her true self, but she recognizes the lessons in this, for example, she learns about her true self and how to connect with God. She finds that her true self is her connection to God.

I've met people who believe that we're one small piece of this great whole thing, but that there's not a separate being, and it could be that too. And I don't know that I've defined that within my own sense of knowing. And I've kinda come to a point that I'm really ok with not having to know even. I think it's fun to think about and it's a curiosity that we're drawn towards because it is such a mystery. But I'm ok with not knowing, and just knowing that I'm in some way a piece of something greater than myself... And in doing so, the more I learn about myself, my true self, not just what I appear to be at first. Then the more I come in contact with that mystery.

Cori believes that everything is connected and that the source of everything is infinite. She does not believe she fully knows herself, because the source is infinite, although, she learns lessons from everything she encounters, which she believes is like accumulating knowledge. The more lessons she learns the more knowledge she gains, and the more she learns about herself; this brings her closer to God.

Cori believes that God is in everything and in all of us. Truth is part of God. She believes that "the truth is that which never changes" and she uses every moment of the day as an opportunity to practice yoga and to find her own truth. Finding the truth within her being helps Cori become closer to knowing her self. She defines the true self as the spirit and that "the experiences of the true self...is always a spiritual one."

Cori's practice is about her search for the true self. She describes this experience as soul searching and "as finding that place that really opened your heart up." She uses God synonymously with the spirit, the soul, and the true self, although distinguishes between herself and her true self. The search for the true self for Cori is her search for God.

My personal practice is completely about finding the true within my self...the truth of my physical experience in this life...the truth of my mental experience in this life...and about the emotional reactions that I have to the mental experiences and the physical experiences.

The parts of her being that do change interact with one another and are affected by her connection with her true self. Cori has never questioned whether God or the concept of the true self exists,

I don't think I ever questioned that...there is a true self to you, or a soul or a spirit or something that's beyond just your mind or your body. I just never had a doubt about that.

She believes indeed that God does not change. However, she recognizes change within her states of being, for instance, the body, and the mind.

The spirit is that which doesn't change. Your body's gonna change, your mind's gonna change, you're emotions are gonna definitely change, they're extremely fickle. But you're spirit doesn't change. And so I think that's the true self, is the spirit.

She identifies a vague line that separates what parts of her being incur change, and what part does not. The self, then, appears to be the multiple selves and the combination of the mind and body, while the true self is the singular self. This singular self is where Cori connects to God. It is her spirit, it is the spirit, and it is the part that does not change. Her search for God is moving beyond the physical and the emotional, beyond thought and ego.

Cori operates under the assumption that people are the sum parts of something greater than themselves; however, she recognizes that this is not the only possibility and is open to other ideas. She may subscribe to one theory more strongly than another, but it is more important to her that she has a developed connection to God and her deepest self. She claims:

And my personal belief is that the word God is just a word and it's a name we give to him and there are many different paths but there is one truth. And I believe that nobody really knows. And so anything that I feel about it, is only how I feel about it because I don't know.

The definition of God is not important to her. She does not require a definition, because she has her experience and that is enough for her. She understands that language is limiting and that “people define words in different ways.” Her connection to God needs no words, and requires no thoughts. She believes “that God is in all of us.” She simply knows this is true. There is a clear philosophy to her yoga practice.

Tom.

Tom defines yoga as “union with the Godhead, union with the pure consciousness, the individual self being unified with the universal self.” Clarity and purity are the essence of the self. He defines the concept of the true self, as “the self is perfect. The self never changes. The self is always serene. The self is love, is happiness. It’s peace. It’s all that.” He believes that “the self is always present and it pervades everything. And its just perfect, clear, present awareness and pure love.” He explains that the self:

...can be individualized with a personality...the self is always connected to the universal self, or God, the undifferentiated self, the self with no boundaries, the self that can be everywhere...omni-present.

He uses terms the universal self and universal consciousness interchangeably with the true self and distinguishes between the individual self and the true self, whereas the individual self is the mind or the ego—the part that struggles. He uses terms like “individualized,” “obscure,” and “omni-present” to describe the true self.

He describes the spiritual experience of the true self as “spaciousness.” He explains, when you’re having the experience of the self, when you feel a close connection to the self, you feel spaciousness.” He explains the physical experience as a loss of body sensation and being present in the moment and a “greater depth to your awareness.” He connects with his true self when in these moments of being “connected with a deeper part of [him]self and life around

[him].” He describes this connection: “I was just really clear, I lost all consciousness in my body...I would experience time lapse...and I would forget the space of time....”

And so everyday you try to connect with that part of yourself, that isn't struggling with your experiences in life and what your life situation is, what your story is. Your self has nothing to do with any of that. It's free from all of that. And everyday you commit to trying to experience that.

For Tom, the true self is the connection to the universal self, and that this part of you is free from the ego and the associations. This self is unburdened, but just the part of us that makes us part of the Whole.

Tom experiences difficulty verbalizing his concept of the true self, not because he is not knowledgeable on the topic, but because his true self is more a feeling or an individualized experience and is difficult to put into words. He explains:

I'm just completely blank. And its not that I haven't experienced those things, its that what can you really say about it?...I've practiced yoga, the hardest thing has become for me to explain it, because I look at it in awe. It has so much depth. It's what I'm looking for.

The paradox, he believes, is that “when you perceive the true self, you'll realize that it cannot be summed up,” because the true self is “me, and it's everyone.” The concept of the true self is as abstract as the concept of God, which explains Tom's difficulty in verbalizing it. According to Tom, “the self is always connected to the universal self, or God, the undifferentiated self, the self with no boundaries, the self that can be everywhere, omni-present.” While the true self is what he is looking for, he realizes that he may never find it, as he may never comprehend its entirety. He believes that he is still searching for the true self, and that his yoga practice is “connecting with the self.”

Tom thinks of the body as the vehicle for the self. Yoga helps people get back into their bodies, or their vehicles. He explains that “we can imagine that the body is sort of the vehicle...or could

be used as a medium for enlightenment.” According to Tom, “we can use our experiences in this body to help us look deeper and beyond the body.” The body houses his true self and is the mechanism he uses to achieve enlightenment.

How do yoga practitioners describe the experience of the true self while engaged in a yoga practice?

John.

John has experienced connecting with a higher power during his yoga practice and describes this as a “feeling a kind of full surrender...a kind of removal of self.” He states: “the power of the life energy is the closest I can come to a concept of a higher and power,” which he once experienced in a certain pose (*Padmasana*⁶), of the Ashtanga practice. He experienced a “moment of feeling a kind full surrender...there’s a kind of removal of self.” He describes yoga as “unique to every person, everybody’s body is a different history, a different structure. John understands that a good way to approach yoga is through the physical and identifies the physical benefits to yoga, as “increased circulation, greater flexibility, and ease of motion, the ability to stand in a place for a lot longer comfortably, to sit somewhere longer comfortably.” However, he both recognizes and experiences the benefits of yoga beyond the physical. John’s reasons for practicing yoga are closely tied to his perceptions of the value and the benefits of his practice. Yoga, for him, “is an activation of so many different parts of personal potential.” Yoga acts as a motivator for him. With practice and instruction from a teacher, John believes that “the layers start to reveal themselves,” “i.e. a greater calm, a more powerful sense of breath, breath control and the use of breathing as a balancing agent for different situations in life.” The physical layers and more assist John in creating an ease to his life.

⁶ Padmasana is a pose in the closing sequence of the Ashtanga practice, see Scott (2000). According to Scott (2000) “Padmasana is the classic yoga position for meditation and, apart from their individual benefits, all the other yoga poses are designed to prepare your body to be comfortable in just this one” (p. 134).

Yoga practitioners use the energy from their core to move through their *asana* (posture) practice. John realizes that the movements in an *asana* practice actually start in the body's core, which is in the center of the abdomen. John experiences the physical benefits of yoga as "harmonizing the range of motion...awaken[ing] your body to where your movement is really coming from, i.e. the center of your abdomen." Practitioners do not rely on arm, shoulder or leg strength to assist them through their *asana* (posture) practice, but rather the energy from their core. For John, this strength in his core is "integral to poise and to being able to do anything with a greater sense of stability." While John does experience increased strength in other areas of the body is a result of an increased strength in the core, without the core energy, he recognizes that his body may not handle the physical demands of the Ashtanga practice and he might incur an injury or encourage a re-injury. This recognition is where the act of mindfulness becomes useful. Being mindful and paying attention to your body's needs means knowing where your body and mind's limitations exist.

While he has stayed on the same series of poses for around two years, he has experienced rehabilitating transformations during this time. He began practicing to heal a lower back injury from a chiropractic malpractice. In attempts to heal his back injury, he began practicing only the foundational poses (the sun salutations) of Ashtanga yoga. He describes this experience.

I think the most tangible, profound event was relating to a back injury that I had actually in the iliosacral joint, which is more of a hip injury....I had suffered for like ten or eleven months continuously with this injury and I mean it just makes you feel 80 years old....it's like an ice pick in your spinal column. And very disruptive to sense of strength and security of your own physical well-being....I wore this therapeutic belt for two and half months, twenty-four/seven...It was supposed to take 2 or 3 weeks, that's what the physical therapist was anticipating...And it was two and half months. I mean I had it on all the time, I would take it off during the day, check and see how I was doing...because when I had it on it gave pain relief.... I would check it every couple of days [makes motion like removing belt] "Uhhhhh! No. not." Then put the belt back on. Then finally one day I took it off and never got the ice pick.

This experience introduced John to the Ashtanga practice. His Ashtanga teacher convinced him to stay committed to the practice, even though he endured back pain. John practiced intelligently and mindfully, paying attention to his body, in order to avoid re-injury and worked through the pain during his rehabilitation. Connecting with his true self helps him practice mindfully on his injury.

John learned that yoga helped him ‘undo’ the physical trauma done to his body on account of his chiropractic injury, and this learning transformed his conscious state of being. He realized that he could ‘undo’ and relearn in any state of being. He recognizes the importance of staying in the moment and he believes that the method of discovering the breath brings him back to the present moment. Seemingly easy, for most practitioners staying in the present is the most difficult part of the practice and the constant cycle of fading in and out of the moment. John believes that the “discovery of the power of your breath” has a great effect “on your state of mind.” No matter what thoughts arise during a yoga practice, he believes that focusing on the breath can “change your conscious state.” For John, this change in conscious state refers to the recognition that he can choose to calm a rapid beating heart or stretch tense muscles just by “taking a big deep breath.” It is the choice that is important. Remaining in the present is a choice that he needs to make to every second. Coming back to the present is part of yoga and, for John, a valuable practice both on and off the yoga mat.

John expresses surprise as a result of the transformation he experienced. He compares it to accident victims who sometimes claim “that they cannot imagine where their life would have gone if they hadn’t had that experience.” As opposed to what he refers to as other “body disciplines,” like T’ai Chi, Ashtanga provides an opportunity for transformation. The physical transformations he experiences result from “a really nice mixture of a very personal effort

simultaneously in a room full of people all kind of surrendering themselves to *their* personal effort.”

Cori.

Cori uses yoga to get in touch with her true self, to listen to her deepest self. Although, Cori’s practice is not about postures and there is no difference between any of her “practices.” She considers her whole life her yoga practice in which she listens deep within herself to get in touch with her true self. She acknowledges the benefits of an asana (posture) practice and seated meditation, and often engages in walking meditation.

Her yoga practice is about connections, mainly her connection with the spirit. She uses all opportunities and challenges as “on [her] path to transformations, or...to greater spiritual awareness.” Her path entails viewing the good, the bad, and the in between as beautiful--and necessary. Metaphorically-speaking, she compares her path with the stages of a flower. People typically think of the bloom as the beautiful part of a flower, however, all the stages contribute to the overall health of the plant. She tries to see the beauty in all these stages. She states that “we see the blossoming as being beautiful. And I’m trying to move more in my life towards a place of seeing each of those processes, even they compost, as very beautiful.”

Cori views the body as the vehicle for the self, and is aware of the separation between her self and her body. She believes that “the body is the lesson in everything,” and that while “while we need to respect it and care for it as best we can, we need to use it. It was given to us to use.” The body houses the self, but as the body ages and dies, it ‘falls off’ the self. She believes the value of yoga comes partly from the physical benefits of the practice. She describes:

...you align the energies of your body...you’re a lot more open and spacious person....the more you align the energies and all the other aspects of your body or your being...your mind and your spirit and your emotions...are more accessible to you.

Listening to her deepest self buried beneath her thoughts strengthens her connection to God. She believes: “I think it enhances your whole being, your mind, body, soul, to move through this process of being in a human life.” Cori recognizes that if she wants to live a healthy and long life, she needs to care for her body before it dies and falls away. She does require the asana practice to consider herself still practicing yoga. She can connect with her true self through seated meditation, through walking meditation, or through any means she views as a valuable learning opportunity.

As an important lesson in practicing nonattachment, Cori understands that there is more to life than the physical body. An antecedent to practicing nonattachment, for Cori, is acceptance. She practices nonattachment to the body because of her realization that “you’re gonna have to accept it later on...you’re body’s just going to slough off and fall off of you, eventually.” Nonattachment for Cori does not mean neglecting the body. She values the body as a gift, but is not afraid to push her body to her limits in order to learn a lesson. While she views the body as a gift, she recognizes the detriment to attachment because life is fleeting. The body dies off. She assumes “it’s extremely purposeful that we’re in these bodies and I don’t think we’re supposed to escape them.” She believes that “we’re in the physical bodies for a reason...everything we experience in our physical bodies is to learn from, absolutely everything.” Not escaping them, for her, means proactively caring for her body. She describes yoga as a preventive method to care for her whole body in an organic way. She believes:

Yoga practice enables us to touch ourselves, to feel places in ourselves that we probably go through our whole lives without feeling, to open up ourselves, mentally, and emotionally, and physically, and strengthen ourselves mentally, emotionally, and physically.

She views the body as a gift and values taking good care of her body. She believes that the practice of yoga helps her. She believes that everything people experience affects their whole

body, including their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual selves. Practicing yoga prevents her from escaping her body and her self and keeps them both healthy. She practices staying in the moment and learns from these experiences.

Cori prefers movement and finds it difficult to remain still. For her, yoga is “meditation in motion,” and comes natural to her; “I like motion...I don’t particularly like sitting still, I’d rather move.” She explains: “physical things are easy for me to do. I enjoy them. They’ve always been fun to me. And I like doing that.” She explains the difficulty of keeping her mind still. She allots a time to practice her meditation, usually 15 to 20 minutes. Meditation is difficult for her without a prescribed time.

Because it’s so hard for me if there’s not prescribed time, then my mind will start thinking “has this been enough?”...I go into those mental places ‘cause it’s so hard to still m mind when my body is still.

The more she practices meditation, the easier it is for her to remain present while sitting. She explains: “most of the time if feels like not time at all, now because I enjoy it so much.” She defines meditation as both “being present” and “being quiet.” She explains it as “deeply, deeply listening. And so you’re aware, you hear what’s going on, but you’re also extremely quiet.” She views her best practices as those that offer opportunities “for transformation or for self-understanding.”

Although she learns from the discipline of developing a daily practice, she does not require a daily *asana* practice to nourish her body. If she could no longer engage in the physical practice of yoga, she explains “I’d feel like still that I was doing yoga practice in some way.”

I no longer think of yoga as the asanas only. And so, when somebody says do you do a yoga practice everyday, I absolutely do, but I don’t do asanas everyday. But everyday, I do soul searching in some way.

The asana practice is not the only the practice in yoga. Anything can be a practice in yoga. As a lesson in nonattachment, Cori focuses on the practice of seated meditation. Cori finds value in the difficulty she experiences with the seated meditation and views it as a lesson to be learned. She explains: “I’ve made a meditation sitting practice a party of my regime, because I feel like I need the discipline to be still.” Cori learns from her chosen discipline, but believes the truly difficult thing is to quiet the mind, “being quiet enough to really listen.” For her, quieting the mind is “both in the realm that you get your mental mind, your thinking mind out of the way enough that you can really hear from your deepest self. And so you’re not so much thinking as you’re listening.” She does not claim to still her mind completely while in meditation, but instead recognizes it as a constant practice.

Tom.

Tom identifies yoga as a method to connect to his true self and to connect his true self with the Self. He believes that yoga moves him closer to his self. He believes “the true self is part of a higher being.” Tom speaks of yoga as a grounding practice, and that many people “can’t feel [their] feet grounding into the earth as [they] walk around,” and being “unaware of their bodies.” He believes the more he meditates, the more often and the more deeply he connects with this part of himself. He claims: “When you sit enough, you sensitize yourself enough with those energies then those experiences are more available.” Yoga helps him “start to see clearly” what is going on in his body and mind during a practice.

You can get on that mat, you can be extremely emotional, whether its sad or angry, and through your practice you can clearly watch what’s going on and you can feel the sensations, and before you know it, you go right beyond on that.

Yoga brings him clarity, and allows him to express many other things, such as strength and awareness. To go beyond the sensation, Tom realizes he must let go of the thoughts in his head

or let go of engaging with these thoughts to remain present. Not engaging with his mind, or ego, brings him closer to his self and to God. He states “let all thoughts, all things that are going on in your lie clear out, and that, in a sense, is yoga, or is moving you closer to the self” (24). He explains that:

Yoga works to clarify our awareness, so we can have a deeper experience of life...lots of us walk around in this body and don't really feel it, cant really feel ourselves connecting with the earth...feeling really heavy and not really understanding the importance of being in this body....”

For Tom, practice is one of the most important aspects of yoga. Yoga, though, is not restricted to the asanas (postures), but includes meditation, relationships, and life. He explains that he is “100 percent committed” to his yoga practice. Yoga helps him on his journey towards enlightenment.

Tom believes the value of practicing Ashtanga yoga comes partly from its physical benefits. He describes asanas (poses) in yoga as “putting yourself, your body, into different environments that bring up different emotions.” He understands that “yoga poses affect a person on many, many different levels” and realizes that the *asana* “poses have secrets.” He believes that “we store our emotions, past experiences in our physical body” and that yoga helps him release these memories in his physical body when he “energetically work towards changing.”

And maybe you don't even know that you are releasing that, but eventually over time...when you don't manipulate yourself...and energetically work towards changing it. When you just do the practice and just pay attention, change just happens on its own, that's true deep change, 'cause then there'll eventually be no memory of that change. It's not contrived change...It almost seems like it wasn't ever you.

When these memories surface as a result of a yoga practice and from deep within his body, he chooses to release them for his body to make room for change and growth, to encourage change and growth for his body and mind. For him, the goal in yoga is observing what is happening in your mind. He believes the objective in yoga is to “just watch what's happening in your mind and also in your body with the sensations that come up,” and that yoga “gives you techniques to

focus your mind.” (9). For Tom, yoga is a tool or method “to control our life-force.” For example, Tom uses the power of the breath, or *pranayama*, as a way to control his life-force. Pranayama, he explains “is listening to your breath, but also taking very controlled, conscious breaths.”

When you can control your life-force, you can control where that energy goes in your body, whether it’s into your mind, to control your thoughts or to control your emotions, body sensations. You’re taking control of what controls your physical body, and your mind. It’s the power behind that. And so when you learn how to harness that, then you can do anything.

Learning to control his breath helps Tom learn to control his life-force. Remaining present and controlling his life force is his connection to his true self, which is beyond his mind, body, and ego.

Tom realizes struggles in life and in his mind. He does not have unrealistic ideas that life is easy and that simple deep breaths will cure his human suffering. He states that “a misconception in a lot of people is that yoga makes life easier.” While the lessons he learns on the yoga mat help him cope in life, he believes that “at the same time, it makes life harder.” Life, according to Tom, is meant to be unbalanced and that the experience of a constantly balanced life is “an illusion.” He explains that “part of the richness in life is the teetering” of balance. For Tom the “physical existence is meant to be unbalanced.” He recognizes struggles within his mind to maintain a committed yoga practice.

Tom identifies the dichotomy of the self versus the true self. He explains that people become addicted to sensation and recognizes this as identity with the ego. He believes that “our mind labels the sensations that make them what they are, and...how people can be addicted to being angry and to being sad,” which he summarizes as “addictions to feelings.” He states that “if you look deeper, you could notice how our life is...directed by the pursuit of sensation. He

believes his mind has the potential to sabotage his yoga practice. He uses the term mind synonymously with the ego. He describes his struggle with the practice.

I would wake up and maybe I felt a little sick and my mind would wanna say, “No, it’s not a good idea to practice, you don’t want to do that, just rest.” But then I would test that. And I would say, “oh I wonder what it would be like if I just went ahead and forced myself to practice, I wonder how I would feel?” And I would always felt better. And so I realized that the mind, when it has a chance and opportunity, it tries to sabotage your practice.

Tom recognizing when his ego gets in the way of his practice, but when he puts his ego aside he learns when it is truly better for his body and mind if does not practice, and when his mind his trying “to get out of” practicing. By not allowing his mind (ego) to sabotage his practice, he experiences the benefits of a daily practice, such as clarity and transformation.

How does a yoga practitioner describe the experience of the true self in everyday life?

John.

John believes that people want to experience peace beyond this world, peace within their bodies, and oneness with the spirit. He theorizes that yoga was developed both to balance the states of being and to promote awareness in being. This balance allows him to experience peace and oneness. He describes what he perceives to be the goal of yoga.

There was a goal to create a harmonizing activity, for people to focus on. Harmonizing oneself, becoming aware of one’s body, becoming aware of one’s relationship with the possibilities of the body and the body’s connection with emotions, thoughts, and larger trends of the state of well-being.

Yoga harmonizes John in himself and with the world. He explains: “I’m already feeling the spirit of the higher power, the life spirit of the world. I’m feeling it all the time.” This harmony keeps him aware and in higher states of being. His life is uncomplicated by material possessions, for he values knowledge and creativity as more important qualities to achieve.

Yoga helps John with his relationship to his will. Learning to question and challenge his will in his physical practice taught him how to question his will in other situations, such as “intellectual” and “interpersonal challenges.” John values the physical benefits to a yoga practice, but also yoga’s innate intelligence. Through yoga he finds the ability to challenge his will and to learn from these challenges.

Then beyond that physical things...discovering the relationship with your own will that is involved...you’re put right there with yourself deciding whether you’re going to accomplish what you know is possible or whether your will is just not there and you have to question your will and challenge your will...and suddenly you find that many of things in life you are able to just say yes to, to take on challenges, intellectual challenges, interpersonal challenges because you feel sort of an unconscious, a subconscious stability.

Beyond the physical, he finds stability and strength within his being when taking on his challenges. He knows his limits, which he first experienced his limits through the *asana* (posture) practice in yoga, and because he knows his limits, he also knows when to question and challenge these limits. The more he practices, the more he can take on the challenges. John states:

The physical effort necessary for Ashtanga’s series and cycles is challenging enough that you’re put right there with yourself deciding whether you’re going to accomplish what you know is possible or whether your will is just not there.

To avoid injury or re-injury, John recognizes his limits in his *asana* (postures) practice and which challenges to accept or reject. While engaged in *asana*, he is forced to recognize that in that moment he has the choice to continue through a pose or to stop. Stopping may be viewed as not following through a challenge. For example, John was only three weeks into learning the primary sequence before yoga “called up” this lower back injury, putting him in worse pain than when he first experienced the injury. The idea of practicing on his injury was, to him, unbelievable. He claims that “the only position that [he] could get [his] body into that was not in constant, piercing pain was the fetal position.” After the pain ceased, John experimented with the

Ashtanga philosophy of discipline, as taught by his teacher, that “you gotta work through these things that your body calls up.” He continued his practice, using yoga as rehabilitation to work through his pain, which eventually ceased. He believes yoga is the only organic way he could have rehabilitated from his injury, and he views any other way (i.e. surgically, pharmaceutically) as not an option.

John’s relationship with himself also includes challenging and questioning his life and the choices he makes. He views this relationship as significant to his practice. John describes himself as “profoundly dualistic,” and comprehends the life society expects him to live and the life he wants to live. He explains: “I contradict every thought with its opposite.” John speaks of his relationship to himself and his struggle of whether he is striving for enough based upon the traditional American ideals. He frequently challenges what he is actually doing versus what he feels society asks of him. He also questions his motivation with his career and whether or not he wants a family.

I contradict every thought with its opposite. It’s this ongoing weighing of things. And so in that, I have to observe what I end up choosing...I don’t know how it ended up this way, but certainly in this society that I have grown up in, the individual has to choose....You know an innate compulsion, a family duty, and at least not in my life. I feel like most Americans are all driving around alone, you know, just thinking that they are going to make that great life. Or they’re going to get that life that they see as the one and it involves making a family eventually for lots of them, but there’ still this, “all my life alone,” and then the things that you do to become a citizen, you know of America. I just haven’t had any of that really ever asked of me. So I have had a big, a big question mark hanging over my life as to whether I am supposed to strive for any of that stuff when my instincts don’t lean that way.

He experiences this same question with his yoga practice. John takes his time through the Ashtanga sequences, and learns the next posture only when he feels his body and mind are truly ready. He recognizes his choice to listen to wither his body or mind. His dualistic nature provides him with a feeling of “a constant push-pull between two poles.” This push-pull, the choice to

listen to his body or mind is present for John in his *asana* practice. He explains: “I’ve got this pattern that runs for an hour and fifteen minutes and that’s the allotted time in the space and I do it at a pace that feels like that’s thy way my body wants to.” However, rather than struggle, he prefers to move about his day with ease—“they natural flow of things.” His practice teaches him to maintain a rhythm to his day. Yoga allowed him to “[find] a whole other world open with relation to [his] daily rhythm, the rhythm of [his] moods.” For John, meditation is listening to his mind and not struggling with choices. He explains: “basically, it just made me happy.”

Learning about his *asana* practice teaches him about external challenges. If he can accomplish goals in the practice of postures, he realizes he can take on external challenges, like his music. John noticed this through his work with music and the new technology available to assist with his music composition.

Being more dutiful and responsible with sitting in front of that computer and learning how to run it, against all my philosophies built up, in all my beliefs and instincts about technology. Just going against that and saying, its just another tool. And that’s part of my true self too is that I don’t have a hard negation about anything.

He initially resisted the use of machines to make music, but recognizes the utility of yoga in helping him surrender to the things in life he resists, but views as valuable. He states: “I noticed my tolerance of kinda having to surrender to the pace of outside factors was easier to deal with.” He continues to say that he found himself “just not being as distracted.” For him, his true self is present in his everyday by his tendency to follow his natural inclination and to devote his full attention to composing music.

His general philosophy is not to “apply [his] will, but rather see what is really needed in a situation.” Rather than imposing his will on others, he reserves his will for his own musical endeavors.

There is what I spend most of my time on which is my personal work, my creative work, which is *all* my will. It is a completely solipsistic little world. I do a continuous 24-hour a day immersion exercise in just creative expression...It's been that way since I was three years old.

Ashtanga has helped John strengthen this process of challenging. He refers to his self as having the ability to transform over time, and that this transformed self could be viewed as a new self.

As the finer manifestations of yoga reveal themselves to you...You're given a new self and you find out where you stand with yourself, in certain ways...where you stand with your will...where you stand in relationship with asking something of yourself, sensing you need to do for yourself. And will you do that, even if it's difficult, or even if it is inconvenient?

The challenges put on his body as a result of yoga surprises John, but he appreciates the opportunity to accept these challenges and to learn and grow from them. He compares this to accident victims who sometimes claim "that they cannot imagine where their life would have gone if they hadn't had that experience." His transformations have occurred by pushing past the difficulty or inconveniences that arise in his every day life.

Cori.

Cori's practice is not about the *asanas* (postures), but about connections and relationships with others and to God. Cori believes that just as yoga is part of everything, people are part of everything. She considers everything she does part of her yoga practice. Cori enthusiastically provided stories about her relationship with herself, to her husband and children. Family is the most important thing to her, though she recognizes the relationship between happiness and nonattachment. She believes that we are in relationships with this whole world.

We're in a relationship with this whole world, but in any relationship, it's not all about you. And my meditation practice of sitting a certain period of time was at first all about me. What do I get out of it? And for [her husband] to want to sit with me, then I was ok with, we kinda compromised a little.

Cori recognizes that her relationships are not only about her. She believes in interactions that are truthful, honest, and caring. Her relationship to her self is important and she believes that her self is present in all her relationships. She experiences a sense of peace from yoga that she relates to as “a deep understanding within [her] self.” She notices the inter-connectedness between people that she believes is completely altruistic:

If I turn it towards other people and say, “let me show you how beautiful you are, let me show you what value, great values you have to me and to this world.” And in doing that, I bless myself in return.

Her yoga practice is about recognizing the blessings she receives from God. Like lessons, Cori looks for the blessings in everything and views blessings as another way to learn. She believes that she learns more from her failures than from her successes: “...usually by trial and error...so I learn, learn, learn, and then I didn’t learn as much when I succeeded, because everything went the way I wanted, and then I learn, learn, learn.” She learns to compromise for the others in her relationships. She believes there is a connection between people and that people’s reality is based upon perception and people are just “bouncing off each other’s perceptions of reality.” She finds lessons in her interactions with them, whether the lesson is compromise or blessings.

For Cori, judgment impedes learning. She practices non-judgment by viewing the interconnectedness of everything and believes judging something means requiring it to be something other than what it is. Rather than judge something, she prefers learning from it.

Any time you judge something, then you’re apart from it. And so, if I’m judging you, I’m sitting myself here and you’re there, and I’m saying “[researcher’s name] this, or [researcher’s name] that.” And they could all be very positive things, things we view as positive and good, but I’m still judging you. But when I just see you as a connection of all the beauty that’s in the world, then I see you more as part of me. You become someone to learn something from. And you enhance my life and hopefully I enhance yours.

These lessons of nonattachment and non-judgment result from Cori's relationship to herself and to everything else. She views these lessons as ways to increase her quality of life.

Nourishment, for her, occurs beyond food consumption, beyond for the physical body. For Cori, her mental, emotional, and spiritual self also require nourishment. She gets this nourishment from her relationships. She learns lessons from these relationships, which she believes assist her with her evolution through life. These lessons are valuable to her; therefore, she looks for the lesson in everything. For example, she consumes knowledge for enlightenment, surrounds herself with positive energies, and searches her soul for what she believes to be right. Her consumption of energy, and the lessons she learns are valuable because she learns about her self, the world, and God. She states:

You get an opportunity...to learn something about yourself and we usually learn more when we fail than when we succeed...we make a lot of the same mistakes, just differently, over and over...It's never a problem to do something wrong, but if you don't learn something from it, that's when it becomes a problem because if you take whatever you failed at or messed up or made the wrong choice about it and then you don't learn from it, you'll just go back and do it again.

Her yoga practice is composed of her lessons learned. Cori believes the lessons she learns are a positive and healthy practice for her whole body.

Cori's idea of practice extends far beyond the yoga mat. Cori believes yoga is everywhere and that she is practicing every moment. She admits that if she could never practice the *asanas* (posture) again, yoga would still be present in her life. She would instead focus on finding yoga in everything else. She claims, "I'd feel like still that I was doing yoga in some way."

All these practices of yoga apply to everything else in life, anything you do, you have to find to really enjoy it and do it well. You have to find a steadiness. You have to find a certain level of proficiency with it, of strength within it, of knowledge and awareness and that takes great practice. And then with that you find the ease.

She values that yoga is a practice, and that practice invalidates the idea of achieving perfection, which, to her, means there is nothing left to learn. Thus, she values the practice because she values the lesson. The ease she experiences after committing herself to anything is a valuable lesson in her yoga practice.

Cori believes that transformation occurs without seeking change and she believes “we will transform in some way whether we try to or not.” She does not like “the word growth so much as it implies that we have something that we have to be other than what we already are.”

The way we define growth is not being satisfied with where we are. We don’t want to sit in that place of complacency. We wanna keep transforming, but we will! I mean, we will transform in some way whether we try to or not.

Her transformation takes place not through self-growth, but learning to be where she is. While she is certain of transformation, she does not try for it. She believes in the utility of transformation, particularly in the positive. She states:

Should not our earnest efforts be towards positive transformation? Because positive transformation then will nurture me and if I’m nurtured, it will nurture everybody else that I’m in contact with and even people I don’t realize that I am. So, it’s...a selfishness of wanting to transform and move and we come, it’s really very altruistic.

Cori believes that her practice affects everyone, not just those she comes in contact with, but the world. Her output of energy from her practice in yoga affects the universe, just as an ocean wave creates a wind that eventually travels inland. Without yoga, Cori does not believe that she would be as healthy and open. Yet, this goes beyond the physical. Yoga assists her body in correctly functioning and flowing, keeping her healthy. She explains that “if our body or are mind is filled up with all these tensions, with all these rocks...then the process of transforming or growth...will be slowed down.”

Tom.

Yoga brings Tom clarity, focus and balance to his being throughout his daily activities. Without his daily practice, he experiences foginess to his being, and he “[carries] that foginess throughout [his] day.” He is speaking of the clarity a practitioner achieves through a daily practice. Tom realizes the benefits of yoga on much deeper level, for example “a deeper level of strength and energy.” He states that:

The value of practicing yoga...it’s the physical benefits, making you stronger and more balanced, and the awareness it gives you in your body. And deeper than that, what it does to your circulatory system, and your glandular system. Bringing all that into balance and it has that very clarifying effect to your consciousness. It sort of clears that slate on a daily basis....

He claims yoga helps him balance his emotions. He refers to this as clearing the slate. He explains further that “the objective isn’t necessarily to clear your mind, and empty it; it’s to let it move through the things it feels like it needs to move through and so it processes it.” While the texts claim the goal for yoga practitioners is to empty their minds, this is not actually possible, particularly in the west where people experience constant stimulation (through television, radio, etc). When in meditation and thoughts cross Tom’s mind, however, the goal is allow notice those thoughts and release them, rather than engage in them. He believes his practice affects everyone and not just those he is in direct contact with, but with the “universal consciousness.”

Tom believes that many changes occurred in his life as a result of being involved with yoga. He explains: “I continue to change. It’s always changing.” He explains that his being does change, both his self and his true self, but his connection to God remains the same, unchanged. When Tom realized true self existed, he began to be able “to trust the following of [his] heart a little more.”

He believes that he constantly changes as a result of his yoga practice, not just physically (which is not a concern of his), with his relationships. For him, life is a set of relationships.

The physical body becomes more flexible or healthy, that’s just a byproduct of yoga. I pay no concern to that. That comes as it will. Life is relationships, our relationships to ourselves, our relationships to our objects that we all possess...it’s profoundly changed my relationships. And it still profoundly changes my relationships.”

He believes “life is relationships.” He notices the change that occurred for him with his relationships as a result of committed yoga practice. Even though initially yoga transformed his physical body, the change in his interactions with others is more important for him. Tom refers to yoga as a journey, in which he moved from a destructive life to “a deeper experience of life.” Tom believes the “the journey never ends.”

Tom dedicates his life to yoga, and while he does not expect any tangible return, he recognizes the sacrifice in this. Tom teaches yoga for a living, which is an exchange for monetary gain. Any money received from teaching is so that he can afford his desired lifestyle. The motivation, though, behind teaching is to allow him to live yoga fully.

Tom reflects on the seemingly negative value of yoga. He explains.

And when you get deeply involved in yoga, it's such a challenge and you put so much of yourself into it, or at least I put 100% of my life into it. And then you realize...you coulda had all those things that people strive for, but instead, you put that energy somewhere else, that isn't necessarily tangible...sometimes after all that work, after all that effort, all that struggle, you don't have anything...

From an outsider's perspective, it appears that Tom does not have much. He puts all his effort into practicing yoga, the asanas, the pranayama, and meditation. But at the end of the day, it may only appear that he has a healthy body. He notices the potential struggle in this, and explains that “the depth of yoga is that it's hard, you can't really pin it down.” For Tom, yoga is more than the physical benefits; maintaining a healthy body and mind are important for a long, happy life.

Tom defines being present as not engaging in his thoughts. Although, the goal of yoga is stop your thoughts, there is impossibility with this task. Instead, he simply does not engage in his thoughts. Tom gives an example of being present in his daily life as someone being negative towards him.

If you were truly present in that moment, that person said something to you, you wouldn't flinch at all. You wouldn't even recognize it as an insult. If you recognize it, then you're trying to be what you think it's like to be present. When you're present, you don't know you're present, necessarily. You're just present. If there's an acknowledgement of you being present, then you're not present.

When negativity is directed towards him, he accepts his choice to either “identify with the small self, the conditioned, illusionary self” or the “more confident and secure...deeper Self, the Self with a capital S.” If he chooses the deeper Self, he believes he can redirect or move past any negativity, “those things just seem to pass right through you.” He explains:

The more I practice meditation and yoga, the more I'm the present, the more I am able to stay in that place of not worrying, knowing that everything is inherently perfect. You see it in Mother Nature. Everything just seems to fall right into place, even if it seems like there is disharmony, its still harmony.

By realizing his true self, he realized what his true self's qualities are, such as perfect in nature, clear, and honest. Realizing the true self “helps you become more confident in your actions, everyday actions, or interactions with people.” His connection with his true self helps him be present during his day. He describes disharmony as still being harmony, because the definition of disharmony is a lack of harmony, which still implies harmony.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the lived experience of yoga practitioners, and their search for the true self. The research questions guiding this study were: 1) How does a yoga practitioner describe the concept of the true self? 2) How does a yoga practitioner describe the experience of the true self while engaged in a yoga practice? 3) How does a yoga practitioner describe the experience of the true self in everyday life? The nature of this study is qualitative, thus I interviewed three yoga practitioners to describe the true self. I used Heideggerian phenomenology to examine the lived experience of the true self.

Discussion of Findings

How do yoga practitioners describe the concept of the true self?

The concept of the true self was most commonly referred to as the connection to God. The yoga practitioners in this study synonymously use the word God to mean the Self, the soul, the spirit, the universal consciousness, the Supreme, or the One, although there is clear distinction when the terms are used in context. For example, the yoga practitioners all expressed this dichotomy of their self versus the true self. They believe that yoga came about first as an experience, a realization of the union of the individual self to the universal self. Upon this realization, people sought out this experience and passed its knowledge on through the generations. Yoga is a method to access the true self's connection to the Self. The yoga practitioners in this study believe that they are constantly engaged in a yoga practice and that everything they do is yoga.

They all view the body as a vehicle for the Self. Their self is the body and the associations with the body, while their true self is their connection to God. They believe that the

self changes, but that they maintain the same soul. They all recognize that the body and mind change, but their true self stays the same. It's at their core. The yoga practitioners describe the Self as being omni-present, and anything that is love and positive. God is described as being present in everything and that everything is God. Our bodies serve solely as vehicles, as a gift from God, and deserve respect. The participants believe that the true self never changes, although the body ages over time, perhaps as a way to teach non-attachment to material possessions. According to yoga philosophy the body allows people to move about the physical plane, but it takes a dedicated practice to transcend into the spiritual realm.

One participant believes that the true self is repressed by society and social conditioning (John). Others refer to both the physical and the spiritual experience of the self as “a feeling of spaciousness” (Tom). The yoga practitioners describe yoga as “meditation in motion” (Cori). All of the yoga practitioners described certain struggles within their being that is individual to their yoga practice. Their yoga practice is about connecting with the self. They describe meditation as being able to be quiet enough to listen to their “deepest self.” Both Tom and John experienced difficulty attempting to describe the abstract concept of the true self, especially in regards to how the true self manifests within the physical body. They all indicate that the search for the true self is a life-long, potentially lives-long, endeavor and none of them believe they are settled in this search. In other words, they all believe they cannot yet know their true selves.

According to the dominant contemporary view of the self, the self is unitary, or stable, rational and never changing (although post-modernism refutes this theory) (Clarke & Dirkx, 2000). According to the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, the Self is “the eternal, never changing One” (Satchidananda, 1990, p. 164). Similarly, my participants identify the self as unitary, coherent, and stable, congruent with the modern view operating in society (Clarke & Dirkx, 2000).

According to *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, the true self exists beyond the body and thought (Satchidananda, 1990). According to my participants, the body and the mind change, but the true self remains the same, similar to Sheldon et al., (1997) that being true to the self “entails feeling authentic and self-expressive across different roles, as humanistic and phenomenological models suggest” (p. 1391). According to *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, yoga is letting go of the changes, the differences, and the ego by stopping the mind (Satchidananda, 1990). *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* deals with many aspects of a person’s life and offers a clear definition of the Self.

Connecting with the true self is finding that relationship between the self (i.e. your body, your life) and the universal self, that which is in everything. None of the practitioners believe that they know their true selves, or that they could ever know their true selves. Under constructionism, many truths and realities exist (Crotty, 1998), therefore, the yogic view of the true self is just one of the possible truths or realities out there.

How does a yoga practitioner describe the experience of the true self while engaged in a yoga practice?

The yoga practitioners describe the experience of the true self while engaged in a yoga practice as the will to continue through the practice, to remain present. They first identify the physical benefits when asked about the value of yoga and that *asanas* have “their own intelligence, their own secrets” (Cori). However, they all recognize that *asanas* are only one part of the practice, but yoga is also interactions, relationships, feelings, and mental processes. Their will plays a role in their yoga practice. Yoga acts as a motivator, a test in will, where they may question: “can I perform the next posture? Do I have the strength, the mental, emotional, and physical strength to continue this practice?” (John). Emotions and memories come up as a result of the physical practice, as an opportunity to learn, to clear the mind and connect with the breath

(Tom). They believe their practice affects everything, themselves, their relationships and the universal consciousness. Yoga brings them clarity and balances their emotions and states of being.

Yoga practitioners cease all thoughts while engaged in a yoga practice, which helps them transcend the physical realm and to connect with their true self. The second *Sutra* says *yogas citta vritti nirodhah* or “the restraint of modifications of the mind-stuff is yoga,” in other words, letting go of thoughts (Satchidananda, 1990, p. 3). Seemingly easy, the restraint from thought is actually the most difficult aspect of yoga. According to Satchidananda (1990), when those who practice yoga successfully still their mind, the true self becomes clear and known. All the participants indicated they attempted in this their yoga and mediation practices in some way. John actually refers to it as “discovering the relationship with his own will,” and allowing that struggle to come up and to be with it. Cori explains that yoga is “being quiet enough to really listen.” Tom describes clearing the mental slate and indicates the objective of yoga “is to just watch what’s happening in your mind and also in your body with the sensations that come up.”

While all the participants identified the physical health benefits as important to a committed yoga practice, none of them practice yoga specifically for this reason. Increased physical benefits of yoga are only the by-product of a yoga practice, while rather the search for the true self serves as the real purpose for a disciplined practice. Sinari (1965) explains the transformation from the physical benefits to beyond.

Yoga begins with the training of respiration (pranayama). Since respiration and consciousness have a very close relationship, a control on the former would produce the desirable channeling of the latter. The rhythms in the respiration and the states of consciousness can be made to loom together by practice. As the practice becomes more and more pointed and inner-directed, the activity of consciousness begins to attain an extraordinary lucidity, and a direct penetration through the experience-content is achieved (p. 225).

Part of the practice for the participants is learning to remain in the present. Meditation, pranayama (the breath), and *asana* (posture) are methods the practitioners use to focus their attention and remain present. Morley (2001) identifies the significance of a yoga practice similar to the participants.

Yoga not only affirms the existence of the external world, but employs the perceptual relation between the self and the world as the means of meditation practice. Control of the body is equated with the mastery of external world, and this control is achieved through focusing the senses” (p. 75).

The practitioners learn to control their inner world through the power of pranayama. In yoga practice, they get to this place of control while being present, which is described as “spaciousness,” losing sense of body and time, and being really quiet, and truly listening to their deepest self. This explanation is similar to Travis and Pearson’s (2000) findings describing practitioner’s experience of meditation as an absence of space, time or body-sense, and a feeling of ‘unbounded silence’ and peace with complete awareness, but without thought.

How does a yoga practitioner describe the experience of the true self in everyday life?

Yoga practitioners describe the experience of the true self in everyday life as the ability to remain present and maintain the connection to the Self in any situation. They use the same principles they apply on the mat, the will to get through a practice, the will to get through the day. Yoga provides lessons to everyday life, not just interactions with the world, but with their self and with their other relationships, and they find value in these lessons which teach them to push their limits on the mat and in life. All the participants recognize the importance of both meditation and postures in yoga, but they believe that the practice of yoga can be present in all daily activities, through the act of mindfulness.

Realizing that the self is “self as a perfect, good and pure in nature, clear, honesty, and simple,” helps yoga practitioners “become more confident in everyday actions or intentions with

people.” Yoga harmonizes the yoga practitioners with the world. This harmony keeps them aware and in higher states of being. Although they believe that *asanas* are not the only part of a practice, they still recognize that learning to accomplish certain postures teaches them to take on external challenges, such as a career or family. Each explained that they experienced certain transformations as a result of a yoga practice, such as the experience of “the path to greater spiritual awareness,” rehabilitation, harnessing control in any situation through the practice of pranayama, or by pushing past the difficulty or inconveniences that arise in every day life. The true self, according to the practitioners, is the connection to God. They all attempt to maintain that connection in the daily life, not only when engaged in a yoga practice. They view everything as connected.

The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali states that yoga is not a religion, but rather a science, and a philosophy (Satchidananda, 1990). According to *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, only through intense study and self-discipline can practitioners find their true self. The true self is found through both study and with practice. Theoretical and pedagogical concerns do not take the place of doing yoga (Morley, 2001). Similarly, Satchidananda (1990) interprets the first *Sutra* in *Sadhana Pada* as “the self cannot be known by theory alone” (p. 82). In Yoga, knowledge exists beyond the mind. To go beyond the mind is to understand the true self and the One. In order for our minds, limited through culture, to understand the unlimited, those on the search for the true self must transcend their minds.

5.2 Limitations

This study examined yoga and the true self with only three participants. For some, this may bring up questions of reliability and validity. I hope that my participant’s voices come through the analysis and provide its credibility by answering the how and why questions posed in

this qualitative study. Though the participant's in this study are valid in their thoughts of the true self, this research contributes to the body of knowledge that claims the self is never-changing, rational and stable. Other theoretical frameworks, such as post-modernism and feminist theory, refute this claim. While the framework of this study is phenomenology, the humanistic paradigm informs my participants, thus, the findings present the true self in a modern way. I expect criticism regarding my findings. On the other hand, if I am to present true qualitative research, I respect the views of my participants as both valid and reliable.

In the yogic philosophy “each human being is at core a soul (atman) that dwells eternally in the changeless, infinite, all-pervading transcendent reality of Brahman—the supreme essence from which all creation derives” (Cope, 1999, p. 41). Post-structuralism, on the other end of the spectrum, argues with this idea of a changeless self, this supreme essence. After the break, when the paradigms shifted and the post-theories emerged, the human being was no longer the individual, but rather the subject. St. Pierre (2000) believes that “if consciousness cannot create a unified, coherent self, then the unconscious certainly cannot” (p. 501). Under post-structuralism, people are produced by themselves, as well as their culture and practices and there is not this core or essential self that remains the same through the years. The desire of some philosophers to move past the post-modern view of the self conflicts with the knowledge generated from this study, thus presenting a limitation to this discussion of the self.

5.3 Implications

This study has both practical and theoretical implications. Clark and Dirx (2000) relate the concept of the self to educational pedagogy, and that a primary function of teaching is to boost self-esteem and self-concept. Practical implications could include the field of public health, particularly those using programs using yoga techniques to assist in some predetermined

construct, such as reducing stress. Clark and Dirx (2000) view the “development of self-awareness and self-understanding as critical to improving the ways in which practitioners interacted with and related to patients” (p. 103). How health professionals understand the self and self-concept shapes their interactions with their patients or community. This study has potential positive implications for the future of public health with programs intent on fostering a sense of self. Crain (2005) provides two ways to “nurture a firm sense of self: by encouraging independent problem-solving and creative projects” (p. 6). This study also contributes to the growing body of literature showing the positive benefits of a regular yoga practice, and provides a succinct explanation of a specific topic in yoga, the true self. The knowledge generated from this study may assist novice or seasoned yoga practitioners.

This study may also contribute to the theoretical literature on the self. This study, through the literature review alone, shows the positive impact yoga has on these modes of being, including physical, physiological, mental, and spiritual modes. While this study may contribute to the theoretical understanding of the self, it does so under the modern paradigm. My participants may never reject the post-modern concept of the true self; in fact, John refers to the self as ever-changing. Just as they believe they could ever fully know their true self, they may never deny the possibility of an unstable self.

5.4 Conclusions

This phenomenological study examined the lived experience of yoga practitioners, and their search for the true self. This study offers insights into the lives of Ashtanga practitioners and how they make sense of the concept of the true self. The practitioners offered a thick description of the true self, which was similar to the modern view of a coherent, stable, and unchanging self. While the concept of the self is itself debatable, the positive health benefits of a

yoga practice are irrefutable. The participants describe the concept of the true self in terms of positive affect or emotions, for example love, patience, clarity, and truth. Similarly, they described negative affect or emotions, such as hate, greed, anger, as not being components of the true self. All of the participants believe that yoga them connect to their true self. They all identify that they practice yoga to discover, or come closer to their true self, and they use their true self a connection to God. Although they can access places of their true self, this requires being present, which is almost impossible to maintain at all times. Therefore, they could not ever fully know their true self and they understand they may never find their true self. However, connecting to their self becomes easier through a committed yoga and meditation practice. The participant's yoga practice brings them closer to their true self and to God.

Appendix A

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I, _____, agree to take part in a research study titled ‘The Study of Yoga, its health benefits and the search for the true self’, which is being conducted by Colleen M. McCoy from the Department of Health Promotion and Behavior at the University of Georgia (706-224-1175), under the direction of Su-I Hou, DrPH, in the Department of Health Promotion and Behavior at 706-542-8206. I understand that my participation is voluntary; I can stop taking part at any time without giving any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have information related to me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The purpose of this study is to understand the yogic philosophy of the true self and how yoga practitioners define the true self in everyday life.

If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:

1. Participate in a one-hour tape-recorded interview.
2. Answer questions regarding my yoga practice, my spirituality, and my understanding of the true self.
3. Participate in a subsequent tape-recorded one hour interview.

I will not benefit directly from this research. No discomfort or stresses are expected. No risks are expected.

No information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others without my written permission, except if it is necessary to protect my welfare (for example, if I were injured and need physician care) or if required by law. I will be assigned a pseudonym, which will be used on any identifying forms, including transcripts and on tape. Tapes will be destroyed following completion of transcription.

The investigator will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project (706-224-1175).

My signature below indicates that the researchers have answered all of my questions to my satisfaction and that I consent to volunteer for this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Researcher
Telephone: _____
Email: _____

Signature

Date

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Appendix B

Pre-Interview Survey

Name	
Age	
Occupation	
Sex	
Race	
Where did you first learn to do yoga	
Where did you receive yoga teacher training (if applicable)	

1. Where did you grow up?
2. What exposure did you have to religion growing up?
3. How long have you been practicing yoga?
4. How did you become a teacher?

5. What experiences contributed to your desire to develop a life-long yoga practice?

References

- Auerbach, C. F. & Silverstein, L. B. (2003). *Qualitative Data: An introduction to coding and analysis*. New York: New York University Press.
- Barnes, V. A., Treiber, F. A., & Johnson, M. H. (2004). Impact of transcendental meditation on ambulatory blood pressure in African-American adolescents. *American Journal of Hypertension, 17*, 366-369.
- Center for Mindfulness (CFM). (2005). *Mindfulness based stress reduction program*. Retrieved on November 30, 2005 from, www.mbsr.org.
- Chaline, E. (2001). *Simple path to yoga*. London: MQ Publications Limited.
- Clark, M. C. & Dirkx, J. M. (2000). Moving beyond a unitary self: A reflective dialogue. In A. L. Wilson & E. R. Hayes (eds.), *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education*. (pp. 101-116). San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Cohen, L., Warneke, C., Fouladi, R.T., Rodriguez, M. A., & Chaoul-Reich, A., (2003). Psychological adjustment and sleep quality in a randomized trial of the effects of a Tibetan yoga intervention in patients with lymphoma. *Cancer, 10*(10). 2253-2260.
- Coker, K. H. (1999). Meditation and prostate cancer: Integrating a mind/body intervention with traditional therapies. *Seminars in Urology Oncology, 17*, 111-118.
- Crain, W. (2005). True self. *Encounter: Education for Meaning and Social Justice, 18*(4), 1-6.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. London: Sage Publications.
- Davidson, R. J., Kabat-Zinn, J., Schumacher, J., Rosenkranz, M., Muller, D., Santorelli, S. F., Urbanowski, F., Harrington, A., Bonus, K., & Sheridan, J. F. (2003). Alterations in brain and immune function produced by mindfulness meditation. *Psychosomatic Medicine, 65*, 564-570.
- Dunn, B. R., Hartigan, J. A., & Mikulas, W. L. (1999). Concentration and mindfulness meditations: Unique forms of consciousness. *Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback, 24*(3), 147-165.
- Edmund Husserl. (2006). The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Retrieved August 24, 2006 from, www.iep.utm.edu/h/Husserl.htm#H1.
- Elson, B. D., Hauri, P., & Cunis, D. (1977). Physiological changes in yoga meditation. *Psychophysiology, 14*, 52-57.

- Garva, G. (2006). A clarification of Heidegger's phenomenology. *American Psychologist*, 61(3), 255-256.
- Ghoncheh, S., & Smith, (2004). Progressive muscle relaxation, yoga stretching, and ABC relaxation theory. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 60(1), 131-136.
- Gillani, N. B., & Smith, J. C. (2001). Zen meditation and ABC relaxation theory: An exploration of relaxation states, beliefs, dispositions, and motivations. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 57(6), 839-846.
- Harinath, K., Malhotra, A. S., Pal, K., Prasad, R., Kumar, R., Kain, T. C., Rai, L & Sawhney, R. C. (2004). Effects of hatha yoga and omkar meditation on cardiorespiratory performance, psychologic profile, and melatonin secretion. *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, 10(2), 261-268.
- Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being in Time*. Translated by John Macquarie & Edward Robinson. Harper & Rowe.
- Horrigan, B. (2004). Conversations: Richard Freeman on yoga as a path to physical and spiritual health. *Alternative Therapies*, 10(2), 65-72.
- Husserl, E. (1962). *Ideas*. New York: Collier Books.
- Jobst, K. A. (1998). So what if there is no immediate explanation? *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, 4(4), 355-357.
- Jones, A. (2001). Absurdity and being-in-itself. The third phase of phenomenology: Jean-Paul Sartre and existential psychoanalysis. *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing*, 8, 367-372.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003a). Mindful yoga. *Share Guide*, 22.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003b). Mindfulness-based interventions in context: Past, present, and future. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 10(2), 144-156.
- Kuhn T. (1970). *The structure of scientific revolutions*. (3rd eds). The University of Chicago Press.
- Lo, P. C., Huang, M.L. & Chang, K. M. (2003). EEG alpha blocking correlated with perception of inner light during zen meditation. *The American Journal of Chinese Medicine*, 31(4), 629-642.
- Luskin, F. (2004). Transformative practices for integrating mind-body-spirit. *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, 10(1), S-15-S-23.

- Martin Heidegger. (2006). The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Retrieved August 24, 2006 from, www.iep.utm.edu/h/heidegge.htm.
- Matsumoto, M., & Smith, J. C. (2001). Progressive muscle relaxation, breathing exercises, and ABC relaxation theory. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 57*(12), 1551-1557.
- Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study application in education*. San Francisco, CA. Sage Publications.
- Morley, J. (2001). Inspiration and expiration: yoga practice through Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body. *Philosophy East & West, 51*(1), 73-82.
- Nayar, H. S. (1981). Study of some physiological and biochemical parameters in subjects undergoing yogic training. *Indian Journal of Medical Research, 74*, 120-124.
- Niedermeyer, E. & Lopes da Silva, F. (1999). *Electroencephalography: Basic principles, clinical applications, and related fields*, 4th ed. USA: Williams & Wilkins.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage Publications.
- Peng, C. K., Henry, I. C., Mietus, J. E., Hausdorff, J. M., Khalsa, G., Benson, H. & Goldberger, A. L. (2004). Heart rate dynamics during three forms of meditation. *International Journal of Cardiology, 95*, 19-27.
- Robinson, F. P., Mathews, H. L., & Witek-Janusek, L. (2003). Psycho-endocrine-immune response to mindfulness-based stress reduction in individuals infected with the human immunodeficiency virus: A quasiexperimental study. *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine, 9*(5), 683-694.
- Saladin, K. (2004). *Anatomy & physiology: The unity of form and function* (3rd ed.). McGraw Hill.
- Satchidananda, S. (1990) *The yoga sutras of Patanjali*. Yogaville, VA. Integral Yoga Publications.
- Schell, F. J., Allolio, B. & Schonecke, O. W. (1994). Physiological and psychological effects of Hatha yoga exercise in healthy women. *International Journal of Psychosomatics, 41*(1-4), 46-52.
- Scott, J. (2000). *Ashtanga yoga: The definitive step-by-step guide to dynamic yoga*. New York: Three Rivers Press.
- Selvamurthy, W., Nayar, H. S., Joseph, N. T. & Joseph, S. (1983). Physiological effects of yogic practices. *National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences of India Journal, 1*(1), 71-79.

- Sheldon, K.M., Ryan, R.M., Rawsthorne, L.J., & Hardi, B. (1997). Trait self and true self: Cross-role variation in the big-five personality traits and its relations with psychological authenticity and subjective well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 73(6), 1380-1393.
- Sinari, R. (1965). The method of phenomenological reduction and yoga. *Philosophy East & West*, 15(34), 217-228.
- Smith, J. C. (1999a). *ABC relaxation training: An evidence-based approach*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Smith, J. C. (1999b). *ABC relaxation training: A practical guide for health professionals*: New York, NY: Springer.
- Solberg, E. E., Holen, A., Ekeberg, O., Osterud, B., Halvorsen, R. & Sandvik, L. (2004). The effects of long meditation on plasma melatonin and blood serotonin. *Med Sci Monit*, 10(3), CR96-101.
- Sparrowe, L. (2002). *The woman's book of yoga & health*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc.
- Spiegelberg, H. (1965). *The phenomenological movement: A historical introduction*. (2nd ed). The Hague
- Spiegelberg, H. (1972). *Phenomenology in psychology and psychiatry; a historical introduction*. Northwestern University Press.
- St. Pierre, E.A. (2000). Post-structural feminism in education: An overview. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 13(5), 477-515.
- Tacon, A. M., McComb, J., Caldera Y., & Randolph, P. (2003). Mindfulness meditation, anxiety reduction, and heart disease. A pilot study. *Family & Community Health*, 26(1), 25-33.
- Travis, F. & Pearson, C. (2000). Pure consciousness: Distinct phenomenological and physiological correlates of 'consciousness itself.' *Internal Journal of Neuroscience*, 100, 77-89.
- Travis, F. (2001). Autonomic and EEG patterns distinguish transcending from other experiences during transcendental meditation practice. *International Journal of Psychophysiology*, 42, 1-9.
- Travis, F., Arenander, A., & DuBois, D. (2004). Psychological and physiological characteristics of a proposed object-referral/self-referral continuum of self-awareness. *Consciousness and Cognition*, 13, 401-420.

- Waelde, L. C., Thompson, L., and Gallagher-Thompson, D. G. (2004). A pilot study of a yoga and meditation intervention for dementia caregiver stress. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 60*(6), 677-687.
- West, M. A. (1980). Meditation and the EEG. *Psychology Medicine, 10*, 369-375.
- Yu, T., Tsai, H. L. & Hwang, M. L. (2003). Suppressing tumor progression of *in vitro* prostate cancer cells by emitted psychosomatic power through zen meditation. *The American Journal of Chinese Medicine, 31*(3), 499-507.