# RESEARCH PROJECT

**What does a committed practitioner of yoga bring to their profession as a practicing psychotherapist?**

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## Declaration

This thesis is the original work of the author, and to the best of my knowledge, contains no material published or written by another person, except where referenced in the thesis.

Ethical approval for this thesis was granted in October 2014

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## Dedication

*To my father, whose influence, I am proud to say, remains alive in me.*

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to discover what impact yoga has on the practicing psychotherapist, the reasons for committing to yoga practice and how it influences their work as a psychotherapist. It explores the meaning that yoga has on their lives, personally and professionally. Using semi-structured interviews, the study collected data from four registered and experienced therapists who had committed themselves to yoga practice for a number of years, at the same time working as psychotherapists. A descriptive phenomenological approach has been used to collect and examine the data and report on the experience of the psychotherapists.

This study is viewed from an existential perspective with relevant references included in the discussion in support of this perspective. The study found a significant lack of literature specifically accounting for a psychotherapist's experience in the context of being a committed practitioner of yoga. The results of the study indicate that the practitioners reported no concerns or difficulties arising out of their yoga practice in relation to influencing their practice as a psychotherapist. The study concludes that yoga practice has a profound impact on the participants, personally and professionally. The philosophy and practice of yoga enabled a deeper sense of awareness, with themselves and in the encounter with their clients. This way of being was constituted by a number of factors reported by them as being conscious of

something bigger than their sense of self, being more deeply embodied, and having a greater sense of authenticity and relatedness in their personal lives and professional work as psychotherapists.

Whilst yoga has been widely acknowledged to being beneficial to an individual, it remains under researched in its potential to contribute to the therapists' own development and the delivery of psychotherapy.

**Key terms/words:** psychotherapy and yoga, yoga psychotherapist, existential psychotherapy.

## INTRODUCTION

As a practitioner of yoga and psychotherapy, I took for granted what each discipline meant in their separateness. I had developed fleeting assumptions about how a person with these two interests manifested in their professions as psychotherapists, but I was never certain, similar to what Emmy van Deurzen (2010) says, "we get drawn into particular ways of thinking about things and about the meanings they automatically suggest" (2010, p.38). From this position, I decided to pursue this question more precisely and explore 'what' a committed practitioner of Yoga brought to their profession as a psychotherapist, and 'how' this manifested in their lived experiences. Exploring the relationship between 'what' and 'how' is described by Langdridge (2007) as the *Noema* and the *Noesis* respectively, which forms the existential phenomenological approach. Langdridge says that this "…serves to emphasize the way in which that which is experienced is always experienced in a particular way" (2007, p. 15).

Whilst Yoga is widely known to promote physical health (Kirk, Boon & DiTuro, 2006), psychotherapy and yoga are known to share similar health promoting aims that create cognitive, behavioural and emotional change (Rama, Balentine & Ajaya, 1976; Shankarananda, 2004 & Vivekananda, 2005). Psychotherapy and yoga have distinct frameworks with distinct origins, yet there is enough anecdotal evidence to say that many therapists including psychotherapists are committed to yoga as a personal practice. Some have even called themselves Yoga Psychotherapists (Kocian, 2012).

There is a substantial amount of literature about the benefits of yoga from a physical, psychological, medical and spiritual perspective (Farhi, 2000; Iyengar, 2001; Kaminoff, 2007; Mohan and Mohan, 2004; Saraswati, 1993; Vivekanada, 2005). However, there is limited research that describes what the psychotherapist takes from their yoga practice that specifically informs or contributes to the way they work as a psychotherapist, or how this may impact their work in the therapeutic relationship.

This study was borne out of the above considerations and my own passion in yoga and psychotherapy. Like me, there may be therapists that have a tacit understanding of the influence that yoga has on them and their work as psychotherapists, or they may be curious about the meaning formulated from a descriptive study like this.

In following the descriptive phenomenological framework, the scope of this study does not allow for a critical analysis of the findings. However, from discovering important categories of meaning and the thematic relationships shaping this phenomenon, the reader will get to know more about the

essence of the practitioners' experience and the influence this has on their delivery of therapy. These findings provide specific fields of interest for further research that could influence practice, theory and potentially policy, which will benefit other therapists in similar situations or those who may have similar questions.

## DEFINITIONS

### Definition of Psychotherapy

Essentially, psychotherapy is a talking therapy with a multitude of ways in understanding what it means. This is borne out by Corey (2005) saying, "The field of psychotherapy is characterized by a diverse range of specialized models" (2005, p. 463).

The Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia (PACFA) explain that, "Psychotherapy and counselling are professional activities that utilize an interpersonal relationship to enable people to develop self-understanding and to make changes in their lives." PACFA differentiates Counselling and Psychotherapy to say that "counselling is more likely to be on specific problems, changes in life adjustments and fostering clients' well-being", whereas, "Psychotherapy is more concerned with the restructuring of the personality or self and the development of insight" (PACFA, 2013).

## Definition of Yoga

Yoga is known to be a philosophy from India that forms part of the Vedas (meaning wisdom or knowledge), which is an ancient body of four texts from which Hinduism and Buddhism also emerged (Kirk et al., 2006). Iyengar (2001) tells us that yoga is an ancient and extremely subtle scientific practice that unities the mind, body and spirit and a commitment to this practice leads to being at one with the environment. Mehta (2002) states yoga is a "…philosophy, a science and an art", and "…in its purest form, is a complete system capable of answering all of human needs" (2002, p. 8). For Mohan and Mohan (2004), yoga represents a "…comprehensive and integrated working model to address all aspects of our health and well-being, both for maintaining health and for resolving conditions of ill health" (2004, p. 3). Another definition is that, "Yoga is simply a conscious and systematic process for the complete physical, mental, intellectual, emotional and spiritual development of a human being" (Pruthi - in Foreword, by Nagendra & Nagarathana, 2000, p. v).

The Indian sage, Patanjali, is known to have provided the eight steps of yoga, also called the 'eight limbs' of yoga (Kirk et al., 2006) ). These eight steps are literally aphorisms and sequential steps towards higher levels of personal transcendence (Iyengar, 2001). The eight steps are as follows: *yamas (*general ethical principles*), niyamas (*self-restraint/moral code of conduct), *asana* (physical postures), *pranayama* (breath awareness and breath control), *pratyahara* (detachment and withdrawal from the senses and sensory objects), *dharana* (one pointed concentration), *dhyana* (prolonged

concentration) that leads *Samadhi* (one loses the sense of self, the dual nature that we began with, and blends into one's being – existence), also called the soul (Iyengar, 2001).

This study draws on the definition of yoga as it is understood in its classical forms and promulgated from that Indian perspective. This involves a study of yogic texts and it's applications to one's lifestyle, which goes beyond the third step, the physical aspect (asana), which in the West, has been the type of yoga frequently practiced and offered, as seen in gymnasiums, for example. R. Vivekananda (2005) explains that some forms of aerobic exercises seen today include many yoga postures, or many just attend yoga classes that are simply physical stretches. He states, "…it's not what they call it that's important; it's what they are actually doing that tells us whether it is yoga or not" (2005, p.9). Accordingly, the definition of yoga as understood in this classical Eastern perspective has been applied to this study, unless it is explicitly stated or described as being of another type.

**Definition of a Committed Practitioner of Yoga**

A literature search provided no concise definition of what this meant with respect to the length of time required for a person to be seen as being committed to their practice. However Bryant (2009), a scholar on the Yoga Sutras, views commitment when, "Practice becomes firmly established when it has been cultivated uninterruptedly and with devotion over a prolonged period of time ('yoga sutra 1.13', 2009, p. 479). There is no end in sight for this commitment, as Iyengar (1966) informs us that, "The study of yoga is not

like work for a diploma or a university degree by someone desiring favourable results in a stipulated time" (1966, p. 28), instead, he explains that success is achieved in "…constant practice…it is a spiritual endeavor" (1966, p.30). Yehudi Menuhin's foreword, in B.K. Iyengar's 'Light on Yoga' (1966) seems to have an imbedded inference to one strengthening ones mental characteristics, by simply returning to the practice daily, using the body as the instrument, he indicates that with "…unflagging patience we refine and animate every cell as we return daily to the attack, unlocking and liberating capacities otherwise condemned to frustration and death" (1966, p. 11). Over the years this commitment leads a practitioner, and generally under the ongoing tutorage of a yoga teacher/adept, to develop their own *sadhana.* This is a Sanskrit term that Paramahamsa Hariharananda (2006) describes as being a "spiritual practice" (2006, p. 256). Thus, commitment to yoga can be understood as being a personal journey that involves learning, studying and training (Styles, 2000) in its philosophy and practice, for an indefinite and ongoing duration. It was in the vein of Kevin Aho's (2014) description of commitment, as being "…already bound up in the structured and unified weave of body, consciousness, and world" (2014, p. 41), that I wondered what personal factors a practicing psychotherapist who was also a committed yoga practitioner, brought to their therapy sessions.

## Definition of Existential Psychotherapy

Mick Cooper (2003) highlights that defining existential therapy has been a difficult proposition for him. He explains that existential therapy is a "…rich

tapestry of intersecting therapeutic practices, all of which orientate themselves around a shared concern: human lived existence" (2003, p.1). This declaration from Cooper confirmed my own struggle in trying to define existential psychotherapy.

Emmy van Deurzen (2009) states, "What we now call psychotherapy was originally called philosophy…" (2009, p. 146). Existentialism grew from the contributions made by the philosophical influences of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger and Sartre (van Deurzen, 2010). Drawing on the works of (Cohn, 1997; Cooper, 2003; Spinelli, 2005; van Deurzen and Arnold-Baker, 2005), Spinelli (2007) suggests that unlike other psychotherapies that have implied or covert philosophical underpinnings, existential psychotherapy is explicit in its fundamental philosophical formulations and is also known as "existential phenomenology" (2007, p.1). Additionally, Spinelli (2007) explains that it is this difference in the philosophical suppositions that sets existential psychotherapy apart from other contemporary psychotherapies. Exploring how a person exists in the world (see Spinelli's 'relatedness', 2007) and the meaning he/she derives in this way of existing can be seen as an existential way of approaching therapy. To gain some coherence about existential thinking, the reader is encouraged to refer to Mick Cooper's book 'Existential Therapies' (2003, p.7), where he presents a simple comparison of the various existential philosophers who have contributed to this way of 'doing' therapy and understanding the human condition.

Like van Deurzen (2010), Tantam (2014) states, "Existential psychotherapy originates in philosophy, and in particular in the philosophy of being" (2014, p.

127). Using Heidegger's concept of 'being-there' or 'being-in-the-world', Cohn (2002) explains this concept to mean, "the center for an understanding of human being is no longer placed within individual consciousness but in a wider context of which we are a part" (2002, p. 104). Yalom (1980) defines existential psychotherapy as operating in the four ultimate concerns of life, which he calls, 'death, freedom, existential isolation and meaninglessness'. Van Deurzen (2009) describes existential psychotherapy as working in a person's rich matrix of their world views that can be located in the four 'dimensions of existence' *(physical, social, personal and spiritual)* (2009, p.84).

Described in this way, the reader will get to appreciate that existential psychotherapy remains a deep and thorough human endeavor where, as van Deurzen and Martin Adams (2011) indicate, a person's predicament and distress is understood and placed against a "…wider background of human living, and not purely as personal or intra-psychic issues" (2011, p. 144).

## LITERATURE SEARCH

### Method of Literature Search

The method by which literature has been searched and included in this study is as follows:

*Searches by internet links:* LMA/LA – William Hannon Library, PubMed, Google Scholar, American Psychological Association, Australian Psychological Society, Springer Link.

*Search terms used*: yoga and psychotherapy, yoga psychotherapist, psychotherapy and yoga, yoga practitioner and psychotherapy.

*Searches by Journal Articles*: International Journal of Yoga, Yoga Australia, International journal of Psychotherapy, British Journal of Psychotherapy, Contemporary journal of Psychotherapy, European journal of Psychotherapy and counselling, American journal of psychotherapy,

*Searches by personal book collection*.

*Citation and secondary referencing*.

Mental health professionals recognize that yoga may be a beneficial adjunct to psychotherapy, but they are not adequately informed about why this is the case (Douglass 2009). Therefore, understanding what a psychotherapist with a commitment to yoga, has to say about their experience, was the focus of this literature search.

## Yoga and Psychotherapy

As seen by Vivekananda (2005), the aim of yoga can be understood to mean the evolving of our human potential in the context of our physical (understanding the functions of the body), mental (becoming knowledgeable about the processes of the mind) and spiritual ("experiences of the transcendental force/spirit") dimensions, equating each of these words with terms such as "self-understanding", "self-awareness" and "self-realization", respectively (2005, p. 11). Vivekananda (2005) impresses on us that this self-awareness in the context of how we are evolving aims to harmonize the

individual consciousness with a higher consciousness, the spiritual dimension.

From a western psychotherapeutic perspective, May (1977) tells us that “One basic aim of therapy is to enlarge the self-awareness by means of clarifying inner defeating conflicts” (1977, p. 36). By understanding and becoming aware of new possibilities, we get to express ourselves more creatively, thus overcoming potential threats in our lived experiences, which May calls “self-realization” (1977, p. 370). Transcendence, also connected to ‘force/spirit’ (Vivekananda, 2005), is understood differently in western psychotherapy. Drawing on May (1958), Hoffman, in (Hoffman, Yang, Kaklauskas & Chan, 2009) explains that transcendence does not point specifically to a spiritual dimension, but from an existential perspective, “…refers to the ability to see things fluidly and symbolically (as part of a meaning system) and in the context of a broader meaning system” (2009, p. 22).

Whilst psychotherapy can help to develop introspection and self-awareness and encourages the person to explore ways that are less self-limiting and more self-sustaining (Ware, 2007), Salagame (2010) sees yogic ways of self-awareness as quite different to western notions of self-awareness. Thus, self-awareness as found in yoga (Vivekananda, 2005), is understood as an evolutionary process leading to more of a spiritual awakening, to that bigger consciousness (‘*atman*’- see Rama et al., 2009; ), whereas, the development of self-awareness in western psychotherapy is not necessarily connected to one’s spiritual awakening (Salagame 2010).

Saraswati (1974) writes that western psychology and psychotherapies have predominantly treated man in isolation from his environment, which could never produce a holistic approach to psychotherapy. He adds that western psychotherapies aim at 'self-actualization' of the individual, whereas yoga refers to a person's "'self-realization' in all spheres of being, or awareness of one's inner nature and its expression" (1974, p. 19). To confirm Saraswati's perspective, we see Eid and Larsen (2008) explain 'self-actualization' from a western psychotherapeutic perspective as the expectation that an individual should be "…self-directive and self-sufficient, and find, consolidate, and uplift the best within the self" (2008, p. 420). In this way we see a stark contrast in the two approaches, where this subtle difference is explained by Saraswati (1974) as being one with the whole, or a supreme consciousness, which is a practice of 'Self Realization', that is also extensively propagated by Swami Shankarananda (2004).

Yoga does not adhere to diagnostic labels attached to human distress. Instead, it attributes human failings, distress and discontent to the way a person lives their lives in the context of the philosophy of yoga (Vivekanada, 2005). The Indian sage Patanjali, describes yoga in his yoga sutra 1.2 as "Yoga is the stilling of the changing states of mind" (Bryant, 2009, p. 10). Classical yoga is said to pay less attention to the physical aspects (asanas) and more on meditation and the various techniques of concentration of the mind, which is different to the popular understanding of yoga (see 'Definition of yoga') since its export to the West (Bryant, 2009). Mohan (2004) confirms this when he says yoga "…deals primarily with the management of our mind" (p.3), and like Mohan, Bryant (2009) explains that "…it is the mind that

imagines itself to be the real self…", which is seen as the "…seat of ignorance and bondage" (p. xlvi), leading to human distress. It is when the two, consciousness and mind are seen as one, that an individual remains stuck in their distress and needs assistance in understanding how they came to this predicament, sometimes referred to as 'ignorance' (Bryant, 2009, p. xlvi). Yoga provides a philosophy of mind (Bryant, 2009; Rama et al., 1976; Saraswati, 1993 and Vivekanada, 2005) to overcome this, which is said to be a key to yogic psychology in being able to understand the mind, working to going beyond it and observing it, which is attaining another level of consciousness, sometimes referred to the higher self or atman (Rama et al, 2009; Salagame, 2010).

**General benefits**

A study by Forfylow (2011) produced an extensive literature search on the benefits of yoga on cardiovascular and respiratory conditions, neurological conditions, mental health disorders and addictions, and concluded that an integration of yoga and psychotherapy is highly conducive to a holistic approach in psychotherapy. Khalsa (2004) conducted a large literature review on mental health (anxiety, depression and addiction) and bio-physiological conditions (cardiovascular and respiratory) to find overall benefits of yoga on these conditions. Following yoga practice, people commonly report experiencing many benefits; physically, emotionally, psychologically and behaviourally, including changes in ones neurophysiology, such as improved sleep, (Douglass, 2009) and a general sense of well-being (Dey, Barrett and

Yuan, 2003). Nagendra and Telles (1999) completed a study on the effects of yoga on memory to conclude that ten days of yoga training on children were enough to demonstrate an increase in their memory scores.

Woodyard (2011) examined existing research from 1990 – 2009 and found that yoga enhanced "muscular strength and body flexibility, promote and improve respiratory and cardiovascular function, promote recovery from and treatment of addiction, reduce stress, anxiety, depression, and chronic pain, improve sleep patterns, and enhance overall well-being and quality of life" (2011, pp. 49-54). Apart from some of the studies referring to meditation and the physical postures, no additional details were provided about the type of yoga that influenced these beneficial changes.

**Yoga and mental health**

McCall writes, in the International Journal of yoga Therapy (IJoy), that the first recorded yoga article in western medical research was in 1948. Research in the benefits of yoga continued to have a purely medical focus, until yoga's popularity surged in western culture from 2000. Since then there has been an exponential increase in research with consistently high correlations in its benefits on conditions such as stress/anxiety, pain, and depression, as indeed, this article states, since 2012, more than 53% of the articles have addressed these conditions (McCall, 2014).

A study by Lavey et al. (2005), examining 113 psychiatric in-patients reported significant improvements in negative emotions. This also included tension-

anxiety, depression-dejection, anger-hostility, fatigue-inertia and confusion-bewilderment, after engaging in yoga therapy. Elizabeth Visceglia (psychiatrist and yoga practitioner), states that “Yoga is most fundamentally a system designed to address and heal the source of mental illness itself – our mind, and the sense of alienation the mind clings to” (Visceglia, 2008, p. 25). In her article, she lays out the benefits of yoga and contrasts it with prevailing western medicine and thinking. For example, she links the concept of “divine madness”, found in yogic philosophy, that attributes aspects of spirituality to it, as David Kinsley notes, “The madness of the saints is a mark of their freedom and transcendence” (cited in Visceglia, 2008, p. 26). From this, one can get a glimpse of the ground of acceptance of the human experience found in a yogic framework, without looking at it through the lens of pathology.

Blanchard & Kornfeld (2009) cites Visceglia’s research, showing how yoga improves the poor function of the endocrine and parasympathetic systems in patients with chronic schizophrenia; benefits of yoga intervention for young adults with elevated symptoms of depression (Woolery et al., 2010); patients suffering with psychosis and Schizophrenia (Visceglia and Lewis, 2011) have shown that yoga improves the mental state and quality of life for these patients, including effective treatment for Tardive Dystonia, a condition derived from long term use of psychotropic medication (Rothenberg, 2009). Forfylow’s (2011) study on empirical research from 2003 to 2010, examining yoga as an effective treatment for anxiety and depression conclusively pointed to yoga being of benefit.

## Integrating yoga into psychotherapy

Novotney (2009) says, “With a growing body of research supporting yoga's mental health benefits, psychologists are weaving the practice into their work with clients” (2009, p. 38), such as stretches, deep breathing and meditation. Melanie Greenberg (2007) has found that bringing one’s personal experience from yoga, into the practice of psychotherapy is also seen as beneficial to clients because she suggests, "If you can come to a level of peace with yourself, there may be more nurturing that you exude toward your patients"(cited in Novotney, 2009, p. 38). Steven Galindo (2013) reports in an article that a competent yoga practitioner teaches “a way of being”, which is “intrinsic to the character of the teacher” and argues that “it is difficult to separate the professional life from the personal life” (Galindo, 2013).

Bennett-Pasquale (n.d), brings yoga into her practice, especially to support the trauma work that she does as it is difficult to tap into the bodily felt experiences from talking therapy alone. Bo Forbes (2007), a clinical psychologist, speaks to 700 psychotherapists at a conference and tells them that she works from “…all levels of being” and from a spiritual context, as a result of having a background in yoga.

## Yoga and an embodied sense of well-being

Hatha yoga can be understood as ‘Ha’ (meaning the sun) and ‘tha’ (meaning the moon), that symbolize the unification of opposites (the sun and the moon, also understood as the positive and the negative, the heating and cooling

forces) as described by Kirk et al., (2006). In bringing the opposing forces together, Salagame (2010) tells us that the practitioner develops an exquisite balance of the sense of self that is the result of the unification of these opposing energies.

In Betsy Rippentrop's blog (2014), she writes, "…the deep world of the mind, with the wisdom of the body is something called yoga-based psychotherapy". She adds, "We MUST bring equal and respectful attention to both body and mind, because they are of course, deeply connected" and "…give equal acknowledgment to the possibility that there is a larger plan and flow to your life" (cited in her blog, 2014). Blanchard & Kornfeld (2009) comments on Visceglia's approach to psychotherapy, including psychologists and social workers, where they include aspects of yoga (physical postures and meditation) into their therapy sessions, as a result of being motivated by the concept of a mind and body connection.

Studies by Twemlow, Sacco and Fonagy (2008) on difficult clients with entrenched, violent behavior that are known to be treatment resistant to the talking therapies have shown improvement with the combination of physically oriented therapies like yoga or martial arts and psychodynamic psychotherapy. The study found a strong link between the clients' embodied felt sense of being that was gained from the therapist's own display of their embodied way of being. In this way some of the aspects of yoga, particularly the physical, that brings with it that feeling of a mind/body connection, as seen in Farhi's (2000) work, plays a vital role in the initial stages of being able to connect with oneself and the mental health distress in an embodied way.

David Emerson and Elizabeth Hopper, co-author a book ('Overcoming trauma through yoga- Reclaiming your body', 2011), where a vast amount of data about the benefit of yoga experienced in a profoundly embodied way, is described to a reader who is a victim of trauma, a yoga teacher or a clinician. In this way, they provide a comprehensive therapeutic framework, built on the philosophy and practice of yoga. However, what is lacking is a description of the practitioner's experience and description of how yoga influences their work as psychotherapists.

**Yoga and the therapeutic relationship**

The integration of all the eight steps of yoga Iyengar (2001) can lead to a process of self-care, self-healing ( Vivekananda, 2005) and self-realization (Shankarananda, 2004), thereby providing the potential for a therapeutic relationship with the other.

The 'therapeutic alliance' described by numerous authors (Bugental, 1987; Corey, 2005; Kottler, 2010), to name a few, is seen as a defining feature in psychotherapy. For Visceglia (2008), the therapeutic relationship, with the influence of yoga, is seen as having a connection to the other with a sense of presence and compassion and a step away from the medical model of treating mental health distress. Relationship, for Rippentrop (2014), is understood as being a "…really poignant and powerful means of change" (blog, 2014). However, Valente and Marotta (2005) provide us with a closer look at what makes this relationship important when considering yoga as being its influence. Using six psychotherapists, they found that yoga provided the psychotherapist with a higher degree of self-care, reduced factors

associated with burn-out, greater internal awareness, personal growth and a clearer empathic connection to the 'other', thus allowing practitioners to remain in their professions. In addition, utilizing yoga as a mechanism for self-development was seen to be a less expensive option than most long term personal psychotherapy for self-development (Valente et al., 2005).

## Yoga and Spirituality

Yoga essentially is based on a spiritual foundation (Saraswati, 1993; Harihārananda, 2006; Rama, 1976; Vivekananda, 1953). This is a concept that is too vast for the scope of this study. However, from a yogic perspective, spirituality can be understood within a non-dual framework, where man is not separate from a concept of a higher being (Harihārananda, 2006); it is the management of thoughts, emotions and understanding the workings of the mind within a bigger consciousness (Saraswati, 1993); and for Vivekananda (2005), "According to the yogic view, a person is a spiritual entity, interacting in the material world, using a body/mind as a vehicle" (2005, p. 23).

## Existential perspectives on yoga

A search in this context did not produce any definitive results. However, by extending yoga's concept of spirituality into the framework of Emmy van Deurzen (2009) and van Deurzen and Adams (2011) existential framework, we see a spiritual component as the fourth and inner most dimension, in the 'four dimensions of existence'. In these dimensions of consciousness, van Deurzen et al. (2011) argue that the spiritual dimension is our relationship to

the unknown where meaning is sought about ideal worlds that are linked with our personal values that give us a purpose. They posit that "…the spiritual dimension is the central axis of existential therapy" (2011, p. 20). However, spirituality in classical yoga is a very practical experience and does not stop at the cognitive levels of thinking, as described by van Deurzen (2009).

### Limitations

Except for the study by Valente et al., (2005), this literature review offered no findings that specifically focused on the lived experiences of psychotherapists who were also committed practitioners of yoga. The finding demonstrates that there is a lack of information pertaining to a practitioner's direct reporting on their experience and how they practice as psychotherapists, as a result of their committed practice to yoga.

## METHODOLOGY

### Descriptive Phenomenology

Langdridge (2007) informs us that "Phenomenological research is invariably qualitative…" (p.83), which involves a study of phenomena "…in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). Unlike quantitative research, that specifically looks to reduce phenomena via measuring, categorizing and "…drawing determinate conclusions…" (Van Manen, 2014, p.29), this study describes the lived experiences of participants

in a "…strict nonreductionist way…" (Giorgi, 2009, p. 212) which is best suited to qualitative research.

Among the three broad categories (descriptive phenomenology, interpretive phenomenology and narrative analysis), descriptive phenomenology is known to be the oldest form used to understand phenomenological psychology (Langdridge, 2007). This method is based on an existential philosophical approach where the method of psychological enquiry was developed by Edmund Husserl (Aho, 2014; Cohn, 1997; Cooper, 2003; Giorgi, 2009; Langdridge, 2007; Spinelli, 2007; van Deurzen, 2010; Van Manen 2014). Langdridge (2007) explains that phenomenology "...is the study of human experience and the way in which things are perceived as they appear to consciousness' (p. 10). Phenomenological research encompasses many versions and some, such as "*interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), hermeneutic phenomenology and template analysis (TA)"* are discussed by Langdridge (2007, p. 107). Langdridge explains that these methods have a stronger emphasis on "…main-stream (principally social-cognitive) psychological literature and "…less emphasis on the description" (ibid, p. 107). Seeing that this study is principally aimed at gaining a thorough descriptive account of the participants' lived experience, a descriptive phenomenological method was seen as the most suited.

For Van Manen (2014), "Phenomenology is the way of access to the world as we experience it prereflectively" (2014, p. 28). This means that we try to observe and understand experience as it unfolds in the phenomena being studied. The phenomenological process of inquiry begins with what is called

‘intentionality’. This concept was developed by Edmund Husserl which means that, “...whenever we are conscious, we are always conscious of something” (Langdridge, 2007, p.21). In the context of ‘intentionality’, we move into thinking about ‘what’ we want to study and ‘how’ that phenomenon appears to the consciousness. In this way, the phenomenological process steps away from subject-object dualism and uses the ‘noema’ and ‘noesis’ correlates (Langdridge, 2007, p.15) as has been described in the ‘Introduction’.

We are all holders of knowledge and personal experience that translates into our assumptions and bias in the way we go about relating in the world. Husserl calls this our ‘natural attitude’, which “…is the most basic way of experiencing the world, with all our taken-for-granted assumptions in operation” (Langdridge, 2007, p.17). An important consideration in phenomenological research is “phenomenological reduction” (van Deurzen, 2010, p. 39). The researcher steps away from their usual ways of seeing and understanding things, so that they can step into the world of the other. This is called ‘epoche’, which means bracketing the ‘natural attitude’ (Husserl’s terms, cited in van Deurzen, 2010, p. 38), and what she also calls the “task of unknowing (ibid, p. 38). By bracketing their assumptions and interpretations, the researcher can ‘return to the things themselves’ (Langdridge, 2007; van Deurzen, 2010), which provides a full revelation and first-hand account of an experience.

Langdridge (2007) highlights, that there are four stages to data collection and analysis. The first stage involves reading and re-reading the transcripts for overall meaning. In the process of becoming immersed in the data, text is

reduced to form specific meaning units, which becomes the second stage called, 'identifying meaning units'. Whilst identifying meaning units, the researcher adopts a "psychological attitude" (p. 89) to capture any detail that becomes appropriate for the next stage, that of 'psychological significance'. In this third stage, not all meaning units produce psychological significance and it is important to remain mindful of not straying into specific engagement with particular psychological theories, so as to 'constrain the meaning' of the developing themes. The fourth and final stage is the development of 'individual structural descriptions' which is then synthesized into a 'general structural description'. Once again, this involves returning to the meaning units with its psychological significance, revisiting the transcripts (as required) and writing up individual accounts containing the key element for each participant. Identifying all the invariant factors from the individual general structural accounts that signify common themes amongst the participants' experiences are then synthesized into a general structural description. This becomes the final document of analysis that provides the cumulative descriptive experience of the participants for the phenomenon being studied (Langdridge, 2007, pp. 88-90).

Certain rules apply in the process of phenomenological investigation and using Giorgi's rules, van Deurzen (2010, pp. 40-1) describes these as:

1. Epoche - setting aside one's presumptions by bracketing them.

2. Description - Describe my experience as it is observed and not explain it. The task of describing is repeated over and over again until nothing is felt to be left out from the experience.

3. Equalization- attaching equal importance to all aspects of the description without letting some stand out.

4. Horizontalisation – setting up my observations and that which I describe in the context of that which naturally arises for it in its own background.

5. Verification – Repeated and careful checking of my observations against what is actually the case.

**Sampling strategy**

Participants were required to have particular homogeneity that conformed to working professionally as psychotherapists (with at least 5 years of post-qualification experience as psychotherapists) and with a 'committed' personal practice in yoga. Langdridge (2007) writes about the importance of recruiting participants "...who have a common experience but who vary on as wide a variety of demographic characteristics as possible" (2007, p.87). In doing this, the data is expected to reflect common themes across varying experiences including those found to vary across the participants thus becoming idiosyncratic (Langdridge, 2007). As the definition of psychotherapy includes practitioners from a range of academic/professional backgrounds, participants had to agree and conform to these criteria.

A definition and duration of commitment was not specified formally, but was discussed at the preliminary interviews, where it was determined by the researcher and the potential participant that they met this criteria (for a better understanding see 'Definition of commitment'). For example, in my telephone

interviews with those that responded, there were some who only occasionally engaged in yoga, or they in themselves did not feel that they had a personally deep and thorough enough experience of yoga, to do justice to this study. This was encouraging as it meant that the phenomenon I was studying, and its parameters (specifically the criteria for a commitment to yoga), was clearly understood by the individual.

This study required no more than 4 participants. An attempt was made to get a gender mix to balance the field. Participants were recruited by advertising in Yoga Australia (The National Peak body for regulation and membership), networking by word of mouth and contacting yoga teaching schools and facilities. Whilst it can be argued that recruiting via word of mouth promotes potential bias where the researcher's views remain too close to those of the potential recruits, the descriptive phenomenological method used takes into account the researcher's intent behind the study, which is facilitated by a position of epoche, thereby bracketing their own assumptions throughout the study (Langdridge, 2007). This is a difficult issue, and seen by Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, as not achievable, the way Husserl envisaged experiencing the world, as another person would (Langdridge (2007). Despite this, bracketing remains an important consideration in phenomenological research, as Giorgi (2009) explains, "It is not a matter of forgetting the past; bracketing means that we should not let our past knowledge be engaged while we are determining the mode and content of the present experience" (2009, p. 92).

The participants were given a brief outline about the study after their verbal agreement. They all signed a consent form prior to commencing the interviews. Interview questions are included in Appendix 1. The first question is an open ended phenomenological question that immediately gets the participant into the setting of the phenomenon being explored.

**Ethical concerns**

By changing the names of the participants, anonymity was preserved. All participants signed a consent form which also had details of my supervisor, and University, if at any time they required direct access to them. Participants were offered follow-up debrief sessions, if it was required. They were made aware of the possibility of this research being made public if it was published in an academic journal.

In consenting to participate in this research, the participants were aware of the purpose and aim of the study, but were not provided with a sample of the questions they were going to be asked. This was seen as a positive step, where no rehearsed responses could impact the richness of the data and outcome of the study (Finlay 2011).

At no point during this study have any of the participants wanted to withdraw their participation. Only one participant requested a copy of the interview transcript and that was readily given.

Ethics approval was granted by Middlesex University, London. In addition to following these guidelines, ethical guidelines from PACFA were also adhered

to, as the researcher is a registered clinical psychotherapist and mental health practitioner with PACFA.

**Data collection**

Semi structured interviews were considered the most appropriate as it did not constrain the participants' responses as structured questioning would have done, nor would it allow the process and information sought from becoming potentially scattered and information becoming unfocused (Langdridge, 2007). Semi-structured questions also allowed for a degree of openness and flexibility, but where the responses were still contained within the constituent parts of the question, thus "…aiming to elicit the maximum amount of information about the topic at hand" (p. 87). Thus the interview directed the participants into thinking about responding to my questions of interest, without leading them to think or speak specifically in a manner that was of interest to me. Giorgi (2009) compares the process of 'directing the participant' and 'leading the participant', where the former process aims to get the "…participant to speak to the researcher's phenomenon of interest" as opposed to getting the participant to speak in ways that specifically aim to capture specific data the researcher wants to be included, the latter being an example of data bias (2009, p. 123).

One interview was conducted at the place nominated in my research proposal, at a private, professional counselling practice. Three of the four interviews were conducted at the participants' private consulting rooms. This was considered convenient as the alternative option was for them to travel a

long distance to the venue I had set up. The ethics board was made aware of this change and approval gained, prior to the interviews being conducted. Venues for all the interviews provided privacy, confidentiality and safety. Interviews were recorded on a digital voice recorder, which were then transcribed.

**Reflexivity**

As I reflect on myself as a data collecting instrument, the reader will benefit from becoming aware of my own background as a practitioner of yoga and psychotherapy, and the potential influence I could have had in the interviews. I was born into Roman Catholicism and remained connected to its beliefs into my teenage years. I became increasingly disconnected with the formal Roman Catholic practices and its belief systems from my late teens. In 1992 I began formal Buddhist studies, specifically adhering to the teachings of the Kagyu lineage (a Tibetan Buddhist sect). In 2005 I got interested in yoga and went to study Hatha yoga at the Vivekananda Ashram in Bangalore, India. Since then, I have continued to incorporate and benefit from Eastern and Western philosophy in my personal life and professional practice. With this in mind, I remained reflexive, maintaining a journal that contained my thoughts and reflections on how the research was progressing and how I might be influencing the outcome with my own assumptions. In this regard, it is important to point out that from my back ground knowledge, it was clear that I was gaining direct experiential knowledge of a personal nature from the participants, with little to no assumptions being made in their responses.

Writing this research project was a mix of experiences. It was satisfying because I was exploring something of deep personal interest. It was complex and rich because of the many textured aspects to the methodology and forms of explanations that was weaved into it. It was exhilarating and humbling at times because of the insights I gained and the knowledge I kept discovering in the process of learning, reflecting and writing. Immersed in this project felt like Van Manen (2014) saying, "…to write is to reflect; to write is to research. And in writing we may deepen and change ourselves in ways we cannot predict" (2014, p.20).

The phenomenological method that is built on a philosophy of enquiry automatically includes the person questioning. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) confirms this for us when he says, "…he who questions is himself implicated by the question" (Lefort, 1964, p. 27). Thus, remaining reflexive and bracketing my own experiences became an important factor in conducting this study. During the interviews, I often found myself reflecting on what I was attempting to follow and becoming conscious of whether I was being distracted by a particular insight of mine and becoming intentionally eager to explore this further. In attempting to stay true to the phenomenological method of inquiry I frequently found myself becoming reflective about this tendency of mine and the way the questions were being framed. On one occasion, I became aware that I was pursuing a particular concept that had strayed out of the participant's lived experience. In disclosing this at the time in the interview we were able to return to the question and continue with a deeper commitment and clearer understanding of the process in my inquiry.

## RESEARCH OUTCOMES

This study included 4 female participants. Their age ranged from their late 20s to their late 50s, with an average age of 42+ years. The participants' specific ages were not requested so as to keep within the parameters of social/political correctness and/or etiquette, and in being mindful of personal sensitivities to one's age being asked. All the participants were professional registered psychotherapists with a range of differing academic backgrounds. They came from different yoga backgrounds and averaged 17+ years of committed yoga practice between them. The participants had a cumulative average of professional practice in psychotherapy of 17+ years. Table 1 provides a map of the participants' details.

Participants remain anonymized and the names attached to each are not their actual names.

| Name | Gender | Age | Years of yoga practice | Type of Yoga | Years of psychotherapy practice | Academic background |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Frieda | Female | 50+ | 20+ | Satyananda | 30+ | Psychiatry |
| Sandra | Female | 50+ | 20+ | Hatha | 15+ | Psychotherapy & Counselling |
| Jessica | Female | 45+ | 20+ | Vivekanada Hatha | 20+ | Psychology |
| Edwina | Female | 25+ | 10+ | Iyengar, Purna | 3+ | Psychology |

**Table 1- Participant details**

**Individual Structural Description**

Each of the participants' meaning units and psychological significance were integrated into individual structural descriptions and the one below is a sample of one participant.

Edwina was introduced to the Iyengar method of Yoga when she was in university studying her Psychology degree. She described the impact as inspirational where she discovered a deep connection from engaging in the physical exercises from the very first class. Yoga practice became an important routine for her as she continues to experience a feeling of being embodied, in a way she had never experienced before.

As she continues to grow into the practice and study of yoga, Edwina develops an understanding of a 'Higher Self', with the 'soul' being understood as being higher than the 'self'. She finds a deep balance in this understanding, as she remains committed to this concept that provides those deep connections to the questions she had as a young girl. Edwina also describes the 'higher self' as the 'core self', a place of calm, around which she experiences other layers she calls, 'thinking, the mind and the intellect'.

Despite wanting to walk away from the difficult experiences that frequently emerged in her yoga practice, she developed a tenacity to stay with the experience, because she believed in the constituent parts of yoga and the therapeutic effective she was experiencing. Her commitment to yoga had shown her another way to become resilient. With this, she also developed an experience of love and compassion for herself and others, which was something that she had never experienced before.

Edwina received Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) in her earlier years, and whilst reporting that it stopped and arrested the unhealthy patterns, she was left with the deeper questions remaining unanswered. Remaining committed to yoga practice and its philosophy and engaging with like-minded people continues to help her in her personal and professional life. She describes a feeling of 'abundance' and consequently sees the human potential as 'amazing'. Self-blame is a distant experience and she no longer experiences a sense of feeling diminished. Yoga has become profoundly meaningful for her where she is unable to separate these Eastern concepts in her professional work as a therapist. Using a metaphor of an electrical conductor (like a conduit) she compares herself to the qualities of a conductor. She experiences a special ability to apprehend signal from herself and others and contain them in a safe space (conduit), where effective therapy can occur. With yoga providing another avenue for self-awareness, she now uses it as her primary tool for self-care on a daily basis. This was something she was unable to access from her psychology training.

The yoga asana practice naturally led to transitioning into the subtler parts of yoga, using self-awareness, one-pointed concentration and meditation. These deeper yogic experiences allowed her to understand the deeper existential questions about life in another way. Unlike (CBT), where she felt inclined to 'jump in to correct any automatic thinking errors', she now works in a relational perspective, which is about the relationship one has with ones thoughts as opposed to encouraging cognitive restructuring. A relationship with ones thoughts is experienced as 'dropping into our observer'. In this regard, not being fused with ones thoughts is the spiritual experience that

leads to accessing the ‘higher self’, as she notices the traffic of thoughts, coming and going. She uses Mindfulness practice with her clients, which she sees as being a direct extraction from Eastern (Yoga and Buddhism) philosophy. Meta-cognition is the Western framework she describes to her clients, providing a scientific perspective of the layers of the mind/consciousness, where they can get a sense of becoming an observer of the patterns of their thoughts.

She experiences no personal or profession conflict in the integration of the Eastern and Western therapeutic concepts and describes the integration as a ‘beautiful relationship between the two the scientific and the spiritual or subjective side to things’. For Edwina, her yoga practice is about ‘THE WAY’ she is able to be with her client’s in the room. Whilst the Western psychological training provided a framework to work with negative patterns and barriers, it does not provide the spiritual framework for her. Following the completion of her Clinical Psychology studies, she felt like an expert. However, her yoga practice has changed that perspective and has humbled her in knowing that she is always learning, and like everyone, that we are all on our own path, she is grateful to be able to ‘facilitate some change or development in someone’s life’. On reflection, Edwina confirms that she would have remained ‘a little bit detached’ if yoga was not an influence in her life.

## General Structural Description

The general structural description represents the themes and essences of the phenomena described and common across all the participants' experiences.

At a time of wanting to explore the deeper questions about finding meaning in their lives, all the participants felt an overall inadequacy with the knowledge base they had accumulated till then, as it did not address the 'deeper questions' or the 'underlying difficulties' they were experiencing. Embarking on the path of Yoga was described by them as being the framework which helped them make sense of their lived experiences.

For them, the missing bits were discovered in the language of the philosophy of yoga. They describe their discovery being contained in the language that lays out the philosophy of 'mind' which helped them make connections to their deeper unanswerable questions. Yoga asana (the physical aspects of Yoga) practice was the stepping stone that kept the participants connected to this new experience. Their physical experience is collectively contained in the description by Frieda who says, that her physical practice was one of 'heightened sensitivity which progressed to become subtle and onwards to the supreme'. With this commitment to practice they report that Yoga showed them different ways of working with themselves and understanding their experiences.

All the participants describe a relationship with something other than themselves. A 'higher-self', something 'bigger than this small self', 'soul/spirit', the 'sacred', are terms the participants often used in their narrative. Sandra experiences her body as a 'temple' where she is able to locate the 'sacred', a

concept that always eluded her as a young girl, when she strove to find it in her Christian framework. Edwina talked about connecting to things 'higher' than her concept of 'self'. Frieda says she experiences the 'soul/spirit' that takes her beyond her thoughts and feelings, to 'something beyond that'. She also describes the concept of 'spiritual' as a place where "...there is no self-esteem." For Jessica, spirituality is 'about a sense of meaning' and not necessarily 'definable'. She adds that spirituality is not found in the 'shrinking down, narrowing down we often do, disconnecting from the larger whole'. It is about a 'sense of meaning that is larger than this moment, this small self'.

The participants all highlighted the significance of gaining an awareness of another level of consciousness. They describe this awareness that comes from transcending their own character and personal psychology as a result of their involvement in Yoga. They explain that the philosophy of mind from a yogic perspective provides a framework to explore suffering in the 'way' we live our lives and the 'meaning' we derive from it. They are conscious of a higher-self, where the sense of ego, also referred to as 'small-self', is understood and managed with a state of acceptance and in relationship with the higher-self. Participants had a view that Western psychotherapy points to a strong attachment to an 'identity of being a victim' or the self (small-self as opposed to higher-self) that is 'worthless'. There was consensus that the 'way' they relate with their thoughts and feelings were different to their Western training, where 'suffering is seen as an aberration from the norm'. They did not get to know about a 'bigger' system in Western Psychology. For them, it is more about the whole relationship that is understood within the framework of the small-self, contained in a larger whole, including the higher-

self. In this relational experience Frieda reports that ‘old thought patterns lose their intensity’, where she has developed a ‘different way of seeing, thinking and feeling’, describing it as being more ‘spontaneous and natural’. The participants all shared the view that resisting psychologically distressing feelings with an accompanying ‘self-loathing’, was an anathema.

All participants reported having greater resilience as a result of their Yoga practice. Resilience is seen as being of great importance in counselling sessions, in between sessions, alone with their personal reflections and contemplations, and in their general relational experiences with others. The Participants describe resilience as being able to withstand the difficulties that arise in a session, and not being swayed by bias or judgmental feelings, but returning to the reasons of why they are in the room with a client.

Yoga is described as a source of personal healing by all participants. They report that they are no longer afraid of their suffering because of how they relate with their thoughts from a yogic perspective. Returning to work as a practicing psychologist, after experiencing ‘burn-out’ and discovering Yoga as her support to return to her profession, is seen by Jessica as the ‘paradigm shift’ that allowed this to happen. Providing a paradigm shift is voiced by all participants because it gave them the tools to understand themselves, care for themselves and ultimately be with clients in very personally satisfying ways.

All the participants reported to have discovered healing from taking the time to educate themselves and changing their ways with the principles and practices of Yoga. From this commitment to Yoga they experience their

relationships with themselves, clients and others in a more 'human' dimension. They describe this with using terms such as 'more compassionate', 'less self-loathing', 'more love for myself and the *other'*. From their awareness of their changed ways and attitude, they extend this experience as being an important criterion for clients if they (clients) were serious about making significant and lasting change. Seen in another way, this calls for taking responsibility for one's own well-being, and as noted by Frieda, for therapy to work, clients' needs to own their experience and develop that sense of self-responsibility, otherwise healing remains superficial and temporary. Yoga practices that foster 'self-care' are reported as healing by all participants, also providing that solace and wisdom and a refinement in the ways they manage their own distress.

Participants talk of being embodied. They describe this sense of being embodied as beginning from their asana practice which then led to that feeling of connection to a higher self or bigger whole. Participants describe the integrating of the bio-physiological and psychological signals in their own idiosyncratic ways, and this description is simplified by Frieda when she says, 'noticing it, be with it, don't try and intellectualize, notice the feeling and the experience, own it, allow it … (to emerge in all of you is what Frieda may have been alluding to). They all agree that difficulties of life are held and accepted in an embodied way, and together, with this awareness of the 'self' being part of something bigger, another type of consciousness is developed.

Listening is also described by all the participants as being done from an embodied sense of self. They explain that it is not done in isolation with the

thinking mind, but from the heart, and it's not about being in anticipation. Whilst her 'intellect is running in the back ground', Sandra says that it is her embodied self that is listening. Paying attention to that which is unfolding in the relationship is the quality of 'listening', and it 'forms itself moment by moment'. Using an analogy of the Indian salutation, 'Namaste', which translates as, 'the sacred (or spirit/soul) in me sees the sacred in you', Sandra conveys the experience of 'intentionality' from all of herself as opposed to the thinking mind. This analogy seems to describe what all the other participants say about the way they are with their clients in a session.

Self-care, love and compassion are descriptors used by all the participants and is articulated by Jessica, in yogic terms, as 'Ahimsa' (kindness and non-violence to oneself and others). All participants report these qualities as being the baseline that helps them remain present and available for the 'other' in a non-judgmental way, despite what may emerge in the client/therapist relationship. For Edwina her yoga practice is about 'the way' she is able to be with her clients in the room. Her belief that behind one's thoughts, emotions and behaviour, there is love and goodness, and as she explains, 'underneath what might be some tricky stuff, there is a soul, there is goodness and love, and just as it's within me the same is within that person'. The strength of 'ahimsa' is also evidenced in their practice when they report that despite whatever conflict arises in the course of the therapeutic relationship, they live in hope that the psycho-education they deliver, is like the sowing of seeds, which, as Frieda says, becomes the client's 'developmental introject', that could manifest itself at a later stage in their ongoing development.

From this experience of feeling more ‘human’ and ‘grounded’ and ‘whole’ in themselves and their relationships, all the participants report a change in no longer feeling like they are the expert. Frieda says that she is ‘not this omnipotent guy, the king, the all supreme, all powerful fixer of the problem’. Edwina, who thought she had all the answers to psychological problems after graduating, gradually dropped this sense of being the expert. They all report feeling more ‘authentic’, ‘humbled’ or ‘honoured’ in the therapy room and as a consequence, they often see this reflected in the clients where they too are able to tap into their own experiences of what it means to be authentic.

All the participants had a view that the medical model had too much regulation and influence on the psychological profession, and the prescription of medication, should not be seen as the first choice of treatment. Jessica’s description of being ‘far less focused on illness’, and her view on the ‘reductionist’ model, together with the ‘medicalization’ of the profession, resonated with the others participants. They felt that the ‘reductionist’ way of seeking to heal by way of systematically applying symptoms to categories and labels, stand in the way of a holistic approach. They report that a person’s experience is narrowed down to an exploration driven by a system that scopes a person’s distress and applied to criteria belonging to the Diagnostic Statistical Manual, version 5 (DSM V) or International Classification of Disease, version 10 (ICD) 10, which remains inadequate, narrow and potentially harming.

The concept of impermanence, was directly and indirectly used by all the participants as they described the changing nature of our thoughts, emotions,

feeling and behavior, and in this way, they described how it helped to understand that symptoms of distress would change with the right attention and understanding given to them.

They found no contradictions in their personal or professional lives with the applications of this integrated approach and as articulated by Edwina, she actually discovers a ‘beautiful relationship between the two, the scientific and the spiritual or subjective side to things’. All participants were directly connected to traditional lineages emanating from India, in their yoga studies and practices. The influence of this was evident in the way they described their practices, and the philosophy and mechanisms in how to understand the mind. They all reported that supervision of their work was well received and supported by their supervisors.

Without exception, all participants described being introduced to a new language, which was like a paradigmatical shift that helped them understand the ‘mind’, with increasing clarity and satisfaction. Frieda experiences this as ‘an eloquent and vast understanding of how the Mind works’, and in this way, Edwina feels that the limitations of Western Psychotherapies are ‘exceeded’. Stemming from their own lived experience in the meaningful ways they were experiencing their lives and relationships, their cumulative description, rests on what Jessica says that there is a ‘trust and faith’ in the process. Just as Eastern philosophy, and its principles and practices have given the participants another way of ‘be-ing’, they describe the possibilities of providing the client with tools and strategies, from these Eastern influences to adopt and employ in the management of their own mental health and well-being.

Frequently articulating that their commitment to yoga has changed their attitude and the 'way they are with the client', it is the faith and conviction that emanates from their personal benefits, that the participants attempt to pass on to their clients, especially trying to foster an awareness in the clients to develop a particular 'attitude', where without it, they are seen as being motivated to take responsibility for their own well-being. All the participants report on developing a strong and satisfying integration of both Eastern and Western systems. And for Frieda, who feels 'grounded in this bigger process', and 'trusts' her 'own ethic that is informed by this process', her narrative is used on behalf of the others to describe not feeling like 'a slave to a particular system', where this integration provides a clarity and freedom to choose in the process of being a therapeutic instrument, keeping them creative and authentic in their work. All participants described a changed relationship with nature and other human beings, giving them a 'home-base, a reference point that they can go back to'.

Participants say that Yoga is not something that is brought separately into the session. It is no longer a choice about how they are as psychotherapists, because it is who they are. Like western psychology, the philosophy and principles of yoga are imbued in them and evident in the way they work as psychotherapists. They say Yoga is always in their therapy. Yoga informs them about how to be with their clients and offer tools appropriate for the clients' needs.

## DISCUSSION

The difficulties participants experienced in not being able to address those deeper questions or the underlying difficulties within the context of their existing knowledge, is reflected in Yalom's (1980) statement: "The precise nature of the deepest internal conflicts is never easy to identify" (p.6). However, for all the participants, discovering the answers to their deeper questions was located in the language of the philosophy and practice of yoga.

The reasons for remaining committed to this practice could be reflected in work by Rama et al. (1976), where they posit that the framework of yoga was developed as a system and training for a life of well-being. In this way, the participants' commitment can also be reflected in Bugental (1987), when he states, "Commitment is a courageous response to the existential anxiety that comes with our being confronted by our responsibility for how we act or do not act in our lives" (p. 247).

### *Another way of being a Psychotherapist*

As a result of their commitment to yoga, all the participants describe yoga as providing them with deeper understandings of themselves and being in relationship with their clients in a different way. They frequently articulate the words, 'another way of being'. This way of being is composed of themes (*consciousness, opposing forces, embodied, spiritual, relatedness, authenticity, integration*) that are described below. Before looking at the discussion about these themes, an explanation of 'being', from an existential

perspective, will give the reader a clear perspective of the way this study is encased in existential thinking.

*An existential explanation of 'being'*

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), an influential German existentialist and a student of Edmund Husserl, expounds the concept of 'Be-ing' (see Mulhall, *'Being and Time,* 2013). To understand this word 'Being' more precisely, Cohn (1997) gives us a clue where, "…the capital B is used to distinguish Being from beings. Human being, which alone among all beings is aware of Being and able to reflect on it" (p.12). What follows from this is the concept of one's ontological nature of being.

The participants' personal explorations can be seen as ontological in nature; ontological meaning, "…those intrinsic aspects of Being which are 'given' and inescapable" (Cohn, 1997, p. 12). These inescapable 'givens' can be thought of as the parents, culture or circumstances we are born into, the impermanence of existence and the fact that we all must choose (Cohn, 1997). Ultimately, we are responsible for all that we do and referring to Sartre's existential view, Philip Stokes (2008) states that we "…cannot make excuses or defer responsibility" (2008, p.153). Like Heidegger's 'Being', Jean-Paul Sartre's (1905-1980) claim is that 'existence precedes essence'. In this way "…man first exists without purpose or definition, finds himself in the world and only then, as a reaction to experience, defines the meaning of his life" (Stokes, 2008, p.153).

Stokes (2008) provides a simple expansion on Heidegger's 'Being'. The German word '*Dasein*' means 'being-there' (2008, p.151). Ordinarily, we may think of 'being-there' in a subjective way attributing this to a human beings' subjectivity. However, Heidegger sees *Dasein* as a perspective, which is to say, a particular way. Stokes says, "In sum, *Dasein* is a perspective from which action originates" (2008, p. 151). Another way to understand this is through Heidegger's concept of 'Being-in-the-world'. Cohn (1997) says, "With this expression Heidegger describes our inevitable involvement with all there is" (p. 13). The three hyphens imply that we are always part of our experience in the world and we cannot ever be separated for it. These references aim to provide the reader with the existential context when the participants make reference to 'another way of being'.

*Consciousness*

All the participants report that yoga provided them with another way of understanding consciousness, often referring to it as being more expansive and multi layered, as found in the yoga practice of the '*koshas'* (Vivekanada, 2005). These are the five sheaths (or layers), comprising the physical, energy, mental, wisdom and bliss, also described as the "…dimensions of human existence", that constitute our levels of consciousness, (p. 25).

Our consciousness is constituted by our neurophysiology, our intentionality and the state of our mind (van Deurzen, 2010). Being conscious and operating on multiple levels that are interdependent in nature (Vivekanada, 2005; Rama et al., 1976) can be seen to be the excepted norm within yogic

and existential literature. Van Deurzen (2010) confirms this by suggesting, “Consciousness operates on all these different levels, and our particular mode of relation to our world constitutes our consciousness at all these different levels at once” (p. 272). Frieda provides a succinct summary for all participants when she says, “Eastern philosophy found the whole, an eloquent and vast understanding of how the mind worked and how that linked to feeling, emotions and life.” She adds, “In trying to understand the mind, western psychology added only ‘so much’.” This is emphasized in the Cartesian view (Cohn, 2002), where Western psychology rests on the principle that the mind is the thinking part of the individual. Edwina draws our attention to being conscious in this dual nature when she says, “…we do not operate from the neck up…”, which is reflected in Kevin Aho’s (2014) work when he explains, “…view of the self as a detached cogito is a mistake that uncritically assumes the existence of an independent mental sphere that is somehow detached from the outer world” (p.49). In this multi-layered description of consciousness, the participants also point to the importance of acknowledging all the emotions in our experiences which they often refer to as the opposing forces.

*Opposing forces*

Participants frequently articulated the problem associated with not accepting ones negative emotions, which they say, from most western psychological frameworks, is normally seen as symptoms of an illness that need to be eradicated. However, in experiencing themselves as being part of a whole,

they insist that without acknowledging the opposing forces, therapy remains ineffective.

Yogic philosophy specifically teaches about opposing forces. Starting from the universal forces that work in pairs, these pairs encompass the masculine and feminine aspects (Brahma/Sarasvati, Vishnu/Lakshmi and Shiva/Kali), and in these pairs one experiences the creative, nurturing and transformative forces, that need to be managed, inclusively (Stiles, 2000). As staying with the polarities of experiences has been a personally transformative experience for the participants, they view this as an important dynamic of psychotherapy. Impermanence is another concept used by the participants to describe how they developed a gradual acceptance of their lived experiences, which is seen as useful link in the acceptance of ones polarities. Understanding it from this position made it easier for them to experience the dynamic nature of one's opposing forces. Negative, distressing or self-defeating experiences are not seen as pathological symptoms, but brought into focus as parts of a whole, with them often saying that the therapeutic work begins from this relational whole.

The polarities of our experiences can also be understood through Kirk Schneider's (2008) model of constriction and expansion, where Cooper (2003) says, "…a psychologically healthy individual is one who is willing to confront, rather than avoid, both ends of the constrictive-expansive continuum" (p. 86). Working this way with the opposing forces is what resonated deeply for Frieda. In this way, she suggests that being in a space that is 'bi-directional', a term also found in van Deurzen's (*Therapist's*

*reaction,* 2010, pp. 285-6) that allows the movement of the coming and going of opposing forces or reciprocal experiences. Managing life in this way is seen as necessary and achieved by developing some flexibility around counter parts or opposing forces of existence and experience (van Deurzen, 2010).

Acceptance of the opposing forces influences one's way of being, as Frieda notes, "…working from this place changes the consciousness as well." To the extent that we remain in denial about our opposing forces, the participants see this as a barrier in therapy, where getting to take responsibility for oneself and the need to change ones attitude remains a primary reason for therapy not being effective. Schneider (2008) informs us that the human spirit is both 'free' and 'limited'. Free to be willful and creative and limited by our facticity (such as our social and environmental constraints). When viewed from the acceptance of the opposing forces, we witness creative adjustments to one's predicaments, where, drawing on Merleau-Ponty's work, van Deurzen (2010) aptly says, "it is in me and through me that creation finds its expression" (p. 97), and as therapists it is our task "…to help our clients face their polarizations as they arise…" (Schneider, 2008, p.65).

Drawing on Heidegger's work, Cohn (2002) suggests 'Two forms of solicitude' (p. 37), where 'solicitude' (being Heidegger's term) refers to the approach a therapist may take towards a client. To "Leap in" (p. 37) means the therapist takes away the responsibility and the potential for the client to gain that lived experience for the possibility for change, whereas, to "Leap ahead" (p. 38) means to allow the client an experience of their own existential potential to

change. The latter, is echoed by the participants as being the way they are with their client's and the way for clients to understand and accept, so that change becomes real and alive for them. This can be seen as another way of being, where the opposing forces are acknowledged and better managed as an embodied whole.

*Embodied*

Being embodied in mind, body, spirit, is a descriptor often used by the participants to differentiate themselves between how they experienced life prior to engaging in yoga and the way they experience it now. For them, there is no other way but to being embodied, which is also reported to being a powerful determinant for therapy to be effective.

Jenny Mackewan (1997) states that "…peoples' emotional life is largely experienced in and through their bodies" (p. 162), but as we know, Western thinking is generally seen to remain strongly aligned to the 'mind/body' split, and in this separation, it struggles to explain the interaction of the two (Cohn, 1997). Cohn posits, that as we use the words mind and body, a gap exists, but these words are "…different aspects of the same experience" (1997, p. 65). This means that whatever conscious experience we are in we make sense of it mentally and at the same time accommodate it in our bodies, where "…the experience of one always implying the experience of the other" (1997, pp. 65-6).

In Yoga, pura means ‘dwelling place’ and the term purusha means ‘the person who dwells in that place (Iyengar, 2001, p. 252). Iyengar describes this eloquently by saying, “The rhythm of the body, the melody of the mind, and the harmony of the soul create the symphony of life” (2001, p. 251). For Farhi (2000), “When we become aware of, and begin to live from, unfamiliar aspects of ourselves, we find that our range of expression expands, as do our choices” (p. 56). The message from these quotes can be found in Frieda’s description of her daily practice, when she says that she connects to “…that other place” and “…grounds me in my life, my body, or when I’m breathing, or moving or chanting. It feels important.” To assist in this process, she adds that there needs to be the “…surrender of the ego, the desire that I’ve got to control it, I have to understand it…it’s the surrender of the ego to the bigger flow, to that bigger intelligence”, that is also part of the embodied experience.

For all the participants, being embodied is experienced with yoga asanas (the physical practice) which coincides with Farhi’s (2000) description: “…grounding spirituality in the body…” where the mind’s attention is “…completely in the body so that we can move as a unified whole and so we can perceive what the body has to tell us” (pp. 16-7). Bugental (1987) lists ‘embodiment’ as one of the dimensions in his model of the ‘givens of existence’ and for him, the body is seen as the “...always present condition of our conscious experience…” permeating all aspects of our living (cited in Cooper, 2003, p. 83). Merleau-Ponty states, “It is through my body that I understand other people, just as it is through my body that I perceive ‘things’” (cited in Cohn, 1997, p. 62). We hear Edwina describing embodiment as her body being like a conduit, like an electrical conductor, being open to the

exchange of experiences. Making contact and attending to the client's experiences in this embodied way is seen by Schneider (2008) as a way to "…uncover deeper levels of their existential pain…" (pp. 64-5).

Cooper (2003) explains that embodiment ('bodily-felt experiences'), from an existential perspective, is a complete and direct experience of how we apprehend our world which could even "…precede our intellectual grasp." (p. 21). Adding to his conviction he quotes Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) who said, "There is more wisdom in the body than in thy deepest learnings." (Cooper, 2003, p. 21).

*Spiritual*

Participants linked their overall yogic experiences to one of being spiritual. This was not associated with a reference to a God, or religious dogma, but specifically pointed a way of finding meaning and being connected to something bigger than themselves.

Different overlapping ways of describing their experience and attempts at using specific words (a 'higher-self', 'bigger than this small self', 'soul', spirit', the 'sacred', 'that other place' and 'whole') may suggest that the concept of spirituality remains imprecise for language to adequately describe it. Referring to Wittgenstein's work, Tantam (2014) states that the failure of language to adequately describe the spiritual experience has to do with "…the idea that it is an experience that happens before we have time to put it into words" (p. 110). For Mackewan (1997), "Transpersonal and spiritual matters are

inherently difficult to describe because they refer to experiences that go beyond the realm of facts and words" (p. 150). However, as noted by all the participants, the philosophy of yoga provided the language and practice that led them to that different way of being. Their collective descriptions of the spiritual context of their experiences can be found in Rishi Vivekananda (2005) work when he says, "The yogic viewpoint of the human being is extensive and exalted. It teaches us that our centre is the spark of divinity- our spiritual reality- the *atman*" (2005,p. 23). Deborah Cornah (n.d.) points to spirituality containing the following elements:

> "a sense of purpose; a sense of connectedness - to self, others, nature, 'God' or 'Other'; a quest for wholeness; a search for hope or harmony; a belief in a higher being or beings; some level of transcendence, or the sense that there is more to life than the material or practical, and; those activities that give meaning and value to people's lives."

For the participants, the experience of the spiritual emerges from their connection to yoga. A yogic practice that involves the 'five koshas' describes the layers of human existence that encompasses the human spirit, which constitute the physical body, energy body, mental body, wisdom body and bliss body (Vivekanada, 2005). The application of this philosophy into yogic practice in that deeply embodied way remains the place from which we hear the participants describe their spiritual experiences, quite easily and without hesitation. Unlike the views of Tantam (2014) and Mackewan (1997), it seemed a lot easier for the participants to describe their spiritual dimension

as it is seen as a living, embodied and multi-factorial interdependent way of being.

This immediate identification with the spiritual can be heard from Edwina when she says, “yoga is a time to connect with things higher than myself…” Yoga is seen as a “…pathway to a higher self…the belief that this body that we have in this lifetime is got to be good for our soul.” Sandra reports that “yoga has enabled me to develop an expanded experience of being a human being, a part of the whole, changed my relationship with nature and other human beings, yoga gives me a home base, a reference point that I can go back to.” Faith and belief are words also used by the participants to describe the strength of their convictions to their commitment to yoga, to enable them to maintain this way of being, which is exemplified when van Deurzen (2010) discusses spirituality and says, “we put ourselves at the disposition of what is greater than ourselves” (p. 102).

*Relatedness*

As a result of their commitment to yoga, and the profound and sustained changes experienced in themselves, the participants describe the way they relate with others and their clients as being significantly different as well.

Spinelli (2007) argues that this principle is primary and fundamental in the therapeutic endeavor, as it encompasses the individual in their irreducible multifactorial ways and allows for a fuller expression of their way of being. In this context, all the participants share a common philosophical platform where

yogic principles inform them about intersubjective relational ways of being with themselves and with others.

They all articulate a profound sense of self-care that emerges out of this relatedness. The ethics and morals found in the 'Yamas and Niyamas' bring them into this relational field at a very personal level from the beginning of their engagement with yoga. From a yogic perspective, it is common to find the principles of the Yamas and Niyamas underpinning the various aspects of the yogic philosophies that influences a practitioner in developing that particular relational way of being with themselves, with others and with nature (Vivekananda, 2005). These can also be understood separately as the intra-personal, interpersonal and the transpersonal relational ways of being. The intrapersonal belongs to the consciousness developed and understood by the individual. An example of the intrapersonal experience can be understood from Frieda who refers to her daily practice as providing "intentional time." She says, "this practice over the years is the system, my system…incorporating the "mind, body and psychic system…focus on what is bigger than me, something bigger than this (points to herself). Practice connects me to that other place." Applying these learnings in one's communication and relationship with others becomes the interpersonal dimension which comes to life in Edwina's description of relating as a 'conduit', and which is exemplified in van Deurzen's (2010) description of relationship, when she says, "I am, more than anything, an emptiness which only comes to life in the process of resonating with what I encounter" (p. 237). Finally when we leave the familiar world of our everyday pre-occupations and issues dealing with self-identity, we use the term transpersonal (Rama et al.,

1976). In this space, participants describe doing their own practice, which include specific breathing (pranayama) practices, meditations, chanting or mindfulness practices. These may be combined with physical practice and are often done in between sessions, as a form of self-care.

Relating with distress and suffering is seeing "…the raw honesty, a kind of spiritual path, which comes from yoga, Buddhism, you know, most explorations of spirituality…" says Jessica. In this relational experience she says, "…my suffering is more existential based…I don't see suffering as an aberration from the norm. Psychology training kind of taught me that it was…it taught me that the problem is in the suffering but now I think it's about how we relate to our suffering."

One's ontological experience in the world, in its primary sense, is based on care (Aho, 2014). Aho adds, "…we already embody a felt sense of care or concern with things that arise out of our situated frame of reference" (2014, p. 151). This is evidenced in the participants' attitude, made frequently apparent when they speak about the levels of personal healing they had achieved through yoga, and their wish to share these ways of healing with their clients. Caring becomes an underlying feature for all the participants in the way they work with client's. This is supported by Simmington (1996) when he describes, "…no healing of a permanent nature can come from anything less than an inner creative emotional act" (p. xvii). Caring about and working with suffering in such a perspective can be referenced to van Deurzen (2010), and drawing on Kierkegaard's philosophy, she suggests, "…it is precisely because he suffered as a human being that he was able to put his finger so precisely

on the issues that matter most to people who are suffering" (p. 17). This is not an inference about the suffering of the participants, but it reminds us that the participants began their journey of yoga in an attempt to understand those deeper questions of the givens of their existence and the predicaments they found themselves in at the time.

Personally gratifying healing from the practice of yoga has been acknowledged by all participants and relating and connecting at this multi-layered level of experience is essential. As Frieda states, "you must connect at this level for healing to occur. Changes of habit, thoughts or medication can alleviate symptoms, but that deeper change does not emerge." Like Frieda, Jessica's group of clients who report that they were shown how to go within to gain that meaning for themselves, resonates with what Bugental (1992) has to say about the subjective self. He explains, "Life-changing psychotherapy, more than most other forms of therapy, demands that we recognize the patient's subjectivity as the true site of our endeavours" , where, "…that quest must beyond question, take the seeker into the depths of his subjectivity" (ibid., pp. 3-4). In this context, Yalom is said to have a 'personal mantra'; "It's the relationship that heals, the relationship that heals, the relationship that heals" (cited in Cooper, 2003, p. 72).

Adding to this relational dimension would be the quality of listening that needs to be done "…on many levels simultaneously" (Bugental, 1992, p. 71). In this regard, we also see van Deurzen (2010) describe consciousness as an activity that comprises many layers that are interacting with one another at

once. It is from this embodied multi-dimensional experience that participants describe that they listen.

In this relational stance, the participants reject a system that treats an individual based on their pathology just as yoga philosophy does not work within a framework of pathology (Rama et al.1976; Vivekananda, 2005). From an existential perspective, van Deurzen (2010), also seen as the 'de-pathologising' existentialist (Cooper, 2003), states that existential therapy seeks to explore the difficulties encountered in our "…vibrant and dangerous aliveness" (2010, p. 238), in the givens of our human existence, essentially moving away from the field of pathology. In this context, participants articulate having a conflict with the predominant medical model that they feel is often too intrusive in the scope of working in a holistic way. Bugental (1992) describes his experience with psychology as one of fascination, producing a feeling of power within. He informs us that it "…taught me much about people, but never really brought me to know others - or myself" ( p.17). From this it can be argued that the relationship with the other is an objectification of the 'other', having its place in scientific applications and remains distant and separated from the way existential therapy is applied. This is not a full scale sentiment for the rejection of the scientific understanding of the human predicament, but drawing on Heidegger's writings, Aho (2014) suggests, "It is the hegemony of the scientific method as the only way to interpret the human situation that is at issue…" (p. 136).

*Authenticity*

Collectively, these themes are described by the participants as being their ways of finding that sense of the authentic. In this context Bugental (1992) says, “Psychotherapy is a means by which a person may seek to gain or regain congruence with the givens of being human” (p. 246). In this way, Cohn (1997) states, ‘The aim of existential psychotherapy is often described as the emergence of a more authentic way of living” (p. 122).

As noted above, participants are conflicted about the over medicalization of their profession. For Jessica “The profession of psychology is becoming more and more prescribed, in being told what we are allowed…” “Doctors being in charge of psychology” is how she describes the ‘clinicalization’ and ‘medicalization’ of the profession. She says, “most of my patients want to explore ‘meaning’ in their lives, not the ABCs of CBT. It’s OK for ten minutes of a session, and that’s enough as one tool in the tool belt.” Quoting R.D. Laing (1927-1989), Cooper (2003) writes, “At a time when therapists are becoming increasingly preoccupied with regulations and codes, such a challenge may be of particular importance” (cited in Cooper 2003, p. 106). Van Deurzen (2010) states that, “This is particularly true with the CBT model approach to therapy, which seeks to adapt the individual to the reality of life as soon as possible” (p. 246). Taking a somewhat strong stance, like some of the participants, Aho (2014) reminds us that the prominence of the medical model can influence us in becoming “…complicit in our own objectification…” and “…fleeing from who we are” (p.161). By this he means that we hand over the responsibility of our well-being to the doctors, or put another way, “…we

disown ourselves by simply going along with the crowd" (ibid., p. 62). Despite this, the participants describe being resolute in remaining authentic to their way of being. They all admit that they are unable to be anything but themselves in the therapy room, which resonates with Jung when he said, "…be the man through whom you wish to influence others" (cited in May, 1989, p.79).

Frieda sees a difference in being a 'professional person' and states that she feels like a 'whole person'. She says, "I add something to it. Human." Getting to this multifactorial way of the 'whole' has been described by the participants as being mindful at multiple levels. Yalom (1980) informs us that "Forgetfulness of being is the everyday mode of existence that Heidegger refers to as the "inauthentic" (1980, p.31). But with "mindfulness of being", Yalom (1980, p. 31) explains that a person gets to bring their full human capacity into being in the world, just as Frieda articulates, that she adds something 'human' in her relatedness.

Whilst authenticity could be seen by some as a superior call to a way of being, van Deurzen (1999) states, "The essential nature of Dasein requires us to be open to inauthenticity as to authenticity" (p. 123). This realization is seen in Edwina's description of her own maturity when she says, "When I finished my degree, I felt and I thought I had a lot more answers than I actually did. And I thought my role was actually more expert than it really is. Through yoga, I've really come to appreciate that I'm always learning. It's been humbling and has put my role into perspective."

*The integration*

For those who believe that by taking a person's narrative apart, they are tackling the parts, they are forgetting that the parts come with an outline of the 'whole' (Cohn, 2002), a concept (the 'whole') frequently referred to by the participants. From this statement we get to understand the interdependent nature of all the themes that remain alive and fluctuate in their intensity to influence and inform the participants' way of being in their work as psychotherapists.

The strength of this integration in the way they work as psychotherapists is evidenced by Frieda, who explains, "Yoga is the prime mover…in making sense of my own life…that also informs my practice as a psychiatrist and psychotherapist." Jessica describes yoga as being a psychology in its own right, saying "…my yoga is always in my therapy." For Edwina, "…the limitations of psychotherapy…can be exceeded" as yoga informs the way she practices. Finally, integration seems unquestionable when we hear Sandra say, "It's not something that I bring, it's something that I am."

## CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that yoga is a powerful medium that influences a psychotherapist's search for personal well-being, which also translates across and enhances their professional work as psychotherapists.

*Findings*

The research has found that a committed yoga practitioner, working as a psychotherapist, brings a range of interdependent themes that support and enhance their work as psychotherapists. The study describes what the participants mean when they say they experience 'another way of being'. These findings tell us that the participants describe working with: a more expansive consciousness, an acceptance of ones opposing forces, a deep embodied way of understanding oneself and the other in a spiritual and authentic relationship and, being able to experience a profound sense of self-healing and self-care.

Existential principles applied to the themes that describe the participants' 'way of being', provide us with an appreciation of the possibilities of integrating Eastern and Western philosophies. These themes are supported by existential principles such as Heidegger's 'being-in-the-world' (Mulhall, 2013) and 'being-in-the-world-with-others' (Langdridge, 2007), and are well placed in the existential model of the 'human dimension' (physical, social, personal and spiritual) as described by van Deurzen (2009, 2010).

The integration of yogic philosophies and practice in their work as psychotherapists provided no contradictions or confusion. The study finds the participants generally opposed to the prescriptive, manualized models of psychotherapy that views an individual within a framework of pathology. The study found that the participants worked with a strong sense of self-care, confidence, creativity and humility. The study also found that the influence of yoga was always present in the participants' ways of being personally and

professionally. Engaging in yoga to establish a better way of being for themselves has culminated in not being able to separate this out from who they are in their professions, as psychotherapists.

The literature search has demonstrated that there is a wealth of knowledge about yoga and its benefits, however, there remains a significant lack of information relating to what a psychotherapist has to say about how yoga influences the way they practice as therapists.

The limitation of the study can be seen in the demographic spread, where we see only female participants being used. The reason for this was that there were no male respondents at the time. Not having a gender balance may have excluded vital differences in the descriptive experiences and outcome of the study. The small sample size is also seen as a potential limitation to this study. Being swayed by my own bias in the process of this study is also seen as a potential limitation, and this has been explained in the section called 'reflexivity'. To overcome these limitations, a recommendation is noted, including suggestions for the application of the outcomes of this study.

*Recommendations*

- A larger study with varying demographic criteria will help attest to the findings of this study.
- Apply these findings to yoga courses as a direction for those who may want to consider working as counselling therapists.

- Apply these findings to the training of psychotherapists with the purpose of providing a path of learning and practice to support their own self-care or for those who are not trained in a particular spiritual dimension.

## APPENDIX 1

### Interview Questions

**1. Can you describe your journey that led you to study both yoga and psychotherapy?**

a. What prompted you to take up yoga? **OR** How did you get interested in yoga?

**2. What does yoga mean for you?**

3. **Can you describe what you get from your daily/regular practice of yoga?**

a. How has this influenced your personal life?

b. In what ways?

**4. What has influenced you in bringing yoga to your profession as a psychotherapist?**

a. Can you describe this?

b. How is this useful in your work as a psychotherapist?

c. What, if any, are the challenges you experience in attempting to do this?

**5. What circumstances in a session would you say call for the inclusion of yoga or aspects of it, into your work as a psychotherapist?**

a. How is this received by the client?

b. What do they say? Do you have an example?

c. Once introduced, how are subsequent sessions framed?

d. Can you describe what happens?

**6. What does this integrated approach do to your professional status of psychologist/psychotherapist?**

a. How has it changed?

b. What specifically has changed?

**7. Do you discuss, describe or explore any aspects of yoga, that influences you as a psychotherapist/psychologist with your supervisor?**

a. What would these factors be, specifically?

**8. How would you describe the type of work you do as a psychotherapist now, with the integration of yoga in your practice?**

a. What has changed in this work since you first began?

b. What has influenced these changes?

## APPENDIX 2

### Interview data

This is a sample of the responses to interview questions from a mix of participants to each question. Participants remain anonymized in these responses.

***Can you describe your journey that led you to study both yoga and psychotherapy?***

> Well, I began psychiatry because it seemed to me to be the only interesting bit of western medicine, and I didn't feel very engaged in being a general practitioner or the lifestyle with any other specialty. So I began that and I guess parallel to that, I started to understand a lot about the mind, western psychology added only 'so much' to that, so I was

introduced to, colleagues actually, to Buddhism, that then led me to yoga, I was doing yoga classes anyway. I had a Christian upbringing, and that didn't give any philosophy of mind, and Psychiatry talked about the pathology of the mental process, but not the philosophy of mind. So certainly in Eastern philosophy, I found the whole, just an eloquent and vast understanding of how the mind worked and how that linked to feeling and emotion and life. Um, and I guess parallel to that was um, I began to have my own psychotherapy, using a Freudian model. So personally, I was exploring what, how do to I make sense of myself and relationships and deal with the problems of life.

Well, it's interesting, because my interest in yoga, I should say first, I grew up as a kid in a, a Catholic family, and I was always very interested in my, in spiritual practice that is in the sacred, I should say in the sacred, and this is something that always drew me as a kid, and what of course when I left school I gave up my Catholic practice, but I was still very interested in this notion of the sacred, and I didn't have language for it, obviously in those days because I was very young. But there was something that really intrigued me. I had a vague memory from when I was a kid, um, an aunty of mine used to do yoga, and a , and I heard a little bit about yoga that it was good for managing stress. So, and of course this is going back now, what am I, going back thirty years or more. And, so yoga wasn't around that much, but anyway, I was living in Melbourne at the time, and, so I sought out a yoga class, a

beginner's course, and, from the very first moment, I did that beginners course, some lights went on for me.

Just before I turned 30, I completely burnt out and left the field of psychology and said that I would never do that again. And, around that same time I, er decided to travel to India…

So then I found myself at University studying psychology and they just happened to be operating yoga as part of their curriculum, it didn't towards your marks or anything like that, but it was on after hours, you could do a yoga course and I took it up, and I practiced with a teacher who is of the Iyengar style, loved it and then never looked back. I think at that time I had finished my therapy. It was also an opportunity for me to be embodied and to experience my body in a different way compare to how I had been experiencing my body for quite some time.

***What does yoga mean for you?***

It means wholeness. Yeh,

*And how do you experience this wholeness?*

In many ways, it's the, the uplifting thoughts but it's also the deeper, negative, lower thoughts that draw on the feelings, the angry or jealous feelings, it's the light and the dark, its, you know, the easy and the hard,

it's the whole, its encompassing the human, the divine, for me it's encompassing everything. It is, that is as I experience, my experience, my purpose, to be whole.

*OK. So what's coming to me is the word 'polarities'... that you are not avoiding but you are with…*

Yah, yah, that's it, and that seems to me the very essence of the union, you know of the opposites, that holds it together for someone.....

*And how does yoga allow that to happen?*

And then what comes to mind is that, the very physical experience of, er, opposite forces in the body, so, there's one asana that I would teach and do, er, the fish pose, and you lie with your hands behind you and you have your forearms leaning down and as you, as you push down through your forearms you lift up. So you're lifting up and you're pushing down and you feel a space in between you. The opposing forces create a space. And for me that's, that space is where everything happens, that space in between the opposites. So that's how, that's one example, in the very physical experience of yoga where you hold your opposites, not just pushing your chest up and getting the best back bend, but focusing on the grounding down and lifting up, creates that real space that you can feel in our body sometimes and it changes the consciousness as well.

It's really about a whole kind of a paradigm shift for me, in terms of how I understand myself and my mind, um, and so, I guess, proactively and reactively, the right kind of yoga strategies I can use to take care of myself. So that first level for me is about myself and my self-care, yah. The second one is how I am in the room with the client and um, all that, all the things, the tools that I have that I can use to really assist with. I guess that third layer is about the yoga therapy, is about looking at what's going on for a person, and look at what's out of balance in their live and what kind of yoga tools might be useful. And that might be particular asana practice, it's always breath-work, I always use the breath for clients and sometimes other types of meditations to practice or other sorts of self-awareness. I often teach, um, use of mind, concept of mind, in my psycho-education, in terms of talking about the Bodhi mind, chitta, and ahamkara and the manas mind and what happens when which part of the mind is directing the attention and, so, that third layer for me is really about the kind of practicals of what I can share with my clients from a yoga framework.

Yeh, yeh, So it's a time just for me. It's a time where I guess dedicate some of my life to a practice that is important to me both physically and spiritually, it's a time for me to connect with things higher than myself, you know a practice that , I find it really calming, soothing, it's really my time to connect with myself from day to day…

*You mentioned 'higher than myself'. Can you flesh that out a bit more, what is it ...*

I think I'm becoming aware of, it's really difficult to put into words, um, coz the best way I think I can describe is that the feeling that occurs when I sense that connection, I'm able to connect with that and I guess I'm checking in, there is that, I'd probably call it my core self, maybe I'm describing the same thing, the core self, the higher self, and then the layers on top of that, which is the thinking, the mind, the intellect, .....

*So when you're' 'checking in' what's happening there for you, what do you mean by checking in, how is that.....*

I guess it's a dropping down into somewhere more core, more central to me, and there's a calmness about that.

There are two things that kind of changed that self-analysis process for me, when we bring in that yogic perspective. One is ahimsa and the other one is, yup sure, understand yourself and understand 'small self' in context with the 'bigger self' as in the world you live in and everyone around you. So it's not just about involuting, and kind of so much self-analysis that you become this kind of smaller focus where you actually do not really care about anybody else. It's understanding this small self so that you can live in a context of the larger self, and be conscious of your relationship in the word around you. Because that's very much what yoga's about too. It's not just about me on my mat in my little isolated

world. Yah and then what happens when you get off the mat and go out and you live in the communities. And that's the Niyamas.

More expanded experience of being a human being, which is part of all there is, a part of the whole. So my relationship to nature and to other human beings is much changed now, and yoga practice I think enables me to have a home base.

It's my experience of my physical body, yoga has given me, the asana aspect of yoga has given me a very, an increasingly sensitive experience of my physical body and then the subtle body and beyond that the supreme consciousness.

Now that I have an aging body (laughs), it enables me to, to er, stay friends with my body. In a very physical way, so purely physical, I'm able to remain reasonably mobile and strong and er, so it keeps me healthy in that way. Um, from the point of view of the mind, I also er, from my practice, um, just as I have an aging body, I also now, at this time in my life I can see, I can see that there's a horizon off in the distance. And that horizon, I think once we get to a certain age, you know, it starts to appear and that, that we start to realize at a very, very real way that this life is not going to go on forever. And so along with that, comes a very, much, much deeper appreciation of the meaning of life and the meaning

of death, how, and that how I er, relate to life, relate to death, is also now a very, very important part of my practice. Um...

*Can you tell me more about that relationship you have with that concept of life and death and the horizon and try and bring it back to yourself?*

Yah, um, I'm very conscious of the impermanence of life now, um. Years ago when I was younger, I was very swept up in the permanence of my experience. And now that I'm older I realize that that's just nonsense, ha ha. Um, so, I have an appreciation, I'm, I'm able to live in, my, my practice enables me to live in an aging body and till be friends with it, to live with the recognition of, of the impermanence of life, the, the finality of death, and also in a, in a more of an umbrella sense, recognise myself as part of a greater whole.

I had a lived experience of the importance of going through, what are difficult times, and certainly had the experience that you know, I guess of impermanence, so that difficulty wasn't there forever. Once it came up, it might be difficult for some time, then, it passed.

*So by saying that something doesn't stay fixed, and by staying with it, it gets transformed, what is it saying in the dynamics of the relationship, is there another way of saying this, what else is happening, for the person?*

Hum er, the change, the change you mean?

*May be I'm not asking the question very clearly. But staying with the processes of the body, and, and as you say, just letting it flow without avoiding it, how else could this be explained?*

Ah yes, it's the surrender of the ego, the desire, I've got to control it, I've got to understand it or I've got to get rid of it or I've got to keep it here, er, to me, it's the surrender of the ego to the flow to that other bigger intelligence and, hum…

*How is that different to conventional western psychotherapy?*

Well there is no bigger intelligence in western psychology. It's about the ego. It's about, although Jungian teaching is about centering the personality of self, rather than over the ego. So there's a sense in that system which is why I'm interested in it and studying it, that the ego is there, it has a role but, it's not the whole player in the story. And to me I guess that's the difference to me between the west and the east. The sense of the bigger intelligence, God, system, I might use a word like 'bigger system', or 'creative intelligence', or the 'source'.

***Can you describe what you get from your daily/regular practice of yoga?***

I get, I get, um, I'll break it down, I get flexibility in my joints, I get to refresh my energy, I get to um clear my mind of the you know, of the rabble, how we get stuck in there, I get to refine my all of my senses I suppose which, and then with that I come to that, this sense of embodiment, it helps me to be more embodied, to be actually here, with

this experience of what's actually going on in this body, so that I can then be present for the experience of what's going on in the world.

I guess the philosophy of that gives words to my experience, so I experience something, for instance, my body, my thoughts, my feelings and something beyond that.

Hum, yeh, grounding, coz, two things I think, well two main things, some intentional time I'm setting aside to focus on that that's bigger than me whatever I decide to do, whatever the practice is, yes, there's something bigger that this (pointing to self) individual life. So it connects me to that other world to that other place, but at the same time it is one of the most paradoxical things that it grounds me in my own life as well. Just being in my body or when I'm moving or breathing or chanting, it grounds me into this body. It feels important (says it quietly).

*And with that grounding experience, what happens to you? How would you describe your experience of being grounded?*

Yeh, it's using the body to create a grounded space in consciousness I think. It's a, it's a mental or a subtle experience. It's Yes (with some deep emphasis), this is my life, where I am, I'm talking to you in this room, it's like the body helps ground the, gives it, the consciousness, gives it , the focus, and it feels (pause and quietly 'good'), feels OK. Even if something unpleasant is happening (energised) to be grounded in that,

seems to hold it. It feels ok to bear the difficulty when your grounded (getting quieter), when I'm grounded.

I think one of the most profound influences has been in terms of feeling greater stability and consistency in my life and a letting go of worries and things that I used to think were such a big deal, that er, through yoga, don't seem to be quite such a big deal any more. There's a resilience that's built in within me as a result of my yoga practice and I think also the other thing I would describe is the opening up to allowing in and out, love, more so than, than I would have expected ever before.

***What has influenced you in bringing yoga to your profession as a psychotherapist?***

Because it works, it's this healing you see, and I want the person in front of me to experience this wholeness and healing and, this seems to me one of the ways, one of the, you must connect at this level for healing to occur, you know, certain changes of habits and thoughts can change to alleviate a symptoms or medication can alleviate a symptoms but that deeper, that deeper change, and yoga may not be the only way, I suspect, but its, it offers some very deep healing. So that's why I would bring it in and also because I'm practicing it and I'm in a different space now when I'm with a patient. The listening is different, the listening is coming from a different place. It's not listening with my thinking mind, head, or, its listening with the heart, it's, what is, it's not anticipating what

is going to be said or how I might formulate it. It's (softly) different listening.

The philosophy of yoga has given me a framework to put words to that, concepts for that and you know when I experience that, that is the source, that is where the healing comes from then, and that's what the model, that's what the teachings say to me, then that's, and I experience that healing and I want to offer it to the people that come to see me. But certainly what I learnt of western psychology, up to this point, didn't have that depth, it sort of, seemed to have thoughts and feeling, there was an unconscious of some sort, but er, I hadn't experienced it as healing in the way I have, er, from the practices of yoga.

*Can you talk a bit more about what this is healing is for you?*

Hum, yeh, it's er, it's subtle sometimes. It's a shift that happens um, not through my personal world but I guess it's a sequence of events that bring me to a point where something happens and there's a shift at a deep level. And that comes through a change of perspective. I see something that I didn't see before or I'm conscious of something I wasn't conscious of before or er, that old thought patter loses its intensity, er, there's a different way of seeing, of thinking and feeling. It comes more spontaneously, naturally to me.

There's an inherent intelligence, the psychic fact, the system is, is geared toward wholeness. So we need, it requires everything, it requires the opposites, to be whole.

For me yoga is fantastic as a psychotherapist for self-care, for looking after myself, for re-energising myself, so that I am available and when I'm in a session with a client I'm there as much as I can be, so I think yoga is an amazing tool to basically managing stress, down loading after a potentially big day and being emotionally available to my clients.

*And would you not get this from contemporary psychological studies, practice and awareness, the type of qualities you were just describing....*

For me no, maybe some people do,

*So how is it that you don't get this from contemporary psychology?*

I guess one of the most basic things is the use of my body, you know, through my asana practice, you know I'm moving my body, my muscles, moving my joints, connecting with my body in a way that's very different to the traditional psychological therapies. And when I, you know I use the meditative aspects of yoga, I guess that it's more, I guess, I don't know, again, it touches on deeper questions.....

*…and traditional psychology doesn't provide you with that?*

…er, it does to an extent and certainly, yah, certainly only to an extent, it does and it can but I guess having a personal practice and meditation,

it's almost like the limitations of psychotherapy can be I guess, exceeded, I don't know how to say that quite so well

*Psychotherapy can be exceeded?*

…yeh, it sort of seems like, it sort of can take existential question to another level that are more difficult to answer in western psychotherapy....

If I can be more refined in my own embodiment then I find that I am able to be more present for my clients. It helps me to just listen better. You know, to have somewhere to come back to, to that embodied experience.

*How does is help you? What is happening for you that is enabling you to listen differently or better?*

The listening happens in the body.

*So tell me more about, can you explain a little bit more about what happens to you when you listen? How are you listening in your body?*

If I can use an example that was given to me once and I found that it really resonated with me. In er, um Asian culture, in particular, this was a Zen teacher that used this example, so well say it was Japanese culture. You know all the bowls are, the cups don't have handles, so if you ask me to pass the cup, here (Western culture), I'd say sure Brian, hold the cup and I'd pass it to you (using one hand and not 'completely' facing

me). If we were in Japan and if we were born by our (Eastern) traditions, the way I would do it is to take the cup in both hands and I would turn towards you and I'd hand you the cup with both hands. And what I'd be doing is not only handing you the cup but offering you my heart. As is described in, in the heart, in that Eastern way. I'm also turning towards you my centre, which in that tradition might be called the Hara, or the Dantien or Manipura (in yoga) or any other names for that centre which in turn towards you. So it recognises that as well as this physical flesh and bone body, there's another part of me which I recognise as 'mind' which I turn towards you. And in the yoga tradition of course we know, that when we say Namaste it says 'the sacred in me recognises the sacred in you'. So in a way I'm saying Namaste to my client. Now whether I'm turning towards them or not of course depends on the client depends, on the set-up. But, but, to set the intention, to turn that part of myself in the direction my client I offer tem, a, what I believe is a sacred recognition of one another as a point from which the work can be done, can begin, can be done.

Having experienced 'burn-out' so significantly and so early, I really didn't think I would do therapy work again, and the fact that I can get up every morning and I have something I do, which is good for me and starts my day in such a clear and centered focused way and between clients I have things I can do, I know what I can do if I'm holding tension, I know what I can do if my breathing is affected, through you know counter-

transference issues, so you know I have plenty of tools in my personal kit-bag, which I feel is the best self-care mechanism I have. I'm also very aware of my own, um, embodied experience I have while I'm working with people.

*So, just picking up on the awareness of your embodied experience... did that, did you have that in psychology…*

No, definitely not. In fact I would have said that I was much more of the, er, umm, denial, avoidance of any of my own, um, self-awareness, to my detriment. But you know all that embodied experience that happens when we are in the room with somebody especially with somebody who is in quite a lot of pain, hum...

*Psychological pain?*

Yah, either way, actually, I think, physical pain you know also, um, so that second layer for me is about all the tools that, er, practical tools as well as my understanding of what's happening in the room, in the moment with the client. And I think yoga makes me a much better therapist from that perspective as well.

*What do you think about when you say that, what is it about yoga that tells you that you're a better practitioner?*

I think because I'm a better tool, I think I'm stronger, I'm clearer, I'm more present, um, I'm more able to be steady, and usually calm in response to other people's trauma, so I think that a lot of it, the reason it

helps me to be better, a better practitioner, is because it makes me stronger.

My own embodiment enables me to be there in a very real way, and be present with the client.

I think my own personal experience of yoga and how it's been such a great way to facilitate self-knowledge, particularly having had a very destructive relationship with my body at one point in time, I've really had an experience where yoga has transformed the relationship that I have with my body and with myself and I just think it's so powerful, and I really I think it's really important to share that.

*And were you not getting that from traditional western psychological paradigms, psychotherapy theories?*

Not really, not so much, not the kind of bigger questions and the other ways of going about looking for or asking those questions or seeking out knowledge.

*Other ways?*

Yah, 'other ways'. Well if I think about myself, I tend to be quite cerebral and I do a lot of thinking type therapy and talking therapy, er, you know CBT kind of stuff. Whereas for me, what really helped was to bypass that kind of I guess rational process stuff to find a different avenue, which

was, in some ways quite surprising and I'm not sure exactly how it happened…

*What was happening?*

I think it was through the physical practice I was turning inward toward my body, my bodily experience and coming to know myself, I guess, from the beginning, on a level that I ignored for a long time. From the perspective of how is my body feeling, and I would have no idea. So it was this opportunity, or this avenue for me to come to know myself more from the inside, the felt sense of who I was. You know it was hard for me to do from talk therapy

*Can you tell me a little bit more about the felt sense?*

It's about, you know not just living from the neck up but also from the neck down and being able to connect with and tune into my bodily signals, so my body signals are a whole bunch of things to me like, how I'm feeling emotionally, when I need to eat, when I don't need to eat, tension in certain areas provides me with knowledge about how I'm feeling, you know, where my boundaries are what is important to me , so I guess really tuning into and knowing how I'm feeling and being really connected to my body. If I didn't have that bodily awareness, I might react quite instinctively, er and I guess unconsciously, to those kind of sensations. I guess having that awareness of, that bodily awareness, I can actually use that as 'data'/information, to then kind of respond. So I think that's really become a really great tool for me to use.

***What circumstances in a session would you say call for the inclusion of yoga or aspects of it, into your work as a psychotherapist?***

For example, when there's a lot of anxiety in a person and when the thoughts are just catastrophizing, I guide the person back to their body, just sitting there, in the seat and get them to ground both their feet on the ground or I get them to stand up into tadasana/mountain pose and guide them through the physical aspects and you know, the focus on the breath and just let them find some grounding, stillness and solidity. So that's one way I do it,

It's mixed. So my clinical practice, my specialty is working with people with (*purposely left out for anonymity*). So that, most people I see come because they know of my focus, um, but I'm also very clear on my website on myself, on my promotion, that you know I am also very influenced by yoga teachings and the yoga therapy. So I'm clear that that's part of what I do. I'm aware that that probably makes some clients not come to me, which is fine, you know, but I always check out with people in the first session. Is there something that they come with a particular interest in or not? Because some people are very receptive and they've chosen me, because of that more, what they see often, what they often say, kind of more holistic, um, kind of approach. And if that's the case I feel I have a lot more freedom to use a lot more tools. But some people will openly, I had someone yesterday and she said, "I just, I

don't want you to do any of that yoga stuff. I've just come to you for psychotherapy."

*So the person who doesn't wish to engage with the yoga…, what happens for you when they say I don't want, you know, what do see that as, and how do you see that comment from them that "I don't want the yoga"*

I'll often talk about, you know, how I bring yoga into my practice, um, so it doesn't really bother me when people say 'no' to that. I guess I'm usually clear with people that, you know, yoga is a big part of me, and how I think, and I can't guarantee you that I'm not going to slip into some kind of yoga language here or there, um, but you know if I talk about anything that's unclear, let me know.

Yoga techniques can be quite helpful to help people train the mind to be more focused, helping to be more present for their experience, give them an opportunity to respond to their experience rather than let them be overwhelmed by it. Yoga is good for helping in a very busy mind, so in the case of anxiety it a bit of a 'no-brainer', in the case of dealing with trauma, if people describe symptoms that, again cold be anxiety or obviously a physical reaction, or flashbacks; so I can often think of yoga techniques that can start to develop awareness so that person has some choice about what they do in response to their circumstances but it tiny steps, particularly in the case of trauma as you would know, so I'm very careful about that. But very often it can very helpful to just develop awareness.

Certainly in terms of sharing some knowledge, I guess very practical yoga techniques.

*Such as?*

Pranayama, yeh, or the paying attention to and control of the breath, and certainly the way I'd introduce that is through, very scientifically, so talking about the impact of breath on the parasympathetic nervous system. I think I also bring yoga, I don't know how to say this but um, in terms of yeh, just being open to peoples', sort of beliefs, spiritually, I guess those sort of existential issues. Certainly, meditation and mindfulness are things that I encourage my clients to explore, certainly in sessions I will invite them to do so, particularly with that embodiment, is something I will often use in my sessions with y clients, um I guess, for the purpose of assisting them to develop a greater awareness of that internal bodily experience

***What does this integrated approach do to your professional status of psychologist/psychotherapist?***

…so, I guess I'm, I'm also pretty clear that, I think once something has been integrated, it's impossible to un-integrate, (smiles), what's the word..

*To break free, to walk away from that,*

Yeh, yeh, that's right. So I couldn't not operate from a yogic psychology framework anymore. That's part of, part of the, how I think now.

*Do you experience any challenges that you may talk to yourself about or wonder about…*

Yeh all the time. Actually, one of the things I find most challenging is when someone comes in for the first session and their lives are just like everything is just, everything is unhealthy. So sometimes there's an internal conflict for me about thinking where to start, you know, what, er, it feels a bit too hard. But usually in a situation like that, I will start, when it feels too much, I will start talking about ahimsa. Usually I won't use the language of ahimsa, but I use the language of kindness and compassion and self- harm versus self-care. Because I think that, unless we start there, it's pointless to try and talk about behaviour change or talk about any of those things.

It's made it more clear as to what I want to do and what I don't want to do in terms of work, as to how I work, decisions about what I will and won't read, what conferences I will and won't go to, it keeps it creative, for me it's become much more creative, and I don't feel a slave to the system or the, to solve or cure or fix the person, er, yeh, given me a lot of freedom actually. You know there's the person whose got some role in it too, in the bigger system, so there's, I'm not the all supreme all powerful, fixer of the problem. I've learnt that it has to be your own journey and yoga gives you the tools for that. Know thyself.

***Do you discuss, describe or explore any aspects of yoga that influences you as a psychotherapist/psychologist, with your supervisor?***

My supervisor has a real appreciation of what it means to me and he is very accepting of that. And I thinking his own way, he's not a yoga practitioner, he has had an experience or understands what it means to be embodied and he has an interest in that, but through a different lens.

I don't necessarily bring the yoga stuff, that's more my think and way of being in sessions, but I guess that informs the way that I practice and speak about my clients and structure my sessions. My supervisor is very supportive of the way that I practice.

The supervisor I had just finished with, he had a great interest in Eastern things. And he was also quite orthodox. He thought it was great and that was important for me. I'm now arranging a Jungian therapist and that's a very inclusive system.

***How would you describe the type of work you do as a psychotherapist now, with the integration of yoga in your practice?***

Soul is the word, soul centered, the whole person, the whole unique person. A tailored approach really. There's not an operationalized method or a formula, er, finding a real place in me where the relationship is authentic and that's what's helpful for the other person. And, you know, it is about the relationship actually, between the therapist and the client, that's where the healing really is, that's like the dish (holding her hand out in the form of a bowl) where it all happens..

*And which takes me to asking you about that dish, because there's a vulnerable person in distress who comes to see the therapist. And the inclusion of this person into your space, er, I'm assuming that this is a profound experience you are describing here, I'm wondering, has yoga influenced that to happen for you?*

Yeh, yeh. Yes no doubt. Because of the way it's changed me therefore I'm different in here.

*In here means?*

In the professional therapeutic relationship. I'm more whole, more of a whole person, less that professional. And I think that helps, one of the things that helps. More human.

Yes, it's a good question. I would say I'm, um, much more resilient, resilient because I have a different relationship with suffering, with my own suffering and I'm not afraid of it as I think I was before I had a way of understanding suffering, that is more existentially based, um, I don't see that suffering is an aberration from the norm. Whereas, my psychology training kind of taught me that it was. So that's a big difference. You know my psychology training taught me that, the suffering, the problem is in the suffering, you know, and I now think the problem is how we relate to our suffering.

*Can you say a little more about what that is about for you?*

I guess it's the, um, the raw honesty of, I suppose this the kind of spiritual path, really, which you could say, comes through yoga, it comes through Buddhism or it comes through, you know I think most explorations of spirituality, um, but, the kind of trust and faith, well that's part of what life just is, instead of trying to resist, feeling like there's something erroneous or, I think before yoga, my way of thinking was very much, I'd been quite influenced in some of my early psychology training, this was the early 90s, and positive psychology was just beginning. It's a phrase that I have a real reaction to (smiles) um, because the idea was very much about happiness and be happy and be, you know have a joyful life, and now I understand that same language and that same concept in a very different kind of way of thinking. There was a fair bit of naivety and optimism going on, that life should be good, and it should be ok and everything should be fine and if it wasn't that something's wrong, or, whereas, you know, now I understand that well, life isn't always good, it isn't always ok, and the contentment or 'santosha' comes from the way we react to it not being ok and still find contentment even when it's not. So I, some of that is about the natural maturity that happens but it was also, really enhanced for me through some of the yoga psychology, you know studying the yoga sutras for example, your, the classic kind of psychology text.

There's no separation between spirituality, psychology, physiology, they are just different angles on the same theme. So I think that kind of

integration, I guess that's one word that I use and think about a lot, the integration and the wholeness, that it's just a different angle of the same thing.

*Hence the strength of the word integration that makes sense for you…*

Yes, It's not, they are not so separate, they are just, that's always possible, it's always capable of being that shadow, and for me that's, you could look at that as being Jungian psychotherapy, look at it being yoga psychotherapy, but for me there's a real similarity in that, in terms of understanding wholeness, as opposed to always looking for difference ...

*So it seems that, clearly, that the qualities of yoga, er, I'm sorry if I'm interpreting this,*

No please…

*You're taking me a place where you've really adopted the style of integrating and understanding a human being from a yogic perspective and you can't help yourself, but have it influence your western approach to psychotherapy, as a psychologist…*

Yeh, yah. I would agree with that. I'm pleased that for me, it's not something I feel like I'm, I guess this is the distinction. Yoga is not something I do to clients or even that I do with clients. Yoga is something that I do for me and therefore it intrinsically is part of who I am in the room. And I think it's also. Yah, so it really comes from that place of being, something that has that relevance and importance to me, and therefore, because of that integration, um, it just comes into the room.

So my yoga practice is changing and I'm changing as a human being that will affect how I work as a psychotherapist. Because I really believe that who I am as a human being, is actually significant, in the therapeutic process and the establishment and the cultivation of the therapeutic relationship. And I guess my hope, now I don't know how good, true this is, but I hope I'm continuing to refine that. To understand it better.

*What is the 'it' that you are trying to refine? Can you talk a little bit about that?*

The 'It' is my experience of being human. To understand that better. To be able to be with that more comfortably. To accept everything that comes with that and to, in doing so, to take responsibility for myself as a human being. I think when looking back, before I was interested in existentialism I was actually quite existential, because I was really conscious of not being responsible for a long time.

I think you know, the yogic belief that you know, the saying that mind through self is not my body, it's not my mind, something greater, um, you know, the same is for you, so with my clients, in a way to conceptualize um, perhaps if I feel negative emotional reaction to someone, connecting with that belief then underneath what might be some really tricky stuff, there is a soul, there is goodness and love and just as its within me the same is within that person. So I think what comes with that is a genuine care and connection for that person for that soul and a belief in the potential for that. And seeing that other stuff, the layers that just need to be kind of sifted through (laughs), if that makes sense.

*And when our making sense of the person like that, what are you using as a therapy tool to support that therapeutic journey, is it yoga, yoga influenced psychotherapy or psychotherapy…*

I probably say both. Yeh, I, that conceptualization, certainly not western, like the way I was taught to do therapy from a western perspective, but certainly the models of western psychotherapy can be fantastic to getting rid of some of these barriers

*Like CBT?*

yah

*So are you saying that you have shifted and integrated different things and you're moving in a different direction?*

Yeh, yeh, you know I'm still very new to psychology and to being a psychotherapist, but already I think I've had, yeh, a pretty kind of, I'm starting to get a sense of what my style, what seems to be something that my clients respond well to and the yoga is a big part of that. And sometimes I have this (big Question) that I'm not doing it by the book and it's kind of, and I take that stuff to supervision, and I certainly don't want to be practicing way beyond the bound of what's considered to be effective, but I certainly think that, particularly for beginning practitioners, it's really hard, because your told to stick to the book and the protocol or follow the manuals.

*What are your thoughts around the integration of yogic thinking and CBT, as a practitioner?*

I trained in CBT and probably I'm new to discovering these other amazing therapies, but I think a lot of the things my yoga practice brings me is the ability to sit with people and to ponder those questions and to not necessarily have answers to those questions and that it's ok, but I think it just allows a deeper appreciation and understanding of people and some of the existential challenges that might arise in therapy, and not feeling a need to necessarily jump in and have to correct any automatic thinking errors. One of my lecturers would say that mindfulness and CBT and not necessarily exclusive concepts um, I actually more and more I believe that it's not about the contents of our thoughts that we need to change that, but its more about the relationship we have to our thoughts, which is very much a yogic belief and also I guess it's essentially the foundation of mindfulness. And so when I am using CBT, I don't encourage cognitive restructuring from the perspective of, you know, you must change your thoughts, but from the perspective of being able to show people that perhaps there's another way that we can relate to our thoughts.

*Can you describe a bit more about what you mean when you say we have a relationship with our thoughts, in the yogic way, how does that happen for you?*

I guess it's, from a psychology perspective, I call it dropping into our observer. So it's kinda like meta cognition really, it's about finding the observer within, so recognizing there is a part of you that can be used to observe your thoughts and it doesn't need to be fused with your

thoughts. And from a yogic perspective, I guess we are talking about, enhancing or connecting with our core self, about releasing the mind from the senses or the thoughts that come and go and connecting with stability.

*So you don't need to be fused with your thoughts...*

Yah

*Is here another way you can describe that. What does it mean?*

For me personally and spiritually, I would describe that as you are your higher self, and your thoughts are something that come and go, as part of your day to day experience. I certainly wouldn't use that language necessarily with my clients, (smiling) unless they were open to it, but I think effectively, that's what's happening, when we are doing that sort of work in therapy.

*Do you experience any challenges in attempting to do this or is it just a natural thing that you have with you?*

In a way the more I do it the more I feel it's just natural. I think at first I felt self-conscious, even though it's about conversation, you know, sometimes I would get someone to do breathing or do a particular pose to help to ground them, er, but the more I trust the bigger process and my own ethic, the less I find that a particular challenge that, you know, what would the official professional bodies say, er, and I guess the other challenge that comes with this is that sometimes there is a resistance

from the person, there's a resistance, even if I don't use yoga, the person wants immediate relief from suffering, they want a tablet, you know the magic tablet, er, in a particular form, so that's a challenge.

*I was wondering just in the talking therapy, I'm wondering how yoga informs your talking therapy as opposed to a purely medicalization of symptoms and diagnosis?*

Yeh, the first thing that came to mind when you were asking that was this knowing that you, your essence is, you are in your essence, existence and knowledge and bliss. You know there is no issue of self-esteem from that space. You have that and I have that. The person often is self-loathing of extraordinary intensity. So, one I think, recognising that there is this essence in the other person is important, first and foremost and second, putting a word to it all, offering the philosophy, where we will consider that this is a possibility that you have an essence and covering it is this self-loathing and these habits of mind. Hum, pause.....not everyone can take that in, you know, but you plant the seed.....

*And you say sometimes people are not ready to receive it.....*

No, there's a strong attachment to the identity of the victim or the self, that's worthless...

*So how do you work with them in those instances....*

Hum, er I come back to that deep listening, so hopefully they have an experience of, they value that I value them that I give them the time once a week or once a fortnight. And in a way they have to come to experience that essence of worth. I can talk to them about for an hour a day for the next thousand years telling them. But unless they experience it so hopefully they experience it when they come in here, that there's a value put on them.

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