

(R)Evolution Toward Harmony – A Re/Visioning of Female Teen Being in the  
World:  
The Un/Layering of Self Through Hatha Yoga

by

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BA, Dalhousie University 1993  
BEd, University of Maine 1995  
MEd, Acadia University, 2000

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

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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University of Victoria

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## **Supervisory Committee**

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Dr. Kathy Sanford, (Department of Curriculum and Instruction)  
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**Outside Member**

## **Abstract**

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This work is a collectivist engagement between researcher and participants in a knowledge quest for self-hood through engaged bodily awareness and sense. The world of the teen girl is explored from a philosophical, social, and political perspective that emphasizes expression of self through embodied knowing and being. The process is performative where yoga is used as an arts-based method to explore the self through bodily awareness. The body is reclaimed as a way to know oneself. Yoga is the expression of the living, being, and knowing body. The asana practice, the still of meditation, and the flow of the breath are emancipatory discourse where each of us moves, changes, and grows; and ultimately becomes. This becoming is a consciousness raising experience that finds and grows voice.

The transformative process engages a physical expression where participants' and researcher's individual sense of self is connected with their universal sense of self hereby replacing current patterns of harmful thinking with new consciousness that is reflective of self awareness and realization.

Found poetry is used to explore the experience of the participants. The poetic representation brings the reader into the world of the teen girl. Voices that have been secret and silenced are celebrated. The body is the instrument through which power and ownership of the moment and the self are expressed through emotion and experience. The participants and researcher move collectively and intuitively from passive objects to self-knowing subjects; subjects who are thoroughly engaged in the world and aware of their highest potential as liberated selves.

The findings of this collectivist and activist research approach indicate that embodied engagements elicit the space where flesh speaks and external and internal become unified as one. Yoga is an artful, embodied expression that is about experiencing the world without being enslaved by the world. This is not a passive engagement but an activist engagement that challenges hegemonic ideas of girls in the world and in the world of a girl. This further embraces the idea of the unity of whole-self and mind-body interconnectedness where we are not passive observers of the body with awareness of self located in the head watching over the body as object. Subject and object as separate dissolve and mindfulness is the present. The end result is one where we become; we become fully engaged in a creative and fluid self-hood enabling self-knowledge, self-acceptance, and self-love.

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## **Dedication**

For My Mother: The Strongest Woman I Have Ever Known  
I love you with all of my heart and all of my soul

## **This Work**

What is this work?

This work is:

Embodied and Emergent in that it engages research through the perspective of the body and the exploration of self through embodied ways of being and knowing the world.

Transformative in that its goal is to join the participants individual sense of self with their universal sense of self by replacing the participants current patterns of thinking with new conscious awareness that is reflective of self awareness and realization.

Poetic in that it engages and grows voice of the participant-SELF and my-SELF; to bring the reader closer to the world and words of the participants hearing the voices that are secret and silenced; to re-tell lived experience and open the world of the teen girl in the teen girl's words to the reader.

Feminist in that explores consciousness from the perspective of reclaiming the body as the way and path to knowing, loving, and accepting self in the world in which the self lives.

Rhizomatic in that it is fluid from not only a cerebral perspective but also an experiential perspective.

Arts based in a performative way of being. The art is the physical expression of bodily movement. As we move, we change and we grow.

## The Prologue (The Initiation and The Foundation)

My Mantra

Affirmation

My blood and chi are flowing smoothly  
I am filled with peace and joy  
I am free of pain and illness  
I am blessed with good fortune (Wilcox, 2004, p. 24)

The year was 1989. It was summer and I had finished grade 11. I was a well-adjusted popular teen...or so I thought. I held a part time job at a record shop. Yes, record shops existed in the late 80's. Although we had recently turned a corner in technology with the advent of compact discs, we still sold cassette tapes as well as vinyl. I had managed a small vinyl collection myself. My secret love was for alternative rock including The Replacements, The Cure, The Jesus and Mary Chain, The Violent Femmes, The Pogues and The Smiths. I considered myself an expert in post-punk, indie and alternative music. I had a steady boyfriend for at least two years by that time. He had given me his ring; a special present to him from his grandfather, and one that held great meaning to him and then to me. I was a good student averaging 90 plus on my report cards. So what was the problem?

I was sometimes plagued by indigestion caused by ulcerated stomach tissue brought on by stress; life stressors a teen girl might experience. My parents worried. I was often overwrought and emotional. Not atypical in body or mind for that time.

My father took me to the local library. The session was entitled, "Practicing Transcendental Meditation and Finding your Mantra." "Darlene, dear, remember who you are." You have to know my dad. At the time, I didn't have any idea what he meant. I knew at some level I was supposed to be proud of myself. "Remember dear, the highest form of love is Self love. You must love and honour yourself."

I didn't appreciate the beauty and value in those words at that time. I remember, from the time I was a little girl, my dad reading Buddhist quotes to me. He called himself a Catholic Buddhist, if there is such a thing.

"We are what we think. All that we are arises with our thoughts. With our thoughts, we make our world."

"Do not dwell in the past, do not dream of the future, concentrate the mind on the present moment."

I liked hanging out with my dad. We spent many days together since I was a little girl. I used to ride in the basket on the front of his bike. This may be considered child endangerment today but that was the 70's. We drove to school everyday together. He was a teacher at my high school. My dad would agree to share the radio on the way to school – half CBC, half The Replacements. This was the late 80's after all. But still, I struggled. So off we went to the library.

There was a small man. He gave a lecture. It was a weird crowd. Or a least weird in the eyes of a 16 year old girl. There were no other girls there. No one my age. I felt out of place. Unease. But I was intrigued. I felt intrigued by these ideas. My interest had been sparked. When it was my turn, the small man took me to a corner. "I will give each of you your mantra," he said. "Your mantra is special and it is yours." "Do not ever tell anyone your mantra and always use it with your meditation." I nodded. I was still ill at ease but more intrigued. I captured the sound of my mantra in my mind and in my heart. I listened with intention. As good students do. It was a moment in time that changed my life. I understood through a quiet contemplation and attention to the moment that there was something beyond myself that could help me re-focus, to disengage and engage in a

different place; one that offered meaningfulness. This meaningfulness was separate from my everyday existence and one that propelled me, yet with a gentle lightness, to another space. Even in a moment because the separation didn't last much longer than that. I hadn't known such separation from reality existed and I would seek it out again and again for the next 25 years until we enter the present.

In this present I would share my love of separation through meditation with others; first my yoga students both young and old and then my research participants; these teen girls. It is shocking to me that a few moments in time 25 years earlier could have had such a life altering effect that I would take those very sensitivities, those emotions, that meaningfulness, that heartfelt momentary peace, and bring it forward for something more beautiful and something more good than personal momentary peace and separateness. This is a peace and separateness that generates a holistic notion of oneness; not with others but with oneself.



# Chapter 1

## Introduction

I wonder how to sustain a relationship between us, between two made from body and language, between two intentions participating in an incarnate relationship which is actualized by flesh and words.

In this double willing, I and you remain always both active and passive, perceiving and experiencing, awake and welcoming. In us, sensible nature and the spirit become in-stance within the singularity and evolution through the risk of an exchange with who is irreducible to oneself (Irigaray, 2004, p. 22).

### The Posturing of Yoga for Transformation

The word yoga means to yoke or to join. It is derived from the Sanskrit root, yuj. Philosophically, the joining is thought to involve the union of a person's individual sense with a person's universal sense (Bower, Woolery, Sternlieb, & Garet, 2005). Yoga has roots in India that can be traced for over 2000 years as well as being found in Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism. Hatha yoga is one of the eight limbs of yoga. It is the physical expression of the discipline. Hatha yoga has the aim of liberation through physical transformation (Feuerstein, 2001; Stone, 2008). This transformation can occur through a physical or corporeal way as well as through the mind by reformulation of structures of meaning (Feuerstein, 2001; Mezirow, 2000). Feuerstein (2001) and Stone (2009) describe yoga as a process that replaces our conscious patterns of thinking and doing with

new, less harmful and more benign patterns that are expressive of the power and virtue of self realization. Cohen (2003) also describes a transformational process through yoga but approaches the transformation through a reformulation of the reified structures of meaning in an incremental shifting approach, which will ultimately lead to a new and more flexible mind.

Regardless of approach the end result, with continued attention to practice, is transformation. Cohen's (2003) research indicates how yoga can enhance education through insights by "making the body a laboratory for cultivating personal transformation" (p. 86). Yoga has gained popularity as many popular culture heroes/heroines (such as Heidi Klum, Madonna, Sting and his wife Trudie Styler, Prince Harry, Cameron Diaz, LeBron James, Lady Gaga, Gisele Bundchen, Demi Moore, Robert Downey Jr., and Gwyneth Paltrow to name but a few) engage in the practice. Yoga is also touted as a power workout to tone, strengthen, and improve our body from a physical perspective (Bender-Birch, 2000; Cowen, 2010; Love, 2006; Shaw, 2009; Sherman, 2010). This approach seems to stray far away from the original idea of embodied being and knowing. However, this is not the case. Yoga as an adaptable physical and mental experience not only strengthens and tones the body by making it flexible but also engages the mind in a process of focus, concentration, and engagement in the moment (Cohen, 2003; Stone, 2010; Whicher, 2005). It is through this process that I take a group of teen girls (my research participants) to bring forth transformation in their lives. This transformation is sought as an authentic examination of self in their identity formation process to a place of self-

knowledge, self-acceptance, and self-love. Transformation for this group of teen girls will engage an emancipatory discourse where their growth will assist them in understanding themselves and ultimately 'becoming.' This 'becoming' will be a living manifestation of the possibilities of consciousness raising in embodied being and knowing of self as a subject thoroughly engaged in the world.

The principal enemy in life is fear. To write only has meaning if the gesture of writing makes fear retreat. As always, it is double: we must be afraid and not be afraid of writing for the sake of writing, and at the same time we make fear retreat. The fact that there is jubilation of writing should not reduce the experience of mourning, or delude people. It is not: mourning is small, writing is large. Not at all. Pain is always, unfortunately, stronger than everything. What happens is not the jubilation of writing; it is the strange feeling, the outpouring of joy we can have when we discover (and not only in writing): I ought to be dead and yet I am not dead. Or else: this death which ought to kill me did not kill me. It is the jubilation we feel to be still living, the excitement without pity of the narrow escape (Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 1997, p. 26).

### **Yoga Bringing me Forward to Self-Knowledge, Self-Acceptance, and Self-Love**

I am a cancer patient. By this time, I have had four surgeries and numerous treatments and drug therapies. I am not whole, but broken and scarred. Scars run across my neck and down my abdomen. I can't remember feeling how I imagine

normal people feel. I can't imagine not having intense nausea. I can't imagine incredible energy. I can't imagine freedom. I am not free because I live every day with the fear and terror I might die. No, I don't think about it every minute. I don't ever think about it or even talk about it. I don't need to because it is a part of me. It is part of my whole self; a part that I did not choose and cannot escape from. You can run but you can't hide.

This day I have decided that this practice will move me over. It will take me over to the other side. About every three weeks, my parents drive me five hours to my yoga immersion weekends. I study for four hours Friday night, from 8am until 6pm Saturday and from 8am to 6pm on Sunday. Then I drive the five hours home. Sometimes the weather is severe. Blinding snowstorms. But I don't miss a weekend. I don't miss a weekend because I knew at that moment in downward dog that this practice – this yoga – would help save me. I had a professor who told me my belief in yoga was almost evangelical. This is not the case. Yoga has strengthened my body and strengthened my mind. Yoga has helped me find self-acceptance and self-love. This is a deep part of myself that I have struggled to find.

This is a story of me but it is also a story of them, my research participants, as I write and experience the world reflexively. I explore female teenhood from the perspective of a woman who experiences the world corporeally. By embracing the body as a knowledge site, I am able to serve feminist purposes by engaging the world of the teen girl as embodied being; an embodied being who uses her embodiment to better understand herself. The purpose of this experiential study is not singular. It is not meant to create a specific result. It is meant, instead, to shift ideas and thoughts. It is an opening up of ideas where teen girls can explore the world and their relation to it and in it through the site of the body. The socially constructed idea of teen girl is explored and re-framed from the perspective of embodied subjectivity.

*I have struggled my whole life to find myself, to find self-acceptance and self-love. I still struggle but my sense of seeing in-side and out-side myself has changed. Yoga has helped me move from this in-side place of acceptance and love to this out-side place of acceptance and love. This is why I can write about this experience. These words, this 'text', are that expression of this place of acceptance and love.*

### **The Journey**

Yoga is my life's work. Professionally, I am a counsellor of teenagers. This career choice has allowed me the flexibility to live more fully and completely in the world I have created as my own. Yoga is integrally connected to my heart center and to my daily world of work. The asana, pranayama, and meditation are part of daily work practice. I use the philosophy and the process to fully engage

my clients in the present; to give them focus, clarity, and enhance their well-being. It is a world of beauty that comprises momentary and sometimes longer separations to the world of the yogi-yogini. As I am a work in progress, I do not ever expect to be the expert but instead to learn as I live and to share what I have learned as I live. This sharing is part of this doctoral process. I knew when I laid in bed many months ago determining my study and my path where, in my heart-felt space, this research must go. Where was I to go? And who was to help?

I knew my doctoral work must utilize the ideas of yoga as embodied knowing. I began with a paper for my doctoral dissertation seminar discussing the possibilities of yoga as embodied research for teen girls. I work with teen girls everyday. I am not a teen girl but I was one once. I thought about the effects yoga had on me and my life. I thought about how it had changed me and what this meant for my research. My research is not without bias; as no research is, qualitative or otherwise. Mine is especially meaningful to me as I have had the experiences I believed my research participants were having. The paper was to be presented to my classmates as part of my grade for the seminar. I was a fairly new doctoral student so this was not my actual proposal or anything near that. Instead it was an idea that I might possibly use. It was well received by my classmates and I was happy to engage in dialogue surrounding how I would undertake such a process. My professor felt it was a herculean undertaking and possibly too much. He suggested perhaps I have someone else engage the students in the yoga process and I could interview them and report my findings

through the dissertation process. He also felt that the research was moving too much toward the psychology department and made some suggestions as how I could make it more educational in nature. I disagreed, of course, being a staunch feminist with a strong belief in my own ideas and a passionate connection to philosophy from a psychological realm.

Sometimes in the Academy, one experiences confusion and a lack of understanding of one's ideas and ideals. Passion and commitment can foster great results. But passion and commitment alone is not sufficient. One needs the support of those that BELIEVE! With an impassioned understanding and some grace from the universe, I found that person. It happened as a beautiful accident with a suggestion from another professor about the possibility of being supervised by a woman who, I believe, is a great feminist thinker, one who supports and encourages ideas that are challenging. Hence the creative becomes the academic and the academic becomes the creative. I spent many months leading up to my data collection idealizing my space as that of a person who engaged in ideologically challenging ways of being and knowing. Ideas that engaged minds AND bodies. This arts informed performance research engages the minds and the bodies of my female teen participants. It is research that does not and cannot separate the mind from the body as the mind is the body and the body is the mind. No Cartesian dualisms but instead a unified and holistic heart centered approach utilizing pranayama, hatha yoga, and meditation as feminist self evolving research where movement becomes method as an expression of art that is self. Dr. Kathy Sanford came into my life as an accident as she was on

study leave the year I began my doctoral program. However, our paths crossed in the most meaningful and beautiful way and I am where I am now with her support and encouragement. Ask yourself this: who are you and what does that mean? Then ask yourself: what does that mean for your research? She asked me those questions and the journey began as I was officially supported in my personal space and research ideas.

### **Being a Girl**

The social construction of being a girl is fragmentary and complex (Grosz, 1994) and fraught with confusion over sense of self due to the subjective nature of the subjugated and subordinated world in which we live. From a metaphysical perspective, girls' understanding of themselves or their self-understanding is constructed through their experiences of what it means to be a girl singularly and a girl socially with and in relation to others. Being a teen today is a challenging experience. Being a teen girl today is challenging but also constructed by societal notions of what it means to be a girl. In many ways, these ideas have not changed since I was a teen girl. As girls, we are constantly trying to negotiate the world. This world objectifies girls' bodies and girls' minds. It is a world of sexualized representation in media, which feeds into the world of the girl as being objectified. This social objectification manifests in a host of unhealthy behaviours through social media including Facebook, Twitter, and You Tube to name but a few. The dualisms have been socially constructed as mutually exclusive body and mind. This is par for the course historically and presently. Even traditional "feminist theory, with its commonly close relation to psychoanalytic theory and to



various forms of phenomenology, has tended, with some notable exceptions, to remain uninterested in or unconvinced about the relevance of refocusing on bodies in accounts of subjectivity” (Grosz, 1994, intro. viii). By exploring subjectivity by reconfiguring the ideas of the body, we are able to collectively understand and appreciate a sense of self. “Bodies have all the explanatory powers of minds” (Grosz, 1994, intro. viii). This is a reconfiguration of the understanding of self through a bodily awareness. This bodily awareness can be achieved through a yoga and meditation practice. The primacy of corporeality does not in any way disregard agency, reflection, or consciousness (Grosz, 1994). Instead, it re-maps and re-configures the exploration of self through an understanding of the body. As a high school counsellor, my world is primarily occupied by that of the teen girl. The world of the teen girl is a world of emotion and passion; one that is politically charged and engaged. I have found that there is a lack of understanding of self in the world of the teen girl. The world of the girl is a world of conflict, confusion, disorientation, desire, and difference. This is a world of power and patriarchy. As a woman, I experience this world daily and sometimes struggle with expectations put upon me. I move forward as I negotiate my space with an understanding through my her-story of experience. It is not without challenges. When I ask myself how I understand myself, I make a realization that I do this through a self-knowledge that I have garnered by better knowing whole self. This is a unity of self where I use my body as a site of knowledge. How do I come to know my body? I come to know my body through my embodied experiences. This can be achieved through a movement of the

body in a safe and sacred space. Through my own personal journey of self-discovery, I was able to find my-self. Was it lost? Maybe. Maybe at one time or another, we are all lost somewhere outside of ourselves. That in no way means we don't live our lives. However, it does mean we live our lives by going through the motions. Going through the motions does not allow a full self-hood to emerge. How can I better live a self-full life? How can I change or transform my life so as to better understand my self? I may have found the answer accidentally. Accidental happenings are sometimes life altering and my story is one that is such.

### **Purpose Statement**

The body is not a self-identical or merely factic materiality; it is a materiality that bears meaning, if nothing else, and the manner of this bearing is fundamentally dramatic. By dramatic I mean only that the body is not merely matter but a continual and incessant materializing of possibilities (Butler, 1997, p. 404).

### **A Re-Visioning of Embodied Ways of Be-ing**

The purpose of this study is to explore the identity formation of teenage girls through a performative methodological examination of embodied knowing and being from in-side and out-side 'self' perspectives. A hermeneutic phenomenological approach to feminist consciousness will be used "to enable our ... students to experience a more positive and growing sense of self-worth and self-identity" (Sanford, 1999, p. 41).

## **Research Questions**

How can female teens use hatha yoga to embrace the body as a site of knowledge to experience transformation? [Transformation is sought as an authentic examination of self in their identity formation process to a place of self-knowledge, self-acceptance, and self-love. For this group of teen girls, transformation will engage an emancipatory discourse where their growth will assist them in understanding themselves].

How can the narrative of self-discovery be expressed through bodily movement?

How can an exploration of the body through hatha yoga inform an understanding of self?

## **Value and Scope of the Study**

This is part of my journey as an educator to assist my teenage female students in the process of transformation to a place of self-knowledge, self-acceptance, and ultimately self-love through a practice based ‘performance’ process that is more than just evaluating and judging but an authentic examination of self so as to find voice and grow voice. This engages an opportunity to move from a passive object to a self-knowing subject, from a “worldless I” (Burwood, 2006, p. 129) to a self-accepting and liberated being-in-the-world open to infinite possibilities and the achievement of their highest potential. Research of this nature encourages critical-thinking, awareness, and dialogue to engage a space of self-reflection, liberation, and creative self-hood. Thornborrow & Coates (2005) discuss performance as an idea that encompasses both its relation to the performance of identity and the social self and also the telling of a story as a performance. In this particular work, identity formation of inside and out-side self and the transformational process of the posturing of yoga as embodied performance for teen girls will be examined as feminist pedagogy using a hermeneutic phenomenological framework.

“Authentic help means that all who are involved help each other mutually, growing together in the common effort to understand the reality they wish to transform” (Friere, 1978). This authentic educational process is one that can be characterized as rhizomatic (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987); that which is not only cerebral but also experiential. This will “necessitate and help initiate a re-thinking

of the emancipatory discourses involved with schooling “ (Orner, 1992, p. 75). As articulated by Jones (2011),

As a feminist, such a project offers me a tenable way to enter into the discourse of the girl armed with a ‘becoming’ that is not armed with a psychoanalytical configuration of woman. By theorizing outside this overdetermined box, one begins with action, deploying powerful rhythmic flows. In other words, girls produce rhythmic tactics for becoming (p. 386).

This arts based research approach will be used to find transformation and meaning of self for these teen girls through a performance methodology. As noted by Clover (2011), “Feminist approaches to arts-based research are not neutral but seek to identify and disrupt inequitable knowledge/power patterns” (p. 14) while engaging research that promotes a discourse that is liberatory. The idea of embodied performance will be engaged from a feminist interpretation of the hermeneutic phenomenological approach. I hope to gain insight and understanding into the meaning making activities of teen girls as they strive for transformation to a realization of self-knowledge, self-acceptance, and self-love.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Locating the Context**

It's important in the initial dialogue to locate a context for the ideas that were ultimately formulated into a program that can be characterized as an (r) evolution toward harmony for the teen girls who participated. Yoga in its physical manifestation as asana, pranayama, and meditation will be examined as embodied emotional performance and how this embodiment creates a unified body and mind will be studied. This creates awareness of the territory of the body and the powerful effects this territory has on the mind. By re-learning and re-discovering our bodies, we become enlivened as active participants in our own life stories. This is pedagogy from the perspective of performance and movement becomes the method; research where to become is to acknowledge the self, the self as other, as well as the other in relation to ourselves.

### **Yoga as Embodied Emotional Performance**

Much research has focused on studies that show regular practice of yoga helps teens improve their health and their minds (Bamzai,2008; Brock, 2006; Derezotes, 2000; Marcinkowski, 2003; Parag & Mardemootoo, 1990; Smith 2007). Yoga has helped many students face the day-to-day pressures of surviving as a teenager in today's ever changing and challenging world. In a review of literature on the therapeutic effects of yoga for children, Galantino, Galbavy, & Quinn (2008) discovered that "regardless of the goal, yoga seems to be a multitasking modality that simultaneously treats physical impairments and

psychosocial issues such as stress, anxiety, and hyperactivity” (p. 78). Yoga helps students develop a better sense of themselves in relation to their peers and their families, builds self-esteem, and generates confidence by its non-competitive spirit (Rodefer, 2011). “The mind-body connection is a powerful tool in enhancing a sense of well being, accepting self, decreasing anxiety and relieving stress” (Cryne, 2010). Through the process of posturing in yoga, teens can experience how their bodies respond to the physical movement. Cultivating a mindfulness about the body can help change negative visual cues, body language, and social interaction (Cohen, 2003). This allows a cultivation of meaning making about self and other and fosters an ability to “observe without judgment” (Cohen, 2003, p. 89) one’s body and ultimately one’s mind. While our culture continues to marginalize female bodies, hatha yoga allows teen girls to re-envision their bodies through a transformation process. This is a transformation process that engages teens in expanding their reflection to more than just a cognitive activity and instead connects the mind to the body. Cohen comments, “I was one of those ... girls who felt like a klutz in gym class. Because of the changes I’ve experienced through yoga, I no longer see myself as a kid with the lowest fitness scores, ready to duck if a ball came her way” (Cohen, 2003, p. 90). Yoga has shown to be a buffer against harmful side effects of self-objectification and promotes embodiment and well-being. It has also been found that yoga practiced with more frequency was positively associated with increased body awareness, satisfaction with life, and decreased negative affect (Impett,

Daubenmier, & Hirschman, 2006). The literature supports change that may give rise to transformation for teen girls.

### **Embodied Minds and Mindful Bodies**

An embodied and active/enactive approach looks at teen girls as “living systems characterized by plasticity and permeability (moment to moment adaptations within the self and toward the environment), autonomy, sense-making, emergence, experience, and striving for balance” (Koch & Fischman, 2011, p. 57). Teen girls are contextualized before they are conceptualized. As noted by Jones (2011) “she is not born a clean slate, ready to actualize the desires written upon her verbatim. She functions because of her own rhythm and engages with desires of all kinds. It is her performance of the functions that challenges the nature/culture divide” (p. 389). Promoting the self-awareness of teen girls can be accomplished from a mind-body relation and interpersonal relatedness perspective. The ideas of movement, posture, gesture, and action elicit the ideas of en-action as knowledge.

The rhythm of a refrain sometimes engages with something quite tangible, that of the Territory of a Body. From savage media accounts to protective sociologies of girls and popular culture, the girl body is defined as an exploited and contested territory precisely because it is read as malleable, controllable, decidable and effectless. Why is this body so over-determined? How does one even locate the body of a girl? The whole of the girl body is built of milieus and marked by indexes referring to still more milieus (Jones, 2011, p. 388).



Meaning is derived from knowledge as action in the world. We transform the world at the same time that the world transforms us. This is what Husserl (1954) termed kinesthetic consciousness. “Not only are we socially constructed, but in some sense we construct ourselves” (Butler, 2004, p. 23). We can re-discover our bodies by be-ing them. As quoted by de Beauvoir (2011), “one is not born, but rather, becomes a woman” (p. 283). This re-learning and re-discovering our bodies occurs by be-ing them through movement, “One facet of the enigma is thus to know as adults what it is like to learn one’s body by being it, in particular by being in it in movement...” (Sheets-Johnstone, 2011, p. 129).

### **To Embody an Experience**

To embody an experience from the place of female teenhood is an aesthetic narrative performance (Ng-A-Fook, 2009) that liberates teen girls and encourages critical thinking, awareness, and dialogue to engage a space of self-reflection. The act of self-reflection should be enacted as a way of opening a new space, a third space, drawing on the space of the self and other and possibly self as other (Kristeva, 1991).

Performance pedagogy is sustained in tension by multiple voices; one that is bounded but yet has infinite possibilities and has an ability to be as beautiful as a piece of art – an aesthetic quality that is not ‘beauty’ in a traditional sense but beautiful in its ability to assist one in the achievement of their highest potential through a consciousness of self and other as well as self as other (Wang, 2001). Research of this nature opens up a space and place for reflection for myself as researcher from a self-reflexive perspective as well as for my participants.

Performance pedagogy “needs space for reflection, fruitful otherness, where you can spread your roots and receive breath from the Other. Ideally research (that) opens up voice, softens the spinal chord, warms the arms, and makes one vulnerable” (Oikarinen-Jabai, 2003, p. 569). This can be viewed as decolonizing pedagogy (Tejada, 2008) where students can partake in the construction or embodying of an experience where they understand that their future is unintelligible without a reading of their past. The lack of an approximate mapping of the past, that can inform a critical understanding of the present, reduces us to ontological orphans who are unfamiliar with and disconnected from the genealogy of our being in the world, to people who (not knowing who we are or where we come from) can easily be told what is and is not ours, where we are from, and where we do and do not belong (Tejada, 2008, p. 28).

This is an open-ended mode of emergence and moving toward a new space of creative self hood and accepting the other’s ‘otherness’. As noted by Wang (2004),

An ethics of both love and freedom through the strange site of otherness ... is necessary for a creative selfhood in a global society ... Just like a good mother who respects the fact that her child will become a person she may not expect, one needs to allow ... the other’s otherness ... [not] to coincide with one’s own sense of self. Such a relationship between self and other ... expands one’s psychic space to incorporate differences ... [enabling a mutually sustainable community of strangers] ... [In this ethics]

the Kristevan self-other relationship is constantly in movement just as the subject in process is engaged in an ongoing creative process (p. 101).

The educational experience is an embodied experience and as such “the learning subject is essentially an embodied subject” (Burwood, 2006, p. 130). Our bodies become active participants in the process of knowing and are implicated in the process as well as the outcome of the experience. As articulated by Burwood (2006), “We still like to think about education as being about the life of the mind, as if this can mean anything in the absence of the life of the body. The fact is that the student or tutor ‘takes his body with him’, as Valery and Merleau-Ponty might have put it (Merleau-Ponty, 1964)” (Burwood, 2006, p. 130). This is part of our integration with the world. This integration with the world is an ongoing event. It is part of the enjoyment of space in our negotiation of the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

This is curriculum from the perspective of the site of the stranger (Heubner, 1985), maybe the stranger inside of each of us (Kristeva, 1991), into a creative space that encourages and ultimately sustains transformation; a dancing and inspired pedagogy (Aoki, 1996) that is awakened by allowing it to approach in-side of us and to touch us - the re-vealing of the stranger and what this means to embodied learning and how this lends and leads to embodied learning as an experience for teen girls; how this illuminates our learning of self. This is a re-creating of surprise and spontaneity in learning and opens a space for a new language – a language of multi-versities and ways of knowing and being-in-the

world. This embracing of uncertainty allows for the adventurous, the unexpected, and the transformational.

This is a powerful idea that may open up place and space for provocation. Let there be provocation! By allowing a space to open to engage dialogue, it will be possible to elicit a nourishment of consciousness, will, imagination, power, and love (Wang, 2004). This is a move outside the fixed boundaries we are taught as women that we must stay inside to be safe (hooks, 1995). Here the opportunity to transgress gives rise to express an embodied reality,

...By accepting the multiplicity of voice, the intertwining of speech and silence, ellipses, autobiography, and fiction, we make it possible to create new discourses that cut across gender and ethnicity. The world is full of voices. Every creation and every human being expresses her/himself. When I venture into dialogue with culture and approach the Other (and also myself), I am offered the possibility of transgressing. There, I think, art comes to help me in research to communicate and to express my embodied realities. All my memories, feelings, thoughts, and sensual experiences are inscribed in my body (Oikarinen-Jabai, 2003, p. 574).

This beckons transformation and, perhaps, an opportunity to become complete.

As noted by O'Brien,

In our Western world, the word "love" has deep connotations we do not normally associate with business - romance, for example, or that special feeling among family members or close friends. But I am not talking about these kinds of relationships. By "love", I mean a predisposition toward

helping another person to become complete: to develop to their full potential. Love is not something that suddenly strikes us-it is an act of the will. By 'an act of the will,' I mean that you do not have to like someone to love him or her. Love is an intentional disposition toward another person (O'Brien, 2008, p. 105).

A process such as this is life long. "In such a journey, we need to be willing to let go of who and what we are so that new selves can be born" (Wang, 2002, p. 292). This is beginning again "...by making the unconscious conscious, by consulting and listening to the self, by voicing the unsaid, by listening to others and staying alert to all the currents and undercurrents of life about them, by imagining themselves inside the new poem or person or idea they want to come to know and understand" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997, p. 141). Such an expression of a new horizon of multiple voices elicits diversity of views in a discourse. This heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1981) allows teen girls' voices to grow and to flourish. Greene (2000) refers to this as the "consciousness of growing" (p. 273) allowing one's old self to move aside quietly and engage the space of one's new self. "To worry or to smile...such is the choice when assailed by a stranger...our decision depends on how familiar we are with our own ghosts..." (Kristeva, 1991). This is a reconstruction of the world and the self, allowing the voice of the stranger to be ever present as there is constant search for new meaning.

## **Accepting the Ambiguous and Awakening our Voice(s) and the Voice(s) In-side and Out-side Ourselves**

She must learn again to speak

Starting with I

Starting with We

Starting as the infant does

And her own true hunger

And pleasure

And rage

(Marge Peirce, 1978, p. 38 as quoted in Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997, p. 130).

There is always fear of the unknown and of the ambiguous. However, a lack of spontaneity and openness in learning engages a space that becomes stagnant and dull for teen girls; essentially “It becomes, that is to say, boring. In my opinion, it is the main purpose of education to give people the opportunity of not ever being, in this sense, bored; of not ever succumbing to a feeling of futility, or to the belief that they have come to the end of what is worth having” (Warnock, as quoted in Greene, 200, p. 272). To allow teen girls to participate in a process that is a creative transformation of self, we must engage the space of the stranger (Wang, 2004). Opening-up and awakening to that of the Other is not only other people but also the other in-side of ourselves. This opens up a space not only for knowing but also for be-ing ourselves. We reach forward and toward new experiences that change our sense of self and sense of self in relation to

others. Oikarinen-Jabai (2003) discusses negotiating different identities and otherness in herself as researching from a holistic perspective. This is an activity that involves her as one with her embodied reality and history. She engages in 'herstory' and below is an excerpt from a letter to herself,

I write to you because I cannot live without you. Again and again, the shivering of your spine when you fumble in the opening spaces makes me fall in love. Sometimes I am tired of you. The twitching movements of your head...Often I experience you as odd, strange, unknown. I would like to run away from you...Sometimes I hate you. I am a prisoner. Where do you take me? Chain me to uncertainty. Force me to wander in places I have not been before (Oikarinen-Jabai, 2003, p. 570).

The author writes this letter as she continues on her path to find ways of performative writing. "My letter is an introspective journey to meet the Other in myself" (Oikarinen-Jabai, 2003, p. 570). Her life is interwoven in her writing as a performative means of embodied experiences and encounters. In her performative approach to research, she discusses pain, embracing, voice, approaching borders, and play. She is able to find a hybrid third space that "forms new authority structures and political initiatives that hardly can be understood within traditional conceptual frameworks" (Oikarinen-Jabai, 2003, p. 574). These transitions happen first in the body "By meeting the otherness outside, then in ourselves, we come to realize the deeply embodied roots and routes that bind us to different cultural discourses, narrations, images, and voice...For aesthetic expression, and for research, this space is sanctum

sanctorum and/or Pandora's box. What it produces there reaches the nonverbal realms" (Oikarinen-Jabai, 2003, p. 574).

As a re-creation of self and the world, this supports the personal transformation of self in the world, in the curriculum, in the classroom, and in the self - eliciting a form of catalytic validity. As quoted by Lather (1991),

Catalytic validity (Reason & Rowan, 1981, p. 240; Brown & Tandom, 1978) refers to the degree to which the research process re-orient, focuses, and energizes ...in what Freire (1973) terms "conscientization," knowing reality in order to better transform it. My argument is premised not only on a recognition of the reality-altering impact of the ...process itself, but also on the need to consciously channel this impact so that respondents gain self-understanding and, ideally, self-determination through ... participation (p. 68).

This moves beyond a space of fixed identity to one of transformation. Pinar (1998) encourages the reader to think of Maxine Greene as she asked a packed auditorium at Louisiana State University, " 'Who am I?' she poses, partly to us and partly to herself. She answers: 'I am who I am not yet.'" (p.1). This is an incredible expression of the unexpected. Aren't we all 'I am who I am not yet'? He continues, "'Not yet' ...the phrase still hangs in the air around me. Maxine Greene is...not yet. Her own sense of incompleteness, of what is not yet but can be, inspires us to work for a future we can only imagine now" (Pinar, 1998, p. 1). This transformation allows a change in self and self in relation to other that elicits change that is so powerful that it engages post modern philosophy, critical



thinking and voice as we “free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently” (Foucault, 1977, p. 9).

## Chapter 3

### **Ontological Framing and Epistemological Reflections**

Unlike epistemology, epistemological reflection does not seek universality; it is neither a "normative" (Schmidt, 2001, p.136; Miller & Fredericks, 2002, p.983) nor a finished discipline. It makes up a persistent, creative activity that is renewed time and again. It shows the difficulties faced by researchers when the characteristics of what they intend to know are unprecedented, or else, they cannot be, in part or as a whole, registered, observed, or understood by existing theories and/or concepts nor by available methodological strategies (Vasilachis de Gialdino, 2009).

Considering the lived experience of women and girls in particular from a post-modern approach, one is able to look to the site of the body to frame the research. From this framework, the research will be discussed from a feminist phenomenological perspective that is hermeneutic in nature.

#### **Feminist Phenomenology: A Phenomenology of Embodied Subjectivity**

Looking to the writing and research of Iris Marion Young (2005), it is possible to develop an understanding of women's lived experiences from the perspective of bodily movement. She discusses women's bodily experiences from the perspective of being a subject for herself but also an object to herself. Women, therefore, make decisions about their actions based on how they appear to others as objects but also how they appear intentionally to themselves. This separation of self results in seeing oneself from an externalized perspective

(Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Grosz (1994) discusses the phenomenology of the 'flesh,'

Merleau-Ponty begins with the negative claim that the body is not an object. It is the condition and context to which I am able to have a relation to objects. It is both immanent and transcendent. Insofar as I live the body, it is a phenomena experienced by me and thus provides the very horizon and perspectival point and places me in the world and makes relations between me, other objects, and other subjects possible. It is the body as I live it, as I experience it, and as it shapes my experience (Grosz, 1994, p. 86).

This is a crucial piece for an examination of identity formation in teen girls. This results in a perception of self that is 'discontinuous unity' of self.

An essential part of the situation of being a woman is that of living with the ever-present possibility that one will be gazed upon as a mere body, as shape and flesh that presents itself as the potential object of another subject's intentions and manipulations, rather than as a living manifestation of action and intention (Young, 2005, p. 44).

Young (1998) believes that a primary feminist task is to expose and to counter the violence and exploitation that women suffer as being women in society. In her earlier work, she acknowledges women's body comportment is constructed as oppressed and is "inhibited, hesitant, constrained, gazed at, and positioned. Women appear primarily as the victims of a patriarchal culture that refuses to admit us to humanity" (Young, 1998, p. 289). These ideas were the beginning of

her discussions regarding the gap she believed existed in both existential phenomenology and feminist theory with a construction of feminist criticism that showed how women are excluded and prohibited from a full expression of humanity in a patriarchal society. She further acknowledges the need to move beyond even these ideas to a place and space that addresses the less limited and more “self-conscious project of philosophically describing feminine body comportment, motility, and spatiality” (Young, 1998, p. 289). This would be a phenomenology of action and a focus on specifically feminine forms of movement. Sheets-Johnstone (2011) discusses the primacy of movement over that of perception and that she believes perception results from movement. She argues that self-knowledge comes from movement and we can only learn about ourselves by attending to the bodily sensations of movement. We develop a sense of what constitutes ourselves and ultimately others through movement. Movement as a perceived phenomena constitutes knowledge. This is significant from an epistemological sense in that we come to understand ourselves, ourselves in relation to others, and ultimately the world through movement. This is a shifting in ideas that brings the body and the embodied self to the forefront of subjectivity and knowing.

### **Hermeneutic Phenomenology from a Critical Feminist Perspective**

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a philosophical tradition that was created by a blending or synthesis of two orientations: hermeneutics and phenomenology. Hermeneutics can be traced to authors such as Schleiermacher and Dilthey while phenomenology’s history is connected to Husserl and is studied

from a transcendental perspective. Heidegger and Gadamer can be credited with the synthesis of the ideas, which were then expanded upon most recently by Ricoeur (Thompson, 1995). “Hermeneutic phenomenology is a human science which studies persons” (van Manen, 1990, p. 6). There has been much debate that hermeneutics and feminism are not and cannot be compatible (Code, 2003). However,

What feminism has been about from its inception is a protest against the meaning assigned to “woman” and an argument that the meaning must be changed. Gadamer’s hermeneutics allows feminism to talk about meanings and change in a way that, although not absolutist or foundationalist, nevertheless does not deny the possibility or desirability of established meaning (Hekman, 2003, p. 196).

Research from a human science perspective that is phenomenological, hermeneutic, and semiotic or language oriented is important in studying young people and, as van Manen (1990) notes, the interpretive sense of the experiences of the lifeworld. The term lifeworld is used by hermeneutic phenomenologists instead of the more traditional term ‘data’ because they are not gathering separate pieces of information but, instead, interrelated themes and stories are the starting point for inquiry (Todres & Holloway, 2010, p. 180).

Through the life expressions of my female teen participants, I hope to be able to interpret their meaning making experiences from the perspective of van Manen’s (1990) lifeworld existentials that permeate the lived experience of people. These lifeworld existentials are: lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived

time (temporality), and lived human relations (relationality) (Hyde, 2008; Munhall, 1994). Understanding is a productive activity between researcher and participant. Those involved in the process, in essence, codetermine meaning. Gadamer (1975) acknowledges there is not a ready-made meaning but instead meaning is interpreted and that which is interpreted always transcends what was in the original mind of the researcher and participant. This does not result in a work of fiction but, instead, a fusion of horizons occurs (Bakhtin, 1981, Hyde, 2008). A person's horizon is constantly changing in relation to their lifeworld. It is not static. As Slattery (2003) notes, there is

A shift toward the subjective and aesthetic by reconnecting hermeneutics to autobiographical inquiry, narrative research, lived experience, critical theory, participatory ethnographic study, arts based autoethnographic research, and other forms of qualitative curriculum research. Nietzsche (1968) contended 'we have our highest dignity in our significance as works of art – for it is only as aesthetic phenomena that existence and the world are eternally justified' (p. 656).

This reflective analytic method allows a fusion of horizons. As noted by Ricoeur (1991), "phenomenology remains the unsurpassable presupposition of hermeneutics; and on the other hand, that phenomenology cannot carry out its program of constitution without constituting itself in the interpretation of the experience of the ego" (p. 38). Any question of 'being' is a question of the meaning of being. This is the question of being and the meaning of being as explored from the perspective of the un-layering of the self through the process of

yoga posturing. Gadamer (1975) acknowledges that no method can ensure insight, but that insight emerges through interpretation of experiences. Teen girls are not separate from their world but situated in and constituted by it. They are influenced and shaped by the world as they are integral to it and it is integral to them (Hartrick-Doane & Varcoe, 2005). This hermeneutic phenomenological approach from a feminist perspective allows the researcher to ask 'what it might be like' to be a teen girl and to grasp the 'world of the teen girl'. This philosophical approach also engages a more person-centered practice and this "lifeworld-led education" (Todres & Holloway, 2010, p. 179) can only expand our horizons in understanding teen girls' lived experience.

Todres & Holloway (2010) discuss hermeneutic phenomenology from a feminist framework, "A hermeneutic phenomenologist may use 'feminism' as an interpretive framework and demonstrate how this perspective may throw some new light on the phenomena studied" (p. 179). My hope is to examine how teen girls see themselves from in-side and from out-side themselves and how this experience could possibly transform them in some positive way. Whether this transformation is possible is yet to be determined.

In the analytic of hermeneutic phenomenology, situatedness (an existential phenomena) is not to be approached in terms of an epistemic standpoint (a perspective involving assumptions and value based on the kinds of activities a particular group engages in), but in terms of a hermeneutic situation. In this regard, situatedness is defined by what can

be seen and grasped within a given mode of being-in-the-world (Ginev, 2011, p. 123).

From where did these ideas arise? I did not think about it except from the perspective of transformation for students. I realized this was not enough. Why did I want to do this? What brought me to this space? I realize this was a connected part of my being from memories. I realized I wanted to use my life experiences to understand my students' experiences. Seeing yourself from inside allows deep self-analysis of how you see yourself while seeing yourself from the out-side allows you to see how others may perceive you. Is it possible to better understand others' transforming experiences if you can come to understand your own?

These frameworks provide for a participatory un-layering of the self in the process of be-coming transformed to a place of self-knowledge, self-acceptance, and self-love (as a process of transformation). This requires the researcher to reflect upon the assumptions about the world and about knowledge and helps the researcher to think about the implications of such assumptions (Dowling, 2006). Understanding comes from the educator being personally involved and interpretation is linked to one's own being in the world. Research from a human science perspective that is phenomenological, hermeneutic, and semiotic or language oriented is important in studying teen girls and the interpretive sense of their experiences of the lifeworld.

In researching the meaning making structures of what it means to be a woman, we must take into account the historical and sociocultural traditions that



give meaning to our being in this world. Harding's (1991) feminist standpoint epistemology acknowledges the value in privileging the standpoint of women's lives. As society is gender stratified, the oppressed, women, have less reason to need to maintain the status quo as well as the social order. The oppression of women leads to their marginalization in society and transforms them into 'strangers'. However, as strangers they become valuable and their position "provides an explanatory perspective, which the dominant group of the 'natives' cannot attain" (Ginev, 2011, p. 120). This allows for a self-reflective interpretation in research.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is ultimately concerned with the task of "discussing the temporal process by which human beings proceed about the enterprise of world reconstruction, which in the first place, derives from our ontological prowess to question about beings" (Okoro, 2006). As discussed by Hyde (2008), hermeneutic phenomenology must take into account the insights, prior understanding, and particularities of the person. In research, many traditions try to separate or even eliminate the prior understandings of the person from the process. Prior understanding is considered a prejudice that may impede research. In hermeneutical phenomenological research, the prior understanding (prejudice) is a necessity for any act of interpretation. We come to a prior understanding of self through an exploration of our memories as part of our 'story' of self. As Gadamer (1975) notes, the goal is not to eliminate the prejudices but instead to test them through the engagement with the expression of life or perhaps, text. Thus, a phenomenological method which purports to be

“hermeneutic” needs to be able to account explicitly for the researcher’s approach and how interpretations are managed. It needs to address how the relationship between researcher and researched – the interface between subject and object – is negotiated. Interpretation is required, say hermeneutic phenomenologists, to bring out the ways in which meanings occur in a context. Firstly, any description of lived experience by participants needs to be seen in the context of that individual’s life situation (Finlay, 2012, p. 22). I realize it is impossible to be completely objective. Acknowledging my reflexivity, I am hoping to engage with my students in meaning making through a discursive and performative process. A performative process as performativity allows the construction of identities as they are formed through performative actions. The performative process is not entered into alone and has cultural significance for gendered bodies through action, gesture, and behaviour. Their life expression will be the text for analysis and their assessment of self as a move toward transformation. My experience is pivotal for my understanding of their meaning making experiences. My self-awareness and self-reflection is necessary so as to come to a better understanding of my self; from deep in-side and out-side myself – my stranger and my ghosts (Kristeva, 1991). This process of understanding will elicit self-identity. The purpose in this process is to provide meaningful engagement with the world; a journey of self-acknowledgement that is self-knowing and self-luminous. Learning about myself will help me to learn about and better understand the ‘other’. Re-counting and re-shaping my story will help me to help others understand and re-count and re-shape their stories.

## **Feminist Consciousness**

In hooks' (1984) writing, she speaks to the idea that information about feminism is often circulated and engaged in through the written word in books, pamphlets, and flyers. This research moves away from a focus specifically on the literary and moves into a landscape of performance-based inquiry, narrative and storytelling inquiry, and collective biography memories from an arts based research and feminist perspective. These types of inquiry will be expanded upon in chapter four. Academic writers theorize about feminism from an academic perspective and often exhibit bias as they have little to no relationship to the lived experience of the women being studied (hooks, 1984). As noted by Press (1993),

Feminist theory and feminist research, continue to be marginalized and effectively silenced (in "mixed" company at least) in most areas of our discipline...Feminists' growing dissatisfactions with existing research patterns, questions, and methods gave rise to the extensive interdisciplinary debates characterizing the feminist methodology/epistemology literature, on the one hand, and to search for a distinctive feminist method or set of methods, on the other (p. 24).

Feminist methodology is useful as the discourse has challenged "at their very core the use of conventional research methods in the social and natural sciences and the philosophy of science undergirding these methods" (Press, 1993, p. 24). The discussions regarding feminist methods are routinely characterized by

whether feminist work can take place within existing disciplinary frameworks or whether feminist work must challenge and ultimately transform the frameworks. My lived experience, my embodied sense of self, and my work brings me to a cohesive blending of both ideas of feminist uses of traditional methods and the utilization of a feminist framework that challenges and transforms the research and the participants with a focus on researcher and participant reciprocity, consciousness raising, and emphasis on reflexivity and voice within a transdisciplinary approach. Reinharz (1992) identifies themes in feminist research including the idea that feminism is a perspective, not specifically a research method, and that feminists use a multiplicity of research and includes qualities such as an ongoing criticism of nonfeminist scholarship, is guided by feminist theory, may be transdisciplinary, aims to create social change, strives to represent the diversity of humanity, focuses on the researcher as a person, makes an attempt to develop valuable relationships between the people studied, and attempts to form a relationship with the reader.

The focus of this research is academic and feminist but one which also engages and grows voice and experience of the teen girls that will be studied. This focus will be a critical dialogue where 'knowing' as an embodied perspective can only be seen when others as well as oneself are viewed intersubjectively. These feminist claims lay hold the ideas that given that women's ways of knowing and subjectivist realities have been virtually excluded from objectivist epistemological notions of knowledge and the philosophy of objective knowledge is at some level connected to a philosophy of domination (Code, 1991). If we

view others as objects rather than subjects, coming to know them is learning to manipulate and dominate rather than understand. Traditional epistemology has not been able to adequately develop ideas of a socially embedded knowledge. Therefore, “its systematic objectivist biases have actually contributed to the oppression of women by giving rise to the unfortunate stereotypes about them, their capacities, their experience, and their knowledge” (Press, 1993, p. 27).

### **Reflexivity**

I may be viewed as a privileged critical thinker so some may ask how I could engage these knowledges and experiences. Simply, I was once a teen girl. I am no longer, however, I have the lived experience and history from a host of embodied experiences of my reality that will allow me to engage the space and the experiences of these teen girls. This writing and research is a double portrait of myself as researcher and as participant as I situate my work firmly in the place that I embody. This gives authenticity to my work in that I live-in-the-world and be-in-the-world of teen girls. My work as a high school counsellor and yoga teacher allows an embodied experience and an opportunity to engage and grow voice from an authentic lived experience as a self-reflexive practitioner. My writing regarding this subject matter is implicitly embodied and authentically voiced. This engaging process is as important and as valuable as my embodied role as yoga teacher. However, through yoga I embody my lived experience and I am deeply and reflexively aware of my being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1962). I may be accused of blurring the line between researcher and participant but this double portrait allows truth in experience. Researchers often engage in

theoretical work which may be beneficial to their field but in this process they may come across as a “disembodied voice” (Bolwell, 2011, p. 686) that could be anywhere in the world and completely disconnected from the world they are studying. Their expert status disconnects them from their participants and the field in which they work. This work will display the richness of the embodied experience in a pedagogical approach that is grounded in embodied knowing and being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1962). Embodiment is the key experience and idea in this research. Barbour’s (2011) definition of embodiment states:

Embodiment is a holistic experience, different from ‘body’ experience (which remains differentiated from the ‘mind’ and is typically based on Cartesian dualistic understanding of body and mind). I argue that embodiment encompasses an individual person’s biological (somatic), intellectual, emotional, social, gendered, artistic, and spiritual experience, within their cultural, historical and geographical location. Embodiment is not a random or arbitrary set of genetic material – it recognizes that material conditions of race, gender, sexuality, ability, history and culture. Embodiment therefore indicates a holistic experiencing individual. Most importantly, embodiment can also be understood through movement, an embodied activity (p. 88).

The teen girls I will work with are “not an ‘absolute subject’ or ‘worldless I’, in passive receipt of information or untouched by the process. Rather, the student is a subject thoroughly implicated in the world and a given social dimension and its

personal relationships” (Burwood, 2006, p. 129). Embodiment is a process of be-in-our-bodies:

‘Being in’ our bodies is not a reductive experience; it is a plural and multilayered coalescence of the different anatomical body systems: biochemical, genetic, respiratory, muscular, cardiovascular, circulatory and reproductive, alongside a fleshy integration of psychological, social, and cultural shaping. From the moment we are born, bodies are necessarily involved in a complex process of, in de Beauvoir’s (1949) sense, becoming women and men. Moreover, this process of becoming is temporally and geographically contingent and how we go about incorporating this palimpsest of experience is lifelong (Allegranti, 2011, p. 2).

Embodiment is a process and one that changes through and over time.

### **A Feminist Pedagogy of Self-Acceptance, Self-Knowledge, and Self Love**

Realizing this “flies directly in the face of the essential positivist tenet of researcher neutrality” (Lather, 1991, p. 68) does not cause me constraint. I realize there will be many detractors of my study given that I am placing myself in the role of researcher and participant. I will use this reflexivity to better understand my participants and their lived reality as I strive to engage them in the research that I am hoping will actively transform them in their search for self-identity. Reading Sparkes (2002) gives me hope that although many will consider my work self-indulgent, there will be others that can see the impact it has on participants and view it from the perspective of self-knowing, self-sacrificing, and

self-luminous. I am also strongly resonating from a critical feminist perspective as I hope my work with teen girls will assist them in developing a sense of self-identity.

### **Summary**

“Right now I’m busy being born” - Teresa-twenty four years old (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997, p. 141).

The above discussions focused on the philosophies of hermeneutic phenomenology from a critical feminist perspective of the personal and embodied knowing from in-side and out-side one’s self in the process of being and finding meaning of being-in-the-world. The process of yoga as the embodied emotional performance of un-layering of self, physically and emotionally for transformation, offers a way to re-formulate and to re-discover the path of finding oneself within the challenges of life. Whether transformation to a realization of self-knowledge, self-acceptance, and self-love is possible can only be determined through the process of research. The research on hatha yoga has indicated that with continued attention to practice, transformation is possible through a physical process of strengthening of the body and through a cerebral process of engaging the mind (Feuerstein, 2001; Stone, 2008). The yoga process also has shown in research to provide many positive outcomes for teen girls including healthier self perception, less personal objectification, reduced anxiety and relieving stress (Bamzai, 2008; Brock, 2006; Derezotes, 2000; Marcinkowski, 2003; Parag and Mardemootoo, 1990; Smith 2007).

Denzin (2006) acknowledges,



My position can be briefly summarized...Our research practices are performative, pedagogical, and political. Through our writing and our talk, we enact the worlds we study. These performances are messy and pedagogical. They instruct our readers about this world and how we see it. The pedagogical is always moral and political; by enacting a way of seeing and being, it challenges, contests or endorses the official, hegemonic ways of seeing and representing the other (p. 422).

Leavy (2009) notes that the traditional concepts of reliability and validity have developed out of positivism and are not appropriate for evaluating arts based research methods. I will be incorporating arts-based methods as non-traditional forms of inquiry, such as performative and narrative inquiry, feminist inquiry, movement as method, and poetic representation, in hopes of encouraging the academic community to open up ranges of inquiry and to think differently about what constitutes knowledge (Wall, 2006). This is a crucial piece for teen girls and, therefore, a crucial piece for the research. Will the yoga process of un-layering of self as embodied performance elicit transformation in teen girls? The research will answer this question.

## **Chapter 4**

### **The Methodologies and the Methods**

I wonder how to sustain a relationship between us, between two made from body and language, between two intentions participating in an incarnate relationship which is actualized by flesh and words.

In this double willing, I and you remain always both active and passive, perceiving and experiencing, awake and welcoming. In us, sensible nature and the spirit become in-stance within the singularity and evolution through the risk of an exchange with who is irreducible to oneself (Irigaray, 2004, p. 22).

### **Embodied and Holistic Methodologies**

This journey begins with a study and focus on what I will call embodied methodologies. Embodied methodologies are of a corporeal nature. “These are methodologies which can handle the complex and messy realities of corporeal experience; methodologies which reflect the multifaceted, contradictory, ambiguous nature of lived experience and the ways in which it deifies easy categorization; and, more importantly, these methodologies also integrate the equally complex ethical issues which pertain to such intimate knowledge” (Inckle, 2010, p. 27). This encompasses a new kind of research often referred to as creative methodologies and “new writing” (Denzin, 2003, p. 118).

Arts based researchers are not ‘discovering’ new research tools, they are carving them. And with the tools they sculpt, so too a space opens within

the research community where passion and rigor boldly intersect out in the open. Some researchers come to these methods as a way of better addressing research questions while some quite openly long to merge their scholar self with their artist-self. In all cases, whether in the particular arts-based project or in the researcher who routinely engages with these practices, a holistic, integrated perspective is followed (Leavy, 2009, p. 1-2).

These approaches encompass such strategies as reflexive dialogue, poetry, dance, performance, music, film, visual arts, and a number of creative writing strategies. This is an expansion of the qualitative paradigm from both a theoretical and epistemological grounding. Leavy (2009) defines arts based research practice as “a set of methodological practices across the disciplines during all phases of social research, including data collection, analysis, interpretation, and representation” (p. 2-3). This writing and this research engages my personal politics and ethics as a woman and as an educator as well as the ideas of empowerment and new feminism as they relate to teen girls. This is the heart of my work; heart-full work creating knowledge on resonance and understanding. Using a feminist consciousness, I approach this phenomenological research from the framework of identity formation through embodied learning and yoga as an embodied emotional performance in the process of transformation to a realization of self-knowledge, self-acceptance, and self-love for teen girls. This will be accomplished through a discussion of arts based research including narrative inquiry, feminist methodologies, movement as

method, performance pedagogy, and poetic representation. I introduce this work as a “contemporary convergence of theoretical, methodological, arts-based, practical and activist engagements” (Pink, Hubbard, O’Neill & Radley, 2010, p. 6) within everyday life of teen girls.

### **Narratives of Embodiment In Visible Bodies – Narrative Inquiry**

#### **Narrative Inquiry and Analysis of the Narrative Interview for Reconstruction of the Events**

Stories are about characters whose actions are sequentially organized and casually related. Characters have roles and their roles are motivated. Who people are, what they do, why they do it, and what difference it makes-these things are explained by stories. Stories are, thus, explanatory devices that help us make sense of the random and inexplicable happenings of everyday life. People aren’t characters until stories make them so. Events aren’t grouped in logical chains until a storyteller groups and imposes logic on them (Temple & Gillet, 1989, p. 136).

Stories are a way of making sense of the world around us and making sense of our roles within that world (Bruner, 1990). Stories are also the reconstruction of raw experiences into memories and gives meaning to the human experience (Reissman, 1993). Therefore, “the act of constructing one’s own stories, as well as interpreting the stories of others in relation to one’s past experiences, enable individuals to render meaning from human experience” (Danko, Meneely, & Portillo, 2006, p. 11). Teen girls engaging in storying as

story reading, story writing, and story sharing gives them an opportunity for the re-construction, re-examination, re-invention of their own realities and “embody a temporal, iterative process” (Danko, Meneely, & Portillo, 2006, p. 11). This allows for multiple points of entry into narrative learning that acknowledges that “meaning is fluid and contextual, not fixed and universal. All we have is talk and texts that represent reality partially, selectively, and imperfectly” (Reissman, 1993, p. 15). Knowledge in this sense is the creation of meaning. This meaning is co-created by the storyteller or writer and the listener. This co-creation elicits a construction of shared meanings and understanding through a dialectic with others and possibly a dialogic with self (O’ Flahavan & Tierney, 1991).

Scientific thought is logical thought that seeks out an objective truth. This is “separate knowing – thinking based on detachment” (Danko, Meneely, & Portillo, 2006, p. 11). This objective truth or separate knowing shows the characteristic elements of argument, criticism, and objective evaluation (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997). Narrative inquiry and storying are rooted in the arts and, instead, emphasize connected knowing which is based on relationships and emotions. This “storied voice” (Danko, Meneely, & Portillo, 2006, p. 12) has characteristic elements of questioning, empathy, and a subjectivist perspective (Clinchy, 1990). Even within the burgeoning realm of qualitative research methods, the surge in narrative inquiry over the last few decades represents a change from traditional qualitative methods to arts based qualitative inquiry (Leavy, 2009). The qualitative research paradigm is expanding and there is an evolution toward re-finishing and re-defining qualitative practices. Pinnegar and

Daynes (2007) discuss this evolution in qualitative research and the four converging phenomena with regard to the researcher, the move in data from numbers to words, shifting of generalities to particulars, and the emergence of new epistemologies. The liberation movements of the 1960's and 1970's, particularly the women's movement and particularly from a North American perspective, brought renewed interest in the narrative quest. As noted by Butler-Kisber (2010),

These were used to bring silenced voices to center stage and to question mainstream and deficit notions of history, culture, and society. Not only did narratives illustrate the poignancy and potential power of personal experiences, but this way of researching, which requires ongoing and trusting relationships, also brought to the surface unsettling questions about power, authority, voice, and representation in research (p. 63).

The subjective, relational, and contextual in research was now demanding recognition. Multiple, subjective, and contextual ways of knowing were blurring the boundaries of what counted as knowledge.

Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interactions with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives, both individual and social (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000, p. 20).

Participants often tell stories but the stories are not in chronological sequence. Re-storying is often done with stories that have been analyzed and re-organized into a chronological sequence (Creswell, 2007). Re-presenting stories in sequence can allow for a beginning, a middle, and an end. This often includes a three dimensional narrative inquiry space of the personal and the social (the interaction), the past, the present, and the future (the continuity), and the place (the situation) (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000). The data analysis that emerge include story description as well as emergent themes. Postmodern narrative analysis also provides for de-construction of the story that un-makes them through an in-depth analysis of silences, dichotomies, and disruptions and contradictions. This is an important aspect of the research in that it assists the researcher in formulating a rapport and relationship with participants. It gives rise to an opportunity for both parties to learn and to change in an encounter that may provide epiphanies or opportunity for dramatic change in the story line (Creswell, 2007).

Storying through collective biography memories are strategies of writing that aim at generating moments that a reader can enter into that space and bring about an immediacy of telling that is devoid of explanation and results in storying that is not fictional in that the stories are generated through memory rather than imagination. They may contain elements of fiction and the art of fiction and fiction writing in that they work with percepts rather than concepts. You bring your bodies together in a particular time and space to enable you to examine bodies that you may have left behind; stories in another time and space remembering

stories from another time and place (Davies, Browne, Gannon, Honan, & Somerville, 2005). Collective biography memories can elicit thought processes that assist the writer in a becoming-woman story. These are stories of discovery, surprise, and adventure. “Becoming-woman...means going beyond identity and subjectivity, fragmenting and freeing up lines of flight” (Gargett, 2002, p. 36). This writing is empowering as “time is irrelevant here, as is the (monetary) value of what we write. We are unequivocally in a state of joy, even bliss – our capacity to act is intensified and the possibility of going beyond the already known-lures us on” (Davies et al., p. 355).

Narrative research is considered a challenging approach to research given the intensity of the procedures and characteristics (Creswell, 2007). However challenging the procedures and process may be, this is an opportune methodology for working with teen girls as an approach to assist them in finding an embodied self-knowledge. As a researcher, I would need to develop an extensive knowledge of my participants and their lives. As their yoga teacher, a depth of sincerity and connected knowing and being is established. As “active collaboration with the participant is necessary” (Creswell, 2007, p. 57) which requires a constant self-reflexive approach and a personal honesty regarding one’s personal and political motivations and background. All of these things will reflect in the re-storying of the account. It is valuable and necessary to address the challenges such as: Who owns the story? Who can or should tell it? Who can change it? Whose version is convincing? (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). I ask myself of the research: What motivates me in this re-construction and re-storying



of teens embodied experiences? “I search inward and outward, backward and forward through my on-going personal experiences to uncover, penetrate and lay open the personal tension that moves me to engage in this inquiry, much as an unresolved conflict or problem propels the plot of a short story” (Pithouse, 2005, p. 206). These teens’ stories are not only their stories of feminine adolescent narratives of embodiment but also my narratives as I re-position myself in their journeys. My meaning making of their life experiences through a narrative lens provides a context for the unfolding of my life story. We

Are burdened with a past for which we are accountable - even though it is not all our own making – and with a future that is both unpredictable as well as foreshadowed by preconceived images of it...constraints of the past and foreshadowed futures at each point of the writing suggest particular horizons in which it can proceed (Conle, 2000, p. 192).

### **The Feminist Methodologies**

The most important of our work - the work of liberation - demands of us that we make a new language, and we create the oppositional discourse, the liberatory voice. Fundamentally, the oppressed person who has moved from object to subject speaks to us in a new way. This speech, this liberatory voice, emerges only when the oppressed experience self-recovery (hooks, 1988, p. 28).

Feminist scholarship come from a space of engaged rather than value neutral research. This is sometimes a source of debate with respect to its methodologies (Eichler, 1997). A critical gender perspective is also included in

feminist research. Longino (1993) notes that feminist research has two focuses: “(1) identification and elimination of ideologies and methodologies that are masculine in perspective and content and (2) identification and realization of the sciences to a liberatory and emancipatory perspective” (p. 259). This is especially critical for a study on teen girls in terms of exploring new topics in research as a generation of young women have the benefit of having a generation of older women that have the lived experience of being feminist scholars. Critical analysis of feminist scholarship is therefore necessary to elicit an understanding of the criteria for feminist research and its relevance and necessity to the field of research in general terms.

Given this framework, feminist theory should necessarily be directed to masses of women and men in our society, educating us collectively for critical consciousness so that we can explore and understand better the workings of sexism and sexist oppression, the political basis of feminist critique, and be better able to work out strategies for resistance (hooks, 1988, p. 35).

Feminist methodology is useful as the discourse has challenged “at their very core the use of conventional research methods in the social and natural sciences and the philosophy of science undergirding these methods” (Press, 1993, p. 24). The discussions regarding feminist methods are routinely characterized by whether feminist work can take place within existing disciplinary frameworks or whether feminist work must challenge and ultimately transform the frameworks.

Mies (1993) makes a case for the postulates that she believes should inform all feminist research methodologies including:

- The idea of value free research must be replaced by conscious partiality
- The view from above must be replaced by the view from below
- The idea of spectator knowledge must be replaced by active participation in action, movement, and struggles for women's emancipation
- The change from the status quo becomes the starting point for the research quest
- The research process becomes one of conscientization both for participants and researcher so the study of the oppressive reality is not carried out by experts but by the 'objects of oppression.' The researcher gives their tools to the people
- The conscientization of women through a problem formulating methodology that is accompanied by an understanding of women's individual and social history
- The knowledge that women cannot effectively appropriate their own history unless they collectivize their own experiences (pp.38-42).

My research goal from the perspective of my lived experience, my embodied sense of self, and my work brings me to a cohesive blending of both ideas of feminist uses of traditional methods and the utilization of a feminist framework that challenges and transforms the research and the participants with a focus on researcher and participant reciprocity, consciousness raising, and emphasis on reflexivity and voice within a transdisciplinary approach. This may be considered

biased because of its self-declared nature. However, there is no need to attempt to provide objectivity as there is no such thing. Bias is accepted as it gives voice to the participants. As noted by Warren (1990),

A feminist ethic makes no attempt to provide an 'objective' point of view, since it assumes that in contemporary culture there really is no such point of view. As such, it does not claim to be 'unbiased' in the sense of 'value-neutral' or 'objective'. However, it does assume that whatever bias it has an ethic centralizing the voices of the oppressed persons is a better bias – 'better' because it is more inclusive and therefore less partial – than those which exclude those voices (p.140).

Modern western patriarchy tends to identify women with nature and therefore become objects to be managed and exploited (Merchant, 1980). This thought process is reductionist and reduces the capacity of human beings to know other knowers and other ways of knowing, including women's ways of knowing and teen girls' ways of knowing. Teen girls' voices must not be discounted but instead actively cultivated. Feminist methodologies encourage and foster the growth of 'voice'. This non-hierarchical research approach allows the teen girls' construction of reality as well as my construction of reality to be considered. The approach recognizes "that all theory is always grounded in experience" (Eichler, 1997, p. 19). This provides a transformative agenda for teen girls and "within this frame of reference, research which is openly value based is neither more nor less ideological than is mainstream positivist research" (Lather, 1986, p. 64).

This is an openly value based research process that not only describes the world of teen girls but also advances and transforms their worlds. The process is not without rigor as “once we recognize that just as there is no neutral education there is no neutral research, we no longer need apologize for unabashedly ideological research and its open commitment to using research to criticize and change the status quo” (Lather, 1986, p. 67). This work will elicit a deep acceptance, knowledge, love of self, and a countering of the patriarchal views of teen girls as deviants from male established norms (Lather, 1986).

Gilligan’s (1982) research discusses conventional feminine construction of moral dilemmas. The traditional feminine construction of the moral problem equates feminine goodness with self-sacrifice. However, when participants examine their own thinking, their thought process moves toward a recognition of the conflict between the dependence and self sacrifice of femininity and the choice and existential responsibility of adulthood. Teen females are constrained by the heteronormative culture that is institutionalized and ingrained. This structure renders them self-sacrificing and often powerless to be themselves and instead are controlled, molded, and decreased in individuality. The girls become constrained and often powerless, fighting to gain a sense of control wherever and however they can get it. This often shows itself as competition, jealousy, and group power-over dynamics so that they may receive some validation from their male peers who hold far more power socially. Silencing their internalized sense of self can lead to self-loathing, self-harming, shaming, sexual violence, and in the extreme, suicidal ideations and even suicide. Female teen life is intricate

psychologically and socially. This research elicits an excellent opportunity for participants to grow through exploration of their own experiences and identity.

### **A Transdisciplinary Approach: A Rhizomatic Mode in Feminism**

Making transdisciplinary connections, or 'riffing, stresses the agency of the feminist theorist as part of her project; feminisms are not truths which have come from beyond or outside patriarchal histories, they are counterhegemonic practices from within. Conceived in this way, feminisms do not seek to find a new language or an ideal theory ('untainted' by contact with 'phallogocentric' discourses'), but instead focus on the ways in which the texts, objects, images, and ideas which surround and interpellate us as subjects might be reworked towards different ends (Meskimmon, 2002, p. 381).

"...We are all embodied actors, as the condition and form of our bodies affects our interactions" (Fingerson, 2006, p. 4). Coming to understand how teen girls experience their bodies allows the researcher to come to a greater understanding of how they experience their lives learning how they see and experience the world from their own eyes and how they see the worlds of each other.

It is "trans" in the coming together of two different voices riffing off each other; a crossing of thresholds not setting out to achieve some kind of harmony, but to heighten their difference. It is "inter" in that when they attune themselves to the rhythm, vocabulary and tonality of the other, or at least become conversant in them, they can have a dialogue of sorts; one

grounded in hybridity, the formation of something new from ill-fitting components” (Tofts, 2013, <http://blogs.unsw.edu.au/tiic/leaf/leafwire/darren-tofts-being-indisciplined/>).

This feminist approach at a more concrete level allows the researcher to engage the world of the girl from a socially relevant and politically responsible perspective.

Feminist detachments from girls operate by assuming feminists are formed in the experiences of women rather than girl. Feminism’s investments in its own maintenance remains antagonistic to transformations that do not promise to reproduce it, and the desire to reproduce the same within feminism remains a block on an active feminist politics. Consequent to this antagonism, feminism not only often alienates young women but also helps to confine feminine adolescence to a chronological period circumscribed by various utilitarian criteria. In this context it is crucial to also consider the particularity of girls in forms of popular feminism that are distinguished from and sometimes opposed to feminist theory defined by academic practices (Driscoll, 2002, p. 134).

This encourages agency and an understanding of their own teen girl experiences as separate from women’s experiences. Instead of a specific focus on women’s experiences, I will examine the embodied life of the girl. As noted by Fingerson (2006),

children, particularly girls, are an 'outsider group' in our society, as they have particularly less power than adults do. I follow the 'new sociology of childhood,' which seeks to uncover agency in children's lives and defines children as competent social actors. Children are not just adults-in-the-making but have their own unique cultures. Childhood, including adolescence, is a permanent structural feature of society (p. 5).

Girls actively interact in their worlds in embodied ways. The body is a consequential part of the lived experience of the teen girl. How teens see and use their bodies is political and powerful. Teen girls are often characterized as third wave feminists.

The third wave is the current generation of feminists comprised of women in their teens, twenties, and thirties. The goal of third wave feminists are diverse and much more individualistic...The body, in particular, is central to third wave analysis and many invoke the body in their interpretation of gender ...Third wavers show off their bodies and see their bodies as a source of power, both sexual and social, that girls and women control for themselves (Fingerson, 2006, p. 133).

In an increasingly visualized culture, the body is not static or purely for functionality but a way to express unique individuality and expression of self. It is also the site for an opportunity to truly know and understand oneself; a site to develop self-knowledge, self-acceptance, and self-love.

The body is a most peculiar "thing," for it is never quite reducible to being merely a thing, nor does it ever quite manage to rise above status of thing.



Thus it is both a thing and a non-thing, an object, but an object which somehow contains or coexists with an interiority, an object able to take itself and others as subjects, a unique kind of object not reducible to other objects (Grosz, 1994, introduction and acknowledgements xi).

Bodies are unique as objects because they are the centers of insight, knowledge, perspective, reflection, desire, and agency.

In relation to critical theory and philosophical thought, such strategies have powerful ramifications, emphasizing that no idea stands outside the material and historical actions through which it was produced and that no concept is sacrosanct. Working along these lines, feminist scholarship moves easily in and between bodies of thought, stressing their corporeal origins and their ability to reconfigure with other concepts with differing effects (Meskimmon, 2002, p. 381).

### **An Embodied and Enactive Feminist Approach**

As a feminist, such a project offers me a tenable way to enter into the discourse of the girl armed with a 'becoming' that is not reliant upon a psychoanalytical configuration of woman. By theorizing outside this overdetermined box, one begins with action, deploying powerful rhythmic flows. In other words, girls produce rhythmic tactics for becoming: ways to hack cultural signifiatory regimes by learning to recognize, hover upon, flow around and through the contours that will shape them into subjects. Their liminal status allows for and assures their molecular configurations. A feminist rhizomatics of girl also traces interventions in the production of

subjectivities—the ways in which becoming troubles the primacy of the subject as mode of being (Jones, 2011, p. 386).

Embodiment is not a neutral topic and this research is not neutral. Pillow (2003) acknowledges that bodies interrupt and decentre the study of power relations. Teen bodies are objects of power as well as being sites of resistance to power.

The rhythm of a refrain sometimes engages with something quite tangible, that of the Territory of a Body. From savage media accounts to protective sociologies of girls and popular culture, the girl body is defined as an exploited and contested territory precisely because it is read as malleable, controllable, decidable and effectless. Why is this body so over-determined? How does one even locate the body of a girl? The whole of the girl body is built of milieus and marked by indexes referring to still more milieus (Jones, 2011, p. 388).

This resistance to power allows for an opportunity to assert themselves.

“Observing the body and observing from the body reveals how young women negotiate the myriad of conflicting demands, desires, and accountability placed upon them as young women” (Pillow, 2003, p. 139). This is contrary to the research view from above; from nowhere, and as Haraway (1988) notes the view from the body as “always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity” (p. 585).

Embodiment is a process and one that will change depending on our lived body experiences through time (Allegranti, 2011, p. 2). Essentially, a feminist

“embodied analysis proliferates the asking of what has not been questioned, a telling of what has been unspoken and unspeakable, creating spaces for multiple subjectivities, theories and practices to operate” (Pillow, 2003, p. 141). This is an opportunity to “engage with/in embodied processes by highlighting autobiographical, relational, and political aspects of our selves as interwoven” (Allegranti, 2011, p. 2). As we sense the world around us, we make sense of the world around us. This creates and re-creates the world in which we live in a more embodied way of doing life.

### **Summary**

I am a work in progress. I draw on my experiences as I ‘become’ in an effort to re-conceptualize my-self. This is an on-going process of embodied aesthetic wholeness in which there has been no beginning and there will be no end. A journey which is not my journey alone. This is also the journey of my research participants as we adventure into the immersion of self. The arts-informed nature of this inquiry will assist in bringing forward that which can ‘become’ but cannot be seen. “Intentionality is the seed from which the rendering and understandings emerge” (Sameshima, 2007, p. 267). The goal of this process is the personal, the communal, and the social. However, it is also the political. What is consequential is not only what I experience or what my participants experience but also what it evokes for teaching and what it evokes for learning as an expression of a pedagogical practice. How does this process change pedagogy in a way that is he-artful and evocative? This is an intentional re-vision of pedagogy that is private in the mode of self and public in the mode of

'other.' This is pedagogical practice of liberation and of transformation through a layering of arts based strategies in a self-reflexive inquiry process. Emergent pedagogical practices require an open-minded exploration that moves beyond the idea of a single authoritative truth and impersonal objectivity and instead facilitates textualization of self (Nahachewsky & Begoray, 2010). An examination of alternative ways of be-ing and know-ing will let us awaken our hearts, our minds, our bodies as we express and engage the third space for the reveal of what has been waiting for us – ourselves.

### **The Methods**

#### **Yoga as Arts Based Performative Inquiry and Performance Research: A Process to Assist in Formation of In-side and Out-side Self**

Yoga as an embodied practice for teen girls was used because as a “mode of inquiry, what was important about art was what it awakened or evoked ...how it created meanings, how it could heal, and what it could teach, incite, inspire, or provoke...” (Bochner & Ellis, 2003, p. 507). As an expression to know yourself, yoga was “not something to be received but something to be used; not a summary but a turn in conversation; not a closed statement but an open question; not a way of declaring ‘this is how it is’ but a means of inviting others to consider what it (or they) could become” (Bochner & Ellis, 2003, p. 507). My hope was to research how teen girls see themselves from in-side and from out-side themselves as they experience the body as existentially resonant and consciously liberated and how this experience could possibly transform them in some positive way.

## **Movement as Method**

...Life becomes performance and performance becomes life (Ellis, 2004, p. 157).

As a yoga teacher, I believe yogic movement assists the researcher in articulating the body as a site of knowledge (Cancienne & Snowber, 2003, Sheets-Johnstone, 2011). I am a moving researcher in that movement and the performing arts are part of the research I do. Yoga can be musical, visual, performative, poetic and can serve narrative. “We use movement methods within the educational research process to pose critical questions; to connect with the emotions of participants, to understand theoretical concepts, the self as a place of discovery; and to represent research through performance...” (Cancienne and Snowber, 2003, p. 237). As research is an act of discovery, so is yogic movement. Hatha yoga is a kinesthetic process of self-discovery from an embodied perspective. This is in direct contrast to the Cartesian dualism of the separation of mind and body as distinct regions of human experience. This binary continues to be examined and challenged in the literature (Butler, 1993; Grosz, 1994; Irigaray, 1992; Kristeva, 1980). The embodied experience in terms of how teen girls inhabit their bodies and perceive others’ bodies can be studied and understood through an examination of the corporeal body and movement as method. Husserl (1954) termed this experience in movement kinesthetic consciousness. This allows teen girls to “learn one’s body by being it, in particular by being in it in movement, and more particularly to know what it is like

to experience this self-movement as something other than the attainment of mind over matter” (Sheets-Johnstone, 2011, p. 129).

### **Performance Pedagogy**

A critical performative pedagogy also offers...students...the opportunity to see themselves again through the performances of others; performance as a barometer of truth or reality. The performance can serve as a critical reflexive lens in order for teachers and students to see and realize their own resistances, their own stereotypic assumptions, habituated responses, and experiences... (Alexander, 2006, p. 256).

We experience the world through being-in-the-world (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). Our experiences of being-in-the-world posit that we are subjects in the world but separate from the world and can only experience the world and its textures, sounds, gestures by living it. From a postmodern perspective, hatha yoga engages the body as a discourse as we engage a place of embodied being, knowing, and connectivity in a world of fragmentation and separation. The physical movements inherent in the yoga practice involving the arms, hands, hips, and legs engages a shift in perception where we move from an engagement solely of the physical to an integration of body, mind, and spirit. The body becomes a site to experience expression of the meaning of being-in-the-world. The movement of the teen girls’ bodies becomes a system of meaningful motions. Finding meaning of being and knowledge of self, love of self, and acceptance of self can be discovered through the physical engagement of hatha yoga and the mental engagement of the perception that not only do we have

bodies but to the reality that we are bodies (Cancienne & Snowber, 2003). From this site, the movement of the body becomes a place of discovery and re-discovery for teen girls. “As arts based researchers, we explore how we have been socially constructed through our bodies as well as how the physicality of our technique moves us beyond and lived experience moves us beyond our social constructions” (Cancienne & Snowber, 2003, p. 239). The body becomes a locus of discovery (Halprin, 2000) and the site of study becomes the body or the self as instrument (Eisner, 1998).

The hatha yoga experience becomes a corporeal way of knowing and being-in-the-world. “We are more interested in using the body to release the tension, understand relationships of self and other, and ultimately to heal bodies that are silenced, stressed, and restricted in ways that are unhealthy” (Cancienne & Snowber, 2003, p. 250). This is an experience approach where my participants become researchers, as I am the researcher, as we research the self. As articulated by Sheets-Johnstone (2011), “thinking in movement is foundational to corporeal expression and to being a body” (p. 419). For teen girls, the understanding of being in the body will elicit an understanding of the self. “Thinking in movement is thus clearly not the work of a symbol-making body, a body that mediates its way about the world by means of language, for example; it is the work of an existentially resonant body. An existentially resonant body creates a particular dynamic world without intermediary” (Sheets-Johnstone, 2011, p. 425). This is a self created world that teen girls can create moment by

moment and one that is theirs for self exploration where there is not necessarily a beginning or an end. It is a moment in and of itself.

“Movement-animation can be in and of itself meaningful” (Sheets-Johnstone, 2011, p. 426). We awaken to our experiences and attune to breathe and to touch; we are consciously embodied. “As we reacquaint ourselves with our breathing bodies, then the perceived world itself begins to shift and transform” (Abram, 1996, p. 63). This is a wordless dimension that allows exploration of our sensory participation. These experiences cannot always be described in language.

The discovery of self through hatha yoga is an emergent experience that is felt, performed and embodied, and allows transformation. This can also be known as the subtle body which is the idea “used to describe a model of embodied subjectivity in which matter and consciousness are not understood as ontologically distinct but as varieties of ‘energy’ resonating at different densities” (Johnson & Barcan, 2006, p. 25). This idea of the subtle body explains “the self as multiple, extensive and radically intersubjective” (Johnson & Barcan, 2006, p. 25). This is an alternative discourse and practice that brings the body, the corporeal self, into a space between self, other, and the world. This re-thinking represents a radical departure from dominant western thought. The self as extensive and open allows a move away from the idea of the singular subject. This is significant for teen girls as they can begin to see themselves beyond their five senses and into an intuitive realm of plural consciousness. These ideas are allied with Irigaray’s (1992) thoughts on dual subjectivities and Deleuze and



Guattari's (1987) concept of a 'body without organs – (BwO)'. This approach can assist teen girls in acknowledging that the individual self is intimately and deeply interrelated with her environment and the boundaries of self and other are not clear cut and move beyond the boundaries of the corporeal self.

### **Philosophical Reflection Represented through Poetry**

I had no interest in traditional representation of the words of my participants although I wondered if it might be an 'easier' or more 'accurate' representation. I then asked myself what is easy and what is accurate? As I began the construction of interview questions, I knew I would be eliciting responses based on my questions. This made me re-think the representation of their words, their ideas, their feelings, and their beings. I was keen on avoiding "shallow, empty, spurious, and one sided interpretation and understanding" (Denzin, 2001, p, 138) of others. Because I was using a non-traditional method of exploration of sense of self, movement as method, I thought it only appropriate to experiment with poetry to represent interview transcripts. Gergen & Gergen (2002) discuss the experimental alternatives to traditional writing in qualitative research and inquiry and encourage experimentation with alternate representations including performance and poetry. Richardson (1994) discusses the term creative analytic practice ethnography when she discusses authors moving outside the conventional practices of social science writing. If writing is analysis, as Richardson (1994) notes, writing or representing differently would enable different forms of analysis. In constructing a poem with the interview data, I hoped to re-think the data and re-present the data while embodying the

experiences of the participants' being and knowing. As Richardson (1994) remarks, "settling words together in new configurations lets us see and feel the world in new dimensions. Poetry is thus a practical and powerful way for analyzing social worlds" (p. 933), in this particular instance, the world of the teen girl. By viewing the interview data through a different lens, I was able to re-enter and re-engage the world of the teen girl, through their words, phraseology, vision, and sense. In no way did this make me an 'in-sider' in the world of the girl. Here I was the 'other' or an outsider. My goal was to acknowledge this truth and the vulnerability of this position. I wanted to move from the space of simply being with the girls to being for the girls. I was not one of the girls. Instead, I was able to infiltrate the space as a temporary guest. I occupied a two-place space in time, meaning I was occupying a temporary autonomous zone in the world of the teen girl but very much still an outside force or other. This temporary autonomous zone allowed me to create a non-hierarchical system of social relationships with my participants by being engaged in their present space by separating my mind from society's ideas and judgments around norms for teen girls. This idea was popularized by the anarchist writer Hakim Bey in the early 1990's ([http://dreamtimevillage.org/articles/permanent\\_taz.html](http://dreamtimevillage.org/articles/permanent_taz.html)). "The main goal of the experimental text is to evoke the reader's emotional response and produce a shared experience. Poetry, as an experimental text form, can be an effective way to reconstruct and confirm the lived experience of others while challenging researchers to learn about their abilities to communicate qualitative inquiry in a different way" (Carr, 2003, p.1330). As discussed by Sparkes, Nilges, Swan, &

Dowling (2003), "Since poetry embraces the notion of speech as an embodied activity, it can touch both the cognitive and the sensory in the reader and the listener. Therefore, poetic representations can touch us where we live, in our bodies" (p. 155). This work is a heart-felt experience that engages and re-visions our embodied sense of self. It is highly visceral, personal, and emotional.

Richardson (1997) observes that poetic representation opens the process of self-construction, which she discusses as the reflexive basis of self-knowledge. I become present in the text only as 'artful' constructor who claims no 'experiential author(ity)' (Sparkes et al., 2003). This may be my research but it shall not be researcher-dominated work. The voices of the girls, embodied and passionate, should speak to the reader themselves.

Voices are alive. Meaning crackles in-between words: in breaths, rhythms, a myriad of laughs, pauses, spaces in between, rising and lowering pitch, snapping fingers and guttural sounds (that are difficult to convert into conventional alphabetical letters). The dance between the interviewee and myself: my interruptions, my nervous laughter, my awkwardness –hanging – suspended in questions that trail off ... (Chadwick, 2012, p. 86).

I am not a poet nor do I claim to be a scholar of literature, however, I want these poems to work to re-present being and knowing from the space of the world of a girl. Kirby (2011) best articulates my true feelings around the poetic process and re-construction and re-representation of embodied being through words (voice), "All of the poems embody risk, both in their sometimes clumsy form and in their context, and I take a risk in sharing them with you now" (p. 30). If writing is an

intuitive process (Muske, 2005), I am trusting my intuition that this poetic expression is an aesthetic form of knowing where knowing becomes an embodied emotional response connected to an externality and the aesthetics belong to the knower and not the externality (Harding, 2003; Taylor, 2002; and Denzin, 2006).

### **Validity and Trustworthiness of Data**

Arts based research practices have required a re-visitation of the qualitative paradigm regarding assumptions around the scientific standards of evaluation. Critics of arts based methods ask how it is possible to evaluate the knowledge that is constructed around this type of data. However, Leavy (2009) notes that the traditional concepts of reliability and validity have developed out of positivism and are not appropriate for evaluating arts based research methods. It is necessary to come from a perspective that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' model of evaluation with respect to knowledge derived from the qualitative realm as opposed to the traditional positivistic notion of mandated scientific method.

"There is no test of statistical significance, no measure of construct validity in artistically rendered research" (Eisner, 1985, p. 191). Instead, one must look to the researcher's ontological and epistemological assumptions and success of a research project is connected to the purpose and how the methodology has assisted the research objectives and communicated the findings. "Validity in the arts is the product of the persuasiveness of a personal vision; its utility is determined by the extent to which it informs" (Eisner, 1985, p. 191). Flexible methods of assessment or adapted conventional methods can then move

knowledge construction forward. At the point of the beginning research design, strategies can be implemented that can assist with the issues of assessment. These issues of assessment are the authorial voice and being able to come to see yourself and your thoughts, feelings, and emotions from in-side and out-side yourself through personal reflexivity. These strategies include, but are not limited to, aesthetics, interdisciplinary collaboration and reflection, subject-object, using theory explicitly during data analysis from a macro perspective, literature review, analysis cycles and also ethics (Leavy, 2009). As noted by Eisner (1985), "What one seeks is illumination and penetration. The proof of the pudding is the way in which it shapes our conception of the world or some aspect of it" (p. 191).

## Chapter 5

### The Path to (R) Evolution

In the summer of 2010, I enrolled in four courses at the University of Victoria. One of these courses was EPHE 585: Qualitative Research Genres in Sport and Physical Activity. To an outside observer looking at the course title, this course might seem like a course that those might take who were specifically interested in physical activity and sport from an exercise science perspective. This may be true. However, it was in this course that I refined my ideas, my sense of self, my writing ability, and my personal connection to ideologically challenging research methods. I also met Andrew Sparkes, Carolyn Ellis and Patti Lather (in literature!) and for the first time knew what it meant to experience catalytic validity. This was a life altering experience for me personally, philosophically, and intellectually. I also worked harder than I had in any course I had ever taken in my entire life. I thought, wrote, expressed, engaged, presented and re-wrote. It was an intellectual and academic gift to have the opportunity to study with Dr. Tim Hopper. Tim opened my eyes and my heart to writing that would ultimately change me and change my future. Through his encouragement, I felt ready to move forward to Candidacy Exams. I am often questioning. I question myself, my sense of self, my ideas, my intellect, and abilities. This is part of my journey. Yes, I experience self-doubt. Although as a therapeutic interventionist, I spend my time assisting others to move forward in self-expression and acceptance, I often struggle with these ideas. It was my time in Tim's class that gave me the courage and passion to move forward.

Moving forward with candidacy successfully behind me, I wrote a proposal for a study that engaged heart, bodies, and minds. With acceptance of this study and Human Ethics Approval in August of 2012, I began my recruitment process. In the beginning days of September 2012, I advertised a 10 week yoga program, involving pranayama, hatha yoga, and meditation for female teens between the ages of 15 and 18 years. A poster was created (see Appendix 1) and was displayed at local high schools, coffee shops, and the hospital of the Cape Breton Regional Municipality. A description of the 'study' was also sent out to the Nova Scotia Social Workers' Association for information and participant recruitment purposes. I received much interest. However, many people, especially mothers of teen-age daughters, were looking for a yoga program that was simply a yoga program. Perhaps it is just my pre-judgment, but it seemed many people were confused by the idea of yoga being used as part of a research study with teen girls. There was also interest from the local Cape Breton Regional Municipality Recreation Department. The response at many levels seemed to be the same, "oh, this is a study..." "I thought it was a yoga program." Of course the poster as well as the actual email recruitment indicated such but yoga is going through a phase of popularity. I believe people did not see the 'research study' but the 'yoga program'. Many people want to do yoga or at least they think they do. Or at least they want their daughters and clients to do yoga. However, most people do NOT want to be studied. Or at least do NOT want to be what they believe is STUDIED. I was not concerned. I was looking for approximately 6-10 participants who would be willing to commit to a 10 week program as well as a pre-study

interview lasting approximately one hour and a post study focus group lasting approximately one hour on the last day of the 10 week program. It was my hope to do a follow up closing interview with those that were unable to make the focus group.

After approximately three weeks of recruitment, I had 9 teen girls from all walk of life, all shapes and sizes, all personality types, and cultural backgrounds agreeing to participation in the program. I felt before my study began that I had hit the diversity jackpot and I had no idea how it happened. The girls lived in the local area but were born in India, South Africa, China, Norway, as well as Canada. All participants were attending school and ranged in age from 15 to 18 years; one grade 10, three grade 11's, and five grade 12's from varying high schools within the CBRM.

I began an interview process with each student individually except in one case where two girls chose to be interviewed together. Each interview took place at the school where the participant was a student in a quiet area that was private except in one case when this was not possible and that particular participant was interviewed at a coffee shop in the early evening. I asked a series of beginning questions regarding sense of self in relation to self, peers, and environment as well as questions around past experiences of being a girl at different times in their lives and what that meant to them (see Appendix 2). Responses varied deeply depending on the particular teen's sense of self, their experiences in relation to the worlds they inhabited, and the worlds they believed they inhabited. The interviews were emotional. I believe the girls felt a sense of being able to



express their inner most sense of themselves and the worlds they were inhabiting during the interview process. In all cases, there seemed to be a sense of initial cautiousness where they were trying to figure out exactly what they felt they should say. I always encouraged honesty as opposed to the 'right' answer. In each case, within a few questions, I could see a truth emerging that was reflective of deeply held personal beliefs, judgments, and sense of self. In several cases, personal trauma and lack of connection to their present sense of self was revealed. In these particular cases, there were tears and in some cases even expressions of anxiety, insecurity, jealousy, negative sense of self, judgment, and negative moods.

The transcription process began almost immediately although the interviews were not coded at that time. I then began the pranayama/ hatha yoga/meditation program in early October 2012. The program was to run weekly for approximately 60-75 minutes on Wednesdays from October 3rd until Wednesday, December 5th. As Halloween fell on a Wednesday and it was a group decision to skip that day and I had to cancel on November 21st as I had bronchitis, the program ran instead until December 19th, 2012. Attendance was much better than I expected. Although I expected fairly good attendance, I was prepared for absenteeism due to the busy lives of teen girls including work, studying, extra-curricular activities, volunteer work, and family responsibilities as well as possible illness. I had also made it clear in the informed consent process that participation was voluntary and participants could withdraw at any time. They also had a choice to have their interview data not used in the analysis process if

they wished. All participants agreed that even if they were to withdraw, their personal interviews could still be used. Because I was using video and some photography for the final dissertation piece, anonymity could not be guaranteed. This was not a problem for any of the 9 participants.

The 10 week program was comprised of varying styles and types of yoga. To bring about a connection to their bodies, we began with an introduction to yoga and the physicality associated with the practice. Eventually we were able to move forward to other beneficial and underlying changes in how we felt about ourselves and what that meant to quieting the mind, refocusing the thought process while strengthening the body and reformulating the structures of the mind to elicit deeper experiences of self including “greater trust in the flow of the universe, increased creativity, and a heightened power to move toward realizing your dreams for your life...in essence, practicing yoga opens the door to creating a new state of being” (Morissette, Introduction, p. 1, 2009).

There is no right or wrong way to finding yoga or a yoga practice. My students were beginners in that they had not practiced yoga. I created a program with this in mind. I also created a program that I hoped would appeal in some way and at some level with the varying personality, body types, and backgrounds of the girls.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Data Collection Process**

#### **A (R)Evolution Toward Harmony - THE PROGRAM**

##### **Week One – Introduction to Yoga**

Week one was an introduction to the idea of yoga as a physical practice or a practice of postures with a brief dialogue on the history of yoga and the ideas of union or yoke with one's physical and spiritual selves. This is what we would call a "beginner yoga" class as yoga teachers. I wanted the girls to have an understanding of the expectation of the program, the practice itself, as well as the great historical and spiritual knowledge that has been written about from a philosophical perspective for many thousands of years. The purpose was to have the girls understand that yoga is not something to be learned and then to be finished. It is about learning for a life time and that even I, as a yoga teacher, was always learning. Yoga is an ever changing, life affirming action that should feel good. If it doesn't feel good, it is not being done right or it is not for you. Because, of course, yoga is not for everyone. I also teased them about the many thousands of physical yoga postures I would teach them and how long this would take. There was a look of terror on their faces and then I disclosed the truth and the benefit of being able to laugh at ourselves. There was also an assurance that this program was for them to experience some other aspect of themselves and was for their benefit so they should make it such; acknowledging that I would appreciate their presence each week but understanding that teen girls have busy lives that sometimes take them elsewhere.

There was a discussion about physicality, energy, meditation, awareness, profound inner peace, and the material world. These are also known as the Five Koshas. The five Koshas are inside everyone and also known as layers of energy. “Simply put, the koshas set a foundation for whatever roles you play in modern life - parent, spouse, daughter, son, businessperson, employee, artist, teacher, or any number of other titles you use to describe yourself” (Morissette, p. 4, 2009). We always begin in the present with the physical because it is something that can be understood. This kosha is that of the outer layer of ourselves and can be connected to feeling, touching, and seeing. I used the idea of the koshas to formulate the framework of the program; beginning first with the physical and moving toward each kosha with an easier sense of understanding which ultimately brings us toward Atman, meaning your true essence. The purpose is to live life fully, engaging in the moment to moment ideas whether they be joyous or painful all the while moving toward a greater sense of our truth; a sense of self-knowledge, self-acceptance, and self-love.

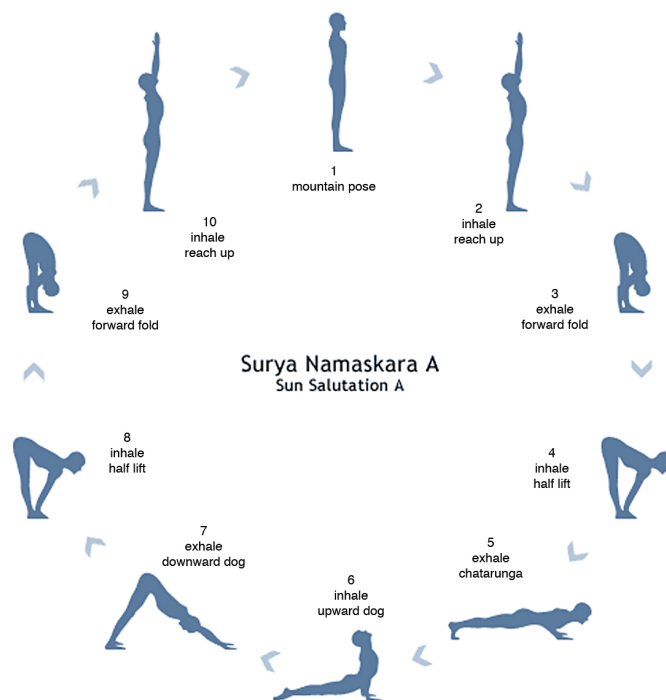


**Figure 1 Cynthia arriving open-minded to our first practice**

I believed it was impossible to delve deep inside oneself with meditation and mindfulness philosophical training in the first week but I did discuss the goals of the program and where would go as we progressed. We would use our physical bodies through movement to bring us closer to our deeper understanding and acceptance of self. The physical practice of yoga has a way of connecting us to our deeper sense of self. This week was an exercise in understanding the physical self and what that was to each of us. Some challenges presented physically as the girls were new to the practice. There were also some challenges emotionally and psychologically as they inspected one another with a sideways glance. This is a manifestation of the deep connection between how we believe we appear to others and how we feel about ourselves and what our internal essence or sense is at that time. “Everything from your facial expressions to how you hold your body tells a story about your inner life” (Morissette, p. 8, 2009). That is not to say we will ever live beautifully perfect lives free from torment, stress, judgment, or pain. The goal is not about escapism

so much as a cultivation of understanding self so as to live more healthfully; emotionally and physically. This is a journey and the girls are my participants on this journey with me. Together we become researchers on the journey of self.

I always begin a yoga practice with the physical because we are all so very aware, or at least believe ourselves to be aware, of our physical selves. We began with asanas, which are the physical postures of yoga. The Sun Salutation A series of postures is one that I begin each practice with in almost any class from beginner to advanced. This is part of my training as an Ashtanga yoga teacher.



**Figure 2 Surya Namaskara A**

Retrieved from:  
<http://sansastudio.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/surya-namaskar-a-1.jpg>

This series of postures is also known as Surya Namaskara A. Surya Namaskara A is a flowing series of postures which can unite physical movement with breath and can be a complete posture practice within itself. Connected to this series is Sun Salutation B or Surya Namaskara B.



**Figure 3 Surya Namaskara B**

Retrieved from:

<http://www.ashtanga-yoga.eu/suryanamaskara/suryanamaskara%20engl.htm>

We practiced these postures slowly. It was an incredible learning experience for me as I watched the girls watching. We watch as we are being watched.

## **Week Two – Kripalu Style**

“The whole aim of Kripalu Yoga is to enable us to use the intelligent energy of prana for our healing, personal growth, and spiritual growth, and spiritual evolution. This evolutionary energy has the potential to awaken ...” (Yogi Amrit Desai as quoted in Faulds, 2006, p. 223). Week two of Evolution Toward Harmony was a study in the practice of being present or aware using the principles of Kripalu Yoga. Kripalu (Krih-pah-loo) means being compassionate in Sanskrit. Kripalu yoga was named for Swami Kripalu, a yoga master renowned in India for his deep compassion. “The essence of Kripalu Yoga is not a posture, a breathing exercise, or even a meditation technique. It is learning how to be fully present in the moment-by-moment experience of being alive” (Faulds, 2006, p. 11). Having practiced Kripalu Yoga and experiencing the benefits of utilizing both breath and postures to become fully present, I wanted to bring this possibility to my students. This practice is a yoga practice in personal evolution. You learn about yourself by being present to the sensations, emotions, feelings, and thoughts that are with you. This is a form of experiential learning that awakens a deeper sense of who we are, where we are, and what we are. When we can learn about ourselves, we can become more self-aware. The purpose is to use this self-awareness to live more fully and completely in the present.

Being present is a difficult practice. I chose this style of yoga for our second week because we had talked about postures, alignment, and injury in our first week and we needed to delve into the deeper ideas of the momentary graces of the yoga experience so we could move into other styles, ideas, and



philosophy in later weeks and take the appropriate basic principles with us on this journey. The girls were open minded but questioning. I explained that being present in a moment is a technique that we would use not only in yoga but also in life. When or if we are confused or stressed or strained, we could re-focus by becoming present which would help us to move forward. The practice of being present consists of several steps:

Breathe – let yourself breathe fully in and out; a natural breath with a conscious awareness

Relax – let yourself release mental tensions; acknowledge them and then let them float away; soften your jaw and your facial muscles as well as your body



**Figure 4 Rachael, Samrana, and Ashna during Kripalu Style**

Feel – let yourself be open and aware of any sensations and emotions that you might be experiencing in that moment  
Watch – let yourself observe your experience closely; not holding on to anything nor pushing anything away, just acknowledge what is happening

Allow – let yourself be accepting of yourself and your experiences; without feeling the need to change

(Faulds, 2006, p. 12).

We began our practice with a discussion of these ideas and what they meant to us. It seemed to be a challenging concept for teen girls because everyone is always planning what's next. I explained that it is easy if we are aware of it and eventually would become a regular part of life; a healthy part. All the feelings that arise during this practice and in life including sensation, emotion and thought are tingling currents of a life force or energy that we call prana in



**Figure 5 Evelyn on her yoga journey**

yoga. “Kripalu Yoga teaches that the body is animated by an energetic life force intimately tied to the breath. Rhythmic breathing charges the system with energy. A balanced sequence of yoga postures encourages it to flow freely and evenly to all parts of the body” (Faluds, 2006, p. 4). The yoga practice through a Kripalu approach acknowledges that regular yoga practice can initiate and sustain personal change and

transformation. It is through a nurturing bodily experience that we are able to open our hearts and clear our minds so that positive change can inspire you to your full potential.

There are three stages of Kripalu Yoga and they are body and breath awareness, focusing inward, and meditation-in-motion (Faulds, 2006). The body

and breath awareness is crucial to a successful yogic experience. The physical practice itself must be done with an awareness of breath. We cannot go through the motions of a practice all the while holding our breath. I could see this being a problem. It takes much practice to become in tune with the breath. To sync the breath with the bodily movement is even a deeper challenge and it was obvious that some of the girls struggled not only with the postures but also with a focus on breath. When I would stop them and ask them if they were breathing, they would acknowledge not so much! When they could focus more on the breath, then they could focus on the body. Focusing on the body was a necessity to release chronic muscle tension that we all experience in North American society. The girls also encountered some personal physical limitations during this second week. Yoga was thought to be physically hard! This was news to many of the girls. However, I assured them of the beauty of each and every one of their personal practices in all the differences that they exhibited. We are all different. We are all unique. We are all beautiful. We are all good.

Focusing inward is the second stage of the Kripalu process. This is often thought to be one of the most challenging parts of the process. In the inward focus process, you learn to acknowledge and accept deep emotional and mental tension. I explained that our emotions, our memories, our pasts, our tensions, and our stressors are here to stay. Ignoring them or dis-acknowledging them will not make them disappear. The purpose here is to open the heart and clear the mind. This can be done by engaging in a physical practice where a series of postures is held for a slightly longer time than they would be in a vinyasa flow

practice. The holding of postures can help to strengthen our bodies but also bring a focus to the moment. The momentary awareness of bodily sensation and mind sensation is intensified. This elicits thought that is deeper in nature; a variation of an introspection through an introversion. It is thought by Kripalu practitioners and followers that holding poses for a longer time period can help with release of deep-seated emotional issues. When these issues are brought to the surface, even momentarily, they can be acknowledged and then let go. A regular practice of Kripalu can restore a healthy emotional balance and bring forth a clarity in mental state which encourages learning and personal growth (Faulds, 2006).

Meditation-in-motion is part of the Kripalu experience. When we relax our mind, our bodies can move spontaneously and naturally as if guided from within. We spend our lives responding to external stimuli of the powerful patriarchal persuasions so as to survive. This is a break away approach where we respond specifically to our internal stimuli. "Kripalu Yoga's approach to meditation is unique, because it recognizes that the essence of meditation is a state of deep inner absorption that can occur in either the flow of yoga postures or in moments of physical stillness" (Faulds, 2006, p. 6). So we started where the girls were and headed into the depth of the full practice. It was a class of conscious awareness and possibly discomfort. I was engaged in a personal inquiry and asked my students to engage in their personal inquiries as well; what do you feel? Where do you feel it? Are you breathing? Is your breath blocked? Are you holding your breath sometimes? What is happening in your head? In your mind? In your

heart? In your belly? This is a practice of self analysis of looking not only inward to where we are but also outward to where we can go. I am watching the girls and they are watching me. We watch each other. We learn and we grow.

### **Week Three – Vinyasa Flow Yoga**

With a foundation for physical practice and a sense of the history and purpose of yoga, we moved toward a more physical hatha yoga practice in week 3. This practice is called Vinyasa or Vinyasa Flow. With flowing yoga, each posture is sequentially linked to the previous posture almost as if in a dance. Many students of Vinyasa yoga find it challenging as there is no generalized break between postures but instead the postures fluidly move and expand into one another. Although we did not spend much time in a dialogue this week, we did have a brief discussion at the onset as a review of what was important for a healthy and non-harming practice. This included breathing, listening to the body, non-judging oneself or others, and letting go of expectations of achievement. Breathing is a natural part of the hatha yoga practice and no good can be achieved when one holds one's breath. The breathing is part of the unifying process of bringing the body and the mind together. Vinyasa means the marriage or coming together of breath and movement. In hatha yoga, you physically feel your body move and you breathe in accordance with that movement; inhaling when the body moves upward and exhaling when the body moves downward. This brings awareness to the body and awareness to the moment. Instead of looking back to the past or looking forward to the future, we are fully present in the moment. This is an opportunity to connect not only with the present, which is all that we have, but also to yourself. The present moment is the only moment in which we can live our lives. This momentary focus on the present can take us

away from the comparisons we make of ourselves to others as this moment is only about us. It is here that the most challenging work is done because not



**Figure 6 Ashna in Samasthiti preparing for Surya Namaskara A**

only do we not judge others but we also must not judge ourselves. Consciously, when we practice it is about ourselves and about accepting ourselves. There are no two people the same and no two bodies the same, therefore no two yoga practices the same. Judgment of ourselves and comparison of ourselves to others can only make us feel superior or inferior

and neither is helpful or beneficial (Shaw, 2009). With these ideas in mind, we set

forth to a full 50 minute physical practice including a warming of the body with sun salutation practice A and B as well as a series of asanas in an appropriate sequence including standing, balancing, seated and core work, and a closing relaxation meditation. The Vinyasa Flow practice is beneficial physically as it keeps your body warm, builds strength and flexibility, increases ability to endure a longer practice, strengthens the cardiovascular system as well as bringing a balance to the musculoskeletal system (Shaw, 2009).

Moving from our breathing exercises to the warm up of our sun salutation practice gave the girls an opportunity to move fluidly into the practice as the body

naturally warmed up. For a series of standing postures, we worked on Utkatasana (Fierce Pose) and the warrior series as well as a series of Trikonasana or triangle postures. We then moved into a series of side angle and extended side angle postures. This was a natural progression into the balancing postures which included Vrksasana (Tree) and Arda Chandrasana (standing half moon). The seated posture series brings a natural move toward closing as the girls sit comfortably on the mat. We began in Dandasana (staff pose) with legs together and fully extended forward. This posture always looks very easy but in actuality it is one of the most challenging postures as it requires focus and attention to the full body. We then moved into Baddha Konasana (cobbler's pose) and Sukhasana (seated cross legged pose). The girls were happy to come to seated without realizing the physical work that is required in seated posture work. We ended the prone postures with Happy Baby, which made everyone laugh. It's a position of vulnerability to be lying on your back with your legs dangling in the air; however, the benefit is that no one can see anyone else as your drishti (or gaze) is toward the ceiling. I always end every yoga class with a brief meditation; guided imagery or creative visualization. The meditation was a guided imagery on living in harmony with oneself and with others. Meditation is a five to ten minute opportunity to be quiet and mindful. This is challenging for teen girls!!! It did not help at all that the janitor of the venue polished the floor every Wednesday at exactly 4:10 pm. This was extremely problematic as it was at this time we would always move into our closing practice and the room was beautiful and quiet, the lighting was dimmed and all of a sudden there were clanging keys,



shuffling shoes and a big WHIR... He would often go into the next room once he got going but all we could do was giggle. A conversation ensued about life and how it is often beyond our control and sometimes we must simply adjust; however we can!

## **Week Four – Ashtanga Yoga: Standing Series**

By week four, we had been practicing together for a month and there was a different ease and emotional comfort. Of the original participants, one had ceased to attend. She had been recommended by a social worker and had reservations about yoga and the practice. All other original participants were still involved. It was at this juncture that I brought in the video camera. There were some concerns about being watched and we had a group dialogue about being watched by each other each week and how that wasn't much different from video. The issues inherent with feelings about being videoed were not nearly as difficult as actually videoing. Whatever my strengths are, they are not technologically engaged. Previous to this actual session, I met with Maynard Morrison who teaches Film and Video to high school students. I watched him with his class as he directed, changed lighting, encouraged the students, and videoed the sessions. I found this to be incredibly helpful. On my second visit, I took a lesson in videography. I probably needed 10 lessons to be even reasonably proficient but I was willing to practice at home. In all honesty, I had the video camera all summer for the summer before the study and was supposed to be regularly taping myself and other people to become accustomed to the process. It was as challenging for me to get the camera on the Tripod as it was to tape. Apparently the Tripod is also worth more than most cameras so I was terrified of snapping/breaking/making the Tripod.

The purpose of week four class was not necessarily to earn a multitude of new postures or even to learn new philosophy but instead to learn to feel

comfortable with the idea of being watched. I had a few requests to put the camera on an angle that would exclude certain faces as at this time, not everyone was comfortable with the idea that someone may see their face attached to their body attached to the yoga practice. In an almost hilarious



**Figure 7 Kelsey preparing for a variation of Padangusthasana**

the postures.

We began with our sun salutation practice while being taped and were then ready to move into a more challenging practice to generate body warmth and heat. With the distraction of the camera aside, it was a great practice! We began with Padangusthasana (big toe posture) and moved into Padahasthasana

adventure, the battery ran out 10 minutes into taping and the cords were not anywhere easily accessible. This was not a bad thing as I noticed a look of relief on the girls' faces when they were told the battery had run out and we only had 10 minutes of footage. It was then an ideal time to engage a full class that might have been physically challenging if it were to begin without added concerns. However, the relief at not being seen by 'video' made the class seem easier regardless of the challenging nature of

(hand under foot posture), moving toward Utthita Trikonasana (extended triangle posture), Parivrtta Trikonasana (revolved triangle posture), Uttihitta Parsvakonasana (extended side angle posture) and Prasarita Padottanasana (expanded leg stretching posture), Parsvatanasana (intense side stretch posture), Utthitta Hasta Padangusthasana (extended hand to big toe posture), Ardha Baddha Padmottanasana (standing bound half lotus posture), Utkatasana (fierce pose), and finally ending the standing series with Virabhdraasana I (Warrior 1 posture) and Virabhdraasana II (Warrior 2 posture) (modified from Bender-Birch, 2000; Swenson, 2008) This standing series took most of the remainder of the class. I saved 10 minutes at the end to move into a closing sequence to restore the balance of the body. I had the girls come to lying on their backs, bending at the knees, and rolling gently on their backs from side to side. At this very moment our floor polisher arrived... as if on cue. From this position, I moved into a brief meditation on breathing out discomfort; including exterior noise and physical awkwardness. Well deserved after today's class!!! There were many sighs of relief but also clapping for the practice well accomplished.

## **Week Five – Ashtanga Yoga: Seated Series**

Week five was a continuation of week four but this time I was prepared to video! After learning more about the camera in the preceding six days, I felt I might be able to get some footage of the girls at practice. The purpose was really to assist them in feeling a level of comfort with an external or ‘other’ present. The video camera was a ‘stranger’ or ‘other’ in the room. There was some initial skepticism but with assurance that I wasn’t going to market the video on YouTube, we set out with the continued Power Practice of Week 4. As usual we began with pranayama with a focus on Ujjayi breath. This form of breath work is a great fit to powerful asana work as it keeps the heart rate regulated. In Ujjayi pranayama, both the inhalation and the exhalation are done through the nose. I guided the girls to inhale and fill their bellies. Ujjayi pranayama is diaphragmatic breathing where the belly fills with air, then it rises to the lower rib cage and then finally into the upper chest and throat. The length and speed of the breath is controlled by the diaphragm and a sound similar to the north wind or the ocean is made by moving the glottis as the air passes in and out. The inhale and the exhale are of equal duration. The Ujjayi pranayama is also known as the breath of victory or victorious breath. There were giggles as I demonstrated. I made a popular culture reference used by one of my Ashtanga yoga teachers, David Swenson, and compared the breath to that of Darth Vader. I explained the breath could be used at anytime to slow or control the heart rate.

We then entered into the practice of Surya Namaskara A (sun salutation A) and Surya Namaskara B (sun salutation B). We did two of each of these

series of postures. Then we moved into the seated series. By now the students were starting to notice a shift in perception. This shift showed in the perception of their bodies and in their minds. There was a small dialogue around how we were



**Figure 8 Kelsey demonstrating Navasana**

They are passion (Rajas), inertia (Tamas), and peace (Sattva) and have incredibly powerful effects on our sense of self, including our moods, our feelings, and our actions. As qualities of nature, the gunas are energy patterns that are always shifting and we can be aware of these shifts if we are mindful of our personal state. The gunas are thought to be inseparable and are compared to the strands of a single rope and are everywhere in nature. We manifest the gunas as shifting energy patterns one at a time or possibly in combination.

feeling and ultimately how we feel differently everyday and this depends on multitudes of life interactions and behaviours. There was also noticeable improvement in their physical practice. I was so happy! The practice was really changing.

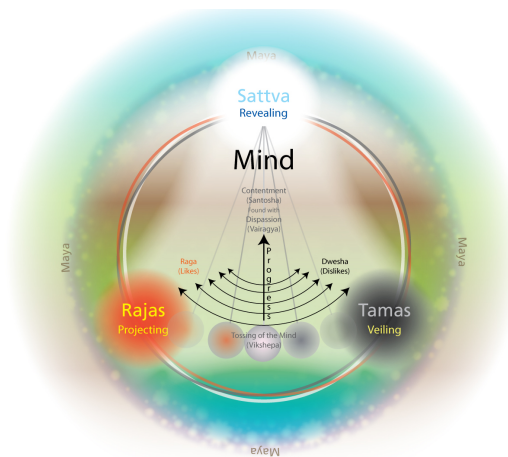
When discussing a shift in perception, it's important to acknowledge the three gunas. The gunas are qualities of nature that flow through all in the natural world.

Our human consciousness or state is affected by the energy processes of the gunas. As noted by Rosen (2013),

The gunas can also apply to our daily practice. Some days we're as ponderous as a boulder; other days we're revved up. Then there are those rare days when we sattvically float through our practice. Traditional texts suggest we cultivate our sattvic nature, at the expense of tamas and rajas. But I believe it's better to cultivate a balance of the three gunas, so that, simultaneously, we're tamasically grounded to the earth, rajasically passionate about our work, and sattvically reaching for our goal, which is the realization of our authentic Self  
(<http://www.yogajournal.com/wisdom/1629>).

The girls were content to be sitting comfortably on their mats. I discussed the gunas with them and asked them to have a conscious awareness of these states while in practice. I hoped the awareness would translate into a conscious awareness in everyday life too.

We began in a seated leg extending posture, Paschimottanasana, or intense west posture and then used the Physics of Flight (Swenson, 2008) to jump back to intense east posture,



**Figure 9 Visual image of the gunas**

Purvottanasana. The 'jump back' using the physics of flight practice elicited some laughter but was a fun experimentation using full body strength. We then moved into Ardha Badda Padma Paschimottanasana, or bound half lotus intense west stretch posture. Triyan Mukhaikapada Paschimottanasana (horizontal one leg intense west stretch posture), and then an easier Janu Sirasana (single leg forward bend). The girls could not believe how challenging a set of seated postures could be. With a few moments mid practice to breathe, we moved on to the Marichyasana postures of A, B, and C all the while holding each posture for 5 breaths. I demonstrated modifications as well as how to handle difficulties and limitations all the while making sure that no one experienced any pain or would do something that could lead to injury. Pushing too far is often a problem in yoga because we feel we 'should' be able to do it. Yoga injuries are more common than people think and my first and foremost goal was to make sure no one became hurt or injured. I kept reminding the girls to focus on their breath and that we had practiced Ujjayi breath for a reason! It was now time to make it work! The video camera eventually became unnoticeable in this class because we were all so very much focused on the moment that nothing else including the 'other' watching was relevant. Ourselves, in our space in the moment was what became consequential. The only distraction was at the end of class with the omnipresence of the floor polisher; I knew it was time to find another space! With the polisher moving to a second room we proceeded to move forward to the deepest part of our experience; our closing meditation. I focused the meditation on "The Movement Inward" which is a movement toward the inner world of



ourselves and the inward movement of our consciousness. Here we took the ordinary moment and lifted it into our deep inner sense of clarity and awareness. This is not a process that should or would be the same for everyone and it was not meant to do that. Instead, the purpose is to take us to the moment. I guided the girls to acknowledge any feelings, ideas, worries, and images they might be having and then consciously let those float away. The gift is not the end result of meditation, but rather, the moment of meditation. Progress in meditation is not linear. So this particular exercise would be more beneficial to some than to others. Nonetheless, it is the acknowledgement of the physical body, and then a lessening of this body and a more fluid attunement with the subtle body, which is the body made of energy. After we have been seated or laying quietly, we often move from a state that is purely physical into a slightly different state. “We become more aware not just of our thoughts, but of the images and the shifting energy currents that move beneath the surface of our being” (Kempton, 2011, p. 198). This is known as our vital sheath or our Pranayama kosha. It is possible to use pranayama or breathing in meditation to quiet the mind. As our meditation deepens, we become more aware of our prana or vital force. We can settle more deeply ‘inside’ at this point. Sometimes it feels like we are not breathing at all because we are so deep within ourselves. However, the breathing returns to normal once we roll to our side and return to the present. This week was the most comprehensive week of meditation to this point although it was only for 10 minutes! I thought it might be time to move toward a full meditation class.

## Week 6 – Meditation

We had completed half of our program by this time. The girls' attendance was great with occasional absences by one or two for other obligations, including sporting events, school trips, or work. Week 6 was our Meditation week. I began the class by asking the girls to find a comfortable seat on their mats. We started this class with some relaxation pranayama. There are many benefits to better breathing and this was an opportunity to focus specifically on breathing for the first 15 minutes of the 60 minute class. I explained to the girls that 'better breathing' could boost their physical health as well as improving their mental and emotional sense or

well being. A focus on breath has been noted to offer various benefits including countering feelings of tiredness, releasing tension and assisting in coping with stressors, boosting



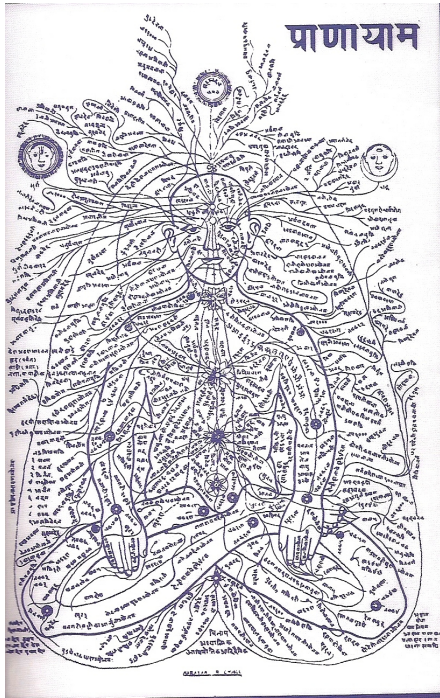
**Figure 10 Seated after meditation**

immunity function, increasing focus and concentration, bringing about a sense of calm and awareness to the present, as well as boosting energy (Saradananda, 2009).

We talked about holding our breath and how sometimes we are unaware that we are doing this unless someone brings this to our attention. There were instances initially in the program where the girls were so intent on watching and learning that they did not breathe. Breathing is an instinctive act and one that brings an awareness to the body and mind connection. We talked about the inhalation, the exhalation, and the retention of the breath. The inhalation is the act of taking in air and is a natural part of breathing. Oxygen within the air is absorbed into the bloodstream and then transferred to all cells in the body. The exhalation is the outward flowing air from the body that expels waste such as carbon dioxide. The retention aspect is the transition between inhale and exhale. When holding an inhalation, more oxygen enters the bloodstream, and more carbon dioxide passes from our blood into our lungs and it is quickly dispelled in the exhalation. This retention can act as a source to calm a body and calm a mind. Breathing or the practice of pranayama is one of the main disciplines within hatha yoga. Understanding pranayama can be difficult and I explained to the girls they first needed an understanding of prana. We had touched on prana as the vital energy or life in past yoga weeks. Prana is the subtle energy that is different from the physical energy that flows through our bodies. Yet it does flow through the body as is manifested in breath. By a breath focus, it is possible to direct vital energy in the body (Saradananda, 2009). “The Sanskrit word prana is usually translated as ‘vital air’, ‘life force’ or ‘vital energy’, but none of these descriptions really explain it” (Saradananda, 2009, p. 22). The word is not translatable to English easily although can be translated to Chinese - ‘chi’ or

Japanese - 'ki'. The prana flows through the body in a system of energy centers or channels called nadis. It is thought in ancient yoga texts that in order for the body to be healthy, prana must flow through 72000 nadis in the body.

Although there are 72000 nadis or energy channels, the focus for the breath is on three specific nadis; they are ida, pingala, and sushumna. The ida



**Figure 11 Visual image of the nadis**

channel or nadi flows to the left of the spine while the pingala flows to the right and the sushumna is the center which is the spinal area itself (Saradananda, 2009, p. 23). The purpose of this brief discussion on nadis and breathing was to show the girls that the only time that the breath flows evenly is when we are meditating. This would be when the breath enters the main or central energy channel or

sushumna. This is where the pranayama comes in to relevance. The pranayama is the

ancient yogic technique of breathing in a balanced state. We had practiced Ujjayi pranayama in past weeks but in this particular class, I decided I would teach the Kapalabhati breath or purifying breath. In translation from Sanskrit to English, Kapala means 'skull' and bhati means 'shining'. Therefore a loose translation in my practice would often be called skull-shining breath.

We began by sitting cross-legged with back straight taking 3 breaths in and out. Then with an inhale, we began a rhythmic pumping by contracting our

abdominal muscles quickly and then immediately releasing them approximately 25 times. With the quick contraction of the muscles, the diaphragm moves into the thoracic cavity, emptying all stale air and pushing it out of the body through the nose. After the forceful exhalation of the breath we relaxed our abdominal muscles and inhalation automatically happens. The focus therefore is on the dispelling or exhalation and not inhalation. Inhalation is thought to be best in passive form. The girls thought this was very funny but enjoyed the practice nonetheless.

With an ease and relaxation apparent we moved forward to our meditation. I hoped the girls could relax for the next 40 minutes as meditation can be a challenging pursuit for even the most tutored and practiced yogis. I, myself, have struggled with meditation for years and have been practicing for 25 years. I wanted the goal in the meditation class to be aware of the pure 'I' awareness or the ever present 'self' experience. I guided the girls to a quiet place deep within themselves and deep within the very moment we were in. I asked them to leave behind the chatter, self and otherwise, to come to a deeper sense of awareness in the moment. I first guided them to have their thoughts slide away or maybe, depending on their imagination and ability to visualize, drop away. Then any images they might be seeing in their mind's eye to leave as well. I find it far more effective to use a creative visualization and have them imagine their thoughts and images in forms in their mind and visually engage the mind to watch the thoughts, inner chatter, and images to move away from them. I then asked them to imagine themselves as they are in this moment. With a sense of that space, I

guided them to imagine an awakening where they moved from a physical state of being to one of expansiveness. No one spoke or asked me what this might look like and I made no attempt to create an image for this direction. This is an act of moving toward the opening of a self-dialogue of 'who am I?' 'what am I?' 'what is my self?' When the greater sense of the moment showed itself, that separation of the purely physical to the purely evolved and aware, I asked them to become it by accepting it. Essentially, the goal is to become the moment and that is challenging. I've had students tell me it was not the words I used but the comfort of my voice guiding them into the present moment; to being in a space and time that is just simply that space and time. Personally, I had had success in meditation and less than success. It depended on many factors in my own life and I had no doubt it was the same experience for the girls. As yoga is not a practice for all, neither is meditation. However, one cannot know where one's path is unless one makes an attempt on that path.

Finding the deep awareness in meditation may happen immediately for some, years for some, and never for others. "It is the furthest shore of human experience, the place where the human recognizes itself as spacious, impersonal, and divine" (Kempton, 2011, p. 218). This can be a limitless and formlessness experience, however, the Siddhas, who are self masters of inner yoga, note that this limitless or boundless state can also have a body which may be viewed as a blue light that moves in and out of a meditator's field of vision (Kempton, 2011). However, frustrated meditating individuals looking for the blue light, do not need to despair! I talked to the girls about the beauty of the

momentary experience as opposed to an incredible strength forward trying to achieve boundlessness! “But the truth at heart of the meditative experience is beyond all of this. We find it in the spacious Presence, the unmoving Beingness that arises when seeing merges into itself, when there is no longer an object in awareness” (Kempton, 2011, p. 220). This is known as consciousness or pure being and knowing. The state of consciousness is the deepest immersion into the Self. Merging from yourself into the Self is called Samadhi (Kempton, 2011). This is paradoxical because not only is this state of consciousness beyond our normal state of being aware and conscious, it is also deeply within it. I talked to the girls about the differing feelings we could experience during and possibly after meditation. These feelings could range from simple relaxation to possibly a deep sense of peace and everything in-between including bliss, love, and compassion. The peaceful quiet space of meditation can simply be that; peaceful and quiet.

The Exercise (as adapted from Sally Kempton, 2011, p. 225):

### **The Light of Awareness beyond Your Experience**

With eyes closed, focus for a minute on your breath. Say quietly to yourself, “Behind my thoughts is the light of pure Awareness. My thoughts come out of that light and merge back into that light. Behind my breath is the light of Awareness. My breath arises and subsides in that light. The sensations in my body come out of that light of Awareness. It is the light of Awareness that allows me to perceive, and that light of awareness is in whatever I perceive, whatever I feel, whatever I hear.”

As thoughts come up and perceptions arise, be aware that they are all arising and subsiding within the ground-light of pure Awareness, the divine source.

When you open your eyes and begin to look around, have the feeling that it is the light of Awareness that allows you to see and that appears in all that you see.

I ask the girls to quietly bring themselves back to the present moment by inhaling and exhaling naturally, wiggling their fingers and wiggling their toes. I then ask them to recite with me “I am.” “I am.” “I am.” This is a recognition of themselves and how we end our meditation practice in week 6. They then bring their knees to their chest, rock side to side on the small of their backs, and roll gently to one side or the other where they make a pillow with their underlying arm for their head. Once completed, they come gently to a seated posture. I say always to end the practice, “From the love and light in me to the love and light in all of you, Namaste.”



## **Week 7 – Yin Yoga**

We changed our venue for week 7 to avoid the floor polisher and an infestation of ants in the room we had used for the previous 6 weeks. I was concerned how this would affect the girls and their comfort in the practice space we had been accustomed to using. We agreed to meet in the new room and the plan was to use a stage for the practice. The room had multiple opportunities to change the level and color of lighting as it was used for filming plays. There was no natural light but there had not been in the previous room either. I immediately felt a comfort in the room and had one of the film students, Matt, who was familiar with the lighting system to show us varying levels and colors of light.

The natural progression and flow of our program was to move into a Yin yoga practice for week 7. Yin yoga is a type of yoga that allows a person to leave behind the world they inhabit and move toward their deeper sense of self. We live in a world of yang. Yang is a forceful world that is dynamic and moving; ever changing. Yang refers to the high and the brighter, the forceful and the dynamic (Clark, 2007). Yang is the way I live my life. I am referred to by Clark (2007) as a “yangster” (p. xvi). However, given my predisposition to a deeper and more intent journey of Self, I am also intently interested in the Yin of life. Yin is a complement to yang. To engage in a path or journey of Knowing-ness and Being-ness, I follow the practice of Yin within the Yang lifestyle I lead day to day.

I began the class by storytelling (story adapted form Clark, 2007). The girls are interested and I tell the story about a mountain and explain that life is that mountain. Paths are varied and different and there are many ways to climb to

the top. Once we reach the top, it is called called 'samadhi,' the state of consciousness where the mind becomes still and detached and is able to observe without attachment; to be aware of our own existence but without thinking about that existence. The summit of the mountain that is life is a very small place and once reached, one cannot stay but must descend occasionally. This requires an incredible amount of energy! Energy requires lots of motivation and lots of hard work. This is where the idea of 'yangsters' comes in. I explain to the girls that I am a yangster and everyone laughs. Vinyasa flow, power yoga, and Ashtanga all complement the yangsters at yoga practice. However, I tell the girls this is only one way or one path. The complement to this way of life is Yin. Instead of climbing the mountain we will go on a trip down the river to the universal ocean. The Buddha is waiting at the ferry that takes us on this journey and all we have to do is be willing to go. It will be a relaxing trip. Just as there are many paths up that Yang mountain, there will be many side rivers to sail on as we make our way down the Yin river. We may choose this or that river or we may leisurely stay on course. Regardless, we will enjoy the easy pace of this journey and have an appreciation for the breadth and depth of the experience. This is the practice of Yin Yoga and week 7 is the ferry ride down the river to the universal ocean. If there was skepticism, no one showed it!

Yin yoga has many of the same ultimate goals of Yang yoga but it also targets the body in a different way utilizing the connective tissues including ligaments, bones, and joints where the focus is the hips, joints, and pelvis area of the body. In the Yin practice, the poses are held much longer and are often

thought to be quite challenging because of this. A posture could be held for as little as one minute (which is actually a long time to hold certain postures) or as long as twenty minutes!!! This helps to bring the contrasting aspects of the body into balance, which is thought to assist in achieving harmony. This is never easy! In Ancient China, they called this center the Dao. The Dao is the harmony or tranquil nature found in all events that we experience as humans. Leaving the center brings us to the Yin and to the Yang. As we know, our existence is always moving and changing; in flux. Too much of anything is not healthy. It is more about seeking balance.

We Must Stress the Tissues; Then We Must Rest the Tissues! (Clark, 2007). It is possible to be poorly physically prepared to work the mind in meditation. Without going into an in-depth anatomy session, I guided them into a 36 minute beginner Yin practice. We practiced 12 postures and held each for approximately 3 minutes. We began with an opening breathing exercise and moved into butterfly, dragonfly, sphinx, child's pose, seal, child's pose again, half shoelace with right leg, then left, happy baby, Reclining twist on right, reclining twist on left, and ended with savasana. Wow! It must be remembered, always, that Yin yoga is not restorative yoga and this was an active class.

## **Week 8 – Jivamukti Style**

Week 8 was an opportunity to combine all that we now knew about philosophy of the mind with all we now knew about practice of the body. Jivamukti Yoga is considered a yoga practice for liberating body and soul. This is a transformative practice bringing together the body and the mind for liberation; an opportunity to know yourself and gain many insights. Partaking in jivamukti yoga is an act that is both creative and inspiring. Jivamukti (pronounced Jee-va-mook-tee) comes from the Sanskrit word jivanmuktih, which translates to liberation while living. Jiva means soul and mukti translates as liberation. The creators of Jivamukti yoga feel that liberation is the only reason for practicing yoga. It is a philosophical contemplation mixed with a challenging physical or hatha yoga practice. “Jivamukti yoga is the practice of internal revolution, of liberating the only prisoner you can really free: your soul” (Gannon & Life, 2002, intro. xviii). Yoga as a practice helps to teach us who we really are. Asana or hatha practice enables us to feel our bodies while meditation enables us to watch our minds think. It shows us rather than tells us who we are. Jivamukti Yoga is a practice that teaches us that we can experience joy and we can experience sorrow and both of these emotions will flow through us without destroying our peace of mind (Gannon & Life, 2002).

We began the class by chanting Om. We had not, in 7 weeks, chanted. I read and the girls sometimes repeated but we did not chant. Chanting is considered ‘far out.’ I explained what Gannon and Life said about ‘Om’ to the girls.

Another reason we chant Om is that it means absolutely no-thing. It doesn't belong to any religion or sect. It is too primal for that. Om comprises the three most basic sounds a human being can make: Ah, Ooh, Mmm. This takes it out of the realm of the intellect. It is beyond thought so it means no-thing. It is liberating to start a practice with the experiential acknowledgement that one can go beyond thought (Gannon & Life, 2002, p. 13).

A yoga class from this style is physically challenging. The physicality helps a person challenge their preconceived ideas of self. This creates a space to push beyond the physical and into a realm of detached acknowledgement.

The class begins with the chant Om. The girls listened as I read a verse from Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. We then moved forward in an understanding that our practice today would be used as a vehicle for a more liberated self and with this liberation comes Ahimsa or non-violence; toward self or other. Music accompanies our practice. The songs varied and the practice was physically engaged. It was a fun day and an interesting practice. We ended with a meditation on Ahimsa. Essentially, what goes around, comes around. This is not something any of us should ever forget!

## **Week 9 – Iyengar Style**

Guruji or BKS Iyengar would say, simply, “practice and something will change.” This change may be life altering. Or not. That’s ok, I tell the girls because even a small change in perception is a change.

Iyengar yoga is a form of hatha yoga that focuses on detail and alignment in posture practice and in pranayama. It is a hatha practice that was developed by BKS Iyengar. In this yoga practice, we begin with the physical body because it is easily accessible to us and concrete in nature. “it is here that yogasana and pranayama practice allow us to understand our body with ever greater insight and through the body to understand our mind and reach our soul” (Iyengar, 2005, p.22). Iyengar believes that as we perfect asana, we come to a deeper and better understanding of the true nature of our being and our embodiment. To reach the ultimate freedom and to open the gates to our soul (atman), we must integrate body with breath, mind, intelligence, consciousness, conscience, and our core. This can bring ultimate freedom (Iyengar, 2005). The practice of Iyengar values the physical practice of asana as it allows one to enter more deeply into the three levels of the quest for liberty. These are the external quest which makes the body firm, the internal quest which brings steadiness to intelligence, and the most inner quest which brings benevolence of spirit. The body can often act as an obstacle if we cannot transcend the barrier of it. Iyengar feels yoga integrates the oneness of self with the oneness of all that is beyond the scope of ourselves. “Oneness, what I often call integration, is the foundation for wholeness, inner peace, and ultimate freedom” (Iyengar, 2005,

Intro. xiv). In the integration there is a union between the “rhythm of the body, the melody of the mind, and the harmony of the soul” (Iyengar, 2005, intro. xxi). We began the physical practice using the traditional Iyengar series of postures. We then moved into Iyengar Meditation (Dhyana). “Meditation is the stilling of the movements of consciousness” (Iyengar, 2005, p. 182). Meditation closes our class on Week 9 as it has on each week for the last 9 weeks.

## **Week 10 – Awakening at the End (The Practice of Presence/Freeing the Mind)**

In the midpoint in the journey of our life I found myself astray in a dark wood For the straight path had vanished (Dante, La Commedia Divina, Inferno Canto 1 - (1-3).

I was at once saddened but also relieved that we had reached the pinnacle of our program and that this was our last class. It was a comprehensive 10 week program and I had learned an incredible amount but was ready to bring the process to a fruitful closure.

Duality, the creating of a self 'in here' that perceives an object 'out there,' always creates separateness and alienation. Dualism is self-constructed; it's not built into reality as it presents itself. This takes us straight to the heart of the yoga practice: yoga is the inherent union and interconnectedness of all existence before we split things up into subject, object, or any method of categorization (Stone, 2008, p. 11).

The final week of class was to be a practice around coming alive in the present moment and a focus group to engage a group dialogue around the process. "These teachings and practices that we call 'Yoga' are merely instruments to help us return to the moment-to-moment unfoldings of rhizomatic life, which is a life that leaves nothing out" (Stone, 2011, p. 17). We began with an Ujjayi breath to center the students in the moment, release any negative energy, and bring the heart rate to its norm. "The union of the body and mind or self and soul, or whatever way the modern split is described, is first healed with breath" (Stone, 2008, p. 147). It seemed very often there was always someone



rushing to get to class and it proves difficult to move into a physical yoga practice and meditation with a mind that is whirling in many directions. With a focus on the breath, we become centered and can bring a state of energy and awareness to the moment we are in.

The physical practice in the last class was an ending as it was a beginning. The girls had a complete comfort and knowledge with Surya Namaskara A and Surya Namaskara B. This is a beautiful practice of saluting the sun. We did three each of the series of asanas. It was physically demanding but there was a flow and cohesiveness to the process of communal understanding and knowledge in movement; a dance of fluidity. “Mindfulness is a meditative awareness practice that develops a capacity to attend to our body, emotions, mind, and the environment with a receptive, noninvasive attitude” (Powers, 2010, p. 90). I encouraged the girls to have an awareness of the mindfulness aspect of this practice and to rest into our discomfort by acknowledging it when it arises (Powers, 2010). This was a union of our group with the moment; as well as the self in each of us. “When you ask yourself the question, who am I?, if you can allow yourself to observe what happens from a place of stillness, you can see how self-constructed our ideas of self are” (Stone, 2008, p. 180). This flow was not about physical form or about the words associated with the postures. This whole process was about “breathing your circumstances, staying in the body” (Stone, 2008, p. 187). When exploring the body, we use the mind, but eventually we see that the mind and the body cannot be separated as they are one (Stone, 2010). I began the meditation with a reading from Patty De Llosa (2006),

Each movement begins from the floor, passing up through the legs to the trunk and on to the arms, which are light and feel like the branches of a bamboo tree swaying in the wind. You feel power coming up through your legs and slightly bent knees as you repeatedly “root” your feet into the earth. You may have to recall your wandering mind to focus on your movements – not only the physical but, more subtly, the experience of your energy in motion. Although a hundred thoughts call your attention away, you return to center your mind again on the tan-t’ien, as if grasping the string of a floating balloon before it moves too far out of reach.

Gradually the fog lifts from your waking-up mind and you begin to experience a sense of lightness, a kind of opening up in all your joints, as if there’s more space between the bones. Your thought becomes clear and alert to every tiny change of circumstance in mind and body. The air blows softly against your skin. Perhaps when you first began to move, you had to concentrate to keep your attention, on the slow-moving positions, but now your mind freely accompanies them. You are attracted to a new and delicious sensation, result of the connection between two parts of your nervous system. Your mind and body are listening to each other (De Llosa, 2006, p. 53).

As noted by Boccio (2010) “much of the ‘work’ of meditation involves how we experience the body, particularly our reactivity to experience” (p. 144). This brings us as students of yoga to a understanding that mindfulness is examining the body within the body; as “we are not distant observers of the body, with

awareness located in our heads observing our body as an object, but rather awareness permeates the whole body, like a sponge saturated with water” (Boccio, 2010, p. 152). Subject and object as separate dissolves when we come to understand the meaning of mindfulness. And so the practice comes to an end. Yoga is not just pranayama, nor it is just the physical hatha practice, nor is it just meditation. Yoga is living an engaged life. Yoga is an embodied experience of mindfulness. Yoga is an awareness that we are not just a body, nor are we just a mind. “Yogic awareness is the literal yoking of our attention (citta) to what is actually going on in the ordinary vicissitudes of each and every moment” (Stone, 2011, p. 5). The

world is large and in flux as we are in flux. “The body and the world are movements I cannot catch up with. Life, and this

very body and self, are not fixed in any

way. We are rhizomatic, we are split atoms spreading out from a core, we are fluid creatures in every sense” (Stone, 2011, p. 5). “Identity is a spectrum, and in varying conditions, who and what I am shifts” (Stone, 2011, p. 5).



**Figure 12 Practicing Vrksasana**

## Chapter 7

### Representation - The Beginning

With the program over, it was time to take a deep reflective look at the initial interviews. The interview responses varied widely as did the participants. Some responses were very matter of fact and others were reported with great emotion and heartfelt expression. Some interviews lasted more than an hour while one finished in 25 minutes. Most of the participants answered as if telling a story about themselves and their lives. As in life, we are all very different as are our stories.

I have many stories to tell. These are stories from deep inside myself that have determined who I am, what I am, and where I have been and where I will go. My deepest felt experiences come from my embodied knowing; how my body experiences the world and what that means to my understanding of my-self and the world around me. My embodied knowing is how I explore the world around me and thus explore myself. As language and thought are determined from embodied activity (Gibbs, 2005), I have come to know my-self as my body is a site of knowledge where I discover and uncover myself. If I have re-discovered and un-covered my-self through embodied being-in-the-world, I am determining that my research participants can also.

Thinking deeply

Waiting

Where does this thought come to us from: from the body

It is the place that writes

What is it called

To follow the course: of the blood of the wind etc.

(Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 1997, p. 42)

Let me tell you a story. This is a story about my sense of having a body and being a body and what that means to me. I tell you this story as I contemplate the body; my body, as an emotional and physical territory. It is the body of a woman. This is a body made of blood, bones, and tissues and of joy, sadness, and fear. It is something that I use to discover, uncover, and recover my self. My body is an essential part of my perception and cognition of my experiences with the world around me. As I move, I am an embodied being and this gives rise to my consciousness growing. It is an integral part of how I see and be in the world. It is my construction of my reality. This story is an embodied telling as are my participants' stories, which follow.

### **My Shoes Are Lost**

My form (rupa in Buddhism) was challenged in great magnitude this weekend. My connection with my sense of self was questioned when I 'drank' the swell. Simply put, I almost drowned while sea kayaking. Lost oar, shoes and an almost unrecoverable kayak; I managed to make it to shore. Body swept by the waves and bruised by the craft that I used to experience the earth and the elements. I felt water fill my lungs and take away my breath. I did not think about living or dying. I did not think. I pushed against the water.

I take my body for granted. And very often over use it and abuse it. I know better than this. As a practicing yogíní, I am aware that everything depends on my body. My body matters.

What does that mean and how does that relate to the work I do and what this study about girls and their embodied awareness means?

“The body is more than the body, and our feelings about it run deeper than we can know” (Fisher, 2013, p. 34). I have asked my participants the same questions I asked myself repeatedly throughout my life:

Ask yourself, from what perspective do you look at your body? From inside, peering out from the body’s eyes? Or from the outside, as if you were looking at it in a mirror? But how is it possible for the body to be external to itself? No, that can’t be. The body must be contained in the experience of looking, so what you see and call “my body” must be something else (Fisher, 2013, p. 34).

My bodily awareness is heightened as I examine and analyze (embodied analysis) my participants’ experiences through their words and through their actions. I have a host of data including journal notes, research log, audio interview and typed transcription, video interview, video yoga sessions and a videoed focus group. It is an overwhelming amount of information to work with and to understand and experience. I ask myself how my body experiences the information; is this separate from my brain? No, the dualism does not exist as what my brain experiences is my body. There is no separation with this or in this.

My awareness brings my experience full circle. I experience as I am experiencing.

I am thrown from my sea craft into the Atlantic Ocean. There is no separation from mind and body. I do not take time to evaluate the situation or to think. I respond as a whole to a crisis in which I am aware of being a body as my body is submersed deep into the iciness that is the water. My life jacket pushed me upward but the crashing and beating of the white caps overwhelm me. My body becomes inconsolable as my lungs fill with water. I feel my shoes sliding off my feet; being pulled deep down into the sea hundreds of metres below. I watch my oar float away, my kayak separate from my grasp and I surrender to the moment, yet I do not take time to separate my body from my mind and rationalize the situation. My consciousness is activated by my embodied self; by my experience in that moment. My body no longer appeared to me to be my body in those moments as I struggled with the viciousness of the living entity that was swallowing me whole. Prediction and planning cannot always serve us and save us.

I reflect on the experience and I ask myself if I experienced the sea? Is the sea the object that has overcome me? Is the sea and its lash against me what I experience? However, upon deeper reflection I see that I experience my experience and my conscious awareness of that experience; however real or

misconstrued that experience was for me. I have a body and I am a body – as are my participants who have also become researchers; researching the self. I did lose my shoes. My oar. But not my life; again I have a body and I am a body and I move forward – as do my participants.

“...Embodiment provides the foundation for how people interpret their lives and the world around them” (Gibbs, 2005, p. 3). I believe my participants can better come to understand themselves through their embodied experience. The phenomenological experience of the body moving and in action can transform how we perceive, act, experience emotion, think, and learn.

.....  
.....one cannot talk about it without.....  
.....attitudes, positions, dispositions of the  
body-(and)-of-the-soul or even mechanisms.....  
(Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 1997, p. 3).

The above quotation by Cixous and Calle-Gruber (1997) is a part of a dialogue regarding Cixous’ writing process. She believes that her writing grows from deep inside her unconscious and involves her whole self; her ‘living and complete body’ and cannot be separated from such. Gibbs (2005) furthers this idea, “Although psychologists and others readily admit that much knowledge is derived from sensory perception, few scholars, until recently, have emphasized the importance of kinesthetic action in theoretical accounts of how people perceive, learn, think, experience emotions and consciousness, and use language”(p. 3). He notes that the disembodied view of the mind is inaccurate and that human



cognition is shaped by the experience of embodiment. The phenomenological experience of our bodies as moving, living, and breathing entities informs and shapes our thoughts and perceptions.

### **The Interview as an Embodied Emotional Space for Performer and Audience /Interviewee and Interviewer**

Hélène Cixous: What is most true is poetic. What is most true is naked life. I can only attain this mode of seeing with the aid of poetic writing. I apply myself to 'seeing' the world nude, that is, almost to enumerating the world, with the naked, obstinate, defenceless eye of my nearsightedness. And while looking very very closely, I copy. The world written nude is poetic (Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 1997, p. 3).

Through the act of embodied interviewing, I was able to be part of the world of the teen girl. In my interview quest, I hoped to connect with my participants in a way as to become an in-sider to the knowledges that are part of the experience of female teenhood. This was a journey in which I would engage the familiar to them; the everyday life that they experience and what that means to them in their personal sense of self and in their relationships with and to others; the 'other' sometimes being themselves. This was a story-telling session where their narratives were personal to them and constructed by them. Bruner (1996) characterizes the narrative as well as the interpretation of the narrative as "trafficking in meaning" (p. 90). The interview process becomes a form of storytelling where my participants presented themselves and their world to me. Acting as interviewer gave me an in-depth view of the world of the girl as felt through emotion and experience. As noted by Bresler (2006),

The orientation of emotions facilitates a personal connection that, in turn, enables perceptions, conceptualization, and meaning-making. The aspect of personal connection in narrative, in particular, and the generative power of that connection is at the core of conceptualization of narrative as an act of coming to understand the world empathetically, exploring and negotiating polysemic meanings (p. 22).

The narrative can be looked upon as how we experience the world. Bresler (2006) articulates, “Narrative inquiry in the social sciences, I suggest, is grounded in auditory, kinesthetic, and aesthetic sensitivities, and embedded in the lived experience of constructing and attending to narratives” (p. 23). Through what Bresler (2006) has termed the “embodied narrative” (p. 24), I was able to attend to the storied world of the girl. “An embodied narrative inquiry attends to story realms – the performances and the recounting. It is based on connection: based on the narrator and his/her story, and connection to the audience, the listener(s)” (Bresler, 2006, p. 25). As the audience, I listened intently and made connections to the experiences of the girls. Through this engaged relationship of performance and audience, they as performer and myself as audience, I was able to generate broad categories of experience. The categories below are not just words. They are instead an expression of lived experience of the teen girl. Through the participants’ words, I have come to meaning-making of their lives and sense of self.

## Participants' First Thoughts – Voices in the Beginning

I think we're always changing  
I haven't really figured out who I am  
I'm just trying to find my way in the world (Ashna)

I was the fat kid  
What I see of myself kind of affects  
What I think other people think of me  
When I think about being me  
I'm just tired and stressed (Samrana)

You just have to like create this image  
If I ever gained a pound  
I'd go to the gym like non-stop hours  
You have to be really tough (Alex and Evelyn)

Big girl voice  
Little girl voice  
Little girl  
Gets bullied  
Gets called ugly  
Gets called stupid (Peyton)

Compare - try not to  
Negative - try not to  
Sometimes jealous  
Look at her  
She's so pretty (Raven)

Get jealous  
Self-conscious  
Not going to care tomorrow  
so why care now  
But I do (Rachel)

Overwhelming  
Thinking it out  
Time thinking  
Take a bath  
Fall asleep (Kelsey)

The way people treated you  
The way people looked at you  
The way they saw you  
The way they judged you  
Is how I felt (Cynthia)

My initial set of interviews took place before the yoga program began. I was getting to know my participants and I interviewed each of them individually except for two girls that chose an introductory interview together. As I noted above, the initial interview process began a series of opportunities to form connections. It was as if the girls used the initial interview time to share their meaning-making ideas of themselves with me. This process was the same in each interview. I established a rapport with each girl by introducing myself and sharing some personal information including my hobbies, interests, and the type of work I do for a living. The key was to frame a narrative of my sense of self for them to begin to know. I wanted to show trust and be trusted. Although each girl interviewed was very different from every other girl and their answers varied widely, the interview was always a sharing of a personal view of themselves. It was as if they wanted to tell me who they were and what they were about. Their words embraced a personal narrative that told a story of female teenhood; and included the ideas of the anxious self, the social self, the unknowing self, and the insecure self. These categories emerged out of a deep analysis of their words and the notes I made on their body language and presence in the interview spaces.

As the interviews moved forward and the space became more comfortable, there was a deeper dialogue emerging. This depth of expression found itself in an exploration of the girl not only as self but also as other and that of being othered. The attributes put forth encompassed the categories of

judgment, jealousy, social hierarchy, and popularity. These categories emerged in the latter part of the initial interview process

As a bond forms between two people in dialogue, a picture is created of a person and their world. I not only listened intently to the words, which formed a springboard for continuing dialogue, but also watched their bodies change in position during the course of the interview. They began in seated positions as if they were in a classroom setting. There was a formality and a cautiousness in their expression, both verbally and emotionally. This changed within minutes once conversation and sharing had begun. There seemed to be a distinct need to tell; who they are, how they experience life, and what this experience means to them.

Upon first reflection, it would seem that the participants could not possibly be more different from one another, not only in their physical appearances but also in their emotional affect and expression. To see each girl and then imagine them together in a space for a similar practice was initially very hard to do. Of the nine participants, none seemed at all similar. They were all uniquely beautiful in expression. Yet upon closer examination of the words that told the story of their reality, it became obvious that these girls, although all incredibly unique, shared the same ideas of themselves and of themselves in relation to others.

|little girl

I write like |the child learning to walk: she rushes, faster than herself, as if the secret of walking were ahead of her.

(Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 1997, p. 64)

It is only through our senses that we can see and feel our mind and the world around us. The ideas manifested by the girls were at once real and also created in that what they told of their existence was how they experienced their existences through their own reality. This was their knowing of their experiences as intuitive ideas of a lived reality that was solely theirs; all else existed within the realm of their ideas. The external world is the world they shared with me through their consciousness. Their thoughts and their experiences constituted their reality. Gregory Bateson reflects on personal reality and sense of self, saying,

In solipsism you are ultimately isolated and alone, isolated by the premise "I make it all up." But at the other extreme, the opposite of solipsism, you would cease to exist, becoming nothing but a metaphoric feather blown by the winds of external "reality." . . . Somewhere between these two is a region where you are partly blown by the winds of reality and partly an artist creating a composite out of the inner and outer events [p. 245.]  
(Brockman, 1977, p. 245).

We share a common voice but express this voice in multiple ways. I have connected deeply with these girls' lived realities as they embody the universe. We can come to know ourselves through language as language is a passage when shared and expressed. It becomes a truth – I have lived it through them. This engages our deepest thoughts through meaning and leads us forward to further engagement through experience and interpretation of this experience, allowing us to be “gradually drawn into the flux of imagination, color, sounds, and mood” (Wang, 2001, p. 90). In this representation and analysis, my hope is to

begin an 'awakening' of the experience of my participants by allowing it to approach me and touch me. Through this interchange, this representation can be infused with my own life experiences to awaken and engage my participants in a vibrant, vital, and dynamic dance with the world with the goal of recreating the surprise and spontaneity of self knowledge through embodied emotional performance; shared words, space, and place.

### **The Sutras of the Yoginis**

“The term sutra is a predecessor of the English word “suture” and refers to precise tying together of previously disparate philosophies and practices. Sutra form, concise and dense philosophical verse, exists in all schools of Indian philosophy ...” (Stone, 2009, p. 12). The mythological sage, named Patanjali, codified the practice of yoga in India

some time between the third century B.C.E. and the turn of the millennium, only four centuries after the dharma teachings of Siddhartha Gautama Buddha, prior to the birth of Jesus, just after the great Wall of China was constructed, and sometime around the assassination of Julius Caesar...(Stone, 2009, p. 11).

I have purposely taken the words of my participants and represented them in poetic free verse as a precise tying together of their previous disparate ideas and their philosophical sense of self. Upon completion, I again take the responses, or text of interviews, and poeticize the words. The 'text' as poetic expression gives feeling and voice in a concise but philosophical way of the experiences of the participants.

These are the 'texts' of the girls. "The word 'text' is related to the Latin word *textus*, a tissue. This is derived from *texere*, to 'weave.' "To be faithful to a text, ... we have to weave it into the fabric of our daily lives so that it comes alive..." (Stone, 2009, p. 14). This weaving is not unlike the unraveling and unraveling of words that form ideas about being. My hope is to have the reader embrace the world of the girl when reading the text that has been created through the weaving of their words. As noted below, this creation happened through a disassembling of interview text and a re-assembling of words as a poetic piece engaging a narrative of teen life experiences; the poems below are their embodied tellings.

### **Poetic Representation and the Art of Found Poems as Personal Narrative**

"The text that follows is a writerly text that performs as it progresses" (Kirby, 2011, p. 30).

The research that follows is an exploration of the embodied subjectivity of the girl. It is both experimental and tentative as is not easily defined (Chadwick, 2012). This is a disruption of the normative ideas around research. The poems that follow are the embodied tellings of the participants as they see themselves as selves within their world before beginning the yoga program. The transcripts of the interviews were studied and coded for categories and themes. They were then de-constructed as words and re-constructed as poems. The words below are the true words of the girls; nothing was added or changed. These are their thoughts and their voice as text. This is an unraveling and weaving together of the text. The words were taken apart and put back together as embodied tellings;



an alternative way of data representation. I begin with a brief description of each participant; a telling of them to you from me. This is a glimpse into the eyes, minds, and hearts of the girls before they began their practice.

## Introducing Ashna

Ashna is a beautiful, intelligent, and wise young woman. She excels in academics, deeply supports issues of social justice, and volunteers for community issues that she believes in and values. That does not make her bullet proof to the world in which we live. She defines herself and compares herself not only with her own personal expectations of her-self but also to the expectations out-side herself. This is where she is othered. To be othered in the world of the teen girl is to be excluded or subordinated and denotes a hierarchy is in place. It is a complex idea in that we are all 'other' to someone and possibly to ourselves. However, teenhood is fraught with loss of the idea of oneself. Othering implies idea of 'we' or 'us' as opposed to 'they' or 'them'. Even with a healthy sense of herself, she is not immune to societal exclusion and judgment in world of the girl. When engaging the world as an individual being, she understands herself to be connecting with her life, however, when she considers herself as a social being, she becomes reticent to see herself as an individual self but instead as a girl that is defined by others and shaped by others. The ideas of a social hierarchy and judgment define the space of the teen girl world.

## Ashna - A Beginning Found Poem

I think we're always changing  
I haven't really figured out who I am  
I'm just trying to find my way in the world  
I really don't know who I am yet

I want to be able to connect with people  
I understand myself  
as someone who wants  
to engage with the world

I'm filled with lots of self-doubt  
But I have the potential  
But my judgment gets clouded  
I get too caught up

I am a believer and a dreamer but  
Self doubt comes from inside  
Self doubt comes from outside  
Strength within to overcome that

It's hard when you lose perspective  
How I understand myself  
To connect with life  
That is my purpose

When I'm alone  
I imagine myself in that sort of way  
When I'm surrounded by people  
I get caught up

When surrounded by people  
You start losing  
You start letting other people define you  
Too caught up

With other people  
Defining yourself  
Somebody else shaping you  
I compare

Stop thinking about other people!  
Stop comparing myself!  
Stop thinking I'm not enough  
Why do I compare?

Especially when you're a girl  
Our surroundings control us  
Taught we need to look a certain way  
Behave a certain way

You're constantly seeing  
You're young  
You're watching those images  
On TV - in magazines

Just hearing people  
I wish this part of me was different  
Maybe I should change myself to fit in  
Beauty industry is powerful

We're in a vulnerable position  
We don't really know who we are  
We don't really know where we want to go  
Or at least that's the case with me

When you're in a position like that  
Society has certain expectations  
You're more vulnerable to believe  
Those expectations are everything

## Discussion of Ashna's Initial Reflections

The first stanza of the above poetic expression indicates a sense of anxiousness and unknowing:

I haven't really figured out who I am  
I'm just trying to find my way in the world  
I really don't know who I am yet

The very nature of her personal ideas of herself indicate that she is still searching and hasn't yet found that space of self-knowledge. This is a natural space in the world of the teen girl as female teens are often subjugated and their voices are sometimes silenced. These are hegemonic ideas that need to be challenged. The body is the instrument through which power and ownership of the moment and the self are expressed through emotion and experience.

I'm filled with lots of self-doubt  
But I have the potential  
But my judgment gets clouded  
I get too caught up

Insecurity is expressed by Ashna as she struggles with ideas around who she is and the doubt that she experiences as a teen girl in the world that she espouses as her own. This doubt comes from deep in-side her-self. She is aware of her abilities and she expresses this as her 'potential', however, she also believes her judgment gets clouded when she is 'caught up'.

When I'm surrounded by people  
I get caught up  
...  
You start letting other people define you  
Too caught up

Spending time with other people leaves her feeling defined by the idea of these people. She loses sight of her personal sense of herself when she is with other people. This is when she experiences 'othering' as this is a tactic used by the people she speaks of to impose control.

With other people  
Defining yourself  
Somebody else shaping you  
I compare

This leads to some uncertainty about self and with this definition of self, imposed by others, one becomes 'othered'. With this 'othering' in place, comparison and judgment becomes part of the world that they engage.

We're in a vulnerable position  
We don't really know who we are  
We don't really know where we want to go exactly  
Or at least that's the case with me

Her vulnerability is expressed as a state or a position in life demonstrating that the path to knowing oneself is unclear; as is the life path in general.

When you're in a position like that  
Society has certain expectations  
You're more vulnerable to believe  
Those expectations are everything

The positioning of oneself within 'society' (the world of the teen girl) makes one vulnerable, defined, and expected upon. Finding the space of self-acceptance and self-love through a knowledge of self is challenging without knowing the path to follow, a path that is often hidden, due to comparison, other's definitions, expectations, and judgments.

## **Introducing Samrana**

Samrana is an independent spirit. She considers herself to be unique and expresses herself through her hair, makeup, and band t-shirts. Samrana is motivated to study and do well in her classes so she can have choices after high school and she considers her friends to be similar to her in relation to personal style as well as attention and focus to school work. Her schedule is often too full and she finds it difficult to get everything done in a limited amount of time; wishing for longer days with more hours. She fills her life with extra curricular activities, volunteering, and school work as she desires to achieve and that is what she believes will improve her life. Samrana considers herself to be different from her peers and calls herself 'weird'. The excessively busy schedule occupies space and time in her life so she can separate from the social hierarchy of the teen experience. The junior high school experience was challenging for her as she felt like an outsider and was bullied.

## Samrana – A Beginning Found Poem

About myself  
About my body  
Kind of depression  
Gained a ton of weight  
And want to lose that

I'm pretty self-judgmental  
About my body  
So I don't feel comfortable  
So that kind of sucks  
Everyone is super judge-y

Consider myself to be  
Super socially awkward  
Don't know how to act  
Why can't I  
Just go straight up to people

If they're wearing a band t-shirt  
I'd be like oh my God, let's be friends  
Sometimes I just feel really awkward  
When I pass someone  
I feel like they looked at me

I always get super self conscious  
The whole social hierarchy  
So if they hung out with the popular people  
Who go to the big parties  
Then I might not approach them

For girls it's mostly stereotypical  
Like most of the cheerleaders  
It's going to sound like Mean Girls  
But it's the pretty girls  
Who wear Aeropostle, Forever 21,  
Abercrombie

Like the big stuff  
Who dress like a fashion show  
Looking like they stepped  
Out of a magazine  
Those girls

They get invited  
To all the parties  
Guys are all over them  
That's why they are the popular  
Girls inviting other girls

I believe other people see me weird  
Awkward at times  
People see me  
As kind of a nerd  
People think I'm an overachiever

I was the fat kid  
What I see of myself kind of affects  
What I think other people think of me  
When I think about being me  
I'm just tired and stressed

## **Discussion of Samrana's Initial Reflections**

Samrana is concerned about her body. The embodied sense she has of herself is negative and this contributes to her sense of her personal situation and what she believes other think of her.

I'm pretty self-judgmental  
About my body  
So I don't feel comfortable  
So that kind of sucks  
Everyone is super judge-y

Her perception of herself is negative and she is often depressed about herself and her body and the images she has of these parts of herself.

Consider myself to be  
Super socially awkward  
Don't know how to act  
Why can't I  
Just go straight up to people

It is a challenge for her to be herself in social situations and often considers herself to be awkward and has even referred to herself as a 'nerd'. This prevents her from understanding the social cues that she feels she needs to understand to be accepted by her peers.

I always get super self-conscious  
The whole social hierarchy  
So if they hung out with the popular people  
Who go to the big parties  
Then I might not approach them

She is insecure about herself and the perception others may have of her. This is part of her not knowing who she is; this is an expression of her insecure self. This



unknowing causes her to not like herself. She is unable to like someone she doesn't even know.

For girls it's mostly stereotypical  
Like most of the cheerleaders  
It's going to sound like *Mean Girls*  
But it's the pretty girls  
Who wear *Aeropostle, Forever 21, Abercrombie*

This anxiety in social situations causes her to manifest herself as insecure and unknowing and leads her to a place where she is separated from a social world that she feels 'othered' from. This 'othering' causes jealousy and judgment as noted above where she feels she is separate and distinct from the 'mean girls' - the 'pretty girls' and 'cheerleaders'.

They get invited  
To all the parties  
Guys are all over them  
That's why they are the popular  
Girls inviting other girls

Samrana is very aware of what popularity is and how it 'others' those that don't fall within these socially constructed ideas of reality. This social hierarchy defines the space and world of the teen girl.

I was the fat kid  
What I see of myself kind of affects  
What I think other people think of me  
When I think about being me  
I'm just tired and stressed

What 'other' people think affects her very sense of herself. This has a negative effect on her thoughts, feelings, behaviour, and her body.

## **Introducing Alex and Evelyn**

Alex and Evelyn chose to have their initial interview together. They were friends from the same high school, although had met only a month before as Evelyn was a visiting International student from Norway. Alex and Evelyn are young women who are very different from one another physically and socially. One is tall, blond and athletic; the other shorter and more finely featured with darker hair. It is interesting to note that although from another country, Evelyn presents as a typical teen meaning that her non-Canadian citizenship in no way changes how she sees the world and experiences the world. They are friends and feel comfort in a group interview, yet their ideas and imaginings of themselves are honest, forthright, and presented truthfully. There is a sense of always trying 'to be' something. This comes within an awareness that we 'should be' who we are, yet what is that? There is a distinct idea of being 'more' - healthier, thinner, prettier. When are we, as youth, as young women, enough? What does it mean to be enough?

## Evelyn – A Beginning Found Poem

I haven't slept  
My body gets tired  
Sleep more, eat healthier  
My body will tell me  
If something is wrong

Keep working at it  
Work out my whole life  
Not bragging  
I have things I can overcome  
with my body

I try to be pleased with my body  
Sometimes yeah  
sometimes not at all  
I think it's more not  
I look ok but often I'm like Ok, no way

I'm not even looking in  
The mirror at my body  
Don't feel good about myself  
And oh my God, feel bad because  
I look like that

Eat really badly  
Makes me feel really bad  
Shouldn't have eaten  
It's kind of weird, but when  
I'm alone, I'm okay

'Look at me'  
Some people don't like me  
The way I look the way I act  
That's their problem  
Like this is me I can't do anything with it

Like at least not how I look  
Like maybe how I act  
But I'd have to find other friends  
Really polite a bit fake  
You have to be who you are

I'm a bit nervous  
Don't know who to talk to  
What to talk about  
But it gets better  
You just have to start somewhere

No one knows me  
You just have to like create this image  
First impression pretty important  
Still making a first impression  
I'm saying and I'm doing

False impression  
That's not always good  
Suddenly you be yourself  
People will not like you

They won't be your friend anymore  
You can be whoever you want  
I feel bad about myself  
because it's not interesting  
I feel like I'm a lame person

Overweight  
Can I say that?  
See people  
At the beach really fat  
really big people

That would ruin a lot  
Must be really hard  
Wouldn't be comfortable  
If I looked like that  
I don't want to look like that

Your mind  
You would be sad  
Depressed maybe  
When I look at people  
How do they let themselves

Get like that?  
I would never...  
If I ever gained a pound  
I'd go to the gym  
like non-stop hours  
You have to be really tough

## Alex – A Beginning Found Poem

Eat right, exercise  
Listen to my body  
Not always  
But I try to make an effort  
Life is busy

If I eat really badly  
I have to exercise  
It's important to stay fit  
My physical self  
Is not that bad

I see myself as happy sometimes  
I see myself as better when I'm alone  
More comfortable  
Throw your hair up  
Be cozy relax

With other people  
You try harder  
I've changed a lot  
Since junior high  
I try to be more outgoing

Sometimes I am very stressed  
I go for a walk  
Or a run  
It helps  
To exercise makes me happy

If I eat a chocolate bar  
I run  
Then I feel less bloated  
Then I look in the mirror  
I feel happier

A connection between  
your mind and your body  
They're both you  
Really depends on  
my mood where I am

## Discussion of Evelyn's Initial Reflections

I try to be pleased with my body  
Sometimes yeah sometimes not at all  
I think it's more not  
I look ok but often I'm like  
Ok, no way

These words seem to indicate that Evelyn is trying to feel confident but is presently in a space of insecurity. This insecurity is expressed as not feeling good about herself and not looking in the mirror so she won't feel bad about what she sees. She is sometimes comfortable with her appearance but as quickly becomes uncertain. This uncertainty is an expression of unknowing.

You just have to like create this image  
First impression pretty important  
Still making a first impression  
I'm saying and I'm doing

Evelyn is feeling anxious and expresses herself as nervous when choosing who to talk to and what to say. She desires to be social and feels the desire to connect, yet, feels no one knows her and the person she put forward is only an image of her true self.

False impression  
That's not always good  
Suddenly you be yourself  
People will not like you

They won't be your friend anymore  
You can be whoever you want  
I feel bad about myself  
because it's not interesting  
I feel like I'm a lame person

Evelyn believes there is a sense of judgment around her and this causes her to feel she needs to give an image of herself that is not real or true, but false instead. She believes if she expresses herself as being true that people won't like her and she will lose friends. The above words express the social self that experiences such an undue amount of stress that she acknowledges she is not fun to spend time with because she's not as interesting as she should be. The stress prevents normalized social teen interactions.

Overweight

Can I say that?

See people

At the beach really fat

really big people

That would ruin a lot

Must be really hard

Wouldn't be comfortable

If I looked like that

I don't want to look like that

Your mind

You would be sad

Depressed maybe

When I look at people

How do they let themselves

Evelyn has the perception that those around her are not the same as she is; she is one of those who don't fit the 'mold' of the social hierarchy. The judgment of others is what she experiences as she is 'othered' by those around her. She judges and is judged; it's all a part of the everyday world of the teen girl. This imparts the competition to be popular that requires her to be fit, to work out:

I would never...

If I ever gained a pound  
I'd go to the gym  
like non-stop hours  
You have to be really tough

The need to be strong comes from a social ideal, the hierarchy that is created by being othered and ultimately becoming unknowing of who she is. When she is unknowing, she becomes anxious and she judges and compares as she is judged and compared.

## Discussion of Alex's Initial Reflections

Alex was a much quieter interview participant and took her lead from Evelyn. This may be a danger in an interview duo in that there is an echoing of answers. The very noticeable difference between Alex and Evelyn was that Alex shared much less information. In general observation, and without analysis, I would say that Alex was shy and looked to her friends for a lead. I noticed this in the interview. I would ask a question and Evelyn would answer and Alex would echo the sentiment by saying "exactly" or "that's right" or nod her head in agreement. I did perceive that the same issues seemed to be a part of her everyday life as they were a part of Evelyn's.

Eat right, *exercise*  
Listen to my body  
Not always  
But I try to make an effort  
Life is busy

There seemed to be a social ideal that Alex saw as being appropriate for her and this required her to spend time exercising so she could fit in. She did note that it was challenging to fit the exercise time in because she viewed life as being busy.

If I eat really badly  
I have to *exercise*  
It's important to stay fit  
My physical self  
Is not that bad

There is some anxiousness and anxiety associated with what she believes is eating badly although she does comment that she feels her physical self is "not that bad" yet she notes that she is more content or "better" when she is alone.



There seems to be less pressure to “be” a certain way when she is alone. She can be herself and she is more at ease at that time. This would indicate a sense of insecurity with others that she does not seem to experience alone.

I see myself as happy sometimes  
I see myself as better when I'm alone  
More comfortable  
Throw your hair up  
Be cozy relax

With other people  
You try harder  
I've changed a lot  
Since junior high  
I try to be more outgoing

She commented that she tries harder when she is with others as this is important for her social self. Alex has made an effort since her earlier teen years to fit in and be more socially engaged.

Sometimes I am very stressed  
I go for a walk  
Or a run  
It helps  
To exercise makes me happy

Alex remarked that she was very stressed sometimes and dealt with this stress by engaging in physical activity. Her stress is partly associated with a pressure to be fit and this insecurity results in making a conscious effort to be what she believes is socially appropriate.

If I eat a chocolate bar  
I run  
Then I feel less bloated  
Then I look in the mirror

I feel happier

She commented that she feels happier when she looks in the mirror after she exercises. She experiences anxiety related to how she thinks she looks and comments on feeling “less bloated” after exercise. This remark seems to indicate that her happiness comes from outside herself and is based on a social ideal.

There is anxiety associated with a body image that does not fit this ideal.

A connection between  
your mind and your body  
They're both you  
Really depends on  
my mood where I am

Her final remarks are interesting to note because although she acknowledges a mind-body connection as being a part of herself, she comments that this connection depends on how she feels and who she is with at a particular time.

### **Introducing Peyton**

Peyton is a young woman who presents as having it all together; she comes to school in full make-up, hair extensions, and what she describes as “cute” clothes. She has told me that it takes hours to get ready in the morning. This ‘outside’ self does not match her ‘inside’ self. She feels that she tries incredibly hard to look pretty but it is to no avail. The outside presentation of herself is a false image. She compares this to a mask and she wears this mask to pretend she is someone she is not. Her personal relationships are challenging and feels other girls are especially difficult to understand and to trust. Boys tend to be more accepting but only if you are considered typically pretty. Her sense of self is fragile and she is emotionally discontent.

## Peyton – A Beginning Found Poem

Kind of disgusting  
Ugly and worthless  
Everyone calls me stupid  
Your head's shot - Like I know

I feel like I look disgusting  
I feel gross  
Spend a lot of time on how I look  
No matter how hard I try I just look gross

Really dirty looks  
Don't like when people reject me  
That's my biggest fear; rejection  
I feel it happens all the time

Guys are all the same  
You look pretty they'll accept you  
But girls, judged by them  
Girls are catty, judge deep inside

They look under everything  
See if you have anything wrong  
You're depressed, you're weird  
She looks prettier than me

It's that type of crowd  
The popular girls  
If I didn't look like I do  
I wouldn't be accepted by them

I feel horrible inside  
My outside doesn't match my inside  
My insides, it's like really black  
Like just really sad

Feel like I'm fake a lot 24/7  
This right here this is the real me  
Just a really sad person  
Two faced fake

Don't want to be judged just chill  
Take off my make up  
Take out my extensions  
That's what I really look like

Got my mask on  
Look a little bit better  
Still feel really horrible  
Mirrors everywhere

Talk to people  
The thoughts go away  
Party girls - Not all nice  
Really popular - Really bitchy

Make myself prettier  
Plastic surgery  
Big girl voice  
Little girl voice

Little girl  
Gets bullied  
Gets called ugly  
Gets called stupid

I'd probably cry - leave  
Very easy target  
Pathetic sad person  
Breakdown

Wearing a mask  
But different deep inside

## **Discussion of Peyton's Initial Reflections**

She describes her insides as being black. She associates blackness with sadness. There is no connection between her outside image and her inside image.

I feel horrible inside  
My outside doesn't match my inside  
My insides, it's like really black  
Like just really sad

The amount of effort she takes to prepare herself to be seen in a public space is to no avail. It is moot because she believes the effort does not produce any positive results.

I feel like I look disgusting  
I feel gross  
Spend a lot of time on how I look  
No matter how hard I try I just look gross

Her insecurities prevent her from feeling like she can be accepted unless she creates an image of herself that is untrue and fake.

Feel like I'm fake a lot 24/7  
This right here this is the real me  
Just a really sad person two faced fake

Peyton represents herself as someone she believes other people will like, however, this makes her feel horrible as this is not who she really is or what she is really about. This creates a confused state of unknowing.

Got my mask on  
Look a little bit better  
Still feel really horrible  
Mirrors everywhere

She feels that if she is part of the right crowd and she has a relationship with these people then the bad feelings will disappear. Her social self believes that being accepted by the 'in' crowd will change how she feels.

Talk to people  
The thoughts go away

This is not always the case. She believes she is still judged and may be rejected.

Really dirty looks  
Don't like when people reject me  
That's my biggest fear; rejection  
I feel it happens all the time

The popular crowd is the crowd she wants to be associated with and these ideas of social hierarchy permeate her surroundings and her existence.

It's that type of crowd  
The popular girls  
If I didn't look like I do  
I wouldn't be accepted by them

She wants this acceptance from the popular crowd, although, at the same time she acknowledges that they are catty and judging of her and everyone else.

Guys are all the same  
You look pretty they'll accept you  
But girls, judged by them  
Girls are catty, judge deep inside

She becomes a part of this lifestyle and shows the jealousy and judgment that she fears is being extended upon her.

Party girls - Not all nice  
Really popular - Really bitchy

Inside she is alone and sad.

I'd probably cry - leave  
Very easy target  
Pathetic sad person  
Breakdown

She expresses this insecurity and anxiety as the two parts of herself.

Big girl voice little girl voice  
Little girl  
Gets bullied  
Gets called ugly stupid

Her existence is permeated with a reality that shows a distinct separation of inside self and outside self.

Wearing a mask  
But different deep inside

## **Introducing Raven**

Raven is a kind and generous young woman. She is an advocate of a more socially just world and promotes proactive community change. She wants to be a nurse because she wants to help people. Her life has been challenging. She has had family difficulties and has changed schools. She is trying to find her space, a space in which she can truly express herself in an honest and forthright way, but also in a place where she can be accepted and honoured as a young woman who is real. Her insecurities are expressed as she compares herself to what she believes herself to be -- seeing herself as nothing, negative, and needing to be what she believes is the appropriate representation of female teenhood.



## Raven – A Beginning Found Poem

I'm uncomfortable  
I'm shy  
Don't laugh at me  
Not a public speaker  
Work around it

Hungry and cranky  
I just try  
Put on a happy face  
That's how I should be  
Shouldn't take out my anger

Sadness  
See myself -nothing -negative  
Should be healthier  
Should work out more  
Wouldn't be as chunky

Compare -try not to  
Negative-try not to  
Sometimes jealous  
Look at her  
She's so pretty

Judged, judging, nervous, scary  
They just don't care  
Skipping school  
Illegal activities  
People are careless

First impression important  
Wouldn't come to school  
In sweat pants  
Lazy days  
Put best self forward

At home  
More at ease  
Personalities don't change  
Wouldn't change everything  
About me

Still want to be me  
Love the things I love  
Wouldn't change that  
Change something physical  
About my appearance

Not my mind  
It's like the whole package  
It's ok to be yourself  
You don't have to fit in  
Don't do things to fit in

Do things because I want to do them  
Be self  
Follow dreams  
Do what you want because you want to  
Not because other people want you to

## Discussion of Raven's Initial Reflections

Raven is experiencing a negative sense of self. She expresses this by thinking of all the things she should do to improve her appearance.

*Sadness*

*See myself -nothing -negative*

*Should be healthier*

*Should work out more*

*Wouldn't be as chunky*

Feeling that she needs to be a different person causes her to compare herself to others; she is 'othering' and she is 'othered'. This plays into the social hierarchy and ideas of popularity that encompass the teen girl world.

*Compare - try not to*

*Negative - try not to*

*Sometimes jealous*

*Look at her*

*She's so pretty*

She examines others but is also examining and judging herself. She is seeing herself in relation to how she is seen. It is challenging and scary for her. Trying to find her place in the world causes her to wonder, worry, compare, and judge.

*Judged, judging, nervous, scary*

*They just don't care*

*Skipping school*

*Illegal activities*

*People are careless*

She is trying to find a space in this world that fits who she is and what she wants, yet it is challenging for her. There is a distinct difference between what she sees as her present self and what she wants for herself as a true expression.

Not my mind  
Its like the whole package  
Its ok to be yourself  
You don't have to fit in  
Don't do things to fit in

She does not have to fit in but the pressure exists nonetheless to do so.

## **Introducing Rachael**

Rachel is a pleasant and relaxed young woman who prides herself on trying to be laid back and take social cues from her family, who she values and trusts. This family relationship is important to her. She speaks of a deep connection to her parents and her siblings. Rachael talks about her friends and enjoys their company but has an understanding that their choices are not always the best choices for teens. She presents as 'going with the flow' and often lets others take the lead and make the decisions, yet she is keenly aware of what she should and should not do. Her presence brought a spiritual and meditative openness to our practice as she had meditated before. Rachael believes in supportive programming for teens so as to help them make healthy decisions socially and personally.

## Rachael – A Beginning Found Poem

Do my best, stay calm  
I get mad, I'm quiet  
Try to understand myself  
Stay in more than go out  
Not an outgoing person

Friends are like  
Get out, get drunk  
I don't do that  
Rather be designated driver  
Than be the girl in the ditch

Find myself  
Be relaxed  
Just go with the flow  
How you should go through life  
Have these deep talks

Try to do what my parents do  
My family has the most impact  
On my life than anyone else  
Don't usually give my opinions on things  
Get everyone else's opinions

Find I'm always flip-flopping  
We could do that or that too  
Ok whatever works  
Don't have a preference -the decision  
Rest with someone else

Try not to freak out  
Over little things on my face  
Don't really care about my hair  
Just go out

Get jealous  
Self conscious  
Not going to care tomorrow  
so why care now  
But I do

## Discussion of Rachael's Initial Reflections

Try to do what my parents do  
My family has the most impact  
On my life than anyone else

This influence shows itself in her ideas of herself and herself in relation to her friends in terms of what young people are doing for fun and to be social.

Friends are like  
Get out, get drunk  
I don't do that  
Rather be designated driver  
Than be the girl in the ditch

However, this family connection she has is only one aspect of her social self.

This social self tries very hard to be an independent thinker, yet she sometimes feels unknowing and insecure.

Find I'm always flip-flopping  
We could do that or that too  
Ok whatever works  
Don't have a preference -the decision  
Rest with someone else

If she doesn't have to make a decision, she can be assured that the decision is someone else's.

Don't usually give my opinions on things  
Get everyone else's opinions

This 'whatever works' attitude could be viewed as easy going and free.

Find myself  
Be Relaxed  
Just go with the flow  
How you should go through life

There is some sense of knowing that being easy-going is an appropriate characteristic for her idea of a healthy social self, yet she acknowledges the 'flip flopping' between her sense of herself with family and their expectations and with friends and their social selves. As a teen, she is not without the ideas of comparison and jealousy.

*Get jealous*

*Self conscious*

*Not going to care tomorrow*

*So why care now*

*But I do*

She knows that she is sometimes self conscious and sometimes jealous.

Knowing that none of what matters in the moment will matter the next day should ultimately prevent these feelings, yet it does not.

## **Introducing Kelsey**

Kelsey is a tomboy and 'everyone's girl'. She is sweet in nature and pleasant to be around. When I asked her about her friends, she acknowledged that they were both similar with her and different from her. Kelsey spoke of her relationship with her brothers and the influence this has had on her over the years. This played a formative role in her perception of reality of herself. However, this journey has not been without some hardship and she conceded that she wasn't always in the healthy place she is now. In the past, she struggled with certain life circumstances but believes herself to be strong and was able to get past this challenging time.



## **Kelsey**

It took me a while  
To get where I am  
Emotionally and physically  
But I just try to step up  
And over it

Just think it out through myself  
Average not over-going extremely beautiful  
Not down below, unattractive  
Average  
Just Average

Different life story  
Just so much all at once  
People go through it  
But not all right on top  
All at the same time

Overwhelming  
Thinking it out  
Time thinking  
Take a bath  
Fall asleep

More of a boy-ie girl  
My body  
Short and small  
Best friend heavier  
Don't see her differently

She's insecure  
Try to help her  
Don't see her differently  
But express myself  
Differently

Have it easier than other people  
Average size not extremely small or bigger  
Try to be somebody that can help  
To be a good influence  
More like real life

## **Discussion of Kelsey's Initial Reflections**

Kelsey started our interview by telling me that she hasn't always been where she is in her life at this moment and this change took a period of time and growth.

*It took me a while  
To get where I am  
Emotionally and physically  
But I just try to step up  
And over it*

In this personal expression, she is talking about her social self and her struggle from both an emotional and physical perspective. The feelings she has had were those of being insecure and being uncertain of who she was. She has made an attempt to move forward by not over thinking.

*Just think it out through myself  
Average, not over-going extremely beautiful  
Not down below, unattractive  
Average  
Just Average*

She describes herself as being average. Kelsey believes average is positive as she could be 'unattractive'. This is a comparison and also a commentary on the social hierarchy that is part of the world of the teen girl. As a teen, these expectations to be popular can be challenging and very often overwhelming.

*Overwhelming  
Thinking it out  
Time thinking  
Take a bath  
Fall asleep*

As a justification for her personal ideas of herself and in comparison to other girls, she describes herself as a 'boy-ie girl'. This descriptor places her in the middle, as average. She then makes a comparison of herself to her friend who is 'heavier' but quickly eases back on the judgment by acknowledging that she does not treat her friend differently because she is heavier. These very words put forth the idea that if she does not treat her friend differently for being heavier, someone else most certainly does.

*More of a boy-ie girl  
My body  
Short and small  
Best friend heavier  
Don't see her differently*

Being heavier than 'average' constitutes some insecurity. As a 'friend', Kelsey makes an attempt to help her because it is necessary to help someone who is considered 'heavier' in the world of the teen girl.

*She's insecure  
Try to help her  
Don't see her differently*

It is most important to Kelsey that I am aware that she doesn't see her friend differently than she sees herself.

*Have it easier than other people  
Average size not extremely small or bigger  
Try to be somebody that can help  
To be a good influence  
More like real life*

As an average teen of an average size, she believes she has it easier or at least is not as focused on or noticed as girls who are heavier. It's interesting to

recognize that by trying to 'help' girls and be a 'good' influence, it makes her world 'more like real life'. This shows a distinct difference in her perception of teen life and her perception of real life. She perceives 'real life' as a separate existence where people are expected to have a good influence on those around them whereas her teen life is a temporary space where insecurity and judgment are the social norm.

## **Introducing Cynthia**

Cynthia is a bright, motivated, and ambitious young woman. She has her future planned out completely from undergrad to law school. These ideas are well formulated in her mind as being an integral part of her future self. Her present self is analytical and self-critical. Much time is spent thinking and wondering about her body, her mind, and what this means to her personal relationships and her future. There is a constant sense that she could have achieved more. Cynthia is always comparing herself to others and especially other girls. She characterizes them as judgmental and harsh in their appraisals of her and of each other. In her younger years, she felt more confident but the transition from childhood to teen hood was tumultuous and her confidence in herself plummeted. She says there is intense pressure to be prettier, thinner, and simply better.

## Cynthia – A Beginning Found Poem

Alone  
Things running through my head  
Tend to think  
Maybe I could have done better  
Self-analyze self-criticize

Girls are itty bitty  
Way of portrayal  
Makes girls so self conscious  
Not a size 0  
Weigh 50 pounds

Who you are  
Not a magazine, not Miss America  
You, as a person  
No value for opinions no consideration  
Miserable

Making transformation  
From girl to teenager  
All changed in high school  
Confidence  
Went down the drain

The way people treated you  
The way people looked at you  
The way they saw you  
The way they judged you  
Is how I felt

Should be no expectation  
Should be who you are instead  
Must be between 110 and 120lbs  
Must be a cheerleader  
Must be with the right group of people

Those girls  
Must be one of those girls  
Not looked down upon  
Left out don't care about you  
Judged

Could lose weight  
Could tone down  
My body could  
Always be better  
Must always be better

On the treadmill at the gym  
Beside me  
The girl that's 90 pounds  
Like wow!  
I could be her

I'll stay an extra hour  
Pressure to be  
So much to offer  
Keep things to myself  
Don't have the confidence

Depends  
Who's there  
Who I'm talking to  
Who's around  
Holds me back

Girls are worse than boys  
I'm so cute! I'm so fit!  
Those that aren't like them  
They are just disgusted  
Interactions are hard

Shallow and close minded  
See and hear the whispers  
Sometimes don't even hide it  
Makes me sick  
They're so perfect

Be a different person  
A work in progress  
Crying everyday hated who I was  
To this is me  
Take it ...take it how you want

Put on a little weight  
People noticed  
Got picked on a lot  
A really negative attitude  
Didn't want to do anything

I could be better  
No I can't  
I am who I am  
To realize all the positive  
That doesn't happen very often

## **Discussion of Cynthia's Initial Reflections**

Cynthia feels some sense of social isolation and has a tendency to over think certain life situations. This pattern leads to a negative personal analysis and condemnation.

### *Alone*

Things running through me head  
Tend to think  
Maybe I could have done better  
Self-analyze self-criticize

These struggles come from inside her head and show her insecurities and anxieties. They come from a social space and the social self and what she believes her self to be in comparison to others.

### *Girls are itty bitty*

Way of portrayal  
Makes girls so self conscious  
Not a size 0  
Weigh 50 pounds

This is an acknowledgment of the social hierarchy and what is deemed to be appropriate in physicality if you want to be popular. This judgment of others has originated in the way Cynthia believes she was judged, coming back to the idea of judge and be judged.

The way people treated you  
The way people looked at you  
The way they saw you  
The way they judged you  
Is how I felt

These feelings have affected her very ideas of her social self and caused insecurity and judgment.

Should be no expectation  
Should be who you are instead  
Must be between 110 and 120lbs  
Must be a cheerleader  
Must be with the right group of people

Ideas of who she 'must be' have caused her great personal strife.

Those girls  
Must be one of those girls  
Not looked down upon  
Left out don't care about you  
Judged

This has instilled an idea of judgment and what she 'could' be as opposed to what she is.

Could lose weight  
Could tone down  
My body could  
Always be better

On the treadmill at the gym  
Beside me  
The girl that's 90 pounds  
Like wow!  
I could be her

Knowing what she 'could' be or what she believes she should be causes her to judge others as she believes they judge her.

Girls are worse than boys  
I'm so cute! I'm so fit!  
Those that aren't like them  
They are just disgusted



Interactions are hard

Shallow and close minded  
See and hear the whispers  
Sometimes don't even hide it  
Makes me sick  
They're so perfect

With a diligent competition to be popular comes an unfortunate social space of  
jealousy and judgment.

### **Introducing Darlene**

Darlene is a researcher but also a participant in her own study. When she was 16 years old, her father took her to the local library to learn about Transcendental Meditation (TM). He said many years after that he hoped it might help her to relax and to find some insight into her self. He also brought Buddhism into her life as a study and as a practice. Darlene was an analytical child and has become an analytical adult. Life has become an opportunity for self-study and self-exploration. This self-examination may bring answers, yet it may not. It is a purposeful pondering into her being.

## Darlene – A Beginning Found Poem

Is it possible that we spend our whole lives in search of ourselves?

I have been searching since I was a little girl

I have been searching since I knew what searching was

I have been wondering who I was

Since everyone told me who that was

That was a long time ago

And now I am here

I am still searching

Maybe the search is what is meant by living

If one does not search, does one live?

How do they experience fully and completely

What life is or what it can offer?

Would I be happy if I chose tradition

House, husband, and kids

Would I still yearn

For more? For me?

It is not that I don't know what love is

Because I do

I know what love is

And that is what makes my life so hard

Would I be as fulfilled if I didn't feel so deeply

Love so much

Possibly

Or maybe not

Would I be more fulfilled if I reached out?

Can you desire connection

Yet wish to be alone?

What does that mean?

Where do you find what you desire?

Too many questions

And always

There is no answer

Will the seeker find a space of peace?

So the seeker seeks

And travels to far away lands

In body and in mind

Is there a time when you shall seek no more

When you shall find solace and peace

Use mindfulness

Is that your answer

Is it your saviour

Who saves me from myself?

I think my memories are in my mind -

But I know my memories are in my body

## **Discussion of Darlene's Initial Reflections**

I know we are what we have become. Through experience, we create our understandings of life and who we are, what we stand for and what our conceptions of the world are. Our experiences create who we are. As Sameshima quoting Carl Leggo says,

“My past is always included in the present, implicated, inextricably present with the present” (2004, p. 22). This is so true. Our ecological, cultural, ethical, gendered, and embodied positionings are embedded within the theories we embrace consciously and unconsciously as researchers, learners and educators, and these beliefs inform our relationships, teaching, and ways of being. Yes, I know this but how can I get out? You're helping me, aren't you? (Sameshima, 2006, pps. 13-14).

And so it is that we, as researchers, learners, and educators help each other. Through our conditionings and being, we help each other to come to terms with and find a space of understanding of who we are and where we will go. This is a journey that I believe is life long and we learn more about ourselves and our relationships with the world and each other through our day to day interactions, connections, and experiences. As I live, move, and breathe, I continue to change. In this change I become more deeply engaged in my sense of myself. I don't do this alone but with others including the other as myself.

## **The Girls**

Through examination of the initial interview transcripts, I was able to see the overarching themes of the anxious self, social self, unknowing self, and insecure self. Although the participants expressed some ideas associated with a positive sense of self there was always a need to express or show a reaction to the feelings they had about their bodies in the world and their bodies as they saw themselves and as they believed others saw them. This translated to personal feelings of jealousy and judgment that they experienced within a social hierarchy where there is the need to be popular. These interviews were an embodied emotional expression from them to me. The disclosure was comfortable and the participants were forthcoming. I approached the interviews as a dialogue or a conversation. The ideas espoused by the girls were examples of binary thinking - likes and dislikes, me and mine, inner and outer (Stone, 2008). As this was a pre-yoga program dialogue, the girls did not show in any embodied way the interconnection and non-separation of their existence.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Representation**

#### **Last Thoughts - The End of the Study**

The essence of yoga is the unifying of the person's individual self with their universal self. The word 'tapas' is the spirit of yoga. "Tapas is being grounded in a reality that is not 'apart from', and the skill of 'grounding' is the activity of feeling what is without plotting escape routes" (Stone, 2008, p. 77). It is natural for teen girls to develop relationships with themselves and with the 'other' that are conditioned responses or habits of attachment and aversion. This presents an unhealthy sense of self from the perspective of how 'I' see myself in relation to the other as well as unhealthy sense of self in how 'I' believe the other sees me. Binary thinking creates a dualism in lack of self-knowledge and understanding.

The yoga program was an opportunity to engage the essence of what yoga means for our lives as more than asana; instead the interconnection of a unified body and mind. The benefit of understanding and engaging the true essence of yoga is to be here and be now; and be comfortable with whatever is taking place including the positive, the negative, and even the in-between. We, as yoga practitioners, can become so engaged in the present moment that we put our attention there, which creates a mind-body unification. The key is to utilize these ideas in future moments as well as the present. Through this unification of mind and body we are able to engage niroda. "Niroda is the releasing of the habitual patterns or fluctuations in mind-body" (Stone, 2008, p.

80). This is a pilgrimage inside ourselves and my goal was to take the girls on this journey through yoga. The yoga program was created from the perspective that the journey is the destination and existence is everything we experience. The creation of self is seen through the sense that we do not eliminate self narrative but instead create new patterns of self and let go of the negative stories we have created through habitual patterns of discontent and disconnect that have manifested themselves in the negative sense of self. This is the creation of a new story or sense of self through love, compassion, and kindness.

To explain how the process of yoga enabled such a transitional space and transformation in a period of four months, I want to tell the story of the lotus flower. Yoga is the uniting of consciousness in the heart. In yoga, the lotus flower symbolizes the bringing together of our human nature with our divine nature. The seed of the flower is planted in dark and muddy waters deep below the surface of light. Although there is no light to allow the flower to grow, the flower is able to draw growth energy from deep within itself. It grows through the dark and muddied space and emerges into the light. It becomes cleared from dirt and mud and although it lived in the mud, was not affected by it and it did not overshadow its beauty. This is a story that we can use to understand the powerful effects of the process of yoga. As we engage in the practice, yoga allows us to see the true beauty inside of ourselves and we can let that shine outward and be positive all around us. Although the world we live in and our interpersonal relations can sometimes be dark, challenging, and difficult, yoga helps us to find the worth and beauty inside.

A number of themes presented themselves during the post-program interviews including awareness (bodily and mind), mindfulness (connectedness, focus), inner peace (contentment), and acknowledgement of self (acceptance). In this chapter, I construct found poems from the focus group dialogue as well as the final interviews that were audiotaped and videotaped. Again taking the words of the teen girls and placing them together to demonstrate how each of the above noted themes was repeatedly present within the interview data.

### **My Body is My Instrument**

My body is my instrument. It is the place where I can give voice to my opinion. It is the space where I have certain power, even if it's only the power of locating my thoughts and emotions (Bruguera, 2013, <http://www.universes-in-universe.de/woven-maze/bruguera/>).

With continued practice each week, the girls were able to have a better understanding of the benefit of being an engaged body-mind in the current moment. This helped create a mind-body pattern that could be translated from that moment to the next moment and so on. Stone (2008) refers to this as neuroplasticity; "neuroplasticity sees the brain as an organ not separate from mind or body, and describes the brain's ability to recognize itself by forming new neural connections throughout life" (p. 80). As the brain sprouts new nerve endings, it changes at all times within the environment that it is in. The mind-body system is not a closed system or loop, but instead an open and flexible loop constantly in motion and subject to change. This means our ideas, attitudes, behaviours, and predispositions are open to change as well. Yoga is a process



that engages circuits in the mind-body loop that are used less often. This is a letting go of old and often negative patterns of thinking and being and replacing this negative pattern with a “pilgrimage inside our own bodies” (Stone, 2008, p. 80). This pilgrimage is a way for us to better be ourselves and know ourselves. Therefore, we are changing within the context of our environment. The practice of yoga creates a path to be and know your-self amidst the ongoing flux and change in life.

Through an acknowledgment of mindfulness and the interconnectedness that it brings through the yoga practice, the girls were able to leave the world of reactivity, negative belief patterns, and dramatic storied selves to enter a momentary peace within themselves. This is change that awakened them to the “natural state of being with what is, and practice supports us in waking up to this natural state” (Stone, 2008, p. 169). The girls noted great and positive change in their lives. This change happened through our yoga practice and in order to sustain this change, we must sustain our practice. A yoga student will feel transforming effects after engaging in practice. But these effects will not last without awareness and quickly old habits show themselves. Awareness through practice is to take away the seeds of understanding of waking up to know what ‘herself’ means. This is a way of being fully in our lives. Practice is essential for this. “Asana practice offers a great window into impermanence. From day to day, the body feels and moves differently each time we come to practice... opening to the reality of change liberates that energy” (Boccio, 2010, p. 160). I find my-self knowing through doing. My knowledge is uncovered through my body and I find

my-self through the experiences and knowledges of my body. I become knowing of the change as I experience it personally through an understanding of my embodied self. Through a personal reflective stance, I experience and become aware of the ever-changing space my body and my mind inhabits. I am able to reconfigure what my consciousness knows as reality. As I am un-knowing of the girls' experiences, I can only become knowing through their experiences and their voices.

### **The Girls' Final Thoughts from the Embodied Experience of Yoga**

On the following pages, I have taken the final focus group transcript of all participants and constructed a found poem of their combined ideas and thoughts. The ideas and thoughts were used in a collaborative effort to represent the feelings, emotions, and experiences after the end of the yoga program. This focus group took place after the last yoga class. It was videotaped and then transcribed. I began with the same questions that I asked the girls at the beginning of the program. The questions were the same, yet their answers were not. At first there seemed to be some hesitation to answer such personal questions in a group forum. Within minutes of the first question being answered, however, the girls began to speak candidly about their feelings, ideas, and sense of the situation and themselves. A safety and security had developed over a period of four months that fostered an ease of spirit and togetherness in dialogue. I took the focus group transcript and watched the video footage and constructed a found poem of their group dialogue at the end of the research process. These are the words of all the girls as they completed the program. Their words

represent where they are and where they have come from and what this embodied yoga experience means to them.

Four of the nine participants, Ashna, Cynthia, Rachael, and Samrana, also agreed to a final individual audio taped interview. As there was much information shared in these last interviews, I was able to utilize these transcripts to construct four “end” poems. In June, six months after the yoga program ended, I also did a final video interview of three of the last four individual interview participants, Ashna, Cynthia, and Samrana. These girls were videotaped in the end as they agreed to be on camera and talk about experiences after the program. The transcripts from these final interviews and the video footage were used to do an embodied analysis and the final four “end” poems were created from their words. An embodied analysis returns the body to the text and draws embodied experience into writing (Ouzounian, 2006).

These poems, including the focus group poem, are called “The End Found Poems” as it was, simply, the end of the program and there was great change from the original pieces that are entitled “The Beginning Found Poems.” Although the program had ended, the change did not. These experiences provided an opportunity for ongoing self-discovery.

The poems were constructed through a process that I became familiar with as I read through other researchers’ works. The interview transcripts, although very often lengthy, were cut into words and phrases. I then constructed ‘phraseology’ from their word; their voices. These poems represent their embodied experiences at the end of the ten-week program. Ouzounian (2006)

comments, “ By including the body in the reception and analysis of a work, authors (including myself) cannot avoid or avert self-representation. An embodied reception reveals the body’s biases, tendencies and aims – in other words, its history” (p. 70). It was a challenging task as the girls had so much to say. How does a researcher select the most prescient ideas from multitudes of words? I looked at their words from the perspective of thinking deeply as a body and experiencing the world, the sensations, thoughts, feelings, and ideas as a body. The mind alone, as noted above, does work in isolation. The mind-body loop allows the experience to become unified. The thoughts and experiences are not only in the mind, but also in the body. This returns to the very idea of the narrative of self-discovery being expressed through bodily movement and bodily movement assisting in understanding Self. The study’s findings of awareness, mindfulness, inner peace, and acknowledgement of self indicate transformation was experienced through bodily exploration.

## Moksa-sastra as Liberation Teaching (freedom from dukkha)

### The Focus Group - An End Found Poem

Time and busyness  
Stress infiltrates the space  
Breath relaxes appreciate the space  
Yoga relaxes appreciate the space  
Come if you can  
Experience variation no rush  
Relax love the music  
love the space  
No expectation no consternation  
Expression Strengthening Flexibility  
A surprise  
Meditation - The beauty  
Heart rate pounding  
Breathing through  
Energy of the breath  
The Volcano an explosion  
The mountain rising up  
What's happening!  
The warrior is present  
Ujjayi a gift  
More at peace with myself  
Change in a moment  
When in the practice  
Inhale exhale  
The moment change  
Vinyasa flow move in space  
Insight meditation drawn inward  
Sending out loving kindness  
Wasn't always loving to myself  
Wasn't always kind to myself  
I'm really good really awesome  
Everybody should see the goodness  
Awesomeness in me we need to see

This in ourselves  
It is then other people  
Will see the awesomeness in me  
Our sense of self a different space  
In the beginning strangers in space  
Radiate positive ways  
Mind-body connections  
Separating for a moment  
Thinking being in a moment  
The practice  
Infinite change in body in mind  
Meditation seems impossible!  
People are crazy  
Sitting there inhaling exhaling  
Challenging to relax in a moment  
Physical presence spirit moment  
Strengthening the body the mind  
Depends on the moment  
Amazing perseverance  
Minds changed not seen  
Bodies change can see  
But minds do change!  
Very different bodies  
Very different minds  
Work harder want something  
Push some days can't possibly do yoga  
Wow I can!  
Bring myself forward  
Relaxed state of consciousness  
Re-vision self  
Then I'm light  
Finally getting things off my mind  
Found my way my path  
Changed how I saw things  
A better sense of things  
I am better with the world

## **Discussion of the Focus Group's Final Reflections**

The focus group gave the girls an opportunity to engage in a dialogical process of togetherness where their thoughts could be shared in a collective environment. This coming together gave rise to a sharing of personal feelings that indicated a transformational space. Their day-to-day experiences of shortage of “time and busyness” were replaced with “breath relaxes” and “appreciate the space.” This was a calming environment where there was no need to feel pressures that were experienced outside the program in regular female teen life events. The program fostered a peaceful atmosphere “no expectation or consternation.” The practice was physical, sometimes intense, and encouraged an awareness of body and mind. The energy they received from the practice was comparable to “The volcano an explosion, The mountain rising up” while the meditation encouraged a mindfulness characterized as “insight meditation drawn inward.”

The practice also elicited a loving feeling they were able to feel within themselves but also outside to others, “sending out loving kindness.” This was a change from the pre-program personal criticisms they had experienced and shared with me. The connection between the body and the mind was repeatedly noted by the girls during the focus group. Although it was suggested that yoga was a way to “strengthen the body,” it was also a way to “strengthen the mind.” It is interesting to note that the comment was made about how it is noticeable when a body changes but you cannot see a change in how a mind thinks or what a mind knows, “Amazing perseverance, Minds changed not seen, Bodies change

can see. But minds do change!... The practice, infinite change in body, in mind.”

As noted, the mind was changed with the practice and moved to a space of “mind-body connection.” This made for an acknowledgement of self and an opportunity to explore a path of life that was new, “Then I’m light. Finally getting things off my mind. Found my way, my path. Changed how I saw things. A better sense of things. I am better with the world.”

## Ashna - An End Found Poem

Yoga is a good way to sort of de-clutter  
Good to do it at the time we do it  
Right after school  
So many things going on in your head

My self control  
So hard to be in the moment  
Certain weeks are better than others  
I am able to de-clutter my mind

Engaging in the moment  
Is always going to be difficult  
The more you are aware  
We should be in the moment

It peeled off the layers  
I could get back to who I am  
I think other girls felt that too  
When you do de-clutter

When you do get rid of clutter  
You connect with yourself  
It's more about what I achieved  
than change perhaps

Just the girls  
was nice small too  
If it's a huge group  
It's not as intimate

Meditation is the best time  
It was the best of all  
You would read certain passages  
It would resonate with me

Sometimes in meditation  
I would not have connected  
Resonate a couple days later  
Something clicks

The butterfly to stretch my legs  
The breath work  
That was when my mind  
was emptying

My thoughts were just  
sort of drifting away  
Try a lot of breaths  
at different times

After yoga practice  
That's when it helped the most  
Meditation is always wonderful  
Talk about perspective

Refocused my perspective  
Zooming out and looking at the bigger picture  
Which I lose sometimes  
I accept myself as who I am

But I think our life begins when  
We accept we are who we are  
I feel love  
With people who sort of emit love

I don't know  
If it's a love for myself  
It's just warmth  
I think that's what makes a person complete  
More emotional than physical



## **Discussion of Ashna's Final Reflections**

Ashna is a young intellect and a bright philosophical mind. Her sense of reality was expressed differently than any other teen I have ever worked with as a counsellor or yoga teacher. Although differing in perception and expression, she experienced the same teen angst. She expressed that yoga was a way to separate the mind from the deeds of the day and allowed a focused and centered awareness. Ashna noted that she felt this way but she believed the other girls did too, "It peeled off the layers. I could get back to who I am, I think the other girls felt that way too." The opportunity to practice yoga in an intimate group fostered support and relaxation.

The meditation practice assisted her in emptying the space of her mind and she could feel her thoughts floating away. This assisted in a mindfulness in the moment and an inner peace that manifested itself at other times even when she was not practicing, "Meditation is the best time, It was the best time of all, You would read certain passages, It would resonate with me. Sometimes in meditation, I would not have connected, Resonate a couple of days later, Something clicks." The practice enabled her to experience a connection to her self and this helped her acknowledge herself, "After yoga practice, That's when it helped the most, Meditation is always wonderful, Talk about perspective." When she accepted herself, she commented, "refocused my perspective, zooming out and looking at the bigger picture which I lose sometimes, I accept myself as who I am." Ashna noted that life begins "when we accept we are who we are." This enabled love for herself but also love for others, "I feel love with people who sort

of emit love.” She characterized this as a warmth that was more than physical, “I don’t know if it’s a love for myself, It’s just warmth. I think that’s what makes a person complete, more emotional than physical.”

## Rachael – An End Found Poem

Unique Cool  
Narrated teaching  
Same mind  
Meditate

Being who you are  
Finding out who you are  
Walk of meditation  
It gets easier

Enlightened society  
Move me forward  
We felt it moved us  
Pass it along

Sharing the knowledge  
Focused on your breathing  
Find I see things  
In a different perspective

It was like finding yourself  
On what I'm like  
And who I am  
Just really comfortable

Was really judgmental  
I'm not like that anymore  
Metta bhavana  
Loving kindness

Peace, bodily warmth  
Deeper sense of self  
Ahimsa, non-violence  
For everyone

Come through  
To appreciation  
Unifying effect  
The body the mind

Initially hard to focus  
Focused on everyone else  
Not breathing  
Then it happened

It has changed me  
Motivation, dedication  
Incredibly engaged  
Different perspective

In the beginning  
Watching other people  
Watching me  
Looking around

Then came focus  
Still separate  
But come together  
Now I get the flow

Change not noticeable  
But taking the seeds  
Of experience away  
Recognize them in some other place

In life takes you away  
From the craziness  
Brings you into  
Some sense of yourself

A focus in the moment  
Takes you  
Out of the moment  
Peace and relaxation

For the moment  
The rest of the night  
Really calm chilled  
Just be

## **Discussion of Rachael's Final Reflections**

Rachael commented that the practice moved her forward. I believe she meant it moved her forward emotionally as she noted that she now sees things in her life from a differing viewpoint, "Enlightened society, move me forward, we felt it moved us, pass it along." This is an awareness that she did not previously experience. She compared this to finding herself, "It was like finding yourself, On what I'm like, And who I am, just really comfortable." Although she never said she was lost, she did note that she has a better understanding of herself and has become more comfortable with that. This is an acknowledgement of self that manifests itself through a loving kindness toward herself and non-violence or ahimsa toward others. Ahimsa was achieved through her experience of mindfulness, "Peace, bodily warmth, deeper sense of self, Ahimsa, non-violence, for everyone." Through mindfulness, she also experienced a unification of the body and the mind, "Then came focus, still separate, but come together, now I get the flow." The unification process separated her from the craziness of everyday teen life into a state where she achieved inner peace, "Change not noticeable, But taking the seeds of experience away, recognize them in some other place. In life take you away from the craziness, brings you into some sense of yourself." This was finding the still point, "A focus in the moment, takes you out of the moment, peace and relaxation." Or as she so beautifully noted, "really calm, chilled, just be."

## Cynthia – An End Found Poem

Get in touch with your body  
How it moves in different poses  
Never thinking you could do them

To connect with yourself  
Not about anybody else  
About you

the group process  
the individual experience  
connecting with your body

feeling your body and IN your body  
looked in the mirror saw someone  
Did not see me

My body and my personality  
They come together  
Not worried what my body looks like

Girls changed  
Talking about their lives  
Just opening up about everything

You wouldn't judge  
That made an impact  
Separate yourself from others' eyes

You are breathing  
Mind body connect  
Sameness in meditation

My mind at ease  
Just focused  
On my body - my mind - my-self

After practice you become calm  
After practice you become whole  
Just focused on that moment

No tension just relaxing  
Your focus breathing  
My mind and my body

Huge impact  
On my life and in my life  
Connect body and mind

When I look I the mirror  
Don't see my self as separate  
Body and mind see them as one

The prison of your mind  
Shy away from things  
You follow your mind not your body

My mind body relationship  
Has changed incredibly  
It changed my whole life

I used to dread  
Getting up in the morning  
Now I have another day to live

I look back  
Cannot believe some things  
Said, thought, how negative I was

Now I am  
Completely different  
I am confident

Seeing someone  
Who is a connected whole  
With their mind - their body

Being able to connect  
With the person I know I am  
Not the person they think they see

Just taking time to breathe  
Not only in yoga  
In the real world react differently

Now is different  
The biggest connection  
Mind and Body being one

They are one - body and mind  
love my entire self  
The process has changed me

My mind body connection my wholeness  
Before I was stuck in my body  
Now I am the way my body moves

## **Discussion of Cynthia's Final Reflections**

Cynthia experienced life deeply and was intensely aware of how she saw herself and how she believed she looked to others. She spoke to me in her closing interview about how she felt both the group process as well as the individual journey of yoga fostered a mind and body connection, "To connect with yourself, Not about anybody else, About you. The group process, the individual experience, connecting with your body, feeling IN your body." This was an awareness of body and mind and contributed to her change in perception of herself. One of the comments that most struck me was that she believed herself to be 'in' her body after yoga while prior to the program, she was outside of her body looking at it from a distance. The process fostered a mindfulness, especially in meditation, for her that encouraged a focus on her body, her mind, and the moment, "You are breathing, mind body connect. Sameness in meditation. My mind at ease, just focused, On my body – my mind – myself." After the practice, she sensed herself to experience an inner peace that she described as "whole."

It is interesting to note that prior to the yoga program she had commented on herself as being fragmented; or separate. She said this again in her closing interview in reflection and remarked that she now saw her body and mind as unified, "huge impact, on my life and in my life. Connect body and mind." This changed her mind body relationship which in turn brought forth a different way to live her life. The program allowed her to experience her reality from a different place, "My mind body relationship has changed incredibly. It changed my whole life." Her life before the yoga program was challenging, especially in the

mornings, “I used to dread getting up in the morning, now I have another day to live.” This change in perception enabled her to acknowledge herself and even love herself,

Now is different, the biggest connection, mind and body being one.

They are one. Love my entire self. The process has changed me. My mind body connection, my wholeness. Before I was stuck in my body.

Now I am the way my body moves.

## Samrana – An End Found Poem

All of a sudden  
You're different  
Getting a better feel for yourself

Kind of more aware of my own self  
Doing the stretches  
Balance Body Awareness

Meditation helps me  
The flow  
Be less stressed

Watching them watching me  
So intimidating  
In time less judgment more care

Meditation really calming  
The physical space mental space  
Take me out of groggy

Beyond your limiting self  
Out of your comfort zone  
Getting the feel of your body

You're in balance with yourself  
Taking yourself to another place  
Positive awareness of self

Multi-tasking  
Giving 100 percent to everything  
Yoga helps focus, attention, Concentration

Yoga helps being  
More aware of your surroundings  
More aware of your self

More comfortable taking chances  
More comfortable with me  
Less judgmental than before

Now being in my own body  
Is pretty good  
At times maybe perfect

Sometimes I wished  
I could pause the world  
Just kind of leave my body

Now it's not so bad  
Yoga is like putting life on pause  
Without putting it on pause

Thinking in the moment  
Forget about everything  
Compassion and love

More comfortable  
Being in my body  
After yoga accept myself know myself

Didn't know I'd ever feel less stressed  
Yoga brightened my life  
Yoga helped with accepting myself

Accepting everyone  
Less comparing  
Looking at other people

Accepting someone may be better  
Or not  
The beauty of life everyone is different

Love yourself  
If you hate yourself  
your life is not happy

Too much negativity  
In the world already  
Spread some positive

Revision to positive  
Capable of anything  
I can really do anything

A mini theory of knowledge lesson  
Take me away for a few minutes  
That is peace



## **Discussion of Samrana's Final Reflections**

Samrana leads an incredibly busy life with multitudes of extra-curricular activities, a heavy International Baccalaureate schedule, as well as holding a part time job for a period of time. She originally came to yoga to get some physical exercise and to help her relax. In her closing interview, she commented that the program was able to do those things for her and that it was helpful to her. However, she also noted that the program took her from a limiting self-space to one that was beyond such a state where she achieved bodily awareness within her surroundings and a connectivity with her mind, "All of a sudden you're different. Getting a better feel for yourself. Kind of more aware of my own self... Balance, body awareness." She framed this as positive awareness of self with less personal judgment, "beyond your limiting self, out of your comfort zone, getting the feel of your body, you're in balance with yourself, taking yourself to another place, positive awareness of self." Processing her day pre-yoga program was straining and stressful for her, "Didn't know I'd ever feel less stressed." During and after the program she was able to think in the moment and forget about everything that was stressing her, "Yoga is like putting life on pause, without putting it on pause." This mindfulness elicited a compassion and love for herself and for others, "Yoga brightened my life, yoga helped with accepting myself." As her life brightened, Samrana felt more at ease and even some peace, "A mini theory of knowledge lesson, take me away for a few minutes. That is peace." She noted that she had made a "revision to positive" and she said "I can really do anything." This was self-acknowledgement that she hadn't experienced

before doing the program, “Now being in my own body is pretty good, at times maybe perfect.”

### **Letting Go as the Path to Peace**

When we let go, the non-dual united nature that we call “yoga” comes forth correcting the waywardness in our distractions and misperceptions.

In the realization of a holistic and integrated reality, of which we are only a part, sensitivity, devotion, and love burst forth (Stone, 2008, p. 137).

By letting go of the clinging we have to negative thought processes of self, we are able to be-come one with our-self. “We practice serpent (bhujanga) and we become a serpent. We practice eagle (garuda) and we become eagle....We practice in full connection to the earth (prthvi) and we become earth” (Stone, 2008, p. 137). The yoga practice teaches us as students that life is ever-changing and the self is ever changing with life. Yoga assists the practitioner to embody the ever-changing state of life and self that has no seamless beginning nor end. With this liberating process engaging a whole self experience, a number of themes presented themselves during the post-program interviews and focus group as noted above including awareness (bodily and mind), mindfulness (connectedness, focus), inner peace (contentment), and acknowledgement of self (acceptance).

The girls took part in this study for varying reasons. Initially there seemed to be an overarching idea of being fit and exercising to stay healthy and thin. With further dialogue as the initial interviews progressed, it became obvious that the participants had a sense of what their bodies should look like; the idealized body of a teenaged girl. None of them, regardless of shape, size, or perception of the world, felt that they possessed the idealized body. However, it became obvious to

me throughout the yoga process that the idea of the benefits of yoga were more comprehensive than being fit, being healthy, and idealized bodies. It was only at the end of the program when I engaged the participants in a focus group and interviewed four individually that I was able to fully understand how they had changed and what this change or transformation looked like to them. They expressed themselves in many ways, however, as noted above, the four themes that presented themselves were awareness (bodily and mind), mindfulness (connectedness, focus), inner peace (contentment), and acknowledgement of self (acceptance). As all human beings are unique, so is their expression. Although unique in how they expressed their ideas, the ideas manifested were the same.

## **The Final Themes**

The following sections are a discussion of the girls' discoveries of themselves. Each section chronicles a theme beginning with Awareness (bodily and mind). I have used specific sections of the found poems to demonstrate how each theme showed itself to be present. I have taken a holistic approach to the discussion process by referring to specific words from the final interview/focus group experiences.

### **Discussion of the Final Themes**

#### **Awareness (Body and Mind)**

Throughout the practice, there seemed to be an on-going change in the participants. One of the utmost benefits of yoga is a growing sense of awareness. This awareness manifests itself differently in yoga for each person. I found the group showed characteristics of a greater awareness. As Ashna acknowledged,

*It is something else  
Infinite change  
Fluidity in body  
Fluidity in mind*

It was noted in the focus group that there was an infinite change that has happened and this change was a fluidity not only in body but also in mind. This is a natural change often seen in yoga practice. This idea of awareness was expanded upon by Cynthia.

*Connect body and mind  
When I look in the mirror  
Don't see my self as separate  
Body and mind  
I see them as one*

She noted that there was a connection between her body and her mind. She first noticed this when she gazed upon herself in a mirror and saw herself not as two separate entities of a dislocated self but instead as a unified self. Cynthia articulated that before the yoga program, her perception of herself was that of someone who was stuck in a body.

*Before*

*I was stuck in my body*

*Now I am my body*

*The way it moves*

*The way I'm connected with it*

The awareness for her came from a bodily perspective as she talked about how she became one with her body and this connection brought an awareness of how it moved.

*Get in touch*

*with your body*

*How it moves*

This awareness enabled her to see herself differently.

*Now I see*

*It doesn't matter*

*What those people think*

*My self worth*

*Is what's important*

Cynthia noted a growing sense of self worth that came from the awareness that it wasn't important what other people thought of her, what was important was what she thought of herself.

*It (yoga program) gave me a good sense*

*Of who I was*

Samrana was also able to specifically comment on the awareness gained from her yoga experience. This awareness was first physical.

Kind of more aware of my own self  
Doing the stretches  
My balance my body  
More awareness

But then moved into an emotional space.

I didn't know I'd ever  
Feel less stressed  
Yoga brightened my  
Perspective on life

This emotional awareness enabled her to engage the moment.

Thinking in the moment  
Forget about everything  
Compassion and love  
Made me less stressed

The ability to have an attentiveness in the moment helped her to move to a new and positive space of awareness of her self and her self in relation to her surroundings.

Taking yourself  
To another place  
Positive awareness  
Of self

Yoga helps  
Being more aware of your  
Surroundings  
Being more aware of your  
Self

Rachel also talked about the perspective change that the yoga program brought to her.

Sharing the knowledge  
Like enlightened  
Focused on your breathing  
Find I see things  
In a different perspective

She noted that this experience was not easy but eventually happened through an ease of practice.

Initially hard to focus  
Really focused on everyone else  
Not breathing  
Then it happened  
A sense as natural and fluid

With this awareness brought a change for her that was not specifically noticeable but that enabled her to see things from a different perspective at other times.

Change  
Not noticeable  
But taking the seeds  
Of experience away  
Recognize them in some other place

Ashna echoed the sentiment in her post yoga program dialogue.

After yoga practice  
That's when it helped the most  
It just worked for me  
Meditation is always wonderful  
Talk about perspective

### **Mindfulness (Connectedness and Focus)**

Mindfulness is the process or experience of being in the moment. In this state of active attention, a person is focused on the moment. With a mindful



approach, you can observe your thoughts from a distance without attachments of emotions, positive or negative. When you live in the space of the moment, it is possible to be open to the experiences of life more fully and completely. The program gave the girls the opportunity to be completely mindful. This wasn't something that came naturally or freely to the girls, as teenagers tend to live and think in both the past and the future, the past in the sense of 'should have' and 'could have' and the future in the sense of 'what if'. With a focus on the present, we were able to develop a practice of mindfulness that changed the girls and their perception of reality.

Ashna noted a sense of being present.

*We should be in the moment  
Shouldn't always be thinking about  
The past  
The future  
All those things*

She commented that her perspective had changed and she was able to see her life differently.

*Refocused my perspective  
Zooming out and looking at the bigger picture  
Which I lose sometimes  
I accept myself as who I am  
I've learned and am still learning*

The ability to zoom out and look at the bigger picture is a mindfulness approach that allows a shift from thinking about the past and the future and instead thinking about the present as if watching the body and experiences of the body from outside the physical body space. This is known as pratyahara. Pratyahara can be

defined as detaching from the senses. “In pratyahara, the mind is withdrawn from the external world and turned inward” (Bell, 2007, p. 137). The key in pratyahara is to separate from the excessive stimuli in our everyday world. Although a person can never truly isolate themselves from the stimuli that is the world around them, they can be in the world but not of the world.

The program helped Ashna free her mind of over-thinking and she was able to experience a relaxing sense through her attention to the moment.

Yoga helped me  
To de-clutter my mind  
To sort of unwind

Samrana also commented on the opportunity to be in the moment, which she was able to achieve in meditation.

Meditation  
A chance to  
Forget about everything  
A chance to thinking  
In the moment

This experience allowed her a re-visioning of her present space, which brought about a focus and concentration that she was lacking prior to the yoga study.

Revision to positive  
Capable of anything  
Focus and concentrate  
I can really  
Do anything

This sense of mindfulness was also expressed by Rachael. In her case, she spoke about it as a process of an understanding of the joining of the mind and the body.

Come through  
To appreciation  
Unifying effect  
The body and the mind

Being in the moment and aware of the moment permitted her to carry forward a mindful sense which she described as “chilled” and this enabled her to “just be.”

Rachael used the words ‘just be’ and I believe she was referring to a sensory state of now; not the past and not the future but this momentary space. “In pratyahara, we withdraw our attachment and aversion to the delights and irritations of the senses” (Bell, 2007, p. 138). This is a challenging task as it requires a person to be fully aware of the world and its sensations but not to be bothered by it.

For the moment  
The rest of the night  
Really calm  
Chilled  
Just be

Cynthia spent much of her pre-yoga interview discussing how she felt about her body and how this affected every interaction she had. In her after program conversation, she noted that her body was no longer just a body or something physical. The focus of the program allowed a detachment from negative ideas around her physicality to a connected understanding of the body as part of her whole identity.

My body  
Was definitely a big issue  
I just saw it as a body  
But now I've connected

I understand how it moves

A mindful approach encouraged her to take a step away from the challenges of everyday teen life to have an experience that was more than exercise but also an opportunity to connect with her whole self.

Take a step back from everything  
To connect with yourself  
More than exercise  
Not about anybody else  
About you

The focus group spoke to the mindfulness of the experience as well. This mindfulness was a process that happened over time and over the course of the hour each week spent together. The girls spoke of their attentiveness to the moment and the space they were in but also noted that they could be consciously aware and still at ease. This was easier said than done and as Cynthia acknowledged below; getting there and settling in was challenging. Once in the space, she was able to separate her over active mind from her attunement to the present moment.

Relaxed state of consciousness  
Re-vision self  
Not right away  
Dragging myself in

Then I'm light  
Finally  
Getting things off my mind  
Found my way  
My path

This is a process that is learned through experiential ways of being and knowing your self in the moment you are in. A mindful state is one that brings a person's complete attention to the moment-by-moment experience. Although it cannot be seen, the increased attention to the immediate experience promotes a transforming space. Kelsey noted that her change was not just on the outside.

*I changed a lot  
Minds have changed  
Not seen*

Change is not always visible or physically seen. The mind and sense of reality can change through a process of bodily movement and engagement. The practice of yoga engages mindfulness. This mindfulness can also be described as a practice to learn the mind through the body or know the mind through the body. The yoga process allowed the participants to express that mindfulness changed them but that this personal change was also able to be manifested outward. We used a practice in our meditation that has been coined "knowing the body through the mind" (Bhikkhu, 2010, p. 187) by Jill Satterfield. This is a yoga practice of visualization where the body is imagined as a house. In this practice, the teacher guides the students through a series of questions such as "Where is the brightest room?" "Where is the darkest?" "Where do you store your childhood memories?" "What is the coziest room?" and "Would you like to trade houses with anyone?" Then the teacher directs mindfulness and breath work into the darkest rooms of the house and so on (Bhikkhu, 2010). This enables a restorative sense of bodily awareness through visualization. Ashna commented on feeling love inside and propelling it outside.

Insight

Meditation

Drawn inward

Sending out love

Sending out kindness

This positive experience also allowed a separation from the day to day stress related to events of being a teen girl. This practice can change the way teen girls look at themselves and how they look at others by bringing an attentiveness to being unentangled by participating in life. It is impossible not to participate or live our lives. However, yoga fosters a non-aversion to what is happening around oneself. "The yogi travels from outside to inside and then from inside to outside, just to come to the understanding that outside and inside are not different aspects, but one" (Swami Lakshmanjoo as quoted in Stone, 2010, p. 195). This drives a change that is not temporary but one that fosters life long personal inquiry and attention to being. The process can transform the way teen girls experience stress and day to day teen challenges on a more permanent basis by shifting the way they live their lives. Alex noted the positive experience of separation from the day to day world and connecting as a whole self.

Radiate

Positive ways

Mind-body connections

Separating for a moment

Or even a day

Getting centered or bringing focus and attention to the present moment is a challenging task and one the girls said had to be learned. To be here now is a challenge but one that provides teen girls with opportunities to separate from

personal everyday teen difficulties and begin a process of do-nothing. To do-nothing is to be specifically in a momentary grace and space or as Rachael noted above, to “just be.” This engages a reflective space of personal attention. One cannot always have control of the situation or of life. By relaxing into an open-hearted awareness, a person can let go of the control they seek to have and accept a situation for what it is; whatever that may be. This is a cultivated trust in awareness. As Bihikkhu (2010) comments, “Sustain the environment of awareness and simply watch, feel the body changing. Surrender, with faith in the body’s own wisdom. Get out of the way. Let the universe adjust itself” (p. 191). For teen girls, making a choice and responding to the stimuli of the world is not a bad thing.

“Our free-willed choices are part of the ‘way things are’ and when these choices come not from a self-centered viewpoint, but instead issuing from mindfulness, wisdom, and kindness, the result is joyful and liberating. It is unentangled participation that leads to peace” (Bhikkhu, 2010, p. 190). By turning their attention inward, the girls have developed a skill that assists the body in making adjustments and ultimately the mind makes adjustments to meet that space. Surrender is not giving up but acknowledging the situation and becoming accepting of it. In Sanskrit, the term surrender or pranidhana is considered a most important quality because it is at this point that we lose our self-centeredness and become aware and the expression of that is goodness and acceptance. Mindfulness assisted the girls in achieving this aspect of acceptance.

## Inner Peace

With awareness and mindfulness achieved, the girls repeatedly acknowledged some sense of peace or peacefulness in their lives. Peace can be defined in many ways but is always understood as a quiet and tranquility that promotes a separation from disturbance. Personal peace or inner peace is a state of mind associated with freedom from stress and an understanding of knowing oneself. Inner peace is a state that is achieved through a conscious awareness of the body and the mind and when we become mindful of the present. The girls had noted that sometimes it became difficult to focus during the practice, however, the 'seeds' of the practice would show themselves at a later time; possibly days or weeks later. Rachael discussed the difficulties she had when she would try to focus during the program. However, without specifically knowing how or why, she would feel the change and was able to utilize this sense in other aspects of her life.

Initially hard to focus

Focused on everyone else

Not breathing

Then it happened

...

Change not noticeable

But taking the seeds

Of experience away

Recognize them in some other place

If the girls felt that change should happen the second we sat in a yoga class, they would be disappointed because this change takes time and sometimes happens unnoticeably and takes them by surprise. Kempton (2011) compares it to changing weather patterns as it often follows no discernable direction as the



journey we have to move inward to our true sense of self is comparable to passing through phases or spaces of full experience, brilliance, dullness, thickness, and sharpness. This is life. Coming to recognize the change that we experience through awareness and becoming mindful of that change, for the good and the bad, is what brings some sense of peace. It is distinct from being aware and from being mindful. The mind becomes more gracious as the body recognizes our inner self and acknowledges that self as goodness. This is known in meditation as the state of ripening (Kempton, 2011). Samrana talked of this quietude and compared it to temporarily stopping life, if that was at all possible.

Now it's not so bad  
Yoga is like putting life on pause  
Without putting it on pause

The hiatus and this tranquil momentary experience engaged a space of peace and this peace spilled over to her understanding of the importance of loving her self to have a fulfilling life as there is already too much negativity for self and other in the world.

Love yourself  
If you hate yourself  
your life is not happy

Too much negativity  
In the world already  
Spread some positive

As an International Baccalaureate student she was enrolled in a course called Theory of Knowledge 11. She compared this new found sense of peace to a lesson from the course that could be utilized as a life lesson. As noted earlier in

this writing, female teens live in a world today that values ideals that are from the outside as opposed to the inside. Girls compare themselves to others and to images that popular culture espouses as being the social norm. The value of self and learning to love ourselves is not something that is considered to be consequential nor is it something that is engaged as a normal practice in schools or in life.

*A mini theory of knowledge lesson  
Take me away for a few minutes --  
That is peace*

Rachel specifically spoke of peace as a deeper sense of self and one she associated with ahimsa, which we studied in our program as non-violence toward self and other.

*Peace, bodily warmth  
Deeper sense of self  
Ahimsa, non-violence  
Peace, meditation  
For everyone*

She remarked that she had been judgmental before the yoga program, however, she has noted that her focus has changed and instead now manifests a loving kindness or metta bhavana more often. Judgment is not only about others but also about ourselves. If we judge other people it is negative and critical of the people we judge but it is also a commentary on how we feel about ourselves (Bell, 2007). The path of yoga elicits an outstretching goodness and positive nature.

*Was really judgmental  
But don't find*

I'm like that anymore  
Metta bhavana

As a whole, the group made many comments about finding a path to a more peaceful existence and self. They associated this sense of peace with relaxing or being able to relax. During the group interview, Raven stated that the easiness of the environment during the program helped her to feel more relaxed and this brought her into a space of love. This love was one that she extended to the music we played and the space we practiced in, however, it was the freedom from being told what must be done and how it must be done that relieved her anxiety and worry.

Relax  
Love the music  
Love the space  
No expectation  
No consternation

As students focusing on the moment in our program, we practiced breath work or pranayama called Ujjayi, the warrior breath. This warrior breath or breath of the ocean channels focus and attention to the very moment at hand and slows the heart rate which promotes an overall sense of peace. Ashna discussed the concept of Ujjayi at the focus group session and how the particular practice of this breath work calmed her and helped her to feel relaxed; at peace.

The warrior is present  
Ujjayi a gift  
More at peace with myself

This enabled Cynthia to feel somewhat weightless as it promoted a path to freedom from constrained thought and experience. As she remarked in the focus group session,

*Then I'm light  
Finally getting things off my mind  
Found my way my path*

Freedom from inhibited thought process or obsessing over the past and the future prevents teens from living wholly and fully as engaged human beings who can come to value and love themselves. Evelyn talked about her sense of reality changing during the course of the program. She felt that she was more comfortable with herself and with the world around her.

*Changed how I saw things  
A better sense of things  
I am better with the world*

With a better sense of oneself and the world also comes a conscious honoring of the present and oneself within that present. This is peace.

### **Acknowledgement of Self**

With awareness, mindfulness, and peace present in the lives and experiences of the girls, the group noted that there was an acknowledgement of self as positive. Although they spoke of some positive sense of self when they were younger, they felt that this was lost in the teen years. The yoga program encouraged a rediscovery of what was once a natural feeling of knowing. This acknowledgement of self assisted them in a feeling of oneness with themselves and others. The positive state resulted in over all feelings of goodness. At the focus group session, Evelyn talked about feeling really positive about herself and

how this optimism should be something that all can see. She felt so uplifted about herself that it was something she wanted to share with those around her; to spread this joy and goodness.

*I'm really good really awesome  
Everybody should see the goodness  
Awesomeness in me, we need to see*

The girls noted that their sense of self moved to a different space that was new. During the focus group, Samrana commented that although the girls were unknown to one another at the program opening, they moved forward to a more knowing way of seeing themselves. Although she spoke these words, she said “our” as she spoke for the group.

*Our sense of self a different space  
In the beginning strangers in space  
Radiate positive ways*

Ashna spoke to me in her private interview as well as to the group about her renewal during the program as a forward moving experience where consciousness affected vision and brought about a positive change in what she thought about herself.

*Bring myself forward  
Relaxed state of consciousness  
Re-vision self*

This renewal encouraged a change in perspective or sense, which made her feel more connected to her life.

*Changed how I saw things  
A better sense of things  
I am better with the world*

It was at this point that Evelyn commented that if they had a positive sense of themselves, then others would see this positive change.

This in ourselves  
It is then other people  
Will see the awesomeness in me

In individual post program dialogue, Cynthia expressed that she was different and was self-loving. This indicated to me that the change was to that of self-love from a pre-program space of a lack of self-love. This was transformation.

They are one body and mind  
Love my entire self  
The process has changed me  
My mind-body connection my wholeness

Feeling more comfortable with who she is assisted Cynthia in seeing herself as different which enabled her to value herself. She had spoken of being in a prison that was her mind and how this prison disabled her from feeling connected to the things she should have been connected to at this point in her life. However, yoga opened up her sense of reality.

The prison of your mind  
Shy away from things  
You follow your mind not your body

...

Comfortable in different situations  
I see myself differently  
Value myself more

This acknowledged sense of self helped her to see the world, her world, in a new light. She called herself different and said this difference brought about self-assuredness that she did not have before.

Now I am  
Completely different  
I am confident

Seeing someone  
Who is a connected whole  
With their mind - their body

Cynthia did not always love herself or see herself as whole or unified, however, at the end of the program she could. She spoke candidly of her personal fear of dealing with a new day whereas now each day is brighter and more positive. The negativity and judgment she experienced pre-program is not in her present life. The struggles she had as viewing herself within her mind-like prison had changed to a state where she has become a unified whole.

I used to dread  
Getting up in the morning  
Now I have another day to live

I look back  
Cannot believe some things  
Said, thought, how negative I was

Now is different  
The biggest connection  
Mind and Body being one

The program encouraged a sense of self as whole. The program allowed a change to take place that for her meant a connected sense of self; an embodied awareness and wholeness. She is connected and complete.

Before I was stuck in my body  
Now I am the way my body moves

It sounds somewhat dramatic but Cynthia noted that the process has changed her life. It brought forth a unity of mind and body in which she discovered herself.

My mind body relationship  
Has changed incredibly  
It changed my whole life

Rachael also commented on the renewal process as a unification of the body and mind. She described this journey as a 'coming through' for her. This was a growth and growing of her sense of self-acknowledgement.

Come through  
To appreciation  
Unifying effect  
The body the mind

This journey also helped Ashna come to a new knowledge of self within her life. Her expression of this knowledge was subtle and mature as she commented on how one can only live fully when one accepts oneself. This is when the real life journey begins.

But I think our life begins when  
We accept we are who we are  
I feel love  
With people who sort of emit love

The program assisted the girls in becoming more comfortable and enabled an acceptance and knowledge not had prior to program completion. Samrana repeated the idea in her closing conversation with me.

More comfortable  
Being in my body  
After yoga  
Accept myself  
Know myself



Now being  
In my own body  
Is pretty good  
At times  
Maybe perfect

The self is created by our attentiveness and our acknowledgement allows a deep embrace of our whole being. The key words for me in Samrana's final dialogue were "after yoga... accept myself... know myself."

### **From Resistance to Observation**

This study was a journey for my participants and a journey for myself. Hatha yoga is an introspective path of self-transformation that utilizes the body as a vehicle for harmonizing and strengthening one's energy. With this in mind, I acted as a guide for the girls while taking them through an embodied program that I hoped would promote an understanding of self and possibly engage a transformative space. By using yoga to balance our energy, we are better able to understand and free our minds, as well as develop an open and receptive heart. Through the process of pranayama, asana, and meditation, the girls in this study found a space of awareness, mindfulness, inner peace, and acknowledgement of self.

Awareness is the consciousness and recognition of a situation. In this particular case, the situation is the body and body is the site of knowledge. This insight into each girl's personal reality allowed a consciousness awakening that elicited mindfulness. "Mindfulness is a meditative awareness practice that develops a capacity to attend to our body, emotions, mind, and the environment

with a receptive, noninvasive attitude” (Powers, 2010, p. 90). This focused the girls on a momentary space of attention, pushing away the negative habits of distraction and personal criticism and leaving room for finding the truth inside each one of us -- the authentic self. This study engaged a focus on the body and bodily movement through the pranayama, asana, and meditation practice and this embodied awareness brings an active attention to the body and to the moment. Active attention brought the girls a greater understanding of the body and the mind as one which allowed the girls to accept the moment without changing it. This is called receptive attention in an active practice. Being active and yet receptive can translate from yoga practice into everyday lives. Samrana, Rachael, and Ashna all commented that they were able to recognize this change in their everyday lives and sometimes quite unexpectedly. Powers (2010) has noted that she “found that the insights that can arise when we rest in a receptive attitude open us to deeper truths about ourselves that can directly enhance the way we operate in daily life” (p. 91). She indicates that this receptive element can bring forward a direct shift in how we deal with challenging and difficult circumstances in day-to-day moments, “feeling better able to connect with ourselves with increased care and kindness, while feeling more able to meet unavoidably difficult circumstances in life without adding suffering to the suffering” (Powers, 2010, p. 91).

The girls were able to find a peace that centered them through awareness and mindfulness. They repeatedly remarked that peace pervaded their space and sense during and after the program. The settling into the stillness of peace took

time. “Yoga is a path of peacemaking” (Stone, 2009, p. 86). Peace became a state in which the girls developed trust in and for themselves. Yoga as a path toward peacemaking promotes a culture of awakening and it is here that the girls experienced an acknowledgement of self. The girls described this as a mind and body connection that gave rise to appreciation for self and other; appreciation that emitted ahimsa and metta bhavana, non-violence and loving-kindness. The program supported the girls in becoming awake in the world and the outcomes were present-centered awareness (bodily and mind), mindfulness, inner peace, and an acknowledgement of self. Experiential spaces speak for themselves and this study engaged an experiential space that fostered the above noted findings. These were not specific outcomes that I set out to find. I had hoped to use yoga as a movement method to foster transformation in the lives of teen girls by engaging self-discovery.

I was somewhat uncertain as to whether this transformation would present itself and if it did, what it would look like. I asked myself, “what does transformation look like?” I had no specific idea but believed it was connected to the narrative of self-discovery through embodied knowing and being. The results are indicative of these ideas. Transformation is change that is unique to each individual. As I noted initially in this work, all teen participating were unique, yet each girl experienced the ravages of the societal implications of being a girl including the othering that is typical in this demographic as well as judgment, jealousy, social hierarchy, and popularity. With participation in the program, each unique teen experienced positive and often life changing attributes as indicated

by their voices. This is meaningful educationally, psychologically, philosophically, and politically. Female teens can come to experience identity formation that is transformative from an in-side and out-side perspective through an embodied practice. When a female teen becomes knowing of her body, she can also become knowing of her mind. As the findings indicated, this connective space can foster healthy sense of selves as well as positive relationships with others. The following passage, taken from Kempton (2011), epitomizes the value and legacy of a regular practice.

These practices can set a pattern for the rest of your life as a meditator, especially if you remember that what you seek in meditation is your own Beloved, your own inner intelligence, your own Awareness, your own Truth. The one who lives inside you reveals herself in so many ways...She is there as the feeling of love or softness that sneaks in when you relax your tense muscles, ... as the insight into your own magnificence, as the highest thought you are capable of holding about yourself... Keep looking for her...– always knowing what you are looking for is what you already are... Meditate on your own Self, the one who is always there for you, and the one who contains you in its stillness, the one who is always meditating on you (p. 298-99).

Through the embodied practice of yoga, the girls discovered Self. They were able to embrace their bodies, which engaged an understanding of wholeness and the body-mind connection. The girls experienced a transformed

or changed narrative of self during the practice. It is my hope that the changes the girls experienced will offer continued life long understanding of Self.

## Chapter 9

### Analysis and Discussion

“Where does the body end and the mind begin? They cannot be divided as they are inter-related but different aspects of the same all-pervading divine consciousness” (Iyengar, 1966, p. 28). There are many paths to the realization of the power of the mind-body connection for overcoming powerful emotions such as grief, despair, loss, and “yoga practices teach us to move deeply into the subtle mind states and energies that make up what we call ‘the body’ “ and ” with such an attitude mind and body practices become one” (Stone, 2010, p. 226). Yoga is the path I chose to overcome difficulties in my life and the path that I show to my participants to overcome challenges in theirs. To be fully engaged in this world as girls and as women and to move beyond the marginalization and the misunderstanding of ourselves as girls and woman, we must see and experience the interconnectedness of the body and the mind. “Yoga postures can be a doorway into the mind, an invitation to witness our minds through the physical entrance that most of us can relate to” (Satterfield, 2010, p. 142). The body can then become a conscious home for the mind and an interconnectedness forms, allowing true compassion for self.

#### **Re(dis)covery of Self Through Yoga**

I realize now, in reflection, that research is a process of discovery and maybe this type of research is also a process of recovery; possibly then re(dis)covery. Did I answer my initial research questions?

## **How can female teens use hatha yoga to embrace the body as a site of knowledge to experience transformation?**

The teen girls in my study engaged in a journey of self-discovery through the embodied pursuit of yoga. The initial interviews indicated a lack of self-understanding and that was expressed through judgment, jealousy, social hierarchy, and popularity. These situations and understandings of reality caused confusion in sense of self and sense of self in relation to others. The girls expressed much stress, frustration, and teen angst. Distraction, discontent, unhappiness, and judgment are commonplace in today's world and especially within the world of the teen girl.

## Body and Mind in the World of the Teen Girl Before Yoga

I'm filled with lots of self-doubt  
My judgment gets clouded  
I get too caught up  
Stop thinking about other people!  
Stop comparing myself!  
Stop thinking I'm not enough  
Why do I compare?

I always get super self conscious  
The whole social hierarchy  
For girls it's mostly stereotypical  
Like most of the cheerleaders  
It's going to sound like Mean Girls  
But it's the pretty girls  
Aeropostle, Forever 21, Abercrombie

Those girls  
Must be one of those girls  
Not looked down upon  
Left out don't care about you  
Judged  
Guys are all the same  
You look pretty they'll accept you

But girls, judged by them  
Girls are catty, judge deep inside  
Sadness  
See myself -nothing -negative  
Should be healthier  
Should work out more  
Wouldn't be as chunky...

If I eat a chocolate bar  
I run  
Then I feel less bloated  
Then I look in the mirror  
I feel happier  
Compare -try not to  
Negative-try not to

Sometimes jealous  
Look at her  
She's so pretty  
Get jealous, self conscious  
Not going to care tomorrow  
So why care now  
But I do



If we can learn to observe how we feel directly, acknowledge it, and move forward, we can then become more enlivened, more authentic, and more accepting of our selves. The rigidity of our attitudes is as much a block to self-knowledge and self-acceptance as the rigidity of the body. Powers (2010) notes that, “As we turn openly toward our hostility without scorn or pretense, acceptance itself shifts our experience” (p. 96). When we are mindfully engaged, we don’t desire to control our lives or the outcome nor do we flounder in the possibility of life’s uncertainties. The girls experienced hostility toward the challenges in their teen lives and this was expressed through distraction, discontent, judgment, and jealousy. Through the process of yoga, they were able to experience bodily knowledge and acknowledge their feelings and accept themselves. It was only at that time that they could begin to understand their perceptions and accept themselves wholly. Many difficult things are happening in my teen participants’ lives as they are in my own life. If we can face aversion in an open and truthful way, through the yoga process, we are better able to have experiential insights leading to a deeper awareness of personal self-hood. At that time, we can allow ourselves to inhabit the feelings we are having, experiencing how we feel with these feelings inside of our bodies and inside of our minds. The blaming, judging, and feeding of self-condemnation that teen girls experience can be set aside through yoga practice allowing a kinder, gentler, and more intimate relationship with our whole selves (Powers, 2010). The girls used their minds to engage their bodies in an emancipatory discourse. Yoga is one’s true self, and as Austin (2010) notes, “Yoga is a practical discipline that unites

and silences one's whole being to rest in the Self (the capital-S self, the eternal core of the soul, is distinguished from the transient small-s self)" (p. 46). Through this practical physical pursuit, we become 'in' our bodies, being in our bodies allowed us to transcend all else except the present moment. Being in our bodies in the present moment was an opportunity to become one with ourselves and to experience self-knowledge, self-acceptance, and self-love.

Refocused my perspective  
Zooming out and looking at the bigger picture  
Which I lose sometimes  
I accept myself as who I am  
    A focus in the moment  
    Takes you  
    Out of the moment  
    Peace and relaxation  
After practice you become calm  
After practice you become whole  
Just focused on that moment  
Yoga helps being  
    More aware of your surroundings  
    More aware of your self  
    Changed how I saw things  
    A better sense of things  
I am better with the world

### **How can the narrative of self-discovery be expressed through bodily movement?**

I rediscovered and recovered my sense of self, as did my participants. We did this through the process of yoga. My participants became collectively and individually changed by their yoga experiences. Change is something that happened for them as they grew more aware, mindful, peaceful, and knowledgeable of themselves. Cynthia acknowledged, "Now I am completely

different; I am confident; seeing someone who is a connected whole with their mind – their body.” Samrana noted, “You’re in balance with yourself” while Rachael commented, “peace, bodily warmth, deeper sense of self, ahimsa.” Ashna shared, “It peeled off the layers. I could get back to who I am. I think other girls felt that too. When you de-clutter after yoga practice, that’s when it helped the most. Talk about perspective!” This is a transformation from their initial space of judgment, jealousy, social hierarchy, and popularity. Of course, it is unrealistic to think that these new feelings and beings completely replace the old feelings and beings. The key in the findings is that there was positive change through the embodiment experience.

### **How can an exploration of the body through hatha yoga inform an understanding of self?**

The beauty of the experience was heart-felt and mind and body opening in changes that engaged a liberatory discourse that brought active and passive reflection and change in sense of self. The girls themselves noted that they were more comfortable being in their bodies and this comfort encouraged them to accept and know themselves. The yoga process also elicited an acceptance of other people and encouraged a willingness to acknowledge difference as being part of life. Being more comfortable with themselves enabled the girls to refocus their energy and their perspective. The refocusing was part of the self-discovery process.

The biggest connection was the mind and body connection and realization of a whole self; a oneness with oneself. The oneness becomes something that we not only learn but also live. Living as a whole self or experiencing oneness is

self-knowledge that engages a deeper understanding of ourselves as unique beings. Self-knowledge allows a personal and powerful connection to the meaningful beings we are. Connection to ourselves as meaningful beings is a self-acceptance that becomes the reality that we are. We are able to create this reality when we come to the knowing that we are worthy; not only of the love of others but also, most importantly, the love of ourselves. Each teen girl had an experience that was both a personal and group journey into a universe where the abundance of self and spirit was a realization of one's own capabilities and truth. Essential wisdom is an inward journey where truth lies in self-understanding. The embraced and embodied yogic experience enables a healing process that engages a liberatory self-hood where the essence of self-knowledge, self-acceptance, and ultimately love of self is uncovered through something that has always been with us but that which we may not have known; our selves. What's out-there in the world will always be out-there in the world. The journey undertaken is one that was a discovering, un-covering, and re-covering of what's in-here; deep within all of us. Cynthia shared her new and different sense of self during her final interview:

Now is different  
The biggest connection  
Mind and Body being one

They are one - body and mind  
love my entire self  
The process has changed me  
My mind body connection my wholeness

Before I was stuck in my body

Now I am the way my body moves  
I'm connected (Cynthia).

### **From Dissolution to a Path of Inner Peace**

“I Can't Stand This for Another Minute!”

This is a common phrase we often hear ourselves say. I say this too. The practice of receptive attention garnered and practiced in yoga and translated to the world allows us to interrupt the thought process for a minute and ask ourselves “why?” Powers (2010) encourages the yoga student to ask “What’s going on in my body right now?” This teaches us how to be with ourselves in difficult moments. I used this approach in my yoga program to help my female teen participants understand, from a physical perspective, the value in experiencing tension or discomfort, taking this physical domain to the level of mindfulness by asking ourselves to focus on the situation, the feeling, and then the attitude. This disentangles the body experiences from the mind experiences, giving an emergent insight into how our mind determines how our body suffers. I look to this as an opening up of the idea of accepting the experience that we cannot change and to pause for a moment to accept that which arises within us and to unite the disconnect between body and mind. This is not magic but a simple reformulation of the wholistic sense of self.

## **Change as the Path to Renewed Sense of Self**

This study has changed me and changed my participants. I am more aware of the population I work with daily. This has given me an opportunity to be engaged within this population on a deeper and more comprehensive level of understanding. It has also helped me to better understand my Self. I have uncovered a deeper sense of my own self through this process. This has reaffirmed my belief in the practice and in life.

Conducting embodied research is a meaningful form of inquiry. Through this research approach, I engaged my participants in movement so as to better know their bodies and ultimately to know themselves. This journey was my journey and also their journey. Together we journeyed through unknowing to knowing. My journey did not begin with the undertaking of the yoga program in the Fall of 2012. It did not even begin with my doctoral studies in the Fall of 2010. My journey began when I was a teen girl. The girls have now begun their journeys.

A journey can have a beginning and an end or perhaps, in my case, be a beginning where a path presented itself and this is the path that I have taken ever since that day. That is not to say that my life is not without the struggle. It may not be the exact same struggle I experienced as a teen girl, however, the struggle I live now is still defined by self-exploration and identity formation. As a woman, my identity is one that is defined by social mores, ideas, norms, and standards. I have always questioned where I fit within this space. I am living my

life. It is a good life. Yet to live, breath, feel, think, act, and move is to change and to grow.

### **Living Yoga as the Journey of Self-discovery**

Yoga is an integral part of my existence as it has helped me to understand my self and define my self in the present moment. Of course, I still plan for the future; I still lament for the past. I am a human being and I am a woman. But I do this consciously knowing and being aware that I have the place, the space, and the moment that I presently experience and that is all that I have. This is a challenging concept; one that is not only challenging to me but also to my participants.

This study is about practicing yoga, the pranayama, asana, and meditation aspects of the philosophy. It is also about living yoga. There is no right yoga or wrong yoga. “Yoga isn’t something you learn, and then you’re finished. Yoga is a lifelong journey and commitment. And it doesn’t matter what style of yoga you practice; there is no one way” (Morissette, 2009, p. 3). To practice yoga is to find love for self and love for others. This has been called the “bliss body” (Morissette, 2009, p. 206) and we all know that with life being hectic, busy, and stressful, it is a challenge to find this love for self. I am on a journey of self-discovery. This journey has no foreseeable end in sight.

Through this process, I have come to the space of the teen girl from within the mind set and perceptions of that worldview through interactions and embodied understanding. This was a feminist self-evolving process where I challenged myself to enter the world of the teen girl and foster a safe and

personally aspiring environment. The space was created for encouraging a new vision of self-hood.

This was not an encounter that was driven by a guide book on yoga or even a philosophical text. Instead, this was a pursuit of a new discourse in self-discovery and continuous unity of body and mind. We awakened to ourselves and this was a critical dialogue that moved the participants from a state of personal and societal objectification to one of conscious empowerment and agency.

Reawakening love and intimacy for one's self and beyond requires practice. This is not because love is something far away from us but because we forget... We forget we are whole...Practice awakens the dormant and often invisible interiors of the mind, body, and heart in order to establish a more tender, responsive, creative, and active self (Stone, 2011, p. 58).

The findings of this collectivist and activist research approach indicate that embodied engagements elicit the space where flesh speaks and external and internal become unified as one. Yoga is an artful, embodied expression that is about experiencing the world without being enslaved by the world. This is not a passive engagement but an activist engagement that challenges hegemonic ideas of girls in the world and in the world of a girl. This further engages the idea of the unity of whole-self and mind-body interconnectedness where we are not passive observers of the body with awareness of self located in the head watching over the body as object. Subject and object as separate dissolve and



mindfulness is the present. The end result is one where we become; we become fully engaged in a creative and fluid self-hood enabling self-knowledge, self-acceptance and self-love.

## Chapter 10

### Concluding Remarks

#### Challenges

Although the yoga experience produced positive change in personal perception for the participants, it was not without its challenges and difficulties. Female teens today live lives that are multi-faceted in nature. The demands and pressures of being a teen girl are increasingly changing their lives. Social media, school work, sports, extra-curricular, and part-time jobs are but a few of the everyday expectations of today's female teen. I was keenly aware of this because I work with teen girls every day and have moved in-to and on the outside of that world for many years. Through those years, I have watched the world change and female teens change to meet the nature of that ever-moving space around them. In many aspects, the study was positive in that it gave an opportunity for the teen girls to stop for a momentary glance, feeling and being, and to see what was happening all around them. This pause lead to an awareness of body and mind, mindfulness, inner peace and an acknowledgment of self that would elicit an understanding of the out of balance nature of all that surrounded them and a knowledge of how to cope within that.

However, that did not change the difficult nature of finding participants who were willing to commit to a beginning interview, a 10-week yoga program, and final focus group/closing interview. Through the recruitment process there were many responses but as I noted earlier, the responses were more often than not from those that were curious as to what I was doing. Yoga seems to be trending

right now and this is noticeable when we watch TV, go to gyms, and look online. It was incredibly time-consuming to field the requests for information. Most of the information requested was from interested mothers looking to enroll their teen daughters in a yoga program that was free. There were many questions around what 'a study' was and what 'participation' required. There were also inquiries from local physical fitness and recreation programs looking for information about a yoga program that was specifically for physical health and wellness. With the explanation given, it left only those genuinely interested in the process. After all, it was appearing to be a time consuming process for participants that required a fair amount of energy. My nine participants were open-minded and motivated for the process without knowing what it would actually hold.

### **Unfulfilled Expectations**

I had many expectations for my project. Not all my expectations were realized, of course. I could have felt profound disappointment that every week's practice didn't happen exactly as I expected it to happen. As a matter of fact, no one practice happened as expected. There were always problems with technology including video camera battery life and utilizing a tripod appropriately, scheduling issues because of Halloween activities, autumn colds and flu, the girls' busy lives, and issues with our venue including the janitor polishing the floor during meditation and the infestation of red ants that required a relocation for fear of being crawled on by social insects while in savasana! This could have destroyed the mood, the practice, or perhaps even worse, the program. Yoga

taught me again to let go of my attachment to perfection, to specific results, and to my expectation of outcome.

I have learned this and experienced this before. But in the engaged space of this practice, I was able to experience non-attachment. It will be what it will be. That is it. This didn't prevent me from having worry, from not trusting myself and my ideas, and from not hoping for goodness! As I mentioned earlier, I am human. It is this humanness that reminds me of what is possible and what is sometimes impossible and to be accepting of that. What became possible was an awareness of body and mind, mindfulness, inner peace, and acknowledgement of self. This is the real story; this is the narrative of self-discovery. I have changed and I am changed. The participants have changed and are changed.

### **The Connection Between Body and Mind**

We read that yoga will give us better bodies, less sore and stiff backs and necks, and improved concentration. This may be true. However, the purpose of this engagement was to begin a journey that would be transformative in body and in mind. Making the connection between body and mind is a significant finding of this study in terms of becoming a true self; finding self-knowledge, self-acceptance, and self-love. Our physical practice of pranayama, hatha yoga, and meditation was a gateway to an infinite exploration of self. This was an opportunity for my female teen participants to explore themselves from deep within themselves so that change could happen outside themselves in their day-to-day-lives. This experience was an experience brought by me, a woman, to them, the girls. This is yoga from my own experience, which engages a deeper

perspective through a simple practice. I entered the path and my journey began as a student of Transcendental Meditation (TM) when I was 16 years old. My desire was to share this consciousness raising experience with them that I was so fortunate to have at sixteen. The nature of the practice is that it becomes a journey that is transformative personally for the practitioner; in this particular case, my female teen participants. This journey was also transformative for myself as researcher and participant. My approach was one that was heart centered as I am not a traditional scholar of Indian philosophy or of the Sanskrit language. Instead, I lead my participants toward their true Self; the self inside all of them. When the true Self is discovered, we have discovered that which is deep within us – self-knowledge, self-acceptance, and self-love.

### **Finding the Power Within**

We are all seekers of one thing or another. It is a natural human trait to seek our truth (Sri Anirvan, 2007). Our truth is often obscured by the excessive, overarching, inherent, and dominating patriarchy that surrounds us. Today's cultural milieu does not support the seeking of self or self-exploration for female teens. As the research in this work indicates, the expectations for teens are not concerned with self-study to achieve healthy senses of self. Popular culture does not encourage momentary introspection and positive change through self-understanding. We don't have to look further than our mobile phones, our computers, and our televisions. The world has inundated us with Twitter, FaceTime, Facebook, Flickr, Instagram, Tumblr, Messenger, Pinterest, and YouTube. There is mass technological communication telling young woman what

and who they should be. Our inner and outer selves generally do not flow together in a harmonious nature. Instead there are powerful, relentless, conflicting, and confusing messages about how to be a young woman in our society. The ideals of young women are fostered and encouraged by a still patriarchy laced with misogyny. The authoritative and controlling patriarchy keeps girls and women from knowing their true Self and undermining their ability to self-discover and self-power. So I asked myself, how can teen girls become physically healthy, psychologically and emotionally well women with an understanding of their place in this world? Through the practice of yoga; of course. Yoga fosters an engaged life. Many of us would like to think we became engaged in our own lives at some point. However, it is generally not when we are teens that this awakening happens. I can speak to this as a woman who was once a teen girl. I began an exploration that was not readily supported or engaged by society some twenty-five years ago. I was one of the lucky ones in that I had a supportive environment in which to grow my true self and find my authentic voice. That was still an extremely challenging pursuit; a pursuit in which I still engage. This study enabled the female teen participants to tap into the depths of their inner and true selves so as to become powerful in their own lives; so as to challenge the stereotypical and damaging ideas and ideals that continue to contain and confuse women and girls.

The girls acknowledged a state of not knowing who they were and expressed that this puts them in a vulnerable position. In the final dialogues, the

girls often used the pronoun 'we' as this is a feeling they believe young women experience. As hooks (2006) succinctly notes,

I often use the phrase 'imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy' to describe the interlocking political systems that are the foundation of our nation's politics. Of these systems the one that we all learn the most about growing up is the system of patriarchy, even if we never know the word, because patriarchal gender roles are assigned to us as children and we are given continual guidance about the ways we can best fulfill these roles (hooks, 2006, <http://tribes.tribe.net/lovethegoddesswithin/thread/e8dd819a-1a8e-4083-9517-9e7a9e177a93>).

The findings of the yoga study yielded a discovery of self for these girls in that they changed and they grew in an affirming and authentic way. In discovering their authentic selves, the girls were able to manifest a deep interconnection between the body and the mind. This growth showed itself through awareness of body and mind, mindfulness, inner peace, and acknowledgement of self. Self-knowledge, self-acceptance, and self-love are empowering. Becoming empowered through the process of finding and growing self was overwhelmingly beautiful to watch unfold. However, this is NOT an end result but instead a process or a journey. I undertook the journey of self-discovery twenty-five years ago and will continue on this path. The hope for this research is that these girls will continue on this path as well. The six month follow up with the three participants that engaged in a final videotaped interview indicated that they are

still on that path they began in a yoga studio in October of 2012. The research process encouraged the participants to contemplate seeing the teaching come alive in their lives in places and at times when they were not at practice. Seeing the teaching show itself at other times and in other places in their lives is a powerful end result. The impact has meaningfulness for the participants as it has altered the reality of their lives and opened them to become self-acknowledgeable, self-accepting, and self-loving. The voices expressed are significant to research and to the lives of these young women because we forget each and every day we are whole beings. The process allows us to remember.

Yoga teachings are not a response to life that stand apart from its movement. Yoga is a living question that continually points its practitioner back toward his or her own life, back into the body, straight into the community. Awakening is not the end result of a systemized process. Reawakening love and intimacy for one's self and beyond requires practice...We forget we are whole... Practice awakens the dormant and often invisible interiors of the mind, body, and heart in order to establish a more tender, responsive, creative, and active self (Stone, 2011, p. 58).

I have been awakened inside and outside myself as have my participants. This is a gift we have given ourselves. It is the best gift there could be. To live healthy and fulfilling lives, young women must be given the opportunity to become empowered and engaged as whole beings. Yoga engages young women in a mind-body emancipatory and liberatory discourse that grows self-knowledge, self-acceptance, and self-love. It is our responsibility as educators and as human



beings to raise consciousness and grow voice through embodied awareness programs. Progressive rhetoric, such as 'girl power,' is insufficient to foster change in the thought processes of young women. To transform the present social space of conflict, confusion, and objectification, it is necessary to proactively transform the way we think, perceive, and engage young women and the way they engage themselves. This research advances the idea that yoga is a liberatory course of en-action to explore subjectivity by reconfiguring the idea of the body as the site of knowledge to assist young women in becoming self-accepting and liberated beings in the world.

## Epilogue – Encouragement and Conclusion

As I listen, I hear and feel and see a change

### The Voice of Transformation

Especially when you're a girl  
Our surroundings control us  
Taught we need to look a certain way  
Behave a certain way

You're constantly seeing  
You're young  
You're watching those images  
On TV - in magazines

Just hearing people  
I wish this part of me was different  
Maybe I should change myself to fit in  
Beauty industry is powerful

We're in a vulnerable position  
We don't really know who we are  
We don't really know where we want to go  
Or at least that's the case with me

Change not noticeable  
But taking the seeds  
Of experience away  
Recognize them in some other place

It has changed me  
Motivation, dedication  
Incredibly engaged  
Different perspective

Sometimes in meditation  
I would not have connected  
Resonate a couple of days later -something  
clicks

But I think our life begins when  
We accept we are who we are  
I feel love with people who emit love

Sometimes I wished  
I could pause the world  
Just kind of leave my body

Now it's not so bad  
Yoga is like putting life on pause  
Without putting it on pause

I used to dread  
Getting up in the morning  
Now I have another day to live

They are one - body and mind  
love my entire self  
The process has changed me

My mind body connection  
My wholeness  
Sending out love kindness

Wasn't always loving to myself  
Wasn't always kind to myself  
I'm really good really awesome

Everybody should see the goodness  
Awesomeness in me  
We need to see

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**Appendix 1**  
**Recruitment Poster**

**Are you a female teen  
between the ages of 15  
& 18?**

**Are you interested in  
participating in a 10  
week yoga research  
program?**

**For more information  
contact Darlene at**

[evolutiontowardharmony@gmail.com](mailto:evolutiontowardharmony@gmail.com)

## **Appendix 2**

### **Pre-Study Interview Questions**

#### **Autobiographical Exploration and Awareness**

Who are you? How do you understand your 'self'?  
How would you describe your 'self'?/How would you tell the story of your 'self'?  
How do you see your 'self' when you are alone?  
How does your sense of self govern your perception of your reality?  
What do you see when you look in the mirror?  
How do you tell the story of yourself?

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#### **Relational Awareness and Identity/Social Sense**

How is your story the same as the stories of your peers? How is it different?  
How do you see yourself when you are with your friends?  
Ask yourself these questions:  
How do I see my self in my life story?  
How can I better understand myself?  
How would I describe myself as a girl?  
How do I describe myself now?

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#### **Embodied Awareness**

How would you describe your body?  
How does your body make you feel?  
How does your body affect your interactions?  
How do you express your 'self'?  
How does this change depending on where you are? On who you are with?  
How would you describe 'being in' your body?/How do you understand yourself as a physical body?

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### **Focus Group Questions**

#### **Debriefing after Movement**

What was this movement experience like for you?  
How has the experience re-shaped you? How has it changed you?  
How has the group process changed you?

Can you talk about whether there is a mind-body connection for you through this process?

How has your body experienced this physical movement?

How has your mind experienced this process?

How can this process help you re-vision your body? Your mind?

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### **After-Study Interview Questions**

Who are you? How do you understand your 'self'?

How would you describe your 'self'?/How would you tell the story of your 'self'?

How do you see your 'self' when you are alone?

How does your sense of self govern your perception of your reality?

What do you see when you look in the mirror?

How do you tell the story of yourself?

How do you feel you know your 'self'?

How do you accept your 'self'?

How do you feel love for your 'self'?

In what ways (or not) has this process helped you re-vision your 'self'?

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## Appendix 3

### Informed Consent Form for Participants

Research Project – A (R)Evolution Toward Harmony: A Re/Visioning of Female Teen Being in the World: The Un/Layering of Self Through Hatha Yoga

Researcher – Darlene Kyte

This consent form will help to inform you of what this research is about and what your participation will involve. With this study, I will attempt to gain insight into the identity formation of teen females through a methodological study using hatha yoga, pranayama (breath work), meditation, and conversation. This research is being done in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy – Educational Studies at the University of Victoria, in Victoria, British Columbia. Please read this form carefully.

The information obtained will be used to examine the identity formation of teen females through a methodological study using hatha yoga, pranayama (breath work), and meditation. You have rights with regard to your participation in this study.

- Participation is voluntary. Participation in each weekly one-hour group yoga, pranayama, meditation, and conversation session will be videotaped with your permission. There will be ten of these weekly one-hour group yoga sessions occurring after school during the months of September 2012 and December 2012 in a community dance studio.
- There will be a private individual pre-interview before the program begins. These interviews will be audiotaped and confidential.
- There will also be weekly conversation during the one hour yoga program as well as a videotaped focus group at the end of the study.
- You may cancel your participation agreement at any time, if you so wish. If your participation is cancelled, your interview data will not be if you so wish and the video footage with your image will have the facial features distorted or blurred to protect your confidentiality in the final product if you wish.
- Your interview responses will be anonymous and confidential. These responses will be heard by only myself and will be transcribed shortly after each taped interview. You will have the opportunity to view the transcription for accuracy. Excerpts from your taped interviews may become part of the final research project as well as for educational and scholarly purposes. No identifying qualities will be part of such excerpts. Excerpts from the video footage from the weekly yoga sessions will be used as part of the final research project and for educational and scholarly purposes with your permission.



\_\_\_\_\_ If I withdraw, I agree to my image being used in the final dissertation product and for educational and scholarly uses.

\_\_\_\_\_ If I withdraw, I do NOT agree to my image being used in the final dissertation product and for educational and scholarly uses.

You can contact me, Darlene Kyte, or my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Kathy Sanford, at any time regarding any of the above stated information. My telephone number is x-xxx-xxx-xxxx and my e-mail address is xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx or xx. Dr. Sanford can be reached by telephone at x-xxx-xxx-xxxx or by e-mail at xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx. You may verify the ethical approval of this study or raise any concerns you might have by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria: x-xxx-xxx-xxxx or ethics@uvic.ca.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ acknowledge that I have read the above stated information and understand what I have read. I have been informed of the purpose of the study. I also understand that interview information I give will be kept anonymous and confidential. I am aware that I am able to contact Darlene Kyte about any aspect of the study at any time that I so wish. I am also aware that I am able to withdraw from the study at any time and without consequence. I acknowledge that I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 4

### Letter of information and informed consent for Parent/Guardian of Participants aged 15-16

Research Project – A (R)Evolution Toward Harmony: A Re/Visioning of Female Teen Being in the World: The Un/Layering of Self Through Hatha Yoga  
Researcher – Darlene Kyte

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Your daughter/female child in your care is being invited to participate in a yoga research study. This letter of information will help to inform you of what this research is about. With this study, I will attempt to gain insight into the identity formation of teen females through a methodological study using hatha yoga, pranayama (breath work), meditation, and conversation. This research is being done in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy – Educational Studies at the University of Victoria, in Victoria, British Columbia. Please read this form carefully.

- The information obtained will be used to examine the identity formation of teen females through a methodological study using hatha yoga, pranayama (breath work), and meditation.
- Participation is voluntary. Participation in each weekly one-hour group yoga session will be videotaped. There will be ten of these weekly one-hour group yoga sessions occurring after school hours during the months of September 2012 and December 2012 in a community dance studio
- There will be a private individual pre-interview before the program begins. This interview will be audio taped, transcribed, and confidential.
- There will also be weekly conversation during the one hour yoga program as well as a videotaped focus group at the end of the study.
- You may cancel your participation agreement at any time, if you so wish. If your participation is cancelled, your interview data will not be if you so wish and the video footage with your image will have the facial features distorted or blurred to protect your confidentiality in the final product if you wish.

The interview responses will be anonymous and confidential. These responses will be heard by only myself and will be transcribed shortly after each taped interview. Participants will have the opportunity to view the transcription for accuracy. Excerpts from the taped interviews may become part of the final research project as well as for educational and scholarly purposes. No identifying qualities will be part of such excerpts without permission from participants. Excerpts from the video footage from the weekly yoga sessions will be used as part of the final research project and for educational and scholarly purposes with agreement from the participants.

You can contact me, Darlene Kyte, or my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Kathy Sanford, at any time regarding any of the above stated information. My telephone number is x-xxx-xxx-xxxx and my e-mail address is xxxxxxxxxxxx or xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx. Dr. Sanford can be reached by telephone at x-xxx-xxx-xxxx or by e-mail at xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx. You may verify the ethical approval of this study or raise any concerns you might have by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria at x-xxx-xxx-xxxx ethics@uvic.ca.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ acknowledge that I have read the above stated information and understand what I have read. I have been informed of the purpose of the study and agree to the involvement as parent/guardian. I am aware that I am able to contact Darlene Kyte about any aspect of the study at any time that I so wish. I acknowledge that I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Signature of parent/guardian \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_