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Beyond Namaste: Exploring the Connection Between Yoga and Interpersonal Communication

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BEYOND NAMASTE: EXPLORING THE CONNECTION BETWEEN YOGA AND
INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to every yoga practitioner (student/teacher) who found refuge in their practice.

Thank you for sharing the love and passion for yoga and making this world a better place.

BEYOND NAMASTE: EXPLORING THE CONNECTION BETWEEN YOGA AND
INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

By

PATRICIA FLORES

THESIS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis study explores the impact that a regular yoga practice has on the interpersonal communication skills of the practitioners. Nineteen yoga practitioners were recruited and interviewed about how their yoga practice influences the way they communicate with others. Data analysis revealed five recurring themes linking yoga and interpersonal communication: mindfulness, self-awareness, self-acceptance, personal growth, and patience. Based on these responses from the participants, the study concluded that a regular yoga practice positively corresponds to increased interpersonal communication skills.

Keywords: yoga, asanas, pranayama, holistic, yamas, niyamas, interpersonal communication, symbolic interactionism, self.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
ABSTRACT.....	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Exploring Yoga and Interpersonal Communication.....	1
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	8
2.1 Yoga Health Benefits.....	8
2.2	
Mindfulness.....	11
2.3 Interpersonal Communication.....	12
2.4 The Self in Interpersonal Communication.....	16
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.....	30
3.1 Study Information & Study Area.....	30
3.2 Recruitment.....	33
3.3 Data Collection.....	36
CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS.....	40
4.0 Analysis Overview.....	40
4.1 Mindful Communication and Yoga.....	41
4.2 The Self, Yoga, & Effective Communication.....	46
4.3 Acceptance and Effective Interpersonal Communication.....	51
4.4 Personal Growth.....	53
4.5 Patience and Interpersonal Communication.....	56
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION.....	59
REFERENCES.....	65
APPENDIX.....	74
VITA.....	75

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Yoga is 99% practice and 1% theory”- Sri K. Pattabhi Jois

1.1 Introduction: “Exploring Yoga and Interpersonal Communication”

Yoga, despite its recent popularity, has been around for thousands of years. Yoga is an ancient practice developed to convey physical, mental, and emotional balance and health. (Ross, 2010). It is a practice that was developed by monks who sat in meditation for long periods of time as a system of spiritual practice to explore the exterior and interior world, and to gain control and understanding of the mind, body, and breath (Feurstein, 1989). These monks or gurus (teachers) did not associate the practice of yoga with religion; rather, they promoted the practice as a systematic philosophy to gain a better understanding of the self. Additionally, they believed that practicing yoga resulted in a more positive and harmonious quality of life.

Yoga has been defined in different ways; at its most simplistic, it can be defined as a philosophy of living in harmony with yourself and the world. The practice of yoga emphasizes the connection of the mind to the body. The Sanskrit term of yoga is yui, which is defined as union; more specifically, union of the mind, body, and breath (Strauss, 1992). While there is no exact date of when yoga was developed, some scholars and yoga gurus have suggested that the practice was created about two thousand years ago (Gordon, 2011). Initially, yoga was mainly practiced by monks and spiritualists, and its purpose was to unify the mind, body, and breath. However, it has evolved into a practice mostly concerned with the physical aspects, or asanas, of yoga (Desikachar, 2005).

In the yoga philosophy, the philosopher Patanjali wrote the Yoga Sutras, which are known as the “authoritative text on yoga” (Laster, 1997, p.213). The Yoga Sutras outline the

eight different disciplines that form the yoga practice (Laster, 1997). These disciplines are known as the eight limbs of yoga or *ashtanga* yoga (ash: eight, tanga: limbs). These eight limbs consist of ethical principles and serve as a guide for living a well-rounded life. Further, the eight limbs are meant to teach the practitioner to become aware of one's health while accepting the spiritual facets of one's nature. While the eight limbs can be practiced separately from the physical poses (asanas), it is believed that the asana trains the mind and body for meditation and spiritual growth (Collins, 1998). Williams (2013), summarizes the eight limbs as follows:

1. Yama: Ethical Practices
2. Niyama: Observances
3. Asana: Physical postures
4. Pranayama: Breath control
5. Pratyahara: Abstinence
6. Dharana: Concentration
7. Dhyana: Meditation
8. Samadhi: Connection with the higher self

Kumar (2016) describes the yamas as “codes of restraint, abstentions, self-regulations, and involve our relationship with the external world and other people” (p.12). While the principal aspect that is taught in a yoga studio is the physical practice (asanas), the remaining seven principles are equally important and learned with time through a steady yoga practice. Further, it is the first discipline (yama) that can be linked directly to interpersonal communication.

In her book, *Yoga, Mind, Body, & Spirit a Return to Wholeness*, Donna Farhi (2002) breaks down the *yamas* into five different categories. They are as follows:

1. Ahimsa (compassion for all living things): this philosophy promotes a non-violence attitude for every living thing, implying to adopt an attitude of non-harming (Fahri, 2000).
2. Satya (commitment to truthfulness): satya is defined as “truth” which encourages honesty.
3. Asteya (non-stealing): refers to different attitudes. Asteya teaches to not take advantage of others in any given situation as well as to not take something that doesn't belong to us. This practice fosters consciousness of how we ask for others' time (Fahri, 2000).
4. Brahmacharya (sense control): which simply refers to the sense of abstinence, specifically in sexual activity (Fahri, 2000).
5. Aparigraha: this term can be defined as letting go (of attachments and situations) as well as to not engage in greedy situations.

In the Yoga Sutras, the yamas are considered to be ethical qualities that cleanse the spirit and foster physical and psychological health in the practitioner (Jenkins, 2007). While the yamas are not normally endorsed in a typical yoga class, some yoga instructors encourage the literature study of the practice outside the yoga shala (place of yoga). Whereas the yoga philosophy might be unfamiliar to novice yoga students, most experienced yoga practitioners know and understand the eight principles of yoga and apply them to their daily lives when not engaged in asana.

Modern yoga became popularized in India in the 1920s by a yoga student named Krishnamacharya, who practiced and taught yoga for over sixty years. Krishnamacharya was convinced that yoga was the greatest gift of India to the world (Desyvar, 2010). In the book, *Health, Healing, and Beyond: Yoga and the Living Tradition of T. Krishnamacharya* by T. K. V.

Desikachar, the author reflects on the life of Krishnamacharya, and highlights his devotion for the practice and his effort in bringing yoga to the masses. Krishnamacharya took under his wing two young Indian students who later developed the two internationally recognized styles of modern yoga: *Ashtanga Yoga* (developed by Sri K. Pattabhi Jois) and *Iyengar Yoga* (developed by B.K.S. Iyengar). These two gurus were the pioneers in introducing yoga to the west in the early 1960's. Yoga in the United States gained popularity when music icons, such as the Beatles, studied yoga with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (Vats, 2016). While the practice of yoga was associated with religion and spirituality in the East, in the United States, the religious element was often left out, though many classes do start out with a brief meditation (Harvard Health Letter, 2003).

Yoga in the west has been tailored and marketed as mainly a physical practice (Collins, 1998), which consists of a series of stretching and strength-building poses. The typical yoga class proceeds as follows: a certified yoga instructor guides the students through the physical practice and usually incorporates guided meditation, which encourages a state of mindfulness and awareness (Taylor, 2003). At the conclusion of the session, the students are put into *savasana* (corpse pose or resting pose) in order to realign their bodies and rest for approximately 5-7 minutes.

Through poses and breathing control, the yoga practice strengthens the body and trains it for meditation. One of the most important aspects of the yoga practice is pranayama (controlling of the breath). During a yoga practice, there are several breathing techniques. The most common, mainly taught in Hatha yoga, focuses on deep inhalations and exhalations through the nostrils. Many teachers are firm believers of the power of breath control over the mind and the

body. Further, researchers suggest that breath control is an important element in the yoga practice as it aids in stabilizing the nervous system (Williams, 2003).

In current literature, studies have proven how the yoga practice can treat different mental illnesses, including depression and anxiety (Hayes, 2011). Additional studies have revealed that yoga practitioners who maintain a daily yoga practice are happier, as well as mentally and physically healthier than the average individual (Diamond, 2012). Other studies have shown that a regular yoga practice leads to an increase in mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 1994 and Marlatt and Kristeller, 1999). However, to date there remains a gap in literature on the study of yoga and its effects on interpersonal communication and the development of relationships.

Being introduced to the United States in the 1960s with a primary focus on asanas (poses) and pranayama (breath control), yoga's popularity in the United States has been increasing rapidly over the past several decades. Currently, approximately 15 million people a year attend a yoga class, and the average yoga practitioner spends up to \$2,000 yearly on yoga studio membership, clothing, and yoga props (Gull, 2013). As to why most people begin practicing yoga, a market study found evidence that the main reason was to improve their overall health and physical fitness. (Yoga Journal, 2014). As can be expected, there were no respondents who listed increases in interpersonal communication and relationships as a motivating influence in picking up yoga. Nevertheless, in this study, I will explore the impact that practicing yoga has on interpersonal communication.

At its most simplistic, interpersonal communication can be defined as communication between two or more individuals (Manning, 2014). Literature defines the process of interpersonal communication as sending and receiving messages. This process is known to include direct methods as well as indirect methods (Manning, 2014). Direct communicators can

be classified as individuals who openly express their opinions and try to convince others that they are always correct. On the other hand, indirect communicators are classified as individuals who tend to be quieter, and are more likely to brainstorm and suggest solutions when there is a conflict. Additionally, Manning (2014) defines a satisfying interpersonal communication when both the message sender and the message receiver have an equal understanding of the message (Manning, 2014). In this study, interpersonal communication shall include the four selves that play a significant role in its development: self-concept, self-awareness, self-disclosure, and self-esteem (DeVito, 1938).

It is imperative for this study to highlight the importance of interpersonal communication. Experts fear that with an increase of technology platforms and social networks, individuals are losing social abilities and becoming reclusive (Forges, 2013). Additionally, researchers suggest that the use of social platforms is slowly overshadowing and taking over interpersonal communication. Previous studies have shown evidence that younger generations are more likely to use these social platforms as a tool to communicate with others, leading some commentators to be concerned that their interpersonal communication skills are decreasing (Tardanico, 2012). These concerns have motivated researchers to create tools to increase and improve the way individuals communicate with each other.

While there are different methods designed to develop and improve interpersonal communication skills, such as developing listening and perception skills, as well as understanding interpersonal systems (Deetz, 1986), in this thesis study I aim to contribute to the growing body of research on yoga by exploring its potential benefits regarding interpersonal communication. Using a qualitative research approach, I will analyze and examine in-depth

interviews with regular yoga practitioners who were recruited from different yoga studios in El Paso, Texas. These participants will aid me in answering the following research question:

RQ. How does practicing yoga impact the practitioners' interpersonal communication?

The research study will be divided in 5 different chapters: Chapter 1 is an introduction to the research study. Further, it provides an overview of the topic and relevance to literature.

Chapter 2 will address the literature review; specifically, research studies regarding the health benefits of yoga. It will also elaborate on the concept of interpersonal communication and the different theories related to the study. Chapter 3 will describe the methodology and offer additional background information for the study. Chapter 4 will provide an analysis of emerging themes. Finally, Chapter 5 provides the conclusion of the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

“Yoga is the journey of the self, through the self, to the self”- The Bhagavad Gita

2.1 Yoga: Health Benefits

The health benefits of yoga are well documented in medicine literature (Atkinson, 2009). Yoga’s increasing popularity is rapidly attracting more researchers across the world to invest in learning the psychophysical benefits that result from practicing yoga. Previous studies have shown that a regular yoga practice can reduce anxiety, stress, and feelings of depression (Atkinson, 2009). Internationally, the practice of yoga has been well recognized, and is currently been treated as a form of mind-body medicine which integrates three key components (physical, mental, and spiritual) to treat different stress-related illnesses (Atkinson, 2009).

Further, yoga’s popularity has consequently led to an abundance of research on its physical and psychological effects. Alternative medicine such as yoga and meditation are beginning to receive recognition as a complement to western medicine. Around 40% of adults in the United States opt to use these forms of alternative medicine as an intervention to treat different conditions such as heart disease and high blood pressure. Additionally, yoga is also being utilized to treat certain mental illnesses, including anxiety and depression (Sulenes, 2016). Different yoga postures have shown to alleviate physical conditions and ease the nervous system.

As a result of these findings, yoga has become increasingly recommended by healthcare providers as a suitable alternative to traditional medication (Sulenes, 2016). Further, due to its emphasis on physical exercise, it is also increasingly prescribed as a method to treat illnesses and cultivate a healthier social life. Considering that a yoga practice can be done anywhere and it is relatively inexpensive, it is hard to find reasons why not to recommend yoga.

The meditative aspects of yoga have also been found to have a positive effect on people suffering from mental disorders, including anxiety (Gangadgar, 2015). Yoga has also shown promising results in patients suffering from schizophrenia. As such, physicians are increasingly prescribing a yoga practice, in addition to traditional western medicine, when treating illnesses such as schizophrenia (Bangalore, 2012).

Additionally, studies have also shown a positive correlation between the practice of yoga and an increase in the functioning of the nervous system (Streeter et al., 2010; Van der Kolk, 2006). Basically, the health benefits of yoga are numerous; a regular yoga practice has been shown by researchers to result in the following:

- Controlled hypertension (Hagins, Rundle, Consedine, & Khalsa, 2014),
- Greater heart rate variability (Friis & Sollers, 2013; Telles, Nilkamal, & Acharya, 2011)
- Improvement on Type 2 diabetes results (Innes & Vincent, 2007)
- Alleviates risks associated with antipsychotic medication ((De Hert, Schreurs, Vancampfort, & Van Winkel, 2009).
- Positive effects on depression (Shapiro et al., 2007; Uebelacker et al., 2010)
- Improved automatic responses to stress and coping behaviors (Kinser, Goehler, & Taylor, 2012; Streeter, Gerbarg, Saper, Ciraulo, & Brown, 2012).
- Reduced state anxiety (Li & Goldsmith, 2012)
- Improvement in psychological, social, and occupational outcomes (Gorczyński & Faulkner, 2010; Vancampfort et al., 2012).

A previous study conducted by H.R. Nagendra (2013) demonstrated that a regular yoga practice helps individuals deal with mental health issues such as depression, PTSD, anxiety, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia in the following ways:

- Calming results: most patients with mental illnesses report calming effects after every yoga practice.
- Relaxation: through the yoga breathing technique exercises, patients report an increased state of relaxation.
- Awareness: by increasing awareness, the yoga practice aids the patient in becoming more aware of themselves and others.
- Increased attention span: through the practice of yoga, a patient is able to maintain a state of focused attention for longer periods of time. Resulting in helping patients to complete tasks successfully.
- Acceptance and adaptability: the practice aids the patients to better transition from the therapy center to the outside world.
- Security: a yoga practice provides a sense of security, which gives the patient strength to recover (Nagendra, 2013).

Previous studies have shown that some of these qualities have a positive effect in interpersonal communication. Therefore, it stands to reason that a person who begins practicing yoga would, in addition to receiving psychophysical benefits, could potentially see an increase in their interpersonal communication skills. One aspect that has been explored in literature concerning interpersonal communication is mindfulness.

2.2 Mindfulness

Similar to the yoga practice, mindfulness is an ancient practice that is often associated with different spiritual traditions such as Buddhism (Hick, 2008; Shapiro & Carlson, 2009) and

is a practice that has been defined as “an understanding of what is occurring before or beyond conceptual and emotional classification about what is or has taken place” (Chiesa, 2013, p. 256). The earliest known writings of mindfulness date back 25 centuries in Eastern traditions (Bhikkhu & Bhikkhu, 1995). Baer et al. (2006) identified the following different stages of mindfulness: (1) awareness of the mind and body: (2) identifying sensations of the mind and body: (3) the ability to describe personal experiences: (4) the ability to remain neutral to these experiences; (5) the ability to accept every experience. Kabat-Zinn (2003) defines mindfulness as “an active regulation of one’s attention so as to focus it on the many cognitive events (Kabat-Zinn, 2013, p.17). Mindfulness has also been helpful in developing awareness. In simpler terms, Dreyfus (2011) defined mindfulness as “the ability of the mind to retain its object and not float away from it” (p. 51).

The concept of mindfulness was brought to the west by T. W. Rhys Davids in 1881 (Gethin, 2011), and made its way to modern psychology in the 1970s, by Jon Kabat-Zinn, who introduced mindfulness to medicine (Bishop, Carlson, & Anderson, 2004). Some of the practices that are associated with mindfulness include meditation, yoga, and tai chi (Baer et al., 2008). These practices typically include breathing exercises, body movement, as well as listening exercises (Williams & Penman, 2011) and are taught to suppress attention from thoughts. In Buddhist philosophy, mindfulness is practiced as a method of reducing suffering and providing a harmonious way of life (Chiesa, 2013). Yoga has been shown in studies to be an effective way to achieve mindfulness (Salmon, Lush, Jablonski, & Sephton, 2009; Shelov, Suchday, & Friedberg, 2009).

Similar to yoga, several studies have indicated that mindfulness is proven to be beneficial for different mental illnesses, including stress and anxiety. Additionally, researchers have found

a correlation between mindfulness and increased well-being and happiness (Chiesa & Serretti, 2011). Other studies have exposed a positive outcome of mindfulness regarding cognition functional (Felver et al., 2014). Additional studies indicate an increase of positive interpersonal relationships through mindfulness (Grepmaier et al., 2007). Kozlowski (2013) shows that increased mindfulness is linked to increased relationship satisfaction, reduced conflicts within relationships, and higher understanding and acceptance of others (Barnes, Brown, Krusemark, Campbell, & Rogge, 2007).

One of the most important factors of mindfulness is empathy. Both empathy and compassion are imperative in Buddhist spiritual traditions, as they emphasize mindfulness in their spiritual practice to achieve these qualities (Goenka, 1993) Mindfulness in interpersonal communication has been explored in previous studies (Elmes and Gemmill, 1990). Langer (1989) recommended different methods on how to increase mindfulness in interpersonal communication. These methods include openness to new information, create and recreate categories, and avoiding relying on first impressions (Chanowitz and Langer, 1981; Langer 1989).

2.3 Interpersonal Communication

As this study explores practices of interpersonal communication, it is important to examine its significance and relevance to the field of communication. This section will begin with an overview of interpersonal communication literature and will then focus on the relevance and value of interpersonal communication.

Scholars have argued that interpersonal communication is essential to a healthy society (Muus, 1997) and it is related to the overall quality and satisfaction of relationships. DeVito (1938) argued that interpersonal communication can be defined in two ways. One way is to

define it by the number of people communicating and their relationship to each other. This is known as the dyadic or relational definition (Wilmont, 1987). A different perspective is to treat interpersonal communication as a developmental process where communication begins as impersonal and becomes more and more personal as the interactions increase in frequency and intimacy (Miller, 1978). This is known as the developmental definition (DeVito, 1938). As I believe that neither are mutually exclusive, the use of “interpersonal communication” in this thesis study shall encompass both definitions.

The ability to communicate effectively is called interpersonal competence (Spitzberg and Cupach, 1980). The importance of having good interpersonal communication skills has been explained by many scholars, and DeVito (1938) argues that interpersonal communication skills are essential to an individual’s empowerment. In other words, being able to communicate effectively has a positive connection to creating new friendships, positive interpersonal relationships, the ability to adjust to new situations, and to cope with difficult and stressful situations (DeVito, 1938). Studies have shown that people with effective interpersonal communication skills tend to be more successful in higher education (Rubin and Graham, 1988) and more satisfied in the workplace (Wertz, Sorenson, and Herren, 1988).

Studies have also shown that individuals who have low interpersonal communication skills have a higher risk of developing mental illnesses, including depression and anxiety (Spitzberg and Cupach, 1989). Essentially, a lack of good communication can lead to negative outcomes such as misunderstandings and conflicts (Yüksel-Şahin, 1997). Ackerly (2001) states that human beings are actively seeking to communicate. Additionally, Ackerly explains how interpersonal communication is considered to be an essential ingredient in humans, as it is present from birth. The emotional growth of a child begins with communication, as the quality of

an individual's behavior depends on it. Ackerly also states that lack of communication is considered to be the foulest punishment after deprivation of life, as a common sentence in prisons is solitary confinement (Ackerly, 2001).

Deetz & Stevenson (1986) argue that many people find certain key interpersonal situations particularly difficult (meeting new people, giving advice or criticism to friends, etc.). Therefore, interpersonal communication skill development can make normal difficulties and the tensions involved easier to handle (Deetz & Stevenson, 1986). Communication skills development is an endless process of trying out new things, feeling more comfortable in handling situations, and adapting to a continually changing set of challenges and situations (Deetz & Stevenson, 1986, p.2). Help in developing communication skills comes from a number of sources. Deetz & Stevenson (1968) argue that advice from friends and parents on how to act in new situations and their feedback aids in the development of communications skills.

Deetz & Stevenson (1986) argue that there are five basic assumptions about interpersonal communication skill development and change. They are:

1. Communication skills are learned.
2. Interpersonal skill needs change.
3. Particular need – personal and situational, as well as the specific needs of a given relationship- determine the usefulness of various skills.
4. Individuals can exert considerable control over their communication behavior and skill development.
5. Self-esteem and healthy relationships require successful skill development (Deetz & Stevenson, 1986).

The assumption that people can control their communication behavior is based on the possibility of choice (Deets & Stevenson, 1986). People can become more aware of how they communicate, therefore, by developing interpersonal communication skills, an individual can have better control on the way they communicate (Muss, 1987). In this thesis, I argue that a regular yoga practice increases awareness of the practitioner. Becoming aware of communication habits and patterns is the first step toward being able to assess their effectiveness (Blanch, 1977). Awareness of problem communication habits and patterns is a necessary condition for choosing preferable behaviors (Deets & Stevenson, 1986). Gaining awareness through a yoga practice can improve interpersonal communication, therefore, yoga practitioners could be claimed as individuals with higher interpersonal communication skills.

Additionally, Deets & Stevenson (1986) argue that self-esteem and healthy relationships depend on interpersonal communication skill development. Deets & Stevenson suggest that the capacity to act in a productive manner and have control over significant aspects of one's own life is central. Further, they explain how the sense of accomplishment that comes from successful efforts contributes to overall feelings of confidence. Not only can people discover their capacity to learn new behaviors, but they can also discover their ability to manage their interpersonal interactions (Deets & Stevenson, 1986).

Furthermore, scholars have argued that attitudes influence interpersonal communication. Lawrence Rosenfield et. al. (1976), suggested that people at their best are careful, thoughtful, and touched by good humor. Deets & Stevenson (1986) explain that "how to be careful" simply means to delay judgements and appreciate others and their attempts at communication. In this thesis study, I hope to add to the research on this topic by suggesting that a regular yoga practice can aid to the development of these skills. By linking the yoga philosophy with the principles of

interpersonal communication, this study will examine the concept of the self. In previous research studies, scholars argue that who you are and how you see yourself influence the way you communicate with others and the way others communicate with you. The self-concept, self-awareness, and self-esteem play a significant role in interpersonal interactions (DeVitto, 1938).

2.4 The Self in Interpersonal Communication

Scholars explain that who you are and how you see yourself determine and influence your interpersonal communication (DeVito, 1938). This section of the literature will explore and explain self-concept, self-awareness, self-disclosure, and self-esteem. These four selves play a significant role in interpersonal interactions (DeVito, 1938).

Self-Concept:

Simon (2011), defines the self-concept as a scheme of thoughts, principles, and behaviors that each person uses in developing one's own individuality. In other words, the self-concept, according to Shavelson et al. (1976), consists of each individual's consciousness that is created through the exposure and understanding of their own surroundings. Such perceptions are significantly predisposed through the assessments given by others. Similar to Shavelson et al., DeVito (1938) defined the self-concept as the individuals' feelings and thoughts about their strengths and weaknesses, as well as their abilities and limitations (DeVito, 1938). Other scholars define the self-concept as "people's conceptualizations or beliefs about themselves" (Leary & Tangy, 2003, p.7) and the extent to which "self-beliefs are clearly and confidently defined, internally consistent and temporally stable" (Campbell et al., 1996, p. 141). Shavelson et al. (1976) describe the self-concept as a tool to predict human behavior. Who you are is also reflected in the attitudes, beliefs, and values that you hold. DeVitto (1938), stated that the self-concept is developed by several factors: (1) how other people perceive an individual and share

with him/her, (2) how individuals compare themselves to others, and (3) the way individuals understand their beliefs and attitudes. Researchers suggest that the ability to understand the self-concept plays an important role in determining how an individual behaves and interacts with others (Marshe & Hattie, 1996).

An interesting way of explaining the development of the self-concept is by the notion of the looking-glass self by Charles Horton Cooley (1922). This approach states that individuals create a perception of how others perceive them based on the attitudes and behaviors that occur around them. The idea of self-concept encompasses self-esteem, self-confidence, self-knowledge, and the “social self”. Further, the past, present, and future (or possible) selves are also included in self-concept, with the latter being the most important in this context, as it focus on what one’s future might be and what one does or does not want it to be. (Myers, 2009).

The contributions of Williams James (1890-1963) were imperative in this field, as James (1890) is known as the first scholar to explore and theorize the self-concept. Additionally, James (1890) further developed on the concept of the Me-self, which he defined as the sum total of all a person can call his or her own. This could be subdivided into what he termed the constituents of the self-as-known. James (1890) emphasized the three models of the self, which are: the material, the social, and the spiritual self. The material self can be described as possessions of the self. The social self consists of the self-perceptions of others, for as James concluded, “a man has many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind” (p.190). Lastly, the spiritual-self can be described as an “individual’s thoughts, dispositions, and moral judgements” (p.66). The spiritual self is considered to be the most stable model of the three selves (Harter, 1996).

The self-concept has been discussed for over one hundred years (e.g., Hollinworth, 1926, 1942), and the developmental nature of the self-concept was explored by Plucker and Stocking (2001) in the 1990's (Gross, 1989; Harter, 1982; Marsh, 1992). Currently, scholars interpret the self-concept as a "cognitive schema, or an organized knowledge structure that controls all self-relevant information" (Leary & Tangy, 2003, p.31). The self-concept's structure is stated to be more influential than its content. For instance, the content contains two different principles: knowledge and evaluation. Knowledge can be defined as who I am, whereas evaluation consists of the opinion of yourself (Campbell, 1990). Many researchers suggest that an increase in knowledge of the self-concept has many positive benefits, including a more successful academic career (Marsh & Hattie, 1996).

Self-concept can be interpreted as both a structure and a structure/process (Hattie, 1996). For some individuals it can be a structure and set of beliefs that dominate processes and actions, whereas for others it can be a structure/process that involves a set of regulate behavior in various social settings (Hattie, 1996). It is important to understand that self-concept can be influenced by the situation and significant others; it is culturally bound, different across generations, and change with age; and individuals can vary in the degree to which they wish to be high self-monitors, high in personal causation, and high in control (Hattie, 1996). Erikson (1968) states that human beings are always aware of who they are. Yet, self-concept is both stable, enduring, and protects against change as well as varying. Hattie (1992) argues that "a basis of this stability is that individuals develop patterns of understanding their conceptions of self via self-consistency, self-enhancement, and self-verification and challenge the boundaries of their self-conceptions" (p.115).

Symbolic Interactionism Theory on Self-Concept

A theoretical perspective that can be used on the structure of the self is the symbolic interactionism theory (Harter, 1996). Symbolic interactionism is defined as a sociological perspective based on the work of Cooley (1902), and Mead (1925, 1934). For these scholars, “the self is considered to be primarily a social construction, crafted through linguistic exchanges (symbolic interactions) with others” (Harter, 1996, p.334). Further, these scholars explained that relationships play an important role in the development of the self (Harter, 1996). The symbolic Interactionism Theory on Self-Concept is considered to be the most popular theory within interpersonal communication studies (Harter, 1996).

Compared to Cooley’s “looking-glass self”, George H. Mead (1925) gave the social interactionism theory a different interpretation by developing the “me-self” concept. Mead argued that “we appear as selves in our conduct insofar as we ourselves take the attitude that others take toward us. We take the role of what may be called the generalized other (p.59) and in doing this, we appear as social objects, as selves (p.270). While Mead usually emphasized the Me-self, he did find the I-self to be important as well, stating that “the I gives the sense of freedom, of initiative, although it must act in consort with the Me-Self” (p.59). (Harter, 1996). Mead (1925) stated that the development of the self-concept relied on interpersonal relationships and ones’ emotions. Further, he explained that the self was developed through time, and was shaped by both external and internal factors (Harter, 1996).

Finally, Blummer (1969) stated that interpersonal relationships and communication depend on the meaning and perception they have on each individual. Language, according to Blummer, is the process in which the mind is aided in formulating ideas through the comprehension of interactions, symbols, and words. Thus, language leads to meaning. The last

concept is thought, which can be described as the understanding of codes, ideas, and labels. This last concept comprises the mind, ideas, values, and way of thinking (Blummer, 1969).

Self-Awareness:

DeVito (1938), defines self-awareness as “the extent to which you know yourself” (p.56). In other words, Burnard & Morrison (1992) define self-awareness as the capacity to become aware of every aspect of the self, with the purpose of developing an individuality and social perception. They argued a developed self-awareness led to changes in behavior and in attitudes towards yourself and others (Burnard & Morrison, 1992).

Heron (1973) argues that one of the most important functions of examining and understanding self-awareness is to be able to differentiate ourselves from others. Additionally, Heron (1973) elaborated on the idea that by becoming self-aware, one can gain control of the self. Burnard & Morrison (1992) argued that as individuals understand and develop their self-awareness, their awareness towards others increases. The result is they become more understanding of others. Therefore, it is argued that the more that we can distinguish ourselves from others, the more we can understand how similar we are to others (Burnard & Morrison, 1992). The importance of having a developed self-awareness has been stated before in literature. Researchers suggest that an increase self-awareness leads to an improvement of the satisfaction on interpersonal relationships (Burnard & Morrison, 1992).

Various methods of developing self-awareness have been explored in previous studies. Methods that have utilized meditation as a tool to increase self-awareness (see for example Kagan 1985, Hargie, Owen, and Dickson 1987, Bond 1986, Burnard 1989). DeVito (1938) states that an effective method of developing self-awareness is by understanding the self-concept, where questioning who you are may lead to a better understanding of who you actually are

(DeVitto, 1938). A different scholar, Luft (1968) explained that self-awareness can be developed by self-disclosure and social interactions (Burnard & Morrison, 1992).

There are many theories and concepts that talk about the development of self-awareness. However, a well-known approach to self-awareness development is via the use of the Johari Window (Luft, 1969). Through the Johari model of the self, self-awareness can be simplified and explained by the model of the four selves (DeVitto, 1938). The Johari Window was created by Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham. This model is typically used as a tool to evaluate interpersonal communication (Luft & Ingham, 1984). The Johari Window consists of evaluating four selves: the open, blind, hidden, and unknown self. Burnard & Morrison (1992) elaborate on this method by summarizing this approach as follows: The open area is easily described. It is that part of us that we know about ourselves and that others know about us. We are happy to share this information about ourselves with other people. The blind area is that part of us that others know about us but of which we are unaware. Thus, colleagues at work presumably have some opinions about us that we do not know and can therefore, neither agree nor disagree with. The hidden aspect relates to the information we choose not to disclose; therefore, there are some aspects of the individual that remain hidden from others, but it does not necessarily mean that it is hidden equally with others. And lastly, it is stated that the unknown self can also refer to aspects of your personality that you yourself are not even aware of. (Burnard & Morrison, 1992). Further, it holds that these multiple aspects of the self are all dependent of one another (DeVitto, 1938).

Self-awareness is an important aspect of interpersonal communication, and the development of self-awareness by utilizing different tools is well documented. This study will explore how the yoga practice might be an effective intervention to develop self-awareness as

well as the importance of an increased self-awareness with interpersonal communication skills and relationships.

Self-Disclosure

When interpersonal communication is taking place, the act of revealing personal information such as opinions, ideas, and thoughts is described as self-disclosure (Jourard & Lasakow, 1958). Studies have shown that increased interpersonal relationships between two or more individuals generally leads to higher amounts of self-disclosure (Spencer, 1993, 1994). According to Derlega and Grzelak (1979), the act of self-disclosure contains any interpersonal communication that includes revealing information about the self. Thus, it is stated that self-disclosure typically begins with the word “I” (Derlega and Grzelak, 1979). An important element of self-disclosure is that it involves at least two individuals, thus precluding it from being an intrapersonal communication act. DeVitto (1938) explains that in order to have successful self-disclosure, the exchanged communication must be successfully comprehended by the other individual. Being named as one of the most basic forms of human encounter, in simple terms, self-disclosure is defined as the method on how we reveal ourselves to others in various ways of communication (Burnard & Morrison, 1992).

Cox (1989) argues that there are several factors that influence self-disclosure. First, he explains that the length of time that two or more individuals spend together increases self-disclosure. For instance, individuals who have known each other for longer periods of time usually have a higher self-disclosure. Second, he argues that the more intimate the relationships become, the more likely they are to have higher self-disclosure. And lastly, he states that self-disclosure is more inclined to take place when self-disclosure becomes mutual. For instance, when both individuals are equally self-disclosing information, self-disclosure will increase

(Burnard & Morrison, 1992). Similar to Cox, Jourard (1964) states that as someone chooses to self-disclose to an individual, this individual is more likely to be encouraged to reciprocate the self-disclosure. Additionally, by choosing to self-disclose, individuals hope to enhance their interpersonal relationships (Jourard, 1964).

DeVito (1938) identified seven significant factors influencing self-disclosure: (1) Disclosure of others, which basically means that self-disclosure is reciprocal. (2) Number of people, arguing that self-disclosure is higher when the number of people is smaller. (3) Topic, which argues that certain topics are more likely to be disclosed than others. For example, having conversations about money, personality, and body are less common than self-disclosure about tastes and interests (Jourard, 1968). (4) Valence, which is whether the topic is negative or positive. Studies reveal that positive self-disclosures are more common than negative (Hebbet, 1985). (5) Culture, studies reveal that culture exerts powerful influence on self-disclosure. For instance, people in the United States tend to disclose more than other countries (Gudykunst, 1991). Some cultures view the act of self-disclosure as a weakness while others consider it out of place (Hall & Hall, 1987). (6) Gender, most research suggests that women disclose more than men (Naifeh and Smith, 1984). More specifically, women have higher self-disclosure than men about their previous relationships, emotions, ideas, and opinions (Sprecher, 1987). (7) Receiver relationships, meaning that a relationship with the person to whom someone self-discloses influences the frequency and the likelihood of the self-disclosure (Derlega and Berg, 1987).

The importance of self-disclosure in interpersonal communication and relationships is based on the concept that self-disclosure influences how many friendships and interpersonal relationships one has (DeVitto, 1938). Furthermore, studies have shown that those who maintain high levels of self-disclosure report higher levels of self-awareness, as well as higher satisfaction

in their relationships and in their everyday lives (Chaikin and Derlega, 1974; Derlega, Margulis, and Winstead 1987). Some of the benefits of self-disclosure related to this thesis study include the knowledge of the self. By self-disclosing, you gain new perspective on yourself (Cozby, 1973), therefore, you gain a deeper understanding on your own behavior (Mitz, 1982). After a thorough review of the self-disclosure literature, Paul Cozby (1973), states that individuals who possess a healthy state a mind tend to report higher self-disclosure (Cozby, 1973). The ability to cope, specifically with guilt, can be increased through self-disclosure (Cherry, 1991).

Additionally, communication effectiveness can be improved by self-disclosure since it is believed that individuals understand another's messages largely to the extent that they understand the person (DeVito, 1938). The meaning of relationships can be improved by self-disclosure, since self-disclosure may help achieve closer relationships with the person to whom you self-disclose (Schmidt and Cornelius, 1987). Lastly, the physiological health that self-disclosure brings has been proven in previous studies (Pennebaker, 1991) by demonstrating that people who self-disclose are less vulnerable to illness by reducing stresses that usually accompany nondisclosure. Literature suggests that as individuals, we disclose ourselves to a number of different sorts of people (Burnard & Morrison, 1992). For the purpose of this thesis study, a brief summary of self-disclosure with family, friends, colleagues, and strangers will be reviewed.

Self-disclosure with Family

It may be obvious to state that self-disclosure in the family is highly important and overall common. However, Jaurard (1971), suggests that people disclose selectively to family members. Through his research, Jaurard (1971) discovered that children, for example, do not tend to disclose equally to both fathers and mothers. Additionally, Pinkus & Dare (1975), discuss

the frequency with which “family secrets” are uncovered in counselling and therapy. They claim that such secrets can be handed down through families through seemingly unconscious processes (Pinkus & Dare, 1975).

Self-disclosure with Friends

Similar to self-disclosure with parents, Jaurard (1971) suggests that people do not disclose equally to both opposite and same sex friends. It might be imagined that same sex relationships allow friends to share commonalities of experience that are not shared across the sexes. To suggest this, however, is to suggest a theory of men and women as being essentially different over and above the obvious gender and sexual differences. Further, Burnard & Morrison (1992) argue that the deeper the level of friendship leads to higher self-disclosure.

Self-disclosure with Colleagues

According to Burnard & Morrison (1992), the category of colleagues is sometimes a large one and might include people with whom we have close, personal relationships that would almost count as friendships, and at the other end of the spectrum, people we work with but with whom we have little interpersonal relationships. Further, they argue how disclosure within colleagues usually involves work-related conversations, rather than the intimate and personal information you typically disclose with friends and family members (Burnard & Morrison, 1992).

Self-disclosure with Strangers

Self-disclosing with strangers is influenced by various factors. The “stranger on the train” phenomenon has been noted in the social psychology literature (Atkinson, et al 1990). This concept elaborates on the idea that individuals are more likely to self-disclose with strangers due to the fact that strangers are generally unlikely to meet again (DeVito, 1938). Studies indicate

that interpersonal relationships and interpersonal communication are more satisfactory when self-disclosure increases (Collins & Miller, 1994; Omarzu, 2000). People generally begin relationships by sharing superficial information and then gradually share increasingly personal information about the self (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Miell & Duck, 1984). They then approximate each other in increasingly personal disclosures (reciprocity effect; Berg, 1987), and each small bump in intimacy of disclosure is often followed by a small bump in relational closeness (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Miller, 1990; Reis & Shaver, 1988). In other words, self-disclosure is proposed to be a cyclical process by which disclosures produces closeness, which in turn prompts people to self-disclose more intimate and personal information.

In addition to the above, a particular and interesting form of self-disclosure to this thesis study is the disclosure to the self. Literature suggests that self-disclosure to the self occurs via the use of diaries and journals (Burnard & Morrison, 1992). Studies reveal that a key element of positive interpersonal communication is self-disclosure (Collins & Miller, 1994; Cozby, 1973; Derlega & Berg, 1987; Derlega & Grzelak, 1979; Derlega, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993; Jourard, 1971b; Jourard & Lasakow, 1958; Kelly & McKillop, 1996; Tamir & Mitchell, 2012).

Overall, the process of disclosing contains many diverse elements, which include differences in the willingness to disclose information, the content of the information being disclosed and the effect that information has on the discloser and recipient (Jones & Gordon, 1972). Jourard's initial Self Disclosure Questionnaire (SDQ; 1958) was created to address the issue of measuring self-disclosure, with subsequent scales analyzing different aspects in regards to this construct. Current research has tried to define the factors of self-disclosure, but no overarching theory has been universally determined (Collins & Miller, 1994; Omarzu, 2000). The difficulty of self-disclosure is active in that it relays entirely in different factors. This in part

has led to the lack of defining models or theories in predicting self-disclosure behaviors and the cognitive process involved.

Omarzu (2000) developed a model to better understand the process that individuals go through when choosing to self-disclose and eventually, the actual self-disclosing to other people. The model suggests that individuals approach self-disclosure in order to control social interactions and to achieve goals, and assumes that self-disclosure is a one-sided process by focusing on the reason the disclosure is taking place. However, Reis and Shaver's (as cited in Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998) "interpersonal process model of intimacy suggests that level of self-disclosure and responsiveness from both the discloser and the recipient is an integral part of forming intimacy in close relationships" (p.17). While Omarzu's (2000) model accounts for an available and appropriate recipient, it leaves out the characteristics of said recipient and thus ignoring a large part of these types of social interactions (Miller, Berg, & Archer, 1983). It is also suggested that the process of self-disclosure is a linear one; certain cognitive and behavioral steps are taken in a specific order and must be accounted for before proceeding to the next step (Omarzu, 2000). Cognitive research has shown that such decision making does not happen in a linear fashion. Instead, decision making is both conscious and unconscious, with thought processes and other variables being continuously taken into account (Nordgren & Dijksterhuis, 2011).

Self-Esteem:

Self-esteem, or an individual's sense of value or worth (Taylor et al, 2000), can be expressed in one's speech and behaviors (Mojarrad, 2012). Self-esteem can be affected by many factors, such as school, friends, and internal issues; however, the family's role in shaping self-esteem seems to be fundamental (Razaei-Dehaghani, 2016). Typically, self-esteem

gradually increases through adolescence; however, studies reveal that it often decreases during puberty (Mokaire, 2013). Mojarrad (2012) concluded that one of the most important indicators of an individual's personality is her/his level of self-esteem.

Studies have indicated that individuals who have a higher self-esteem usually have a distinctive knowledge of their self-concept (Antonucci 1989, Peuskensb, 2005). Additionally, Miller et al. (1989) suggested that self-esteem is linked directly to self-disclosure. Studies reveal that stressors involving impaired relationships with others were the only ones associated with lowered self-esteem (Miller et al. 1989). Therefore, self-esteem might be determined by the quality of interpersonal relationships (Burnard & Morrison, 1992). Further, it has been proven that people with higher self-esteem perform better and have more successful interpersonal relationships and communication skills (DeVitto, 1938).

Brown and Harris (1978) suggest that low self-esteem has a central place in the development of depression. The absence of someone to confide in, trust, and communicate is a major factor in both low self-esteem and in depression (Harris, 1988). Additionally, low self-esteem can lead to physical and psychological illnesses such as anxiety, depression, behavioral and communication problems, and deviant behaviors (Mojarrad, 2012). Therefore, these studies conclude that low self-esteem increases vulnerability and leads to impaired social interpersonal relationships (Mojarrad, 2012).

In this chapter, I outlined the history of yoga and the proven benefits of the practice. Additionally, I defined the concept of interpersonal communication and its value to society. While interpersonal communication has been studied for years by many scholars and its literature is well documented, this is the first research study that explores how a regular yoga practice might increase the satisfaction in interpersonal communication. Utilizing yoga in

research as an intervention to treat different symptoms is rapidly increasing. Many scholars have studied and documented the benefits of a regular yoga practice, and this thesis study hopes to add to the growing field of yoga by discovering the connection it might have with interpersonal communication.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

“Yoga does not change the way we see things; it transforms the person who sees.”- BKS Iyengar

3.1 Study Information & Study Area

In this study, I collected data from experienced yoga practitioners. Previous studies suggest that the benefits of the yoga practice take a considerable amount of time. Most of the research studies that involve a yoga intervention are based on a 12-to-16-week program length. These studies include lowering hypertension and cardiac autonomic function in patients (Punita, 2016), developing mindfulness through a yoga practice (Watson, 2014), regulating blood pressure (Nelson, 2014), and reducing stress-related symptoms and diagnoses (Lundholm, 2013). Additionally, according to Klatt et al (2009), the benefits of the yoga practice can be noticeable after three months of practicing yoga. Therefore, I recruited individuals who have practiced yoga for at least 12 weeks.

In order to understand the participants’ perspectives regarding their yoga practice, the designed methodological approach focused on face-to-face in-depth interviews. I was motivated to use this approach as interviews, a form of interpersonal communication, would be excellent tools for gathering data related to this study (Roulston, 2012). Based on methodological descriptions of how to formulate and ask questions recommended for qualitative interviewers, I opted to use open-ended questions and follow-up responses, as well as to listen respectfully allowing sufficient wait time for participants to answer. Lazaresfeld (1944) defines this method and its general goals as:

- (1) Wider explanation of significances
- (2) To differentiate opinions

(3) Motivations

(4) Attitudes

(5) Interpretations (Lindolf & Taylor, 2011).

For this thesis study, I felt comfortable using this approach as it as an exploratory research. For the interviews and data-collection, I opted to use an audio recording device so I could analyze and transcribe the interviews later in my notes.

As I was planning my approach, I met both advantages and disadvantages for conducting my study. One of the challenges I encountered with my methodological approach was being a certified yoga instructor in El Paso, TX. As a certified yoga instructor, I was positioned as an “insider researcher” which can be described as a researcher who is directly involved with the research scenery (Robson, 2002). I was concerned with the validity of the interview approach as I was recruiting yoga students who I have known for a significant amount of time. However, experts argue that insider researchers have an advantage over the “outsiders” as they have a better understanding and knowledge of the area they are researching (Tedlock, 2000).

Additionally, participants of the study may feel more open and comfortable to discuss issues that they might not discuss with someone they do not know (Tierney 1994). Therefore, an insider researcher has the advantage to collect richer data that would increase the validity of the study.

Additionally, other advantages of conducting a research as an insider include, trust from the participants of the study and understanding the topic, as well as obtaining permission to conduct the research and enable the study project (Coghlan, 2003; Herrmann, 1989; Rounney, 2005; Tedlock, 2000). For my data collection process, I took advantage of my position as an insider researcher: For recruitment I used my yoga network and connections within the city of El Paso, Texas. These connections and networks gave me the opportunity to recruit participants

prior to the study. Additionally, the owner of the yoga studio where I currently teach was eager to help me recruit potential participants for my study. Thus, my recruitment process was easier as my requests for interviews were almost turned down by the members of the yoga studio, which an outsider in such a study might have experienced. A second advantage that I noticed as an inside researcher, was the acceptance and openness from the participants. Through the interview process, the participants gathered a sense of understanding and knowledge from the topics they were discussing.

While being an insider researcher has many advantages, I also faced some disadvantages. These disadvantages might include a “role duality” my role as both a yoga instructor and a researcher; “making assumptions”, as well as the participants of the study omitting details about the topic since they might assume that you already know what they know (Herman, 1989).

I worked on overcoming these disadvantages by taking some precautions. Regarding “role duality”, my concern was that potential participants would not take the research seriously, as they know me as their yoga instructor and not a researcher (Burke & Kirton, 2006; Herrmann, 1989). However, many of the yoga students who were potential candidates for the study were aware that I was a graduate student, and some were aware of my research study. This allowed me to conduct the data collecting process as well as to gain validity as a researcher. Additionally, during the interview process, I separated myself as a yoga instructor and a researcher by not engaging in conversation while conducting the interviews. Instead, I wrote down my observations and shared them only with my thesis advisor. This process guaranteed the participant’s confidence and security for the study and allowed me to collect valuable and rich data.

A different concern that I encountered while planning the interview process was over which interview questions to ask. Being an experienced yoga practitioner myself, I feared that the questions might be based on my own personal experience with the practice. Therefore, I pursued external help (Rooney, 2005) and input from my thesis advisor. This invaluable contribution from my advisor allowed me to finalize the questions. While conducting the interviews, I collected data without prejudices. I categorized and analyzed the data overcoming my own biases as an inside researcher (Smyth & Holian, 2008). These biases included jumping to conclusions or interpreting the responds based on the perspective I had regarding some participants.

Through the analysis, interviews were essential keys in understanding how a steady yoga practice benefits the way these practitioners communicate with those around them. These in-depth interviews were the most appropriate methodological approach since the study was exploratory. As Lindolf & Taylor (2011) explained, in-depth interviews are valuable when the research study is exploratory and is key in developing new issues or topics. By conducting face-to-face interviews, my hope was to gain deeper understanding and uncover valuable information regarding the participant's points of views, as well as to notice any cue that might be a helpful addition for the results of the study. Through the interview process, I was determined to answer the following research question:

RQ. How does practicing yoga impact the practitioners' interpersonal communication?

3.2 Recruitment

As a current yoga instructor in El Paso, Texas, I had the advantage of being familiar with many yoga practitioners within the city. Being part of the local yoga community, I had the opportunity to share information about my research study before conducting the recruitment

process. This allowed me to create a list of potential candidates who might participate in my study once my university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) had approved it. The initial contact list included 5 yoga instructors, who had a regular yoga practice. Once UTEP's IRB approval was received, the participants were notified via email. The initial 5 yoga instructors from the contact list were given priority and all agreed to be interviewed. A total of 19 yoga practitioners were interviewed; 5 came from the original contact list and the remaining 14 were recruited using the following recruitment procedure:

1. The initial plan for recruitment was to use snowball sampling. The yoga community in El Paso, Texas is barely growing, limiting the amount of yoga practitioners who have had a strong regular yoga practice for at least three months. I felt confident that this approach will be useful to my study as the participants will refer me to other potential candidates (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981).
2. The second plan for recruitment included a flyer that was distributed to three local yoga studios. The flyer script read: "Hello. My name is Patricia Flores, I am a graduate student at the University of Texas at El Paso. I am doing a research study looking at how the practice of yoga changes and benefits interpersonal communication with those who practice yoga 2-3 times per week. Would you be interested in participating in an audio-recorded interview lasting no more than thirty minutes? If interested, please call or email Patricia Flores (email, phone number).
3. The final plan for recruitment included a sponsor for my study. Lindolf & Taylor (2011) defined a sponsor as an ally to you and your study who promotes you and your research with potential candidates. The sponsor's help was extremely valuable and helped me

recruit 6 additional participants. The sponsor's enabled me to become an ally and a valued member with the recruited participants.

In order to gain a strong interview participant network, formal criteria for selection were discussed upon the first meeting with possible interview participants. Engaging in an initial conversation was the best way to measure their dedication to the practice. The initial concern I faced while conducting the interviews was the number of interviews I needed to conduct for my study. Lindolf & Taylor (2011) elaborate on such concern by explaining how many researchers who are new to qualitative inquiry often ask: "what size should the sample be?" In qualitative research, sample proceeds in serial fashion, that is, one adds new instances depending on who and what has come before, so that ongoing sampling supports the emerging theorizing (Tuckett, 2004). The end of this process comes into view when new data no longer adds much of significance to the concepts that have been developed. As a consequence, the number of data sources varies from one study to another (Lindolf & Taylor, 2011). Therefore, as I was conducting interviews and recording data from different participants, I began to notice similar themes appearing in my notes which led me to decide to stop recruiting participants as I felt strongly about the collected data. Through the coding process I noticed a saturation of data, which led me to decide to stop collecting data.

For my data analysis I opted to use the grounded theory, which is one of the most influential models for analyzing qualitative data. Grounded theory is a research methodology that allows the researcher to explore and analyze different categories that emerge from the data collection process. Grounded theory is often viewed as an untraditional model of research, as it takes a reverse approach on research. As data is collected and sort into categories, these categories become the basis for new theory. Thus, grounded theory takes a different approach

from the traditional model of research, where the researcher begins by selecting an existing theoretical framework and proceeds to collect data to prove whether or not it supports her study (Martin & Turner, 1986). Prior to conducting the research study, a literature review was completed for proposal. After completing the data analysis, new themes emerged and were the primary focused for added literature.

3.3 Data Collection

Data was collected through 19 in-depth face-to-face interviews involving yoga practitioners. Kahn and Cannell (1957) describe interviewing as engaging in conversation with a primary goal of gaining data. All interviews were conducted in April and May 2016. One of the challenges I faced for conducting the interviews was timing and location. In order to avoid conflicts of location and scheduling interviews, I tried to arrange location and time with flexibility as soon as a recruited the participants. For location, I opted to use two different yoga studios where the participants currently teach/attend yoga classes, as best results are obtained when the participants feel relax (Lindolf & Taylor, 2011). For those participants who had narrower schedules, I opted to use a local coffee place near UTEP.

Prior to conducting the interviews, all participants were given an Informed Consent Form that provided information about the study (background, purpose, and contact information). After the Informed Consent Form was signed by the participants, interviews were initiated. Nondirective questions were carefully selected for the interviews. I opted to use nondirective questions in order to allow the participants the freedom to answer openly to every question (Lindolf & Taylor, 2011). The following seven qualifying questions were implemented for the purpose of this thesis study:

1. What is your definition of yoga?

2. Why did you decide to start a yoga practice?
3. Why do you continue practicing yoga?
4. Has your practice made a difference in how you perceive yourself and those around you? If so, in what way?
5. Can you describe how practicing yoga has made a difference in your life?
6. Has practicing yoga changed the way you communicate with those around you? If so, in what way?
7. Has practicing yoga changed the way you communicate with yourself? If so, in what way?

For the interview process, I opted to use an audio recording device so I could analyze and transcribe the interviews later in my notes. This option provided a friendlier approach for the participants. I felt comfortable using an audio recording device as rather than writing down notes, I felt more confident and comfortable to sit back and listen to the responses of the participants (Lindolf & Taylor, 2011). The analysis and transcription of the interviews data was completed when all study interviews concluded. The transcription process was performed no longer than twenty-four hours after each interview in order for me to remember important nonverbal cues. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process; no data included in the analysis identified the individual, as all data and individuals were coded with pseudonyms.

As a result of recording 19 interviews, I was determined to set out a clear, logical protocol that I could follow in the transcribing process. Mergenthaler and Stinson (1992), McLellan, MacQueen, and Neideg (2003) discussed seven fundamentals as guidance for transcribing, including preserving the naturalness of the transcript. As I was transcribing the

recorded interviews, I carefully recorded every exact word. Lindolf & Taylor (2011) elaborate on the idea of original speech styles is an important element of qualitative research. Additionally, I did not want to mislay valuable material from the interviews since by editing or altering a participant's responds might change the audience's thoughts (Lindolf & Taylor, 2011).

In order to find emerging themes, I opted to use a manual method of analysis. Manual methods of analysis can engage all of the data in their original form. By cutting my documents and sorting them in different categories, I was able to identify different patterns that later became codes. Once I gained a rich amount of data, I decided to create categories. By categorizing my data, I begin to identify different emerging themes (Spiggle, 1994). From within the categories, I then initiated highlighting different codes. Codes serve as shorthand devices to label, separate, compile, and organize data (Charmaz, 1983). Three features of grounded theory are especially important for analysts of qualitative data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967):

1. Emergent theory is “grounded in” the relationships between data and the categories into which they are coded.
2. Categories develop through an ongoing process of comparing units of data with each other.
3. Codes, categories, and category definitions continue to change dynamically while the researcher is still in the field, with new data altering the scope and terms of the analytic framework.

Since the first stage of the grounded theory model involves coding as many categories as possible from the data, I initially created 7 different categories for potential themes that emerged from my data. Following the next two stages of the grounded theory approach, *integration* and

dimensionalization (Lindolf & Taylor, 2011), allowed me to reshape the categories and produce deeper meaning of them, and I ended up with five categories.

This analysis identified five major themes associated with the yoga practice and interpersonal communication. The recruitment process and carefully selection of participants ultimately aided in giving additional insight to five themes that emerged from the study: 1. Mindfulness, 2. Self-Awareness 3. Self-Acceptance, 4. Personal Growth, 5. Patience. Each of these themes will be explored and explained in the following chapter. These five themes will be analyzed and will aid in discovering whether or not there is a positive relationship between the yoga practice and interpersonal communication.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

“When the practice is done for a long time, without interruption, and with sincere devotion, then the practice becomes a firmly rooted, stable and solid foundation.”-Yoga Sutra 1.14

4.0 Analysis

In this research study, I recruited participants including yoga students who have a regular yoga practice, as well as certified yoga instructors. An important consideration in recruitment was the amount of time practicing yoga that would be required for the potential participants. Although yoga instructors have different opinions on this matter, previous studies suggest that the benefits of the practice take at least three months in order for them to be noticeable (Freeman, 2007). Therefore, I decided to recruit participants who had practiced yoga for at least three months.

Both female and male participants were recruited for the study. The participants' backgrounds were varied, ranging from different socioeconomic levels to varying levels of education. All of the participants were members of a yoga studio in El Paso, Texas, some as students and others as instructors. The amount of time participants had been practicing and/or teaching yoga ranged from two to thirty-five years. Lastly, the styles of yoga that the participants practiced and/or taught included: hatha yoga, ashtanga yoga, iyengar yoga, and rocket yoga. The analysis section will explore in-depth the five categories that emerged through the data collection process, which are: mindfulness, the self, acceptance, personal growth, and patience. Each of these categories is an important factor when concluding whether or not a regular yoga practice benefits interpersonal communication. The statements from the participants will remain anonymous and pseudonyms will be used.

4.1 Mindful Communication and Yoga

Previous research studies have shown that the practice of yoga can help to create and develop mindfulness. While these studies have shown that an increase in mindfulness leads to better interpersonal relationships and communication, there is still a gap in literature that connects yoga and interpersonal communication.

During a yoga session, the practitioners are encouraged to shift their complete focus and attention to what is happening inside the body. By developing this awareness, the practice teaches them to pay attention to their breathing and any recurring thoughts. According to the participants, this continuous technique of concentration and focused attention to the body's internal sensations is a valuable exercise and aids them in becoming aware of their own thoughts and behavior. These learned practices extend into their everyday lives. The participants explain how becoming mindful heightened their sense of internal awareness and brought better control over their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors:

You fall in love with the yoga practice. You start to believe that yoga was meant for you. When I started the practice, I stretched muscles I didn't even think I had. Through the years, you realize that concentration is a big part of the practice, you need to be present in the moment when you are doing a pose in order to not lose your balance. Once you understand how the practice works, the rewards are endless. Yoga has helped me be more mindful about my life and my daily routine. I used to worry all the time about the future, planning ahead. My practice brings me back to reality, it drags my feet back to the floor. I have learned to notice what my body needs and to take care of myself better.

One of the most important benefits of mindfulness is learning to cope better with stressful situations. Mindfulness teaches the mind to reset and understand the importance of coming back

to the present moment. One of the participants of the study shared an essay she wrote about how the practice of yoga and being mindful helped her cope with the death of her best friend:

My best friend committed suicide about two years ago. It was by far, the worst news of my life. I felt completely lost so I started practicing yoga on a daily basis. Practicing yoga made my body stronger, but it also calmed me down. I took it as a sort of therapy, the breathing exercises and meditation soothed me. My practice became my holy space. I drowned myself in the practice, my body became stronger and I started to feel again. I meditated every morning, became mindful of my days and what I was going through. I literally felt how my heart began to heal. I became mindful of how much I was hurting myself by thinking and blaming myself for Claudia's death. I learned that it is ok to cry and to feel sad, I allowed myself to feel all types of emotions (Yogini 7).

This is a powerful statement that shows how yoga helps people cope with and heal from difficult situations. Through mindfulness, individuals develop a healthier state of mind. As such, individuals who have a more positive perspective on life feel better about themselves and others. Previous studies have shown that individuals that go through challenging situations tend to seclude themselves and be less social (Jourard & Lasakow, 1958). In this study I suggest that by coping with and overcoming difficult situations through a regular yoga practice, an individual will see an enhancement of interpersonal communication and relationships.

Regarding interpersonal communication's link to mindfulness, I analyzed how developing a mindful behavior provides a better control of emotions and attitudes. The participants shared how they noticed a decrease in arguments and conflicts with others. They attributed this change to their yoga practice. One of the participants shared:

Yoga has helped me think about what I am going to say before I say it. As before, I jumped to conclusions and moments later I would regret it the minute I said it, but now, I think better and I have a more thoughtful mind. Having control of your words and what you are about to say makes a huge difference in the way you communicate with others, it completely transforms it. You become mindful about others, their emotions and you become less judgmental. You learn to understand that everyone is different, with different thoughts and different ideas, when you take that off from [sic] the equation, communication just flows better.

By analyzing the data, I concluded that mindfulness leads to better interpersonal communication skills when the following are developed: (1) Language (2) Perspective (3) Presence.

1. Language: Being mindful of the words you are saying while communicating with others will lead to better interpersonal communication. A participant shared, “during an argument with a person, I would say words and regret them the second I said them, now, I take a moment and think before I speak.” (Yogi2).
2. Perspective: Being mindful of the people who you are communicating and interacting with might aid in resolving conflicts and disagreements. Additionally, it can develop healthier relationships.
3. Presence: By being present in the moment, coping with difficult and stressful situations will be easier to handle. Yogini2 shared “I work at a hospital and I always find myself in very stressful situations, I used to cry almost every day. And I would get upset at my coworkers and isolated [sic] myself from everyone. But my practice

has taught me to live in each moment and learn to let go, and that became my mantra.”

These three learned behaviors were proven to be a key element in the enhancement of interpersonal communication.

4.2 The Self, Yoga, & Effective Interpersonal Communication

In this section of the analysis, I will be discussing self-concept, self-awareness, and self-disclosure and how each subcategory is linked to yoga and aids in the development of interpersonal communication.

Self-concept:

Knowing who you are as a person is a concept that not everyone possesses. The self-concept, defined by Shavelson et al. (1976), is a person’s self-perceptions formed through experience with and interpretations of his or her environment. In this thesis study, the participants acknowledged that their yoga practice helped them discover who they are as a person. As one of the participants shared:

I’ve learned so much about myself through my practice. I am more aware of my physical body but also I am more aware of who I really am as a person. Yoga does that, it challenges you and breaks you to the point where you see yourself differently (Yogi16).

Another participant explained, “yoga gives you the time and space to notice your ideas and what you are thinking. It makes you realize who you really are as a person” (Yogini6). Essentially, by learning who you are as a person, your interpersonal relationships and how you communicate with others begin to positively transform.

The participants claimed that “the deeper you dig into the yoga practice, the more you discover who you are” (Yogi1). For instance, because overcoming some yoga poses takes time

and practice, the participants stated that the frustration they felt made them realize they lacked empathy or patience. As one of the participants said,

I would cry every single time I couldn't balance perfectly or get on a headstand. After a while, I begin to realize how silly that was and I noticed that I would react the same way in other aspects of my life. (Yogini13)

An increased awareness of the self makes disagreements and conflicts easier to handle. Knowing who you are informs the way you treat others, which results in healthier and more positive interpersonal communication.

Self-awareness

Scholars define self-awareness as the process of noticing and exploring who you are as a person (Burnard & Morrison, 1992). In other words, DeVito (1938) defines self-awareness as the extent to which you know yourself. Currently, there are various methods of developing self-awareness that have been explored in previous studies (Heron, 1973, Kagan 1985, Hargie, Owen, and Dickson 1987, Bond 1986, Burnard 1989). One of the methods that has been explored for development of self-awareness is meditation (Burnard & Morrison, 1992). Meditation, like mindfulness, is a practice that can be developed through yoga. Additionally, previous studies have mentioned how the practice of yoga provides a perfect scenario and opportunity to explore self-awareness (Wittine, 1995), and such studies have proven that the yoga practice aids in the development of self-awareness (Wittine, 1995).

In this research study, the participants contributed to this claim by stating how a regular yoga practice develops and improves the way they see themselves. The skills of developing self-awareness through a yoga practice begins with the physical aspect, as one of the participants explained how “practicing yoga makes you aware of every movement you are doing. You get on

your mat and begin moving and taking breaths with every single move” (Yogini 11).

Additionally, this study revealed that as you develop self-awareness, you get a better perspective on how you treat others. One of the participants explained:

When you are practicing yoga, you bring your mind and thoughts to your breath.

Sometimes, your mind begins to wander outside the mat and you start to think about other things. And that’s when you really have to bring your attention back to your body and what you are doing. (Yogini4).

One approach to developing self-awareness that has not been mentioned before in literature is the practice of setting intentions. This study revealed that during a yoga session, the practitioners were encouraged to set intentions for their own personal practice. During the class, the practitioners gain “control” of their thoughts by bringing their attention back to the intention. For instance, one of the participants explained:

I like to set an intention for my practice, and every day is a different intention. If I am feeling stressed out, the intention might be to breathe. And this intention helps me overcome my practice. As I am moving through the poses, if I catch myself thinking about something that worries me, I shift my focused back to my intention and then feel much better. When my practice is done, I feel happier and more connected to myself (Yogi6).

This suggests that setting intentions on a daily basis might be a beneficial tool in the development of self-awareness.

Interpersonal communication and self-awareness have been linked in previous studies (DeVito, 1938). These studies reveal that people who have higher self-awareness have more positive interpersonal relationships and communication. Participants in this study stated that

learning to be aware of who they are as individuals resulted in stronger and more positive relationships. For instance, one of the participants explained:

I've learned to be aware of who I am. It sounds weird, and it's hard to imagine that I didn't know [sic] who I was until a couple of years ago. And this has changed my life forever. I feel happier and more connected to others. For example, I have had previous negative relationships with different people, and because I have learned to be aware of myself and how others see me, I have handled those negative situations way better. I take a moment to breathe, and bring my mind out of the negative situations, and I try to put myself in the other person's shoes. And then it hits me, I try to ask myself: Is this person trying to hurt my feelings or is it just the way they think? And that helps you see the truth of the situation. (Yogini2)

Being aware of who you are and how others perceive you is helpful in developing positive interpersonal communication skills. Learning to identify stressful situations and how you react to them creates an easier way of solving the arguments and conflicts. Additionally, by developing self-awareness this study revealed that you open more to different people and are more apt to create new friendships.

Self-disclosure

Self-disclosure is defined as how you reveal personal information to others (Jourard & Lasakow, 1958). In this study, the participants explained how their self-disclosure began to change by becoming self-aware and developing a knowledge of who they are (self-concept). For instance, one of the participants revealed:

By becoming aware of who I am I begin to be aware of other people. I learned that everything is a reflection of myself. If I have a negative opinion about others, that is a

reflection of myself. When you see the beauty in a person that is also a reflection of yourself. When I meet new people, I am more open and less judgmental. I opened up to friendships that I thought I would never have. (Yogini5)

There are several factors that influence how much a person decides to self-disclose. While literature shows that gender and nationality play a big role (Naifeh and Smith, 1984), in this study, those characteristics did not influence the process of self-disclosure from the participants. The yoga practice treats both important elements of the development of self-disclosure: self-awareness and self-concept. Therefore, by practicing yoga an individual can become more open to new friendships and relationships and develop better interpersonal communication skills. The participants explained how by practicing yoga they noticed how they became more “friendly and open with strangers” (Yogi3) and social interactions became easier to handle:

I had started yoga when my daughter was little to help me lose weight, but then I started having anxiety attacks when I was with a group of people, I became isolated and never wanted to leave the house, after my second child was born it got worse and they prescribed medication and I never wanted to try medication but they said it would help with living day to day so I tried it, and it felt horrible and he suggested yoga, and that was it. There are moments that I feel that anxiety coming back and is a reminder that I have to come back to my practice. (Yogini9)

Therefore, in this study I suggest that a regular yoga practice is beneficial in preventing and treating different stress factors that create negative social skills and interpersonal communication. I agree with previous findings on self-disclosure regarding its positive benefits (Chaikin and Derlega, 1974; Derlega, Margulis, and Winstead 1987), as participants found

themselves interacting with groups that they never would have considered prior to practicing yoga. As one participant explained: “you feel so good when you do your practice that you want to be good. You feel the need to be good to everyone around you. You start creating communities with people you don’t even knew before” (Yogini8). By practicing yoga, the practitioners began to break the walls that prevented them from building new relationships.

4.3 Acceptance and Effective Interpersonal Communication

For this thesis study, the term acceptance will include both self-acceptance and acceptance of others. Acceptance refers to the yoga practitioner’s ability to accept their own limitations and emotions, as well as those of others without judgment. The participants of the study elaborate on how by developing acceptance, they became less demanding of themselves and others.

Similar to other beneficial aspects of the practice, the development of acceptance through yoga begins in the physical practice. The participants revealed how during a yoga session, “you come to accept where your body is in a certain pose” (Yogi8). Additionally, the participants explain how some yoga asanas are extremely challenging. In order to overcome the frustrations that this might cause, the practitioner is “forced” to accept the fact that the body is not ready for that pose. By overcoming the emotional stress that a yoga pose can cause, the practitioner slowly accepts the strength and flexibility of their own body. The participants explained that their practice has allowed them to become less self-critical and has nurtured their ability to accept their bodies the way they are. In addition, yoga has helped them cultivate a sense of emotional self-acceptance, which was judged to be a necessity for achieving personal acceptance:

Yoga has helped me see myself, really notice my body and who I am as a person. It starts with the physical aspect, you learn to accept your body as it is, how it looks, even if you

don't necessary like it. Then you start accepting where you are in a pose, you learn to be kind with yourself. I would get angry if I couldn't do a certain pose, but then I learned that I was just getting angry at myself. I learned to laugh about it and move on. I think that translates with your life as well. But eventually you begin accepting every situation, no matter how difficult it might be. You accept your present, and learn to deal with it or let go. This practice changes everything. Because you accept yourself, you accept other people as well, with their flaws and everything. (Yogi6)

Self-acceptance has been defined as an individual's satisfaction with oneself and previous studies suggests that is a necessity for good mental health (Shepard, 1979). By fostering a self-acceptance philosophy, the yoga practitioner begins to develop acceptance for others. In other words, this self-acceptance transitions to the other aspects of their lives. Therefore, in this study I suggest that by practicing yoga, the practitioner develops a mindset that allows them to be more accepting of others. As a result, their satisfaction with the way they communicate with others increases. One participant shared:

When I am having a conversation with someone, I am able to understand it from a different perspective. I no longer feel the need to criticize what others are saying, I actually criticize myself if I do. Before, I would listen to someone and correct everything about their grammar, or correct everything about their speech, but now, I accept that person to be without me being negative around them. I allow them to be at peace because that's how I feel. I understand that if I judge and don't accept others, that's just a reflection of what I am feeling. And because I am always at a state of acceptance and ease, that's how I treat others. (Yogini12)

Being able to accept others without judgment creates more positive interactions. This study suggests that the yoga practice helps in the enhancement of interpersonal communication through acceptance in two steps: first, the yoga practitioner develops self-acceptance through challenging situations and discipline they encounter in their yoga practice. Then, the practitioner begins to develop acceptance of others, creating positive interpersonal relationships and communication.

4.4 Personal Growth

Both self-esteem and self-confidence were benefits from the yoga practice according to the participants of the study. While they are defined differently in literature (DeVito, 1938), in this study, self-confidence and self-esteem will be referred to collectively as personal growth. This decision was made as the participants mentioned both terms interchangeably. The participants of the study elaborated on how their yoga practice cultivated in them a sense of self-esteem and confidence. Previous studies have shown how self-confidence and esteem are defined as an acquired attitude that can be achieved by various practices (Lua, 2001). A participant explained: “having self-confidence changed many things in my life, from the way I see myself, to the way I am with others” (Yogi9). As the yoga practice becomes stronger, the self-esteem and confidence of the practitioner begins to increase. For example, practitioners have explained how yoga has improved their confidence: “yoga made me more self-confident and not because I can do a certain pose, but because I learned that there is nothing to prove to anybody, it was something to prove to myself” (Yogi, 5); “Yoga has helped me have more confidence in myself, learning that I am not perfect, but because I am not perfect I have the opportunity to grow and expand” (Yogini, 8). These statements reveal that a regular yoga practice fosters confidence that can be translated as personal growth.

There are some styles of yoga that are considered to be more physically demanding than other forms. Some styles, such as “hot yoga”, makes the practitioner sweat more than the average yoga class. Further, ashtanga yoga is believed to be the most demanding on the body, and the serious practitioners often adopt a vegetarian diet, which transforms their bodies by making them leaner and stronger. While there is no doubt that a regular yoga practice might change the physical appearance of the practitioners by toning the body and losing any extra weight, it is the change of thinking and perceiving that creates self-confidence in the yoga practitioner. It is true that any type of physical activity might potentially aid in developing self-confidence and self-esteem. However, while most physical activity increases these concepts by “improving” the physical appearance of the individual, the yoga practice takes a deeper step:

When I started doing yoga I was very shy, very self-conscious. I joined the studio hoping to lose weight. The first yoga classes were very challenging, I felt very uncomfortable and hated the poses. I continued doing yoga for a couple of weeks but I didn't notice any results. So one day I asked the instructor how long does it usually take to lose weight doing yoga. He said, “yoga will eventually help you lose weight and will align your body, but if you stick for long enough, I promise you that your weight will be the last thing you will care about.” It took me years to finally understand what he meant. And that's true, yoga helped me be confident about my body and feel happy about how I look. (Yogini, 5)

Therefore, by building self-confidence and self-esteem through accepting who you are rather than by improving how you look, the deeper transformation begins to take place. As one of the practitioners added:

I see yoga as a metaphor of life. You find yourself in these uncomfortable and challenging situations, but you can't skip to the next position. You learn to breathe and

let go. To me, my biggest challenge was the headstand. I tried every single day for eight months and just couldn't do it. But then, after months of falling down, my legs went up, and I was able to hold the headstand for three breaths. The moment I came down, I started crying. And that's where it clicked, I started to believe in my own potential. I learned to understand that everything takes time, but with courage and determination, eventually you can conquer anything you set your heart on. (Yogi8)

Increased self-confidence and self-esteem were listed by the practitioners as a key element of their improved interpersonal communication skills. By becoming more confident, the participants shared how they became more open to other people, as well as to new experiences. Their boost in confidence was a great tool in increasing their interpersonal communication skills. Many of the participants shared how their practice made them more open to people by reinforcing their self-confidence. One participant explained:

I have always been very shy, very very shy. I think yoga helped me find my voice. I became more outgoing; I am able to connect with people in a different way. I think it starts with physical confidence, you feel stronger not only in your body but in your mind and heart, then, that confidence reflects in your attitude. You feel better with yourself, happier and healthier. And people start to notice that, they want to be around you, and you engage easier in conversation. Who doesn't want to be around happy people?

People with higher self-confidence are more likely to have an easier time interacting with strangers and making new friends. Even when things go wrong, people with high self-confidence are better able to cope (Schuster, 2009). As such, the participants noted that the increased self-confidence that came with their yoga practice helped them build strengthen old relationships and seek out new ones. In the yoga philosophy, confidence is gained by achieving a stronger mind,

rather than building a stronger body. As a result, self-confidence prevails through time, is cultivated by discipline of the mind, and is not altered by age and deterioration of the body.

4.5 Patience and Interpersonal Communication

The final theme that emerged through the analysis is patience. While patience on its own has not been explored in relation to interpersonal communication, this study suggests that patience is an important factor in its development. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the yoga practice and philosophy, years of practice and discipline are required. The practitioners explain how the ability to persevere through the rigors of the practice and transition through gradual change leads in fostering patience. The benefits of the yoga practice take time and discipline, as the participants stated that the beneficial results are not immediate.

There are some individuals who start a yoga practice, and quit soon after, feeling disappointed with no results. This discipline not only requires patience to the practice, but also challenges the practitioner to be patient with their bodies. The participants expressed how even after many years of practicing yoga, there are certain poses that they cannot achieve. In a sense, a yoga practitioner must be patient with their body and not force any pose, learning to accept where her body is without judgment. One practitioner explained:

I hated yoga when I first started the practice, I did not understand it and it took a couple of tries to finally like it. However, it took years to absolutely fell in love with the practice. The transformation takes time, and it doesn't happen right away, but if you stay for long enough, the time you put into your practice it's an investment to your health and happiness. You have to learn to be patient with your body and not force it too much. You can't have the results without understanding the process. (Yogini 7)

Similar to the other themes, learning patience through the yoga practice eventually transitions to the daily life. This study reveals that by having increased patience, individuals build stronger relationships. As the practitioners explained: “I became more patient, humbler, and less judgmental. It allowed me to be more open to have conversations with certain people that before I never approached” (Yogi 3); “I noticed that my practice made me a calmer person, and I think that draws people towards you. When I talk to others, a five-minute conversation can turn into hours” (Yogini 1).

In literature, patience has been defined as the capacity to accept or tolerate delay, trouble, or suffering without getting angry or upset (Reed, 1967). These yoga practitioners noticed a decrease of impatience through their practice. They explained how conversations with other people became more positive, and they found themselves being less judgmental and more open to other people’s views, beliefs, and ideals. Further, patience helped them cope better with stressful situations and difficult people:

I noticed that yoga is very good for keeping you very mellow. I became very patient with people around me, and I try to understand where they are coming from and not judge them at all. Yoga made me a very calmed [sic] person, and I am open to every opinion, and I think that attracts people into my life. (Yogini 8)

These yoga practitioners state that patience and yoga go hand in hand. The practice takes time, effort, and discipline, which in a way trains them to be patient with their own body and their mind. Eventually, this skill enhances the way the yoga practitioners communicate with others.

Based on the five recurring concepts that I discovered in the data analysis, (mindfulness, self-awareness, acceptance, personal growth, and patience) I argue that a regular yoga practice

benefits interpersonal communication. As each concept is a significant component of interpersonal communication, and each has been shown to increase with a regular yoga practice, it follows that yoga has a positive impact on the development of positive interpersonal communication. By developing mindfulness, practitioners become more present in the moment. By learning self-awareness, the yoga practice teaches the practitioners to understand self-concept, which leads them to have a positive outlook on self-disclosure. Further, these procedures help practitioners develop a sense of self-acceptance and acceptance of others. Additionally, the yoga practice increases the self-confidence and self-esteem of the practitioners, which results in stronger relationships and communication. Lastly, the yoga practice helps cultivate patience, allowing the practitioners to create positive interpersonal communications as they become more tolerant of others.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

“Do your practice... all is coming” – Sri K. Pattabhi Jois

Through the exploration of what the yoga practice consists of and how it benefits the practitioner, in this study I sought to uncover any potential connection between yoga and interpersonal communication. To that end, I believe that the in-depth interviews that I held with the practitioners were the most effective methodology to research this question. The interviews with the participants in this study contributed to the ability to emphasize and categorically understand how the yoga practice improves the quality of life, the interpersonal relationships, and overall wellbeing of the practitioners. The yoga practice has existed for thousands of years, and it was introduced to western culture fifty years ago. Although the practice has been tailored for the American culture, it is surely making its way through literature as more scholars research the practice. This study examined how practicing yoga benefits interpersonal communication of the practitioners. By recruiting participants who were local yoga practitioners and instructors, data was categorized and analyzed. For these participants, the practice of yoga has changed their interpersonal relationships and most importantly, their interpersonal communication.

Answer to the previously asked research question was efficiently addressed through the analysis:

RQ. How does practicing yoga impact the practitioners' interpersonal communication?

To support these claims, the data analysis process uncovered five recurring themes in each of the participants' answers: 1. Increased mindfulness 2. Increased self-awareness, 3. Increased self-acceptance, 4. Personal growth, 5. Increased patience. These five themes were each reported by the participants, either collectively or separately, to have been essential in their increased interpersonal communication skills.

First and foremost, collaborating with previous research studies, the analysis demonstrated that the participants of the study sought to practice yoga for various reasons, mainly physical exercise and stress relief. This demonstrates that the resulting increase in interpersonal communications skills was not a result of a placebo effect, but rather, a naturally-occurring side effect of the practice of yoga. Further, the participants of the study shared how, after practicing yoga, they have noticed a transformation in the way they communicate with those around them. Although these changes were not immediate, their practice has helped them create new friendships while strengthening existing relationships. Additionally, they shared how their yoga practice reduced interpersonal conflicts and arguments, resulting in less stressful lifestyle.

The yoga practice has been associated with mindfulness (Baer et al., 2008). Through developing mindfulness, the participants of the study elaborated on how their yoga practice taught them to bring their focus to the present moment. Mindfulness has been defined as an active regulation of one's attention so as to focus it on the many cognitive events (Kabat-Zinn, 2003) used awareness of one's moment-to-moment experience. As a result, mindfulness became a part of their daily lives, from making decisions about their diet to handling stressful situations. They also became more mindful in interactions friends and family members, which allowed them to build more positive interpersonal relationships. This suggests that arguments and disagreements tend to decrease as mindfulness increases, as it teaches us to take a step back and not react on emotion.

Regarding self-awareness, two additional sub-categories emerged: self-concept, and self-disclosure. The self-concept has been defined as understanding who you are as a person. In this study, the participants revealed that their yoga practice was an invaluable tool to discovering

who they truly were. They became more acutely aware of their flaws and attributes. DeVito (1938) defined the self-concept as the individuals' feelings and thoughts about their strengths and weaknesses, as well as their abilities and limitations (DeVito, 1938). The participants explained that understanding who you are transitions into the development of self-awareness. Heron (1973) argues that one of the most important arguments of examining and understanding self-awareness, is to be able to differentiate ourselves from others. By increasing awareness, the yoga practice aids the practitioner by helping him/her become more aware of themselves and others (Nagendra, 2013). Additionally, by developing greater self-awareness, many of the participants reportedly became more extroverted and began forming new relationships. The meaning of relationships can be improved by self-disclosure, since self-disclosure may help achieve closer relationships with the person to whom you self-disclose (Schmidt and Cornelius, 1987).

Additionally, this study revealed how the yoga practice aids in the development of self-acceptance and acceptance of others. The participants revealed how, as they learned to accept their own flaws, they learned to accept other people's flaws. Through self-acceptance, the participants gained a more positive self-perspective which resulted in a more positive attitude towards others. Further, by learning to accept others, they became less judgmental and tolerant with friends, family members, and strangers, aiding the development of their interpersonal communication skills. Kozlowski (2013) indicates a correlation between mindfulness and an increased interpersonal relationship satisfaction and acceptance of others (Barnes, Brown, Krusemark, Campbell, & Rogge, 2007). Further, from the eight disciplines of the yoga practice, the yamas's philosophy centers on the acceptance of others. The participants explained how by

learning to be compassionate of others and having honest relationships improved their interpersonal communication.

As for personal growth, the participants expressed how their yoga practice allowed them to develop higher self-confidence and self-esteem. Mojarrad (2012) indicates that self-esteem is one of the most important aspects of personality and determinants of human behavioral characteristics and development. Self-esteem can be determined by the quality of interpersonal relationships (Burnard & Morrison, 1992). Through developing both self-esteem and confidence, the participants shared how they became more open to meet new people and engaged in conversations that they would have never considered prior to practicing yoga. People with higher self-esteem perform better and have more successful interpersonal relationships and communication skills (DeVitto, 1938). Their self-esteem and self-confidence gave them the necessary tools to form new relationships and lead more positive social interactions. Additionally, the participants revealed how their personal growth has allowed them to lead a happier life, create new friendships, and communicate better with others.

Patience is the final category that emerged from the analysis, and though it is largely absent from the literature, I argue that the concept of patience has significant implications for the study of interpersonal communication. The participants expressed how their yoga practice and the challenging discipline that it entails translates directly to the way they develop patience in their lives. They defined patience as the most challenging aspect of the yoga practice, as it can only be developed and achieved through discipline and time. However, when patience is achieved, the results are endless. The participants explained that by cultivating patience, their everyday lives and relationships began to transform. Conversations with others became easier and more profound, arguments decreased as they became more tolerant of others opinions and

ideals, and they became more open to new friendships and relationships. This study suggests that an important element of having positive interpersonal communication is patience. Adding patience to the development of interpersonal communication skills is a great contribution to literature. Additionally, future research studies might utilize patience as an instrument to improve and develop interpersonal communication.

These five themes represent a key element in improving interpersonal communication. As my research showed, the practice of yoga encompasses all of them, promising a secondary effect that can potentially change a person's life. Despite yoga being around for thousands of years, it is still comparatively recent to western culture. As such, it is important to increase awareness for those who might have an incomplete opinion about the practice being mainly physical, or even spiritual, and to educate the public about the many other benefits one can experience with a steady yoga practice.

This study can make a significant contribution to the literature in both interpersonal communication and yoga. As previously highlighted, the importance of creating tools to improve interpersonal communication skills increases every year. The fear of losing interpersonal communication becomes greater as technology replaces the way people communicate with one another. As technology takes over a great amount of the everyday life, the fear of losing sense of the real world increases (Adler, 2013). Therefore, the yoga practice can potentially be utilized in the near future as a treatment in the development of interpersonal communication skills.

Additionally, through this thesis study, I would encourage individuals who might be interested in beginning a practice to learn about the transformative and life-changing benefits that a yoga practice offers. Furthermore, by adding these findings to the literature, certified yoga instructors could possibly use this study to inform current yoga students about the benefits of a

regular yoga practice. As a certified yoga instructor, I have incorporated these findings into my classes and have shared the results with yoga practitioners. Thus, more students are learning about the five emerging themes that aid in improving interpersonal communication. This thesis study found that, among yoga practitioners varying in age, gender, ethnicity, and demographics, they all shared a very similar experience with their yoga practice. Through this thesis, these yoga practitioners were able to share their experiences and love for something they claim has changed their lives forever.

Lokah Samastah Sukhino Bhavantu: “May all beings everywhere be happy and free, and may the thoughts, words, and actions of my own life contribute in some way to that happiness and to that freedom for all.” – Translation by Sharon Gannon, Jivamukti Yog

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APPENDIX

Interview Questionnaire

Q1: What is your definition of yoga?

Q2: Why did you decide to start a yoga practice?

Q3: Why do you continue practicing yoga?

Q4: Has your practice made a difference in how you perceive yourself and those around you? If so, in what way?

Q5: Can you describe how practicing yoga has made a difference in your life?

Q6: Has practicing yoga changed the way you communicate with those around you? If so, in what way?

Q7: Has practicing yoga changed the way you communicate with yourself? If so, in what way?

VITA

Patricia Flores was born in El Paso, Texas and raised in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico. She is both bilingual and bicultural. Ms. Flores moved to El Paso, Texas while attending The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) pursuing a Bachelor's Degree in Media Advertising and Marketing, graduating in May 2009. During her undergraduate studies, she completed a semester abroad in Lille, France, which gave her the opportunity to travel to more than seventeen countries. Ms. Flores completed her Master's Degree in Communication Studies while working as a full-time staff member at the Office of International Programs at UTEP. Ms. Flores is currently a Ph.D. student in the Rhetoric and Composition Studies program at UTEP.

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