Yoga and the Pedagogy of Enlightenment

Exploring the role of the modern Yoga teacher

Maya Eliasson
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Abstract

This study inspired by a hermeneutic premise, aims to explore the role of the modern Yoga teacher and the pedagogy employed by individuals who teach Yoga. Yoga is here acknowledged as a vast concept; this paper regards the Ashtanga as composed by Shri Patanjali in 400B.C. as a possible definition of Yoga. Yoga has developed into a globalized industry, with an estimated 100,000 people holding certificates as Yoga teacher, segmented into small, privately owned and run businesses and studios, and while there are forces working towards creating corporate-based structures, no regulatory boards or standards for practice or set professional codes of conduct for Yoga teachers currently exist. Qualitative interviews were conducted with ten individuals, all currently working in some capacity as Yoga teachers. The informants represent a wide range of nationalities; with different backgrounds and relationship to their teaching. Not all informants teach Asana [poses] and generally considered Yoga a spiritual practice, albeit with a physical component. The responsibilities of a Yoga teacher were considered to include the cultivation of a healthy ego, knowledge of traditions and scriptures, and keeping authentic to the practice. The increased objectification of Yoga as a commercialized product made for consumption can create expectation on the Yoga teacher, both in respect to physical appearance and teaching methods. The teachers described their different pedagogical philosophies and teaching methods, resulting in a discussion of the hierarchal changes in power structures as teachers become subordinate to the expectation of the student, as a paying customer with expectations. A possible conclusion is that the commercialization of Yoga is the result of a reappropriation of Eastern mysticism and capitalisation of Western desire for spirituality and physical wellbeing.

Keywords: Hatha Yoga, Pedagogy, Teacher role, Yoga teacher, Hermeneutics
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INTRODUCTION

The use of analogy, or mythology, in order to facilitate an experience for the student, was the common practice amongst those who have passed on the knowledge of Yoga through the millennia (Tichenor, 2007; Broud, 2012). This narrative was shared by Yaniv, one of the Yoga teachers participating in this study, and has been included here¹ as an illustration of this ancient form of the pedagogy of enlightenment:

"Let me tell you the story of the very first Yogi. Humans were nomads then, and surviving was difficult. One small group ventured up north, and winter started. The people sought somewhere to shelter. They looked to caves, but the problem was there was always already someone living inside them, like dangerous animals, just as hungry and cold as the people. One man, alone and close to dying, ventured inside a big cave, thinking to wait out the storm. Crawled up at its mouth, he suddenly felt a presence. He crawled deeper into the cave, and where he saw a big black bear. The man froze in terror, until he realised the bear wasn’t moving. The man moved closer, thinking perhaps it was dead. He got so close he could hear its slow, deep breaths. The man crawled up close to this bear, to share its warmth. Now he became aware of the bears’ heartbeats, much slower than his own. The man now came to the realisation that this wasn’t ordinary sleep, but that the bear’s body was suspended through a willed control, to stay asleep while survival in the world outside was impossible. The man slowed down his own breath, synchronising with the bear. He noticed his own heart slowing down, and he no longer felt cold. This man now entered a new state of awareness, and experienced what we call ‘Samadhi’², the Yogic union of our soul with the universe. This man was the very first Yogi, and this was the beginning of Yoga.

Yoga has grown into big business. Hundreds of millions of people practice Yoga worldwide (Broud, 2012), and the global industry netted US$27 billion in 2012 (Namasta, 2013). Internationally, there are approximately 100'000 Registered Yoga Teachers³ who have gained their certificates through completing one of the many Yoga Teacher Training courses that are available. The increasing popularity of Yoga has given rise to many studies investigating its benefits, determining the demographic of its practitioners and seeking the truths of the origins. This study explores the accounts of a few of the individuals who teach Yoga to others, and through a hermeneutic epistemology, seeks insight and understanding of their particular experience of this role.

While the word Yoga is used all over the world, it is “more famous than it is understood” (Hoyez, 2007, p. 114). The increasing commercial value of Yoga as a product in a global economic market portrays the practice as primarily a physical exercise, which is undertaken at Yoga studios; under the guidance of a Yoga teacher students stretch and contort their bodies on special-made Yoga mats while wearing tight-fitting Yoga pants. This understanding is limited, and considered by some as a transmutation of the spiritual and philosophical traditions of Yoga. Swami Prabhavananda, Indian monk and spiritual teacher, warns us against this representation of Yoga as a “completely degenerate form, a cult of physical beauty, which has nothing to do with what Yoga is” (Prabhavananda, 2011, p.4).

A millennia old spiritual practice, Yoga dates back as far as 1700 B.C. (Alter, 2006). The first recorded documentations, Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras, are dated at around 400 B.C. (Bourne, 2012). These 195 sutras (aphorisms) are a practical guide for personal conduct in daily life. Patanjali describes the goal of the practice of Yoga as: “total freedom from suffering” (Prabhavananda, 2011) and outlined eight consecutive stages, known as the ‘Ashtanga’ in Sanskrit or ‘The Eight Limbs of Yoga’ in English⁴. One of these limbs is Asana – translated into English as ‘poses’. It is from these poses [Asana] that our modern practice of Hatha Yoga was formed. Hatha Yoga is one of several Yogic paths⁵, and deals primarily with gaining control and disciplining of the body in preparation for the higher spiritual states of Yoga. Thus, Hatha

¹ The narrative has been abridged to a more concentrated form.
² For a more in-depth description of Samadhi, see #8 of the Ashtanga, p. 14
⁵ Within the umbrella of Yoga, there are many paths, such as ‘Karma Yoga’ - selfless service to others, ‘Bhakti Yoga’ – the path of devotion, ‘Jnana Yoga’ – Yoga of Knowledge (philosophy), ‘Raja Yoga’- mysticism and occult practices, ‘Mantra Yoga’ – meditational practices using sacred verbal formulas, such as invocations or a phrase containing mystical potentialities.
Yoga may be understood to represent a physical component within the larger, encompassing spiritual system which is known as Yoga.

Appealing to those who wish to pursue body-beautiful ideals, Yoga is now marketed through a proliferation of images of young, slender, flexible bodies (mostly female, and Caucasian) in small, tight-fitting clothing. Simultaneously, Yoga is also presented as a restorative healing practice, suitable not only for the young, fit and healthy, but also for the elderly, infirm and those with physical and psychological ailments. Studies show the therapeutic value of Yoga, as it has been shown to alleviate physical tensions, lower blood pressure and heart rate, reduce stress and anxiety, and improve mental health (see e.g. Li & Goldsmith, 2010; Eggleston, 2011; Kim & Bembem, 2012; Mehrotra et al, 2012). Yoga also attracts spiritual seekers, who are compelled by promises of bliss, well-being, spiritual enlightenment and self-realisation (McGuire-Wien, 2010).

Each of these perspectives creates demands on the role of the Yoga teacher, who is expected to work with the “physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual conditions of the student, and speak to these dimensions in the course of their teachings” (Farhi, 2006, p.3). The vast pedagogy undertaken by a Yoga teacher is thereby not adequately understood as simply physical fitness instruction, but rather as a complex role which combines physical fitness and health with spiritual guidance. What pedagogic philosophies and methods do the modern Yoga teachers use to navigate these dynamic practices?

In this study, qualitative interviews were undertaken with ten Yoga teachers of different backgrounds, teaching styles and nationalities, in order to explore their roles, their understanding of Yoga, and their view of their responsibilities to their students and the practice itself.

The increasingly popular Yoga Teacher Trainings (YTT) set at two levels – 200 and 500 hours, enable many to become Registered Yoga Teachers (RYT) in only a matter of weeks. YTT courses are available internationally, and there is no standardization or governance of content, material or course fees (between EUR 800-10'000, depending on school, style and geographic location). Graduates are awarded a certificate, which they must then pay to register with an independent agency, such as the Yoga Alliance, the International Yoga Federation or the British Wheel of Yoga. These agencies stamp of approval is based only on the payment of their registration fees; they have no set criteria, nor do they perform any form of policing of the schools (Kaminoff, 2007). Concerns regarding the certification standards are discussed within the Yoga community, with debates on issues such as insurance policies for teachers and studios, standards of professionalism, industry regulations and classifications. While insufficiently trained Yoga teachers have resulted in students getting physically injured (see Broud, 2012); there is also concern regarding whether teacher trainings adequately train teachers in the history, philosophy and spiritual aspects which are integral to Yoga practices.

Certain lineages of teachers uphold much higher levels of YTT’s than those previously mentioned; some which span several years, making their education and resulting diploma comparable with the qualifications earned in formal institutionalised educational contexts, such as a vocational training or university degrees.

There are also Yoga teachers who teach without having completed any formal YTT, but who possess great experience and personal knowledge of Yoga. In India, held as its country of origin, Yoga was not considered as a profession, but rather a vocation and lifestyle. Indian Yogis, who pursue enlightenment, often renounce the physical world and any material gains. Those who have reached self-realization may serve as guides for others. These persons are known as Gurus, and traditionally, Yoga was taught only by Gurus to those who proved themselves worthy (Tichenor, 2007). In contrast, many modern Yoga teachers work with groups of students, and often have no other criterion for their students than that they pay the class fees.

In exploring the role of the modern Yoga teacher we can thus gain insights into their philosophy, practices and teachings, and reflect on whether pedagogy can be altered, tailored to the market, without consequences for the resulting outcome. While there is no definitive style of practice, or a definitive pedagogy, the evolution Yoga has undergone may be a reflection of our Zeitgeist; and the Yoga teacher plays an important role as the harbinger of our societal ideals of physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual well-being.
PURPOSE AND QUESTIONS

This is an inquiry into Yoga, aiming to transcend the superficial and reach the specific, targeting the spiritual essence of the practice. What is explored is the relationship a small group of individuals have to their roles as Yoga teachers, and how they perceive their responsibilities to their students, and to the philosophies, traditions and practices of Yoga.

As explicated by my review of the literature published in the field of Yoga, there are a significant number of books, academic studies, magazine articles, blogs and other material available which seek to outline, define and explain what Yoga is. It is therefore not the purpose of this study to provide a historical outline of Yoga and its many illustrious practitioners. The history of Yoga has a multi-linear descendant line of teachers [Gurus]; some whose individual characteristics and personal philosophies and teaching methods have been documented (several Gurus, Yogis, and Yoga teachers have written their own books, participated in others’ or in interviews and documentaries) and these accounts are readily available. There is further a wide range of material published which examines traditions, histories, claims of benefits and super-powers [Siddhis], personal accounts of Yogs and seekers, and various translations of the ancient texts (such as the Vedas, the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, the Yoga Sutras, and the Bhagavad Gita). Studies have been undertaken which establish the demographics of Yoga students, and investigate the many physical, physiological, mental, emotional, psychological and spiritual benefits Yoga may provide its practitioners. However, a dearth was perceived in the examination of the role of the modern Yoga teacher, and how these individuals relate to their personal teachings, their students, and their responsibilities towards the traditions and practice of Yoga.

The purpose of this paper is thus to examine and explore the role of the modern Yoga teacher through a hermeneutic perspective, interpreting the pedagogical perspectives of a group of individuals from diverse backgrounds, in order to facilitate deeper insights into how their teaching methods relate to the spiritual, physical, philosophical and practical totality of Yoga.

How do individual Yoga teachers perceive their teaching roles, relationship and responsibilities to their students and to the practice itself?

Which pedagogical methods, practices, and philosophies do modern Yoga teachers utilise?

How do the individual Yoga teacher relate to the global Industry, concepts of professional standards and the current marketing of Yoga?

How does the teaching practices of modern Yoga teachers compare with the pedagogy of the Guru?
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is based in a hermeneutical theoretical analytical approach and perspective, to understand the meaningfully communicated subjective experiences of the participants and is thus not intended to generate understandings that can be generalized (Walker, 1997). The narrative configurations of the subjective experiences are related to the sociocultural and historical contexts in which they occur and are shaped by (Leledaki, 2012).

The term hermeneutics has been used as a synonym to ‘interpretation’, and is linked to the Greek mythology, where Hermes, the son of Zeus, was the messenger of the Gods who interpreted hidden messages for mortals. In scholarly traditions, hermeneutics is understood as the interpretation of meaning in a specific text (Vandermause, 2011).

The theory of hermeneutics presupposes that human behaviour cannot be explained as a natural phenomenon, and sets the aims of qualitative social science research to emphasise and interpret. This represents a challenge to the traditional epistemology of the logical positivism of the natural sciences in which the researcher is distanced, neutral and objective (Walker, 1997). This also impacts the language used, which moves away from scientific, analytic vocabulary to captures new ways of knowing and meaning making, which has been seen in philosophy, feminist research theory and anthropology (Walker, 1997). Concepts here include interpretations, understandings, lived experience, embodiment and for example, by considering the informants as subjects rather than objects.

According to Hans-Georg Gadamer, understanding is “assimilating what is said to the point that it becomes one’s own” (Gadamer, 1996, p. 398). The hermeneutic approach to a text is thus a technique for empathising with another individual, interpreting and analysing (From & Holmgren, 2000). While human behaviour may well be objectively and empirically observable, the meaning the actors have of their actions can only be interpreted (Gillan, 2008). Through empathy, we are able to relate to another on a deeper level than just through intellectual understanding (Thuren, 2010). The hermeneutic theory thus holds a subjective understanding of the phenomena explored, and sees that knowledge is perspectivistic, not cumulative. The interpretations are thus understood to be influenced by the interpreter, and Gadamer underlines the importance of awareness of one’s own prejudices and using them in a productive and conscious way (Gadamer, 1976), meaning the researchers own experiences, assumptions and biases are made visible throughout.
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As this study is based in a hermeneutic epistemology, the literature review is undertaken as a cohesive survey of both research and theory on the topic, as well as a perusal through books, authors and concepts which the researcher found to be most informative and elucidating to aid the understanding of the themes and ideas discussed in the interviews. This is in accordance to the hermeneutic research methods, as discussed by Walker (1997) and Holloway & Todres (2003). Thus, a working definition of the word, term and concept ‘Yoga’ is sought as despite being a global phenomenon; many people are unfamiliar with the concept and deeper significance of Yoga.

The word Yoga is derived from the Sanskrit ‘yuj’ and while this is etymologically linked to the word ‘yoke’ there is no equivalent term in the English language. ‘Yoga’ means union; it means the “yoking of all the powers of the body, mind and soul to God; it means the disciplining of the intellect, the mind, the emotions, the will, a poise of the soul which enables one to look at life in all its aspects evenly” (Mahadev Desai, cited by Iyengar, 1979, p. 19).

Yoga is described as a pragmatic practice which has evolved over millennia as a science of self-realization, and is concerned only with the subjective experience of the individual. Osho, one of the most well-known Indian Gurus of the 21st century said: “Yoga is a perfect science. It does not teach you to believe; it teaches you to know” (Osho, 2002, p. 165). This constitutes an important distinction; where religious faith requires suspension of internal validation, and orients around shared beliefs, Yoga is a “pragmatic science where everything is tested and verified through direct experience” (Farhi, 2006, p.9). An authentic practice of Yoga is an undertaking of self-research of the questions “Who am I?” and “How am I to conduct myself?” (Krishna, 1993); and while answers can only be found through direct, first-hand experience, these eight limbs may provide a guide for those who seek truth and self-realisation.

The Eight Limbs of Yoga

“The Ashtanga method is universal; it is not mine or yours. That method is perfect, it is complete. This yoga is not for exercise. Yoga is showing where to look for the soul.”

- Shri K. Pattabhi Jois, Indian Yoga Guru

Traditionally, Yoga was taught orally, with the principles memorized in short aphorisms [Sutras], which would then be expanded upon by the teacher to the student (Bharati, 2010). Around 400 B.C., Patanjali, an Indian sage often called the ‘Father of Yoga’, compiled 195 sutras of Yoga. These Yoga sutras are a comprehensive guide to the practice and a practical guide for conduct in daily life. Patanjali defined the goal for Yoga as “total freedom from suffering” (Prabhavananda, 2011), and described eight consecutive stages to ascension to Yoga (known in Sanskrit as ‘Ashtanga’; which translates as ‘eight limbs’ (Broud, 2012)).

The Ashtanga are also cited in other great scriptures and texts: the Upanishads; the Hatha Yoga Pradipika; and the Vedas, and are often referred to in more modern treatises such as B.K.S. Iyengar’s Light on Yoga. Minor variations between publications may be due to translations from the original Sanskrit. (note: I have utilized Prabhavananda’s translation of the Patanjali Yoga Sutras, 2011). The following overview is included in order to provide a more in-depth understanding of the Ashtanga. The Sanskrit terms have been used, with translations provided.
### The Eight Limbs of Yoga - The Ashtanga


   - Ahimsa – kindness, non-violence
   - Satya – truth, not lying
   - Asteya – not stealing, not coveting
   - Brahmacharya – non excess
   - Apigraha – generosity, non-possessiveness
   - Kshama - patience
   - Dhriti – focus, steadfastness
   - Daya – compassion, empathy
   - Arjara – honesty, no deception
   - Mitahara – balance, moderate appetite
   - Saucha – purity of body, mind and spirit (cleanliness)

2. **Niyamas:** Observances. Rules of Personal Behaviour; The relationship to the Self.

   - Hri – remorse, modesty, shame for misdeeds
   - Saucha – purity of body and mind
   - Santosha – attitude of contentment, serenity
   - Dana – giving, without thought of reward
   - Aṣṭikya – trusting path to Yoga
   - Tapas – self discipline
   - Mati – cognition, developing will and intellect
   - Svadhyaya – self study, inner exploration
   - Ishvara Pranidhana – surrender

3. **Asana:** The physical aspects of Hatha Yoga. Translated as ‘seat’/’position. Patanjali wrote: “A sana is to be seated in a position which is firm and relaxed. A sana becomes firm and relaxed through control of the natural tendencies of the body and through meditation on the divine (sutras 46-47, Prabhavananda, 2011). It should be noted that for Patanjali, the highest A sana was the Lotus position, in which the Yogi conquers the body, aligns his/her energies and is in a perfect state of balance (see Osho, 2002; Bourne, 2012).

4. **Pranayama:** Breathing exercises. The mastering of the life force (Prana) through control of the breath. It is the science of the breath (Iyengar, 1966). “A Yogi’s life is not measured by the number of his days, but by the number of his breaths” (ibid.)

5. **Pratyhahara:** Control of the senses, engaging in a searching self-examination, overcoming attractive spell of sensual objects. Purification of mind by overcoming all desires and fears (Svatmarama, 2002).


7. **Dhyana:** Witnessing awareness. “A state of consciousness which has no qualification whatsoever. There is no other feeling except a state of supreme bliss” (Iyengar, 1966)

8. **Samadhi:** Pure, unbounded awareness (Chopra, 2004). Beyond consciousness, There remains no sense of ‘I’ or mine’. The true Y ogi, only the experience of consciousness, truth and unutterable joy. “Y ogi means Unio Mystica. It means the union, the mystic union with oneself. And if you are one with yourself, suddenly you realize you have become one with the whole, with God, because when you move into your being, it is an emptiness again, a silence; a tremendous non-ending silence... and God is also silence. Two silences cannot be two - they are inseparable from each other, and thus become one... This oneness is the meaning of the word ‘Y ogi’. Y ogi means to become one” (Osho, 2002, p. 136).

This is the path of Yoga, starting with the principle of kindness both to others and to ourselves [Ahimsa], steering us towards the goal of ultimate union [Samadhi]. Classic Yoga thus displays a remarkable vision of holistic living (Sheveland, 2011), that remains applicable and relevant as a guide for those who seek enlightenment. Patanjali advises that the Yamas and Niyamas are fundamental in building a Yoga practice. When a Yogin becomes qualified by practicing Yama and Niyama, then the Yogin can proceed to Asana and other means on the path of Yoga (Iyengar, 1966).
The Pedagogy of Enlightenment

“Now, when a sincere seeker approaches an enlightened teacher, with the right attitude, free of perceived notions and prejudices, and full of intelligent faith and receptivity, and the right spirit of inquiry, at the right time and the right place, communication of Yoga can take place”

Patanjali, The Yoga Sutras, Sutra 1:1, written in 400 B.C.

Yoga has a “clear goal for the practitioner: spiritual enlightenment” (Strauss, 1992, p. 33), and the dedicated practice of Yoga will “put one on the path of self-realization” (Shukla, 2012). Explaining spiritual enlightenment is by its nature complicated. Enlightenment is often described as non-dualism, union and complete awareness. In Sanskrit-based languages such as Hindi, Thai and Assamese, terms such as ‘insight’ [Vidya], ‘transcendental state of awareness’ [Samadhi] and ‘spiritual liberation’ [Moksha] are used in every-day contexts (Grace, 2011). However, grasping the conceptual meaning of the state of enlightenment must be understood as vastly different from knowing it through firsthand experience. There is no rational or scientific definition of this state of being. Indian Yoga master and Guru B.K.S. Iyengar describes the state of enlightenment as follows:

“...a peace that passeth all understanding. The mind cannot find words to describe the state and the tongue fails to utter them. The state can only be described by profound silence. The Yogi has departed from the material world and is merged in the Eternal. There is then no duality between the knower and the known for they are merged like camphor and the flame”

(Iyengar, 1966, p. 52).

Thus, the teaching of Yoga differs from most other educations as it is not dealing with tangible, measurable or relatable experiences (Tichenor, 2007). Our contemporary Western curriculums are rooted in “the ethos of rationalism” with “objectivity as the cornerstone of scientific validity” (Ergas, 2010). While regular institutionalized educational praxis is “governed by rational efficiency, maximizing utility and material outcomes for its customers” (Sinclair, 2005, p. 91), Yoga has no central authority or governance. Regular educational methods of organizing formal teaching and learning often consist of breaking down content into constituent components and teaching these one at a time (Luke & Luke, 1994). This approach will not suffice in the teaching of Yoga, as any such divisions of its contents would be arbitrary and “deceive the student into a way of thinking which considers the accumulation of facts, knowledge, techniques and tricks will lead to swifter success” (Steffensen, 2008). Yoga cannot be understood by analyzing one of its components; as “reduced to one aspect of itself, Yoga is no longer Yoga” (Maw, 2008). Here we may consider whether a class which only deals with the practice of the physical poses [Asana], and lacks the spiritual and philosophical components, warrants to be called a ‘Yoga class’.

It has been suggested that rather than individuals with backgrounds in physical fitness teaching Hatha Yoga, “philosophy teachers become Yoga teachers as they would be more able to grasp both Yoga’s philosophical potential and then demonstrate the practice” (Ergas, 2010). A teacher who possesses knowledge of Yogic philosophy, who has experienced first-hand the spiritual aspects of Yoga, and is competent to translate these for his/her student is essential, as “the teacher can only lead the student as far as she has gone herself” (Farhi, 2006, p.4). Teaching only one aspect, such as the poses [Asana] in isolation is not sufficient for it to be Yoga; rather a Yoga teacher bases his/her teachings in the entirety of the Ashtanga.

Traditionally, Yoga has been taught only by those who had achieved all eight limbs and reached Yogic union and spiritual enlightenment. In learning from these masters “mentorship is very important and at the heart of any Yoga practice” (George, 2012). A Guru often had only one disciple, who over a seven-year period was “subjected to a rigorous regimen that they were expected to endure without complaint”
By Western standards, these methods are often considered “harsh and dictatorial” (Maw, 2008), but it was the student who sought out the Guru, asking to be taught, and a Guru would reject many of those who came seeking as unfit or unsuitable for the practice and the teachings.

The Guru

“...you have three things you must do for your Guru:
Find Him; Love Him; Leave Him”

-Ancient Yogic proverb

The Guru is a well-known figure in India, and has become increasingly popular in the Western psyche through spiritual movements. The title ‘Guru’ is similar to the word ‘Buddha’ as it signifies a person who has reached spiritual enlightenment, or self-realization. A Guru is a guide through the darkness of suffering and illusions [Maya], towards ultimate truth [Viveka] and liberation from ego [Moksha]. There can be no specific expectations placed on a Guru or his/her pedagogy, as an emancipated being is free to do, be, say or act in whatever manner. An enlightened being is not constrained by an ego or dictated by a mind, and the paradox lies in the realisation that he/she is a person, or an individual, only through our own perceptions, not theirs (Tichenor, 2007).

A special dynamic occurs between a Guru and a disciple, and in order to gain an understanding of this relationship, it is crucial to remember the unique character of what is being taught: “a state of being, a way of living, which by necessity is intrinsic to the character of the teacher” (Farhi, 2006, p.5). A Guru teaches through “embodiment, the lived reality of who teachers are” (Bergaum, cited by Lussier-Ley, 2010, p.98); guiding the student by his/her nature, personage and inherent way of being in the world.

There are no standard teaching practices for Gurus, nor is a Guru required to have completed any formal education; there are no diplomas available which certify that an individual has reached enlightenment. What the Guru teaches is beyond the rational understanding of the mind, and is not focused towards anything specific, as it is not based in anything specific. The teachings annihilate the ontological need for distinction; the Guru is not teaching at all, as nothing resembling our traditional understanding of ‘knowledge’ is taught by him/her. We could therefore term the Guru, the ‘anti-teacher’. A Guru does not, and could not, provide a student with clear, specific ways to reach enlightenment, but rather guides and orients the student on his/her journey, offering insights into ways to clear the path, but takes no action him/herself. “We must recognise the epistemological assumptions regarding pedagogy and knowledge to understand the role of the Guru. It is in fact in the Guru’s ignorance that we can see his/her pedagogical strength” (Tichenor, 2007). A Guru may use examples and analogies in their teachings, and may offer contradicting and conflicting ideas (Burger, 2005, p. 86), prompting the student to personal discernment and consideration. While progress can only be made through the effort, discipline and practice by the student, the Guru is often considered essential to the process of attaining spiritual enlightenment. B.K.S. Iyengar writes:

“The study of Yoga is not like work for a diploma or a university degree by someone desiring favourable results in a stipulated time. The obstacles, trials and tribulations in the path of Yoga can be removed to a large extent with the help of a Guru (The syllable ‘gu’ means darkness and ‘ru’ means light. He alone is a Guru who removes darkness and brings enlightenment). The concept of a Guru is deep and significant. He is not an ordinary guide. He is a spiritual teacher who teaches a way of light, and not merely how to earn a livelihood.

(Iyengar, 1966, p. 28)
Unfortunately, the Guru scandals in recent times may have led to negative associations among Westerners who are otherwise unfamiliar with these concepts. For many Westerners, their Yoga practice is considered as separate from their daily lives, while in India, a Yogi will often renounce his life, family connections and possessions to signal his transition. Over the last forty years, many Westerners have participated, not only as students, but also as teachers of the Yogic traditions; these individuals have been labelled ‘cultural insiders’ as they are able to relate across these cultural divides (Gleig, 2009, p. 89). Attainment of spiritual enlightenment is not limited to individuals from a specific culture, and has been documented throughout the world. While tensions may emerge from a “dialectic view of contrasting epistemological and ontological orientations to the world which frame the understandings held by individuals” (Brown & Leledaki, 2010), it is understood that between enlightened minds, no discord or tension would be possible, as they have achieved the same united awareness, to which names and labels are only words (i.e. Brahman/God/Allah/Jehovah). Swami Satchitananda wrote: “Truth is the same always. Whoever ponders it will get the same answer. Buddha got it. Patanjali got it. Jesus got it. Mohammed got it. The answer is the same, but the method of working it out may vary this way or that” (Satchitananda.1970).

The implications of modern Yoga practices on the traditional Guru-disciple relationship are many, much due to the (mis-) understanding and representation of Yoga in the West. Each teacher and author of the subject of Yoga has brought their own interpretation and analogies, and the cultural differences affect their teaching styles. The Western mind often struggles to accept authority (Tichenor, 2007), which has led to changes in pedagogical methods. In her study of the Yoga taught by Shri Patabhji Jois at his Mysore ashram, Burger found that “Westerners are not taught the same things nor in the same ways as Indians” (Burger, 2006, p.90). The commodification of Yoga is what has led to the construction of the role of the Yoga teacher.

Changing Yoga for Western Consumption

“Westerners rely on reason. Yoga uses the body, and relies on the experience”
- Gulnaz Dasthi, Yoga Teacher, India

Suggestions that the Western practice of Yoga is less authentic, rest on the assumption that Yoga practices have remained fixed and constant throughout its history. Heraclites, a Greek philosopher who lived in the 5th century B.C., is attributed the phrase “Panta Rei”; which loosely translates as ‘everything flows’, pointing to the insight that change is the only constant in our universe. This understanding applies to the traditions and practices of Yoga, which is now a transnational, world-wide practice and industry. The expansion has been “aided by spiritual seekers coming to India, and Gurus migrating to the West” (Hoyez, 2007, p. 117). While the history of Yoga predates the Vedic age (and thus the recorded scriptural time) its origins are believed to lie in India, where it was predominantly a male, high-caste, ascetic, spiritual practice that required renunciation and devotion (Strauss, 1992, p. 217). Yoga thus represents an “export from the outskirts of social and economic power where it originated, to the centre, gaining broad recognition and following” (Wild, 2002, p. 219). Changes have downplayed the less appealing aspects, and instead focused on attractive attributes of the practice.

This began when Yoga was first brought to the West in the late 19th century, as one of the first proponents of Yoga to the West was Swami Vivekananda, whose goal was to “bring India’s spiritual wealth to the West to gain funds to help the impoverished masses in India” (Strauss, 1992, p.31). Thus, the more
Mark Singelton’s research on the roots of modern Yoga confirms that the modern versions of Hatha Yoga, which are centred on Asana practice are “not more than 100 years old” and the vast majority of these were invented for the Western market, as “there is little or no evidence that Asana (excepting certain seated positions of meditation) has ever been the primary aspect of any Indian Yoga practice” (Singelton, 2010, p. 1). This Yoga is a completely modern invention and phenomenon, due to a change in rationale, from a spiritual existence lived in seclusion from the outside world, to a lifestyle choice that can be incorporated as an addition to the individual consumers’ personal context. Yoga ideals that promote body beautiful ideals and material well-being are also aspects of these inventions and constructions of modern Yoga. This modern Yoga is predominantly an Anglophone phenomenon, “formulated and transmitted in a dialogical relationship between India and the West” (Singleton, 2010, p.11). The cultural imperialism that has produces this health and fitness discourse for middle class consumers is compared to the re-articulating and re-imagined culture and identity which Kobayashi discusses in his study of how transnational corporations utilise their economic and symbolic powers (Kobayashi, 2012). For the Yogi context, the importation of cultural forms is regarded as less a push than a pull, as populations look for usable resources within their periphery to help cope with their endogenous crisis (Shapiro, 2011).

For most of its Western practitioners, Yoga is done in a class, requires special clothing and equipment (there is a wide range of Yoga related products available, on which the total spending in 2012 was US$27 billion globally, according to Namasta Industry reports, 2013). This Westernized and modernized Yoga serves as a clear example of globalization; through its oscillation between Western consumption culture and Indian spiritual systems and traditions, Yoga has become not only “a blend of different cultures, but a new global culture, composed of many cultural and social practices that are transformed by globalization” (Hoyez, 2007, p. 112). Yoga is not a homogenous practice; rather the large global construction is localized and tailored according to the specific circumstance, the individual teachers’ and his/her students own preferences and interpretations. The way Yoga is practiced is impacted by its practitioners.

**Demographics of Yoga Practitioners**

From asceticism, renunciation, and isolation from the outside world, primarily practiced by male Yogis in India – to the West where “Yoga is predominantly pursued by females” (Eggleston, 2011). The international readership-base of the American magazine Yoga Journal are 72% female, according to their own survey (Yoga Journal, 2013). Market analysts use the acronym ‘LOHAS’ to describe the average Yoga practitioner, which stands for ‘Lifestyle of Health and Sustainability’. This demographic is described as “upscale, well-educated, sustainable living, ecologically concerned people who drive hybrid cars, buy natural products and maintain healthy lifestyles” (Broud, 2012, p.3). The vast majority of Yoga practitioners have university degrees and hold liberal social beliefs (Eggleston, 2011). These findings are concurrent with the study on Swedish Yoga practitioners undertaken by Aggestål in 2010, where 87% of the practitioners were female, and 70% hold a high school or university diploma (Aggestål, 2010). The increased focus on body beautiful ideals may be linked to values that exist within this demographic.
Yoga Bodies

“Y our body is precious. It is your vehicle for awakening. Treat it with care”
Siddhartha Gautama Buddha

The body matters to a Yogi because Yoga is the union of body, mind and soul [Atman] with God/the Universe [Brahman]. “The subject of the study of Yoga is the self, and the self is dwelling in a physical body” (Kaminoff, 2007). The Yogi ought not to put the body above all else however, but through the practice of poses [Asana] it is made into a fit vehicle for the spirit to abide in, knowing that it is a necessary vessel for the life experience. Yogic philosophy holds that the body, mind and spirit are not separate, as they are “inter-related and but different aspects of the same all-pervading divine consciousness” (Iyengar, 1966, p. 41). The body matters because it is the physical manifestation of our life energy, it is what we can see, feel and touch.

Bodies are not neutral territories; they are not outside of cultural or educational contexts. In a masculine dominated culture, the body is often associated with the feminine; while the mind is the domain of the masculine (Lawrence, 2012). Bodies are also “intrinsically linked with sex and gender. Bodies are sexually specific” (Grosz, 1994). They reflect and are reflected in cultural norms and dominant institutionalized practices. A body is never “inhabited or appraised as pure physiology” (Sinclair, 2005, p. 91). Values, interests and habits are all embodied (Mullen & Cancienne, cited by Lussier-Ley, 2010, p. 204), and the marks of both conscious and unconscious processes are borne by our bodies (Krieger, 2009).

Western culture has a ”complex and largely troubled relationship with the body; we live much more comfortably in our head than in our bodies” (Clark, cited by Lawrence, 2012, p. 10). The body-mind separation and duality hark back to the 17th century French philosopher Rene Descartes, whose theories “separates the thinking, reasoning, conscious mind and the mechanical, irrational body” (Davies, 2005, p. 190). Most Western education practice gives credence to “cognitive rationality, as if we’re being educated from the neck up” (Lawrence, 2012).

Modern Yoga pedagogy can heal the rift between the disembodied Cartesian tradition and real life, by forming an “embodied, philosophical practice” (Ergas, 2010, p. 1). This body-mind unity implies that the physical and the verbal (of-the-mind) phenomena are coexisting facets of the thinking, feeling, imaging, embodied whole person (Turp, cited by Lussier-Ley, 2010, p. 3). This entails an ontological paradigm shift of traditional Western teaching practices, as traditional models of pedagogy focus on the mental intellect only, and its transmission of information, techniques and ideas to reach understanding, often “treating the body as that which is opposed to thinking, or a hindrance in the production of knowledge” (Sinclair, 2005, p. 91). In the pursuit of self-realization, Yoga teaches that bodily cognizance is an ally. The subjective experience of our individual bodies curtails the dualism, and introduces a broader perspective, as an “extension to our previous epistemological understanding” (ibid., p. 97). Descartes adage “I think therefore I am” is here compared to the Yoga mantra: “I am”. Hatha Yoga requires us to delve into our bodies, and embrace the experience of being embodied. In doing so, the ‘learners’ initial resistance that is held due to engrained cultural norms and self-consciousness will gradually dissipate and give way to an emancipated body-mind experience” (Lawrence, 2010). Perhaps this sentiment works as a provisional description of what the modern Yoga teacher ought to aim to provide his/her students with.
Yoga Teacher Certifications

“When I practice, I am a philosopher. When I teach, I am a scientist. When I demonstrate, I am an artist”

- B.K.S. Iyengar, Indian Yoga Guru

In adapting Yoga for Western consumption, the Registered Yoga Teacher [RYT] has replaced the Guru. To become a RYT, one must complete Yoga Teacher Training [YTT], which is available at one of the many Yoga schools around the world. A Google search for ‘Yoga Teacher Training’ locates 16, 6 million hits, for schools, centres and institutes all over the world, offering a plethora of different styles of Yoga, under various trademarks and registrations, often named after the creator. The financial cost of these courses vary greatly, and will depend on factors such as the style, geographic location, and what is included (some YTT courses are run as exclusive retreats in exotic locations, where the cost of accommodation and meals may increase the cost). The style of hot-Yoga known as Bikram holds the most expensive YTT’s at an exclusive hotel in Los Angeles, California; at an average of US$13,450 (which includes mandatory accommodation at the hotel, but not food), and approximately 600 students are taught per course – at the same time, in a big hall.

The YTT is generally available at two levels; set at 200 and 500 hours respectively. What these hours contain vary depending on the style of Yoga, the school, and the individual teacher holding the course. While schools and centres pay to register for credentials with agencies such as the Yoga Alliance, the International Yoga Federation, the British Wheel of Yoga and the Independent Yoga Network, there are no set standards for content, teaching practices or pedagogical methods. In Sweden the sports organisation ‘Friskis & Svettis’ has created its own style of Yoga, which is taught to instructors in a five day course.

Although Yoga is often considered a “leisure activity, extra-curricular, thus falling outside the formal teaching concept” (Maw, 2008), there has been an increase in pressure for Yoga to become a “regulated profession, with official pedagogical discourse, recognized industry standards, formal pressures for continuous professional development [which may] alter the relationships between teacher, student, tradition and knowledge of Yoga” (Bourne, 2012). Mark Davies, the former president of Yoga Alliance, admits there are differences in opinions regarding standardisations: “Some people feel that Yoga shouldn’t have any regulations because of its spiritual and philosophical origins, while others feel that this is a necessary business practice” (cited by Ginty, 2011).

One major underlying issue is that of malpractice; as physical injuries in students can be caused by insufficiently trained teachers (see Broud, 2012). It is questioned whether a 200 hour course adequately prepares an individual to guide others through advanced Asana. Yoga teacher Georgie Abel writes in Elephant Journal, a popular online Yoga magazine: “YTT courses are not producing teachers that are capable of running a safe and effective Yoga class” (Abel, 2011). Philip Urso, who has been running YTTs for over a decade, comments: “Yoga is missing from teaching Yoga. Instead of Yoga teachers, we were producing teachers who were acting as Yoga teachers, and pretty badly at that. The majority of Yoga teachers were not practicing Yoga while teaching it” (Urso, 2012).
While certifications may be used as an indicator of a minimum level of skill and knowledge regarding Asana, philosophies, Sanskrit terminology, and/or traditions and teacher lineage, it is not possible to assess the metaphysical, autonomic spiritual processes of Yoga. It will depend on our personal values which is given more credence. "If we consider Yoga as a spiritual discipline, the assertions by various organizations and institutions that certifications are for the good of Yoga, and uphold standardization, and professional practice, the underlying motives are based in fear, insecurities, personal power, issues of status and comparative self-worth, and financial advantages" writes Sharon Steffensen, editor of YOGAChicago. She continues: “Credentials can often be deceiving, and would be considered demeaning to a Yogi practicing the pursuit of freedom and truth. This path is travelled alone, the ultimate spiritual journey. Insecure people seek the confirmations of the group; look for external validations and approval from higher authorities” (Steffensen, 2009). While we cannot expect Yoga teachers to be fully self-realised and enlightened, Steffensen suggests that an aspiring Yoga student evaluates a teacher according to criteria of authenticity; do they guide their students with love towards self-empowerment; do they uphold the teachings of non-duality and selflessness; do they present themselves as a temporary mentor for the eternal teacher who resides inside each of us?

Responses to an email sent to a random selection of 20 Yoga schools in eight countries, all offering YTT’s, indicate that none of the schools have any prerequisites or requirements for students wishing to join their 200 hour YTT course; and the vast majority (17 out of the 20) were willing to accept complete beginners in Yoga to their training course. While these are not to be considered as definitive statistics, it does indicate that YTT courses are offered to anyone who is willing to pay the fees.

Yoga and Money

“Yoga is, therefore, a sublime undertaking which cannot be treated in a light vein, a lofty discipline which cannot be lowered to the station of a commercial commodity, for on it depends the peace, the happiness, the survival of the human race”

-Gopi Krishn, Indian Yogi and Teacher

Western culture is materialistic and consumption based. Our obsessions for possessions could be interpreted as a “misplaced religious quest; we turn to money as though it were God, or close to God” (Needleman, cited by Miller, 1992). In a society saturated with material frivolities and short term sensual satisfactions, we can never have enough, and many of us exist in a pendulum from suffering to consumption, which holds no lasting satisfaction, eventually projecting us back to a state of suffering (Wild, 2002). In a consumerist society “people believe they can buy enlightenment” (ibid, p.113), meaning a spiritual laziness sets in.

For the Yogi, enlightenment is understood to be achieved through hard work, and personal effort, and is not aided by wearing a particular brand of Yoga pants or owning a top-of-the-line Yoga mat, whether it is ecologically friendly or not. Some argue that the ‘marketing of bliss’ can alienate seekers from reaching authentic insights into Yoga (Bharati, 2010). Examples of this are proliferating, as advertisers and marketers are jumping onto the Yoga-bandwagon and “go through contortions to make their wares seem essential to a practice that focuses on looking within, as ‘transcendental’ and ‘trendy’ appear in the same sentence” (Warrington, 2013).

Our society has grown accustomed to judging people based on their possessions, and status within a community can often be measured through the ownership of material objects and personal appearance, rather than through personal character or the performance of good deeds. Perhaps we all too often equate
expensive with valuable; we think the price is an indicator of value. We have “no way of relating to something that is available to all, for free” (Osho, 2002). The challenge for the Yogi is to live adequately to his/her physical needs, while being guided by spiritual aspirations, intuition and the values outlined in the Ashtanga. The primary priority is spiritual realization and nurturing of the soul, with “money not as a goal but rather as subservient to the aim of self-knowledge” (Needleman, cited by Miller, 1992).

Historically, the Guru was not paid for his teachings in money or goods, but rather through service, and a disciple would, in some lineages, dedicate seven years of his life in servitude to his Guru (Kaminoff, 2007). As Yoga has been adapted from the primitives of ascetic life to our modern society, the individual who teaches Yoga exists in completely different circumstances. No longer a recluse living as a hermit in a cave in the Himalayan Mountains; the yoga teacher today is required to earn a living to afford a place in our modern society.
METHOD

Qualitative Interviews

This study is based on semi-structured interviews with ten Yoga teachers with diverse backgrounds, nationalities and working within different styles and systems of Yoga. This method was selected as “interviews may be considered the key methodological tool to gain credible behind-the-scenes information” (Kobayashi, 2012). The first hand narrative given by the informants can provide us with a “vicarious experience” (Czarniawska, 2005, p. 19), giving us deeper insights and understandings of the role of the modern Yoga teacher. A hermeneutic theoretical and analytical approach was used to interpret and analyse the narratives. This approach embraces an ambiguity, as this theory resists the idea of a one single authoritative reading of a text, and instead recognises the complexity of the interpretive endeavour (Kinsanella, 2006). Heidegger warns that this method relies on a kind of thinking he terms “meditative” which is a more logical and rational approach which make require greater effort on behalf of the researcher (Heidegger, 1966, p. 46)

The ten semi-structured interviews, set at around one hour were conducted, primarily via telephone (due to geographic distances between the researcher and informants). The semi-structured approach uses an interview guide with specified themes, and aims to allow the interview to “become a dialogue, a direct and spontaneous, guided conversation” (Czarniawska, 2005, p. 30). The informants are here not regarded as ‘objects’ but rather as ‘subjects’ which lessens the gap between the researcher and the research subject (Elden, 2005).

Participants and Time Frame

A total of ten informants participated in this study. There was only one criterion for the informants: they must currently be engaged in a capacity where they are teaching Yoga to others. In order to mirror the diverse, global framework of Yoga teachers, the informants were of varied backgrounds, nationalities, years of practice and teaching experience, and working with different styles or schools of Yoga. A purposive snowball sampling method (see Askegaard & Eckhart, 2012) utilized personal contacts established through my own engagement with Yoga prior to this study. This may also be classified as ‘purposeful and opportunistic sampling’ (see Brown & Leledaki, 2010, p. 126).

Initial contact was established in early December, 2012, to a total of 15 possible informants, outlining the purpose of my study, and requesting their participation in a one hour interview, to take place in January/February of 2013 (see appendix 1). Ten subjects confirmed their willingness to participate, and appointments for the interviews to take place were subsequently scheduled (appendix 2)

There were 4 male subjects, and 6 females. They range from 27-63 years of age, and all are currently teaching Yoga as either a full-time or part-time engagement. All informants receive some form of payment for their teachings, although 3 occasionally teach for free. The table overleaf provides a summary of the informants’ characteristics:
Table 1. Participant Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Current Location</th>
<th>Years Practice</th>
<th>Years Teaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Miguel</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Peruvian</td>
<td>Bali</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sasha</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Canadian</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Yaniv</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Israeli</td>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Nisha</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Philip</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Anita</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Gathering Methods

This study required willing participants for the interviews, and these were contacted via email and facebook. An initial message was sent out which introduced the researcher and the topic and purpose of the study, and requested their participation. Once the subjects had confirmed their willingness to participate in the interviews, appointments for suitable times were confirmed, where the convenience of the informants was given preference consistently, in accordance with suggestions for appropriate conduct by Dalen (2007).

Adhering to the purpose and research questions set for this study, a set of five themes was developed to be used as a guide for the interviews (see appendix 3). These five themes were:

1. What Yoga means to you
2. Thoughts on the Yoga industry
3. A Yoga teacher’s responsibilities
4. My role as a Yoga teacher
5. Teaching philosophies and methods

These themes were outlined in an email sent to the subjects prior to the interviews; which allowed them to gather their thoughts and prepare adequately which is suggested as an appropriate interview procedure (see Amis, 2005, p. 13; Kobayashi, 2012).

Seven of the interviews were conducted using internet telephone services (e.g. Skype), and three were face to face. The interviews were digitally recorded, and additional notes were taken during the interviews. The time for the interviews varied between 45 minutes to approximately 90 minutes, depending on the flow of the conversation. All interviews were conducted by the researcher. Immediately after the interviews, anything of significance was noted. The interviews were transcribed in full, in accordance with scientific guidelines for qualitative studies, and to ease the process of data analysis.

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12 Names have been changed to protect the anonymity of the informants.
**Interview Guide**

The interview guide was created based on the purpose and the questions this study sought to answer (see p. 5), and consisted of a skeleton outline of the themes that were to be covered in the interviews (see appendix 1). This semi-structured format allows the interviewer to create a conversation with the informant who thus is considered as an individual subject, rather than a quantifiable object (see Elden, 2005). The interviewer could thus manoeuvre through the themes, and ask appropriate follow-up questions, or ask for clarifications, which create a better flow and dynamic of a “joined search for deeper knowledge and mutual understanding” (Czarniawska, 2005, p. 26) between the researcher and the subject.

The questions used in the interview guide were brought to a focus group consisting of four Yogis of various ages and backgrounds, currently enrolled in a YTT course in India, to verify that the questions were structured appropriately, clarity of meaning, and that the questions were understood as I had intended. The focus group was selected based on being individuals with personal interest in the subject matter. Their feedback was entirely positive; they judged my questions to be accessible, clear and precise. No changes were made to the interview guide as a result.

All informants were provided with the general themes set as direct questions prior to the interviews. This was to provide them with sufficient time to reflect and prepare their thoughts, as well as to ensure their approval of the questions, as some may be considered personal. Two teachers approached me to confirm their understanding of one of the questions as they felt uncertain as to the intention behind the word ‘materialistically’, as in the question “What has Yoga meant for me materialistically?” I made note of this to ensure that I would clarify my intended meaning with this question to the informants in the interviews.

**Analysis**

The analysis was undertaken though a hermeneutic perspective; the text is not judged as true or false, but rather it is understood as an interpretation (see Patton, 2002, p. 114). These interpretations are constructs, affected by my own preconceptions, understandings and bias, and ought to be understood as such (see From & Holmgren, 2000, p. 219). The researcher herself, and the relationship between the researcher, the subject, and the topic of the interview, should all be visible (Elden, 2005). In analyzing and compiling the results of these interviews, the researchers’ integrity is authenticated through the process of self-study; by examining and reflecting upon our own personal and professional bias, experience and pre-knowledge (Kitchen, cited by Lussier-Ley, 2010, p. 199).

The aim of this study has been to gain an understanding for the particular in depth; rather than finding what is generally true for many (Merriam, 1995). The qualitative interpretation is supported by an ‘alternative epistemology’ which seeks not truth claims, but different meanings (Muller & Cancienne, cited by Lussier-Ley, 2010). This understanding prevents the accounts of human actors from becoming overly cognitive and disembodied.

The data analysis consisted of a thorough review and organization of the interview transcripts. This was done systematically, by reading and re-reading each interview in its entirety, as suggested by Dalen (2007). This process consists of “looking for patterns, links and relationships” (Goetz & LeCompte, 1994). In order to better encapsulate the informants perceived intentions, some sentences were restricted, what Kvale (1997) refers to as ‘sentence concentration analysis’. This was done through a progressive focusing, as the data were worked and re-worked to uncover deeper analytical insights (Berner, 2005). Analyzing qualitative material is a “pervasive activity throughout the life of a research project, not simply one of the later stages of research, to be followed by the equally separate phase of writing up results” (Coffey &
Atkinson, 1996, p. 10). Rather it is a recursive process, which enables me to hypothesize while searching for meaning, manoeuvre the phenomena of interest and contemplate new ideas as they arise. This method is termed ‘analytic induction’ (ibid, p. 179). Selective coding was used to determine categories and their connections, to furnish an over-arching understanding of central themes; which were set in accordance with the purpose and questions posed at the onset of the study. During the analysis of the data, it became obvious that the narratives were better portrayed by separating the themes in to smaller constituents. The findings were organized as follows:

**1. Defining Yoga**
- Physical Implications of Yoga
- Spiritual Implications of Yoga
- Materialistic Implications of Yoga

**2. The Yoga Industry**
- Yoga as an Object/Project
- Certifications and Professional Standards

**3. The Role of the Yoga Teacher**
- Relationship to Students
- Yoga Teacher versus Guru
- The Yoga Teachers’ Body

**4. A Yoga Teachers’ Responsibilities**
- A Healthy Ego
- Knowledge of Traditions
- Changing Yoga

**5. The Pedagogy of the modern Yoga Teacher**
- Pedagogic Philosophies
- Pedagogic Methods

### Ethical Considerations

One of the main ethical considerations of compiling a research study is that of the honesty and integrity of the researcher. This applies to correct referencing and attributing of sourced material and to the relationship formed with the informants and the final representation of their subjective viewpoints (Ekengren & Hinnfors, 2006). The rules and guidelines pertaining to codes of conduct for research in the social sciences available through the Codex website provided by [Vetenskapsrådet](http://codex.vr.se/forskninghumsam.shtml) have been referred and adhered to throughout.

As mentioned previously, the initial contact with prospective subjects consisted in a clear presentation of the researcher, the scope of the study, its purpose and themes to be covered in the interviews, and a brief note outlining why this persons’ participation was requested. The informants were asked to indicate their consent, and provide a few personal details (name, age, nationality) and basic information pertaining to their Yoga practice (total years practice, style of Yoga, whether they held a RYT certification, and if so, where from). Informants were notified that the interviews would be recorded. All participants were ensured anonymity, in accordance with confidentiality requirements. Pseudonyms have been used and any identifying characteristics have either been altered or removed. This was particularly important to one informant, whose participation was on the condition of absolute anonymity, due to her current employment situation. The transcriptions from the interviews are based on sound recordings and notes, and these were reproduced and interpreted in accordance with guidelines provided in Dalen (2007). Prior to final submission and publication of this study, it was given to the informants to read, to ensure their consent to the manner in which their opinions and experiences have been represented here, and that the quotations used are accurately contextualized.
RESULTS AND ANALYSIS
As this study engages with ten individuals from different nationalities, ages and backgrounds, a table has been constructed to provide an easy overview of their teaching context and current circumstance:

### Table 2. Participants teaching contexts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Current teaching engagement</th>
<th>Years Teaching</th>
<th>Completed YTT?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anita</td>
<td>Recently completed a 200hr YTT in India, teaching part time for about 8 months at a children’s’ Yoga studio and at local gyms</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sasha</td>
<td>Founder of boutique Yoga resort on a tropical island, runs retreats and YTT courses in his own trademarked style of Yoga</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>Part-owner and teacher of a franchised Bikram Yoga studio</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philip</td>
<td>Runs a small Tantra Yoga retreat in Italy, working primarily with smaller groups and couples</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miguel</td>
<td>Runs an esoteric-oriented Yoga ashram in South-East Asia together with his wife, who is a self-realized enlightened Guru.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>Full-time university lecturer teaching Yoga part-time outside of regular work commitments, created as immersion courses. Completed a 2 year YTT course in the Satyananda tradition with the Bihar School of Yoga[15]</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yaniv</td>
<td>Lives in a commune, where he is considered spiritual teacher and Guru by his students and followers.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Teaches Yoga primarily through the internet, with over 6000 subscribers to her YouTube channel and a website charging €80/year for a membership which gives access to more digital content</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Teaches Yoga to private customers and markets her classes as therapeutic, often working at retreats and reports around the world.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nisha</td>
<td>A disciple of B.K.S. Iyengar since childhood, now employed at his institute teaching both Indian and Western students. Nisha has achieved a Senior Advanced Level 2 from the Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Institute[16], which equates to 8 years of studies.</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>√</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The diversity of these individuals’ backgrounds and approaches to Yoga may be considered an indicator of how vast the field of Yoga is. Therefore, the initial questions sought to explore how the informants themselves understand and define Yoga.

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[14] Names are pseudonyms
Defining Yoga

As a concept, Yoga is difficult to define, particularly in light of the more recent constructions. “It is more than a sport, an art or a relaxing technique: it can really become a way of life. It is difficult to give a summary of what it is, because there is no rational and scientific definition and you have to feel it by yourself” (Dundon & Duprat, 2006, p. 2). In order to garner an understanding of what the informants’ personal experiences of Yoga have been, the informants were asked to describe the impact their practice and teaching has had on their lives.

The delineation of the physical, spiritual and materialistic implications were made to highlight each component separately, however, these separations are somewhat arbitrary, as Yoga is a practice of unification, not divisions and separations. For example, Rachel said: “Yoga becomes who you are, and how you live. You breathe Yoga. It's that simple” suggesting that the practice of Yoga becomes integral to the entire person. While the results are presented this way on paper, in practice, they are indivisible as they are connected within the practitioner. This quote from Emma illustrates this concept: 'Everything can be Yoga – the practice, the state of being, the goal.'

Physical Implications of Yoga

When discussing the effects of Yoga on the body, four informants mentioned weight reduction and management and increased strength and flexibility. These results are in accordance with published studies on the physical effects of Yoga. Two of the informants had not experienced any significant physical changes, as they had backgrounds in advanced physical training or sports before they took up Yoga. None of the informants had suffered any serious maladies prior to their engagement with Yoga, and thus had not sought it out for its purported therapeutic results; however, Anita had been struggling with obesity since childhood, and credits her Yoga practice with her weight-loss. She said ‘Through my practice I finally realized I have a body, after ignoring it and mistreating it all my life’. This indicates a deep, ontological change in her perceptions; an increased awareness of her physical body. This sentiment was shared by all informants, in terms such as: getting into the body; to get to know my own body; a greater sense of acceptance of my body; feeling balanced; body awareness and knowing that I am here, in this body all the time.

Emma explains: ‘Many of us are strangers to our own bodies’, which corresponds to Anita’s state of being, feeling estranged from her body and lacking body-awareness, prior to her engagement with Yoga. The only person to express the improved physical appearance was Tina, who confidently stated: ‘My body is strong, slim and toned, and I look and feel beautiful because I really work my ass of in my classes’. Initially, to the Western sensitivities to expressions of vanity, this may seem a superficial response, however, in Thai culture, beauty is actively endorsed, jealousy is not common, and to express pride in one’s appearance is accepted, especially when it is the result of effort on behalf of the individual. Tina was the only informant not to mention the body being used as a tool in the pursuit of the meditative state. Miguel, Yaniv, Rachel, and Sasha all emphasized that the goal of Hatha Yoga lies in reaching the unbounded state of unified consciousness [Samadhi] and that this involves taking control of the body. Miguel said: ‘I use the Asana as a way of getting into my body, and to take control, so that I am able to sit for long periods of time without feeling pain or fatigue in the meditative poses for Kundalini meditation.’

Nisha pointed to cultural differences, and explains:

\[17\]The cosmic energy believed to be within everyone. It is pictured as a coiled serpent lying at the base of the spine. Through a series of exercises involving posture, meditation, and breathing, a practitioner can force this energy up through the body to the top of the head. This brings about a sensation of bliss, as the ordinary self is dissolved into its eternal essence (excerpt from the Merriam-Webster dictionary from: http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/kundalini).
Westerners live only in the head. They think, think all the time, thoughts jumping like monkeys. When
we do Hatha Yoga, we make poses [Asana] and make this life move down, into the body, so the mind
goes quiet, and the body is more there. Then we can feel that we are living this whole package, and to
really be alive as a whole being.

This quote illustrates the idea of the dualism experienced in the West, where the mind is seen as somehow
separate from the body. The body can thus represent the starting point in the journey towards Yoga, what
may be termed ‘elemental Yogic materialism’ (see Alter, 2004, p. 7), as the physics of fitness and
physiology are understood as the most basic level of Yogic practices.

**Spiritual Implications of Yoga**

The physical aspects of Yoga are what we can see of Yoga. It is simple to see when an individual is
advanced in their Asana practice, as their bodies and the way they move them through impossible-looking
contortions is readily apparent, a person’s spirituality and beliefs are much less accessible. Any
explanations of personal experiences of the esoteric are by the very nature of the subject difficult to relate
to and compare. The limitations of language in translating the first-hand experience make it a very
difficult, perhaps impossible undertaking. In answer to my question ‘What does Yoga mean to you
spiritually?’ Philip answered ‘Who are you? Can you tell me in a way so that I completely understand your
entire being and the totality of all your experiences? You can ask me this question, but I can’t give you an
answer that satisfies either of us. I can show you, guide you through some experiences, but they will then
be yours, not mine’.

Several of the informants described the inherent problem of sharing the personal experience with another.
Rachel said:

I can’t speak for other people, other students or Yoga teachers. Yoga is different for each individual, and I
find it difficult to explain my own experiences adequately, so talking about someone else’s or generalizing
about the whole is not possible. I guess, if I was going to try to explain it, I would use the word
‘awakening’ to explain what my Yoga practice has meant for me.

This quote indicates that Rachel’s experiences of Yoga have been personal, and that she understands Yoga
as subjective. Unlike the physical, tangible and visible effects that can be measured and seen, spirituality is
metaphysical and thus impossible to quantify. The esoteric experience must be first-hand, as we cannot
possibly relate to it, as it goes beyond the known, as Emma explains:

I have been practicing for more than ten years, and the philosophical and epistemological ideas are so vast,
I am still just a beginner. I have drilled some holes, but I am humble in my understanding of concepts
and terminology. I realize now that the intellectual approach doesn’t get me there. The intellect sets
boundaries, the more you think you understand, the further from knowing you get. Knowing requires you
to digest, to work through and accept, to allow it to become part of the essence that you are. You must
walk the talk, live it, breathe it, be it. You don’t become spiritual by standing in Trikonasana\(^\text{18}\). It is the
intention, the fundamental essence of what I try to share that matters. Otherwise it is just acrobatics. You
don’t need to practice the Asana to live the spiritual truths of Yoga

\(^{18}\) Known in English as ‘Triangle pose’
The understanding here is that an Asana practice in and of itself is no different from other forms of physical exercise, rather it is the spiritual ideas and intentions that create the Yoga practice. Sasha shares this view: ‘Yoga is primarily a system of exercises and meditations for spiritual development. The spiritual stuff is the Yoga’.

Several of the subjects mentioned the Ashtanga (see appendix 1). Sarah said: ‘Pratyahara means withdrawal of the sense. To me that is what Yoga is about spiritually - clearing away all the noise so that we can hear the pure voice within, the True Self’.

Although the difficulties of relating and describing the personal spiritual results and experiences were expressed, nine of the informants did share the view that Yoga is it is essence primarily a spiritual path (albeit with physical components to its practice).

**Materialistic Implications of Yoga**

The Yogis in India have traditionally upheld ascetic ideals of renunciation, and while this culture persists today, it is changing. Modern Yoga teachers manoeuvre between these ideals and the practical concerns of life in our modern society. All the informants earn income from their Yoga teaching, however none claim to be in the high salary brackets. The Yamas of moderation [Brahmacharya]; and non-hoarding/generosity [Apigraha] were here mentioned by four informants, indicating their understanding and application of the Ashtanga in their daily lives. Sarah gives free weekly one-hour classes which she uploads to YouTube, and these have been watched by thousands of people. She says: ‘Me and my husband live by the Ashtanga philosophy of Apigraha – I take only what I need. I choose to align myself with businesses that live up to my ethical values and that are environmentally responsible’.

The values of Yoga may apply to the relationship a Yoga teacher has with money. The Ashtanga does not specify that a Yogi must live without possessions, but they do advocate values such as generosity, moderation, contentment and honesty. Rachel said:

> I do charge for my lessons. I charge as much as the students are willing to pay, I am open to discuss how much they can afford, but I need money too. We are all living in the same world, where we need money to get by. It is also important that the lesson costs them something; it makes it more serious and valuable in their mind.

Balance is important in the pursuit of Yoga; the student ought to give something back for receiving the teachings. While students of the past would serve their Gurus over long time-periods, sometimes for years (Kaminoff, 2007), today people use money as a representation or manifestation of this energy.

Anita, who teaches part-time, says it would not be possible for her to survive on teaching Yoga alone, a supplementary income is necessary. Nisha has a small apartment that is included in her salary: ‘My work is to follow my Guru. What he asks me to do, I do. I am here because I am devoted to him, not because of the salary. It is very modest’.

Sasha runs a Yoga resort which includes a hotel, restaurant and swimming pool, and employs 25 staff members: ‘They all need their salaries paid. That is the reality of how these things are run’. Guests pay for the retreat experience, which includes daily Yoga classes, accommodation and organic food. This type of inclusive Yoga resort experience are becoming increasingly popular all over the world, as a new and updated sort of Ashram experience, a sanctuary away from the stress of modern society. Life today

19 The moral values and rules of social behaviour of the Ashtanga (p.13)
20 Translated as ‘generosity’ or ‘non-possessiveness’
21 Often used to indicate a spiritual hermitage, for Yogis, often holds facilities for room and board, and serve as a place in which a student may live while learning about Yoga. The Ashram is often centred around a Guru and his teachings. Some charge fees per day or per course, others accept donations or contend with the students performing acts of service, such as cleaning,
requires money; it is integral to our well-being. The implications of a Yoga practice seem to be that the individual cultivates a strong sense of moderation and fairness and refrains from greed in dealing with others.

The Yoga Industry

**Yoga as an Object/Product**

When discussing the way Yoga is increasingly portrayed in the media, several informants expressed an unwillingness to hold judgments against others. Emma said: ‘I don’t hold judgment. Yoga can reflect whatever each person sees as important; it’s all just different entrance points. We each have a different path to get to the destination.’ Perhaps also Yoga is marketed and understood differently in different countries and cultures as it has been adapted to and by its practitioners. Anita feels uncertainties regarding how to open up the topic of enlightenment, thus conforming to her students’ expectation of Yoga. She says:

Yoga in America is American Yoga. This is a capitalist culture, people try to make money from everything and that changes things. I think the idea of unification of body, mind and spirit is there, but I don’t think the goal for many people who come to Yoga classes is enlightenment. It may be that not many even know what that is.

Bikram Choudhury is an Indian Yoga teacher who moved to America and has since trademarked his own version of Yoga. Tina says: ‘There are thousand franchises of Bikram studios around the world now. Students of Bikram Yoga can go into any Bikram studio in the world, and find the same class, the same sequences, and the teachers all use the same script to instruct the students’. This commodification is atypical of the Yoga industry as a whole, as most studios are individually run and owned. Yoga teachers often work as private entities, while there are a larger conglomerate brands that market and sell Yoga related products. Their marketing seems to affect how some perceive the practice. Rachel reflects: ‘Now some people seem to think they can buy their way to Yoga, as if it matters how much their mat costs, like having the right gear has more spiritual value’. These quotes illustrate the view that Yoga practice has been objectified, that it can somehow be bought and sold. It is suggested that the dominant logic of consumerism prevalent in modern global culture is reflected in the evolution of the practice.

In the past, seekers went on spiritual pilgrimages to India, which has been constructed as a “domain of spirituality” (Islam, 2012, p. 225). Eight of the informants have been in India (Nisha, who is of Indian origin and lives in Pune, India, is included in these eight). Three of the informants consider their time at Ashrams in India as instrumental to their practice, and consider it an experience that cannot be had anywhere else. While most had positive experiences of Yoga in India, Sasha did not: ‘Yoga in India is all about money. I went there, I went to different ashrams, and I wasn’t impressed; there was no integrity left’. While the notion that Yoga may be more authentic in India, not everyone sees the need to travel to the place Yoga originated in order to experience the authentic practice. Sarah reflects:

I love the cultural aspects that created Yoga, but I have no interest in going to India. There is a romanticizing of India; as if by going there you can get spiritual. It becomes a voyeurism, a tourism of...
spirituality, it’s a billion dollar industry there also. I believe spirituality is within us, and I think it is a strange spiritual materialism that the pilgrimage to India represents when people travel there looking to find themselves. We find ourselves where we are, not anywhere else.

In a consumption culture, Yoga is constructed as a product. The repackaging, re-branding and marketing of Yoga may reflect the consumer’s attitudes and bias, rather than an authentic representation of the ancient traditions, philosophies and spiritual goals. Yoga has now become trendy; a fashionable term, but an empty signifier. As Yoga is not owned or governed, thus there is no control over how the word is used. Miguel reflects: ‘Whatever is happening with this, I don’t really take an interest. I don’t believe focusing on that helps anyone. I know what Yoga is to me, that’s enough’.

There was a general dismissal of the ‘shiny, photo-shopped version’ of Yoga, and generally the attitude was that the best way to stay true to the practice is by living it yourself.

Certifications and Professional Standards
The construction of ready-made certifications available often without any pre-requisites is problematic. Nine of the informants regard Yoga teaching as a vocation, rather than a profession. Only Tina considers her position as a job. She feels satisfied with her training course, and feels that the regulations placed on Bikram Yoga studios and teachers maintain the integrity of the practice: ‘My teacher training was great, there were a couple hundred of us together, and it was really worth the money. Everyone learns the same stuff, and we now teach the same way. That’s what keeps it Bikram’.

Nisha, with almost four decades experience of teaching Yoga feels that ‘it isn’t possible to learn even the basics in 200 hours. After 200 hours, maybe you are ready to practice by yourself, but you are not ready to teach’. It is generally agreed that just doing a 200 hour course is not in itself enough. Rachel who has attended many classes with different teachers around the world, comments:

There are many okay Yoga teachers, there are some good ones, there are some who need a lot more experience for themselves before they should start teaching after finishing a 200 hour course. There are some who shouldn’t be teaching. They don’t know what they’re doing, they damage and harm their students, not only physically, but also emotionally and spiritually.

The widely available YTT courses are understood as a good way to ‘deepen one’s Yoga practice’ and as an ‘immersion’, perhaps similar to the Indian Ashram experience. While in general, this was held as positive, it was reflected that perhaps there is an issue with the marketing of these courses as a ‘one-stop-shop’ to becoming a Yoga teacher.

Philip said:

It’s a piece of paper. That’s all. It’s offensive to the traditions and the countless Yogis, Swamis, Rishis and Gurus who have carried the knowledge and traditions forward for us to learn from. We can’t certify someone’s personal Yoga practice; it’s just a money making venture, and it’s completely un-Yoga.

While a Guru was often selective in his selection of disciples, the YTT courses are available to anyone who can afford to pay the fees. Sasha, who runs YTT courses at his resort, said: ‘I can’t afford to be a picky Guru. I have bills and salaries that need to get paid. If we get complete beginners, I make sure to take them aside and talk to them about their expectations, but I don’t turn anyone away’. Yaniv doesn’t
give diplomas to his students, who come to him for guidance in Yoga, and he admits to occasionally
turning people away if he feels that they are not in the right place to understand his teachings. He says:

It’s not realistic to expect a Yoga teacher to be enlightened, but they need to have walked some steps on
their spiritual path so they can lead their students forward. Otherwise you have a blind leading another
blind, and then nobody has any light to share. That is concerning.

While Yoga is for everyone, the teaching of Yoga is not something anyone and everyone should engage in.
The goal of the true practice of Yoga is to reach Yoga (see Bharati, 2010). The authentic Yoga teacher is
considered as a role-model; a preceptor of the lifestyle, attitude and practices.

The Role of the Yoga Teacher
Stereotypes of Yoga teachers may be anything from the ascetic, bearded Indian Guru in saffron- coloured
robes with strings of prayer beads around his neck, to the young, athletic, Caucasian woman in tight
clothes who drinks green tea and carries her plastic yoga mat everywhere. No matter how he or she
appears- a teacher can only exist through the relationship to his/her students.

Relationship to Students
Miguel has a strict policy for those who wish to learn from him. A disciple must first shave his/her head,
and communication with the outside world must cease completely for the first 14 days of their stay at his
school. He says:

Many come here telling me what they want. They have their expectations. They have already judged from
what they think they know. If they want to learn, they must un-learn, open their minds, and let go, and
they need to show that they have complete trust in us and the process.

Miguel explains that the system they use entails breaking down negative behavioural patterns, which
requires complete surrender to the process. They teach a maximum of eight students who will live in close
proximity to him and his wife during their stay. Once students have completed their course, they are not
permitted to remain in the school ‘so they don’t get dependent on being around us, especially my wife, her
energy is very strong’. These very intense relationships with students are similar to the traditional Guru-
disciple relationships. Philip works with individual students, over much longer time-frames:

For me, the relationship between me and my students takes a while to build. Most important is that the
student has a hunger to keep going, to want more, to know more, and that is not something that I can
teach. I have to be patient, and wait for the student to get ready to accept the teachings. It’s not always a
happy relationship, but I don’t expect it to be. To learn something to change, we have to get challenged. It
takes time, and energy, because we work on deep levels for personal growth and transformation.

From this description it is inferred that Philip’s relationship to his student is personal, and based on the
individuals’ needs and particularities. Unlike Miguel, Philip allows the student to direct the course of the
teachings, and his patience with the student shows that he can relate to their current situation. While
Nisha agrees that challenge plays a big part in affecting change in a student, she reflects: ‘When students
don’t like how I teach, they don’t come again. They don’t like to be told, they don’t like to feel pain, they think it is boring, so they go and find a teacher who is how they want, and feel comfortable. Then nobody learns; very little changes’.

Rachel also feels that the element of challenge is intrinsic for the teacher-student relationship to be of value: ‘I can only teach someone who wants to be taught. Students will find their teacher when they are ready to learn. Our relationship is based on their desire for change’. These quotes all serve to illustrate that the driving force behind the communication of Yoga taking place is the students, and that change is the result of a successful relationship. The teacher-student relationship is portrayed as hierarchal, personal, and focused on individual growth. The students approaches the teacher, asking to be taught, and must then surrender and show respect to the teachings in order to learn, and change.

In contrast, Anita has no expectations of building relationships between herself and most of those who attend her classes. The students may follow her instructions during the class, but she does not demand anything or have any expectation of them. She says:

> Each person is in a different place. The newer students are not so into self-reflection, they just want to stretch. It depends where they are in their practice. I have one student who comes to my classes, twice a week, but mostly people just drop in to my classes when they feel like they have time

In the gym and fitness industry context, the Yoga teacher is no longer a spiritual guide but a physical health instructor, and those who teach in these places will alienate their students and possibly lose their position if they ‘talk about the spiritual stuff too much’. Tina teaches several classes a day at her studio, and has up to 30 students per class, ‘many of them come three or four times a week, so I recognize them’.

Unlike Tina, Sarah feels that her job is ‘more than just teaching a fitness class’ and aims to ‘reach her student on every level – physically, energetically, emotionally, mentally, and physically’. Sarah is the only teacher who teaches students with whom she has no face-to-face interaction. She markets her classes as accessible for the average person, and she says her style is ‘less physically demanding, and instead more restorative, introspective, and created for complete beginners, who want to explore the philosophy of Yoga’.

While the context in which the teaching takes place matter to how the teacher will relate to the practice, the students’ expectations are important. Teachers and students, after all, are individuals, and it is in their relating to one another, and the teachings, that Yoga is communicated. The relationship to students is infinitely different for the modern Yoga teacher than the relationship between a disciple and his/her Guru.

**Yoga Teacher versus Guru**

While all the informants consider themselves Yoga teachers, no one referred to themselves as a Guru. Yaniv is often called Guru by his students, who informed me that he is enlightened. He says ‘A teacher who brings you towards enlightenment is a Guru. A person who teaches you to bend and touch your toes is a fitness instructor’. This quote highlights why it is important to be clear about the definition of Yoga, and understanding of the concept.

For millennia, Gurus have been integral to the teaching of Yoga, the Guru plays a vital role and is “considered as the very source of metaphysical illumination in the life of the seeker” (Tichenor, 2007, p. 8). The informants held diverging opinions and beliefs about Gurus, which may be linked to their
particular epistemologies and cultural frameworks. In India, the traditions revere those Yogis who reach enlightenment, and one can earn good karma by giving them food and shelter. Nisha has devoted her life to her Guru: ‘You must follow a Guru. You must stay with your Guru, follow his instructions, love, respect and devote yourself to his teachings. The Guru is most important for a Yogi’.

The Guru here is external, in the form of another human being, who possesses knowledge, wisdom and truth.

For others, ‘Guru’ is a concept, not necessarily another person but ‘a source of enlightenment, which can be a text, a piece of music, your own experience or a person’ according to Philip. The notion of worship and devotion to another person may be conflicting to a person who has grown up in a non-secular society, which upholds the value of the individual and rejects conformity. Worship can here be seen as linked with religious beliefs and norms held by groups (Alter, 2004). Sarah said:

The Guru is dead. I can’t know what is best for my students. I don’t live their lives for them. The ego and the higher wisdom we carry within ourselves. I am just a person, and I can only help people find their own way. A good teacher will guide you on your path, but we can’t walk their paths for them.

This quote, and the ones below, describes the notion of the ‘Guru within’; a concept that seems more easily digestible for the Western student than the idea of obedience and submission to another’s will and guidance. This internal Guru is seen in contrast to the external Guru as described above. Rachel clarified: ‘You are your own Guru. You have to evaluate everything you hear, see, and feel, and learn from it. You are only accountable to yourself, this is your journey’.

While Emma encourages her students to follow their own, inner guidance, she has a firm belief in the teachings of her predecessors and Gurus:

I consider it my task to guide those who come to me to discover what they have within themselves, to start to listen to that inner awareness You use what you have, to find the answers that ring true for you. We can combine types, and variations of Yoga, it is up to our own personal preference. Nothing is wrong. Personally I trust swami Niranjanananda and stay true to his perspective, philosophy, traditions and practice. This is the tradition which I have been initiated into, and it contains unfathomable spiritual and practical knowledge and experience.

Today there are many other ways to discover Yoga than through the teachings of a Guru. There are Yoga studios that have classes, retreats, books, videos, blogs, podcasts and even apps for smart-phones about Yoga. This dissemination of Yoga knowledge is not always reliable, and a seeker must be discerning in their evaluations. For some, distinctions between Guru, Yoga teacher and Asana Instructor ought to be made more clearly. Emma comments: ‘Nobody who calls themselves a Guru is one, it is a title given by others. The Guru often doesn’t want to be afforded that label’.

For others, names and titles are not so important; what matters is what is being taught, and what is learnt. As far as stereotypes go, a Guru may often be imagined as sitting comfortably in a chair or on a cushion, dispensing advice, sharing insights and answering questions, while the modern Yoga teacher is seen in glossy magazines, dressed in tight lycra, to show the results of her practice on her toned body.
The Yoga Teacher’s Body

The construction of the ‘Yoga body’ as a goal for Yogic practice is a new addition of the modern practice, and conflicts with the traditions where the body was to be conquered, not shaped and formed to fit an aesthetic ideal. The goal of Hatha Yoga ‘isn’t to get six pack abs, but to balance our energies in the body’ comments Sasha. Sasha already has an athletic, muscular body, and he is pictured performing Asana shirtless in much of the advertising for his retreat. The style of Yoga which Sasha has developed is physically challenging and ‘it changes the body, sure, but that isn’t why we do it’.

Teachers who instruct Asana classes are very physically visible, and often, the class is conducted so the teacher stays in front, performing the Asana along with the class. The students will observe the teachers body as a guide, and may well idolize how it looks, as well as how it performs. Anita comments: ‘I get people who say “What, you’re a Yoga teacher?!”’ they are surprised because I am bigger. I guess it’s expected that you have to be all lean and toned and perfect. Some of my students tell me they feel more comfortable coming to my classes because I am bigger’.

The female informants were generally more aware of physical scrutiny and body objectification. Sarah said:

I feel an issue with the body image questions. The larger cultural and systemic problem of the way women’s bodies are held up to ridiculous standards by media and advertising norms, becomes part of the double standard placed on men and women. Men don’t have to answer questions on their weight, hair colour, or what they wear when they practice Yoga. The most frequent questions I get from students is about my weight.

Sarah experiences her students’ main concerns as their weight and appearance, rather than their emotional wellbeing and spiritual progress. In contrast, Tina views her body as her primary instrument and understands that it is important to look good: ‘I had a breast enlargement, you know, I only wear something like a bikini in classes, and my body represents what we’re selling here’. As Yoga, and particularly Hatha Yoga, is so diverse, the students’ expectation of the teachers’ body will vary depending on the style of Yoga. Someone who practices an Ashtanga-Vinyasa flow style of Yoga, which is more dynamic and physically challenging, will naturally develop a leaner, more muscular physique than a person who practices the more sedentary, meditative aspects of Yoga. Emma guides her classes using primarily verbal instructions, and does not feel that her students hold any expectation on her appearance.

For the remaining three male informants, pursuits of physical ideals were likewise dismissed. Yaniv said: ‘This is the body I have. I live well; you can tell by my belly, just like the Buddha! What people think about it doesn’t matter, it serves me well’. The body is understood to be a tool to enlightenment, and the key word is control, and appearance does not matter. Philip explains:

The body is the physical manifestation of our energy, we inhabit it while we are here, it is what we are connected to, and the body’s senses are how we experience the world. Tantra Yoga doesn’t renounce the body or our sexuality the way most other Yoga does. We try to change how we see things, not how we look

It was further observed that the bodies we see in Yoga magazines are not typical, and do not represent the average Yogi, just as ‘most people do not look like supermodels’. Rachel worries that ‘some of these images of toned and tanned Yoga bodies can make people feel inadequate and stop them from coming to Yoga’. These newer, more physical forms of Yoga often focus on sculpting, toning and weight-loss, and this augmentation may encourage the afflictions which Patanjali warned the spiritual seeker against:
Asmita (pride/narcissism) and Raga (desire). Many Yoga teachers work intimately with their bodies, and the structure of modern Yoga classes may result in bodily objectification, perhaps this is something discerning teachers can clarify to their students, as perhaps they have the responsibility of maintaining that in Yoga, the body is a tool, not a goal.

A Yoga Teacher’s Responsibilities

All the Yoga teachers feel a personal responsibility towards maintaining the integrity of the style of Yoga which they practice, as they understand it. This understanding is constructed as a response to their own gains and subjective experiences through their own practice. Nisha reflects on her journey several times a day, in her morning practice and prior to any teaching engagement. She directs gratitude to her own teacher: ‘When I begin a class, I say thank you to my Guru, and ask that he will join me, so that I can continue his legacy through his teaching and experience Yoga through him’. The offering of gratitude and naming one’s Guru and their lineage is part of the way Yoga has been communicated in the past – orally. Gratitude [Santosa] is one of the Niyamas23 of the Ashtanga, and it is purported as one of the most powerful emotional states to be in for teaching and learning to take place (Dalai Lama, 2009; Chopra, 2004).

A Healthy Ego

The structure of modern forms of Hatha Yoga, teaching often results as a one-way instructional monologue, where there is little space for student feedback to occur. The student’s role is often acquiescent and passive, which can make the teaching an egotistical process (Maw, 2008). Some of the informants have responded to this by constructing a separate teaching identity as a ‘channel’ through which the teachings of Yoga are dispersed.

Generally, the informants were aware of their own egos, but attempted to prevent ego conflicts. The following quote from Miguel provides an example of how this can be done:

> Before I enter the Shala24, I stop, and say a little prayer: I ask to be a tool, I ask to be useful, that I follow the flow, and ask the universe to guide me. Taking a moment to calm down, breathe and gather focus prior to commencing classes could be done either outside the class alone, or done with the group.

While the ego is often negatively portrayed, it is necessary for teaching. One must possess an ego in order to engage with others, which is what teaching essentially is. The processes of teaching and learning involve the construction of identities (Lave & Wenger, 1998, p.229), the roles of teacher and student are essential to the knowledge exchange. While Yoga teachings often advocate the killing of the ego, the teachers’ role requires that they work with their ego, not against it, while teaching. It is not the ego itself which is a hindrance; rather it is the self-centred, egoistic or narcissistic tendencies which excludes the student’s experience and maintains sovereignty which ought to be dispelled. Sasha explains:

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23 The observances or rules of personal behaviour, guiding our relationship to ourselves
24 Translated as ‘house’ in Sanskrit, and this term is often used to denote a house or studio dedicated to the practice of Yoga.
I definitely have an ego. I’m aware of it. I do love my job, but it is not who I am. When I am a teacher, I am different from who I am when I am not in that role. In life, I play many roles: boyfriend, brother, son, friend, teacher, and they don’t need to overlap.

Perhaps this understanding can serve as an illustration of why some informants feel that the YTT courses of 200 hours are inadequate to prepare an individual to become a Yoga teacher. The cultivation of a healthy ego is a reflexive project that is constantly under construction, demanding of the individual that he/she has reflected upon their concept of who they are. This requires time, reflection and maturity. It gets personal, as this is not something that happens simply through the construction of a teacher role, as Ulrich Bech observes: “I am I” proceeds “I am a teacher” (cited by Hermann, 2004). It may be that it is particularly easy to fall into a narcissistic relationship with one’s ego while teaching Yoga, as students can often idolize their teacher, not only physically, but also consider them as ‘higher’ morally, spiritually and hold unreasonable expectations.

After being seduced by the teachings of the Guru Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in the late 1960s’ John Lennon said: “We made a mistake. We thought there was more to him than there was. He’s human. We thought at first he wasn’t”. This example illustrates how students may create unrealistic expectations of a spiritual teacher or Guru.

The authentic Yoga teacher must therefore work to maintain a healthy relationship not only to their students but also to their ego. This endeavour is well documented in the ancient Indian scriptures, such as the Ramayana and the Bhaghavad Gita, composed in the 5th-2nd century B.C. The Ashtanga also provides a guide for dealing with the human ego, and thus, a Yoga teacher might be expected to possess knowledge of these scriptures, philosophies and Yogic traditions.

Knowledge of Traditions and Scriptures

This topic was not set as a question during the interviews, possibly due to the researcher’s own bias, it was perhaps mistakenly assumed as obvious. In the analysis of the interviews, however, it was noted and recognized as important as several of the informants referred to various traditions, names of Gurus and teachers of their own lineages, and mentioned the Yoga Sutras, the Ashtanga and other scriptures, Indian epics or well-known analogies used in communicating Yogic ideas and values, which exemplify the Yamas and Niyamas of the Asthanga, and serve as ethical guidelines that will aid a practitioner of Yoga. While all the informants had knowledge of the Ashtanga, some were less familiar with its content and concepts than others. Sarah holds the conviction that a Yoga teacher is responsible not only to have knowledge of the philosophy and texts of Yoga, but also ‘to integrate them into our lives, and bring them to life, and be a living example of these ancient teachings to the best of our ability’.

While all the informants agreed that Yoga is not a religion, and some see that the use of the Hindu scriptures, use of Hindu deities and other concepts taken from this religion is not appropriate when translated to a Western space and removed from its context. While not all teachers were familiar with the ancient Yogic philosophical texts The Upanishads, or the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, there are also much iconic material that has been composed more recently; books written in our modern era by Indian Gurus, Western Yogs and scholars such as Georg Feuerstein. Some of these may be more easily digestible as they are written for the modern practitioner. Several informants shared the understanding however, that the

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25 As I attended high-school in India, study of the great Indian Epics was obligatory, as were lessons in Hindi, Sanskrit and Hinduism. The Yoga scriptures (such as Patanjali’s Yoga sutras, and the Hatha Yoga Pradipika) were often referred to by my Yoga teacher, and it was expected of me to have read them. Thus, I had assumed that these texts comprised an integral component in the YTT course content, and that all Yoga teachers would be well-versed and aware of this material.
Yoga Sutras, the oldest known Yoga text ‘is just as completely relevant to us today’. In one interview a comparison was made between a Yoga teacher being unfamiliar with any version of this text and its contents, to a priest who has never read the bible.

Part of keeping a healthy ego as a teacher is to maintain an attitude of humility, as Sarah says ‘we are always learning more, there is so much left to learn’ and as Rachel reflects ‘one is never finished ‘Each teacher teaches according to his/her own perception and understanding of Yoga. Although there are new styles of Yoga that have been named (and sometimes trademarked), each individual teacher within a lineage or tradition has their own, unique way of presenting and representing Yoga. As a personal, subjective experience-focused practice, it is not perhaps necessary to study the history and evolution of Yoga, but rather to stay where it is discovered and practiced now, as the essential aspects of Yoga are time-less and free from cultural constraints. The extent to which a Yoga teacher is responsible to be familiar with the traditions and philosophies of Yoga, is impossible to determine, especially considering the tremendous changes to the way Yoga is practiced which have occurred over the past century.

Changing Yoga
The change Yoga has undergone, particularly in the past decade, is understood as a direct result of the transnational movement and trans-cultural adaptations that have been made to make the practice more palatable and marketable to consumers (Shapiro, 2011). As some of the informants strive to hold non-judgment as part of their Yoga practice, they refrained from expressing opinions based on values or comparisons. Sasha said:

The world and everything is balanced. I don’t believe it is possible that it could not be. Yoga teaches us to be neutral, to be present in the moment. I don’t try to change the world; I don’t even try to change myself anymore.

Although some Yogis may aim to avoid judgments, evaluations or comparisons, others see no issue in cultivating and expressing their own personal opinion. Miguel reflects that some of the new adaptations to have ‘lost the Yoga part, and become something else. Some of those teachers haven’t been changed by the practice at all, they’ve just taken something they didn’t understand and changed it to suit their own purpose’. This comment was made referring to, in particular, the weight-loss type DVDs that are marketed as Yoga. For others, the new ‘mainstreamed’ styles of Yoga can mean that those who would otherwise not have had any experience at all, bring themselves to the practice, and eventually ‘it hits home, and things that you never thought would happen to you, start to come, and you want to know more, and you look back at what the ideas you had at the beginning and they seem so shallow’, as Anita explains her realization of Yoga. This seems to presuppose that there is an integral value to the practice of the Asana themselves; that simply doing the physical practice somehow directs the practitioner towards the spiritual aspects of Yoga. These notions are mere speculation, and while Patthabi Jois\textsuperscript{26} often would say to his students: “Practice and all is coming”, we cannot infer conclusions without any evidence.

Nisha says: ‘Western students want to think about everything, and they don’t want to get challenged. They have the desire for awakening, but they want to understand it first. So we have to talk more and explain everything. Then practice becomes less’. Sasha also holds this understanding: ‘The Western approach to Yoga is through the mind. The students want to ask questions; they want explanations of things, because they want to understand it through with their mind. The Eastern way is just to do. Copy from the teacher,

\textsuperscript{26} Indian Yoga Guru and founder of the Ashtanga-Vinyasa style, see http://kpjayi.org/biographies/r-sharath
and do without trying to understand. Just do the exercise 2000 times, and you’ll understand, beyond the
mind’. It is understood that just as each person is different and unique, so each practitioner’s version of
Yoga will be different and unique.

For most of the teachers, they see constant changes in their own practice, their own understanding, and
their way of teaching and relating to their roles as Yoga teachers. Emma says: ‘Change, the process of
depth ontological change, is the essence of Yoga’.

Teaching Philosophies and Methods

Pedagogic Philosophies

The personal philosophy of teachers is reflected in their relationship to their teachings, to their students
and to their practice. All informants mentioned experiencing a sense of accomplishment from seeing
changes in their students. These changes could be physical, emotional, behavioural or something deeper
‘from inside’. The informants held different philosophies regarding their teaching practice; which could be
considered a product of their own cultural background, their own experiences of learning and
institutionalized forms of education, and their respective teacher lineages in Yoga. The philosophical
theories underpinning the pedagogical methods a teacher utilizes may entail a “selective tradition” (Luke
& Luke, 1994, p. 566), where the culture-specific ways of organizing teaching and learning affect the
practices and conventions. An individual teachers’ pedagogical philosophy is far from arbitrary, and can
ultimately be linked to his/her personal epistemological ideologies. Sasha said:

> I try to teach by example. The eight limbs of Yoga are separated when we read them on paper, but in
> reality they aren’t. My understanding is that all the eight limbs are part of the process of the meditative
> state. In order to reach Samadhi, you must meditate, and to get there you must do Asana and
> Pranayama. So I try to show people something, give them an experience which allows them to feel
> something, that changes their perception. The world seems to have changed, because they have changed. My
> responsibility is to give them the right experience.

This quote clearly shows a teacher who relates to his role as a role-model for his students, as he
exemplifies or embodies the teachings. Through the teachers own accomplishment, he is able to
disseminate knowledge and guide the students to experiences without expectations of results. This
understanding could be considered as an essentialist philosophy, with the Guru/Yoga Teacher as the
keeper and dispenser of knowledge. Morton and Booth (1998, p. 121) state that: “the teacher’s main task
is to help the student to a changed world-view”, and Sasha’s quote above is a clear indicator that he agrees
with this sentiment.

Student-centred philosophies were prevalent amongst the informants; characterized by a progressive,
constructivist ideology of how knowledge and change are formed. These focus on furnishing a
personalized experience, through which the student gains deep, intrinsic knowledge. This knowledge
is seen
considered different from understanding, as it ‘comes not from or through the mind’. Anita explains: ‘The
mind is just a tool, but what we learn in Yoga comes from the soul. I help my students take their mind out
of the driver’s seat, and put the soul there instead’. The teacher here acts as a guide, but it is understood
that it is the student who has to do the work. The experience must be experienced first-hand, and is impossible to be related through explanations or descriptions. Trying to understand ‘doesn’t cut it’ says Miguel and explains further:

You can understand, without knowing. To think you understand is very different from knowing and can be dangerous. When you have an experience, you get unquestionable proof, that’s when you know.

It is impossible to compare your experience with someone else’s experience, but you won’t really need to, because you’ll just know.

For Emma, the primary focus of her classes lies in maintaining the teachings and staying true to the traditions of her Guru’s lineage:

Many of us don’t want to see who we really are. Yoga is the acquisition of the experience of non-dualism which moves us towards the truth beyond the illusions and constraints of ego. People choose to come to Yoga. They have their own reasons. My task is not to preach to anyone. It serves no purpose to convince anyone of anything. I teach according to the essence of what Yoga is.

As this quote indicates, the teacher thus becomes secondary to the teachings, a facilitator of the knowledge, from which the student takes what he/she is ready to receive. The teacher is unattached to the outcome, and holds no expectation of the students’ performance, but rather, she teaches because she is compelled to do so, perhaps because the knowledge belongs to all of mankind and should therefore be shared so that all may benefit.

**Pedagogical Methods**
The traditional one-on-one, Guru to disciple relationship (see Kaminoff, 2007), is no longer typical for instruction in Yoga. Modern Hatha Yoga has been created and designed primarily as a group activity, done in class formats, and often structured in 60-90 minute lesson formats. The room layout is often as a typical classroom hierarchy; the students are all turned to face the teacher who teaches from the front of the room (sometimes on a raised platform). While some of the informants regularly teach private classes, where the mode of instruction differs depending on the students’ needs, this is generally the way most Yoga classes are constructed. Sarah’s video classes differ in that she teaches without any students physically present at the time.

Tina does not require any planning or preparation for her Yoga classes; ‘I follow what I was taught in my teacher training. Our studio and our classes follow the specifications Bikram has set. We use the same sequence of 26 Asana, and I follow my script. Each class is the same in that way, but the students are different; the same student is different in every class’. The Bikram teachers lead the class through the same sequences using a memorized script. The teachers perform all the Asana along with their students and do not leave their mats at any point, and do not ever physically adjust their students. This strict adherence to a set class structure seems to exist only with Bikram Yoga. The other informants will vary their class content between classes, and will take the context, the location, the demographic of their students, and their expectations into consideration.

Nisha says: ‘I teach Asana and Pranayama\(^{27}\) the way my Guru taught me. Students must work hard, and alignment is important to get the postures. It is possible that we stay in one Asana for a long time, maybe

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\(^{27}\) Lit. Translation ‘control of life energy’. Pranayama are the breathing exercises used for controlling and manipulating the energy within the body and the mind, the life force known as ‘Prana’. Many different kinds of breathing exercises [Pranayama] exist,
up to one hour. It depends.' The Iyengar method of Yoga which Nisha teaches makes use of props, such
as blocks, bolsters, straps and suspensions to aid students and ensure proper alignment in each Asana.
Nisha will assist students by physically correcting them, and she is not shy to use some force in her
adjustments.

Correct alignment is less important in the Vinyasa style of Yoga that Sasha teaches, which is less static
than the Iyengar style, and the movement through Asana is guided by the breath. This style of Yoga is
dynamic and physically challenging. There are set sequences of Asana which can be combined to create a
class around. Sasha said: ‘When students ask me: “should I do this, or that?”, I will tell them that both are
right, they are just variations, whatever you do now is what is best for you. Alignment are just principles,
the geometry of Yoga’. As a general rule, he will not adjust his students, as he feels that it hinders the
students own evolution and makes them dependent on the teacher to get into the pose. Anita also will not
touch students, but explains that the reason has to do with insurance policies which do not cover injuries
if the teacher has physically touched the student. She also considers her students preference for her to
remain at the front of the room: ‘They can feel awkward and embarrassed if a pose is hard for them, so I
don’t put the spotlight on them, but let them work it out in their own time. I don’t think there’s a right or
wrong way’. Prior to her classes, Anita will make a mental plan of which Asana she will use, but she
doesn’t write anything down as her classes ‘basically follow the same structure; we begin with breathing
exercise, then mediation, Sun Salutations, standing poses, hip-openers, forward bends and then backward
bends’. Anita’s class structure here differs from the more traditional, where the Asana are considered as
preparation for the meditation segments, meaning they will precede the meditation components which
would then comprise the final, concluding components of a class.

Sarah meticulously plans her classes; everything from the Asana sequences to the material she reads aloud
during the meditation phases. Her classes incorporate story-telling components and each class has a
different theme. She also creates special classes for various conditions, such as pregnancy or hypertension.
She said:

I set work with the theme for the class, and I start by talking, a sort of Dharma talk, to invite people to
centre and bring their attention from the distractions of the outside world to the class. Then we set our
intentions, the Sankalpa. This is very important, and we go back to the intention throughout the class.
Then we ease into the Asana practice, and I like to link the postures with the theme of the class. I will
start with preparatory poses, and then we move to the bigger, more advanced work. In Yoga, the
understanding is that everything is connected, and our physical bodies impact on every level of our being, so
I guide the students to that insight through the Asana. I will often use breathing techniques that I like
with the poses, and we will end with a few minutes of relaxation, often in Shivasana.

Sarah has been teaching for ten years, and her attention to detail and the way she interprets the Asana has
evolved over that time. She aims to make sure her classes are suitable for complete beginners and she tries
to make sure she remembers to provide suggestions for adjustments and modifications to make the Asana
more accessible for those with physical limitations. This type of Yoga is often termed ‘restorative’ as it
aims to relax the body and mind of the student, and get the student to experience the calm of the

and serve different purposes for the practitioner. All Pranayama consist of three phases: inhalation, exhalation and retention of
breath, which are performed at various intervals.

28 Discourse on spirituality
29 Intention, vow and commitment the practitioner makes. The Sankalpa can be made to pertain only to the specific class, or over a
much longer time period. Sankalpa are often phrased in the present; i.e. “I am…” rather than “I will”.
30 Translated as ‘Corpse pose’, and is considered by some as one of the most important poses, as it is the most relaxing pose for
meditation. Shivasana is performed lying down on the back, with arms and legs extended at about 45 degrees, in a relaxed state
of awareness.
meditative state. Emma also works with a more restorative and relaxing style of Yoga, where the Asana practice represents only one part of the class. Her lesson plans follow the same principles of structure, as she describes here:

I write down which A sana we will use, and plan the logistics of the flow to minimize movements. I think about which part of the body we will focus on, and integrate aspects of bending, stretching, and strengthening, and which chakras we will work on opening. Usually my classes are 90 minutes, and I go through A sana, Pranayama, Yoga Nidra\(^31\) and meditation. We focus on integration, relaxation, body awareness, releasing thoughts, and opening up to allow our consciousness to delve within. I have a clear description of the course available for students so they know what they are signing up for.

Unlike Emma, many teachers work at studios with drop-in classes, meaning they often do not know in advance which students will attend, or what their physical, mental and emotional awareness is.

Philip, who primarily works with private students, is able to first assess the individual and plan his lessons accordingly. He says: ‘I find most people don’t know how to breathe. So I focus most of what I teach on Pranayama, because it is the most vital to getting change to happen.’ Philip works only with the Asana which Patanjali described in the Yoga Sutras; primarily seated poses to aid meditation and breathing work. He does not provide much explanation or lengthy instructions, but guides the student through the breathing, and uses his own energy to ‘create grounding’ for the student. Rachel also considers Pranayama crucial to the Yoga practice: ‘I work with colours, sounds, emotions, and feelings as I guide the students through the Asana. The breathing is so important, and we sync it with the movements, because that is how we open up the awareness, the subconscious can allow the energy to flow through us, and our minds find peace.’

Miguel has a systemized three week practice through which he guides his students: ‘It is carefully planned, everything from the food we eat, to the direction they face when they sleep, to the time we wake up, and the way we engage with one another. We use Hatha Yoga as one part of the program; we also use a lot of meditation and Yoga Nidra. The main part for us is the Pranayama, it is really powerful stuff. Unlike Asana, Pranayama exercises are by nature more difficult to show in photographs and many are difficult to master without teacher instruction or supervision. B.K.S. Iyengar writes: “The yogi's life is not measured by the number of days but by the number of his breaths” (1966). Pranayama is the fourth limb of the Ashtanga (see p. 9.

Like Miguel’s ashram, Sasha’s Yoga retreat houses guests who attend for an all-inclusive experience. Sasha employs a total of 25 staff that cater to the guests’ needs. Sasha focuses primarily on teaching Asana. For those who enrol in the YTT courses or other types of Yoga courses, the teachings of other aspects of Yoga are shared:

We have four or five teachers for each course; an Indian teacher from a line of Brahmins who teaches philosophical content and Sanskrit, an anatomy and physiology teacher who is a trained physical therapist, and a psychiatrist. Then I and another teacher teach the A sana. I think this is a complete set; it’s not possible for one teacher to master all the aspects of Yoga.

\(^{31}\) Also referred to as ‘Yogic sleep’, the conscious awareness of the sleep state, in which the unconscious mind is receptive to verbal instructions and guidance from a teacher. Yoga Nidra is not like hypnosis, as the teacher cannot enforce or superimpose their own will onto the students. It is an aimless and effortless relaxation technique, which some say may lead to the state of enlightenment [Samadhi] or blissful self-realization [Sat-chi-tananda]
In respect to his lessons, Sasha explains:

I never write anything down in preparation. I follow the basic structure - first we work on strengthening, then we warm up, and then we work on the more complicated stretching. We create a base and build from that. The goal is to make people independent of me, I don’t like to superimpose, I don’t like when people do it to me, and so I don’t do it to others. I think freestyle is the best, but a lot of people aren’t ready to do freestyle, so we start with a structure.

Both these quotes highlight the approach that Sasha has both to Yoga and to the teaching of Yoga, indicative of an individualistic philosophy that is reflected in his formation of his role as a teacher, whose goal is to get his students to become self-sufficient. The method each teacher uses is coherence with their teaching philosophies, and will evolve and grow as the individual evolves and grows. As there is no authorities of Yoga, and no institutions which police the practice, there are no regulations or standard procedures. The many styles of Yoga may have created YTTs to which train teachers according to their preference, yet what the individual chooses to incorporate into their own teaching style is their own choice (with the exception of the Bikram Yoga franchises). As Yoga is a practice that emphasizes the subjective experience, Yoga teaching methods and philosophies will vary between teachers. As Dan Charnas, writer for Yoga Journal phrased it: “To each their own, to teach their own”. There is no fixed teacher persona; rather it is crafted and created by the individual, tailored as an expansion and extension of their own, private personality. Perhaps the gauge of authenticity lies in this very notion, that the individual does not try to imitate or live up to some perceived ideal or standard for how they think a Yoga teacher should be, but rather, that they aim to embody the teachings, remaining humble in the realization that Yoga is a practice, not a perfect.
DISCUSSION
The purpose of this paper was to explore the role of the modern Yoga teacher, by examining the pedagogical perspectives of a group of individuals whose diverse backgrounds, personal styles of practice and teaching philosophies illustrate the globalized spread and inherent diversity of Yoga. It is understood that Yoga is an umbrella term, incorporating the Hatha Yoga and Asana practices which represent modern adaptations. There is no minimum definition of Yoga, and while it would perhaps be useful to prevent those using the name only for marketing value and financial gains, there exists no entity or individual who can reasonably claim the authority required to define the practice. Yoga is subjective, not objective or relative. The individual creates her own practice. Resting on a hermeneutic perspective, it is accepted that there is no fixed truth; rather the individual interpreter affects her own understanding. While some may refute the right of a class containing only physical elements to be called Yoga, there are those who believe that it can be a gateway to the spiritual components. Whether or not the purchase of a Yoga for Weight-loss DVD will guide the individual towards enlightenment and spiritual liberation cannot be answered. It may bring the purchaser one step closer, giving them a practice for their present position in life, or it may end up gathering dust on a shelf, unopened.

The modern adaptations to Hatha Yoga practices could be seen in response to increases in obesity levels, stress-related illnesses and psychological disorders, which affect a large percent of the population in the West. According to Stephen Shapiro, modern Yoga is a “highly processed and marketized form of hygiene and therapeutic knowledge-body practice for the contemporary subject within an age of rampant neoliberalism” (2011, p. 30). The global consumption culture has subverted Yoga into a product, subject to commodification and market forces, which is linked to the findings of Kobayashi’s 2012 study on globalisation and corporate negotiating identity for global sportswear advertising, where the symbolic powers of Orientalism is used to reconstruct a national culture and identity (in this case, the Japanese).

The impact for the individual, as a student of Yoga is no longer a seeker on a spiritual quest for enlightenment willing to subject him/herself to rigorous challenges by a demanding Guru, but rather a customer purchasing a service with expectations for results. Based on the interviews, teachers are similarly affected, as they are required to earn an income, and thus must find ways to make their classes attractively appealing to potential students. Tangible results such as weight-loss, stress reduction, and increased flexibility are more relatable than concepts such as enlightenment, higher states of awareness, balancing of chakras, and experiences of Truth, which are hard to measure and thought to be quickly dismissed by potential customers.

However, based on the results, the individual who has chosen to teach Yoga, rather than say Pilates or becoming a personal fitness trainer, may be expected to take an interest in such esoteric matters, and have a familiarity with some of the widely regarded treatises, scriptures and texts dealing with spirituality and Yogic philosophy. The Yoga teacher thus fashions her role by gaining knowledge and insights through contemplation and experience, not through imitation of another teacher’s persona. A Yoga teacher may be better evaluated according to criteria of authenticity and whether s/he embodies her own teachings. As such, the YTT course may serve as an initiation, the beginning of a journey towards Yoga, not the destination.

In response to my invitation to participate in this study, one Yoga teacher stated that he no longer wished to refer to himself as a Yoga teacher “because now it’s used by those who are just really movement teachers, what we should call ‘Asana instructors’, who are responsible for the pornification the timeless wisdoms of Yoga that is taking place”32. His comment highlights the interpretive prerogative of the market

32Written in response to email (Appendix 1), personal communication.
forces, which have led to a transfer of authority and power. The teacher is now subordinate to the wishes of his student, whose constructed notions and expectations set the agenda.

While the Gurus of old would turn away many who came seeking (Kaminoff, 2007), the modern Yoga teacher often cannot afford to be so discriminating. Based on the interviews, the pedagogy employed by some Yoga teachers is thus dependent on conforming to their student’s (customer’s) expectation. In tailoring the practice to suit the students’ tastes, the teacher may be impeding the student from gaining valuable insights and deeper spiritual experiences. A teacher who refrains from challenging his/her students, and gives in to their demands (perceived or otherwise) for class content, may in fact become the very obstacle him/herself, which prevents the student from finding their own answers on their paths, experiencing their own truths, and the student’s potential for growth and knowledge may thus be prevented. This is of course a dilemma, as neoliberal pop-culture values narcissist body beautification ideals and teachers skilled at marketing and self-promotion, will create more buzz, and have more students paying their class fees, than those who aim to stay authentic to the practice and refrain from a systematic exploitation of ancient heritage belonging to another culture.

If the modern Yoga teacher is forced to tailor her teachings to the tastes of the market, adopting cultural substitutes more palatable and easy to digest, we cannot refute the notion that the pedagogy and the resulting outcome is affected, which places into focus the question of whether Yoga should be sanctioned and supported by governments, perhaps on the basis of its therapeutic value. This would inevitably lead to the development of stricter criteria in the educational praxis of Yoga Teachers. No professional standards for Yoga teachers exist today, and it is hoped that the practice will continue free from any governance and external control, as any such attempts would inevitably hold negative consequences for the diversity of the practice. The individuals’ progress on the path in the pursuit of enlightenment cannot be evaluated or certified, and the paradox is, that it is the students’ who seek, find and attach the label Guru to the spiritual teacher.

It is recommended that those who envision teaching as part of their own path, will allow who they are to precede how they teach, to maintain a healthy relationship to their ego, and not do identify with the teacher role, held above the station of the students. In being authentic and compassionate, developing and building relationships with students, by seeing and acknowledging the value of their individual journeys, a teacher will create classes which inspire and empower, calm, soothe and restore.

In summary, while here is no set characteristics which a Yoga teacher needs to fulfil; the role is open to whoever feels compelled to pursue it, for whatever reason. As T.K.V. Desikchar, one of the foremost Indian Yoga Gurus of the 20th century stated: ‘Anybody can breathe, therefore anybody can practice Yoga’. With such a great number of YTT courses available globally without prerequisites, it seems anybody can also become a Yoga teacher. The responsibility for the authentic representation and communication of Yoga must thus lie with the individual who aims to teach. Perhaps also the student ought to be encouraged to engage his/her powers of discernment in selecting a style and teacher. In evaluating a teacher, it is advised that individuals rely on the rational faculty of the critical mind along with the guidance of their own intuition, or ‘gut-instinct’, remembering that Yoga is both the journey, and the destination.

Future Recommendations
What are the implications of the environment in which Yoga is taught? How does the circumstance and context affect the communication and pedagogy of Yoga? Comparisons could be made between daily classes at city Yoga studios, weekly retreats and ‘get-away’s’, to in-house classes at gyms, and ashram stays
in India. How does the personal relationship affects the student’s experience, comparing the participation in a group class, with a private, one-on-one format, and following a DVD from home (with a virtual teacher, no actual face-to-face interaction).

What are the demographics of Yoga practitioner, teachers and teaching locations in Sweden? No statistical data can be found at this time, and while this is understood to be a vast undertaking, quantitative data would be of significant use for future explorations in this field.
REFERENCES


Dear XXXX,

Namaste,

I am writing to you with a request. I am working on my master's degree in pedagogy from Umea University in Sweden, and am writing my master's essay about yoga and pedagogy.

The purpose of my study is to explore and examine the implications of yoga teaching now; and how the philosophical and spiritual underpinnings of yoga are translated by teachers today. I aim to do qualitative interviews with ten yoga teachers from all over the world, with different practices and compare their perspectives.

I would consider it an honour if you would like to participate in my study. Basically, I would like to spend about one hour doing an interview with you at some point in January. We can do the interview by Skype.

If you agree, please could you answer the following and send it back to me.

Name:
Age:
Style of Yoga:
Current Teaching Location:
Total Years Teaching Yoga:
Yoga Teaching Certificate From: (if any)

I hope you are able to participate, and thank you for giving me your time!

Love and Light,
Sincerely,

Maya Eliasson
Appendix 2 – Scheduling of Interview

January, 2013

Dear XXXX,

Namaste,

I am hoping that you have time to participate in an interview session in the next two weeks. I think the best way is for you to find a time that suits you, and I will "meet" you then.

I am working on the premise that the interviews will last around one hour, no less, and it would be great if you would add me on Skype (username details provided) or if you would send me your details so I can add you.

(Please if you could try to make sure you are somewhere reasonably quiet as I will record the sound from the interview.)

The themes I wish to hear your views and thoughts on are:

- Your relationship to Yoga/definition of what Yoga means for you (spiritually/physically/materially)
- How you view your role as a Yoga Teacher and what you hope to teach/provide to your students
- What the Yoga Teachers responsibilities/relation to her students and society?
- Thoughts on the 'global phenomenon' of yoga (the billion dollar industry yoga has become
- How you structure your yoga classes (pedagogic methods and philosophies)

Obviously, if you have anything outside of these themes that you wish to bring to my study, I am grateful anything which you feel I ought to consider/include.

Love and Light,
In gratitude,

Maya Eliasson
Appendix 3 – Interview Guide

1. How do you understand and relate to Yoga?
   - Physically (implications on your body and your relationship to your body)
   - Spiritually (can you describe experiences and ideas, effects on your perceptions)
   - Materialistically (financially, how you relate to the world and personal consumption)

2. What is your opinion of the global Yoga industry?
   (Yoga certification standards, - 200hrs enough? yoga as product, cultural differences, adaptations, capitalism, Indian roots versus modern practice)

3. Do you have any responsibilities as a Yoga teacher? What are they? Towards whom? (students, own teacher and lineage, legally etc. differences between Yoga teacher and Guru?)

4. How do you relate to your role as a Yoga teacher? Any criteria you feel you must live up to? Are there stereotypes which you compare yourself to? Income and money? Expectations on how you conduct yourself in your private life?

5. a) What do you aim to share with your students? Why do you teach the way you do? Personal hopes and goals for teaching – Pedagogic philosophies

   b) How do you structure your classes? Do you plan your lessons or not? Talk me through one of your classes