



**Exploring Yoga and the Flow  
Experience:  
An Interpretative  
Phenomenological Analysis of  
Contemporary Yoga Communities**

**Juliette Hecquet**

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## Abstract

Despite its popularity and existing research demonstrating the positive effects of yoga, little is known about the lived experience of modern yoga practitioners. Yoga is rooted in philosophical and spiritual traditions but has been diluted in its transition to the modern postural yoga practiced in the West today. Existing research has been dominated by medical research suggesting that social science and leisure studies could benefit from a better understanding of yoga as a leisure activity. In this study, the literature detailing the philosophical foundations of Csikszentmihalyi's flow experience have been compared to the foundations of traditional yoga, providing a conceptual framework for understanding the meaning of the modern yoga experience.

The use of this conceptual framework of flow suggested that yoga has five dimensions to induce flow, but that other dimensions of the flow experience were weaker or absent. This study, therefore, extends the understanding of the flow experience away from commonly researched, usually male-dominated, competitive sports and into the realm of women's leisure studies. The findings demonstrate that an online leisure experience can induce flow, which previous flow experience literature has questioned.

In this study, the lived yoga experience was explored through the reflections of fourteen women aged mostly between 40 and 55, using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Two contemporary communities were explored – classroom-based and online, through six weeks of vlogs followed by one-to-one semi-structured interviews. Vlogs, a novel visual research method in IPA, allowed for immediate self-documentation and natural reflexivity about participants' lived yoga experience. They also offered the potential to capture elements of the flow experience.

Three key themes were evident for both the classroom-based and online yoga participants: the evolving sense and transformation of self; a sense of human and spatial connection; and being challenged as participants age. However, the online group reported experiences that contested aspects of existing leisure research, such as women's need for social connection. Participants' ability to control space and place in

their homes through a digitised leisure experience demonstrates that the meaning of space and place is changing for yoga practitioners. This enables a 're-thinking' of leisure, women and the home and contributes to understanding the impact of digitised leisure. Whilst the findings cannot be generalised, this small-scale study suggests that yoga may be seen as a positive, transformational leisure activity for women aged 40-50 years, which the participants viewed as different to other forms of exercise. The use of IPA led to original and unique findings which can further our understanding of women's leisure, embodiment, online and offline space and place.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

Yoga continues to grow in popularity and is viewed by professionals and society alike as a leisure activity that positively impacts physicality and well-being in various forms (Moadel et al. 2007; McCall et al. 2015; Field 2016). However, little is understood about the lived yoga experience or why it is adopted, maintained, and cherished by those who practise it (Park et al. 2015).

A dichotomy exists between the belief that modern yoga remains a leisure activity close to its historic spiritual roots (Alter 2004; Singleton 2010; Cope 2018) or a commoditised fitness and/or wellness remedy with little connotation to its spiritual past (Merz 2014). Yoga offers leisure opportunities as it aims to positively affect physical and mental health (Ross and Thomas 2010) and to enable self-management and maintenance of health and well-being (Birdee et al. 2008). Therefore, the exploration of the yoga experience from a non-medicalised perspective has value to its practitioners and providers. The move towards prevention of ill health through the promotion of well-being means that healthcare providers and communities should be aware of leisure's potential to positively influence physical and mental health (Coleman and Iso-Ahola 1993) and as a way of "understanding and promoting a preventative and positive approach to health" (Jackson 2000, p. 136).

The existing yoga literature is predominantly quantitative, focusing on clinical and mental health, well-being, leisure and tourism (Ernst and Lee 2010). Researchers have operated in distinct silos of medical, clinical applications and sports research (De Michelis 2007; Gupta et al. 2018), often reductively observing yoga interventions' physical or mental effects. Contrasting applications and interpretations of yoga research suggest it is a leisure activity caught between modernity and tradition, and that an experiential exploration of the lived experience of modern yoga, as told by participants without a medical condition, is lacking. The recent popularisation of yoga (Lewis 2008)

raises the question of why this leisure activity has seen surprisingly limited qualitative research within leisure studies.

The term flow experience refers to “a state of consciousness that is sometimes experienced by individuals who are deeply involved in an enjoyable activity” (Pace 2004, p. 327). The use of the flow experience framework in this research can be justified as an established conceptual leisure framework which allows the exploration of individuals' lived experience of yoga from a leisure studies perspective. Flow experiences are thought to lead to optimum awareness and control of the conscious experience and have been compared to the aim of yoga (Csikszentmihalyi 1990). Despite Csikszentmihalyi's belief that yoga and the flow experience are strongly connected, there has been little research connecting the two.

The following chapter will outline the background of this research, including the researcher's personal reasons for choosing to explore yoga and the flow experience. The relevance of yoga as a leisure activity will then be explored alongside the research aims and objectives before summarising the overall thesis structure.

## **Summary of Yoga Research**

Yoga development has been classified into historical classical yoga (Feuerstein 1996) and its modern-day interpretations. The term yoga has been difficult to define; thus, to aid clarification, the current research will concentrate on the modern *postural* yoga (De Michelis 2005) that has been adopted by mainstream yoga practitioners in the Western world. One definition of modern yoga is that it consists of *asana* (postures) and *pranayama* (breathwork) (Singleton 2010) and was furthered by De Michelis (2005) who has led the development of the term modern postural yoga which is the focus in this research.

It is broadly agreed that the origins of yoga can be traced back several thousand years to its spiritual and philosophical development in India, which is described as premodern

or classical yoga (Singleton 2010). To be able to understand modern yoga, an understanding of its historical and philosophical foundations is needed, in which the work of authors such as De Michelis (2005) and Singleton (2010) are key. The origin of the word yoga in Sanskrit, is *yuj*, which means to yoke or join together (Taimini 1961; Newcombe 2009). Although no direct translation exists, the idea of joining together runs through most historical interpretations of yoga.

The Westernisation of yoga in the 1960s (Singleton 2010) led to the emergence of the concept of modern postural yoga (De Michelis 2005). This Western adoption and adaptation are not without criticism; Jain (2014) stated that the influence of the social context requires the meaning of yoga to be modified. The state of being, or consciousness, is seen as foundational to yoga practice (De Michelis 2005; Strauss 2005; Feuerstein 2003). This merging of mind and body, to allow a oneness of self, has led to the yoga literature on the importance of self (De Michelis 2005; Cope 2018) and links with the central role of the self in the flow experience (Csikszentmihalyi 2013). The role of self and consciousness is not clearly reflected in the extant literature on modern yoga, which is dominated by quantitative, medicalised research (Gupta et al. 2018). Authors of a systematic review found that, of the papers reviewed:

“27% were conducted with healthy participants and the other 73% had different medical conditions with the most common being breast cancer followed by depression, asthma and diabetes” (Field 2016, p. 147).

Yoga is recognised as a popular leisure activity. The most widespread study of yoga participation was carried out by Yoga Alliance in the USA, which showed that the number of people participating in yoga had grown by approximately 300% between 1970 and 1990 (Yoga Alliance 2016). This trend continued, with approximately 37 million Americans practising yoga in 2016, a rise of almost 40% from 2012 (Yoga Alliance 2016). However, no such study has been completed in the UK.

Despite its growing popularity, academic research into the demographics of people who practise yoga is not robust, with little known about their characteristics (Park et al. 2015). Previous studies of yoga participation are on one hand concluded to be reasonably broad (Park et al. 2014) but also segregated into individual academic silos (Quilty et al. 2013).

Quilty's (2013) study suggested the demographic profile of yoga practitioners in their study were 86% female and 89% white, with an average age of 35 and a higher education profile, consistent with other national studies. Although yoga continues to be dominated by women of a higher socioeconomic status (Park et al. 2015), the number of male participants has risen by 120% to 10 million and of people aged over 50 to 14 million from 2012 (Yoga Alliance 2016). Nearly 100% of participants consider themselves either beginners or intermediate, with 74% of yoga participants having been practising for fewer than five years (Yoga Alliance 2016).

Yoga research can be divided into the defining texts about yoga, which are spiritual in their foundation, and the medical academic research, which is reductively driven by a medical condition. In comparison, whilst leisure scholars have researched yoga (Nagla, 2006; Patterson et al. 2016) and have more recently been led by specialism linking yoga and leisure (Liu et al. 2022), the study of yoga within a leisure context remains limited. This suggests that the modern meaning of yoga as a leisure experience has been under-explored, allowing this experiential yoga research study to fill a gap left by previous work.

## **Introduction to Flow Research**

The flow experience was conceptualised by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi who defined it as "the holistic sensation people feel when they act with total involvement" (1975, p. 36). Flow is a positive psychological state that occurs when a balance between skills and challenge creates an optimum experience for the individual and proposes to produce

valuable and enjoyable effects (Csikszentmihalyi 1988) and promote well-being (Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi 2009).

The concept has gained attention from sports, work, and leisure researchers, but has been dominated by quantitative methodologies and male research samples (Swann et al. 2012). Measurement of flow is controversial, with the popular use of the Experience Sampling Method (ESM) seen as problematic (Voelkl and Ellis 1998), while the Flow State Scale (FSS; Jackson and Marsh 1996) and Flow Trait Scale (FTS; Jackson Ford et al. 1998) have also been critiqued (Lee-Shi and Ley 2022). The quantitative basis of measurement fostered critique, as academics at the forefront of this research stated that flow was difficult to capture and measure (Jackson and Eklund 2002) leading to difficulties in defining, interpreting, and generalising the flow experience as a conceptual framework.

Csikszentmihalyi began investigating optimal experiences and how it felt when things were going well in the 1960s and developed several iterations of the flow concept. In 1990 Csikszentmihalyi reported nine dimensions to flow which when fulfilled mean experience "seamlessly unfolds from moment to moment" (Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi 2002 p. 90). The nine dimensions of flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1990) will be used to explore flow in this study and are as follows:

1. Challenge-skills balance
2. Action-awareness merging
3. Clear goals
4. Unambiguous feedback
5. Concentration
6. Sense of control
7. Loss of self-consciousness
8. Transformation of time
9. Autotelic experience



Following the outlining of these dimensions, research into the flow experience has demonstrated a divergence of interpretation and findings (Elkington 2011; Abuhamdeh 2020). Qualitative research into the flow experience has been described as phenomenological due to the observation of the experience (Elkington 2010). Therefore, the dimensions of the flow experience provide an appropriate conceptual framework for exploring yoga within leisure studies. Leisure-based research on flow has varied in topic from dancing (Hefferon and Ollis 2006) to music (Diaz 2013) and skiing (Clark et al. 2018). As far as the researcher is aware, this qualitative, phenomenological study is unique in its study of yoga and the flow experience.

## **Rationale for Conducting the Research**

A key rationale for this study is the changing nature of participation in leisure activities. The way that leisure and, more specifically, yoga is accessed has changed due to the digitisation of society, something that existing academic literature on yoga does not fully reflect. Current industry research suggests that 40% of yoga participants access online classes (Financeonline 2022). Arguably, this percentage is likely to have increased post-pandemic, acknowledging leisure practices have reconfigured during this time (King and Dickinson 2023). Part of the changing consumption of exercise and leisure activities is due to the limitations COVID-19 placed on in-person exercise (Bratland-Sanda et al. 2021), suggesting a surge in popularity of online exercise (McDonough 2022). However, researchers have not been able to accurately measure longer-term effects of changing leisure behaviour (Gui et al. 2022) on online yoga participation.

The nature of yoga practice is changing to reflect consumers' leisure consumption patterns, such as the move away from printed yoga materials and more to digital media. This is reflected by exercise being one of the top search terms online in 2022 (CNN, 2022), and by the millions of subscribers the most popular yoga teachers have on YouTube and Instagram. The most successful YouTube yoga channel, 'Yoga with Adriene', logged 3.5 million subscribers in 2019 (Neoreach.com), which increased to 12.1 million subscribers in 2022 (Yoga with Adriene 2022). More recent internet

statistics for general online class participation are unavailable, highlighting the lack of research exploring participation in yoga in online spaces. The availability of yoga classes on social media, including YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook, is vast and has high digital engagement (Lacasse et al. 2019). It is argued that the proliferation of yoga on social media, particularly Instagram, places importance on the physical body and its appearance (Cowans 2016), illustrating a potential disconnect between the perception of yoga within popular culture participants and its original philosophical teaching.

In addition to the recent shifts to online yoga, it is important to consider the link between the philosophy of yoga and the flow experience, which is cemented by the role of the self and the aim to control consciousness and be at one with the immediate environment (or leisure activities). Csikszentmihalyi (2008) stated that control of consciousness led to being merged and at one in an activity, ultimately leading to enjoyment. The merging of action and awareness correlates to Patanjali, the sage of the founding yoga text *Yoga Sutras* (ca. 500 BCE), who described the aim of controlling the mind and body to allow absorption into the blissful state of being at one, termed *Samadhi*.

As such, the foundations of yoga link with the philosophical elements of the flow experience, offering the potential to explore both concepts and outlining a key reason for this study. For example, the flow experience has been used in leisure studies for many years but has only been applied directly in one peer-reviewed study examining yoga, and this was quantitative. Philips (2005) examined the flow states of Ashtanga yoga participants from a quantitative perspective and concluded that yoga positively correlated as a flow experience. Other researchers have examined the flow experience in yoga but have included an indirect activity or context, such as swimming (Briegel-Jones 2013), playing music (Butzer et al. 2016) or serious leisure (Hsu et al. 2020). The differing results of these studies are discussed further in the literature review (see Chapter 2), but the findings do establish the emergence of flow dimensions as variable, therefore contributing to inconsistent views of the flow experience.

## Research Aim and Objectives

As previously stated, the principal aim of this research is to explore yoga and the flow experience. The ultimate aim is to add knowledge of the yoga experience which led to two overarching and related aims that underpin this study:

***To explore mid-life women's lived experiences of online and classroom-based yoga***

and

***To apply IPA as a methodology to analyse yoga and the flow experience***

Six research objectives were designed to meet the two overall research aims.

- ***To critically review the literature on the modern yoga experience***
- ***To explore the present lived yoga experience of yoga practitioners on and offline***
- ***To analyse the experience of yoga for research participants through the flow experience conceptual framework***
- ***To identify how space and place exist within online and offline lived experience***
- ***To conduct an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the experience of yoga on and offline***
- ***To evaluate the value and contribution of using IPA as a methodology to access yoga and the flow experience within a contemporary leisure context***

## Personal Reflexivity

I have been practising yoga for 23 years and was initially drawn to the practice as I found it was the one leisure activity that enabled me to disconnect from my thoughts, bringing me connection, clarity and peace. After my first class, I became more committed to my practice, until I enrolled in teacher training in 2012. The one-year Ashtanga yoga teaching training covered the spiritual and philosophical background of yoga, anatomy and how to teach yoga to a classroom of people. For the past 11 years, I have taught yoga part-time whilst also lecturing at Bournemouth University. I have taught weekly yoga classes and run yoga retreats, and I offer classes and retreats to a local cancer charity I am connected with. Yoga has been a constant in my life and has allowed me time to reflect on some challenging situations I have faced. To this day, I consider myself a practising student of yoga. My aim as a yoga teacher is to make yoga welcoming and accessible to all and to help people feel the connection or disconnection they require and the peace that I have found at the beginning of my yoga journey. As I became more experienced as a yoga teacher, students began to share their observations and stories with me, which can be summarised by one of my students saying that “no matter how much of a bad day I've had or what mood I'm in, whenever I do yoga I just feel better”.

My continued observation of people leaving classes feeling better, more aware and at one with themselves sparked my academic interest. I was also aware of how the practice of yoga is changing, with many people practising online and replacing or complimenting physical classes. This made me consider how these experiences might differ. Could online yoga have the same effects as a classroom environment? Or were online yoga and social media just another way to package yoga as a form of popular culture in the wellness market (Jain 2014). As a lecturer at Bournemouth University, I teach digital and contemporary marketing, so the choice of observing an online community of yoga practitioners interested me. I am interested in how the world of sport and leisure is being changed due to the digitisation of our society and I have published work on pure online fitness communities which have become meaningful in their members' lives. The observation of many more people practising yoga online and my professional interest in the extension of online communities cemented this as an area that fuelled my academic interest. Whilst I am aware that I am a similar profile to my research participants a white female, aged 47 years old with a similar socio-economic demographic profile, I felt this gave me an opportunity to be an insider to the community I wanted to study (Pavlidis and Olive 2014). Yoga needs to expand its demographic; Smith and Atencio (2017) observed in their study on yoga and social dynamics that some participants felt alienated from practising yoga. I accept this observation; however, I believe that learning more deeply about the experience and communities of yoga allows an understanding of how the yoga experience could be offered to wider populations and communities.

## **The Complexity of the Methodological and Conceptual Context**

The starting point for this thesis was an interest in the yoga experience and this led to exploring the many interpretations of phenomenology as a qualitative methodology (Paley 2016; Gill 2020). The philosophical and experiential basis of phenomenology was deemed the most appropriate for this study, since yoga is a leisure activity which combines the mind and body. Merleau-Ponty's (1962) philosophy of embodiment was carefully considered but found to have a greater emphasis on philosophy rather than practical application in research. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) remains informed by the work of Merleau-Ponty and others but allowed clarity for the researcher on the application of principles of phenomenology through research design and participant-led analysis. As a double hermeneutic methodology (Smith et al. 2022), IPA researchers value their own input and interpretation whilst being aware of any preconceptions, captured by reflexivity. As such, there are personal reflexivity inserts throughout this thesis. They work to support the adoption of IPA and help conclude that this methodology is most appropriate for this study and for an early career researcher.

The transition of phenomenology from its philosophical foundation is not without critique, with scholars suggesting it is diluted from its origins (Morley 2001; Hanna et al. 2017). Phenomenology as a philosophy has been compared to the philosophical context of yoga in its aims and view of the lived body (Saraukki 2002; Hanna et al. 2017). For example, phenomenologists aim "to critically challenge and overcome the Cartesian dualisms that underpin much cognitivist and bio-psycho-social (positivist) research" (Murray and Holmes 2013, p. 19). Yoga practitioners also aim for the monistic alignment of the mind and the body, thus also challenging Cartesian dualism (Schweizer 1993). Phenomenology was chosen for this research as it involves an attempt to explore the essence of a phenomenon by investigating it from the perspective of those experiencing it (Neubauer et al. 2019). Yoga is about being present and therefore relates to the

intersubjectivity of Heidegger's concept of Dasein (1962), which means being in the world (Smith et al. 2022). The researcher found that whilst the concept of Dasein aligned with yoga, yoga was more closely linked to Merleau-Ponty's (1962) description of Dasein as 'flesh of the world'. This allowed for the lived body and introduced the concept of embodiment, which is prevalent in yoga (Morley 2001). It is the researcher's view that yoga is a leisure practice which is situated in individuals' social reality and is therefore embodied, recognising the alignment of mind and body. The double hermeneutic position of IPA further shapes the phenomenological position; that values the role of the researcher as part of the interpretation of the individual's lifeworld and therefore is interpretivist in nature.

Therefore, IPA aligns with yoga's aim for the mind and body to be one or joined together. A specific comparison between yoga and phenomenology is the importance placed on the directed exploration of consciousness, which has been described as a striking parallel (Hanna et al. 2017). The use of phenomenology and, more specifically, IPA has been limited in leisure studies (Yoo et al. 2016) and mostly situated in health psychology. Smith (2011), who devised IPA, suggests health promotion is "one of the most important and dynamic areas of research in health psychology" (2011, p. 25) which is also an important field of study in leisure studies. However, while recent studies into surfing (Fendt et al. 2014), conference travel (Yoo et al. 2016), line dancing (Joseph and Southcott 2019) and creative writing (Rampley et al. 2019) are furthering the exploration of the lived experience of leisure and health, leisure-focused research remains limited in using IPA as a methodology. A gap still appears to be evident in research creatively utilising IPA within a leisure context, making this study into yoga's lived experience unique.

## Personal Reflexivity – Understanding IPA

My knowledge of IPA before I began my PhD was very limited. At the start of my PhD, I decided I wanted to study the yoga experience which then led to exploring the flow experience framework and then started an investigation into what methodology would suit my research aim. As part of my early PhD doctoral training, I had attended research philosophy training which included interpretivism, and became interested in how this may enable me to access yoga participants' understanding of what yoga meant to them. I began to develop my understanding by reading firstly more generally about phenomenology and then specifically about IPA. Whilst I contemplated other phenomenological approaches, IPA felt right for this study. As a novice researcher it allowed me to use a phenomenological approach but one that was accessible and had a specificity in how to conduct a research study provided by Smith et al. (2022) which appealed to me as an early career researcher wanting a structured approach. Once I had decided to use IPA as my methodology I researched specific training and attended two external IPA day workshops on Introducing IPA data analysis and Advanced IPA data analysis. The workshops were a reassuring guide, providing further reading and training, but also allowed me to speak to other IPA researchers. In this training the IPA forum was mentioned which is a national IPA online forum where researchers can discuss IPA and its application in research.

I joined the forum and am still a regular member which has provided invaluable guidance and interactions with leading IPA researchers to ask specific questions about my analysis and approach. Through the forum, I met a group of PhD students who were also using IPA and we agreed to meet weekly to create a virtual workspace which acted as both a structured writing space but also a place where questions could be asked, and experiences shared. For the last year and a half, I have met with this small group once a week which has not only provided friendship and support from a peer group who I could relate to, but also has created close relationships with other IPA researchers from across a variety of academic fields. I am very grateful for the support of the forum and of my own IPA group which have both been integral to my developing understanding of IPA.

## **Linking Yoga, Flow and IPA**

The ability to explore yoga and the flow experience requires an in-depth, experiential framework and methodology that can capture participants' lived experiences and reflections. The decision to examine yoga and the flow experience led the researcher to IPA. This is because IPA was considered to be the best methodological choice to enable access to the lived experience of yoga. However, it is acknowledged that to use a conceptual framework, such as flow, within IPA has been criticised as potentially causing epistemological tension (Gerskowitch and Tribe 2021). This caused a dilemma for the researcher because the study of yoga and flow requires an in-depth and intricate methodological approach. And yet, IPA advocates for a detachment from a conceptual framework in direct contact with data at the analysis stage. In this way, this PhD is unusual, and original, in its merging of IPA with yoga and flow. At the same time, the researcher wished to remain faithful to IPA's inductive and participant-led analysis process. The process requires freedom from the initial restriction of a conceptual framework (i.e., flow) directing the analysis. In order to deal with this methodological principle and to apply a leisure studies relevant conceptual frame, the researcher decided to conduct an IPA analysis then a conceptual analysis. This is evident in the structure of the thesis with chapters having separate IPA analysis followed by an analysis that involves concepts relevant to leisure studies as well as an overarching flow analysis.

Given the clear connections between yoga and flow and the limited application of IPA to leisure experience, an IPA approach to yoga and flow makes sense. However, the absence of an initial theoretical framework in IPA, means this study is complex, and original. In short, the choice of IPA enabled an intricate analysis of the findings and flow enabled an embedding of the findings in familiar leisure studies concepts such as self, embodiment, on and offline space and place.



## **My Personal Philosophy**

The choice of a research methodology requires the researcher to reflect on their own personal philosophy (Neubauer et al. 2019). The research paradigm is dependent on the “philosophical tenets of the methodology to which the researcher adheres” (Khaldi 2017, p. 23).

The ontological and epistemological assumptions of the researcher have shaped the nature, design, and approach of this phenomenological thesis. The interpretative ontological position is shaped by the researcher’s view that participants’ social reality is subjective and is constructed by individual experience and lifeworld. The epistemological position of the research is phenomenological, meaning the researcher believes that knowledge is driven by the individual experience of consciousness and the meaning that is ascribed to that experience, which may differ from one individual to the next.

The dilemma of the meaning of ontology and epistemology in IPA is a topic of ongoing debate, with Smith (2022 IPA community forum) describing it as a ‘murky soup’. IPA has been assigned to several research paradigms, suggesting there is difficulty separating out and articulating ontological and epistemological assumptions. This was highlighted by Crotty (1998) who, rather than ascribe to set assumptions, stated that the world becomes meaningful as an outcome of research rather than alignment with a certain ontology or epistemology. IPA is assumed to have an epistemological openness and, therefore, raises question about the need for this research to prescribe to one fixed label. Instead, epistemology and ontology will be addressed in this research by the inductive and individual nature and the specific title of IPA, which is interpretative and phenomenological.

## **The Structure of the Thesis**

The thesis is informed by the inductive, interpretative nature of IPA and follows the guidelines outlined by Smith et al. (2022). The following chapters are included:

### **Chapter One: Introduction**

This chapter outlines the background to the thesis. It sets the scene by providing academic and personal contexts and it explores the complexities of this study. Rationale is offered that highlights the tensions between IPA methodological approach, the connections between yoga and flow, and the application of IPA to yoga and flow. Importantly, the project's aims and research objectives are presented.

### **Chapter Two: Overview of the Yoga Literature**

This chapter reviews the literature on yoga. The development of yoga is discussed, from its philosophical Eastern roots to the modern postural yoga practised in the UK by most of the participants. The silos of research are examined to establish where most research resides and the limitations that arise. This chapter provides a knowledge base for the research and identifies how this research fills a gap in the literature on the lived yoga experience.

### **Chapter Three: Overview of the Flow Experience**

In this chapter, the definition and evolution of the flow experience and details of research both in sports and leisure contexts is introduced and reviewed. The dimensions of the flow experience are discussed, as is the application of the conceptual framework within leisure research, observing the similarities and observations of definition, interpretations of dimensions and problems with application.

## **Chapter Four: Methodology**

The philosophy of phenomenology, which is a central part of the research design, is introduced. IPA is then discussed in detail and justified as the chosen methodology for this study.

## **Chapter Five: Method**

The research design is outlined with an explanation of the original visual research method of participant vlogs and the subsequent semi-structured interviews. The use of NVivo as a data analysis aid and the detailed stages of IPA analysis are then discussed. Also discussed is the structure of IPA data analysis, moving from the personal experiential themes (PETs) to group experiential themes (GETs) and cross-case analysis. The decision to carry out the full IPA analysis before introducing the conceptual framework of the flow experience is considered.

## **Chapter Six: Findings from the Online Participants**

The findings from the group of online participants are presented, followed by discussion that highlights links to leisure studies literature and concepts. This separation remains true to Smith et al.'s (2009) assertion that "in IPA studies, the analysis or results section is discrete" (p. 122) without reference to the extant literature. At the same time, it is recognised that this study does contribute to expanding our knowledge of women's leisure and the discussion serves to identify and embed this contribution.

## **Chapter Seven: Findings from the Classroom Participants**

In the same way as the above chapter is presented, the findings from the classroom group are presented, followed by discussion that links to leisure studies and associated concepts.

## **Chapter Eight: Cross Case Analysis and the Flow Experience**

### **Discussion**

The findings from the two groups are discussed, observing convergences and divergences between online and classroom yoga through cross case analysis. A focus on convergences (shared) and divergences (non-shared) is in line with the stages of IPA (Smith et al. 2022). This exploration allows mapping of the overall findings onto the conceptual framework of the flow experience. The yoga experience, as voiced by the participants, is reviewed according to each flow experience dimension, and the researcher engages critically with the extant literature on leisure, yoga and flow to enable an original discussion that outlines the new contribution this PhD study makes.

### **Chapter Nine: Conclusion**

In the final chapter, the key findings are presented. There is a discussion of the implications of the findings for leisure studies and for the industry. In this way, the PhD offers an academic contribution that involves the application and expansion of key concepts. Additionally, it contributes to yoga industry knowledge, and professional practice in yoga. The limitations of this research are observed. The opportunities for future research are identified. The chapter closes with a personal reflection on concluding the thesis.

This introduction chapter has outlined the broad approach to the thesis to provide a clear foundation for the reader. The next chapter critically explores the literature on yoga, followed by a review of the literature on the conceptual framework for this study, the flow experience.

## Chapter Two: Overview of the Yoga Literature

### Introduction

The following chapter aims to critically engage with aspects of the extant literature to consider what is known and relevant to this study exploring yoga and the flow experience. Therefore, an overview of the literature, including the evolution of traditional yoga to modern yoga, outcomes of yoga, yoga as a leisure experience, the flow experience and the space and place of yoga communities are presented. The review of the development of yoga literature is intended to contribute to an understanding of yoga as a leisure experience. This is not an exhaustive review but does provide a foundation deemed appropriate to explore the research study's aims and objectives.

### The Development of Yoga

#### Classical Yoga: The Movement from East to West

The spiritual foundation of yoga is positioned within Hindu teachings about spirituality and philosophy, including the translations of the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Dhammapada* (De Michelis 2008; Easwaran 2007).

The seminal text *The Yoga Sutras* by Patanjali (ca. 500 BCE) gives the original description of yoga as an embodied experience of mind, body, and spirit. The *Sutras* focus on an integrative yoga form made up of eight components, commonly referred to as the eight limbs of yoga (Newcombe 2009). These limbs are mental discipline and constraint (*yama, niyama*); controlled meditative postures (*asanas*); conscious breathing (*pranayama*); detachment (*pratayahara*); and meditation (*dharana, dhyana and samadhi*) (Pandurangi 2016, p. 16).

*The Yoga Sutras* emphasise adherence to the eight limbs of yoga, combining to cultivate a whole yoga practice, only one of which is *asana* (a physical practice mostly used for meditations). As yoga became accepted as a physical leisure practice the spiritual

aspects of aligning the whole self beyond time and space became more understood (Easwaran 2007).

*The Yoga Sutras* were the turning point for yoga being seen as a physical practice rather than a purely spiritual one, with Patanjali becoming regarded as the spearhead of the classical yoga movement (Feuerstein 2003; Bryant 2015). Further systemisation of yoga texts (Werner 1998) continued the departure from the early classical texts dominated by psycho-spiritual practices into a more modern form of postural yoga.

### **The Western Takeover: The Development of Modern Yoga**

The combination of increasing modernity in India and the West's interest in well-being, the occult, spiritual and associative practices led to further yoga development in the Western world (Alter 2004) as well as yoga's move from the esoteric to the occult (De Michelis 2005). The concept of stress, which formally entered the consumer vernacular in the West in 1930, was also seen to be a driving force in the interest and growth of modern postural yoga (De Michelis 2005).

The development of more practical *asana* (yoga postures) emerged through teaching which sparked an Anglophone yoga revival (Singleton 2010) and further shaped the movement towards the current, Western version of yoga. The synthesis of modern yoga forms and approaches started to develop into typologies of different styles of yoga, schools, styles of belief and followers, described by De Michelis (2005). The significant turning point was the leading text *Light on Yoga* (Iyengar 1995). As one of the most critical modern texts on yoga (Alter 2004), this book detailed a new variation of postures based on male Western gymnastics (Sjoman 1999).

### **The Definition of Modern Postural Yoga**

The modern postural yoga movement was driven by three schools: Iyengar, Wheel of Yoga and Ashtanga which remain the mainstream traditional forms of yoga. This study uses the broad description of Ashtanga vinyasa yoga, a physical and well-being practice with some spiritual overtones. Ashtanga vinyasa is based on hatha yoga, described as the original posture orientated practice (Singleton 2008), upon which many modern

yoga systems are based (Pilkington et al. 2005). This co-ordinates asana, breath, and meditative gaze (Jarry et al. 2017). The postures can be varied and may change from class to class, but the union of postures and control of breath contributes to the yogic experience and helps to focus the mind and achieve relaxation (Riley 2004; Pilkington et al. 2005), bringing about a moving meditative state to calm the mind.

The emphasis on breath and postures reflect yoga's aim of unity between the mind and body and the definition of modern postural yoga (De Michelis 2007). Scholars have acknowledged the physical and non-physical aspects of yoga practice and their effects, supporting the view that yoga is a monistic activity (Shearer 2020). Monism is the view that the body and mind are the same (Riecki et al. 2013) and converges with the idea that unity of the self through mind and body alignment which is a founding philosophy of traditional yoga. Despite practical differences in definition and perception and the fact that many individuals follow a particular style or path, the concept of self connects most academic literature on yoga. The potential for self-realisation in the yoga experience is similar regardless of style or approach (Alter 2006; Feuerstein 2003).

Debate remains on how the components of yoga combine and contribute to the meaning of yoga. Singleton (2010) resisted the need to create distinctions or labels, while Smith (2007) suggested an emphasis on the non-physical but acknowledged that there is broadly something physical affixed. However, the blurring of physical and spiritual contexts in modern yoga remains unclear, leading Eliade (2009) to urge caution around an emphasis on the physical side of yoga, declaring "yoga cannot and must not be confused with gymnastics" (p. 228). The development of yoga from a spiritual to a modern leisure practice is seen by some as a reflection of a changing society (Heelas 2008) but indicated a significant departure from its roots for others. The development of yoga was argued to go "hand in hand with secularisation and professionalisation" (Burger 2010 p.182), where yoga is seen as more diluted and commoditised than its original form (Singleton 2010).

The interpretations of modern postural yoga allowed a more tangible practice for the adaption to the Western world. De Michelis (2007), a leading scholar of modern yoga, defined it as “the performance of yoga (*asanas*) within a classroom format, or with the help of books or audio-visual tools, or memory” (p.3). The repositioning of yoga as a modern, popular leisure activity, made it more accessible to the public, sports and medical institutions. The Sports Council's recognition of yoga in 1995 affirmed it as an important sport and leisure activity, and its potential for medical research was realised by the British Health Education Authority in 1990 (De Michelis 2005), where yoga was described as a useful form of alternative and preventative medicine in advertising material.

As identified above, the broad chronological development of classical and modern yoga demonstrates that yoga is not a homogeneous whole (Feuerstein 2008) but has a complicated history. Still, both the development and philosophical context of yoga cannot be ignored in modern definitions. Alter (2006) described the paradoxical nature of modern yoga as a combination of South Asian philosophy, alternative medicine, and physical training.

All styles of yoga broadly ascribe to the three elements of yoga – postures, breath and meditation – (Pilkington et al. 2005) and share a common concern with the state of being (Feuerstein 2011) but this has not been explored by participants' experience of yoga. The recognition of mind and body alignment and the important role of the self and self-awareness in yoga highlight the dichotomy within yoga research. Defining yoga as a leisure activity with positive scientific benefits in combination with a spiritual background (Newcombe 2009), recognises that yoga's contextual definition and meaning is still to be debated. Despite science and literature's myriad of views, this research is not concerned with defining yoga but rather with observing the reflections and experiences felt by the participants in their lived experiences.



## **The Connection Between Yoga and Medical Research**

Most published academic research in this field has concentrated on yoga to treat the effects “of pain, stress, anxiety, depression and cancer” (Field 2016, p. 147) or other non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory diseases, and diabetes which currently account for up to 70% of the NHS health budget (Department of Health England 2017).

The trend of researching yoga in a variety of clinical and medical settings is increasing. Gupta et al. (2018) assessed global publications during 2007-16 and found that more than 90% of yoga research publications were about how yoga interventions affect depression, stress, anxiety, cancer, obesity, and pain. This review will summarise the core areas of medicalised research on cancer-related symptoms, non-communicable disease, well-being, and mental health, to enable the exploration of key themes and findings presented by medical research.

The modern medical domain is “one of the crucial analytical filters through which the study of the modern manifestation of this discipline can fruitfully progress” (De Michelis 2008, p. 26) through which the study of modern yoga has been progressing. This demonstrates a gap for yoga research from a non-medicalised perspective, illuminating the potential for the lived yoga experience to be explored more fully.

Most medical research into yoga as a health intervention has focused on cancer, particularly breast cancer (Field 2016). Randomised control trials have had different results depending on the type of cancer, stage of disease and trajectory of treatment (Cohen et al. 2004; Bower et al. 2005; Carson et al. 2007), suggesting considerable variations in sample and health conditions. The considerable interpretations present in both method and results mean that the research on whether yoga affects cancer patients is inconclusive (Field 2016; Smith and Pukall 2009).

Authors have concluded that yoga also yielded improvements in well-being, sleep, mood, cancer-related symptoms, and overall quality of life (Bower et al. 2005; Carson et

al. 2007; Moadel et al. 2007; McCall et al. 2015) but measured these medical effects quantitatively rather than exploring experience. While most trials incorporate the three significant elements of yoga – physical postures, breathing exercises and meditation – others focus solely on physical postures (Culos-Reed et al. 2006), showing a discrepancy in how medical researchers approach the study of yoga.

The remaining broad areas of medical interest are how yoga affects non-communicable diseases such as diabetes (Innes and Vincent 2007), obesity (Godsey 2013) and heart disease (Raub 2002). Mancina et al. (2013) found yoga interventions to be comparable or superior to exercise, stating that they have the potential to aid management of cardiovascular disease risk factors such as stress (Chong 2011) and depression (Cramer et al. 2013).

Authors of systematic literature reviews have concluded that yoga has positive outcomes for depression, pain, cancer, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease (Ernst and Lee 2010) and that it is a safe and cost-effective intervention for weight control and diabetes (Kristal et al. 2005). Many medical researchers have concluded that:

“yoga interventions appeared to be equal or superior to exercise in nearly every outcome measured” (Ross and Thomas 2010, p. 3).

However, counter suggestions exist of “overt contradictions” (Ernst and Lee 2010) in research which has “confounders and biases clouding the evidence regarding its benefits” (Patwardhan 2017 p. 31).

Randomised controlled research into yoga and non-communicable diseases continues to grow, with each condition having a vast body of medicalised literature associated with it. The relationship between mental health conditions and non-communicable diseases cannot be ignored, with researchers observing that conditions often co-exist with mental health challenges (Godsey 2013). This has resulted in increased research into wellness and “the promotion of [a] preventative and positive approach to health” (Jackson 2000, p. 136). The traditional medicalised attitude of ‘prescribe not prevent’ is

changing, and medical researchers are beginning to investigate the potential of alternative well-being strategies, such as yoga, as positive self-management tools for managing health conditions (Atkinson and Permeth-Levine 2009; Cramer et al. 2016). This suggests a need to understand the experience of yoga not in conjunction with a medical condition which will allow a clearer view of the meaning of the lived experience of yoga to its participants.

## **Relationship Between Yoga and Well-being**

The previous section highlights the prevalence of yoga research in a traditional medicalised context, the following section discusses how yoga relates to well-being research.

The terms yoga and well-being are often connected in literature, suggesting the importance of exploring how yoga is linked to well-being and mental health and why this is important to this study. The definition of well-being is complex; one definition of psychological well-being centres on the concept of life satisfaction (Ryff and Keyes 1995), which is less concerned with how multi-dimensional outcomes interrelate to the whole person or spirituality. The other common description of subjective well-being is defined as “a person’s cognitive and affective evaluations of his or her life” (Diener et al. 2002, p. 63). A holistic interest in the mind-body connection in well-being research links to the original yoga definition of mind and body unity. Whilst multiple definitions of well-being exist, they often overlap within research, suggesting the broader term of general well-being should be observed for this research from a leisure perspective.

Yoga is known to improve psychological health measures and quality of life (McCall et al. 2015) and has protective and promoting after-effects on psychological well-being (Chaoul and Cohen 2010) and self-regulation (Gard et al. 2014). Research suggests that yoga can alter stress response systems, enhance self-esteem, resilience, mood, well-being, and quality of life (Myers and Sweeney 2004; Bussing et al. 2012) and lessen anxiety (Jarry et al. 2017).

Confusion occurs with the terms 'mental health', and 'well-being', culminating in the WHO (2013) proposing the concept of mental health as well-being. This concept observes the two are inextricably linked and there is a spectrum between well-being which expands also to reflect the presence of mental health illness.

As a growing epidemic, mental health illness is one of the most common reasons people undertake complementary therapy and exercise (Pilkington et al. 2005). Researchers exploring the impact of yoga on mental health have concluded that it alleviates depression, increases alpha waves (a sign of relaxation), and can result in significant stress reduction (Michalsen et al. 2005; Kiecolt-Glaser et al. 2010; Chong et al. 2011). Stress-related disorders are the leading source of adult disability worldwide (Pascoe and Bauer 2015), with anxiety and depression often presenting co-morbidly. Whilst Pascoe and Bauer observe that:

“yoga appears to improve positive affect and decrease depressive symptomology in diverse populations” (2015, p. 280).

Smith, C., et al. (2007) concluded in their quantitative studies that yoga could effectively treat anxiety and Javnbakht et al. (2009) furthered the link with this research by observing decreased anxiety specifically in women following a yoga intervention programme. Consequently, Park et al. (2014) identified the wish to alleviate stress and anxiety as a core motivator for adopting or maintaining a yoga practice which was supported by Gupta et al. (2018) who observed a decrease in anxiety following yoga intervention.

Although most researchers concur with the view that yoga affects well-being and mental health, the body of evidence shows differences in style and methodology, resulting in over-emphasis on quantitative medical studies. Issues with low-quality studies, which lack clarity (Pilkington et al. 2005; Chiesa and Serretti 2010; Pascoe et al. 2015) questions how effects are measured. Quantitative studies show a positive relationship between

well-being and yoga. However, arguably the central role of the self which links well-being, mental health, and yoga, is not clearly represented in quantitative studies.

The interest in well-being has cumulated in a growing body of research (Malathi et al. 2000) which expands the focus away from treating the physical body and towards prevention, through the exploration of the concept of the self and the body-mind connection (Barnes et al. 2007). Yoga as a leisure activity has been compared to aspects of positive psychology given its aim of improving well-being (Diener et al. 2002; Sharma 2008), with Impett et al. (2006) directly linking yoga to increased awareness of self and well-being. These authors concluded that the more often participants practised yoga, the greater their awareness of internal body sensations and the greater their positive well-being. The role of the individual embodied self and recognition of individualised leisure in this research will be explored to provide a more holistic exploration of how yoga and well-being are linked.

Furthermore, the emerging paradigm in health care, stress prevention and intervention have begun to incorporate wellness and holistic practices (Myers et al. 2000) suggesting the medical field is increasingly open to alternative treatments as part of modern health care (Jarry et al. 2017). The recent prevalence of research linking well-being and yoga and the growing popularity of yoga as a preventative measure meant that, in their 2013-2020 planning, the World Health Organisation recommended that yoga and meditation be used for “promotion and prevention of mental health issues” (WHO 2013, p. 29). Yoga, mindfulness, and meditation are now included in health systems in the UK, USA, Sweden, Canada, India, and Australia (Minded Institute 2018). Cramer et al. (2016) concluded that people who practise yoga see it as a form of individual health self-management – which links with yoga’s philosophical aim of mind and body alignment – and as “self-regulation across cognitive, emotional, behavioural, and physiological domains” (Gard et al. 2014, p. 14). Self-acceptance and self-care are recognised as an important part of well-being (Myers and Sweeney 2004; Keyes 2007), and links to the journey of the conscious self being a central aim of yoga (Impett et al; 2006).

With self-regulation becoming increasingly prominent in physical and mental health, it is evident that yoga as a leisure activity can enable both regulation and ongoing management of various conditions (Gard et al. 2014). The ability to observe the experience of yoga through the lens of a positive psychology concept, such as the flow experience, will provide further observations of how participants believe yoga is positive for their well-being and mental health and how the way they practise yoga, online or in a classroom affects this.

## **Medical Research and Well-being Summary**

The previous section's review of medical research literature was necessary because over 90% of yoga research publications exist to explore yoga as an intervention within medical and allied sciences (Gupta et al. 2018). This existing research focuses on physical and mental health and broadly concludes that yoga has positive effects (Ernst and Lee 2010). However, this work is siloed by medical conditions and is limited due to variances in sample, methodology and results (Pascoe et al. 2015). Most studies reviewed are quantitative measures of the effects of yoga on people affected by physical or mental health conditions.

Yoga has also been prevalent in linking with well-being research and related to improved individual psychological and subjective well-being (Malathi et al. 2000; Ivtzan and Papantoniou 2014; Jarry et al. 2017; Kidd and Eatough 2017), demonstrating a change of focus, away from the physical body, and towards treating the body and mind as one. While this study does not aim to directly explore yoga and well-being, yoga is also seen to have transformational properties that can positively affect participants' well-being on and off the mat. This is supported by Gard et al. (2014) who concluded that yoga helped to manage the "emotional and homeostatic perturbations of daily life" (p. 15). The finding that yoga, as a leisure practice, can positively impact people's lives has vast potential for the academic fields of leisure and health and well-being providers.

The existence of research silos has limited research by quantitatively measuring the effects of yoga on people living with specific medical or psychological issues. While both medical and well-being literature agree that yoga has an impact, the question remains of why yoga positively affects physical and mental health. This suggests a lack of understanding of the whole lived experience of yoga participants unaffected by medical conditions, which this research will consider.

The adoption of an interpretative, qualitative perspective in this research aims to explore the experience of yoga and its meaning amongst 'healthy' participants. This research will observe the lived yoga experience, with participants in the Western world who are not knowingly suffering from long-term identified mental or physical health issues. This allows a greater understanding of the meaning of the yoga experience to its participants and explores any individual benefits that organically arise from the experience.

## **Defining Yoga as a Leisure Practice**

Leisure is difficult to define with Page and Connell stating there is "no universally agreed definition of leisure" (2010 p.33). Stebbin's (2017) common sense approach viewed leisure as "residual time left over after work is done for the day" (p.7) but the statement oversimplifies the complexity of leisure and the multi-layered time, activities and experiences, derived by freedom (Page and Connell 2010). Although literature has developed exploring yoga as a leisure activity (Liu et al. 2022) it remains that little has been written exploring yoga within leisure studies. Patterson et al. (2016) stated that it can be classified as a leisure activity due to its non-routine nature and capacity to incite emotional and social benefits, as previously discussed.

To understand how yoga fits within leisure, attention must be paid to how leisure itself can be defined. Researchers have attempted to define and classify leisure using conceptual umbrella terms; one of the most recognised conceptual frameworks in the academic development of leisure is 'serious leisure' (Stebbins 1992), which yoga has

commonly been defined as (Patterson et al. 2016; Liu et al. 2022). Stebbins identified serious leisure as the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist or volunteer activity which could lead to a career based on the skills, knowledge and experience gained (Elkington and Stebbins 2014). The serious leisure framework has been applied to rock climbing (Wood 2016), surfing (Cheung and Tsaur 2012) and kayaking (Bartram 2001). Patterson et al. (2016) considered yoga as a serious leisure activity according to Stebbins's definition (1982) as it transformed into "more than a physical practice and an entire way of life" (Patterson et al. 2016 p. 306). Patterson et al (2016) concluded there were distinct shared traits between yoga, social worlds and serious leisure. Social world can be described as "an amorphous, diffuse constellation of actors, organisations, events and practices which have coalesced into spheres of interest and involvement by participants" (Unruh, 1980. p.277). The distinct traits between serious leisure and social world theory provided a framework for Patterson et al (2016) and found that yoga participants were highly involved in their personal journey but also within the dynamics of the social world of yoga. Whilst the serious leisure framework is important in the discussion of yoga, due to previous research (Stebbins, 1982; Patterson et al 2016; Liu et al 2022) it was not deemed the right framework to examine yoga for this research.

The concepts of serious, active, or passive leisure are not without critique (Veal 2017). This suggests that labelling leisure's meaning implies a need for structure and universality, outlining conditions which must be met for time to be classed as leisure, which may not be true for everyone. The differences between yoga styles and definitions are so wide that it would be impossible to categorise one type of yoga effectively within the serious leisure framework, raising the question of whether it should be classified at all. Shaw (1985) identified this critique of the over-structuralisation of leisure and examined the meaning and conditions of leisure in everyday life from a subjective viewpoint. She found that leisure can be based on the notion of an 'experience', a perspective popular with many researchers. Whilst it is acknowledged that yoga could be classified as a serious leisure activity and could also be viewed from the social world perspective which is seen to be fluid in nature (Lee 2019). The presence and emphasis on a shared experience with others in both of the frameworks did not fully allow in this



research the exploration of one of the communities studied, online yoga participants, where the participants will be alone and at home. Therefore, this research will adopt a modern interpretation of leisure which changes the focus from defining leisure as a context and moving to considering it as an experience (Duerden 2022), is aligned with the experiential position of this research.

Experience has often been an integral part of the leisure literature, beginning with Pine and Gilmore's (2011) concept of the experience economy. The observation of experience in the leisure literature has been criticised by variance in definition (Duerden et al. 2022) and a complex phenomenon (Parry and Johnson 2007). To counter this criticism, typologies of

experience have emerged, with Duerden et al. (2019) suggesting that experience can be ordinary or extraordinary. Bhattacharjee and Mogliner define ordinary experience as:

“those that are common, frequent, and within the realm of everyday life. Extraordinary experiences, on the other hand, are uncommon, infrequent, and go beyond the realm of everyday life” (2014, p. 2).

Whilst yoga is a frequent leisure activity for some people, it is not an everyday experience for most and therefore fits within the realm of an extraordinary experience. Duerden et al. (2019) continued to deepen the understanding of the extraordinary experience by dividing it into memorable, meaningful, or transformational sub-types. Yoga could be seen as any of these types but considering its philosophical and spiritual background and focus on the realisation of self, it aligns more naturally with the transformative experience concept (Ross et al. 2014).

Duerden et al. (2019) concluded that there is high personal and societal value in researching transformative experiences, which are:

“characterized by intrinsically motivated, enduring changes in self-perception and behaviour” (p. 208).

A part of how literature perceives yoga as transformative is spirituality, which remains part of yoga's history and traditions (De Michelis 2007). Research has associated leisure

and spirituality (McDonald and Schreyer 1991; Schmidt and Little 2007; Heintzmann 2009), but there is a lack of research on the relationship between modern yoga and spirituality (Antony 2014), with some suggesting that philosophy and spirituality in modern yoga need to be re-examined (Singleton 2010).

The complexity of the potentially changing definition of spirituality in yoga has restrained researchers. Hasselle-Newcombe (2005) explored the spirituality of yoga practitioners and concluded that less than half of experienced, long-term yoga practitioners affirmed a spiritual element to their yoga practice. This lack of identification with spirituality either suggests a semantic discord, or a deeper disconnect with the importance scholars (De Michelis 2005; Syman 2010) have placed on the connection between yoga and spirituality. The formative yoga literature places spirituality as a core part of the modern yoga experience, (Hasselle-Newcombe 2005) and, given yoga's growth as a modern leisure practice, it is surprising that the connection has not been further researched.

The reasons to adopt yoga and the motivation to be committed to this leisure activity are multifaceted, including strong links to the previous discussed areas of health, well-being, and spirituality. The primary, and popular, reasons for adopting yoga are surmised by (Hoyez 2007) as:

“spiritual motivations are also superimposed on health concerns, also leading to health-related notions (notion of well-being, mental relaxation, etc.)” (p 114).

Whilst debate continues around defining and typologising leisure experiences, understanding the motivations to adopt yoga, and the potential effect of experiencing leisure, is central to understanding yoga, which is the phenomenon in question. This research will define yoga simply as a leisure practice whose meaning emerges from its individual practitioners rather than a prescribed definition, in line with the phenomenological approach of this study as discussed in Chapter 4.

## Women and Yoga

The experience of yoga cannot be fully explored without the recognition that yoga is a leisure activity demographically dominated by women (Park et al. 2015). This research reflects this demographic, so the wider relationship between women and yoga as a leisure activity warrants discussion. Historically, the leisure literature has been dominated by discussion of how women are limited in their access to leisure (Henderson and Bialeschki 1991), meaning that women have felt less entitled to leisure time (Thompson 1999), meaning their experience felt invisible (Green et al. 1990). Recently, the literature has developed to observe the socio-cultural context of yoga (Berger 2018), identifying the issue that yoga participants are mostly middle-class and white (Haddix 2016). This recognition of the contextual factors is crucial in understanding the construction and identity of women's leisure experiences (Jackson and Henderson 1995; Shaw 2001), evidencing that challenges still exist, especially for working class and black women (Putcha 2020).

In addition, the growing body of literature recognising the multiple meanings leisure has for women:

“attested to the physical and mental connection between leisure and health for women of all ages” (Henderson and Gibson 2013 p. 126).

Whilst leisure studies have moved on from questioning whether women have time for leisure at all (Mansfield et al. 2018) to how they can negotiate (Little 2002) and access leisure, restrictions such as time and self-consciousness about bodies and abilities still apply. The common conclusion is that leisure must be negotiated for women, particularly in the home (Stalp 2006). Shaw (1994), a leading researcher of the relationship between women and leisure, concluded that women's participation in leisure is complex and contradictory. Research on women and leisure continues to advance to suggest we are moving “far beyond ascertaining a single meaning of leisure

for women” (Henderson and Gibson 2013 p.127). Instead, gender can be viewed as relational:

“it is constructed and reconstructed in relation to and interaction with other individuals within the contexts of society, culture, and history” (Freysinger et al. 2013, p. 4).

Therefore, how women construct a leisure experience is seen as important for developing identity and meaning in women’s leisure. Researchers have shown that women feel more empowered to dedicate time to themselves through leisure (Lloyd and Little 2010), but that the gendered meaning of leisure is multi-faceted. The multiple meanings of women's leisure led Henderson and Shaw (2006), when examining women, leisure, and gender, to suggest it may be futile to attempt to define leisure as meaning because it will always be fluid.

All participants in this PhD research are white women aged 40 and older, who are therefore labelled ‘middle-aged’ by societal standards. Despite the physical and emotional challenges such women may experience, resulting in changes to identity construction and body image (Dittman and Freedman 2009; Cox et al. 2022), the exploration of middle-aged women’s meaning and experience of leisure and particularly yoga is limited (Cox et al. 2022).

In addition to leisure constraints, women aged 45-55 will experience physical and emotional changes due to perimenopause or menopause (NHS 2022), which can affect identity and cause anxiety (Bremer et al. 2019), amongst other symptoms. While studies have linked yoga to the development of a more positive body image (Halliwell et al. 2019) authors of two core studies (Humberstone and Cutler-Riddick 2015; Cox et al. 2022) that are specific to women, ageing and yoga, concluded that mid-life women viewed their bodies negatively when ageing.

Participants in the above studies were aged 45-60 (Humberstone and Cutler-Riddick 2015; Cox et al. 2022), whereas the current research is distinct in its exploration of

women mostly aged 40-50, who are likely to be experiencing peri or menopausal symptoms. Leisure participation has been positively associated with improving the health and well-being of menopausal women (Parry and Shaw 1999). Yet there has been limited academic research to explore this link in terms of yoga as a leisure activity.

The unique study of women in this age range allows this research to be distinct from the existing literature observing women and leisure and women's lived experience of yoga.

## **Changing Leisure – The Rise of Contemporary Yoga**

### **Communities**

The literature reviewed so far has discussed the evolution of yoga and its rise as a leisure activity as well as who participates. However, change has also occurred in how people access and consume leisure, leading to the development of two contemporary yoga communities: classroom and online yoga.

While it is acknowledged that yoga can be described as a leisure activity it is acknowledged that current literature is limited (Liu et al. 2022). The understanding of yoga as a leisure activity requires a broader socio-cultural understanding of how leisure consumption has changed. The move away from a traditional set definition or typology of how and where leisure takes place raises questions of space and place and supports the subjective individualism of modern yoga, as is evidenced in this research. Societal change is evidenced by the increasing digitisation of society, which may impact people's leisure participation (Spracklen 2015; Silk et al. 2016), suggesting changes to yoga's traditional classroom-based setting. This fluidity of space and place aligns with Bauman's concept of liquid modernity (2000), where changing participation in leisure activities has become multi-dimensional and fluid. The concept of liquid modernity arose from Bauman's observation of how a globalised society was at "a time of interregnum – when the old ways of doing things no longer work" (2013 p.1). Societal change, globalisation, destructuralisation and the rise of the individual brings both freedom and uncertainty which has arguably transferred to people's pursuit of leisure.

Blackshaw (2016) adopted the idea of liquid modernity to discuss the reimagining of a potential liquid leisure which acknowledges change to leisure. This new phase of liquid leisure “ushered in a new phase for leisure which saw it ingeniously empowered by the human imagination” (Blackshaw 2016 p.3) recognising the individuality and experiential nature and meaning of modern leisure. The concept of liquid leisure is not without its critics, but the concept is “valued and valuable because it creates the space in which people can live authentic lives and devote themselves to meaningful activities” (Richards 2011 p. 1).

The rise of online yoga epitomises the individual, liquid leisure experience by challenging the traditional concept of space (Elden 2009) and the potential fixed typology and framework of leisure (Stebbins 1992). The approach of this PhD research, based on the conclusions of literature in this area, is that yoga is constantly evolving, and research needs to allow for the recognition of individual freedom in the experience. As such, the title of this thesis refers to the contemporary communities of yoga which are classroom and online; in the following section, literature on the presence of those communities and how space and place are central to this classification are discussed.

## **The Role of Space and Place in Yoga**

Space and place as contexts are fundamental in any research into leisure activity and/or participation but are complex and difficult to define. The humanistic geographer Tuan (1977) stated that space means freedom, whereas place is security. Space has strict boundaries and concrete dimensions, whereas individuals create a sense of place from a social or psychological meaning attributed to that space (Henderson and Frelke 2000). Space cannot be disassociated from the practice of people who use the space (i.e., communities) and create the place; therefore, space leads to sense of place (Henderson and Frelke 2000).

Space, as a concept, refers to a geometric location, whereas a sense of place has historically been discussed by humanistic geographers as referring to the meaning or

lived experience of a location (Smale 2006), linking to the observation of lived experience in this research. Place refers to the “socio-cultural meaning and emotional attachments held by an individual or group for a spatial setting” (Glover and Parry 2009, p. 98) and is observed as a contextual factor in leisure literature, as it can influence behaviour, shape perception, and define experiences (Smale 2006).

Space and place can be difficult to separate, which clouds their definitions: “distinguishing between space and place continues to present a problem” (Smale 2006, p. 330). Limited research has been conducted into space and place in connection to yoga but, in a phenomenological study with an Australian yoga community, Persson (2007) agreed with philosopher Edmund Casey’s (1993) claim that placeless spaces cause anxiety and confusion. But this was complex in the phenomenological study of place and space in an Australian yoga community. In Persson’s study (2007) the participants practised a more philosophical form of yoga called Satyananda where social conditions and constructs such as traditional space and place are rejected in favour of the belief that conscious beings can transcend space and place through feeling embodied. Henderson and Frelke (2000), discussed space as a vital dimension of leisure resulting in a meaningful sense of place but this contrasts with Persson (2007) finding that the meaning of place and space was not predictable for the yoga participants studied and concluded that an embodied sense of space was not fixed but was linked to individual perspective.

The concept of an embodied space (Persson 2007) was advanced in Cook-Cottone's (2017) study on yoga communities and eating disorders. She concluded that the yoga studio as a defined space has the potential to “embrace, explore and unravel their own relationship to the body” (Cook-Cottone 2017, p. 87). This suggests that both psychological and physiological meaning can be attached to space, which links to embodiment. The idea that the geographical concept and philosophy of space can link to create an embodied space was originally discussed by Casey (2001) and strengthens the need for liquidity around the discussion of space in the current research. The discussion of embodiment expands on Merleau-Ponty’s (1962) theory, which can be

understood by “viewing the body as the locus of experience” (Nevrin 2008, p. 122), and which connects how embodiment is felt through a sense of place.

This research explores space both online and in the classroom, the subsequent lived experience of yoga, and how this links to a sense of place. This challenges the definition of place in yoga, which has typically been limited to classrooms. To enable this approach, this research adopts a fluid definition of space and place and the resulting sense of community, suggesting communities can be less structured and can share values or resources to build social cohesion rather than purely referring to location (Wendel et al. 2009).

## **The Spatial Experience of Yoga Communities**

The discussion of space and place or where people practise yoga leads to the discussion of their identity as “leisure identities are discovered, affirmed and framed within specific places” (Gammon and Elkington 2016 p.1). An area that separates the two communities in this study is space. Classroom yoga is practised in a fixed space and as part of a group and online yoga is predominantly practised alone and at home. In the following section, the two identified spaces, classroom and online, will be explored as specific communities.

Yoga has been categorised as a community-based practice (Davies 2013), which allows both individual commitment and a basis for group commonality (Wenger 1998). Wenger’s (1998) definition of a community-based practice requires three elements: mutual engagement, shared repertoire of practice, and joint enterprise. These conditions can be met in classroom-based yoga practice through shared actions and rhythm of practice. However, the enactment of community-based practice within online settings is yet to be explored.

Community is a concept that sparks debate, with one scholar defining community as being “rooted in territorial, spatial or generational togetherness” (Keller et al. 2003, p.



6). A more traditional definition of community is concerned with sociological structure and can be summarised as a culturally structured group of people in a locality that enables the meeting of daily needs (Arensburg 2017). Potentially, due to the liquidity of the times and the fact that geographical boundaries are less relevant, no universal definition of community is necessary (Edwards 2015). Johnson and Glover (2013) supported a more fluid definition, suggesting that leisure settings can facilitate a feeling of community through human experiences and interactions. Silk (1999) suggested a more liquid definition of community as:

“common needs and goals, a sense of the common good, shared lives, culture and views of the world, and collective action” (p. 8).

Silk (1999) started to address the ‘problem’ of how a community is defined in an online individual experience. The spatial experience of leisure activities must be considered “to understand leisure in the context of everyday experiences” (Johnson and Glover 2013, p. 90). Scholars have argued about whether communities can exist in our post-modernised world (Piff et al. 2012) and Wellman (1996) argued that personal communities can exist where individuals form informal links and relationships, meaning the structure of community can be created by individuals supporting a more fluid approach to what could be considered a community. Nimrod (2014) concluded that little is known about the participation and benefits of online communities. Research on leisure has expanded (Valtchanov et al. 2016; Torres 2022) to examine online leisure communities. However, “little is known about how these groups form and function” (Torres 2022, p.32), providing an interesting area for research into yoga communities.

Scholars have suggested that group experience is framed by a sense of physicality through both space and the existence of other people (Smale 2006; Glover and Parry 2009). Many yoga researchers have observed that yoga practitioners need social connection while practising yoga (Moadel et al. 2007; Gard et al. 2014; Alsobrook 2016), supporting the view that yoga is a group experience. Research into the meaning of community for yoga practitioners has primarily focused on a classroom group experience, despite the rising number of people who access yoga online at home. The

recognition of this individually led online yoga experience allows this research to explore the changing meaning of community, which to date has not been explored by researchers.

The concept of liminoid phenomena reflects the relationship between leisure, space and place and community. Turner's (1979) work on liminoid phenomena as collective or individual phenomena which is "generated often in times and places assigned to the leisure sphere" (1979, p. 492) and supports a more liquid approach to leisure. Central to Turner's work is the view that participants involved in the liminoid phenomena form a 'communitas' or social entity. This supports the recognition that the changing leisure space of yoga, moving from a structured space of the classroom to online, relates to emergence of contemporary communities and the subsequent concepts of liminal space (Elden, 2009). Space and place have the potential to be a fundamental part of the meaning of the online yoga experience in the home, and the absence of physical group dynamics makes this research distinct, challenging previous research focus on yoga as a group experience.

The categorisation of contemporary yoga communities and their formation is not the aim of this research study, but the nature of how and where yoga is accessed and what this means to participants' experience. Rather, observing participants in their natural setting as yoga practitioners will extend the meaning of contemporary communities by observing yoga practised by two distinct groups and exploring space and an associated feeling of place within the lived experience.

## **Re-imagining Yoga as an Online Leisure Activity**

Yoga as a leisure activity is changing rapidly in space and place of practice. One of the largest studies to examine patterns of yoga practice identified that, among individuals who had practised yoga in the last 12 months, 52% attended a formal class (Cramer et al. 2016). However, there is a lack of up-to-date statistics, with the most recent

suggesting that, when looking at sources of yoga information, 36.5% used DVDs or CDs and 27% used the internet (Cramer et al. 2016, p. 231).

The definition of online space is challenging. Yuen and Johnson (2017) acknowledged technology as a potential facilitator of a 'third space': a shared social space. This aligns with Moadel et al.'s (2007) conclusion that the social dimension is important in yoga but does not allow for online yoga, which is practised alone in the home. Moving on from the concepts of limonoid phenomena, Elden (2009) defined liminal space as being in-between, on the border of two spaces. This could be applied to online yoga in this PhD study due to merging the online and home environments in one of the research groups. However, the term 'liminal space' fails to acknowledge the desire to merge rather than separate two spaces, so the definition of a 'liminal space' also seems to be problematic for this research.

This research on online yoga challenges the concept of social dimensions and communities that exist in yoga and how this applies to the broader digitisation of leisure. Silk et al. (2016) concludes that, when discussing the digitisation of leisure:

“we do not know enough about how different social groups access, negotiate and incorporate digitised leisure practices into their everyday lives” (p. 721).

Researchers have been slow to react to the digitisation of leisure (Redhead 2016), although it is acknowledged that leisure must be reimagined due to ongoing change within our digitalised society. Pertinent to this research is work from Silk et al. (2016), who acknowledge that:

“a contextually based understanding of digitised leisure practices is inseparable from the comprehension of the corporeal practices” (p. 718).

Recognising the limitations of existing leisure research, which focuses on physical rather than online enabled leisure practice, is central to this study. The current research allows

the online experience of yoga to be explored, enabling investigation of the contextual consumption of yoga and questioning the historical assumption that yoga is a shared group physical experience (Smale 2006) rather than an individual online one.

## **Summary**

The exploration of the historical foundations of yoga and the development of modern yoga confirmed that yoga is a phenomenon which is complex in its evolution. Authors have noted a departure from yoga's traditional roots as a philosophical system to modern, postural yoga which emphasises the physical effects (strength, flexibility), (Moadel et al. 2007) and their associated emotional effects (relaxation, self-awareness, stress relief), (Myers and Sweeney 2004).

This departure leaves a dichotomy between yoga's practical, scientific benefits and its deep spiritual background (Newcombe 2009). There is limited understanding of how this dichotomy is represented in the modern lived experience of yoga participants (Singleton 2010). The contrasting views of the definition of yoga further complicate the issue by suggesting it is a leisure activity caught between post-modernity and tradition, whose modern meaning is multi-layered and misunderstood.

Academic literature has contributed to the confusion due to the existence of silos of medical and well-being research in this area, as identified in this review. Yoga literature is dominated by medical research (Gupta et al. 2018). Whilst the medical and well-being literature concludes that yoga can have a positive impact on depression, pain, cancer, diabetes and cardiovascular disease Ernst and Lee (2010) argued there have been contradictions. The research to date is varied in terms of the sample, methodology and results (Pascoe et al. 2015), therefore creating multiple views and interpretations of understanding of the effects of yoga.

The problem observed in the research to date is that quantitative research cannot explore the complexity of the yoga experience and why it has positive effects because it is often dictated by a certain medical condition or context.

Yoga research in this review has been observed through a leisure context, but the definition and understanding of leisure itself is complex. This study will adopt a fluid approach to defining yoga in the leisure context, aligning with Bauman's concept of liquid modernity (2000), where changing participation in leisure activities are seen to be multi-dimensional and fluid. Yoga is a leisure activity which is currently dominated by female practitioners and the demographic studied in this study are likely to be undergoing age-related physical and emotional challenges, resulting in changing the construction of identities and body image (Dittman and Freedman 2009; Cox et al. 2022). However, despite this, the exploration of middle-aged women's experience of leisure and particularly yoga is limited (Cox et al. 2022). Thus, the unique experience of this demographic has been underrepresented by current research, which this research aims to change.

Yoga is traditionally practised in a group, in a physical space, and various authors (Moadel et al. 2007; Gard et al. 2014; Alsobrook 2016) have concluded that yoga participants need social connection. Online yoga is part of the modern yoga experience that researchers have not fully acknowledged. The current research will be distinct in enabling a re-imagining of yoga as a leisure experience by observing those who practise online at home alongside those who practise in a more traditional space.

In conclusion, the literature review charting yoga's development from its philosophical history to a popular leisure activity has required the observation of yoga history and its present form. The understanding of yoga has been complicated by the literature's lack of emphasis on the development of a qualitative understanding of who practises modern yoga, where, and how. This study's experiential, phenomenological approach will begin an interpretation of the meaning of the lived experience of modern yoga practitioners and is, therefore, unique in current leisure studies.

## **Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework**

### **The Emergence of the Flow Experience**

The emergence of the flow experience began with research on experience which can be described as “time spent in activities that provide an intrinsically rewarding experience” (Csikszentmihalyi and LeFevre 1989 p.815). Analysis of experience led to the emergence and classification of peak experiences (Maslow 1958; Ravizza 1977), described as something which brings about feelings of happiness and fulfilment. Over time, more attention has been paid to examining experience, how it can be classified and how it affects our state of consciousness and resulting performance.

Flow experiences extend the concept of peak experiences and were originally described by Csikszentmihalyi in the mid-1970s. Csikszentmihalyi is one of the founders of positive psychology, and his classic work on the flow experience left the realms of academic text and entered mainstream publishing, with the proclamation that the flow state enables the ‘achievement of happiness’, similar to the journey of enlightenment, as discussed in yoga philosophy (Cope 2018). Csikszentmihalyi developed a theory of optimal experience named the flow experience, which began in 1975 with a qualitative examination of how it felt when things were going well in an activity. His nine-dimensional model became the foundation for all subsequent research into the flow experience.

Academics have varied in their definitions and interpretations of the flow experience. On the cover of the book *Flow – The classic way to achieve happiness*, Csikszentmihalyi describes flow as a phenomenon that introduces “a state of joy, creativity and total involvement” (2002). Sugiyama and Inomata (2005) suggest that the flow experience is a positive state which can create a sense of oneness with the environment, where the border of the self is expanded. These descriptions connect the conscious self and the sense of embodied space and place, as previously explored in the yoga literature, linking

the two concepts. Csikszentmihalyi (1975) described flow as “the holistic sensation that people feel when they act with total involvement” (p. 36), which correlates with the importance placed on embodied consciousness (Chopra 2023) in yoga practice. This link between self and consciousness intensifies, as a core part of the flow experience is that activity becomes autotelic or intrinsically rewarding. Indeed, people in flow:

“stop being aware of themselves as separate from the activity/action they are performing” (Csikszentmihalyi 2008, p. 53).

There are several dimensions required to enter the flow state, as suggested by Csikszentmihalyi (1988) and Jackson and Csikszentmihalyi (1996).

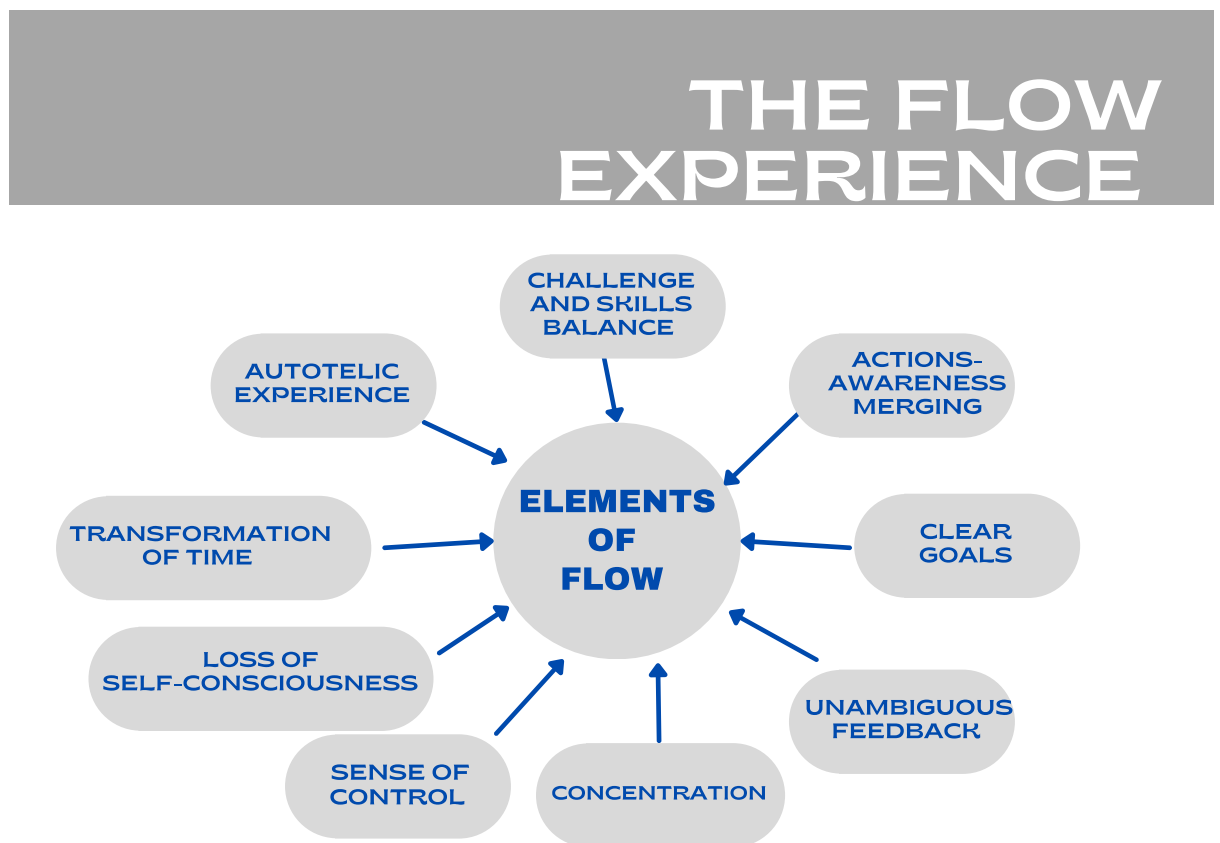


Figure 1: Dimensions of the Flow Experience (Csikszentmihalyi 1990) as depicted by the researcher

Research on the flow experience began by examining competitive and elite sports (Jackson et al. 1998), although non-competitive sports and leisure have been researched more recently Neumann (1992), such as dancing (Hefferon and Ollis 2006), skiing (Clark et al. 2018), music (Diaz 2011) and horse racing (Jackman et al. 2015).

Whilst qualitative studies on flow experiences have been conducted into different sports and leisure experiences, they have been noticeably gender biased to date. In a review of 1194 papers examining the flow experience, 785 were with male populations and 409 were with female populations (Swann et al. 2012). Very few qualitative studies have been carried out with a primarily female population which creates further interest for this thesis as the research participants are all female. While most researchers support the nine-dimensional model of flow depicted in Figure 1, it is not without critique. Stein et al. (1995) agreed that athletes in flow experienced greater enjoyment, satisfaction, control, and concentration, but concluded that the:

“psychological antecedents of flow remain unidentified, as neither goals, competence nor confidence predicted the flow experience” (p. 125).

Vlachopoulos et al. (2000) extended this view to include non-competitive sport through a large study about aerobic exercise. They concluded that:

“the nine-factor model and the hierarchical model did not show an adequate fit to the data” (p. 815),

and that it may limit the research rather than enhance it. The flow experience has been studied extensively in sports and leisure contexts. Still, interpretations of the flow experience's dimensions and its application to research have varied, which the following sections will explore.



## Challenges of Measuring and Interpreting Flow

The measurement and interpretation of the flow experience dimensions is challenging. Jackson et al. (1996) developed the Flow State Scale (FSS) to assess the presence of the dimensions. This was followed by the development of the Trait Flow State (TFS) (Jackson et al. 1998), which assesses the frequency of flow experiences. These measures enabled Jackson to compare the nine dimensions of the flow experience and assess their strength. She concluded that seven dimensions were positive indicators of a flow experience, but that transformation of time and action/awareness merging may not be. Sugiyama and Inomata (2005) further researched flow in athletes and supported Jackson's (1996) finding that the dimensions of concentration on the task and autotelic experience were strong indicators of flow. Differences occurred with two of the characteristics: unambiguous feedback and clear goals, which Sugiyama and Inomata (2005) suggested could be explained by the nature of questions asked of their study participants. This difference leads to questions about how the dimensions are interpreted by researchers, such as how they are framed or explained, particularly in the more common quantitative research, and how they are then interpreted by the researcher.

A quantitative emphasis in research into flow emerged from the use of the FSS (Jackson 1996), which, whilst allowing an experience to be measured at multiple points during the activity, remains problematic, as it regularly interrupts an experience.

Csikszentmihalyi's suggestion (1990) that the quantitative scales did not account for individuality led to the suggestion that flow is determined by the individual and, therefore, "not too much weight should be placed on empirical measures of flow" (Jackson and Eklund 2002, p. 148). Conversely, Jackson's scales allow for transferability across disciplines, meaning greater accessibility for research but also posing a greater risk for misinterpretation and variability in research. It could be argued that the nature

of flow as a multidimensional, fluid, subjective experience means its examination is more suited to qualitative research.

Whilst arguments remain about the mechanisms of measurability, breadth of research and potential diversity, flow is still highly regarded as the concept of a desirable state that promotes self-growth and a positive autotelic experience (Csikszentmihalyi 1990). The concept mirrors the yoga literature's emphasis on the transformation of self, and the role of self-actualising is also shared between the flow experience (Jackson 1996) and the yoga literature (Feuerstein 2003). Elkington (2010) suggested that flow is related to leisure by stating that the flow theory allows for:

“perhaps the greatest sense of personal growth and well-being available through leisure participation” (p. 358).

The connection between yoga and flow in both philosophical approach and practical manifestation justifies its consideration as a conceptual framework for this research and extends the relationship between leisure and flow research.

## **The Philosophical Connection: Yoga and the Flow Experience**

Csikszentmihalyi believed the connection between the flow experience and the practice of yoga was strong, stating that yoga could be regarded as “one of the oldest and most systematic methods of producing flow experience” (1990, p. 106). Philosophical parallels can be drawn given the merging of action and awareness or ‘oneness’ expressed in yoga and the flow experience, which:

“provide us with a temporary glimpse of Samadhi, the blissful state of consciousness participants have been cultivating for years” (Wilson 1990, p. 22).

This sense of ‘oneness’ supports yoga's monistic focus on the joining together of mind and body (Newcombe 2009) and further links the aim of yoga to the flow experience.

## **Developing a Sense of Self**

The importance of self is a central concept shared in the flow experience and modern yoga, with self-awareness and a state of being as main goals of the latter (Collins 1998; Feuerstein 2003). Self-awareness can be defined as “the consequences of focusing the attention on the self” (APA 2023). The concept of self is prevalent in the yoga literature (De Michelis 2005; Sharma 2008; Kidd and Eatough 2017) and is also viewed as an important part of the leisure experience (Ramsay 2013).

The sense of self has been identified as a central theme in yoga philosophy and literature. In flow, the self also has a central role and has been described as:

“the self emerges when consciousness comes into existence and becomes aware of itself as information about the body, subjective states, past memories and the personal future” (Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi 2002, p. 91).

The formative flow research primarily looked at males engaging in competitive sport (Stoll and Ufer 2021), which is diametrically opposed to yoga’s non-competitive, philosophically based history. The active role of the self (Csikszentmihalyi 2002) in flow research could suggest opposition to the yogic aim of the abandonment of ego. This apparent difference between the flow and yoga philosophies could be semantic, as both suggest that paying attention leads to increased self-awareness (Jackson and Csikszentmihalyi 1999) rather than control or loss of self. The flow experience arguably enhances the sense of self, which can lead to self-transcendence (Csikszentmihalyi 2002) and links to the role of self as transformative in yoga (Acebedo 2012) and in leisure (Juniu 2009).

Despite Csikszentmihalyi’s association between the philosophy and characteristics of flow and yoga, few studies have connected the two. Philips (2005) examined the flow states and motivational perspectives of yoga participants and, at that time, stated that there were “no studies focused on the flow experience of yoga participants” (Phillips

2005, p. 14). Flow states were examined quantitatively, using the FSS and found that yoga produced higher flow scores than comparative activities.

Direct links between yoga and the flow experience have not been fully explored. However, Aherne et al. (2011) examined mindfulness training (including yoga) on athletes' flow using the FSS and positive increases in flow during the six-week intervention, with significant increases in the dimensions of clear goals and sense of control. Diverging from these studies' positive results, Briegel-Jones et al. (2013) reported no change in overall flow when examining the effect of yoga practice on flow in elite swimmers but reported positive impacts on physiological and performance elements. They suggested that their small sample size may have affected findings (Briegel-Jones et al. 2013). Although both studies examined yoga and flow, they did so via another activity, namely athletics and swimming. Therefore, yoga and flow were not directly examined but were used as a conduit to affect flow states in another activity.

Mindfulness has been more widely researched than yoga in relation to flow, with Bernier et al. (2009) examining the extent of mindfulness and resulting flow and concluding that the two share certain characteristics. Bernier et al. (2009) agreed with Kee and Wang (2008) that athletes who are more mindful "tend to experience elements of flow more often" (Kee and Wang 2008, p. 409). The role of self-awareness and the aim to control the conscious experience suggests an overlap between flow, mindfulness and potentially yoga.

In summary, the flow experience is described as enjoyable and intrinsically rewarding (Swann et al. 2012) but is also labelled as one of the most elusive and least understood phenomena in sport (Jackson and Csikszentmihalyi 1999). Adopting a phenomenological perspective in this study will provide a greater understanding of both yoga and the flow experience. The focus on positive health management through leisure has practical implications for healthcare professionals and individuals. Schuler et al. (2009) concluded that:

“flow experience may contribute to the long-term maintenance of exercising by positively rewarding the sport activity and thus enhancing the probability to perform it again...” (2009, p. 174).

This statement has implications for all leisure activities and furthers the drive to understand the positive psychology of exercise and leisure and promote longer term commitment to leisure. However, direct studies of the yoga lived experience from a qualitative perspective are limited.

## **Summary**

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) believed the connection between the flow experience and the practice of yoga was strong, given the philosophical focus on the self and state of being or consciousness which are foundational to yoga (De Michelis 2005; Feuerstein 2003; Strauss 2005). The use of the flow experience in the current research can be justified by these philosophical similarities around the importance of self and conscious experience.

Despite Csikszentmihalyi’s acknowledgement of the association between characteristics of flow experience and yoga, the studies that have connected the two are predominantly in the fields of competitive and elite sports (Jackson et al. 1998). Whilst the link is now used in leisure studies, there have been few leisure focused studies primarily with a female population (Swann et al. 2012).

The examination of yoga and the flow experience in both a traditional classroom and as an online leisure activity will enable a greater depth of exploration into the dimensions of the flow experience. The research will examine how the flow experience is shaped by the meaning it has for both person and environment (Namakura and Csikszentmihalyi 2009) in a leisure context and from a female perspective. Further exploration of the flow experience also raises questions about whether an individual’s flow experience can replicate that of a group experience (Walker 2010), which this research will also explore through online yoga which may bring another novel dimension to the flow experience research. This historical rejection of online-enabled flow experience (Jackson and

Csikszentmihalyi 1999) differs from the willingness to explore digitalised leisure experience expressed by Silk et al. (2016) and contradicts the growing digitalisation of society.

This interpretative study allows the identified research gaps to be examined and offers the potential for enhancing understanding of the flow experience across the classroom and online yoga experience.

## **Personal Reflexivity on use of the Flow Experience as a Conceptual Framework**

I approached this research topic firstly interested in exploring yoga as an experience. This led me to the flow experience to allow a way to access the experience through an acknowledged leisure framework. The link between the observation of an experience also led to the methodological approach of IPA to look in detail at the lived, experiential, and individual experience of yoga (see next chapter). Parallels exist between yoga, flow and IPA and suggest that this enriches the research, but this has also created complexity as

"usually in IPA studies the analysis or results section is discrete in the sense that the interpretative account provided is a close reading of what the participants have said. This is done without reference to the extant literature" (Smith et al. 2022 p.116).

To stay true to the methodological choice of this study I have had to make the decision that firstly the participant lived experience will be observed organically, allowing participants' phenomenological accounts to lead the research narrative. Once those findings have been explored through IPA analysis, the flow experience framework will be used as a basis for inductive reasoning to further explore the meaning of the lived yoga experience and the flow experience.

This has been a difficult and potentially ambitious process but is one that I believe adds to the richness of this study rather than detracting from it, as IPA has had limited use within leisure studies. I believe this approach will enable the natural rather than prescribed observation of the lived experience which can then add depth to previous flow experience research.

## **Chapter 4: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

The intention of this study is to co-discover the phenomena of yoga and the flow experience. For the purpose of explaining the research methodology chosen, this chapter, firstly, explores the philosophical approach of the research. Second, qualitative research and the broad development of phenomenology are outlined and followed by the three broad strands of phenomenology, which are debated for use within this research. Each strand is discussed to allow for the preferred approach to be justified as a methodology for this thesis. The chosen methodology is evaluated for its value to this study. Method is discussed in the following chapter to include research design and resulting analysis.

### **Philosophical Underpinning of Research**

Phenomenology is a methodology which has risen from philosophical foundations therefore the concepts of epistemology and ontology need to be discussed to determine the choice of methodology for this research. This study does not aim to debate, extensively, the nature of ontological or epistemological focus but does need to state the researcher's approach as a philosophical standpoint.

As previously discussed (p. 24) IPA is assumed to have an epistemological and ontological openness and could be assigned to several approaches. Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality (Ormston et al. 2014) and in this research the interpretive ontological position is shaped by the researcher's view that participants' social reality is subjective and is constructed by the individual experience and lifeworld. The researcher believes that multiple contexts for reality exist and are evidenced in the post-modern literature (Bauman 2013) and that reality is not necessarily a fixed construct.

Epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowledge and can be broadly segregated into interpretivism/constructionism, critical, positivism and postmodern viewpoints (Merriam and Tisdell 2015). As this research will explore the lived yoga experience it is by its phenomenological nature interpreting that experience. This interpretation assumes “that reality is socially constructed: that there is no single observable reality” (Merriam and Tisdell 2015 p. 9). Therefore, the epistemological position of the research is phenomenological, meaning the researcher believes that knowledge is driven by the individual experience of consciousness and the meaning that is ascribed to that experience, which may differ from one individual to the next.

It must be noted that there is considerable debate about whether an “epistemological basis is problematic for Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis” (Chamberlain 2010, p. 51) due to the exploration of experience and whether we can judge whether experience is real or constructed for the individual. Debate continues regarding ontology and epistemology of phenomenology (Dennison 2019) which will not be analysed within this study, but aligning the research values and broad philosophical approach is important. The principles of interpretive phenomenology (see p. 81) underpin this study's ontological and epistemological approach.



## Personal Reflexivity - Epistemology and Ontology

In the early part of this thesis, I found myself struggling with a clarity regarding the ontological and epistemological position of both IPA and this study. I began thinking that I ontologically aligned to a soft relativist perspective (Braman 2008) as I believe that the world view is real from the perspective of the person seeing it, and there are multiple truths which can never be proven right or wrong. I then began to read more about hermeneutic constructivism which “takes the view that the fundamental comportment or attitude toward the world that each person adopts is one of understanding” (Peck and Mummery 2018 p.389). The more I read, the more I noticed different approaches and different interpretations of those approaches. I turned to the IPA forum (which I was regularly interacting with) to be able to add some clarity. What I found was that there was an observation that there was no one right position in IPA and a distinct lack of clarity or agreement, as Jonathan Smith stated on the forum as a ‘murky soup’ (2022 IPA community forum). The ontological and epistemological openness of IPA (Kimberley and Haaga-Helia 2022) led me to return my thoughts back to the importance of exploring the lived experience of how the individual experiences yoga rather than a fixed ontological or epistemological statement. It is my ontological belief that social reality and the nature of the phenomenon, yoga, is based on individual experience. My epistemological position is phenomenological, meaning I believe people derive their knowledge through lived experience and that objective and subjective experiential elements are interpreted by the individual participant.

## Qualitative Research

Although there is clear debate about the choice between qualitative and quantitative research, this thesis will not debate those advantages or disadvantages, as the researcher feels that qualitative research is the clear choice for a research study based on experience.

Merriam and Tisdell state qualitative research concerns “how people interpret their experience, how they construct their worlds and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (2015, p. 6). A qualitative approach was employed in this research to understand the phenomenon and to conduct qualitative research because “an issue or problem needs to be explored” (Creswell 2013, p. 47). Although ethnography was at first

considered as it enabled a way to describe first-hand accounts of those within the area of study (Hammersley 2006), ultimately phenomenology was chosen as the most suitable methodology.

The nature of phenomenology allows for it to be differentiated from other qualitative research methods in its concentration on life-world study of phenomena to encourage rich, detailed, narrative. Phenomenology allows the deep exploration of a phenomenon and is described as “a qualitative research concerned with the naturalistic description or interpretation of phenomena in terms of the meanings these have for the people experiencing them” (Langdrige 2007, p. 7). The recognition that for this research, the researcher is close to the subject and could be considered an insider (Pavlidis and Olive 2014) is encouraged by Denzin and Lincoln (2002) who call on researchers to enter the lived experience of those they study. Whilst a large part of the discussion about phenomenology debates its definition, the philosophical foundation of the interpretation of lived experience and how this is applied as a research methodology also needs to be explored.

## **Foundations of Phenomenology**

Phenomenology “is a form of qualitative research that focuses on the study of an individual’s lived experiences within the world” (Neubauer et al. 2019 p. 90). Although phenomenology is simply the study of phenomena, it is multi-layered, rich, and has a complicated history. The reason may be that phenomenology tends to discuss not the ‘what’, of a studied phenomenon, but works to uncover the more complicated ‘how’. To assess phenomenology as a research method, the philosophical history needs to be discussed.

Phenomenology arose in the early 1900s when the need to address subjectivity in the everyday lived experience and to examine a more integrated view of the human experience became more apparent (Smith and Nizza 2022). The main contributors to the academic field of phenomenology were philosophers, whose words have since been

extended and debated - with many attempting to interpret this philosophy into a research methodology (Sloane and Bowe 2014). A number of academics have studied phenomenology, and while variance occurs in definition, all broadly agree to the main phenomenological perspective that it is the study which seeks the meaning of experiences (Giorgi 2011; Van Manen 2017; Smith and Nizza 2022). The concept of the lived experience is central to phenomenologists wishing to carefully and fully explicate the phenomena which they are studying, and the meanings individuals ascribe to that experience. (Pascal et al. 2011) aligning to the aim of this study. The phenomenological attitude is a creative but disciplined way of seeing with fresh, curious eyes, and is the core element distinguishing phenomenology from other research approaches on exploring experience and subjectivity (Finlay 2008).

Despite the different iterations of phenomenological philosophy, it is widely accepted that there exist three broad strands of phenomenological thought: Descriptive phenomenology, led by Husserlian thought; Hermeneutic phenomenology, led by Heidegger; and IPA, primarily adopted as a qualitative research methodology by Smith et al (2009).

The following discussion of the philosophical roots of phenomenology will allow the reader to follow the researcher's investigative journey and provide justification of the eventual choice of research methodology.

### **Descriptive Phenomenology**

The review of descriptive phenomenology not only discusses the chronological development of the discipline, and key contributors to the founding philosophy, but also the main elements that contribute, namely intentionality, bracketing and reduction which differentiate phenomenology from other qualitative research methodologies.

Edmund Husserl is generally described as the founder of descriptive phenomenological philosophy (Langdrige 2007) who started the radical new movement in philosophy in the early 1900s. The philosopher began to examine the problem of how experiences

appeared in consciousness and believed phenomenology “could transcend the phenomena and meanings being investigated to take a global view of the essences discovered” (Sloan and Bove 2014, p. 1294). His assertion that researchers should ‘return to the things themselves’ by developing a science of phenomena, arguably set a context for all other phenomenological studies. Husserl’s approach to phenomenology was thought to have arisen from an increasing dissatisfaction with the controversial Cartesian notion which suggested that the mind and body were separate constructs and could be split. Arguably the concept of reduction, separating pre-conceptions and thoughts, which is central to Husserl’s philosophy, reflects a Cartesian view that the mind can be separated out from the world around it.

Husserl was the first to discuss the term, intentional relationship of the consciousness, which describes “the relationship between the process occurring in consciousness and the object of attention for that process” (Smith et al. 2009 p. 9) and was concerned with the epistemological focus on the lived world. The apparent separation of the subject and the object became reason for critics to debate Husserl’s core philosophy. Before exploring further critiques of Husserl’s phenomenological thought, it is worth exploring the three key elements which made early phenomenology different from other forms of qualitative research, which are much discussed throughout all strands and form the basis of the overall philosophy.

Central to Husserl’s philosophy, intentionality is described as the relation between what is experienced (the noema) and the way it is being experienced (the noesis). Intentionality refers in phenomenology to the “configuration of the person/world from a person’s point of view” (Hunter and Csikszentmihalyi 2000, p. 8) in framing a subjective experience. In simpler words, intentionality refers to the notion that “whenever we are conscious, it is always to be conscious of something” (Langdrige 2007, p. 13). Intentionality is interesting to phenomenologists as it connects the conscious relation “between mind and world” (Zahavi 2018, p. 23). This is particularly important when examining a phenomenon where people may experience the same objective experience, suggesting some commonality of group experience, but also acknowledging their own

individual subjective experience. In this research, for example, people may attend the same yoga class but have different subjective experiences – the intentionality allows us to examine what and how participants perceive the experience of that yoga class.

A key and keenly debated part of phenomenology is bracketing or *epoche* allowing the reduction or separation of researcher perceptions to reflect on the phenomena. This is seen as part of Husserl's approach as it allows the description of experience not to be altered in consciousness by previous experience. Husserl (1927) believed bracketing (suspension of pre-knowledge and beliefs) enabled focus just on the research participants' description of the phenomenon, rather than the researcher's interpretation. Finlay (2014) explains that "theory, explanation, judgment and the researcher's previous experience and beliefs are temporarily put aside to probe the is-ness of the phenomenon further" (p. 123). However, tensions have arisen between descriptive and interpretative phenomenologists (Le Vasseur 2003; Tufford and Newman 2012) about how bracketing can be defined and applied. Whilst the original intention of bracketing was to enable the researcher to document their perceptions prior to research, enabling them to take a clearer, more subjective view without bias the question remains of whether this is in fact possible and whether there has been a steady researcher disconnection with bracketing over time which can be conceptually nebulous (Gearing 2004).

Reduction is seen as part of the *epoche* process of bracketing preconceptions and requires the description of what can now be seen (after the process of bracketing) in terms of our individual consciousness free of preconceptions. Existential and hermeneutic philosophers have further suggested that reduction "problematized the challenges of the reductive process by highlighting our embeddedness in the world" (Finlay 2008, p. 8) and questioned whether we can ever truly separate ourselves from our research. Merleau-Ponty suggests the "most important lesson which the reduction teaches is the impossibility of complete reduction" (Merleau-Ponty 1945, p. xiv). While several versions of reduction were proposed by Husserl, this has left a hangover of

confusion over the exact nature and definition of the concept of reduction (Langdridge 2007) and how this can be applied in modern research.

The process of bracketing and reduction is fraught with issues not only of whether this can be achieved but if so, how it can be achieved. Heidegger, Husserl's former academic colleague, argued against bracketing, believing it to be a very difficult process to be able to identify and quantify. Critics of Husserl's work also continue to refer back to the fact that, as a philosopher, his writing is conceptual (Smith et al. 2022) and, therefore, difficult to apply in research projects from a methodological perspective. Throughout the majority of his work, Husserl argued phenomenology to be an objective science (Romdenh-Romluc 2001) but the emphasis throughout his writing fluctuated. Earlier discussions involved intentionality, reduction and bracketing but throughout his life his philosophy evolved into more broadly, transcendental phenomenology, which indirectly questioned the idea of the *epoche* through its aims to look at the essence of the experience itself. The changing nature of Husserlian philosophy led to a lack of clarity (Zahavi 2003) and created further confusion for anyone wishing to review or summarise his philosophy.

### **Hermeneutic Phenomenology**

Hermeneutic phenomenology is regarded as the other traditional theoretical underpinning of phenomenology following on chronologically from descriptive phenomenology and is "concerned with the life world or human experience as it is lived" (Lavery 2003 p.24). As reflective research is generally interpretative, a key feature of hermeneutic phenomenology and a point of difference with Husserl's view, is the idea of research co-creation and co-construction between the researcher and the participants' lived experience. Much debate remains about the hermeneutic turn in phenomenological philosophy and the need to not only describe the phenomenon but also to interpret that phenomenon. This hermeneutic turn began to see a rise in both philosophers and academics viewing the person who interprets the research part of the interpretation (Smith et al. 2022). This manifested in a research methodology that "works for both the people we study and for the people who do the study" (Ezzy 2022

p.6) that values the interaction and engagement with the participants (Smith et al. 2022).

This concept is described as the hermeneutic circle (Suddick et al. 2020) and refers to the multi-level and dynamic relationship between a constituent part (i.e., a word, an individual) and the whole (a sentence, a project, etc.) and allows interpretation from all parts of the experience, then back and forth repeatedly, to view the experience more holistically. This process enables the creation of greater depth of meaning of the phenomenon being studied and signifies a departure from descriptive phenomenology. The hermeneutic circle has been described positively as a good non-linear method for interpreting text but critiqued as perhaps too simplistic in its 'inherent circularity' (Smith et al. 2009).

Martin Heidegger is seen as the formative and leading philosopher in hermeneutic phenomenological philosophy whose approach is seen as a move away from the abstract nature of Husserl's transcendental approach to experience, and more towards a hermeneutic and existentialist emphasis (Smith et al. 2009). The hermeneutic turn was identified as a more modern approach to dealing with phenomena, in a post Cartesian world, reflecting the belief that mind and body cannot be clearly separated aligning more closely to yoga's aim of mind and body alignment. The more liquid view of phenomenology reflects a more empirical development and links back to the, previously discussed, post-modern notion of Bauman's liquid modernity (2000) suggesting it reflects a dynamic but flexible approach to methodology.

Heidegger differed from Husserl in that his core academic field of study was theological whereas Husserl's was scientific (Lavery 2003). This divergence saw them agree on the essence of phenomenology but resulted in different interpretations of this philosophy. The general consensus in the literature reviewed (Lavery 2003; Overgaard 2004; Smith et al. 2022) confirms Heidegger's diversion, away from Husserl, as a deliberate departure of philosophical thought and a move towards interpretation (Giorgi 2007). However, controversy exists concerning the nature of this divergence; some academics

suggest a lack of discussion on reduction in Heidegger's work, which remains unclear, and question whether he rejected this notion or accepted it (Zahavi, 2018).

While Husserl seemed focused on understanding being or phenomena (Lavery 2003), Heidegger's concept of Dasein, which in simple terms means 'being-with', sets aside intentionality and marks the clear separation from the Cartesian attachment (Leonard 1989). Central to Heidegger's subjective perspective is the idea that consciousness is not separate from the world (Lavery 2003) observing that the task of phenomenology is to "disclose which first and foremost remains hidden from view" (Zahavi 2018, p. 61). The appearance of being has high importance for Heidegger or as Smith (2009) states "concerns with examining something which may be latent or disguised, as it emerges into the light" (p. 24). This differs from Husserl's reductionism, by suggesting people cannot be easily separated from their existing world, therefore rejecting the strict concept of bracketing. Heidegger believed people are part of their fore-structure and intertwined with the world and the people around them; and therefore, valuing the researchers input and interpretation.

A paradigm shift in phenomenological philosophy occurred with the development of hermeneutic phenomenology, towards Heidegger's Dasein underpinnings, and ultimately away from pure description towards an interpretative lens. Similar to observations about Husserl's seemingly changing philosophy throughout his lifetime, Heidegger's critics believe that although he started with questions of ontology (Lavery 2003) his writing quickly became more difficult to understand and comprehend, leaving his view unclear and open to interpretation itself.

The relationship between phenomenology and a qualitative research methodology remains controversial. Paley (2017) argues that phenomena should be captured by observation rather than interpretation, as no version of phenomenological research can capture it accurately as it involves another person's perspective. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) contest this, with the argument that all research has to be interpretative due to its context. Although Paley is discounted by modern phenomenologists, his criticisms



resonate with the broader critique of phenomenology from some academics (Willig 2013). Even modern day scholars and phenomenologists admit that phenomenology has its issues, Giorgi (2011) acknowledges, “the scientific practices and procedures of a science-based phenomenology are not yet systematized or securely established (p. 4)

A clear distinction exists between descriptive phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology and for this particular research project neither one seemed flexible or clear enough for the researcher to be applied in this thesis. Whilst it is imperative to acknowledge the historical philosophy that runs through all phenomenology, equally it is important to find a methodology to enable exploration of a modern leisure activity by an early career researcher. Finlay recognises this by describing the need for “a phenomenological sensibility is suggested rather than offering cookbook guidelines” (2014 p.121)

The description of the philosophical foundations of phenomenology is fundamental to this methodology. The following section charts the researcher’s journey to search for a research methodology or approach that aligned most closely with the aim of this research project and the researcher’s world view. Two phenomenologists work will be discussed Gadamer (1900-2002) and Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) were considered as part of the eventual decision of methodology in this study.

The works of Heidegger influenced Gadamer (1960) who is discussed as a key figure in the movement of hermeneutic thought. Gadamer arguably recognised a more fluid contextual hermeneutic suggesting there is a “distinction between the meaning of the text and understanding the person” (Smith et al 2009, p. 27). Gadamer’s work was seen as fundamental in linking Husserl and Heidegger’s work rather than seeing them as paradoxical (Moran 2011). The hermeneutic analysis of mostly historical texts began to bridge between agreeing with Heidegger and (as per Husserl’s original thought) being aware of the subject’s preconception and forethought. Gadamer’s work was an early attempt at forging a link between Husserlian and Heideggerian thought, perhaps beginning the movement towards bridging an approach between descriptive and

hermeneutic philosophies but was limited due to his concentration on historical text analysis, which may not relate to the human subjective experience as literally. Hermeneutics is not used as a way of “developing a procedure of understanding, but to clarify further the conditions on which the understanding takes place” (Lavery 2003, p. 25). Gadamer’s work advocates that in order to interpret our inevitable preconceptions research must preserve openness to them acknowledging the role of the research and the “complex relationship between the interpreter and the interpreted” (Smith et al. 2009, p. 26). This linkage and merging of ideas are further developed by the work of Smith et al (2009) under the umbrella of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, which is discussed in more detail later in this study (see Chapter 4).

The other phenomenological work considered for this study was Merleau-Ponty. This work is considered as fundamental to the researcher’s journey because the work mirrors Heidegger’s reflective phenomenological contribution but extended it through the lens of embodiment (Iwakuma 2002). The change in direction from Heidegger’s Dasein concept (being there) led Merleau-Ponty to expand the philosophy to be more grounded and ‘down to earth’. The philosopher believed “the body shapes the fundamental character of our knowing about the world” (Smith et al. 2009, p.19). This is significant as there is little mention of the body in Heidegger’s or other phenomenological philosophers’ work. Considering the apparent break with the Cartesian view, Zahavi (2018) commented that the “silence regarding the body is puzzling” (p. 78). Merleau-Ponty’s development of phenomenology (much like Gadamer’s development) moves to encompass more than just a description of being, into interpreting being, in relation to the self, the world around us, and other beings.

The recognition of embodiment where Merleau-Ponty regards the body as “a grouping of the lived-through meaning which moves towards its equilibrium” (1962, p. 153) suggests similarities with yogic philosophy and is therefore imperative to discuss within this methodology. This underlying philosophy of embodiment suggests parallels with the aim of yoga practices to allow breath, mind and body to unify.

Yoga research using Merleau-Ponty's philosophy remains largely tied to physical practices, mainly breath work, and conceptual in nature. Morley (2001) discussed the practice of pranayama (yogic breath) and the central place of the body in yoga and discussed how Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body supports this. Although Morley's (2001) brief examination concludes "yoga is an important resource for phenomenologists undertaking future research on the lived human body" (p. 79) and notes the similarities of the two, he focuses on philosophical similarities rather than any aspect of methodological application.

Sarukkai (2002) continues the discussion using Merleau-Ponty's view of reversibility (perceptual senses are reversible) to discuss bodily practices of Hatha Yoga, in particular pranayama (breathwork). This discussion relates to the inner body and potential control yogic practices can offer, but again from a philosophical viewpoint rather than any applications in research as a method. Smith (2007) agreed with previous scholars that there was "obvious resonance between Merleau-Ponty's thought and the philosophy and practice of yoga" (p. 31). But Sarukkai suggested that "many writers continue to view Merleau-Ponty as a philosopher of the inside" (p. 462), which he describes as ambiguous and continues to suggest incorporating other scholars' works alongside Merleau-Ponty's.

Therefore, the researcher concluded that Merleau-Ponty's view of phenomenology is closest and seemingly most suited to the philosophical understanding of the phenomenon of yoga. The relevance and importance of embodiment is acknowledged for this study, as is the wish to stay close to the holistic nature of yoga as a mind/body/spirit practice, but arguably Merleau-Ponty's work does not extend to a practical application of methodological approach desired for this research. The previous yoga research (Morley 2001; Sarukkai 2002), as discussed above, incorporating Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is perhaps limited to the more classical yoga philosophy and analysis of texts detailing the methods of bodily control practices of historical yoga such as pranayama. The more inwardly focused yogic practices arguably limit the studies to a more advanced yoga technique and may not be accessible to modern day yoga

participants. The researcher for this thesis concluded research needs to delve deeper into the lived experience of modern yoga, which involves both body and mind, but is equally accessible and relatable to modern day yoga participants.

Whilst the above review is not an extensive summary of phenomenology, the researcher aimed to chart the process of consideration and route through to their eventual choice of methodology. Firstly, exploring the two broad founding philosophical phenomenological schools, descriptive and hermeneutic, to establish which school this research aligned to. The review of Gadamer was included as it began to bridge Husserlian and Heideggerian schools of thought, which IPA then continued. Secondly, Merleau-Ponty is discussed because the researcher contemplated whether this would be a natural fit for this research given the premise that embodiment closely aligns with the nature of exploring the yoga experience. The work of many other phenomenology scholars could have been reviewed, notably Giorgi (1970) and Van Manen (2007), but the researcher was clear that the aim was not to describe all contributions to phenomenology but to plot the route to the final decision to use IPA for this study.

### **IPA – Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is an integrative hermeneutic phenomenological method introduced by Smith et al and can be defined as “the detailed examination of the human lived experience” (2009 p. 32).

IPA foundations are hermeneutic, identifying with the founding philosophies of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty to explore and interpret the personal lived experience (Tuffour, 2017). Although sharing the interpretative stance of Heidegger IPA believes preconceptions must be captured in order to allow for the double hermeneutic between the participants’ experience and researcher’s analysis to be distinct. IPA is distinct by straddling both the Husserlian and Heideggerian philosophy by providing a usable research methodology that focuses on how people perceive an experience (Langdrige 2007). IPA aims to explore how participants make sense of their personal lived experience rather than the experience or account of the phenomenon itself. As such, it

concur with Heidegger's more interpretative focus by being concerned with the interpretation of the lived experience which is of particular significance or meaning for the individual (Smith et al. 2009).

IPA has two aims: to look in detail at someone's lived experience; and to give a detailed interpretation of their account of how they understand that experience. The deep and rich understanding of the lived experience and meaning on an individual basis is a central theme, whilst moving from the particular to the general. The idiographic nature requires greater detail, and therefore claims a greater depth of analysis on fewer participants, normally 1-6. The small research sample size enables a deeper examination of how participants perceive their particular situations and how they make sense of this within their personal and social worlds. It also allows the researcher to compare groups through cross case analysis.

To further this criticality, IPA involves a double hermeneutic stance, whereby it asks, not only to analyse the participants' experience, but also for the researcher to analyse the participants' accounts of their experience (Smith and Nizza 2022). A large part of its appeal is its structured methodological approach outlined by Smith et al. (2009). This distinction from most other phenomenological research methods appeals in this instance for an early career researcher. Further the acknowledgment that the researcher has a crucial role to play as part of the research through "the ability to reflect on and step outside your cultural membership to become a cultural commentator" (Braun and Clarke 2013, p. 9) also appeals specifically to this research study as the researcher is a yoga teacher. As Denscombe (2014, p. 142) explains:

"Researchers who use a phenomenological approach need to be explicit about their own way of making sense of the world and, in order to get a clear view of how others see the world, they need to suspend (or bracket off) their own beliefs temporarily for the purposes of research".

Critics suggest this may be restrictive (Heidegger 1962), but Finlay (2011) suggests it is, instead, an approach that allows the researcher to be "fully engaged, interested and open to what may appear" (p. 23).

Clear parallels have been identified between IPA, sport and flow research as discussed in the literature review. However, whilst the study of flow is common in leisure studies, combining the study of flow through the use of IPA in leisure is less common. Nevertheless, there are a rising number of academics using the two in their research. For example, Hefferon and Ollis (2006) analysed dancers' experience of flow using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) in their study, which aimed to "specify common and unique facilitators of the flow experience in dance" (p. 142). They concluded by supporting Csikszentmihalyi's nine characteristics of flow similarly to Latham (2013) who studied the museum experience and psychological flow with the use of IPA and found that a numinous experience takes place. The study of yoga and phenomenology (Morley 2001; Sarukkai 2002) primarily discusses classical forms of yoga through a philosophical discussion of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. This research study will explore the lived experience of modern yoga practitioners using IPA which offers a unique methodological approach.

### **Critique of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

Whilst IPA appears to be the most suited to this research aim in the researchers view, it is important to consider the potential issues with this methodology in order to ensure a thorough investigation has been undertaken.

Two noted academics appear to be the biggest critics of IPA and will be dealt with in turn. Paley critiques IPA as a method, but also critiques using phenomenology as a methodology as a whole, with the controversial statement that there is "epic vagueness in phenomenology as a philosophy" (2016 p. 3). Three writers are highlighted, Smith, Van Manen and Giorgi, as creating confusion about negotiating and describing meaning attribution stating, "none of these writers is particularly clear how this is done" (Paley 2016, p. 3). Paley (2016) describes Giorgi's method as a 'mirage' and Van Manen (2015) led by his own values. Equally critical of IPA, Paley (2016) concludes "there is no method in IPA" (p. 145) and that any meaning that has been discussed has been brought by the

researcher themselves as nothing can be interpreted without a background theory. Smith et al (2009) counter Paley's criticism by pointing out that the textual analysis from which the critique is based has been taken out of context. Regarding this particular research study, the rigour of using the flow experience as a conceptual framework to observe the yoga experience may counter Paley's (2016) criticisms of IPA being vague and rooted in the researcher's subjective direction.

Phenomenologists also engage in heated debate about each other's writing and approaches to phenomenology, notably Smith (2010) and Giorgi's (2011) public attacks on each other's phenomenological approach and research. Giorgi (2011) contests Smith's IPA methodology "did not meet generally accepted scientific criteria" (p. 195) with Smith counter arguing that his methodology is not a prescriptive methodology, and that the summation is based on limited texts and taken out of context. The debate continues as each researcher adapts and breaks away from the traditional philosophical phenomenology to form new methodological approaches to phenomenology, that can be practically applied in modern qualitative research contexts.

A further criticism of IPA is that it is only of use within the field of psychology (Giorgi 2011; Moran and Mooney 2002). Academics note the crossover between psychology and phenomenology (Smith 2008) as both are broadly interested in studying consciousness and meaning and both disciplines are inherently related and interconnected. This fact has led to much academic and philosophical debate about where the line to one starts and the other finishes. Critics suggest because of Jonathan Smith's background as a psychologist the approach cannot be translated to other disciplines and IPA remains too entrenched in psychology (Giorgi 2011). The issue of the word psychological however in this definition simply means discerning meaning from the lived experience, which suggests weakness in Giorgi's critique. The extension of this criticism is that it has too much emphasis on cognition (Langdridge 2007). Moran and Mooney's fundamental issue is that "every question concerning any sort of being is a question about the meaning of that being" (2002, p.589). Langdridge (2007) further

suggests that although IPA attempts to work interpretatively, issues remain with the relationship to theory

As discussed, the field of phenomenology through a social sciences lens shares a multitude of similarities with psychology, but the fundamental issue for this and other research remains as to whether first-hand experience can ever be captured by someone else. This issue led Smith (2011) to describe the process involving a double hermeneutic, concluding “there is no direct route to experience and that the research is about trying to be experience close rather than experience far” (p. 10). It has also been widely observed that phenomenology has crossovers with psychology (Merleau-Ponty, 2013) but this is potentially a positive to broaden the research, rather than a negative. Murray and Homes (2013), whilst supporting Merleau–Ponty’s view of embodiment, suggest importance should indeed be placed on the ‘what’ people say but also ‘how’ they say it and believe IPA can extend the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty. Smith (2008) argues that although the disciplines psychology and phenomenology converge in the exploration of meaning and sense making, they diverge in how best to study the phenomena.

The centrality of the phenomenological approach appears in the creation of an environment which is both empathetic and interpretative allowing flexibility for research context. IPA is undoubtedly a modern phenomenological approach which does not subscribe to one specific philosophical stance but rather takes elements from descriptive and hermeneutic philosophies and translates this into a practical and applicable methodology.

To summarise, IPA, like all research methodologies and methods, has advantages and disadvantages. To determine the rigour as a research methodology and method, fluidity needs to be adopted to allow a broader, more holistic phenomenological attitude; there is no one right way to conduct a phenomenological study. Scholars such as Smith et al, (2009) suggest that any experience involves different sides of phenomenology, reflection, embodiment, existential, and description. Van Manen (2017) wrote a critical journal article entitled ‘But Is It Phenomenology’. In the paper, he highlights the view



that phenomenological research has to reflect the philosophical foundations of phenomenology as it cannot be applied to any other qualitative research by exploring experience. A shared view exists, regardless of the philosophical differences, that phenomenology remains about exploring the lived experience. Whilst the purist view of phenomenology may question IPA as a methodological choice, the structure combined with the interpretative fluidity provides a foundation for why IPA is suited to this researcher's approach.

## **The Phenomenological Connection Between Yoga and Flow Experience**

Although phenomenology has been used in a broad range of academic disciplines including psychology, health, and social sciences "the use of phenomenology in leisure studies remains limited" (Fendt et al. 2014, p. 398) and, arguably, under-utilised in leisure research (Pernecky and Jamal 2010).

The research that has adopted phenomenology in leisure studies has been broad, covering spiritual experience (Schmidt 2005), surfing (Fendt et al. 2014) and climbing (Chisholm 2008) and has been more widely adopted in tourism and hospitality research (Jackson et al. 2018). Furthering the connection to this study of yoga, flow and phenomenology, Elkington (2011) explored flow-based serious leisure through acting, table tennis and voluntary sports coaching. Using phenomenological analysis, he concluded that there was "an implicit structural interdependence between the known conditions for flow and certain qualities of serious leisure" (p. 271).

Few academic papers have been written from an IPA perspective on either yoga or the flow experience, which seems surprising given the experiential concept of the lived body "is especially relevant for the experience of yoga" (Morley 2001, p. 75). Smith (2011) himself in the review of IPA studies concluded that there is a noticeable gap in IPA studies on preventative health behaviour and health promotion.

There are, however, a number of parallels can be drawn between all three concepts of yoga, flow experience, and phenomenology (Hunter and Csikszentmihalyi 2000; Morley 2001; Sarukkai 2002; Hunt 2010) which justify the approach in this research. Phenomenology has been previously used as a methodology for exploring the flow experience. Csikszentmihalyi, the founder of the theory of a flow experience, wrote positively about phenomenology of the body and mind in sports, surmising that a “complementary alternative to dualism has been offered by phenomenological thinkers” (Hunter and Csikszentmihalyi 2000, p. 7). This agreed with Merleau-Ponty’s rejection of the Cartesian view that mind and body are separate and drew similarities between the aim of a phenomenological interest in the human experience, and examination of his own theory of the flow experience.

Academics have noted that there appears to be a common conceptual ground (Morley 2019) between the philosophy of phenomenology and the philosophy of yoga. The potential similarity exists between phenomenological philosophy and yoga’s meditative practices and with the concept of phenomenological reduction. As a journey of the self to aid a higher purpose, it appears similar to the eight limbs of the yogic path outlined in yoga philosophy (as discussed in Chapter 2). Morley (2019) discussed the convergence of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy and the work of the yoga scholar, Desikachar (1999) and concludes “yoga is an important resource for phenomenologists” (p. 80).

Smith (2008) agreed with this resonance and application of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy for yoga study, but extended his work, drawing on works by Csordas (1999) to allow for inter-cultural factors to be included in the analysis of the yoga experience. Both Morley and Csordas’s studies discuss phenomenological philosophical similarities but neither details a methodological process for application in research. Kafle (2011) argues that the core state of phenomenology is its quality of illumination and links its philosophical standpoint to the scriptures of Buddhism and Hinduism. However, Van Manen (1990) appears to question this comparison to the traditionally Eastern philosophical approach, asserting “phenomenological human science is a western research method which

should not be confused with either certain mystical or eastern meditative techniques of achieving higher insights about the meaning of life” (Van Manen 2016 p. 23).

Although there are arguably similarities between the philosophy foundation of yoga and phenomenology, the work so far has been centred on embodiment and perhaps more aligned to classical yoga where the eight limbs were closely followed, rather than the modern yoga experience. Whilst academics have made a connection between yoga and phenomenology (Csordas 1999; Smith 2008; Morley 2019), few studies have been identified as studying the experience of modern yoga from a phenomenological perspective. Hunt’s thesis (2010) avoided adopting one prescribed methodology in her study on the lived experience of yoga participants, and instead adopted a broad hermeneutic approach, mainly from Merleau-Ponty. Acebedo (2012) broadly followed an adaption of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological approach and discussed transformation of self for yoga participants through textual analysis and interviews. Kidd and Eatough (2017) extended Acebedo’s (2012) work on transformation and is therefore considered a lead text in this research and in the limited research adopting a phenomenological perspective into yoga. As established phenomenological researchers they concluded:

“phenomenological analysis of yoga participants’ experience could help bridge the gap between what is known about yoga’s health benefits and identification of the mechanisms responsible for those benefits” (Kidd and Eatough 2017, p. 260).

Kidd and Eatough’s (2017) study of yoga, well-being and transcendence used IPA to examine yoga related to sense of well-being and led to questions of whether “there is something intrinsic to the process of yoga which could be universally applicable” (Kidd and Eatough 2016, p. 275). The study concluded with the suggestion that future research should examine why and how yoga links to well-being. A limitation to this research, however, is that the sample was male, and this does not fit with the clearly identified demographic that exists in modern yoga, so widening this demographic, as this research intends to do, would extend current research.

Phenomenological parallels can be drawn between yoga's embodiment and intentionality as a steady, rhythmic state and the flow experience, which Hunter and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) conclude are similar. The study of yoga and flow have similarities which support the choice in this thesis that the "most likely means of gaining analytical traction (in yoga) lies in a phenomenological approach" (Smith. B 2007, p. 31). Three key texts exist which use phenomenology to study the experience of yoga; Hunt (2010), Acebedo (2012) and Kidd and Eatough (2017) comprise the limited academic work on yoga and phenomenology (see Chapter 2 for more detailed discussions).

Modern yoga, as the reviewed literature contests, is positioned as a mind/body/spirit practice and is more commonly viewed as a leisure activity that is spiritually light and dominated by physical postures. This moves away from the focus of classical yoga and may point to a gap in the literature to observe modern yoga with a modern phenomenological approach. The researcher has found no other study exploring yoga and the flow experience from an Interpretative Phenomenological perspective.

## Personal Reflexivity – Justification of methodological choice

As I discovered more about phenomenology I found myself becoming more immersed and but also unclear. The principles of observing the subjective experience and the philosophical movement were clear to me, but I struggled with the continuing debate apparent in some texts of how this philosophy translated into a practical, modern qualitative research method. The sense of vagueness was furthered by scholars suggesting that there was not necessarily one right direction (Denscombe 2003), and researchers should use “a creative approach to understanding, using whatever approaches are responsive to particular questions and subject matter” (Laverty 2003, p. 28).

From a phenomenological philosophical perspective, two phenomenological methods seem mostly closely aligned to this study’s research aim. As I discovered more about the foundational phenomenologists, my study of the yoga lived experience seemed to be most closely aligned to the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty. Although much is similar with Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological embodied approach to this research aim, this did not seem to enable a full analysis of the multi-layered modern yoga experience. I felt that my approach to this research should allow for a dynamic rather than strictly prescribed approach to phenomenology. I found I connected to Murray and Holmes (2013) who blended Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy and IPA by viewing “subjectivity as arising in and through embodied experience” (p. 18). This felt to extend and widen the remit of IPA to include embodiment which countered the critique that the consideration of the body was often absent in IPA.

IPA seemed right for this study for two reasons. Firstly, to enable a clear application of phenomenology as a research methodology offering structure, guidance, and reassurance for me as an early career researcher. Secondly, the double hermeneutic recognises the influence and dual facets of the researcher's interpretations and worldview (Giorgi 2011; Smith 2009) as central to the IPA methodology. One of my concerns with IPA was the conflicting views on the use of theory in IPA. Scholars suggested (Smith 1999; Reid et al. 2005) IPA should be free of pre-existing theories to avoid imposing external concepts to the phenomenon being studied. Upon closer investigation, this statement referred to ensuring IPA remained inductive in nature. Brocki and Wearden (2006) suggest the use of theoretical framework are in fact permissive in IPA, which have in been utilised by a number of IPA research studies (Turner and Coyle 2002; Senior et al. 2002). The inductive nature of IPA allows theories or concepts to be utilised in the discussion at the analysis stage rather than prescribe the research aim. It is my belief that using a conceptual framework can augment and advance the findings rather than detract from them. Therefore, in this study, “external theory may be used as a lens through which to view the analysis, and metaphors may be elaborated” (Finlay 2014, p. 131). Therefore, I believe the use of the flow experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) as a conceptual framework in the analysis stage will not interfere with IPA inductive approach but will enable a deep but structured approach.

## Summary

This chapter discussed the route the researcher took to arrive at the methodological choice of IPA, beginning with the discussion of phenomenology and the difference between descriptive and hermeneutic phenomenology and moving on to an exploration of key phenomenological approaches which were considered (Merleau-Ponty) but rejected. Finally, the reasons why IPA was chosen as the research methodology for this research were explained and how the potential shortcomings of phenomenology and IPA could be alleviated.

The aim of this thesis is not based on philosophy but understanding the lived phenomenon of yoga and the flow experience applying what Van Manen (2002) describes as 'a sense of wonder' which should be at the heart of any phenomenological research. The ability to both describe and interpret in a rich, clear and structured manner materialises in the choice of methodology for this research as an IPA.

In the following chapter the method and corresponding research design and application of IPA will be described in detail.

## **Chapter 5: Method**

This thesis aims to explore the experience of yoga. To access this, and the flow experience, a phenomenological methodology was used, as discussed in the previous chapter. IPA is a methodology committed to the meaning individuals attribute to a phenomenon. This is complicated by the recognition that a person is a subjective individual (Smith and Osborn 2015) whose reflections may vary. Therefore, in order to capture these reflections for this study, two methods of data collection were used: vlogs and semi-structured interviews which were chosen to complement each other and allow for a deeper and richer understanding and documentation of the lived experience.

In this chapter, the method of this IPA study will be explained, namely the use of vlogs and semi-structured interviews. The recruitment of the sample will then be discussed, and the analytical processes employed, and finally, the ethical considerations and reflexivity.

### **Vlogs**

Vlogs (mini-video journals) were chosen to act as a conduit to capture the real-time yoga experience as it happened according to the flow characteristics. The justification for choosing vlogs in this research arose from evidence from previous research which suggested that capturing data as close as possible to when the flow experience takes place could aid understanding and reflection (Csikszentmihalyi and Larson 1987). Whilst the capturing of flow historically used Experience Sampling methods (Csikszentmihalyi and Hunter 2003; Schüler and Brunner 2009), this was argued to potentially interrupt the flow experience (Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi 2009). As explored in the literature review, Jackson and Eklund (2002) developed the measurement of the flow experience from ESM to the Flow State Scale (FSS) and Dispositional Flow State (DFS) to enable the

focus on the nine dimensions of flow in activities, but these measures were quantitatively based. The subjectivity of experiencing an activity contributes to the challenge that any attempt to measure the flow experience will provide only a partial reflection of the reality (Voelkl and Ellis 1988). In this research the use of vlogs allows the qualitative, participant-led, capturing of flow, immediately after the activity has taken place creating a novel and creative approach to capturing the flow experience.

Vlogs are an underutilised method of data collection which could be defined under the umbrella term of visual research. Visual research has two main strands: the collection of visual data by the researcher, or the collection and study of visual data collected from the research participants (Banks 2018). Visual research can mean photographs, drawings, film and videos and the production of video diaries (vlogs). Pole (2004) produced a valuable guide in his book *Seeing is Believing* and stated visual research in its basic form “draws on our basic capacity to interpret the world through our sense of sight” (p. 1). Murray (2009) extended the field of visual research methods by combining it with mobility research and supported Pole (2004) in recognising the need to adopt less static data collection methods which recognise increased mobilisation and digitisation in today’s society. Banks (2018) concluded that the major strength in visual research “lies in uncovering the previously unknown or unconsidered dimensions” (p. 121) which is important in exploring the meaning of the yoga experience.

Visual research is an accepted medium for data collection in some disciplines, but it is less commonly used in leisure studies (Annear et al. 2014). Video as a visual research medium is the most recent, for clarity, this study defines vlogs as self-created videos by research participants using the video function on their phone. The rationale for the use of vlogs in this research is that a video diary is a digitised extension of a written diary which provides a visual representation of the participant experience. Alaszewski (2006) recognised a general need to explore the use of diaries, a relatively neglected source for researchers and Smith et al. (2009) commented that “surprisingly, there has been little published IPA work to date utilizing diaries” (2009, p. 57). The notable exceptions include Smith’s (1999) use of written diarising in his work on transition to motherhood;



sleep quality (Kyle et al. 2010) and nursing (Morell-Scott 2018). Written diaries have dominated this form of research, apart from Williamson et al. (2019) who used audio-diaries as a form of data collection, creating a place for video enabled diarising. Gibson (2005) argues that videos are “socially located constructions that are produced in response to specific research context” (p. 34). This is evidenced in the use of vlogs in educational research investigating student experience (Noyes 2010) and in capturing a sporting experience (Cherrington and Watson 2010) and therefore offer the opportunity to capture the essence of yoga as a leisure experience. Vlogs arguably transfer the power of the research tool literally into the hands of the participants and allow a freer expression of their personal narrative of experience. In this research they are one of two methods of data collection that allowed for robust research collection and for a more immediate capturing of the experience.

The structure of IPA allows creativity to play an important role when discussing the lived experience of yoga participants. Fendt et al’s (2014) interpretative phenomenological study presented individual postcards in order to “encapsulate each woman’s unique aspects of their surfing experience and how these influences affect their realities” (p. 409) which was followed by interviews. Creativity in data collection is also reflected in this research following Van Manen (1990) and Schmidt’s (2005) suggestion that phenomenological data should be presented in artistic form. IPA allows for creative research methods evidenced by (Smith 1999; Langdrige 2007) use of diaries to capture participants lifeworld’s which inspired this research to also allow the capture of the experience using vlogs. Society’s increased visual culture is influenced by the video medium in social media (Cherrington and Watson 2010), such as influencers and the use of vlogs reflects the acceptance of video diaries as normal. The ability to reflect the role of video as a visual medium suggests vlogs are a creative choice of data collection as it allows the participants to tell their story of their experience in their own words.

The participants in this study were asked to record six 5-10 minute vlogs as immediate reflections pre and post yoga practice. Limited direction was given by the researcher to enable the participant to freely describe how they felt before and after their yoga

experience. Each participant was asked to create six vlog entries over a four-six week period and to send them to the researcher by email once each were completed. Participants were asked to record the vlogs on their smart phone as this was seen by the researcher to create ease and accessibility to a suitable recording device and one that they would feel comfortable with. Once complete the researcher then immediately watched the vlogs and transcribed the verbal and non-verbal elements (see Appendix D). This allowed each vlog to be logged by individual entry and date to allow management of each participant's data collection and also enabled a visual account of the participant experience to emerge for the researcher by recording verbal and non-verbal responses. Participants reported that they felt the experience of creating the vlogs was overall a positive experience with some participants feeling it was a powerful way for them to reflect. Other participants expressed whether they were doing the vlogs 'right' when starting the process and needed some reassurance from the researcher. This was provided by the researcher providing a vlog in return acknowledging receipt of the vlog and thanking the participant.

The aim of using vlogs in this study was to capture immediate individual reflections over a period of time which could in addition be used as a prompt to recount these experiences at interview stage. As vlogs are arguably a novel research method for both IPA and leisure studies they will be discussed in more detail in the conclusion as a methodological contribution.

## **Semi-structured Interviews**

A semi-structured interview with each participant followed the collection of vlogs to allow for the retrospective account of flow and to deepen the reflections that emerged in the vlogs. Semi-structured interviews "assume that individual respondents define the world in unique ways" (Merriam and Tisdell 2016 p.110). Correspondingly, Smith et al. (2009) suggest IPA is suited to data collection methods that "invite participants to offer a rich, detailed, first-person account of the experience" (p.56). The researcher felt that semi-structured interviews would provide further depth and supported the usual

approach for IPA studies (Biggerstaff and Thompson 2008) but also “a flexible approach to data collection” (Gratton and Jones 2014 p. 156). This recognises that interpretative and hermeneutic observations were as a result of the relationship between researcher and participant (Kvale and Brinkman 2009). A flexible approach is required by IPA as a research methodology as it is focused on the individual’s lifeworld and therefore the ability “to tell their story freely, on their own terms, taking the time to reflect and think about what to say” (Smith and Nizza 2022 p.19). The individual nature of semi-structured interviews agreed with the research approach in this study and was committed to individuals sense making (Tomkins and Eatough 2010) suggesting this may be more difficult to achieve in other qualitative research methods such as focus groups.

In this study, the interview setting was online via the video conferencing software, Zoom. Remote interviewing, such as online interviews, can offer qualitative research the opportunity to include participants where location could be a limitation but also may better suit the needs of different participants (Brooks et al. 2018). Furthermore, this research was shortly after the COVID pandemic, and many people were used to using video conferencing software so were comfortable with the technology. The visual nature of Zoom enabled the researcher to also note non-verbal responses (see Appendix D) which were seen to be visual signs in the narrative account of the participants lived yoga experience.

At the outset of the interview, it was seen as important to make the participant comfortable to ensure a positive interaction that would build rapport, which is a key ingredient in successful qualitative interviewing (Brooks et al. 2018). Before the interview started participants were given a brief overview of how the interview would be conducted, including timings, and were reassured that they could stop or withdraw at any time and would remain anonymous throughout the study, to fulfil the researcher's ethical responsibility. The interview guide was designed to provide both broad questions and potential probes according to the specificity of the desired information (Merriman and Tisdell 2016). Open-ended questions were used throughout the interview to access the lived experience which was central to this study. The

research questions began by asking participants to tell the researcher the story of what yoga meant to them, this was designed as an opening question to not presuppose the individual participant experience (Fujii 2017) but also to set the tone for a participant directed, open and relaxed interview.

The duration of the interview ranged from 45 minutes to 60 minutes and closed with another open-ended question which asked participants to summarise how yoga made them feel. This closing question was designed to elicit not only the response but also their explanation of how and why this related to their yoga experience.

Interviews were recorded, rewatched and transcribed verbatim focusing on semantic meaning and allowing the conversational style to be captured. This emphasises the importance of “how we construct such knowledge intersubjectively (i.e., between people) through language” (Langdrige 2007, p. 3). The interview transcription was then added to the participant vlog transcriptions for each individual participant. For this study co-construction between the vlogs as a research method and the co-creation of material in the semi-structured interviews supported the double hermeneutic position of IPA as a methodology and allowed for the research to adhere to the experience close nature of IPA (Shaw 2011). To allow for the researcher to reflect upon and improve the interview technique the first five interviews were transcribed immediately to listen and note ways the researcher could improve the interview technique for the subsequent interview.

In summary, whilst considerable discussion continues about the data collection in phenomenological research, it remains that research should be rigorously conducted in order to produce insight in research design, collection, and analysis. This research study attempted to invoke internal validity (Merriam and Tisdell 2015) by using the two data collection methods detailed above; this can be described a form of *triangulation*. Although considered a catch all term, in this research it aimed to:

“refer specifically to studies where a social phenomenon is ‘measured’ from two or more different vantage points, in order to pinpoint the phenomenon, or to improve, test or validate the accuracy of the observation” (Mason 2006 p. 8).

Whilst the yoga experience and flow are not being ‘quantitatively measured’ the reason for using two different data collection methods to explore the flow experience was based on previous literature (see Chapter 3). Previous studies on the flow experience used the Experience Sampling Method (ESM) to measure flow immediately after the event is commonplace but has faced critique (Voelkl and Ellis 1998). Therefore, in this study the aim of the vlogs was to measure the immediate flow experience, and the aim of the interviews was to explore the full and retrospective elements of the flow experience to allow for a robust study which enabled deeper reflections on yoga and the flow experience.

## **Recruitment and Research Sample**

IPA as a methodology is idiographic by nature and requires small sample sizes with Smith (2022) suggesting between six to ten participants. Todres and Holloway (2006) supported this and stated, “phenomenological research, has achieved the most profound insights with in-depth reflections on about six to 12 cases of a phenomenon” (Todres and Holloway 2006, p. 183). In Brocki and Wearden’s (2006) review, participant numbers ranged from one to thirty, although smaller group sizes are the overall consensus for IPA studies.

Following the pattern of smaller sample groups within IPA research, for this research seven participants from each contemporary yoga community (online based and classroom-based) were selected, totalling fourteen participants overall. This is considered a large data set for IPA but was deemed appropriate as each group was analysed separately (See Chapters 6 and 7) initially, before being analysed as one group (in Chapter 8)

Sampling depends on the research objectives set (Gratton and Jones 2104) and in IPA tends to be purposive (Smith and Nizza 2022). To reflect the literature review analysis, which suggests the majority of yoga participants fit a particular demographic, the sample participants were screened at recruitment. This ensured the following inclusion factors, that they had practised Ashtanga Vinyasa yoga regularly for over a year, and that they were between the ages of 25-60 years old. As the researcher is a yoga teacher, in order to avoid complication of the researcher/participant relationship, an additional exclusion factor was that none of the yoga participants selected was a student of the researcher, to allow for openness and to protect validity of the research process.

The sample were selected on the basis that they predominantly used one of the two defined yoga spaces observed in this study; the first was led by a teacher online (recorded or live) but was taken in the home and the second was a standard yoga class which was teacher led in a classroom. The justification for these two groups was that online based classes are the fastest-growing yoga classes and will potentially be the space of future growth whereas classroom-

based yoga is still the most popular form of yoga (as discussed in Chapter 2). The research sample characteristics that were known are detailed below.

<b>Participant (pseudonym)</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Place of yoga participation</b>	<b>Regularity of practice</b>
Hannah	46	Social worker	Classroom	Once a week
Holly	45	Artist	Classroom	Twice a week
Beau	52	Finance Manager	Classroom	Twice a week
Sasha	51	Administrator	Classroom	Once a week
Poppy	40	Marketing Executive	Classroom	Twice a week
Julie	52	Civil servant	Classroom	Three times a week
Diane	49	Social worker	Classroom	Once a week
Cathy	50	Hospitality manager	Online	Once a week
Katy	58	Administrator	Online	Twice a week

Charlie	40	Business owner	Online	Twice a week
Tia	49	Business owner	Online	Once a week
Caityln	40	Unknown	Online	Once a week
Dina	52	Publisher	Online	Once a week
Darcy	50	Property manager	Online	Once a week

*Figure 2 - Sample characteristics*

Creswell (2018) suggested selecting individuals “because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and the central phenomenon in the study” (p.2158) so the sample was recruited via snowballing technique through the researcher’s social media network or referral and aimed to be as homogenous as possible. The benefit of a homogenous sample in IPA is that it allows the attention to be focused on the phenomenon in question and “relates to the phenomena under investigation and potentially to other aspects of the participants and their contexts” (Smith et al. 2022 p. 119). Therefore, it allows for experience variability which can be examined “by analysing the patterns of convergence and divergence which arise” (Smith et al. 2009 p.50) which are terms further explored in Chapters 6 and 7. The specification of an age range, and regularity of yoga practice enabled core variables in sample to be lessened to allow the essence of the experience to emerge.

The research sample recruited were mostly women between 40-50 years old although I had originally asked for a wider age range. Whilst the narrower range was not by design, it has made this research unique. As I fall into this demographic, I needed to be mindful that I did not blur the boundaries between personal experience, researcher, and peer. I found that this was challenged by participants in the interview when finding out I was a yoga teacher where I felt a shift in how they responded, often trying to use yoga language, or trying to ask for affirmation or confirmation (or how to do a posture!), which I struggled not to do as a novice interviewer. After each interview, I watched the recording back and noted where I felt I could improve, such as agreeing with participants, rewording too often, and talking too much and used those notes to try and improve my interview style.

The size of the sample was in retrospect, a very large sample for the idiographic nature of IPA, and I was, in hindsight, perhaps overly ambitious for my first IPA project. Although I wished for a smaller data set at many stages, I also believe that seven participants in each group allowed for a true representation of online and classroom participants, which may not have occurred in a smaller data set.

## **IPA Analysis of the Research Findings**

Throughout the research and the resulting analysis, an overall phenomenological attitude has been adopted to ensure the research aims were met and allowed “focus on the phenomena, on how things appear, what they mean and how they matter to us (Zahavi, 2019, p. 34). This was enabled following Finlay’s (2014) four key processes to guide the approach to analysis.

- Seeing afresh – a form of bracketing was carried out, to allow for genuine openness where pre-understanding and biases are put aside to enable a fresh perspective (Smith et al. 2009). This was done by beginning the researcher's reflexive diary with a description of themselves, their background and their assumptions and feelings about the research. This was deemed essential given the researcher’s close relationship with the subject and the reflexive diary (See



Appendix K) was continued throughout the study. Regular reflections were seen as an important part of this research and are part of this thesis, appearing in blue boxes and written in the first person, which aim to aid the reader with this distinction.

- Dwelling – stopping and sitting with the data allowed the true nature and “implicit layered meaning to come to the fore” (Finlay 2014, p. 125). In practical terms this meant reading and re-reading transcripts and beginning to establish meaning units and layered themes. Application of double hermeneutic presents itself as unique to IPA (Smith et al. 2022) and allowed the researcher to analyse and interpret what the participant had already interpreted.
- Explicating the whole – “Explicating is a phase of synthesis and integration, of clarification and revelation where emergent themes are pulled into larger themes and/or narratives” (Finlay 2014, p. 129). This process required idiographic analysis to ensure the essence and detailed layers of the phenomena allowed any interrelated themes to shine through the analysis of that data, which again encouraged depth of analysis of the two groups proposed and is further discussed in the following exploration of the steps of IPA analysis.
- Languageing - Phenomenology requires rich and detailed descriptions that remain close to individuals' rich experience. Illustrating examples from the data and highlighting key points in analysis brings readers closer to the phenomena (Halling, 2002). The need to reflect participant experience required creativity and texture and needed to be captured in a “lively and engaging way” (Finlay 2014, p. 134) which was achieved in this research through vlogs and interviews.

These four key processes (Finlay 2014) were detailed as an overarching guide for the approach to the data analysis, in the following section the details of the analytical IPA process will be explained.

## Analysing the Vlog and Interview Research Findings

This section will firstly examine how data was transcribed and secondly explain the analytical process distinct to IPA that was implemented in this study.

The study adopted an orthographic style of transcription which allowed the researcher to transcribe across each medium of qualitative research clearly and consistently. Braun and Clarke's (2013) well-used notation system has a main aim "to produce a thorough record of the words spoken" (p.180), however, this could be criticised as being too static for a methodology such as IPA. Due to the idiographic nature of IPA Smith and Nzizza (2022) state,

"it can however be useful to include some comments on the nonverbal aspects of the interaction, such as laughter, marked pauses, or changes in tone of voice" (p.27)

Therefore, the researcher adapted Braun and Clarke's (2013) notation system and recreated it for the researcher's own use (See Appendix C) to allow for specific use within this research and recognise the visual methods used. Techniques from conversational analytics were used to create notations for bodily or social interaction in the transcription comments as outlined in Hepburn and Bolden (2013). This ensured that non-semantics were not lost in transcription and acknowledged the audio-visual nature of the data captured in this research.

Once the data had been transcribed, the analytical focus of IPA began, which aimed to elucidate the essence of participants experience of yoga. The benefit to choosing an IPA methodology was that it allowed for a structured approach to data analysis involving a number of steps. This research followed Smith et al's (2022) structured approach which is comprised **of seven steps of an IPA analysis which are detailed below and illustrate each step the researcher took and where NVivo was used.**

<p><b>Step 1 – Reading and Re-reading</b></p>	<p>To enable the idiographic nature of IPA to remain rigorous, the vlogs and semi-structured interviews were video recorded, listened to in full and then transcribed verbatim. This required time to immerse into the data, read and then re-read the full transcripts to enable a sense of the whole and active engagement with the data (Smith et al. 2022). As Finlay (2014) suggested it was important to review verbal and non-verbal cues to “seek the feeling we are engaging with the phenomenon, which we may even experience in a bodily sense” (2014, p. 126). A full transcript is provided in Appendix D.</p>
<p><b>Step 2 – Exploratory Noting</b></p>	<p>Each case was then read and re-read and then analysed in detail, with exploratory notes taken. This process involved growing increasingly familiar with the transcripts to aid understanding of how the participant expressed and understood the phenomenon. The exploratory notes focused on “content (what was actually being discussed), language use (features such as metaphors, symbols, repetitions, pauses), context, and initial interpretative comments” (Pietkiewicz and Smith 2014 p.12). The researcher used NVivo at this stage to make and store exploratory notes on the transcript. The idiographic nature of IPA meant that there were often notes on each line of the transcript which meant it was deeply involved and time consuming each transcript had between 80-150 exploratory notes (coding shown in the Appendix E). As suggested by Smith (2009) semantic understanding was employed by labelling these notes as descriptive (such as describing what the content of what the participant had said), linguistic (such as pronoun use, metaphors, laughter. hesitation and tone) or conceptual understandings (interpreting the participants understanding in relation to question). In this study each of these was noted separately in NVivo and colour coded to enable reports to be analysed (as shown in Appendix F).</p>
	<p>The next stage allowed the researcher to use exploratory notes to form experiential statements (see Appendices E and F). The transcript was</p>

<p><b>Step 3- Constructing Experiential Statements</b></p>	<p>reviewed with the exploratory notes then the researcher looked to apply experiential statements which allowed the researcher to produce “a precise and pithy summary of what was important in the various notes attached to a piece of transcript” (Smith et al. 2022 p.87). This enabled a gradual understanding of commonality through the data and began the interpretative process of IPA. Whilst staying as close as possible to participants’ own words the deeper level of analysis allowed the experiential statements to crystallize and condense any emergent themes (Finlay 2014) in the initial notes. The labelling of Experiential Statements was carried out in NVivo and began to establish the participants meaning and the researchers interpretation. (Appendices E and F are examples of noting and coding in NVivo).</p>
<p><b>Step 4 – Searching for connections across Experiential Statements</b></p>	<p>The stage of looking for connections across Experiential Statements began by re-reading both the exploratory notes and the experiential statements attached to the transcript and developing an understanding of how they may be connected. A process of imaginative variation was required where, to a degree, the researcher needed to use their own interpretation to build a coherent cluster of Experiential Statements. This the point where the research moved away from NVivo as the researcher found that the use of NVivo felt removed from the participant accounts and difficult to stay close to the data so completed this and every stage thereafter by hand. The process was completed by printing out all exploratory notes and experiential statements attached to the transcripts and re-reading to begin to look for connections.</p>
<p><b>Step 5 – Naming the Personal Experiential Themes</b></p>	<p>The analysis then continued by hand as all the experiential statements were printed out and cut up to be single strips of paper and then on a large surface scattered (see Appendix I) and randomly moved until they were grouped into clusters. Once clusters were refined and finessed they were named and then again grouped to begin to form a pattern where Personal Experiential Themes can be identified. All individually cut</p>

<p><b>(PETS) and Consolidating Them</b></p>	<p>out Experiential Statements and resulting clusters were cut out, stuck in and annotated by hand to be visibly displayed on a A3 sheet and finally emerging Personal Experiential Statements (PETs) were named (See Appendix I). According to Smith et al. (2022) PETs are: personal as they relate to the individual, experiential as they relate directly to the experience and themes as they are no longer tied to the specifics of participant words in transcripts but entities that have emerged after interpreting the whole of the transcript. Once the PETs had been identified and named for each participant a table was presented showing how the experiential statements had been clustered under a Personal Experiential Theme for each participant (See Appendix G). This table and the A3 sheets allowed the researcher to move away from the individual transcript and begin to see the overall essence of the experience for each participant.</p>
<p><b>Step 6 – Continuing the Individual Analysis of Other Cases</b></p>	<p>In IPA the first transcript is fully analysed (Steps 1-5) up to the naming of that participants PETs before moving onto the next individual transcript (Brooks et al. 2018). Therefore, the next participant analysis began repeating the above steps (1 – 5). In order to treat each case as an individual the researcher needed to systematically follow the same steps as detailed above to allow the individual meaning of participant experience to emerge.</p>
<p><b>Step 7 – Working with Personal Experiential Themes to Develop Group</b></p>	<p>The aim of this stage was to “look for patterns of similarity and differences across the participants Personal Experiential Themes (PETs) generated in the previous step and thereby create a set of Group Experiential Themes (GETs)” (Smith et al. 2022 p.100). The review and evaluation of each individual case uncovered whether there is commonality or difference of PETs between cases which could be grouped. This allowed the researcher to search across the data to “highlight the shared and unique features of the experience across the</p>

<b>Experiential Themes (GETS) Across Cases</b>	contributing participants” (Smith et al. 2022 p. 100). A dynamic process of compiling a table for each participants PETs, printing them and cutting them out (in the same way as Step 5) was carried out. Then the group of PETs were reorganised and grouped across the whole group data set. This allowed a table Group Experiential Themes (see Appendix H) to be developed across cases. To ensure that GETs were representative of the research sample a prevalence table was produced (See Appendix J). “The main organizing principle in the table of GETs is to show convergence in the participant experience” (Smith et al. 2022, p.101.) and in this PhD study the compilation of GETs told the story of the group
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*Figure 3: Seven Steps of IPA analysis (Smith et al. 2022) as depicted and interpreted by the researcher.*

The premise of the seven steps of IPA analysis steps detailed above is that it moves from the part (Experiential Statements and Personal Experiential Themes) to the whole (Group Experiential Themes). The seven-step approach that Smith (2022) suggests is suited to this research as it enabled searching for connections across cases (stage 6). The large data set and presence of two distinct groups, online and classroom-based, meant that a further stage of cross-case analysis allowed for both groups to be explored and overall converging themes or differences to be identified. Cross case analysis:

“helps us to understand where meaning converge across a group of participants and to get a sense of the range of individual variation” (Smith et al. 2022 p.121)

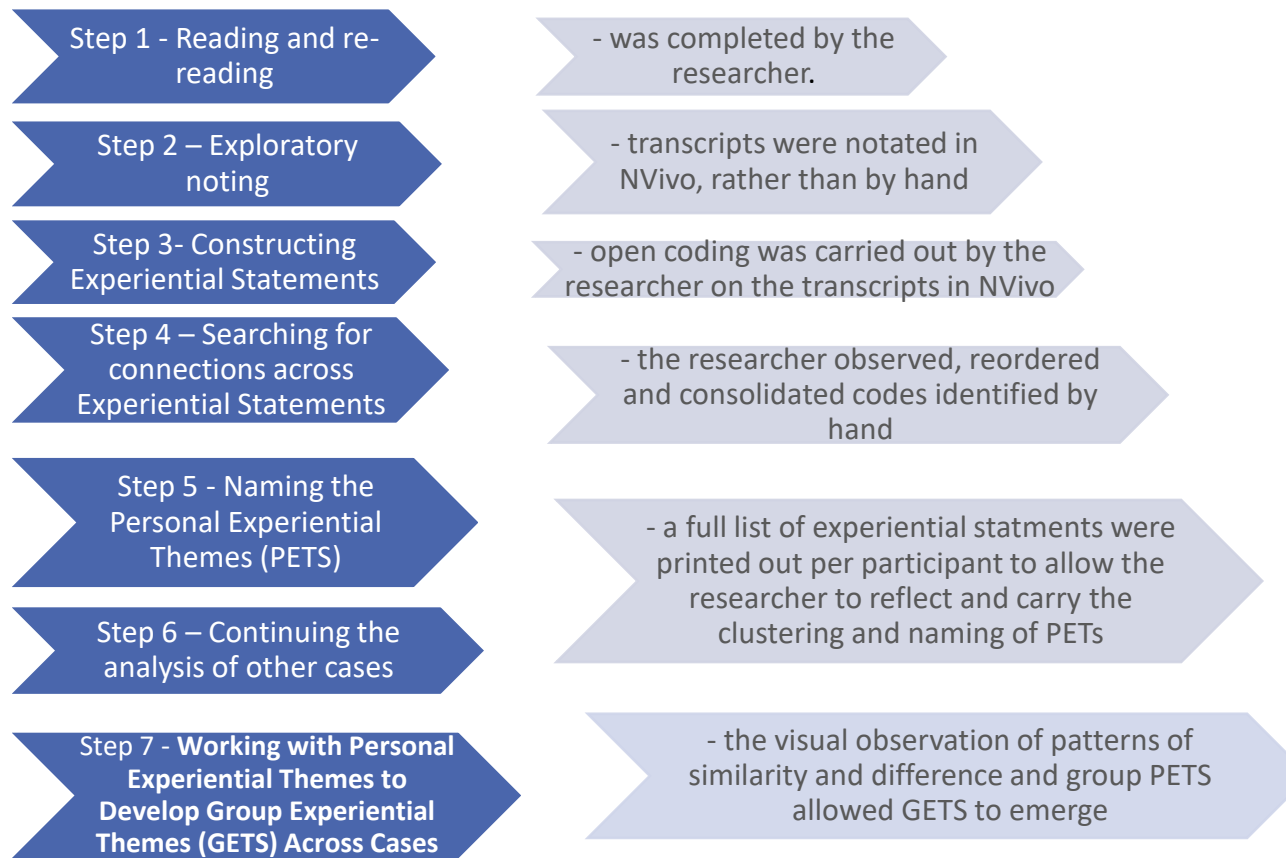
In this study, the exploration of the GETs for each distinct group (see Chapters 6 and 7) enabled a rich identification of patterns, similarities, convergence and divergence and led to the themes being discussed in Chapter 8. IPA provided an idiographic account of the individual experience but also enables the view of the phenomena from multiple perspectives (Smith et al. 2022) which provided further reasoning why the methodological choice is suited to this complex study.

## **Coding Data and NVivo**

The large amount of data and the level of detail required in IPA led the researcher to use NVivo as a data analysis tool at the beginning of the study. This choice was taken to enable an external organisational tool for the research as there was a large data set, with two forms of data collection and two distinct groups meaning analysis was complex. The ability of NVivo to aid transparency of data storage and initial analysis and develop a clear audit trail seemed to counter the critiques of vagueness and trustworthiness (Dennison 2019) that IPA studies attract.

Fielding and Lee (1998) state that qualitative researchers “want tools which support analysis but leave the analyst firmly in charge” (p. 167). The researcher understood that use of a data analysis tool may attract criticism that the tool takes away from the idiographic and interpretative foundation of IPA and will be potentially criticised by purist phenomenologists.

However, in summary the hermeneutic exploration of the data was not handed over to the software but used as a tool to enable the researcher to make the process of analysis more transparent and efficient. The explanation of how NVivo was used is shown in detail below, supporting the previous Figure 2 Seven Steps of IPA analysis:



*Figure 4: Adaption of Smith et al. (2022) seven steps of IPA analysis with correlation to steps for use with NVivo*

As the above figure shows, the researcher initially viewed the use of NVivo as a tool to help document decisions made throughout the analysis, and aid transparency of the organisation of the data only. No data analysis was automatic, and conversely all originated from the participants themselves and the researcher interpretation, to stay true to the phenomenological principles the researcher had chosen for this study. The researcher believed NVivo, at the onset of this study, would aid this research study's depth of interpretation and validity by providing a clear and demonstrable data audit trail.



## Reflection on NVivo

I began this thesis attending multiple training sessions on NVivo as part of my researcher development programme at Bournemouth University which seemed a seamless tool to be able to manage such a large project. As an advocate of technology, the idea of doing data analysis by hand seemed to me to be old-fashioned and unnecessary. However, I acknowledge that this was naïve. As a novice researcher, I failed to understand just how close to the data you need to be as an IPA researcher. I started the project in NVivo which was used to enable the initial noting and first round of experiential statements. This was helpful as a large data set required very detailed notation and analysis. Moving into trying to create Personal Experiential Statements, group and explore commonalities and differences between the cases and move from individual PETs to group GETs, I felt that NVivo did not allow the closeness or the view of the whole data set that doing this by hand and eye would allow. I raised a question about data analysis software on the IPA forum and subsequently wished I had asked there first, as several mentioned it became too hard to use a software tool the deeper you went into IPA analysis. Although I first attempted to use NVivo to cluster and group themes this felt somewhat removed and I felt I was losing a link between the individual cases, so I made the decision to use what I had done with NVivo but continue the analysis by hand. I began by printing out and cutting up all Experiential Statements from NVivo and then spent time grouping them and going through a process of editing and clustering. I then compiled a large A3 artist's folder with each of the Personal Experiential themes (see Appendix I) which could then be seen, reflected upon and referred to. This experience confirmed the criticism of NVivo in IPA and whilst useful as a method to store large data sets it was not personal or detailed enough to allow a closeness to the data or enable the deep level of reflection needed for this IPA study.

## Ethical Considerations

Ethics in social sciences research has two fundamental roles, firstly the treatment of the research subjects and secondly the collection and processing of data (Kitchener 2009).

This research has followed the ethical policies and practices governing all such research and was approved by Bournemouth University ethics review prior to research.

The collection and processing of data was governed by the research principles in the ethical review and adhered to data protection and confidentiality guidelines (Braun and Clarke 2013). Ethical principles detail the rights, dignity, and safety of research participants (Brooks et al. 2018) and set the aim in the broadest sense of protecting the participants in this study from harm. To gain informed consent prior to starting the research, participants were provided with a Participant Information Sheet (PIS) detailing how the research would be managed and what was involved and then were also required to sign a Participant Agreement Form (PAF) detailing their agreement to take part in the research; both are provided in Appendix A and B. Participants were reminded prior to interview and at the start of the interview that their identity would remain confidential within this research and that they had the right to withdraw at any time.

The researcher acknowledged that the privacy of individual data meant “appropriate measures should be taken to store research data in a secure manner” (BSA 2017 p.7) and therefore data was stored on a private laptop which is password protected and ensured no participant could be identified by name by using pseudonyms.

The nature of IPA encourages the deep exploration of experience which held some risk as experience can be deep and multifaceted. The treatment of the research subjects was always at the forefront of the researcher’s mind. The nature of the interpretative phenomenological researcher means that there exists a certain closeness to the subjects to be able to enter their lived world. Whilst ethically yoga is not considered a sensitive topic or a risk for discussion the researcher was aware that motivations to start or continue practice needed to be considered as potentially personal and sensitive to that individual.

In IPA there is an “expectation that commitment will be shown in the attentiveness to the participant during data collection and the care with which the analysis of each case

is carried out” (Smith et al. 2009, p. 181). In the data collection the vlogs enabled the participants to feel comfortable with the subject and the act of reflecting on their yoga practice. To aid this sense of comfort, the researcher sent back a vlog to the research participants to build rapport and to give visibility to the researcher (as most were not known to the researcher) and to begin to allow them to feel that they were safe in recording their thoughts for the research. As Smith points out “one needs to be careful to keep the balance between closeness and separateness” (2009, p. 181). The researcher recognised the need to form a relationship with the research participants without compromising or influencing their reflections. The vlogs the researcher sent to participants were explained as a way for them to be introduced to the researcher and included only messages of thanks, general social observations or responses, and encouragement to do the next vlog. The vlogs were stored on a password protected laptop and were filed under the participant file to ensure confidentiality and data security. The vlogs the researcher sent in response were to the participant only and contained no personal information from the researcher or about the participant. Throughout the study only two recruited participants dropped out after completing one vlog each. The reasons for non-completion were that they had not been to yoga regularly so could not commit to the project fully.

As the data collection methods in this study were unique a pilot study of three participants was conducted to ensure that the vlog guidelines and content and interview structure were clear, and check that no ethical issues arose. Feedback was gained from the pilot participants about how they felt about the research to ensure that the data collection remained in line with the ethical guidelines and the phenomenological spirit. The pilot study revealed that no ethical issues arose but allowed the researcher to reflect more on their own technique as a researcher to be tested and amended prior to the main research study.

## Reflexivity

Reflexivity describes how researchers “are conscious of and reflective about the ways in which they themselves may impact on the research” (Langdridge 2007, p. 58). This was adhered to in this study to ensure that the researcher attempted to not project any of their own experience as a yoga teacher onto the participants or assume any commonality in that experience.

Before the research was carried out the researcher needed, as Finlay (2014) described, to ‘see afresh’ in order to reflect upon the subjective self. Through openness and fresh eyes, a form of bracketing was used to examine the researcher’s assumptions, expectations or hopes for the findings (Finlay 2014). In turn, this allowed for open awareness of self within the research context. This was achieved by the keeping of a reflexive diary (see example of diary in Appendix K) “which records details of the nature and origin of any emergent interpretations” (Biggerstaff and Thompson 2008, p. 217).

The nature of IPA is dynamic and has fluidity, this was a critical factor in the methodological choice of IPA, as it recognised the situatedness of the researcher in the research and therefore aligns with an *emic* perspective, or insider’s perspective (Merriam and Tisdell 2016). An emic perspective allows for a rich, thick description of which IPA has a tradition (Smith et al. 2009). As the researcher is female, within the standard yoga demographic and sociographic profile and also a yoga teacher, there was inevitably some shared perspective. Reflexivity was addressed within the discussion of the researcher perspective but further enables a critical reflection on the role of the researcher on the research process (Finlay 2002). Choosing IPA as a method acknowledges this existing knowledge was inescapable but also enables the researcher to attempt to exclude bias to allow for informed but open interpretation.

Reflexivity has taken many forms and has many labels in phenomenology, but Finlay (2008) believes “the process of cultivating this special, attentive attitude of openness and wonder requires discipline, practice and patience” (Finlay 2008, p. 29). In this

research reflexivity was considered in pilot vlogs and interview, through a reflective diary, and regular researcher reflections (see blue text boxes), alongside the analysis of the research to ensure an ongoing commitment to reflexivity throughout this study.

## Reflection on Vlogs

At the start of this research, I carried out a pilot study with three participants with the belief it would allow me to check the research design of combining vlogs and interviews and reflect on whether these data collection methods worked. I asked the pilot sample to do three weeks of vlogs (half of what I proposed to actual participants), but after receiving the vlogs, I began to doubt the depth of insight they provided. Pilot participants used the vlogs in a very functional way, and observations did not seem to be varied or have particular depth. I raised this with my supervisors, fearing that six weeks of vlogs may be too much to ask of participants and that they would not provide the richness of reflection I wanted but I was advised to give the process time. With hindsight, this was one of the best decisions underpinning this study. I was amazed when analysing the vlogs at the depth of personal reflection that participants whom I had never met (in the majority of cases) were willing to share. The depth of emotional reflection felt similar to a journal where participants would discuss the current stresses in their life, including family and work and mental health, without constraint and in turn, observed how yoga helped them in their lives. The online group seemed more open to vlogging, maybe as they were more digitally immersed. Upon receiving participants' first vlogs I sent a vlog back to each participant to say thank you so that they had a sense of physically 'seeing' me as the researcher and to make them feel more comfortable when it came to the interview. Interestingly, I feel that my absence from the self-directed nature of the vlogs enabled participants to feel more open and freer and meant that vlogs were a core part of this research which were in some ways more valuable than the interviews. Analysing the vlogs as a whole data set for each individual allowed me to recognise just how rich, deeply personal, and valuable to this research they were. This was summarised by one participant who commented how much she enjoyed doing them as they provided a real visual "reflection of a reflection" and reminded her how helpful yoga was to her by saying it out loud and recording herself.

## Summary

This chapter firstly considered the methods used in this study namely vlogs and semi-structured interviews and then explained the sampling and recruitment decisions made in this study. The research approach and analytical process were then explored through the seven stages of IPA (Smith et al. 2022). The coding process and the consideration of the data tool, NVivo was then explored. Finally, ethical considerations and reflexivity of the study were considered to ensure adherence to IPA principles through a detailed and valid account of participants lived experience.

This chapter aimed to justify the use of IPA in this study, but the researcher appreciates that the question remains of how valid any qualitative research method can be (Yardley 2000) and IPA remains a subjective interpretation of the experience (Tuffour 2017). The researcher viewed interpretation as a strength of this qualitative methodology which allowed the creative use of data collection to capture the essence of the yoga experience.

In summary, this chapter has explained how the choice of method enabled the researcher to attempt to capture participant understanding of their individual lived experience of yoga. The use of vlogs attempted to creatively explore the yoga and flow experience, pre and post practice and further enabled the immediate capture of the experience. The novel method of data collection through vlogs agreed with Yardley's definition of impact by providing this research with "material to present a novel, challenging perspective, which opens up new ways of understanding a topic" (Yardley 2000, p. 223). Semi-structured interviews allowed for an additional deeper, retrospective account of yoga and the flow experience. Using the two data collection methods together in this study acknowledged the many layers of exploring yoga as a phenomenon, and allowed for a rich, multi-perspective narrative account, enabling the double hermeneutic required in IPA.

## **Chapter 6: IPA Analysis of Online Yoga Participants**

### **Introduction**

This chapter will begin with a brief recapping of the process of IPA analysis as detailed in Chapter 3 (see Methodology). Each Online Group Experiential Theme (GET) will be presented in turn, by exploring the sub-themes and the related Personal Experiential Themes (PETs). Each theme is explored with analytic commentary and data extracts, enabling the reader to follow the researcher's analysis.

To reflect the large amount of material analysed a prevalence table was developed to show how the participants from each group inhabited each theme (as Appendix J). This table was designed to aid transparency and to ensure prevalence, convergence, and divergence (Smith et al. 2022) of themes among the participants to demonstrate evidence of rigour and variability throughout the analytical stages.

IPA is designed to work from the bottom up in its analysis. The rich personal experiential statements (PETs) as pictured below, are clustered into sub-themes which are fully explored in depth in this analysis; the Group Experiential Themes (GETs) allow for the eventual cross group analysis which will be explored in both the conceptual discussion and in Chapter 8.

## Online Group Experiential Themes (GETs): Sub-Themes A-G

In this section the GET 1 of the online group will be presented, by exploring the sub-themes and the related Personal Experiential Themes (PETs).

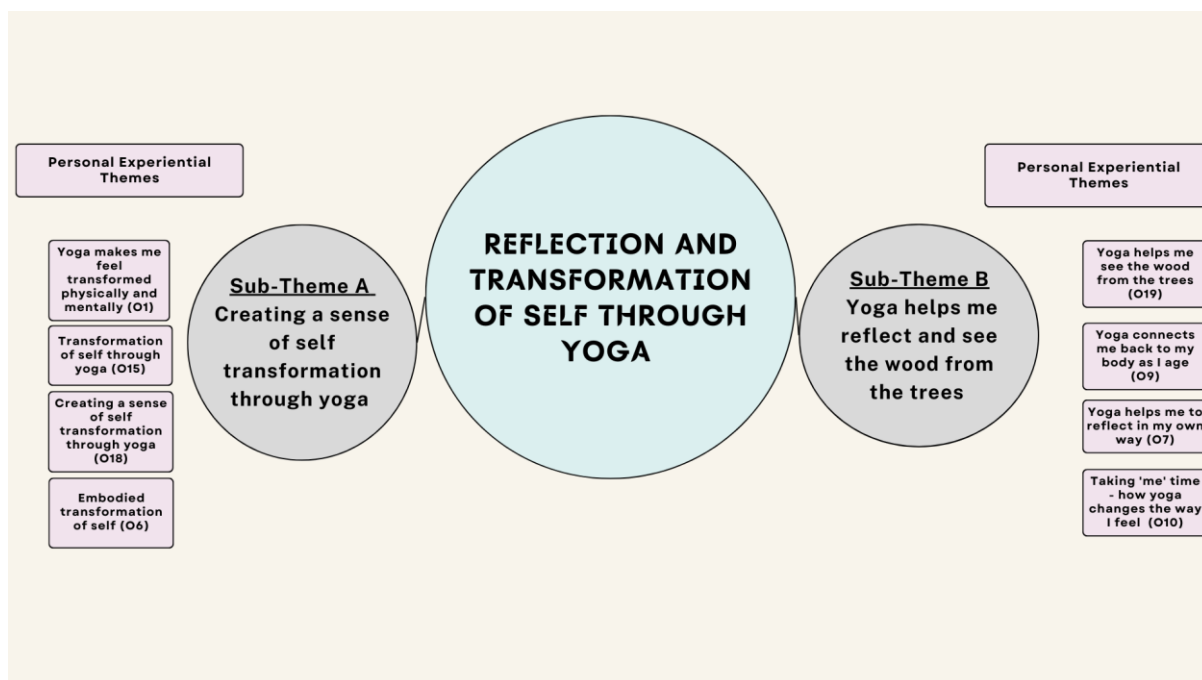


Figure 5: Thematic map of Online Group Experiential Theme (GET 1): Reflection and Transformation of Self Through Yoga

Two broad sub-themes emerged for this GET: Sub-Theme A focuses on the concept of transformation and Sub-Theme B on reflection (a full review of PETs and GETs is presented in Appendix H to provide transparency).

### Sub-Theme A: Creating a Sense of Self-Transformation Through Yoga

Participants described yoga as a transformative physical and emotional experience before, during and following the class. The first part of the sense of transformation was participants becoming aware of their emotional state and sense of self which then



moved to a sense of transformation both physical and emotional, to which this analysis will talk about in turn.

Cathy recognised her present emotional state and self-awareness following yoga:

*“What I’ve really appreciate is, you know, is now for me, yoga is no longer about fitness yeah, it’s great for keeping me fit, helping my fitness and improving my strength. But for me, really now it’s about it’s about headspace.” (0.0130-1)*

Cathy seems to associate sitting on a yoga mat as a time to reflect and the use of the term ‘you know’ suggests a potential need for approval of having time to think. She summarises in a further quote that her yoga practice ‘makes her more self-aware’ and appears to link the time to self-reflect as part of her self-awareness. A sense of appreciation of how yoga has a dual meaning for Cathy begins to emerge as she expresses a changing purpose in her yoga practice from one that is purely physical to one that benefits her mentally by creating ‘headspace’. The reflection that yoga has a dual purpose for Cathy begins to show how yoga has, at first a physical meaning and then transforms to include more emotional meaning. Katy also suggested yoga makes her more self-aware:

*“It’s just always good to have a moment that’s for you and for you to pause and connect and breathe and, you know, move.. tight bones and muscles and also to become curious about what’s going on” (0.0120-3)*

Participants often described the physical benefits of practising yoga, which contributed to the feeling of physical transformation. The central descriptors participants used were summarised as “feeling more energised”, “stronger” and “supple and flexible”. The participants also contrasted pre-yoga and post-yoga physicality, particularly in the vlogs. Negative pre-yoga descriptors such as “tight, sore and stiff” contrasted with the words used to describe post-yoga descriptors such as “taller, more fluid, stronger and energised”. The awareness of a difference between combined pre- and post-yoga physical and emotional states was observed by participant descriptors such as “better and helped” following their yoga practice. Caitlyn described how she felt:

*"I felt loads better physically. I kind of feel a bit more energised, definitely not sort of not stiff and sore from sort of sleeping or the night before. I just sort of feel that the stretching helped and I definitely felt kind of, you know, I was like standing taller and my posture better and I just feel more energised for the day really." (0.0240-2)*

The positive sentiment seems reluctant here with the use of "I kind of" and "I just sort of feel" and contrasts with the repeated use of 'definitely' on the negative associations. This seems to suggest some inability for Caitlyn to explain or express positive physical feelings even though she associates a predominately positive meaning. This reluctance may also be explained by an unfamiliarity of expressing self-awareness which seems to be supported by Charlie:

*"I was quite surprised by how much I was just like; you know I'm really tired or like yeah, I'm really stressed I like it, there always seems to be like a bit of a negative connotation to the start of my yoga practice." (0.0067)*

The negative physical descriptors before doing the class seemed to surprise Charlie because after each class she reflected on she felt positive, describing her feelings post-yoga practice as:

*"I did find every single time that I did it, I felt better afterwards" (0.0127)*

This description points towards a layered meaning of yoga and the transformative properties of Charlie's yoga practice. The recognition that she felt physically and emotionally negative at the beginning of her practice and better afterwards shows the combined transformative properties of the physical and emotional self. It was also apparent that the clarity of a direct transformational experience emerged more clearly in the vlogs which asked participants to talk about how they felt pre- and post-yoga as Cathy described:

*"I've loved doing these little reflection piece actually its made me think that I must start keeping a bit of a journal about how I feel before yoga and how I feel*

*after particularly home practices that I do because they tend to be more meaningful" (0.0129)*

Cathy enjoyed being given the time and space to reflect on the meaning of her yoga practice and in her interview said that she felt the vlogs were more powerful than diarising as it enabled clarity over the positive difference she felt after doing yoga. Whilst this analysis began with the more physical description the layering of transformation was also emotional and linked to self-awareness. For example, Darcy felt that yoga allowed her time for self:

*"I think, it has a dual action because doing the yoga makes that space in my head, but I need the space in my head to be able to do the yoga or if that makes sense. So it has a nice symbiotic relationship(laughs) Yoga, for me, means (...) space in my own head, I think (..)because I feel I know, it's important that (umm) I make time for myself. And the only way I can make time for myself is to make that time in here(points to head) where I sort of identify, okay, there is there needs to be space"(0.009.1)*

Darcy expresses that there is a conflict between knowing what helps her (yoga) but also being able to feel in a place that allows her to access that experience. This conflict is reflected in her hesitancy to articulate but also in the need to connect yoga and the feeling of space. The conflict however is tempered by Darcy feeling like she knows that yoga affects her positively and makes her feel differently as she further expresses:

*"I think yoga makes you realise so many things about yourself and makes you (ummm) recognise the importance of being at being happy and being at peace with yourself and your body, you know, and because of, because I have, you know, by and large, some very negative body image at times, and not all the time, but at times. And it has given me a much greater sense of (umm) thanking my body. You know (becomes tearful) , I think so often for being so bloody amazing" (0.00151.3)*

The increasingly emotional response Darcy has when discussing the effects of her yoga practice shows that accepting and being happy and at peace with your body has significant meaning, in contrast to her past negative associations.

Dina further describes how she feels transformed after a class:

*"...feeling 95% of the time that I've rebalanced and I'm calmer afterwards and my focus is better. And I feel more in control after I've done a yoga class."(0.0192-2)*

Dina, similarly, to Cathy, shows recognition of self-awareness and how she notices that yoga changes her to feel more balanced and in control after a class. The range in her feeling is reflected by her insinuation that she needs to be rebalanced emotionally and that yoga enables a sense of internal emotional control and therefore has transformative properties. The transformative benefits that both Dina and Cathy express reveal the seriousness with which they ascribe meaning to their yoga practice with Cathy describing herself as a "yoga bore":

*"I have told quite a few friends. This is... this is life-changing." (0.0642-6)*

This suggests the deep rooted meaning yoga has for Cathy, Dina further expands on how she advised a friend to take up yoga:

*"I've got a friend who has an equally manic lifestyle to me and I said to her look, you need, give it(yoga) a try? And she was like, oh, I've never got on with yoga, or I haven't done it. But she did a five-week course as well and partway through it, she was like, oh, my goodness, I can't thank you enough I'm feeling like a different person and I'm actually really worried about what I'm going to do in just five weeks finishes. Yeah, this has become so much part of my life now." (0.0642-6)*

The sense from the discourse is that Dina is evangelical about yoga and wants to share and be seen to be able to advise her friends on those benefits almost as though she is an insider. The focus on her friend's words replicates and validates her own feeling that

yoga has a deeply transformational effect to the extent that you can be changed as a person.

The participants in this sub-theme demonstrate firstly how awareness of self was made possible by having specified time for the self. When that time was allowed, self-awareness emerged in reflection as did the ability to recognise transformative aspects of the yoga practice. Participants' descriptions of transformation fluctuated between the physical and emotional layers suggesting deep meanings and association with transformation.

While transformational properties emerged and were identified above in the analysis, participants described a whole-self view of transformation which related to an overall sense of embodiment. Several participants when summarising their response to yoga used the general and broad descriptor of 'feeling better'. Charlie supported this when asked to summarise how yoga makes her feel:

*"Better. Like, if, like, I could waffle, but like the, you know, the end result is it just makes me feel better. It makes me feel better in myself. (umm) I feel more confident about dealing with people and life and things." (0.01277-4)*

The felt experience expressed by Charlie suggests yoga makes her feel better in herself and that as a felt emotion it is embodied physically and emotionally. A message on a t-shirt Cathy owns encapsulates the transformative qualities of yoga:

*"I have a great t-shirt that's got a donkey. ...No, it's a horse. And then has before yoga, then after yoga, it is a unicorn. And I do feel like that, you know, I just feel, I feel more on it. I feel I'm kinder, I feel I'm more compassionate, you know, after that. But yeah, yeah, I'm a unicorn after yoga (laughs)." (0.0355-8)*

In this extract, whilst using humour to depict a transformation, an element of mysticism is also suggested and related to by stating 'I'm a unicorn after yoga'. Cathy's hesitation about how yoga makes her feel supports other participants' difficulty of articulation

describing yoga just made them feel better, suggesting a vagueness in the description of singular elements whilst agreeing that yoga provided a positive sense of embodiment.

Participants appeared to recognise the dualism of separation between mind and body but also the monism of the unity of the whole person in the lived experience. The expression of interchangeable physical and emotional changes in the short and longer term suggests that the transformational properties are unique in yoga. A sense emerged that yoga enabled embodiment to transcend off the mat and into their daily lives making them overall “better, more effective person” in the longer term.

## **Sub-Theme B: Yoga Helps Me Reflect and See the Wood From the Trees**

This sub-theme examined the role yoga had as a place for participants to reflect on their emotional state. All participants mentioned stress in varying ways as a part of their life. Most expressed that yoga was needed because of this stress or that it was seen as a chance to escape from it.

Participants positioned their yoga practice as a way to enable reflection and perspective. Katy said:

*“I don't know what it is, I think you just can see that (umm) you can see the wood for the trees, if that's the correct expression. (umm...) Yeah, I think I've already said that you just don't take things as personal and when you're in a more centred place.” (0.0126 – 1)*

The metaphor “seeing the wood from the trees” describes obtaining clarity and enabling a higher level of consciousness and reflective being. Both Tia and Katy described yoga as bringing them peace, but Katy expanded the analogy of disconnection and creation of space:

*“Yoga is it's just, you know, it's, it is sanity. It is a way to get away from problems from negative thoughts, your own opinions from other people's*

*opinions, from chaos, and from just curveballs that are sent to you in life.”*  
(0.0126-2).

The statement suggests for Katy yoga provides sanity suggests she sees yoga as a space to get away. The chaotic picture painted by words such as ‘curveballs’ and ‘chaos’ contrast with the clarity that yoga brings. Tia also linked yoga to detaching from stress:

*“I think it is about your mental well-being (umm) that you are having that time away from, you know, you’re taking yourself away from normal daily life, and being in a bit of a bubble really and I think that must be good for you mentally, to switch off from the stressors that are outside”.* (0.0294-3

A sense of struggle is created by Tia's description of the need to manage daily stress which is accentuated by her use of the third person description of ‘you’re taking yourself away’. Tia appears to see yoga as a space and time to switch off, similarly to Katy. The image of a protective bubble is created by her description but again some hesitancy is apparent in concluding ‘it must be good for you’ rather than fully recognising a positive benefit. Katy continues to articulate actively “seeking out a place” where she can retreat from the day and experience “my time”:

*“When you have problems that seem unsurmountable, and you have chaos going on in your world, it's just fantastic to (...)seek out this still place where you can, (...) those things can fade into the background. And (umm) yeah that's it really (..)it's especially, it's especially for (...)me as well, it's my time, so I'm not dealing with other things and other people, I am coming back to myself.”*  
(0.0120-3)

Whilst “seeking out” and “not dealing with” could allude to how yoga creates a sense of peace and solace, we also must consider a divergent desire to hide away from the relational outside world, as evidenced by her earlier claim that she sees yoga ‘as a way to get away’. For Katy, yoga seems to enable an outlet with the felt effects of “peace” and “me time” suggesting it is a solace from stress. The ability to distance themselves from the chaos of life and focus on the mind and the body is further illustrated by Katy:

*“The yoga experience is like being under sea. You only want to hear your breathing and focus on what you're doing. That's why it stops me being able to think about all my, yeah, whatever comes in your head.” (0.037-1)*

The metaphor of being “under the sea” created a sense of total submersion, distancing her from many of the tangible senses. The need to focus on just her body and her breath suggests yoga allows her to distance herself enough from the everyday stimulations to be able to connect back to her embodied self. Conversely, a desire to disconnect from the world and other people might signify a retreat from their lifeworld. Katy uses yoga as a psychological tool to protect against the negative aspects of a busy life:

*“It's like a secret weapon because I know if I'm somewhere I'm well ...as long as no one's watching I'm going to do it to stay sane if I'm in a situation that makes me feel insane, I know I got a way of staying sane.” (0.0069-1)*

“Secret weapon” again conjures feelings of a drastic measure and potentially points to extreme case formulation where in qualitative research, the assertion of the strongest scenario is used to justify individual remedy. The repeated antithesis of “sane” and “insane” seems to be used for emphasis and clarity and suggests the strength of yoga's impact on Katy psychologically. Katy seems to view yoga as a remedy that she trusts as a pro-active activity that helps her deal with stress, contributing to the view that she uses yoga as a self-management tool. The admission that she can access this “as long as no-one is watching” suggests an element of self-consciousness dictates her choice to do yoga online.

Participants consistently mentioned that they felt they had to create time for yoga and paradoxically ruminated about the lack of time in their lives. Darcy described this struggle:

*“So, I've had a really stressful couple of days, and I've really missed my yoga I just haven't had (...) well I suppose I have had the actual time, but I've not had the headspace to allow me to get into it.” (0.0158)*



Darcy challenged her concept of time as she started to express her lack of time but then questioned herself that it was not just time but “headspace”. The dichotomous relationship between the creation and distraction of time leads to a feeling of frustration for Darcy who considers the creation of time for yoga as “taking time for myself”. Most participants described yoga practice in this way, including Katy:

*“I needed it, I needed to take some time. It’s just always good to have a moment that’s for you and for you to be able to pause, connect with the breathing and, you know, move (..)tight bones and muscles. (ummm) And also, to become curious about what’s going on ...what’s going on in in life that I feel that I haven’t got time to stop and do (umm) yoga.” (0.0120-1)*

The word “need” highlighted the importance both Darcy and Katy place on taking time for doing yoga as a necessity. This raises the level of meaning they ascribe to their yoga practice but also creates a paradox, where yoga is needed to create space “in my head” but where that space is required before initiating yoga practice. This also suggests some level of pressure that they should do yoga. This discernment in knowing that yoga benefits them is challenged by the non-conscious actions or time restraints that affect the ability to engage in yoga. Whilst the concept of time did not emerge as a major contributor to this sub-theme a lack of time was seen as a stress factor and conversely time was needed for participants to be able to practise yoga.

By beginning to reflect and become more self-aware short-term physical to longer-term psychological benefits were recognised, with this theme illustrating the complexity and depth of yoga as a reflective and embodied experience for participants. The transcendence of particularly psychological benefits of the practice on the mat in particular, such as being calmer and more self-aware, led to transformative properties off the mat which made participants feel both physically and emotionally better.

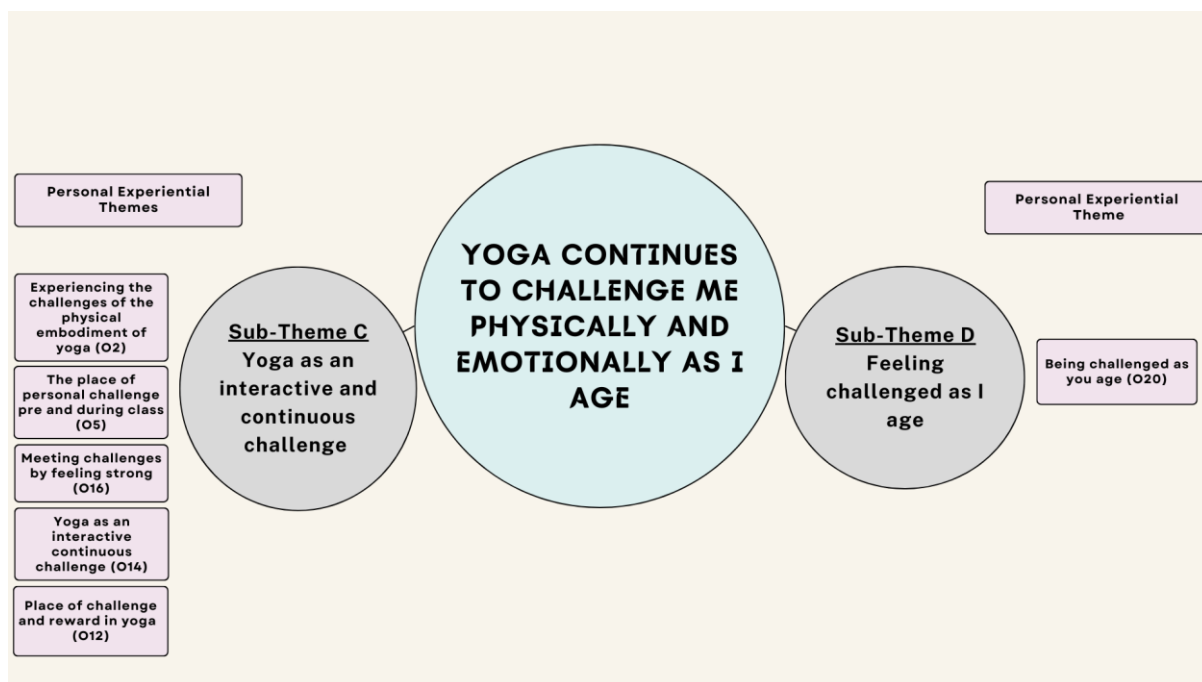


Figure 6: Thematic map of Online Group Experiential Theme (GET 2): Yoga Continues to Challenge Me Physically and Emotionally as I Age

### Sub-Theme C: Yoga as an Interactive and Continuous Challenge

The challenge of yoga, predominantly the physical challenge, was important in participants’ descriptions of their experience. As all participants were women over 40 years of age, the experience of ageing was an important part of this discussion. This will be explored by examining firstly how online participants view yoga as a challenge, and then how they are limited by their physical corporeal state and how they are rewarded for their efforts. The analysis will then turn to the experience of ageing in the overall lived experience.

Throughout this research, participants welcomed and desired challenge. A distinction occurred between an immediate physical challenge experienced through the body and the situational challenge experienced such as limitations. The immediate challenge occurred during an online yoga class through both physical achievements and limitations. The situational challenge of accessing yoga was then explored through the required mental presence and focus the participants felt was required in regular yoga practice. Tia expressed this desire to be challenged:

*“I want to be challenged, I want to have that where you get hot, and you know you’re doing a flow and maybe side planks and all the rest of it. But I also like, the laying down at the end and having that nice little minute or two.” (0.0153-3)*

Tia inferred that she wanted to work hard in her yoga practice and get ‘hot’ before taking the reward of relaxing. The positive outcomes of being challenged were growing in strength and these physical aspects motivated Charlie to practise yoga:

*“That’s probably one of the main reasons I do it. I like to, like, again remind myself that I am strong and can get my body moving and kind of feel the stretching and check, you know, the changes” (0.0404-3)*

The sense of wanting to be challenged and test herself is evident in Charlie’s extract. The sense of reminding herself she is strong seems to have a significant meaning for her as does the progression so that she continues to be challenged. However, the challenge was not seen without conditions. Both self-doubt and the type of challenge were raised by participants as conditions for the challenge faced. Tia’s rise in confidence through her progression in strength was clouded by feelings of self-doubt when being over-challenged as Tia described:

*“So, it does challenge me yeah, it does challenge me. I’m not actually sure I could do an hour.” (0.0153-2)*

This suggests a delicate balance when related to challenge, where the right level of challenge is desired and welcomed but the thought of being over-challenged sparks doubt of being physically able. A further condition of challenge was raised by Katy:

*“I like being challenged so for me, that’s quite a good thing I think that is that yeah, I mean, I like being challenged by myself, not necessarily in a race. But, yeah if I get better at something, or something clicks with me, I think oh, I get it really feel like I’m getting further in this move now than I was before and that’s what keeps me going.” (0.0416-5)*

Katy contrasts a competitive challenge of a race with the self-directed challenge felt in yoga. Being challenged by the practice is evidenced by her progression in the postures which she can feel, and this acts as motivation for her to continue in her yoga experience.

The narrative of the longer-term aspect of the challenge was expressed as continuous, dynamic, and progressive, unveiling another facet of challenge in yoga. Dina expressed her experience as a “yoga journey”, suggesting emotional connection and imagined challenge in the future of the practice:

*“For me, my yoga journey has been quite good, because you can see there's always somewhere further for you to go. (ummm...) And I quite like that”.*  
(0.0415-3)

The journey referred to by Dina is a common metaphor but one which several participants used and suggests a level of agency and control of self-directing the challenge. Participants in this group could control the challenge by choosing different levels or class duration, made possible by the online experience, which enabled them to have agency over the challenge. This benefitted participants’ situational challenges when their bodies were limited, affecting class participation and experiences. Tia expressed:

*“I always I still would do want to try and do the hardest. But I am mindful now that that's possibly not always the best for my hips.”* (0.0159-2)

Tia acknowledges in the interview that she “has real pain in her hips” and although she acknowledges that this is a physical limitation in her yoga class she still wanted to challenge herself to attempt the most difficult level offered to her in the practice. This sense of still wanting to do the hardest challenge, Tia suggests, has been changed by becoming more mindful that she may be negatively impacted by this choice. Dina furthered the sense of tailoring her online yoga class to suit her limitation:

*“I’m really happy that (..)having found yoga, and particularly these small, quick classes that I can do, it makes such a difference. (umm), so I’ve done my 15 minutes back focused class, my back’s looser, my shoulders are down. (umm) and I know I’m gonna have a much more productive day at work because I just feel a bit more like me (0.0093\_2)*

Dina suggests here that choosing a class online focused on easing her back pain enables her to positively self-manage it. The ability to choose a short back-focused class highlights her ability to choose duration and injury focus online which relates to a further theme of self-management of health. This class was chosen to manage her back pain which resulted in her expressing she would have a more productive day as a result. Dina felt happy that she has agency over her limitations and described being able to recognise and address specific physical issues meant that the impact was lessened. Whilst Tia and other participants saw the physical challenges they faced as minor limitations, Caitlyn was using yoga to replicate balance movements given to her on a physiotherapist's advice to improve her flexibility and strength after a major injury:

*“I broke my ankle three years ago and so I definitely find stuff like tree pose can be challenging on the, my not good side, but I enjoy doing that work because it helps. It’s the sort of thing that I did while in physio when I was recovering”  
(0.0037)*

The similarity Caitlyn makes between her yoga postures and the physiotherapist advice sees a restorative meaning of yoga ‘helping’ after injury. Tia and Caitlyn express limitations in different ways, but both see yoga as a form of self-management of physical limitations. Whilst the participants in this study do not have medically managed ongoing conditions some do have issues which affect them. Tia uses yoga to self-manage a minor ongoing limitation of back pain, which emerged for other participants, and one is major injury restoration as evidenced by Caitlyn. The convergence is that both express that yoga is viewed as helpful for self-management of physically challenging limitations.

## Sub-Theme D: Feeling Challenged as I Age

This theme captures the meaning of the experience of yoga when ageing, aided by the homogenous sample of women over 40 years of age. Participants mostly portrayed age negatively and were apprehensive and alarmed about the degeneration of their physical body with age. Katy said:

*"I just try and think well, that's, you know, that's better than yesterday, or at least, you know, you're doing it still. And that means that I think (..) I don't want to be in a mobility scooter when I'm older. And I'm starting to think of that."*  
(0.0278-5)

Katy jumped from an innocuous comment about improvement in her yoga practice to expressing concerns about her future need for a mobility scooter. This showed alarm about her future self. Katy's worries included elevated concern about risk and increased anxiety around ageing:

*"Obviously, you're keeping it really safe, because I want to be able to walk when I'm older. I don't want to break, I don't want to have a neck that hurts, blah, blah, blah, all those things."* (0.0278-7)

The words "I don't want to break" and "can't move" seem based on fear, suggesting some disassociation with the ageing body and perhaps a continuum that the body either works or is broken in older age. The dramatic language used and the expression of ailments as 'blah, blah, blah' suggest almost an unending list of ageing complaints. She counters this negativity with her feeling that yoga is a remedy:

*"As you age, you just feel grateful that you can still do yoga, because you know, a lot of people as they get older, can't move as much as they used to be able to or can't get into yoga postures and you know, I can still get into most of them."*  
(0.0278)

Projecting a future as a capable, healthy woman seems important to Katy but shows some conflict of identification with ageing. The discomfort towards ageing continued as participants reflected on childhood identity and experiences with exercise. Participants were nostalgic about their lost physical ability in contrast to their ageing bodies. Tia explained:

*"I just, I use (..) I just used to pop up like that. I mean, I wasn't a gymnast don't get me wrong. But you know, when you're young, you can just go into a crab and it's no problem." (0.005902)*

The comparison with her childhood self shows nostalgic memories of exercise being easy when she was young. Anxiety about her present ageing body and her 'aching joints' creates a paradoxical mindset towards exercise overall and a sense of comparing different selves through time. Dina also compared herself to her childhood self when recounting her attitude to exercise and competition:

*"And it was because it was a voice in my head that said, you never even came in the top five in a running race at school and it was almost like now I'm on a running track." (0.0158-1)*

She differentiates between self-doubt and inferiority of "not being good enough" when she was younger and her performance in yoga now:

*"And I think because maybe I came into yoga later in life. So, I've approached it a bit more maturely. And maybe everything else is a leftover from the younger years or whether it's I don't know not, not feeling not not being made to feel good enough to be on the team or not being fast enough for you. Needing to, to achieve that to get on to the swim team or to do something. So maybe all of those demons are still lurking, whereas for yoga, it was. Yeah, I was in my 40s. It was a bit like, what have I got to prove?" (0.0172)*

The use of the term "demons lurking" suggests a negative association with a sense of self-identity through past exercise. This suggests that while childhood experiences of

exercise still shape her sense of self, yoga is seen as different as it is accessed later in life. Yoga is also seen as unique as she feels she has nothing to prove as there is no previous identification, and therefore helps to overcome a sense of not being good enough. Participants' attitudes revealed complexities were a part of the sense of self-identification of previous exercise and how this is different in yoga. Participants such as Tia described how yoga helped them self-manage and prevent negative aspects of ageing:

*“I think for my ageing limbs etc yoga is definitely (umm) got to stay in my timetable.” (0.0198-2)*

Tia describes why yoga must be part of her daily life but states it has got to stay and suggests a feeling of obligation or cognitive dissonance in feeling ‘I should do yoga’.

The development of self is evident here with some behavioural and psychological elements from childhood brought through to their adult identities concerning exercise. Ageing, specifically the ageing body, was viewed negatively with an associated complexity of challenging participants' self-identity. All participants in this group started yoga relatively recently with one exception, supporting that the link between yoga practice and the sense of self has developed over time. A sense emerged that yoga is seen as different to other exercise and is approached with an openness that allows participants to value it as a positive and preventative ageing strategy.

Yoga was shown in this theme to challenge participants both by limitations of their bodies but also through the challenge sought from their yoga practice. Challenge presented as both physical; mostly experienced in the online class, and situational; which was felt in everyday life. The journey of challenges often began with the expression of how participants experienced physical limitations. The continued sense that yoga challenges them then moves to a longer-term view that transcends into part of the individual's lifeworld and how they see age will challenge them in the future. In



both instances the ability to manage the online yoga experience is seen as conducive to managing the ageing process positively and pro-actively.

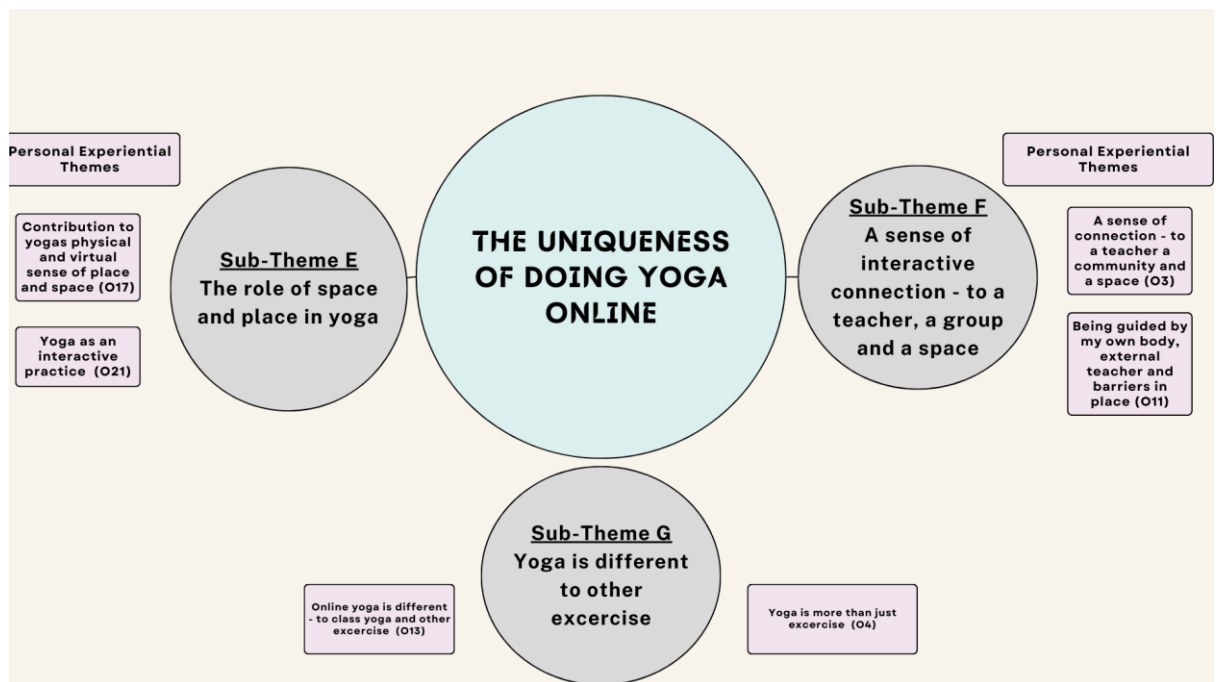


Figure 7: Thematic map of Online Group Experiential Theme (GET 3): The Uniqueness of Doing Yoga Online

This theme explores this difference in being able to create a space to do yoga online, the sense of connection people experience to their teacher and surroundings, and how yoga is different to other exercise the research participants undertake. The first sub-theme outlines how space and place are integral to the experience. The second sub-theme outlines a sense of relation and connection between teachers and other participants. The third sub-theme explores why participants found online yoga different to other exercises.

## Sub-Theme E: The Role of Space and Place in Yoga

Participants used the term “space” to describe yoga literally and metaphorically. Space referred to the creation of a physical location to practise, which was an important part of the experience. First, the role of yoga in a home environment and the need for a defined space is explored and secondly, the reasons people chose to practise online are identified.

Online yoga was conducted in the home, and the creation of a dedicated space for practice became part of how participants co-created and designed their own experience. Cathy set up a space specifically for yoga:

*“I normally do it in the living room. I've got like a diffuser electric diffuser thing that you can put some oils in and just kind of puffs up, but it also does little kind of changing lights, and I quite like to put, to not have the overhead lights on, the house lights on, to have, to have that going.” (0.0161-3)*

Cathy placed importance on sensorial elements such as the lighting to create a calmer environment and a diffuser to burn oils which dually creates ambient light. This creation of a space whilst in her own home shows the need to separate from the standard living space and create an “other” space. She expanded that controlling her environment to suit her individually is an important part of her practice and how it makes her feel:

*“I was surprised at how... importance of the mat and how it makes me feel actually you know I bought it because it was just nice, and I quite liked it. But actually, it has become quite an important part of how I feel when I when I start.” (0.0240-2)*

The sense of surprise that a mat could be important suggested that individually chosen equipment are a core part of the ritual setting of the scene and creation of the sense of place which in turn impacts how she feels. All participants in this group described creating their own space to do yoga which highlighted the comfort of the home environment as a benefit of online yoga. However, participants often did not have a

dedicated space in the home environment for yoga but worked within a multi-purpose environment. Tia felt that privacy was important, describing how she “shuts herself in her room”:

*“I shut myself in the bedroom, nobody comes in. Or if they do they that you know, if they see that I’m sat on the mat or doing something, yogary they’ll disappear. They know that it’s, you know, they shouldn’t interrupt me (laughs).” (0.0061-1)*

The need for privacy and protection of space infers some claim in ownership of the space as “hers” and a place to escape and shutting the door signalled to her family that this time is valuable and should not be interrupted. Charlie also demonstrated needing to negotiate space within the home:

*“We’ve got the gym in the garage but we’ve also got the washing machine and tumble dryer and like, there is more space there to practise but I sometimes find that a bit off-putting you know, there’s like the bike, the tread, the weights, the kitchen and the noise, and that’s sometimes a struggle.” (0.0061-1)*

Charlie reflects that although she has a gym in the garage which is a dedicated space for fitness she often practises in another room as there are fewer distractions and she can create her own individual space. The visibility of elements of a busy household and other purposes of the room rather than a dedicated space means that she finds this affects her use of space for yoga.

Participants preferred practising alone for several reasons. Some desired “alone time” which transferred into the creation of space and place and others preferred avoiding comparisons with others through online practice. Charlie described wanting to actively create distance from other people:

*“I’m sociable, I’m quite nice (laughs). But I’m just not a big fan of, I have to be in the mood to deal with people (umm) and sometimes I just like, it’s the only time that I really get to be alone. Like, with myself, and obviously going to a physical*

*practice is still like, lots of other people there, you're expected to speak to them and, like, so being at home. (...) like just being able to have that time to myself."*  
(0.0120-1)

Charlie here demonstrates the need to begin with a disclaimer of describing herself as being 'sociable' and 'nice'. The time it takes for her to express her struggle with other people and the switch from positive to negative suggests these are difficult feelings for her. Her need to be apart from others and their expectations seems to translate into a need to create a space and place in the home whilst she is doing yoga where she can be free of social pressure and protect "her only time to be alone". Conversely, Katy concludes that practising at home alleviates the sense of competitiveness:

*"The classroom is the learning kind of thing, then my living room, you know, once everyone's away, and I'm just doing it there, that's great. That's just as good in a way is even better, because you can go, you don't, you're not trying to make a good shape."* (0.0147-1)

Katy again seems to start with a disclaimer about why she chooses to practise online as if she needs to defend this choice. The need for everyone to 'be away' suggests the need for privacy in the creation of space and place and allows her not to compete with others as she might in classroom yoga.

Part of the attraction of doing yoga online for participants in this theme was that they could create the space and place to be alone. For some, this emerged as avoiding other people and avoiding feeling self-conscious. In order to create individual control of personal space, design and ritual were performed to create a multi-sensory leisure space. Creating this separate space away from home life, family members and work commitments, when workspace is increasingly part of the home, was difficult. This sub-theme demonstrates how the control of space and place enabled participants to create a calm and positive environment that was conducive to their optimum yoga experience. This creation of space and place was linked to the accessibility of leisure time for yoga and the availability and control of the lived experience.

## **Sub-Theme F: A Sense of Interactive Connection – to a Teacher, a Group, and a Space**

Participants desired and expected a sense of shared connection with the teacher, despite their yoga practice being a virtual experience. This theme explores the sense of connection to the teacher, a group, and a yoga space in turn.

Most participants emphasised the important role of the teacher. Cathy spoke about how she feels as though she knows her online teacher and feels comfortable with her:

*“Back with Adriene [yoga YouTube instructor] and it was it was lovely to hear her voice and to feel calm and guided through what's actually physically demanding practice.” (0.1049)*

Despite having never met or had any personal interactions with Adriene, Cathy described feeling a relationship and a warmth with her, the lack of in-person contact is not articulated as a barrier to this. The sense of knowing her teacher suggests a bond, which is deepened when Cathy talks about how she “trusts” her:

*“I think you have to you have to (...) feel a trust with the person that you're doing online, and you have to feel like it's not online. You know, is you know, it's really important and I don't I don't feel like it's online.” (0.1049)*

A need to justify online yoga with the sense of wanting to replicate a physical class appears as Cathy states twice. The need to imitate a face-to-face interaction suggests a complexity of the meaning of space which is neither physical nor digital. Tia needed a sense of familiarity with the teacher, leading to her loyalty to one online teacher after trying others:

*“I've accidentally clicked on to another teacher before and it's just like, oh, no, no, no, no (shakes head), I'm not going. I'm not going with her with them. I*

*suppose. I don't know. Is it like a safety thing? I kind of trust her, though. I don't know her, but I trust her, and I like her class.” (0.00759-8)*

Tia exhibits a sense of trust which she then counters with ‘I don’t know her’, which potentially contradicts a sense of relationship and points more towards a feeling of professionalism. The value the participants place on the online relationship is an indicative finding that the participant can create trust within that online environment, despite the non-physical context. The online nature of the relationship between the yoga teacher and participants resulted in complex meanings of the teacher/student relationship. Darcy explained:

*“I think I always respect the fact the teacher knows more than I do, so I’m going to do my best for my body and do my best to listen and be guided by them.” (0.0528-4)*

Darcy appeared to admire the teacher's knowledge and used descriptors such as ‘guidance’, ‘trust’ and ‘knowledgeable’ which show respect for the teacher's role. This was reiterated by other participants. Tia described wanting to follow her teacher and she and Cathy also used the word “guidance” not teacher or instructor, the passive language descriptors suggesting they see yoga and yoga teachers as different to other exercise teachers. All participants saw the role of the teacher as important to their experience and that the virtual connection did not restrict the ability to connect to a teacher.

Participants recognised online yoga's positive and negative communal features, particularly compared to in-person classes. Most participants did not miss the presence of other people with only one participant missing the social connection of an in-person class. Others such as Cathy found members of an in-person class could be distracting:

*“I don't miss other people in the class (umm) because I don't, I don't necessarily feel that other class participants add to my experience, I feel sometimes they're a distraction you know, we've got some people in the class who are coming, you're just like, will you shut up, you know?” (0.227)*

The sense of needing approval for not missing other people comes through in this quote by Cathy by asking 'you know' at the end of her reflection. Some participants suggested that group dynamics might increase their effort, with Caitlyn and Katy agreeing that they "work harder in class". However, this seemed to arise from comparisons with other class attendees, with the performative aspect of making "a shape" motivated by self-consciousness, comparison, and competitiveness. These were seen as negative attributes of classroom yoga. As Katy explained:

*"I work harder, definitely work harder in a class, but not necessarily for my good more because I want to make the shape look good for other people, which, you know, I recognise is not the, you know, but I do that I just can't help it, I do it and, you know, I look at other people oh, there's a nice leggings or, you know, things. I'd like those, where did you get those? and all that sort of stuff? whereas, you know, online? You don't do it" (0.0025-3)*

The concept of 'looking good' came through here both in the physical practice and in the clothes worn which is suggestive of expectations or a performance in front of other people. The perception that classroom-based yoga creates more self-consciousness and competitiveness is furthered by Katy:

*"I think that when I'm in a studio working with other people around me, I tend to work a bit harder because (umm...) well, it's really, really rather superficial, but I suppose it's because I feel that you know, people are watching and so I should you know, try my hardest kind of thing. Whereas when I'm at home, I probably I think I still try hard but like I probably don't have to think about how I look from the outside." (0.0225)*

Katy's competitive nature takes over her practice when facing others and comparing herself to them. This is contrasted with her at home online experience which is absent from self-consciousness.

Elements of freedom are expressed by doing yoga at home online and alone, such as lack of competitiveness and self-consciousness and absence of comparison. Despite

regularly partaking in online yoga classes, participants did not identify as part of an interactive online community. Cathy was the one participant who identified with a group, through participation in an online forum with others who were completing the same yoga challenge as her:

*“In January I followed Yoga by Adriene, and she does a 30-day program and I always try and follow along with it live, because it’s really, and then I kind of try and contribute in the group, because it’s lovely to feel you’re doing it with other people at the same time, which is really fun, because (...) you’re getting that community feeling of being in a group.” (0.227-1)*

Whilst Cathy identifies with this community they were not doing the classes together and so this highlights how online communities differ from those in-person and give a sense of shared purpose whilst being physically apart. Connection within the online space was mostly described by the participants in terms of individual enablement. Most participants valued individual choice in the form of time, level of challenge and ease of accessibility, which increased agency and reduced barriers to attendance, as Darcy expressed:

*“Feeling much better now, a bit of a stressful day going into property that I’ve bought trying to get it sorted. So, I find being able to log in online at whatever time suits me is such a bonus (umm).” (0.0232-1)*

Tia identified how online classes removed barriers, such as timetables and lack of choice of classes:

*“I liked doing Adriene and the fact that I can just do it, you know, I don’t have to look at a timetable or book on a class, I can just put on YouTube, and I’ve got an abundance of choice.” (0.0098-1)*

The removal of barriers meant Tia felt that she had more choices of when she practised yoga. This was echoed by most participants who saw benefits in the freedom to choose the teacher, the length of the class, and the area of the body or emotion to focus on.



This differs from a classroom-based class where individual choice is limited and is instead controlled by the teacher or the place of practice, reducing individual choice and control. The online setting permits more individual freedom and reduces barriers to participation.

## **Sub-Theme G: Yoga is Different to Other Exercise**

This theme emerged as participants frequently articulated a difference in perception and the lived experience between online yoga and other forms of exercise they engage in. The observation of yoga as different to other exercise emerged for all participants but was extended to address online yoga specifically. The ability to be able to have freedom of access, repetition of classes, and choice of level all emerged as positive differences in online yoga by this group of participants.

Online yoga is perceived differently to classroom yoga as Dina explains:

*“I’ve personally compartmentalised it differently, and I’m only realising this as we’re talking.” (0.0494-3)*

Dina expresses that she perceives yoga as different which is furthered by Charlie who uses enjoyment as a facet of this difference:

*“I hate running but I know it is needed, but I enjoy yoga.” (0.0144)*

Throughout her interview, Charlie expressed she was trying to lose weight and therefore felt she needed to do cardiovascular exercise, which explains her feelings about running. Interestingly she does not perceive yoga in the same way and therefore is potentially free of those expectations and finds yoga enjoyable rather than ‘necessary’. Tia also expresses a perception of what she should be doing and feeling when exercising:

*“It not an exercise where I would think, I really should be doing a fast, you know, music, jumping around and stuff. It’s about changing my mindset that yoga is as good as any of those, probably kinder as well to my body.” (0.0494-3)*

The notion that yoga challenges Tia's mindset of how she views exercise reinforces that participants saw yoga as a unique leisure activity. The different perception of yoga being kinder to your body, as Tia expresses, might be due to taking up yoga later in life (see Theme D) and therefore approaching it differently, as Dina explained:

*"I can be much more disciplined and slower with yoga, and it might be that I'll do it and think, okay, No, that wasn't going quite how we wanted to, I'm going to retake that class." (0.0494 -1)*

Unique to online yoga is, as Dina expresses, the ability to retake the same class, which furthers the participant's degree of control and self-management and allows the experience to be repeated to benefit the participant.

Alignment of the mind and body meant was one of the primary reasons participants felt yoga was different to other exercise:

*"The way... that... the way you have to think of your body as, as all-one, you know, I mean, it's obvious, isn't it, we say it's all part of you. But you know, to think of the that you're using every little bit of your body and not just think of your stomach, or your arms think of it as a whole unit." (0.0202-3)*

Tia expressed the ability to be self-reflective and view the body as "all-one" and suggests seeing the body as one rather than separate parts. Darcy explained that she will "always" do yoga to bring together the physical and mental benefits:

*"I keep I always will come back to yoga and will always be doing it. Because yeah, because I like to move, and I like to have the physical challenge. And, and, but also that meditative aspect of it (umm) you know, so yeah." (0.0045)*

The sense of yoga as a unifying and embodied practice meant participants recognised the longer-term benefits of just "making me feel better" and are reflective of what Darcy explained:

*"I didn't realise that yoga is 10% on the mat and 90% off the mat" (0.0045)*

The sense that Darcy feels yoga transcends off the mat and into her lifeworld is apparent here, and suggests she sees the physical practice on the mat as only a small part of her practice, and the majority transcends into her everyday life. Katy expands:

*“In yoga, you kind of take what you learn in yoga and meditation into your life so you’re learning lessons, you’re learning to become aware so that when you go out and you’re living in the world, that you don’t just react to everything that you respond”. (00171-1)*

Katy feels as though yoga has taught her to respond rather than react and demonstrates both the potential transcendence of the yoga practice into the participant's lifeworld.

In summary, space and place were integral to participants’ yoga experience. Being able to practice yoga when, for how long and where they can, gave yoga participants a sense of freedom and agency over their lived yoga experience. The active creation and protection of a space within the home environment was difficult for participants but was aided by sensorial elements to create a sense of defined space. This individual sense of creation of place extended to socio-cultural elements such as the avoidance of other people and the commitment to a yoga teacher which were seen as part of the creation of this experience. Participants observed that the ability to manage their own space and place in online yoga extended the feeling that yoga was different to other exercise as it allowed them to control and create an optimum environment to suit them individually.

## **Connecting IPA Analysis of Online Yoga with Conceptual Development in Leisure Studies**

The preceding IPA analysis of the online yoga experience has been analysed without reference to the extant literature in line with the IPA methodology (Smith et al. 2009) to enable the analysis to be inductively led. Therefore, in order to connect the large amount of detailed qualitative data emerging, the following discussion will connect the findings of the online yoga participants to research within leisure studies. This chapter links the three Group Experiential Themes as discussed in Chapter 6 to conceptual development within leisure studies. Firstly, the area of Transformation of the Self will be discussed which emerged from the findings discussed from GET 1: Reflection and Transformation of Self through Yoga (see analysis on p.107). Secondly, Women and Ageing will be discussed, which emerged from the findings of GET 2: Yoga Continues to Challenge Me Physically and Emotionally As I Age (see analysis on p.116) Finally, Leisure Liquidity will be discussed which emerged from GET 3: The Uniqueness of Doing Yoga Online (see analysis on p.123).

### **Transformation of the Self**

Participants expressed that they felt physically and emotionally transformed through reflection and increased self-awareness during their yoga experience. In this section, the three aspects of transformation are discussed. Firstly, how participants felt increased self-awareness. Secondly, how connection to the mind and body through self-awareness allowed a sense of embodiment. Thirdly, how this embodiment transcended from the mat into participants' lifeworld.

Participants' descriptions of self-awareness aligned with the definition of self-awareness as "the capacity of becoming the object of one's own attention" (Morin 2011, p. 807) and seemed to be their starting point when exploring how they felt transformed.

Participants' demonstration of being self-aware connected their contemporary experience of yoga to its philosophical roots, which Feuerstein (2008) describes as the state of being. Historically, self-awareness is considered a core aim of yoga (Collins 1998; Alter 2004). The acknowledgement in this PhD research of participants feeling self-aware supports Kidd and Eatough's (2017) conclusion from their interpretative phenomenological study on yoga, well-being and transcendence that concludes self-awareness increased through yoga practice

The role of self was important in this PhD research as participants' experiences aligned with Ramsay's (2013) more recent research on centring of the self in leisure as giving "a sense of who we are and what else truly matters and has worth" (p. 175). Whilst the concept of self is important in the yoga literature (De Michelis 2005; Cope 2006; Feuerstein 2008; Sharma 2008), it is also well explored as part of the leisure experience. In this PhD research participants self-awareness developed into expressing how they felt a sense of progressive transformation in their yoga experience. Participants felt physically transformed and described feeling "stronger" and more "supple and flexible" but also emotionally transformed as "calmer" and more "peaceful". Whilst Dilletta et al. (2019) found yoga to be a catalyst for temporary and enduring transformation following a yoga retreat, limited research exists exploring yoga in leisure studies.

Within leisure studies there is debate about the role of the self, with initial research from Tinsley and Tinsley (1986) arguing there is a lack of focus on the self during the individual leisure experience. This was contested by Samdahl and Kleber (1989), who conclude that "self-awareness is eminently compatible with leisure and should not be ignored" (p. 9) and recent studies have acknowledged the role of leisure as part of self-care (Dresler and Perera 2019; Tripathi and Samanta 2022).

The link between being able to be aware of the self and being able to care for the self was evident in participants' ability to control and manage their yoga experience online to suit their needs. The participants' ability to control the yoga experience by selecting an online class to "serve a purpose" whether physical or emotional (such as lower back pain or restorative) was a key part of their online leisure experience. The ability to

control the yoga class's time, place and purpose allowed participants to demonstrate self-awareness by knowing “what their body needed”. This furthers Gard et al.’s (2014) framework that positively associates yoga with “self-regulation across cognitive, emotional, behavioural and physiological domains” (p. 14) and because of the ability to control the online yoga experience this meant that participants could go on-line and find a class immediately which could be bespoke to suit their need at the time.

The second element of transformation relates to participant’s sense of embodiment. The role of the self in modern yoga was observed by Hunt (2010) who concluded that “the search for the self for the participants is developmental and progressive” (p. 235). An important part of participants’ meaning making in their lived experience of yoga was being self-aware and self-reflective and how both resulted in a yoga “journey” which was embodied physically and was an emotionally transformative experience. This links and extends the concept of embodiment in the physical and psychological form as described in this study and aligns with Cook-Cottone’s (2020) definition of embodiment as a merging of the internal and external which resides “in and manifesting from the body” (p. 22).

The researcher's sense that embodiment should not be restricted to the corporeal but transcends to a lived psycho-social and cultural experience emerged from participants meaning-making in this PhD research. This supported the view that women's experience of leisure is embedded in social and phenomenological domains (Mayoh et al. 2020). In this research, participants sense of embodiment was often recognised physically in the first instance, but moved into a deeper sense that embodiment was more than just the corporeal (physical body); it extended the embodiment concept to encompass the mind and the body.

The ancient philosophical discussions of the mind-body connection in yoga philosophy (Taimni 1961; Newcombe 2009) are interlinked with the psychological concept of mind-body embodiment or “the conceptualization of mind and body as a single, holistic system” (Leitan and Murray 2014, p.471). Unity of body and mind aligns with Merleau-Ponty's philosophical discussions of embodiment summarised by Gard et al. (2014) as, “action coupled with and not separate from the bodily experience”(p. 9). Participants

consistently summarised both physical and psychological benefits to yoga with one participant summarising “yoga is no longer just about fitness ... it's about headspace”. This finding in this PhD study extends the link to yoga being a positive embodied practice that includes more than the fleshy, physical body. While the participants seemed to extend the sense of embodiment, aligning with the traditional aim of yoga to join the mind and body (Newcombe 2009), participants’ descriptions of embodiment were also complex and varied. Women in this study fluctuated between negative and positive physical and emotional identity. This was also reflected in participants sense of embodiment which at times was also a dualistic, Cartesian description of separate physical and emotional states. This suggests that although embodiment was expressed as incorporating both mind and body this whole-self, a monistic participant view was not constant or simple for participants.

Although yoga literature has become siloed by healthcare modalities (Patwardhan 2017) examining medical or psychological benefits, the examination of embodied transformation has been limited as part of the yoga experience. While leisure studies have recently begun the recognition that yoga can be a transformative practice (Liu et al. 2022) it is more established within tourism literature (Smith and Sziva 2016; Dillette et al. 2019). The findings of this PhD study of participants transformation link to Todres and Galvin’s (2011) work on well-being and embodiment, which suggests a “bodily sense of both being and becoming at the same time” (p. 11). This links to the concepts discussed in this section and explains how in this study self-awareness, transformation and embodiment are inextricably linked in the pursuit of overall well-being in the yoga experience.

The third element of transformation is transcendence. The findings discussed in this chapter suggest that the transformative yoga benefits that participants felt, transcend the mat and move into participants lifeworld. The participants view that yoga was a ‘fix’ for both emotional and physical issues allowed them to feel benefits off the mat in their everyday lives, showing the importance and seriousness with which they felt they ‘needed’ yoga. This supports Lewis (2008) and Gard et al.’s (2014) view that yoga equips its practitioners with skills off the mat to manage “emotional and homeostatic

perturbations throughout daily life” (p. 15). In this PhD study participants felt increased physical and psychological self-awareness, which led to transformative benefit on and off the mat. This finding demonstrates that transformation is a change in the way we view ourselves (Mezirow 1978) and resonates with Gard et al.’s (2014) and Kidd and Eatough’s (2017) research on yoga, which found a similarly enhanced sense of awareness and resulting transformation from yoga.

Whilst embodiment and transformation have been discussed in previous literature, the context of online yoga has not been considered. As such, this study reveals that participants felt embodiment and transformation both physically and emotionally during online leisure. Additionally, online yoga enabled a sense of agency in tailoring the leisure activity to the individual participants transformational wants and needs which transcended into their lifeworld.

## **Women and Ageing**

The presence of age as a part of the yoga experience for women emerged as an important theme in this research. Leisure is seen to become more important to women as they get older (Henderson et al. 2002) but

“research into ageing, leisure and sport has for the most part been positivistic with little concern to understand and make sense of the experiences of older people themselves or their diverse positions in society” (Humberstone 2010 p.3).

As a leisure activity, the physical and emotional effects of ageing are relatively under researched in yoga literature, despite the fact that “age-related physical changes can affect women’s thoughts, feelings, perceptions and attitudes towards their bodies” (Cox et al. 2022, p 460). The following section discusses the core finding that emerged from Chapter 6, that women viewed ageing negatively but conversely perceived yoga as a leisure activity that allows them to positively self-manage the effects of ageing.

This research concluded that participants had complex feelings towards the ageing physical body. The process of ageing was viewed negatively by research participants



and was accompanied by language that suggested a fearfulness with participants tending to endorse a dichotomous view of the ageing body as working or broken. Cox et al. (2022) also found this negativity towards ageing in middle-aged women. The women in their study, who had an average age of 56.5 years, “wished they were thinner, stronger, more flexible and capable of physical activities they could do when they were younger” (p. 469). In this PhD research participants' feelings about ageing were deep-rooted, merging their present self and identity with a nostalgic view of how their bodies used to be. A sense of nostalgia added to the sense of body identity dissonance and was expressed by participants concerning their body and physical ability in yoga now compared to their younger selves. This finding is similar to Cox et al's (2022) study of mid-life women's experience of yoga, they concluded that “comparisons to their younger self appeared to contribute to dissatisfaction (p. 466)

While the present research findings concur with much of Cox et al.'s (2022) findings, they differ in two ways. Firstly, the sample in this PhD research was a younger demographic at broadly 40-50 years and seemed to be fearful rather than accepting of ageing whereas in Cox et al. (2022) participants had “an attitude of acceptance mixed with disappointment and sadness” (p. 469). This comparison may elucidate the second difference, which was that a complex, maybe transitional, identification with physicality existed in women broadly aged 40-50 years with both dualistic and monistic elements present. Notably, the average age for perimenopause and menopause is 45-55 (National Health Service 2022), which is a pivotal time of physical and emotional change for women. Previous research has linked yoga to decreasing menopausal symptoms (Booth-LaForce et al. 2007; Crowe et al. 2015) but much research focuses on the effects of yoga on a single or category of symptoms and therefore the experience of yoga and the menopause has not been fully explored. Lewis (2008) found that motivation to start yoga involved elements such as relationships, life changes and health-related concerns which was replicated in this research where life change was highlighted as a reason to start yoga. The link between participants complex and fluctuating identities surrounding the ageing body and the life stage of participants suggests identification with ageing was deep-rooted and laced with fear. While this research is not a study of menopausal

women *per se* it cannot disregard the significance of the specific life stage and the potential physical and emotional change within the research sample.

Contrasting the negative view of physical ageing was the fact that participants felt that they had evolved or matured and changed the reason they exercise over time to one of self-care health and wellness, which yoga provided. Most participants had started yoga relatively recently suggesting yoga may be a leisure activity women start in mid-life. This supports Liechy et al.'s (2016) study of older women and softball which concluded leisure is not only a part of self-care for older women but also is used to resist the stereotypes of ageing, as participants in this PhD study described. This more positive outcome of ageing towards leisure supports Petty and Trussell's (2021) suggestion that women use leisure as a form of self-care to enhance health and well-being. An additional layer of complexity was added by participants agreeing that yoga was a preventative measure to aid self-care and wellness whilst ageing (Alsobrook 2015; Cramer et al. 2016) however, feeling that they 'should' do yoga as an ageing woman. The need to include yoga as a preventative ageing or health strategy or even expectation to do so could be seen as a barrier to the experience and suggested conflict between the conscious and unconscious in leisure behaviour (Iso-Ahola 2015).

Uniquely, in this PhD research, participants felt they had agency by using online yoga as a positive remedy and a self-preventative measure against the inevitably ageing body. This feeling of agency was enhanced by being able to actively choose an online class based on their physical or emotional state, as previously discussed. The fluid ability to self-manage and control the online yoga experience is distinct to online yoga and has the potential for mid-life women to manage the symptoms of age more actively and potentially navigate how yoga can positively impact the experience of menopause.

## **Leisure Liquidity**

The concept of leisure liquidity is apt when discussing yoga and its evolution from a philosophical and spiritual practice to the online yoga studied in this PhD research. The

concept of liquid modernity (Bauman 1988) arose from the argument that the de-regulation of structure and society was being replaced with fluidity and individualism. As discussed in Chapter 2, Blackshaw (2016) demonstrates how modern leisure could be considered liquid as it is shaped by experientialism and individualism. In the online yoga group, liquidity was evidenced by the perception, creation and negotiation of space and place and how online yoga challenges the perceived fixed parameters of yoga, which will now be discussed in turn.

Whilst space and place are complex terms, this research adopts the broad distinction that space describes a physical location whereas place is where a lived experience is created through sociocultural meaning (Glover and Parry 2009). Whilst the term “space” was used by participants in literal (physical space) and metaphorical senses (head space) a fluid approach enabled participants to merge the digital space (online yoga) and a physical space (home). Persson (2007) found that the meaning of physical space and place was not predictable in yoga and was instead variable according to individual perspectives. The traditional concept of space (Elden 2009) and the fixed frameworks of leisure (Stebbins 1992) were further challenged in this study due to the online context. Participants merged the home and digital space which supports Bauman’s (2000) components of liquid modernity by creating an ‘other’ space which was delineated from the home space and supports the concept of a liminoid phenomena which links a sense of place to a leisure sphere (Turner 1979). This PhD study showed the need for participants to create a space which suggests a need for dislocation from the home domestic space. Women’s leisure in the home remains complex and the separation between work and leisure is sensitive to distraction from partners or children and lacks a suitable space free from those distractions (Deem 1982).

The uniqueness of doing yoga online questioned the role space and place play in women’s online leisure activities. Discussion of how being online affects space and place of leisure is limited, but two constructs are used in leisure studies to explore space: liminal and third space. Liminal space recognises in-between spaces that are on the border of two known spaces (Elden 2009). Liminal space in leisure have been described as

“located on the fringes of society are understood as liminal backspaces because they are characterized as chaotic, unstable and fluid” (Riches 2011 p. 329).

While this definition suggests a certain liquidity it also infers a separation of spaces, and this PhD research identified a deliberate merging of physical and online space to accommodate leisure, which had an impact on the socio-cultural meaning-making of place for participants.

A further concept used throughout leisure to describe space are third places which are defined “as public gathering places that ultimately contribute to the strength of community” (Yuen and Johnson 2017 p.295). Technology has been viewed as a potential facilitator of a “third space” (Yuen and Johnson 2015), and recent leisure studies have examined virtual leisure as third spaces (Reed et al. 2023). The definition of third space as ‘public’ means it is limited in this context as online yoga is practised within a home space; an existing place. Participation in on-line yoga at home in this study did not fit either a liminal or third space definition suggesting a gap in leisure literature to define space and place encompassing an online element. The difficulty in defining space and place for online yoga supports the need to broaden and recontextualise how we think about space and place (Sharpe et al. 2011). This involves the need to recognise individuality and fluidity of thinking about leisure through the lens of liquid modernity (Bauman 2000). The research findings identified a fluid meaning of place for participants and suggests a broader definition of a ‘multi-space’ for leisure which would allow merging digital and physical space to develop a sense of individualised place in the lived experience.

This PhD study also highlighted gendered aspects of having to negotiate space which was considered a constraint on the women's ability to use leisure as self-care (Petty and Trussel 2021). The female participants described needing to protect a “private space” in the home free of distraction and interruption. This began to move away from just seeing the home as a place or location to do yoga and towards an active creation of place that held meaning for them, it was their space and time. Stalp (2006) also found that female quilters received less space for leisure than men and needed to negotiate time and space for serious leisure within the home. Similarly, the need to negotiate time for leisure

contrasted with Kidd and Eatough's (2017) finding that their all-male sample prioritised their leisure time, emphasising their yoga attendance without guilt or conflict. Several convergences were evident with this PhD research and Kidd and Eatough's (2017) study, linking both methodological choice and the finding that yoga enhanced physical and emotional self-awareness. Whilst Kidd and Eatough's (2017) study is distinct in researching a small male yoga sample it raises the issue of prioritisation of leisure time which appears to have gendered implications when observing the yoga experience in the home in this study. The observation of the yoga experience revealed that the women-only sample in this research needed to negotiate both time and space for yoga, raising questions of prioritisation of leisure time for women.

Observations of space and place in the yoga literature have focused on the constraints of a yoga studio and not the relative freedom of online yoga. This suggests a need to expand the boundaries of defining yoga communities (Cook-Cottone 2017). The findings of this PhD research recognised the importance of the fluidity of online space and place. Whilst constraints in terms of negotiating space for leisure in the home still apply for yoga, online yoga also allowed participants in this study a relative freedom of space and place. This liquidity can begin to recontextualise the meaning of space and place when yoga takes place in an online context. The ability to do yoga where and when they wanted allowed participants in this PhD study to co-create and protect their own multi-space which was valued and embraced as individual freedom. Freedom is a recurrent theme in the analysis of leisure (Hemingway 2017) and online yoga displayed an accessibility where participants could "just put on YouTube and I have an abundance of choice". This freedom of choice and ease of access support how liquidity in space and place can enable participants to overcome some of the common barriers to accessing and maintaining yoga as a leisure experience.

The traditional parameters of yoga involve both a teacher, a classroom, and other people are challenged in online yoga and suggest a liquid leisure activity. Online yoga, as observed in this study, removes these structures, and suggests a more liquid view of modern yoga and aligns with the thought that in liquid leisure "people have the freedom to shape it in ways that fit their search for authenticity rather than encountering

something solid to which they conform” (Dattilo and Lopez Frias 2021 p.591). Few participants missed the social nature of group interaction, and many expressed actively avoiding the classroom, showing the complexity of the concept of what connection and community meant to online yoga participants. The lack of consensus that emerged in this study about the need for physical social connection with others disagrees with key yoga literature (Moadel et al. 2007; Gard et al. 2014; Alsobrook 2015). Social behaviour is often viewed as part of the yoga experience (Cox et al. 2022) but this was challenged in this PhD research and questions the definition of a digital community. Whilst participants accounts met two elements of Wenger’s (1998) definition of communities of practice (mutual engagement and shared repertoire of practice) it does not fulfil Coleman and Iso-Ahola’s (1992) social support dimension found to be an important part of leisure’s contribution to positive health.

This further suggests that the formal structure of the yoga experience involving space and place has changed, and the modern yoga experience is becoming more liquid due to the online environment and this extends to the presence of other people. Davies (2013) expressed that yoga could be categorised as a community-based practice, but online yoga has not been previously considered in this definition. A need may exist to consider Silk’s (1999) more fluid definition of “common needs and goals and collective action” (p. 6) in defining an online yoga community. The digital context and lack of others as a collective however challenge both definitions and share more commonality with Johnson and Glover’s (2013) suggestion that leisure can facilitate a spatial feeling of community through its resulting human experience and interactions. This suggests a need to consider a more updated conceptualisation of a leisure community and recognise the online spatial nature of community furthering Torre’s (2020) suggestion that online groups can form communities but do so in a non-linear way.

The fluid nature of the presence of other people extended to the connection with the teacher despite the absence of physical connection. The relationship with the yoga teacher was important to this group, with participants describing “knowing” and “trusting” the teacher, who in all cases they had never and would never meet. It is established that trust is important in yoga, associated with acceptance, challenge and

feelings of community (Sharma 2008) and that it derives from the approach of the teacher in a classroom environment (Cutler-Riddick 2015; Cox et al. 2022). This PhD research however did not show a need for the teacher to be physically present and suggests a parasocial (Gleason 2017) relationship which is novel in leisure research. This absence contested previous research that teacher dialogue enriches the experience (Neumark-Sztainer et al. 2018). The virtual, one-way nature of the teacher role is unique in online yoga and suggests a re-evaluation of the need expressed by previous literature for a teacher to be physically present (Sharma 2008; Humberstone and Cutler-Riddick 2015; Cox et al. 2022). Whilst this PhD research extends knowledge on the role of the teacher it also questions how the positive aspects of classroom yoga dialogue can be replicated to enhance the instruction of yoga in the online experience, which needs further investigation. This study suggested that connection to others was fluid and in some cases not required but connection to the teacher was desired and valued by participants. Both of these elements, however, contrast with previous leisure and yoga literature findings and suggest that online yoga needs to be reframed to explore the more liquid lived experience suggested in this research.

The observation from this research concludes that online yoga is a unique and fluid leisure experience and that leisure research must consider digital cultures to better align with modern society (Redhead 2016). Understanding how the sense of place and space and connection to others is negotiated within an online yoga environment requires an understanding of the liquid meaning of digitised leisure practices which this research begins to do.

## **Summary**

This chapter started with a detailed IPA analysis of research participants vlogs and interview material for the online yoga experience. The exploration of the three Group Experiential themes: Reflection and Transformation of Self Through Yoga (GET 1), Yoga Continues to Challenge Me Physically and Emotionally As I Age (GET 2), The Uniqueness of Doing Yoga Online (GET 3) and supporting sub-themes, identified that the experience

of online yoga participants is unique. The connection of the themes that emerged from the analysis allowed three key areas of conceptual discussion namely: Transformation of the Self, Women and Ageing and Leisure Liquidity.

The discussion of transformation recognised that yoga participants displayed increased self-awareness which led to transformation, which is congruent with previous classroom-based yoga literature (Gard et al. 2014; Kidd and Eatough 2017). A key element of the transformative experience of yoga was the recognition that embodiment extended from the corporeal body providing integration of mind and body (Cook-Cottone 2020) in line with the original aim of yoga (Garfinkel and Schumacher 2000). The sense of embodiment seemed to extend and transcend the yoga experience, and, in this study, participants reported it having positive transformative effects on their life outside of yoga agreeing with Gard et al. (2014) that yoga can enable self-regulation across physical and emotional domains. The sense of embodiment was not, however, static, or straightforward and agreed with Todres and Galvins (2011) understanding of well-being and embodied mobility of “being and becoming” (p. 11). The finding in this study suggests that online yoga participants are allowed the freedom to react to changing individual needs by being able to choose a physical or emotional purpose for the yoga class to act as self-care and self-management for participants. Leisure has the power to transform (Edginton and Chen 2008) and to act as self-care (Tripathi and Samantha 2022), but this study extended this knowledge by observing how online yoga allowed participants to embody, create, control and self-manage their transformative experience.

In terms of women and ageing this study was unique in its sample of mostly women mostly aged 40–50 years and whilst age was viewed negatively and fearfully by participants, yoga was also seen as a transformative and positive remedy to participants' ageing bodies. This PhD research found that body image was complex for women in yoga, contesting the link suggested by other research connecting yoga with broadly positive body experiences for women (Dittmann and Freedman 2009; Mahlo and Tiggerman 2016). The participants' experience in this study reflects the pluralities associated with women, ageing, and menopause as explored by Parry and Shaw (1999).



The exploration of middle-aged, healthy women's yoga experience is limited (Cox et al. 2022) with the two core studies investigating yoga and ageing primarily with women over 56 years old (Humberstone and Riddick 2015; Cox et al. 2022). In this study a sense of fearfulness was apparent in the participants view of ageing which was not present in the closest study (Cox et al. 2022). This difference has identified a potential gap in the research of how the complexities of ageing affect mid-life women's experience of yoga who maybe be perimenopausal or menopausal. Existing research has identified that yoga decreases menopausal symptoms (Crowe et al. 2017) but the experiential link between yoga and the menopause is under researched. In this PhD study participants body image and sense of identity was multi-faceted, whilst viewing ageing negatively, they also wanted to proactively manage their ageing bodies through regular yoga with a sense of self-care and protection that online yoga allowed them.

The above discussion of how women experience of yoga as a transformative and unique leisure activity is embedded within leisure liquidity. The merging of the home space and the online space and the lack of the physical presence of others, challenged the traditional concepts and role of space in yoga (Cook-Cottone 2017) and the leisure experience (Elden 2009). The women participants needed to create, negotiate, and protect a space for leisure in the home which could be viewed as a gendered constraint (Stalp 2006). In addition, the nature of online yoga meant that space and place do not fit the constraints of traditional leisure spaces (Elden 2009; Yuen and Johnson 2015) suggesting a need for a more expansive post-modern discussion of 'multi- space' and place in online leisure.

The importance of a shared experience is prevalent in the definition of leisure (Coleman and Iso-Ahola 1992) and in previous yoga literature (Moadel et al. 2007; Gard et al. 2014). This PhD research provides evidence of a more liquid experience as participants practice alone and in the home, changing the traditional parameters of yoga to become more fluid. Whilst social connection was missed by some of the research participants in this PhD research, others were drawn to practising yoga online due to the desire to actively avoid other people. In contrast, despite the lack of physical presence the need to feel connected and guided by a teacher emerged strongly from this group which

supports existing yoga literature (Humberstone and Cutler Riddick 2015; Cox et al. 2022) and challenges the assumption by previous research that a teacher needs to be physically present. The complexity and lack of consensus around the need for physical connection to others and a teacher to be physically present challenges the meaning of community previously established in yoga research (Smale 2006); it further illustrates the unique nature of yoga as an online leisure experience.

## **Chapter 7: IPA Analysis of Classroom Yoga Participants**

### **Introduction**

The research findings from participants in this group reflect the experience of yoga participation in a traditional classroom with a teacher and other participants physically present. Classes took place in a gym or a professional yoga studio.

The structure of this findings section takes the same form as the previous section and includes research findings from the vlogs and interviews. Each Group Experiential Theme (GET) is discussed in turn with figures showing how extracts can be linked to the Personal Experiential Themes (PETs). This is followed by a discussion of how the findings contribute to conceptual development within leisure studies.

### **Classroom Group Experiential Themes (GETs): Sub-Themes H-P**

In this section the GET 1 will be presented, by exploring the sub-themes and the related Personal Experiential Themes (PETs).

This section focuses on the three broad sub-themes emerged for this GET and begins with: Sub-Theme H: Acceptance and Taking Time for Need to Take Care of Myself (a full review of PETs and GETs is presented in the Appendix H to provide transparency).

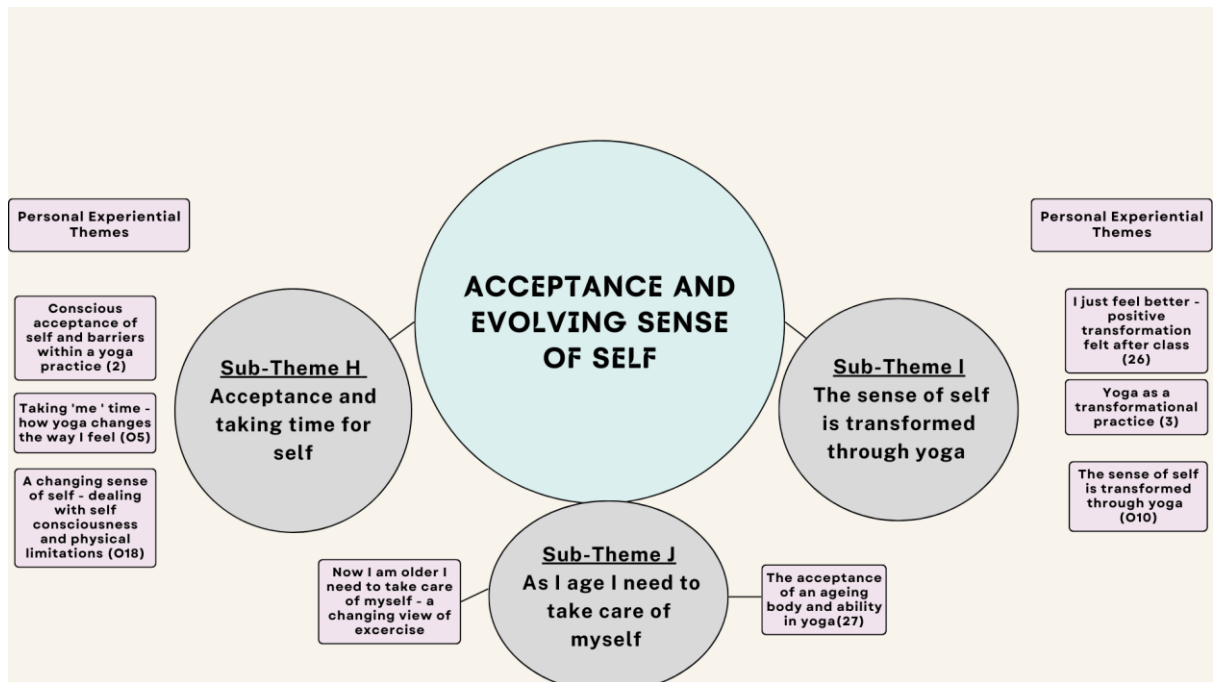


Figure 8: Thematic map of Classroom Group Experiential Theme (GET 1): Acceptance and Evolving Sense of Self

## Sub-Theme H: Acceptance and Taking Time for Self

The sense of self emerged from the data across two areas: how the sense of self was experienced and nurtured; and how comparison of the self played a role in relation to others in classroom yoga. The ability to nurture the self began with awareness of the self. Participants reflected on self through different lenses; their physical selves (physical body), their holistic selves (embodied mind and body), and their relational selves (interpersonal and in relation to other people in the classroom).

Sally addressed physicality subtly, with terms such as “taking care of myself”:

*“I think I've just become a little bit more in tune to getting older and (umm) needing to stretch and look after my body as it were.” (0.013)*

Sally felt as though age had made her more aware of her body and that a sense of caring for the physical self had emerged. Darcy, when summarising yoga, described being more aware of her holistic self:

*"I think obviously it has just made me more aware..of the wonder of being comfortable with oneself, you know and I don't think you really get that from much else". ( 0.0147 – 1)*

Here Darcy is confident in her statement that yoga has made her more aware in that she finds it obvious but then looks for approval in being comfortable with herself. Later she described yoga is a 'significant part of me' which further extends the sense of how integral yoga is to her. Darcy showed an acceptance and awareness of self which was a common experience for most participants, which then translated into identifying their yoga experience as a time for themselves, commonly referred to as "me time". Diane showed intent and commitment to a purpose, which is her self:

*"I like the feel of it. I like the feel of the room. And I feel like I'm there for a purpose, which is me." (0.0507-5)*

The unapologetic sense of purpose here is interesting, and Diane clearly articulates the direct relationship between the purpose of the activity and the self.

The value Diane and Sally placed on time for themselves was in opposition to Beau, who described feeling selfish about taking time to do yoga:

*"I do feel that it's a little bit selfish that I've been a bit self-indulgent (umm) if I think about it too much, taking time out of everything else just to. To do this yoga thing that's all about me and making myself better." (0.0089 -1)*

An interesting paradox was evident in how she described yoga as "making herself better" but felt guilty about it this then turns the view of self into relational which is affected by thoughts of other people's view points. Guilt was associated negatively with the choice to prioritise herself with the opportunity cost of not doing "everything else". Diane also expressed a feeling of guilt before entering a class, however, once in the class she observed that she felt better because "it helps everybody actually":

*"It can be sometimes like really like God I've... I haven't really got time for this, or you feel guilty because you go in and there's other stuff to be doing And but*

*actually when you're there, because you get to this calm place. You don't have that guilt when you come out and you're better you're better for it. So, it helps everybody actually.” (0.0101)*

There appears to be a nuance expressed by Diane's need to make the benefits she feels in yoga also beneficial for others by 'helping everybody'. This suggests a need to justify this focus on herself. Guilt centred on participants questioning the priority of their leisure time and how this affected their subsequent behaviour.

The frequent contradictions of meaning attached to self are evident in this theme. The need to take time to care for self is contrasted with the guilt of (not) doing other things. This led participants to judge this time as 'selfish' and justify this time as having external benefits to others. The experiential nuances that emerged showed the deep individual meaning participants attached to their leisure time.

Self-consciousness emerged in the view of and relationship of self to others. Some participants were particularly aware of the physical presence of other people in their class, and their descriptions of their sense of self were evident and uniquely linked to the classroom context. Hannah described a change in her self-consciousness and view of interpersonal self as she became more experienced:

*“I think when I first started, it was all about what I looked like, what other people thought.” (0.0330 – 2)*

Hannah suggested that visual appearance and others' perceptions were important to her when she started yoga, but she became less self-conscious when she became more experienced:

*“I try a lot more to not...be less, less conscious of what other people are doing and even it was the point where you look you know, they've got the latest gear on, I need to up my game, but that's ego, and I've just tried to be more aware about that.” (0.0330 – 6)*

Hannah feels hesitant to admit feeling self-conscious and uses the words 'up my game' to infer this is not just about yoga but implies a competitive mindset in appearance. She also became more aware of cognitively processing and managing her feelings of self-consciousness by trying to control them proactively. Sasha also acknowledged changing levels of self-consciousness:

*"I think when I was younger, I was a lot more self-conscious, I think because I know most of the people that do the class anyway, that does make a difference. And I think, you know, years ago, you would, I would have been conscious of somebody laughing at me if I couldn't do something, but I think because you know, now you are restricted by what your body can do." (0.0338-7)*

She attributed less self-consciousness to maturity and knowing the people in her yoga class, which may mean a known group environment may lessen the feelings of self-doubt she used to experience.

Beau contrasts with Sasha and Hannah's feelings of self-consciousness by her strength of singularity of self:

*"I'm aware of myself and thinking about things that are important to me, but I'm not, I'm not thinking in the way that's everybody's looking at me, or anybody's looking at me, it's more sort of ...I'm doing this for me, I'm aware of who I am. Okay. And it's that type of self-awareness rather than self-consciousness" (0.00157)*

Beau rejected self-consciousness and replaced it with a clear sense of self and purpose. Where other participants tried to make sense of other people's perspectives Beau appeared here to ignore them.

Most participants did experience feelings of self-consciousness which affected their yoga practice and a clear socio-cultural pressure was evident in a classroom environment. Therefore, the acceptance of self was not always achieved but

participants showed awareness that a yoga class was seen as taking time for the self which was seen as positive and desired.

### **Sub-theme I: The Sense of Self is Transformed Through Yoga**

Similar to the online yoga participants, transformation was often used as a context to describe the overall yoga experience with both physical and emotional properties present. Transformation was referenced in two ways: short-term directly after the class, and longer-term benefits that transcended the class and entered into the sense of self in daily life. Poppy felt the transformative benefits mostly in her mental health:

*“I really do feel that I get a lot out of it mentally. So not only I know, in my head, that going to the class is just going to help me a lot, personally, just, (umm) especially the last year with work.” (0.0187-2)*

Poppy sees yoga as helping her with her mental well-being and infers both a short-term benefit of going to a class and then a reference to ‘the last year’ suggesting she is also aware of a longer-term benefit. This extended the effects of experience beyond a physical practice and into her overall psyche.

*“I go through a oh, I don't really feel like this. I've got to get up the crack of dawn. I don't really feel like this. But I'm going to go. I don't really feel awake. And don't know if I'm really into this, but I'm going to go and then whenever I come out, I feel like oh, (..) that was amazing. I'm so glad I made the effort.” (0.0539-6)*

Diane in her portrayal of her self-dialogue of doubt and resistance to go to class then contrasted this with an overall feeling of satisfaction that she feels better and rewarded by attending the class. Although transformation was apparent from both data collection methods the transformation between pre- and post-class was particularly evident in the vlogs where participants described “I don't feel like this” resistance before class changing to “that was amazing” immediately after class, demonstrating a transformative effect. Holly however took a longer-term view by expressing:



*“Just accepting that’s what I am and who I am and it gives me the tools to know that in, you know, you can take into all aspects of life.” (0.0539-6)*

Holly, when discussing how yoga has impacted her sense of self, links her earlier lack of self-acceptance to currently feeling more self-accepting. This sense of acceptance also impacts how she deals with life, by equipping her with further skills and knowledge. This demonstrates the transformative effect immediately after class but also has the longer lasting effect of managing emotional well-being. Participants feeling emotionally transformed both in the short and long term suggests a beneficial psychological leisure experience through yoga.

### **Sub-theme J: As I Age, I Need to Take Care of Myself**

Participants described age in two ways: how it affected their practice, and their previous experiences which led them to yoga. Many participants described their age as a physical limitation.

Sasha described how her body now restricted her:

*“I sound a bit of a wreck, really, but I’m not, I did gymnastics when I was younger. And I always had to work really hard at it, but I did become quite flexible and obviously, I’m a lot older now. And I don’t do exercises like that every day, which perhaps I should do.” (0.0866-1)*

Some confusion is apparent in how she describes her physical self and then retracts the statement and moves back and forth from a place where she doubts her self. The quick justification of this limited physical identity is approached by looking back at her previous engagement with exercise. Vacillating between her past identity of “doing gymnastics” to being “a wreck” is a reference point to her oscillating view of her physicality. Ageing was often present in participants’ descriptions of their identities. Most participants were negative and fearful about the need to be cautious and “more

aware of things". In contrast, Poppy was inspired by older people in her class who are still active:

*"I really want to stay flexible because I've seen older people, like we were saying the class is fortunate because it's a wide age range. You see older people and you're sort of thinking in your head gosh, I'm 43 now, if I'm 63 or 73, I still want to be able to be flexible and I think nowadays, there's more emphasis on that."*  
(0.0231-3)

The negative association with age appears to shift here to more aspirational ageing as Poppy positively compares herself, and her aspirations of future self, to examples of ageing in the class. As participants had mostly come to yoga recently (within the last 5-10 years) a shift was cited in attitude towards exercise during middle age being more gentle and associated with taking care of the body. Beau did directly refer to this life change in relation to the experience of menopause:

*"I was going through the menopause at the time. So, another physical change that was happening. And I thought, what's a good way to start this?"* (0.0375 - 2)

Beau saw yoga as a way to manage the physical change of menopause, but other physical and emotional life events appeared to have impacted participants and made them seek help at times. Holly identified yoga as a positive leisure activity to support other life changes she was experiencing:

*"I think as I've gone through motherhood, and varying times of my life of grief of, you know, things that I've been working through yoga has really, really helped me through those things."* (0.0152-1)

Holly seems to see yoga as a tool to assist her through more challenging times of her life. The persistent attitude that "yoga is good for you" meant that participants often turned to yoga in times of change. This may, as Beau suggested, align with menopause, which is a time for physical and emotional change as she describes:

*“I keep doing it regularly, mainly for physical stuff, I’m getting older, and I want to keep up that flexibility. And I know if I just stopped doing it for two weeks, it’s just, I lose a lot of flexibility. So, comes back to that and to keep the, I just love the mental benefits that you get out of it at the end as well.” (0.0375 -3)*

Participants also described transcendent experiences arising from the physical and emotional benefits. Beau felt that the combined effect was to help in the self-management of the ageing process:

*“Makes me feel physically stronger and happier. Peaceful (...) I think. So those three things make me feel younger, a fountain of youth?” (0.00375-6)*

The analogy of yoga as “a fountain of youth” demonstrated the group's experience that yoga was suggested to help self-manage aspects of ageing.

In summary this theme provides insight into how a contradictory sense of self existed for participants, one of care for self but also one of judgement. Despite this contradiction, yoga was seen as self-care and as transformative, providing short and long-term benefits. The benefits identified appeared to transcend the physical, into emotional benefits, a greater sense of embodiment, and self-management of ageing in participant experience.

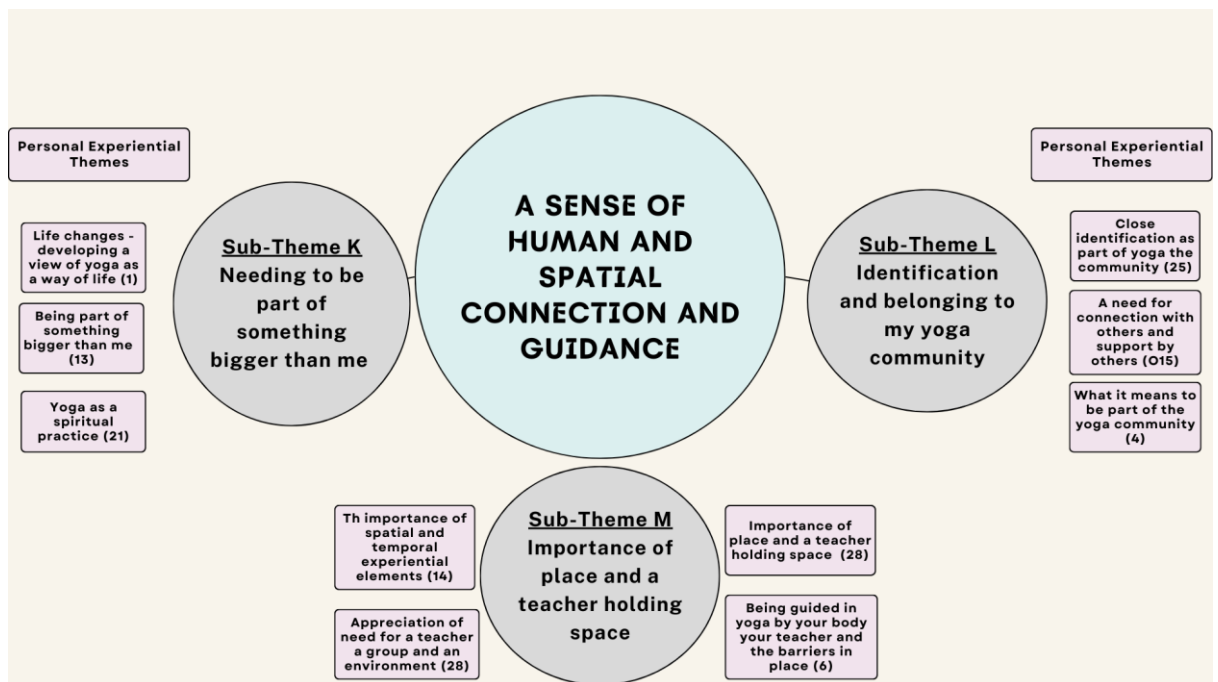


Figure 9: Thematic map of Classroom Group Experiential Theme (GET 2): A Sense of Human and Spatial Connection and Guidance

In this theme the sense of being connected took different manifestations. People expressed wanting to connect to something new or different as a result of life changes. Connection with people and space was also an important feature which was multifaceted but took a predominantly physical expression and was inextricably linked to relationships participants had built with their yoga group and teacher. The desire of participants to connect with something “bigger than themselves” will firstly be addressed. This will be followed by the sub-themes exploring the identification and connection with other people in the yoga community and to space.

### Sub-theme K: Needing to be Part of Something Bigger than Me

Some participants expressed the need to transcend everyday life and create new meanings in their life. Beau experienced a “need to change” and be part of something bigger, outside of work after being very successful in a highly pressured job:

*“I started when I needed to change my life, it was all part of lots of things happening. I had been working in a very stressful job, very long hours, mainly*

*me putting myself on a big team in the city and my life had been about that, I just had kids along the way. But it's been It's been about that for about 30 years. And I needed to change it because I didn't want to carry on like that. So, I needed to, I'm an all or nothing person, so I just wanted a radical change."*  
(0.0594 -1)

Beau described here being highly career motivated, almost prioritising that over her personal life by saying 'I just had kids along the way' which infers her career was the main focus. She was motivated to start yoga as part of a lifestyle change, which emerged as a highly emotional topic when she described it in her interview. A sense of radical 'all or nothing' change is expressed in how she makes sense of yoga now that she can fully commit to it. The ability she described to be able to "let go" and share a purpose through connection with other women was very important:

*"It means a way of life in a way, that means a form of exercise, a form of relaxation and form of clearing yourself mentally. So, it's all those things together. But it does become, has become part of my life and an important part of my life."* (0.0594-1)

Beau identifies yoga as an embodied practice which has physical (exercise) and psychological (relaxation) benefits which led to a recognition of the meaning it holds for her as "way of life". This suggests a seriousness of the leisure activity, and the desire to connect and commit to yoga as a leisure activity.

Although no other participants mentioned spirituality and philosophy, Holly identified with the ethereal, non-physical aspects of yoga as being "into all that", but demonstrated an inability to express exactly what "all that" was, suggesting some complexity about how spirituality featured in her yoga experience:

*"I love all the, you know, I like a bit of chanting, and a bit of an om (yoga chant), and, you know, kind of, like, I'm into all that, you know, I like to have the senses you know, inspired."* (0.0119-3)

Holly seemed to be hesitant here to discuss spirituality and used several language devices to navigate around addressing it directly. While only some participants used spiritual language such as “unity”, “zen”, and “peace” when discussing yoga, spirituality as a term was seldom mentioned. A divide appeared within the group where three participants mentioned spiritual elements while for others it did not feature or was avoided.

The elimination or avoidance of the term “spiritual” suggests this is not a part of all participants natural dialogue and there is a reluctance to identify with something ethereal or, as one participant described, the “airy fairy-ness” of yoga. For example, as Poppy more openly expressed “I try not to do anything like that”. This suggests the concept of spirituality is at most, light within the participants yoga experience, or they felt unable to talk about it, despite the spiritual foundations of yoga. In this way, the findings suggest that participants wish or desire to be part of something bigger but struggled to articulate what this meant. For some participants, being part of something bigger took the form of change, or finding a new direction, or commitment to a positive leisure activity such as yoga, rather than an ethereal or spiritual form.

## **Sub-theme L: Identification and Belonging to my Yoga Community**

A sense of belonging to a group was a strong sub-theme in this group as it was expressed as part of each participant’s experience. Participants identified that they felt part of a group when they attended yoga classes, which for some generated a sense of belonging, a deeper sense of personal relationship, and a strong sense of community. The exploration of this sub-theme starts with the group identity felt by participants.

Participants identified as part of a group whether they went to classes regularly or occasionally. Group identity seemed related to shared participation and purpose, rather than just the repeated contact with the same people through a sustained leisure activity.

Julie identified a shared group experience, although she does not regularly take the same class:

*“One thing you have in common is the fact that you've kind of rolled down your mat and, and stood on it so yeah, I think it's that sort of shared experience.”*  
(0.0121-4)

Julie seemed to appreciate the joining together for a shared purpose, but interestingly, associates standing together on a mat as a point of sharing, almost as if sharing the intention, is more important than the class itself. All classroom-based participants acknowledged the group experience, which was not dependent on knowing people in the class but on a sense of a shared purpose of doing yoga together.

Sasha explained that she ‘knows most people in the class and is aware that there was a social aspect to being part of a group which was important to her:

*“I suppose it is the social aspect of it, because you go in, everybody says good morning, we will have a quick chat and then it's down to the class, but it just feels a bit more sociable, doing it that way.”* (0.0220-2)

The portrayal of group interactions suggests that the social element of the class is important for Sasha. Her account showed how deeper levels of connection were built when relationships required an individual to relate and interact with each other, establishing mutual interests and values. Poppy described other group members as friends:

*“To see everybody that we normally see. So, all my friends, so that's always uplifting. Everyone's always, you know, really happy to see everybody. And it's (umm), it's a nice feeling.”* (0.0914-1)

The way Poppy describes being happy and uplifted to see other members of the group suggested a supportive and positive environment and the change in pronouns to “we” shows the extent to which this feels like a close group. Both Poppy and Beau extend the term friends to other group members, implying a depth of relationship which transcends

“just” a leisure practice. Whilst this is contained in the yoga experience it demonstrated the familial and personal role which this group has in Poppy’s life:

*“It was really nice to catch up with the normal group of friends that go to the Saturday morning class (umm) we've started you know, to share our, you know, stories about our yoga after the class.” (0.0914-2)*

The labelling of a “normal” group by Poppy suggests that the group and group members are fixed and suggests a closed nature to the group. Shared interests contribute to Poppy’s sense of group identity and “community”:

*“I have found that a community of people that go to the similar classes, I found that I share a lot of interests with those people.” (0.0914-31)*

Poppy describes the close relationship with other members of the group as accepting and welcoming:

*“Meeting up with a group of people who are sharing the same experiences, and you can laugh about the same things, I don't see these people really outside of the yoga class, maybe a couple of them, but in general, I don't see any of these people outside of any of the yoga classes, but I see them in the yoga classes. And I would count them as friends.” (0.0914-19)*

Whilst seeing the group as a community it appears to be limited to the space of the yoga class for Poppy which suggests a contradiction and a classification of friendship as those who are yoga friends and those who may be classed as social friends. Beau also explained that she had “made friends” through yoga whom she sees outside class and described as “yogi friends”:

*“I've made lots of friends through the yoga classes that I do as well, we've got a tight friendship.” (0.0484 – 5)*

This sub-theme explored the group dynamic as a community in yoga classes. Identification as part of a group was unrelated to whether people attended regularly or



not. This suggests that group identity arose from sharing a purpose (yoga) rather than any other situational or relational context. Being part of the group meant feeling supported and involved in a positive social experience, by being greeted when entering the class, and engaging in small talk. However, for participants who attended a regular class, this moved to a deeper feeling of community, illustrating the potential to transcend an activity-based friendship to develop into a deeper relationship.

### **Sub-theme M: The Importance of Class-based Place and the Teacher Holding Space**

Participants in this group saw their practice space as holding meaning. For some, this developed into an emotional sense of place. Hannah said:

*“My favourite place to go with the yoga, the (yoga studio name) because they had like lotuses as you went up and they had all the Buddhas in the studio they had the gong and the different yoga mats and bolsters and everything and that felt instantly very calm.” (0.0259-3)*

Whilst Hannah attached an emotional meaning to the ambience and decoration of the space, Beau felt a connection to some of the equipment such as her yoga mat which were part of her individual experience. This suggests that equipment and rituals are a key part of the yoga experience:

*“It (her yoga mat) just feels like an old friend or something so that’s really quite important. Yeah, almost creating your own space with it.” (0.028-1)*

While the physical nature of the space was important to participants, the teacher also played an important role. Participants bound their role to the creation of a sense of place. Holly said that “a teacher is holding that place for you”. All participants expressed a sense of relationship with the teacher suggesting a deep level of personal trust and

respect. Beau described feeling a close individual relationship with a deepness of individualised knowledge from the teacher:

*“She knows us very well. I know, I know when she tells me, and she knows how to talk to me so she’s doing it all the time during the during the class.” (0.0645 – 8)*

Beau describes the teacher knowing them very well to illustrate the depth of the relationship she has with her teacher. Holly agreed with the feeling of being connected to the teacher:

*“What I really like the community of it, I really like the connection and being connected to the teacher in the room with the teacher feeling that the teacher can really see what I’m doing.” (0.0753-2)*

In summary, the desire to be connected to the practice, a place, a group, and a teacher all emerged strongly in this theme. Yoga held significant meaning for some participants who described it as an important part of their life and demonstrated the seriousness of yoga in participants lives. Whilst this leisure activity allowed participants to transcend and potentially change their everyday lives, spirituality did not emerge as a strong sub-theme for participants. Some showed hesitancy or reluctance to adopt language with spiritual connotations suggesting that connecting to something ethereal was subtle if present at all.

The role of the group and the teacher emerged strongly in this group, which described a deep level of trust and personal connection to the teacher and a sense of shared purpose and group social connection. The teacher was respected and held with almost reverence to guide the class. Individual participants felt a close relationship with the teacher and linked that feeling of connection, being known, and developing trust to feeling part of a community, illustrating the important role of the teacher in community development. The feeling of community was established by a range of social interactions and the development of friendship within the group which enabled a positive group

experience and suggested relationships were a key part of this group's experience of yoga.

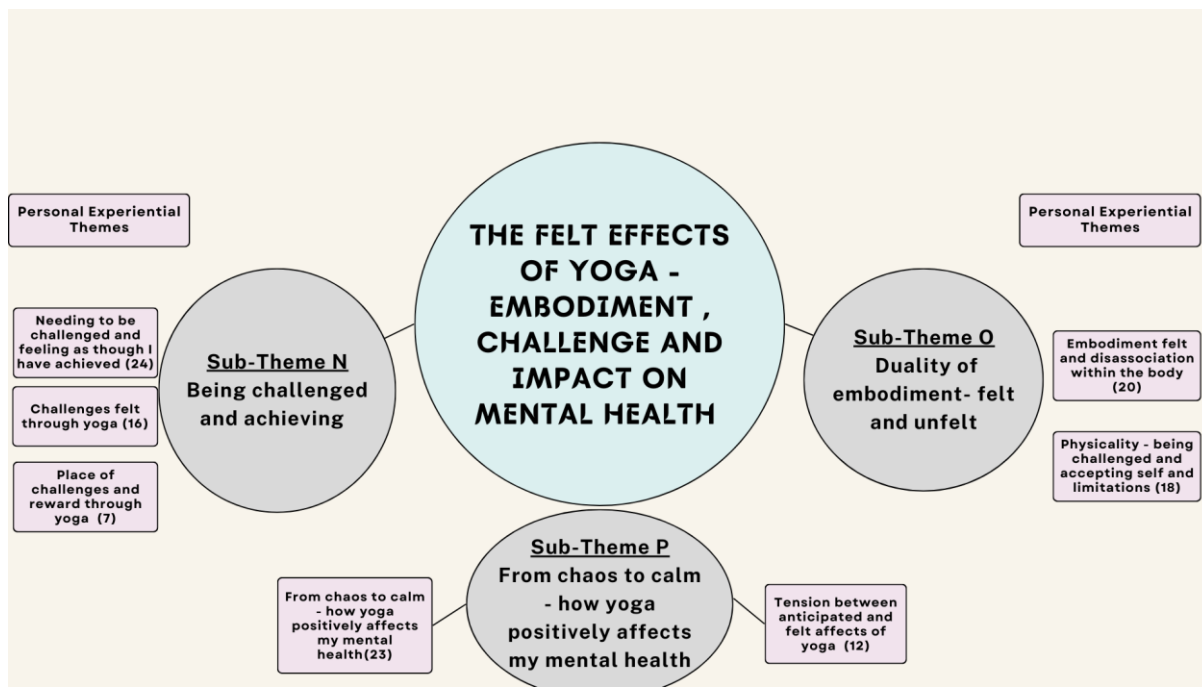


Figure 10: Thematic map of Classroom Group Experiential Theme (GET 3): The Felt Effects of Yoga - Embodiment, Challenge, and the Impact on Mental Health

The felt effects of yoga arose from participants’ discussions of the depth of their felt experience from both vlogs and interviews and takes a broad physical and non-physical context. Three subthemes are discussed here. The first sub-theme looks at how challenge is felt within yoga and the second examines the physical experience of how yoga is felt in the body. Lastly, the effect on mental health and how it is situated in the yoga experience are explored.

### Sub-theme N: Being Challenged and Achieving

Physical challenge was seen by participants in this sub-theme as firstly overcoming physical limitations and secondly becoming aware of how age affected them. Holly expressed concerns about going to class because of an issue she has with her hip:

*"I was a bit worried about going actually because (umm) because my hip has been playing up and I was thinking oh what am I doing to myself, you know is this is this a too much for long class." (0.054)*

Self-doubt about physicality and limitations could turn into a barrier to attending class, with "what am I doing" suggesting a lack of confidence in her decisions about what is right for her body. Conversely, Diane did not display this self-doubt but saw yoga as a positive remedy to injury:

*"I don't take any pain relief. Like, you know, I can't even feel my back now I can't feel any pain. And I know it is down to the strength and in and the flexibility and the yoga that that is what it's you know, thank goodness, you know, it's got fixed kind of thing." (0.0411-6)*

The belief that she can self-manage her condition was strong as she expressed that she missed yoga as she used it to "fix" her physical state. Whilst not all participants were managing health conditions, they universally desired a physical challenge. Poppy expressed a desire to be challenged within her ability:

*"If you're not being perhaps more challenged for me, in my head, I sort of think well, actually, how can I get a bit more out of this than more than I would normally do?" (0.0200-5)*

It was important to Poppy to be challenged at a level consistent with her ability and she was frustrated when she wasn't challenged enough:

*"She's never going to give you a more stretched class, or a more challenging class, which sometimes you feel, oh, I wish I could have had a try at doing the splits." (0.0085-1)*

Being over-challenged felt the opposite for participants as Holly said, "I don't know if I could do an hour". When the level of challenge was right, the sense of time felt altered as Beau explained:

*“If you’re lost in the moment, cliché, but that’s really when that happens, then the time goes by, you don’t, you’ve got no concept of how long anything is taking. Or if you can get yourself into that then goes very quickly, which is probably why it seems to go slowly when you’re trying to do something very difficult.” (0.0271-2)*

This suggests that the right level of challenge is conducive to the level of enjoyment and achieving the right balance between challenge and ability was important to allow for enjoyment. Julie expressed this as a sense of altering time:

*“Sometimes it can go really fast. And sometimes if I’m finding it you know, if you find it really challenging, you’re feeling really tired. You’re just like spending the time thinking, oh God, come on. Yeah, (laughs) are we there yet?” (0.089-3)*

Julie explains here that when the class is too difficult she finds that time slows down and the class feels longer which she expresses is frustrating by saying “are we there yet” seemingly wanting the class to end. Beau expanded the connection with time and proposed an altered conscious state where “time just disappears” and her mind “switches off completely”:

*“Some parts of a class, the time just disappears. I think that happens quite a lot, and there’s a class where we spend lot of time in relaxation at the end and she tells you you’re going to be in this pose for four minutes or whatever. You just think current status for four minutes(raises eyebrows). But you know, you probably sleep or go off. The mind is totally switched off, the time just goes.” (0.0271-2)*

Beau feels that the switch between conscious and subconscious state occurred regularly in her classes. A sense of doubt appears in her description that she could remain relaxed for four minutes but uses the word ‘off’ repeatedly to signal a switch into an altered state. This state is described as timeless where it just disappears and gives a sense of surrendering.

The group positively desired challenge, and when matched with ability this resulted in an optimum experience leading to enjoyment. When challenge exceeded ability this led to dissatisfaction, self-doubt, and a sense of time passing more slowly. Challenge was unique to each participant but was viewed as an important and continual part of their yoga experience and was rewarded by a sense of achievement after attending a yoga class.

### **Sub-theme O: Duality of Embodiment**

Participants explored embodiment as something felt physically in the body and felt in the mind. Physical embodiment presented in two ways: through physical limitations of age or injury, and through expectations and acceptance of how yoga was felt by the physical body. Sasha expressed some anxiety about ageing, but also lives with a physical limitation:

*“So, I’m quite wary to take a bit more care so that I don’t cause any other you know, any, any more injury. It’s something I’ve I’ve lived with for years. I used to do gymnastics when I was younger, and I think I was born with the twisted pelvis, but I did gymnastics, and I probably went hell for leather you know you don’t realise do you when you’re younger.” (0.0305-6)*

This anxiety around her physicality is based on a sense of fragility, which could be more associated with age or body confidence. The heightened awareness of her body and having to “protect myself” starkly contrasts with her younger self “going hell for leather”. This suggests a changing identification with her physical self from a reckless to a protective state that feels fragile.

*“It’s given me body confidence, for a start hugely. In just accepting what my body is like, not that I’ve suddenly got this great body, but just accepting that that’s what I am and who I am.” (0.0090)*

More positively Holly expanded the concept of physicality by describing how yoga has given her body confidence which suggests she did not have it before, and yoga provided

that for her. For Holly, yoga was a remedy for lack of body confidence and became a tool for body and mind to enable positive overall well-being:

*"It's in my toolbox of how to feel better in my mind and my body." (0.0400-3)*

For Beau the word "toolbox" has therapeutic connotations as it allows her to feel better and is applied as a way to remedy mind and body. Beau experienced deepening levels of embodiment from beginning yoga at 40 years old to now being a regular part of her life. Like Holly, she described a progression to self-acceptance and to a deeper sense of affirming her sense of self:

*"At the beginning, it was, it was more than the feelings that I got were more about a relief and an acceptance of who I was. So that was the first stage that I went through. And now I guess it's an affirmation of that." (0.0067 -2)*

The reason for Beau's deepening feeling of embodiment was how she physically feels after practising yoga, which was peaceful and relaxed. She described the "irony" that she has finally realised that mind-body connection can bring peace. As Beau earlier expressed; coming to yoga after having a very driven career suggests she may have been previously doubtful a balanced mind and body could be realised.

*"Afterwards, definitely a similar relaxed, peaceful feel. And that you know, the irony, the irony, the balanced mind body really does happen, it happens all the time." (0.0130 -2)*

Embodiment for Beau and Holly blended into a more metaphysical form which integrated their sense of union of mind and body. Whilst Beau expressed integration of an embodied self, Julie displayed some disassociation between mind and body when discussing the acceptance of her present physical body while doing yoga:

*"I've just naturally come up against obstacles in my body because my body just really didn't want to do things that I wanted it to do. So I really had to battle with some of those things. Like particularly with my hips, I've got quite tight*



*hips so there are some things I just you know, my hips would never let me do.”*  
(0.0389-1)

Julie describes there a battle with her own body and being restricted and limited. Whilst introducing that she has ‘naturally faced’ obstacles, she then refers to these physical obstacles as ‘things’ which deepens a sense of lack of control over ageing and disassociation.

*“Probably would never they will let me do a lotus (yoga posture), you know, but, so I really had to kind of let go of kind of thinking that I should be able to do stuff and and I probably just become, I think much more relationship with my body than I was before.”* (0.0349-1)

Julie continues to compartmentalise her body by describing her legs as “they” and her body as “it”, which contradicted her later statement that she is more self-accepting, suggesting that the relationship with her body is fractious:

*“The challenges... just is about accepting my body and the way that it's built, and you know, the things they'd like to do and the things it doesn't like to do.”*  
(0.0349-2)

*“I'm also aware I have to listen to my body and not push it, particularly at the moment.”* (0.0156 – 7)

Her notion of the body as “it” infers separateness between the body and the self and therefore a sense of dualism when thinking of the mind and body. The words ‘I have to listen’ and ‘push’ also describe a force and struggle with the sense of what her body wants. Conversely, in other instances, Hannah described how yoga heightens her sense of awareness compared to other forms of exercise and referred to the aligned body in the first person:

*“It's the one class where I am sort of mind, body and soul fully aligned, and that, you know, everything is connected. And it just gives me that inner peace, serenity, and that full awareness.”* (0.0599-9)

The ability for Hannah to see her body as apart and also part of an aligned “whole” shows the complexity of the felt self in the lived experience. The existence of both monistic and dualistic views of the mind and body seem to be opposed in the sense of the self moving through being separate but also aligned.

A key finding in this sub-theme is the duality of embodiment that emerged. Some participants seemed to contradict themselves by displaying dissociation with their bodies but also expressing acceptance. Whereas others expressed feeling acceptance and alignment which when experienced, led to increased body confidence and well-being.

### **Sub-theme P: From Chaos to Calm – How Yoga Positively Affects my Mental Health**

There was an undercurrent through the interviews that yoga was a positive leisure activity, but some participants made distinct observations about their mental health. Some participants linked starting or continuing yoga classes to the popular opinion that it can help with stress. Poppy identified her yoga class as a way to overcome her recent stress, resulting in relaxation and focus, which had a calming effect and alleviated some of her anxiety:

*“After the class, I definitely always feel so much more relaxed, so much more focused, because sometimes I can be almost like before the class, not a irrational thinking, but slightly at the end of the day, it's like a bit of working day, it's a bit of what you've had enough of the day now. Whereas when you come back in, then you're a bit more calm.” (0.00171-3)*

Many participants mentioned that they started yoga to self-manage stress. Hannah said:

*“So, it was mostly due to stress that I found yoga and fell in love with it.”  
(0.0021-1)*

Hannah expressed that stress led her to finding yoga. The use of the word ‘found’ suggests a greater depth than just starting yoga and this seriousness is confirmed by following up with a strong emotive use of ‘fell in love’ with yoga. The association of stress management with yoga continued after the initial attraction for Beau:

*“It just gives, it gives me that peace, calm. So, I like stretching but I also like, I suppose the, I suppose just time to just be and be in the flow. It’s therapeutic.”*  
(0.0208-4)

The use of the word “therapeutic” suggests a seriousness of self-care and links back to earlier connotations of therapeutic language of the toolbox used by Beau. Hannah described practising yoga for self-care, and linked her practice to improvements in her overall well-being, which was a far-reaching positive effect of her practice:

*“I think for my mental health, my emotional well-being for the physical aspect as well in terms of stretching.”* (0.0252-3)

Hannah’s description signifies that she feels yoga is unique as an embodied leisure practice in which benefits are physical, psychological, and emotional.

Yoga was shown in this theme to allow participants to self-manage their physical well-being, making it an important part of their self-care, but also unified the mind and the body. Participants were challenged by limitations in their bodies but also sought challenge from the yoga practice. This nuance created a delicate balance in the challenge of meeting but not exceeding their ability, which altered their sense of time and consciousness when met. Challenge also appeared through self-acceptance and moving towards a sense of embodiment where the mind and body felt aligned which held deep emotional meaning for participants.

## **Connecting IPA Analysis of Classroom Yoga with Conceptual Development in Leisure Studies**

The preceding IPA analysis of the classroom yoga experience has been analysed without reference to the extant literature in line with the IPA methodology (Smith et al. 2009) to enable the analysis to be inductively led. Therefore, in order to connect the large amount of detailed qualitative data emerging, the following discussion will connect the findings of the classroom yoga participants to research within leisure studies. This chapter links the three Group Experiential Themes, as discussed in Chapter 7, to conceptual development within leisure studies. Firstly, the area of Evolving Sense of Self for Mid-life Women will be discussed, which emerged from the findings discussed from GET 1: Acceptance and Evolving Sense of Self (see analysis on p.149). Secondly, Human and Spatial connection will be discussed, which emerged from the findings of GET 2: A Sense of Human and Spatial Connection and Guidance (see analysis on p.157) Finally, Embodiment and Wellbeing will be discussed, which emerged from GET 3: The Felt Effects of Yoga – Embodiment and the Impact on Mental Health (see analysis on p.164).

### **The Evolving Sense of Self for Mid-life Women**

The first theme to emerge was the evolving sense of self which included the women's journey from embodiment to a sense of physical and emotional transformation. As this sub-theme of Transformation of the Self (see p.134) and Women and Ageing (p.138) was explored in conjunction with extant literature in the online group discussion, the present discussion will not repeat the more general literature and observations which were detailed in the previous discussions. Instead, in this section, the evolving sense of self will detail how self-awareness and embodiment, transformation, guilt of 'me- time' and the role of ageing played a part in the evolving sense of self for classroom yoga participants.

Similar to the online group findings, these participants showed a high level of self-awareness, which supports the aim of yoga described by many traditional yoga texts (Feuerstein 2008). However, the self was presented by classroom participants both subjectively and objectively due to the presence of others in the classroom environment, which will be discussed in turn. The objective sense of self is one where the focus of attention is directed to the individual self (Silvia and Duval 2001). In this research, the objective sense of self was viewed from monistic and dualistic participant perspectives, with some dissociation with body parts such as “my body is telling me” and referring to the body as “it” and limbs as “them”. This view aligns with Morley’s (2001) work on the phenomenology of the body, which explores our tendency to “separate the outer body in contact with the external world from the inner body which we carry around inside ourselves” (p. 76). However, when participants were asked to summarise more deeply what yoga meant to them it was described from an embodied perspective including both mind and body “where everything is connected”.

This acknowledgement of a multi-layered sense of embodiment which is more than corporeal emerged from participants and is further discussed conceptually later in this section (p.179). This sense of embodiment agreed with Allen-Collinson and Owton’s (2015) research on women and distance running, who concluded that embodiment led to heightened sense of corporeal awareness but also shifted between an internal and external focus.

The multi-layered sense of embodiment moves away from viewing emotions and cognition as separate from the body and supports Sharma (2021) and Morley’s (2001) assertion that yoga research should consider the lived body more. This finding of the alignment of mind and body, as opposed to a purely physical embodied practice occurring alongside disassociation with the physical body, is a novel finding within yoga research.

In this PhD study, however, the participants’ sense of embodiment was not straightforward, changing from a monistic to dualistic view of the mind and the body and was both a subjective and objective experience of the lived body. The subjective self

was also felt by the classroom group and reflects relational observations of the world (Moskalenko and Heine 2003) such as feeling self-conscious. Some participants felt self-conscious about being seen and judged by others, which emerged as self-doubt about appearance and ability. This supports existing yoga research which found pervasive self-consciousness (Coombs and Thorn 2014; Uebelacker et al. 2021) to be a major theme. In yoga, subjectivity is encouraged through a reflective, subjective life (Lea 2009) where participants' self-awareness seems to be enhanced through yoga. In opposition to this more positive aspect of subjectivity, participants self-consciousness in this study was influenced by being with other people. These findings diverge from the idea that social dimensions are important in yoga (Moadel et al. 2007) and questions the need for group involvement in a leisure experience. Arguably, while self-awareness was present, the sense of self could be restricted by the continuous influence of the presence of others, which could disrupt the experience and act as a distraction, as is evidenced in this study's classroom group.

### **Transformation in Classroom Yoga**

This study of classroom yoga suggests that yoga is both a reflective leisure practice and has the power to move from self-awareness and embodiment to a sense of transformation. The concept of physical and emotional transformation in yoga ran through all participants' accounts, with participants expressing that "everything feels better afterwards". Yoga was seen as "a fix", reflecting the transformational benefits of the practice (Ernst and Lee 2010; Ross and Thomas 2010; Kidd and Eatough 2017). In this PhD study it was often used as a way to self-manage both physical and emotional needs of participants and therefore acted as a form of health management (Cramer et al. 2016). The sense of self-management and transformation was seen by participants both in the short and long term, often short-term fixes and longer term transformation of the self. One participant described her yoga experience as developing a longer term relationship with her body linking to a deeper sense of embodiment. Whilst Duerden et al. (2019) described transformation as "changes in self-perception and behaviour" (p. 208) when defining an extraordinary experience, participants suggested that while positive transformation were felt in the short and long term it was also described as

“always” happening, framing it as a constant rather than a transitory part of the yoga lived experience.

### **Guilt in Leisure Time**

Whilst classroom yoga was seen to have transformational properties, it was also associated with guilt. Guilt was felt in this classroom group in two ways, firstly that it was felt time for themselves was indulgent, and secondly that time for leisure was justified as also benefitting others.

The concept of taking time for themselves was described as “selfish” and “self-indulgent” by participants in this study. Previous research (Henderson and Bialeschki 1991; Little 2002) on entitlement, guilt, and prioritisation of self in leisure research has mixed results. In this study participants felt yoga was valued “me time” but struggled with guilt and priority. Lloyd and Little (2010), in their study of women’s psychological well-being in leisure, found that women valued time to do something intentional for themselves, free of obligation. However, Henderson et al. (1989) found resistance and guilt as part of the leisure experience for women, as did Henderson and Bialeschki (1991). Their latter study concluded that, for women, their leisure was contingent on prioritising work and family and therefore their “leisure was usually of lowest priority” (p. 61). Stalp (2006) also found that women quilters identified gendered feelings of guilt when dedicating time and space to a leisure activity, which meant a negotiation of time and responsibilities. It must be acknowledged that in this classroom yoga group, time featured more heavily for this group than for the online group for two main reasons. Firstly, travel to and from class added a time commitment. Secondly, classroom classes are typically of fixed length whereas participants in online classes can select the duration, which may explain the feeling of guilt which was unique to this group.

Another aspect of guilt for the women participating in yoga was the need to justify time for themselves as of benefit to others. One participant described how yoga made her feel better and followed with the statement “it helped everybody actually”. This PhD research found that prioritisation of leisure was questioned by participants and part of the justification of allowing themselves this time was that it would benefit others. This

raises questions about the relationship between women's guilt and taking leisure time and how the need for "me time" through leisure can be negotiated to be guilt-free. Shannon and Shaw (2005) observed that women took time for leisure only after gendered tasks and family responsibilities were complete. This finding differs from Kidd and Eatough's (2017) results about male yoga practitioners, for whom guilt about leisure time was absent. As such, gender appeared to be a factor in the experience of classroom yoga and raises the complexity of women's "me time" in leisure.

While other leisure research has acknowledged guilt (Henderson and Bialeschki 1991; Stalp 2006), this PhD research focuses on women aged mostly 40–50 years, a time when changing identity occurs as a consequence of menopause. Therefore, this PhD research provides a novel insight into "me time", guilt and gender in leisure research through classroom yoga participation.

### **The Role of Ageing**

Almost all participants described themselves as "getting older" with age, described emotively as a negative physical limitation and a future fear for the self. This replicates the findings from Cox et al. (2022) and Humberstone and Cutler-Riddick (2015), who found that older women yoga practitioners viewed their bodies negatively. In this section, the role of ageing, nostalgia and also the potential self-management will be discussed alongside the distinct opportunity of classroom yoga to offer an example of aspirational ageing.

Participants in the classroom group described age as a physical limitation with emotive and drastic language, such as describing the body as a "wreck". Neumark and Sztainer (2018) found that, for middle-aged women, positive and negative body image are not mutually exclusive. These findings question whether the simplistic link between yoga and body confidence (Halliwell 2019) needs to be expanded to include mid-life women more specifically.



The women in this study are at a time of change, with menopausal symptoms potentially affecting their physical and emotional well-being. Some participants directly attribute the choice to start yoga as “time for a change” and related to making positive leisure choices due to life stage of menopause. Humberstone and Cutler-Riddick (2014) concluded in their research (which focused on a slightly older demographic of an average age of 56.5 years), that older women’s view of their body was “not one of decline and lack of control but of mutable accomplishment and integration of body and mind” (p. 1221). While this PhD study found that participants experience a similar sense of integration from yoga, it showed that some participants specifically felt a lack of control over ageing. Therefore, rather than this PhD research concluding that classroom yoga creates a positive body image, the research recognises the complexity of the ageing body narrative also felt in classroom yoga. The complexity around changing physical and emotional identity seems prevalent in women aged mostly 40–50 years, which determined leisure choices such as starting yoga, and how they attributed meaning to their leisure time.

While participants viewed ageing negatively, they also viewed yoga as a leisure activity which counters the negative effects of ageing, supporting Liechty et al.’s (2016) finding that women used sports to reduce age-related changes. A sense of self-care and self-managing ageing through yoga emerged in this research for the classroom-based participants, with one describing yoga as a “fountain of youth”, suggesting an almost mythical idea that yoga keeps her young. This contrasts with the primarily negative associations with age in previous research of women and yoga (Cox et al 2022). Yoga emerges as a leisure activity that allows participants to actively self-manage ageing, expanding knowledge of how leisure can be utilised for maintaining good health in mid-life.

A distinct feature of classroom yoga is the presence of others. The previously discussed potential self-consciousness is countered by the positive presence of older yoga participants in class which for some participants in this study were seen as aspirational. The potential for classroom yoga to promote aspirational ageing would provide a positive view of ageing through leisure that would have value to yoga teachers and

providers, who could promote positive ageing for women to enhance the yoga experience.

## **Human and Spatial Connection**

The classroom group was distinct from those participating online in that yoga occurred in a fixed space and was a shared social leisure activity leading to the following discussion of human and spatial connection. Classroom participants felt connected to the place and space where they practised yoga, and experienced human connection to a group and a teacher, which will be explored in the following section.

### **Connection to Space and Place**

Participants confirmed that they felt a yoga studio was a “dedicated space” which held significance for half of the participants. Previous research found the importance of space and place, and that place is related to social interaction and the formation of social structures (Glover 2017). In leisure studies, space is associated with the practitioners who use it, which leads to the sense of place. Smale (2006) furthered this view by describing the understanding of how place influences behaviour, but also found that place shapes perception and defines leisure experiences.

The sense of place was developed for some participants who showed a preference for a tailored yoga space with decor reflecting spiritual connotations such as Buddhas. Participants felt this differentiated the space in which they practised yoga as a dedicated place for yoga rather than a general leisure space. This PhD research contrasted with the view that spirituality is part of the yoga experience (Bowers and Cheer 2017). Participants either showed reluctance or displayed a pseudo-spirituality of being a “yogi” through preference of spiritual connotations within the space they practised yoga. This begins to highlight the role of spirituality in modern yoga and questions whether yoga and spirituality have become appropriated and commoditised in the modern, secular world (Markula 2014). Newcombe’s (2019) review of the space of yoga

found that the merging of symbols would leave “a post-secular or spiritual impression without pointing towards any specific affiliation” (p. 568). Equipment such as bolsters supported the sense of symbolism and ritual, which began to emerge through participants such as Beau, who described her yoga mat as being “like an old friend”. This concurs with the participants wanting yoga symbolism, which confirms the link of space and the creation of place in this study of classroom yoga.

The finding from this PhD study that space and place of yoga are linked to socio-cultural dimensions, refute Casey’s (1993) traditional emphasis on place and aligns more closely to the conceptual discussion that space and place are changing constructs in leisure (Henderson and Frelke 2000). The combination of the physical space and the associated environment (such as equipment and décor) pushes the boundaries of space in a similar way to Cook-Cottone’s (2017) study, in which the yoga studio was an embodied space which can positively affect the experience. In Cook-Cottone’s (2017) study, the embodiment of space was defined as “the ability to sense and feel through the body in the present moment” (p. 87).

This PhD research suggests that the design of a yoga space has a meaning for participants and is associated with the practice of people who use the place (Henderson and Frelke 2000) as a key role in the embodied leisure experience.

### **Connection to a Group**

The shared space and construction of place in classroom yoga fostered a feeling of community for participants. This became apparent in participants’ descriptions changing from “I” to “us” and “we”, referring to the other group participants and showing some reticence to non-regular attendees of the class.

Participant thoughts such as “I like the community feel of it” suggested that, in this classroom group, shared purpose was felt which bound together classroom yoga participants as a community. Whilst this view of community can contribute to shaping and re-constructing women’s identities (Green 1998), not all participants specifically labelled their group a “community”, but this was often inferred by referencing terms

such as group dynamics, friendship and a sense of a shared experience and purpose. The question of whether the classroom yoga participants could be considered a community can be discussed using Wegner's (1998) three defining elements of a community practice: mutual engagement, a shared repertoire of practice and joint enterprise, which will now be explored.

Mutual engagement (Wegner 1998) and a sense of belonging to a group emerged mostly when participants went to regular classes and knew the other people in the class. This echoes other researchers who have conceptualised yoga as a connected group practice, with social interaction and cohesion a key part of the yoga experience (Gard et al. 2014; Alsobrook 2015). The sense of connection was also felt by participants who didn't attend a regular class, a novel finding, suggesting just the act of sharing a leisure experience contributes to a sense of connection.

Participants identified that there was "a social aspect" to attending their yoga class and most participants identified as a member of a group with a "shared purpose" or shared repertoire of practice (Wegner 1998). Participants began to feel deep levels of connection, which supports an extended and more liquid view of what a community can mean in a leisure setting. The sense of a supportive group emerged throughout, with half of the group describing people they attended the class with as "friends". This suggests a deeper level of engagement in personal relationships and loosely fits the joint enterprise dimension (Wenger 1998) and the development of *communitas* (Turner 2012) and suggests the yoga group could be a social world (Unruh 1980).

This PhD research adds some distinction to the types of friendship exhibited in classroom yoga by extending beyond an activity level friendship. All participants observed some level of relationship with others in their yoga class, but some identified a deeper friendship which transcended the classroom. Coleman and Iso-Ahola (1993) furthered the discussion of leisure as a basis for relationships, concluding that leisure activities are "highly social in nature and facilitate development of friendships" (p. 111). The acknowledgement of friendship being part of the classroom yoga experience agrees with early leisure research about friendship being a highlight of leisure practice for

women (Green 1998). In this PhD study the shared purpose and sense of connection were felt regardless of the regularity of place of practice and suggests the potential of a placeless leisure experience. This diverges from yoga literature that links a feeling of social interaction as part of the experience of classroom yoga (Cox et al. 2022), as this research suggests that, while not placeless (Henderson and Frelke 2000), a consistent space is not necessarily required for a sense of place to emerge as part of the yoga leisure experience.

### **Connecting With and Being Guided by a Teacher**

The yoga teacher played a crucial role in creating a sense of place for participants, with one participant describing the teacher as metaphorically “holding space” in the room. Participants felt they needed the teacher to challenge them which offered a feeling of progression and achievement, and challenge was desired by most participants. The teacher created a positive atmosphere of respect and trust with participants perceiving the relationship as one of depth (Humberstone and Cutler-Riddick 2015 and 2018; Cox et al. 2022). Humberstone and Cutler-Riddick (2015) found that their participants were inspired by the verbalisation of the teacher’s perspective about older women and appreciated their sensitivity when talking about the physical body. Similarly, in the present research, one participant labelled older group members as “inspirational”, in contrast with the negative way ageing was perceived throughout the study. Other research has found that positive ageism is important and that a teacher being “accepting, non-judgmental and supportive of body autonomy” (Cox et al. 2022, p. 463) supports participants’ confidence and self-acceptance. Limited research exists on the meaning of the teacher within a yoga or leisure setting, but Sharma (2008) found that women trust a teacher who is accepting, encourages challenge and builds community through a positive dialogue with yoga participants. The importance of the teacher emerged in the classroom group by the meaning of teacher interactions which shaped and enriched the overall experience of the participants.

## **Embodiment and Well-being**

The felt effects that made participants describe yoga as 'different' were the fact that yoga was seen as embodied, aligning mind and body, which was seen to positively affect participants' well-being.

As previously discussed in the literature review (see Chapter 2) and the conceptual discussion of the online group (see p.134), embodiment in this research extended from the fleshy body, which participants linked with their overall sense of wellbeing. This links to the assertion that yoga is an embodied practice designed to unite mind and body (Newcombe 2009) and extends this to recognise that well-being emerges in connection with the specific embodied experience (Mansfield et al. 2020). This was expressed through participants such as Hannah, who linked embodiment and well-being and felt yoga was "for my mental health, my emotional well-being and for the physical aspect". Some participants described it as their "peace" or even as "therapy", and this supports the idea that the overall aim of yoga is to improve well-being and related subjective and psychological well-being (Ivtzan and Papantoniou 2014; Jarry et al. 2017). Participants supported this by associating their yoga practice with self-care and self-management, which have been previously found by studies (Gard et al. 2014) and supports the role of leisure as a vehicle for well-being.

Well-being and leisure have been historically linked (Impett et al. 2016), but the concept is not without debate. Gibson questioned the recognition of this outside of leisure studies with "Haven't we been advocating well-being through leisure since the beginning?" (In Silk et al. 2017, p. 156). Well-being and mental health were terms used interchangeably by participants and it is recognised that research linking yoga and mental health are complex (Park et al. 2015). Previous studies linking the two have often been outside of the leisure studies realm and have been quantitative with varying results (Pilkington et al. 2005, Pasco et al. 2015) and while not the focus of this research can offer some insight.

Two core points emerge from the findings of this PhD research which could extend the understanding of how yoga as a leisure activity is able to affect well-being positively. Firstly, that well-being and mental health are some of the reasons classroom participants started and maintained their yoga practice. Participants often cited stress as a reason they started yoga, supporting Park et al.'s (2016) findings that most people initiate a yoga practice due to stress relief or relaxation. Limited research exists, however, of why people continue their yoga practice. A finding expressed in this classroom group was that participants felt well-being was a reason to maintain classroom yoga, which offers potential to motivate people to adopt and continue yoga as a positive leisure activity.

The second point to emerge was that participants felt yoga transcended the purely physical realm to a leisure activity that was used as a pro-active positive "tool" to manage well-being. One participant described yoga as becoming a "way of life". This in particular situates classroom yoga and supports Patterson et al.'s (2016) view that yoga and its social world could be considered a serious leisure activity, which is "more than a physical practice and an entire way of life" (p. 306). This extends the meaning of embodiment to be more than just the meaning of the fleshy body to be a part of the meaning linking it to the self-management of participants well-being.

## **Summary**

This chapter started with a detailed IPA analysis of research participants' vlogs and interview material for the classroom yoga experience. The exploration of the three Group Experiential Themes: GET 1: Acceptance and Evolving Sense of Self (see p. 149); GET 2: A Sense of Human and Spatial Connection and Guidance (see p. 157) and GET 3: The Felt Effects of Yoga –Embodiment, Challenge, and the Impact on Mental Health (see p. 164) were all explored in the chapter. The connection of the themes that emerged from the analysis allowed three key areas of conceptual discussion familiar to leisure studies namely: Evolving Sense of Self, Human and Spatial Connection and Embodiment and Well-Being.

The first concept to be discussed, the evolving sense of self, was illustrated by the ability of participants becoming more self-aware in yoga, which was linked to the view that yoga was an embodied practice. This aligns with previous leisure research that described links between embodiment and greater conscious body awareness (Allen-Collinson and Owton 2015) and the discussion of online yoga in this study. The finding in this PhD research extended this view by observing that classroom yoga created a sense of objective and subjective self. The objective self emerged as having both elements of monism and dualism and suggested that embodiment was not a static state but one that was multi-layered and variable. The distinct context of being within a classroom with other people also meant that embodiment shifted between an internal and external focus, with participants feeling self-conscious about their ability or appearance. While self-consciousness has shown to be part of the yoga experience (Coombs and Thorn 2014) it also has potential to restrict the experience (Lea 2009). These findings question the broad assumption that social dynamics in leisure are positive and, more specifically, that social dimensions are important in yoga (Moadel et al. 2007).

Both physical and emotional transformation emerged regularly in participants' accounts of their yoga experience, but this experience was also associated with guilt in classroom yoga participants. Yoga as "me time" was viewed as an "indulgence" and some justified this time by expressing how it benefitted others. Guilt has previously been associated with women and leisure (Henderson and Bialeschki 1991), as has women needing to negotiate time for leisure around family commitments (Stalp 2006). The research findings suggest that, in classroom yoga, guilt and prioritisation of time exists for women choosing yoga as a leisure activity. This finding contrasts to Kidd and Eatough's (2017) study on male yoga participants, who prioritised time for their yoga practice and suggests differences in prioritisation for women yoga participants.

Whilst in this research women viewed ageing negatively similar to other studies (Cox et al. 2022), they also expressed positive elements linking yoga and age. The first was that yoga was seen as a positive pro-active leisure activity to manage the ageing process, and the second was that classroom yoga in particular gave the opportunity for examples of aspirational ageing. This suggests that the visibility of older people enables a positive



example of ageing in classroom yoga which could be motivational for all yoga participants.

The second conceptual area to be discussed was the connection to space, place, and other people. This PhD research furthered understanding of space for yoga through the value placed in equipment in the classroom (such as mats) and décor being seen as part of the ritual to the creation of a sense of place in yoga, and is supportive of the concept of embodiment of space (Cook-Cottone 2017). Questions have previously been raised about how equipment and rituals symbolised a spiritual impression (Newcombe 2009). This is supported by the finding that participants recognised spiritual connotations rather than expressing spirituality specifically, which suggests a complicated view of the role of spirituality in modern classroom yoga.

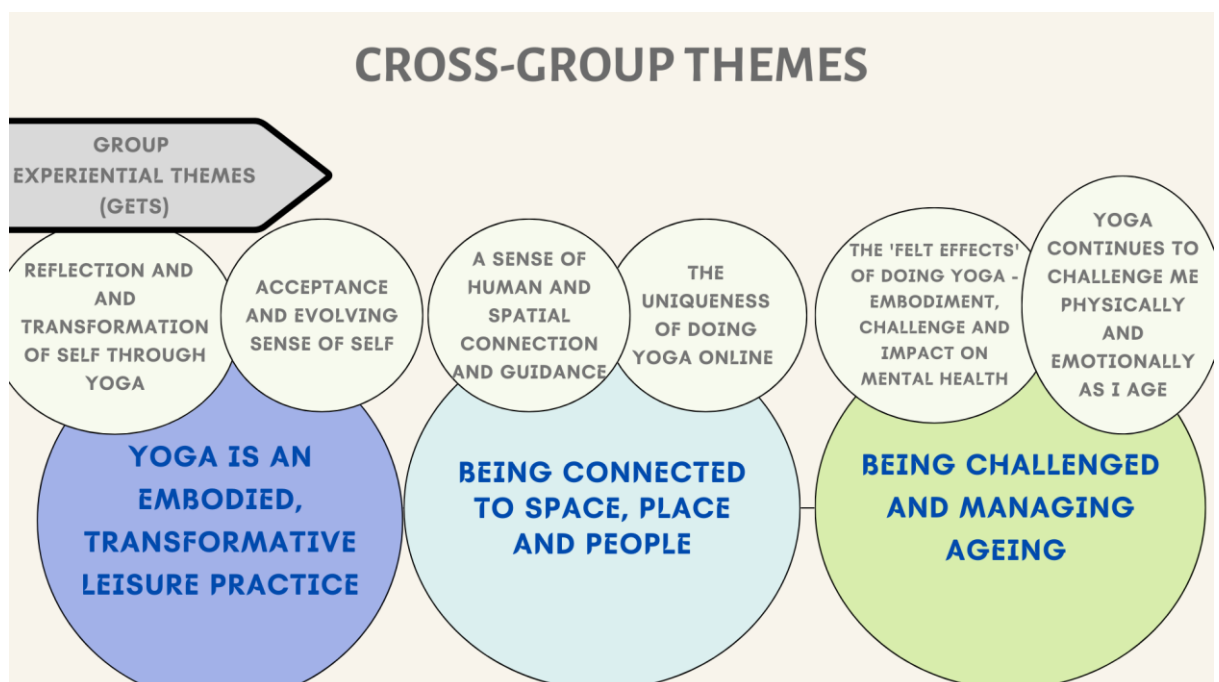
Additionally, a sense of place was developed through both the connection to other people in the yoga class and the teacher. Yoga participants in this study felt a shared purpose and agreed that social interaction was a key part of the yoga experience (Gard et al. 2014). This sense of connection allowed friendships to develop through leisure and meant the close relationship with the teacher enriched the participants' yoga experience. The sense of connection to others aligns with previous yoga literature (Moadel et al. 2007; Gard et al. 2014), but this study found that, further to this, connection was felt regardless of attendance at a regular class, which has not previously been researched. Therefore, for some participants in this study a sense of place was felt through a shared sense of purpose, not just a regular space for classroom yoga.

The third conceptual area to be discussed was well-being. Classroom participants viewed their embodied yoga experience as positively affecting their mental health and overall well-being, making them feel better on and off the mat. This links to the original aim of yoga as uniting mind and body (Newcombe 2009) and in this study, motivated participants to commit to a regular yoga practice. Impett et al. (2006) observed the potential that yoga could positively impact embodiment and overall well-being, which this PhD study echoes.

The classroom participants viewed yoga as a leisure activity that was an important part of their lifeworld which allowed for management of self and ageing and provided a social network. The depth of meaning yoga had for these classroom participants links all of the concepts discussed above, the embodied self, connection, and well-being, and culminated in participants that viewed yoga as a positive leisure activity that can proactively support, enrich, and manage their individual lives.

## Chapter 8: Discussion of Cross-Group Themes and the Flow Experience

This chapter presents an overview of the shared (cross-group) and non-shared experiences of online and classroom-based yoga. By bringing together the two identified contemporary communities of yoga participation, the discussion aims to demonstrate how the overall findings can be interpreted through the theory of flow. Three shared features of the lived experience of all participants are identified as occurring in both online and classroom yoga: Yoga is an Embodied, Transformative Leisure Practice, Being Connected to Space, Place and People and Being Challenged and Managing Ageing. The figure below illustrates the mapping of the all of the six Group Experiential Themes (GETs) from each group (online discussed on pgs. 134-145 and classroom on pgs. 172-182) to the cross-group (shared) themes presented here.



*Figure 11: Thematic map of the six Group Experiential Themes (GETS) and Relationship to the three Cross-Group (shared) Themes*

## **Yoga is an Embodied, Transformative Leisure Practice**

Participants in both groups expressed a sense of being transformed physically and emotionally through their yoga experience. Elements that appeared to lead to the sense of transformation across both groups (shared) were an increased awareness of the self and the feeling that yoga was an embodied leisure activity that aligned their mind and body. Elements that were different (non-shared) were the sense of self-consciousness and guilt felt by the classroom participants. Each of these elements will now be discussed.

Both groups identified self-awareness as part of their yoga experience, which is considered as one of the original aims of yoga (Cope 2018) and is seen as part of the leisure experience (Samdhal and Kleiber 1989). The descriptions of participants yoga experience demonstrated physical and psychological unity which led to an overall sense of an embodied practice and contributes to this researcher's view that embodiment is not limited to the fleshy body. This agrees with research that suggests embodiment encompasses internal and the external elements (Cook-Cottone 2020).

The sense of embodiment was however not straightforward. Participant observations of self included dissociated description of bodily parts as "it" or "them" which is reflective of a Cartesian separation. This supports Morley's (2001) view that it is a habitual tendency to separate but that "yoga not only affirms the existence of the outside world but employs the perceptual relations between the self and the world" (p.75). This PhD research suggests that the sense of embodiment was felt discretely during the yoga experience rather than as a constant. The presence of both disassociation and alignment of mind and body expressed by participants in this study highlight the complexity of the participants' view of the embodied self as both separate and whole.

A distinction between the two groups was that in the classroom group, due to the presence of other people, the sense of self was both objective and subjective as suggested by Morley (2001). The subjective self reflects the relational observations of the world (Moskalenko and Heine 2003) and in the classroom research emerged by participants feeling self-conscious about their ability or their appearance. This is in opposition to online yoga participants who did not feel self-conscious and some who chose to practice online to actively avoid other people. While leisure research supports a more positive view of how social dynamics influence leisure (Stebbins 2018) and yoga (Moadel et al. 2007) this research questions whether the presence of others restricts the embodied yoga experience.

Yoga as a transformative leisure practice was felt by both groups and was described as “me time” but a distinction was that the classroom group experienced guilt. A feeling of guilt was prevalent in the classroom group where some participants labelled taking time for yoga as indulgent and selfish. While the concept of guilt has been identified as part of women’s experience of leisure (Henderson et al. 1989), in this group, the time for yoga was felt to take away more time from responsibilities and family. The dedication of time for yoga was seen as a negotiation of time between leisure, work and family which was discussed by Stalp (2006). A further distinction was that some classroom participants justified going to yoga because it benefitted others by expressing they were “better for it, so it helps everybody”, linking the sense of transformation to external benefits. An emphasis on guilt and feeling the need to negotiate time for yoga was distinct to the classroom group and could be explained by the fact that there are greater time demands due to travel on classroom participants. While this small study is limited, it must be considered that negative associations such as guilt and the need to negotiate leisure time may interrupt the positive aspects of embodiment and transformation discussed above for classroom yoga participants.

### **Being Connected to Space, Place and People**

The sense of connection for participants appeared differently in the classroom and online groups. The connection to space and place was present for both groups but took

on different meanings according to the home environment (for online participants) or the classroom. The connection to people was felt by both groups in two contexts: the relationship to the teacher and the presence and absence of other people.

The connection to others was determined by the spatial situation of the two groups; one social shared space and one solitary space which meant significant differences occurred in the use and the creation of individual space between the two groups. Whilst space was mentioned as part of the classroom group experience, the connection to space was more strongly felt by the online group who all discussed how the sense of place was created in their home environment which shares parallels with Smale who suggested

“place is being considered in the leisure studies literature as an important contextual factor influencing behaviour, shaping perceptions, and defining experiences” (Smale 2006 p.369)

Online participants did not typically have a dedicated space in their house but created one within their home using elements such as mats, lighting, and scent. Atkinson (2010) viewed yoga mats as a heterotopic scapeland, or simply a place to signal escape, which participants supported by viewing stepping on the mat as symbolically significant to accessing leisure time. Whilst a strong statement, this research suggested the creation of space and place within the home for women participants was not that straightforward. The lack of a fixed place in home-based yoga meant women had to create, negotiate, and protect space for yoga. The issue of gender appeared in the negotiation of space in the analysis of the online yoga group, where the merging of the home environment created unique barriers to participants' online yoga experience and links to the need for women to negotiate space for leisure (Stalp 2006). This PhD research found that while space was not predictable in the online yoga experience, a sense of place for leisure could be created and managed, allowing a sense of individual control over the leisure experience.

A clear distinction was that agency was a core theme in the online yoga group who had the unique ability to choose when, where and how to do their yoga class, providing a positive and enhanced sense of control over their leisure time. Page and Cornell (2010) and Henderson (2013) positioned accessibility as central in their definition of leisure.

Freedom is a word inextricably bound to scholarly definitions of leisure (Carr 2017) and ease of access and freedom of choice were key reasons participants chose to practice yoga online. While both choice and freedom are terms that remain controversial (Stebbins 2005) both are key to defining the leisure experience. In this PhD research, the ease of accessibility and control over time was a primary motivation for choosing and continuing to choose online yoga and supports the need for research to examine how digital technology is transforming leisure (López-Sintas et al. 2017).

The greater freedom to create a sense of place meant online yoga challenged the traditional concepts of space (Elden 2009) and a 'multi-space' emerged where participants merged an online space with their home environment. The challenge of the changing structure of modern yoga from the classroom to the home and the emerging view of a multi-space supports the liquid modernity concept (Bauman, 2000) and suggests online yoga is distinct from classroom yoga by providing an example of the changing liquidity of leisure.

The relative freedom emerging from online participants also challenged the sense of shared purpose and connection to others as online yoga was practiced at home and alone. Social interaction and group dynamics have been pervasive in much of leisure (Green 1998) and yoga literature (Alsobrook 2015; Gard et al. 2022). This literature supports the need for identification as a part of a group which was evident in classroom participants who described a group narrative of "we" and felt part of a community where they had "friends". The importance of the sense of shared practice and connection suggested a strong sense of group identity which was a positive element in classroom yoga but not physically possible in the online group.

The results from the online yoga participants contradicted the need for social interaction and questioned the value of the group experience by participants preferring to practice yoga alone or purposefully wanting to avoid other people. This seemed to support the changing nature of yoga participation as more liquid and less tied to physical or social structures. While two participants showed interest in returning to a group class or combining home and online yoga, the majority wanted to continue practising at home

online, prioritising the freedom to access the class in their own space and time. Studies of the online yoga experience are limited (Brosnan et al. 2021) but research in other leisure contexts has found that the benefits of autonomy, control, greater opportunity to reflect and freedom of choice motivated the choice to being alone (Coble et al. 2003). The results of this study question the assumption that social interaction is part of the yoga experience (Gard et al. 2014; Cox et al. 2022). Instead, the freedom of individual choice and autonomy often mentioned in leisure literature (Hemingway 1996; Mansfield and Kay 2020), could be considered as more important than social interaction for some individuals in the yoga experience, which suggests a novel finding in yoga literature.

Additionally challenging the view that social interaction was linked to leisure experience was the subjective nature of classroom yoga (as previously discussed) which is experienced with others. While online yoga participants welcomed practising alone, classroom participants in a group environment experienced self-consciousness, vulnerability, and self-doubt, as found in other research (Coombs and Thorn 2014; Uebelaker et al. 2021). Although this appeared to lessen with the longevity of practice, this finding challenges the yoga literature's mainly positive associations of group classroom yoga (Alsobrook 2015; Cox et al. 2022). This finding has implications for understanding the potential for online yoga where self-consciousness was not a factor and participants can feel less constrained in the leisure activity.

Despite the presence of other people being a key difference in the groups, the connection to the teacher emerged as a central part of both groups' yoga experience and supports previous literature (Sharma 2008; Cox et al. 2022). The situational difference is important between the groups, as the teacher is virtual for the online groups with no prior physical relationship or likelihood of a relationship developing. Despite this, online participants described "knowing" and "trusting" their online teachers. This supports the one-sided connection labelled a parasocial relationship (Gleason et al. 2017) where the sense of a relationship exists and transcends the digital delivery and setting. Yoga literature has recognised the value of the teacher as an important part of the classroom environment (Humberstone and Cutler-Riddick 2015; Neumark-Sztainer 2018). The significant finding in this PhD research is that the



connection and relationship with the teacher did not seem to be affected by this parasocial relationship and therefore contests the need for the teacher to be physically present.

### **Feeling Challenged and Managing Ageing**

All participants welcomed challenge, but the meaning was multi-faceted, being simultaneously physical, emotional, and age-related. Both groups felt challenged by their body's limitations with physical limitations, describing yoga as a form of self-management for their present bodily conditions (Cramer et al. 2016). In addition, both groups saw yoga as a positive remedy to mental health and well-being, which is consistent with other yoga research (Moadel 2007; Chaoul and Cohen 2010; Alsobrook 2015).

The physical challenge of yoga was welcomed by both groups who valued a feeling of progressing in yoga but also emerged as the physical challenges faced by participants. Both groups saw yoga as a "fix" where both physical and emotional challenges were addressed and gave the opportunity to self-manage both, which is supportive of previous literature (Gard et al. 2014).

Participants in both groups shared and extended the view that yoga was a form of self-care and allowed for the self-management of both physical and emotional health and well-being. This supports literature that has positively associated yoga and well-being (Jarry et al. 2017) and mental health (Park et al. 2015) and supports yoga as an embodied leisure practice. Qualitative research exploring yoga and well-being is limited (Pilkington et al. 2005) with an additional scarcity of research on online yoga. The emerging paradigm of healthcare introducing well-being practices (Myers et al. 2000) to prevent or self-manage physical or emotional health challenges suggest the potential value of yoga as an embodied leisure practice to healthcare professionals.

The distinction between the groups was the online group had an increased ability to self-manage by the ability to choose classes to remedy particular issues, such as lower back pain, or resolve emotional issues with classes such as restorative yoga. This extends the

ability for participants to self-manage in online yoga and links back to the previous discussion about how increased accessibility to leisure allows the experience to be more open and liquid. The ability for participants to align the class to the emotional or physical need and to repeat the classes, initiated greater individualisation and agency over the experience. The finding in this PhD research that being online gave the participants a greater ability to self-manage is novel and is an important part of the online yoga experience.

Another part of challenge shared by all participants was age with both groups portrayed age as a negative challenge, in some cases demonstrating fear or anxiety about the ageing body. This finding agreed with Cutler and Riddick (2015) and Cox et al. (2022) found that women viewed their physical bodies and capabilities negatively while ageing (and has been discussed on page 120 and 138). The main difference between the groups was that in the classroom group, some participants found visibility of older people as positive or aspirational. The presence of “ageing” bodies being seen as part of the yoga community gave classroom participants examples of how age may not be a barrier in yoga and enabled participants to see positive impacts on the physicality of the body. The majority of literature problematises old age, but research suggests that leisure can enable a savouring of being older (Hickman et al. 2018). Whilst seeing examples of ageing bodies was aspirational in the classroom group, both groups viewed yoga as a way to manage the challenge of the ageing process more positively.

## **The Flow Experience**

The discussion of how the elements of the flow experience feature in cross-group (shared) themes (arising from the previous discussion) will now be explored. This follows the approach of this research as inductive interpretative phenomenological analysis used throughout this study (and as detailed in Chapter 2). This use of flow experience as a conceptual framework (Csikszentmihalyi 1990) follows the idiographic IPA findings and aims to explore how the flow experience emerged in both groups. In this section the nine dimensions presented by Csikszentmihalyi (1988) of the flow experience, as

depicted below, will each be explored using the interpretations from the previous analysis of the cross-group (shared) yoga experience.

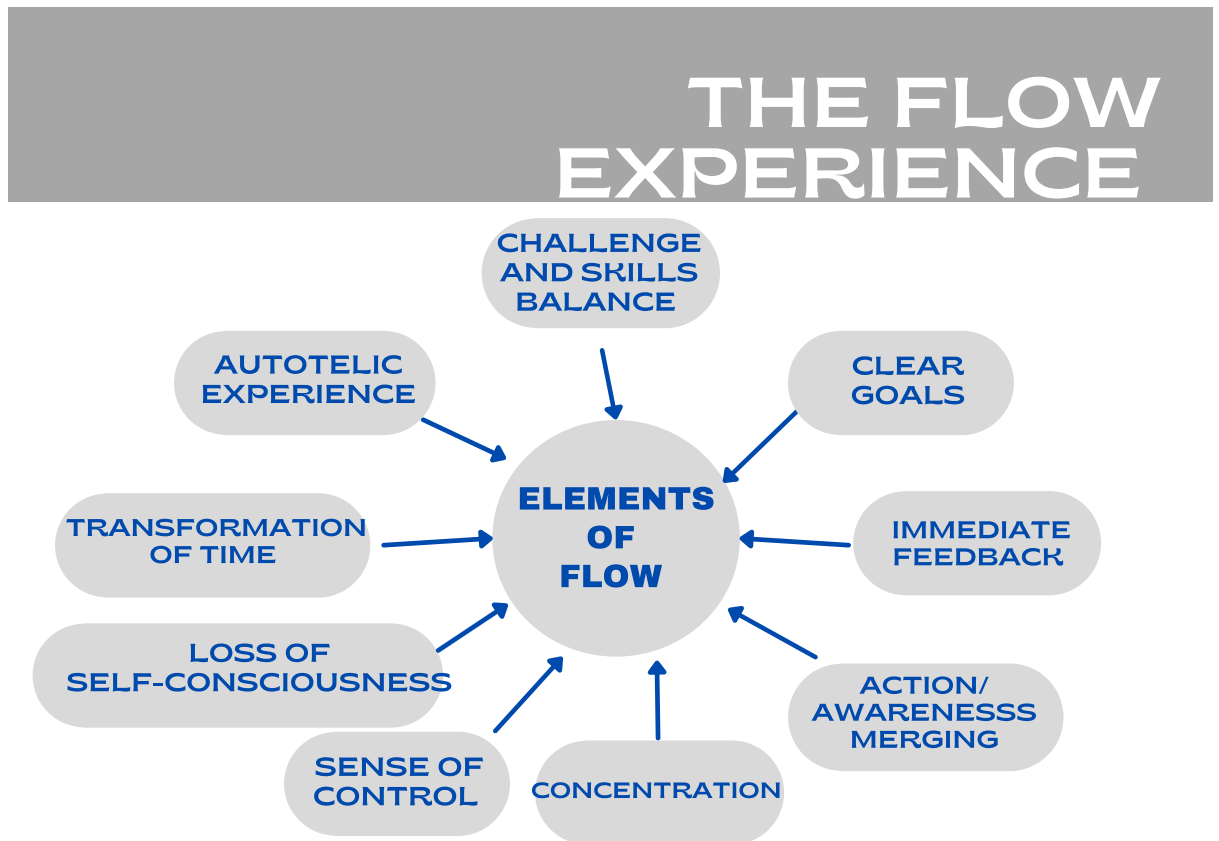


Figure 12: Diagram of the Flow Experience Dimensions (Csikszentmihalyi 1990)

## Dimensions of Flow

The flow experience has nine dimensions of flow as depicted above. In this PhD research five dimensions of flow were present: challenge and skills balance, action/awareness merging, concentration, transformation of time and autotelic experience. Whereas clear goals, immediate feedback and loss of self-consciousness did not emerge in both groups. The findings of this study will now be applied using each of the dimensions of the conceptual framework of the flow experience.

### **Challenge and Skills Balance**

All participants in this study desired challenge (as discussed on p.190) which was continuous and progressive with challenge emerging as both physical and emotional. In this study, challenge was welcomed in participants yoga practice but was caveated by alignment to ability. This supports the interpretation of this flow dimension where a balance must exist between challenge and skills. Participants in the online group had more control over the amount they were challenged as they had agency over choosing what level and for how long they were challenged through the choice of on-demand classes. Phillips (2005) found that challenge was present while studying the flow states of ashtanga yoga participants, but challenge has not been directly researched in core yoga literature.

Challenge is viewed as a property of leisure (Barnett 2004) and as identified in the flow experience, participants in this PhD study felt unfulfilled when under-challenged and wanted to be actively challenged more. When participants felt over-challenged their self-confidence in the practice was affected. In both instances the misalignment of challenge vs skill led to lapses in participant concentration which is an additional dimension of the flow framework.

### **Clear Goals**

The dimension of clear goals did not appear in the findings in this study which contrasts with findings of the only previous study of yoga and flow (Phillips 2005). This may be explained by the fact that Phillips (2005) quantitative study explored Ashtanga yoga which has a set sequence and instruction which does not vary which contrasts with the participants in this study who did not follow a set sequence. Studies that suggest that clear goals improve the flow experience are evident in other area such as mindfulness for athletes training (Ahere et al. 2011), athletics (Jackson et al. 2001) and acting (Martin and Cutler 2002), demonstrating a range of interdisciplinary areas of sport and leisure. In contrast, other sports research suggests that clear goals did not

predict flow (Stein et al. 1995; Sugiyama and Jackson 2005) which suggests clear goals as a dimension to flow is variable.

### **Immediate Feedback**

The component of immediate feedback was more clearly aligned with classroom yoga participation than online yoga, as it typified the taught, live, two-way dialogue. This links to the important role of the teacher that emerged in both groups (see Chapters 6 and 7) in 'guiding' participants through their yoga class. Whilst online yoga provides an opportunity to learn a skill and provide goals, feedback cannot be given on an individual basis. A lack of definition of what is meant by the term feedback by Csikszentmihalyi (1990) means it is not clear how this relates to the one-way flow of information in online leisure. Whilst Csikszentmihalyi describes feedback as being considerably varied according to different activities (2002) it was also described as needing to be unambiguous (Jackson and Csikszentmihalyi 1999) and immediate (Csikszentmihalyi 1999). Despite the important role of the teacher identified in both groups the word feedback did not naturally emerge in participants description of their yoga experience in either online or the classroom group, which may suggest some semantic confusion about the term.

The distinction between whether feedback in the flow experience is intrinsic or extrinsic is blurred in literature and not clearly explained in description or interpretation. This lack of clarity of whether feedback is verbally received or intrinsically felt, or both, suggests research attention has not been placed on embodied leisure activities such as yoga. Clarification of feedback as a dimension is particularly needed within an online environment, as extrinsic feedback is not available in online leisure. The findings of this PhD research challenge how the original description of the term feedback can be applied in one-way, online leisure and propose the framework needs to be further developed to expand contextual understanding (Elkington 2010; Abuhamdeh 2020).

### **Action and Awareness Merging**

The concept of merging of action and awareness dimension has clear parallels with this research where participants described feeling connected whilst practising yoga which they described as a leisure practice that aligned mind and body. Connection emerged as a theme (in Chapters 6 & 7) and embodiment was a central part of this sense of connection. The merging of action/awareness is argued to be one of flow's strongest characteristics (Jackson 1992) and has been found in many studies as a strong indication of flow in leisure (Phillips 2005; Hefferon and Ollis 2007; Panebianco-Warrens 2014). The merging of actions and awareness was present in this research and suggests further philosophical parallels yoga's aim to reach a blissful state of conscious being (Wilson 1990). Whilst Hunter and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) described the phenomenology of flow as "the nature of the experience [which] demands that mind and body work in harmonic unison" (p. 15), flow research has been remiss of examining the experience of embodiment (Chirico 2015) which this study supports.

Whilst the dimension appears to emerge throughout the online and classroom yoga experience, distractions also emerged which could be considered as inhibitors or activators to this flow dimension. Previous research has found that lights, music, and sound can all positively impact the flow experience, for instance in dance (Hefferon and Ollis 2006). This is supported in this research where the creation of place (see Chapters 6 and 7) helped merge action and awareness through situational elements such as equipment and decor which enhanced the experience in both groups.

### **Concentration**

Concentration was a dimension that was shared in both groups and was often referred to as both concentration and focus. Concentration has emerged in other research recognising flow in elite sports (Swann et al. 2012) and Jackman et al.'s (2014) study of horse racing. In sports, rules and competition provide a stimulus for concentration (Jackson and Csikszentmihalyi 1999) whereas in a leisure context, and in yoga there is no competition, and attention is self-directed. In this study, concentration was directed at the body, mind, and thoughts, similar to Heo et al's (2010) study of leisure and flow

in older adults. Participants expressed that yoga made them more self-aware and benefitted their mental health and well-being which emerged in Sub-Theme P Moving from Chaos to Calm (see Chapter 7). Words such as “peace”, “quietening the mind” and “calm” were frequently used by participants in this study which links the research findings to Csikszentmihalyi’s (2002) assertion that concentration “provides order to consciousness, inducing the enjoyable condition of psychic negentropy” (p. 59). Negentropy can be described as creating order out of chaos (Carr-Chellman et al. 2020). Chaos was often used in this PhD study to describe participants’ daily life and contrast the feeling of well-being and transformation attributed to how they felt after their yoga practice.

The presence of other people in the classroom group was seen as distracting by some participants and therefore an inhibitor (as discussed above) of concentration and flow. In the online group, however, the absence of others was considered an activator of flow due to the active avoidance of people choosing to practice online and therefore be free of this distraction. This suggests that concentration as a characteristic of flow was both positively and negatively affected in this PhD research by self-awareness, self-consciousness, and an overall sense of well-being.

### **Sense of Control**

In this study, yoga was described by participants across both groups as a safe and gentle leisure activity and therefore a sense of control did not emerge. The absence of control as a dimension of flow in this PhD research may be accounted for by a recent extension of the framework to suggest flow occurs more readily in high-risk activities (Csikszentmihalyi 2002; Stebbins 2005). Control was found to be important among dancers who had higher risks associated with performing (Hefferon and Ollis 2007; Panebianco-Warrens 2014). The unimportance of control in this research supports previous work suggesting the concept may be more applicable to sports or performative activities with risk (Csikszentmihalyi 2002) and may be less relevant to non-competitive or less risky leisure activities such as yoga.

### **Loss of Self-Consciousness**

The important role of the self emerged in this study through both groups' shared account of their yoga experience and was discussed directly in both groups research themes (Sub-Theme A Creating a Sense of Self-Transformation in Yoga p. 107 and Sub-Theme I The Sense of Self is Transformed in Yoga p.153). The key differentiator is that rather than the loss of self-consciousness both groups gained an enhanced sense of self. Self-consciousness only emerged in the classroom group and in the online group the group did not feel self-conscious, but this was not associated with a loss, rather it did not appear because of the circumstances. Stebbins (2001) acknowledged that flow was more likely to be felt in leisure activities that rewarded the self but the role of the self in yoga has caused controversy in previous flow literature which has suggested the concepts are opposed. Csikszentmihalyi (2002) states a potential difference that "flow attempts to fortify self, the goal of yoga and many other Eastern techniques is to abolish it" (p. 105). This creates the potential confusion of this flow dimension as not centred on the identity and expression of self but the loss of self-consciousness.

Elkington (2009) demonstrated the variance in the interpretation of this dimension with his research on acting and table tennis which concluded the loss of self-consciousness could also be viewed as the ability to forget the sense of self. Whilst this interpretation has parallels to the monistic quietening of the ego described in yoga (Gebauer et al. 2018) this is not how this dimension has been interpreted in this research. The role of the self was not forgotten or lost but was prevalent in the practice and in fact increased self-awareness but was affected by the subjectivity of a social group environment for classroom participants. Online yoga allowed individuals in this study to practise alone, creating a situation where self-consciousness is negligible. Whilst needing further research this suggests the potential for the flow state to be more accessible in an online environment by negating the dimension of self-consciousness.



### **Transformation of Time**

The concept of transformation has been a core part of this research and whilst mostly centred in the sense of transformation of self, the transformation of time was also mentioned as a shared part of both groups experience. Csikszentmihalyi (1992) describes the transformation of time as one of the most common dimensions of flow. This characteristic occurs in flow when time appears to pass more quickly or slowly depending on the activity (Jackson and Csikszentmihalyi 1999) and is supported by some (Conti 2001; Wrigley 2013) but not by others, including in creative activities (Lucznik et al. 2020) and athletics (Swann et al. 2012; Norsworthy et al. 2017). Csikszentmihalyi (1992) himself states there are exceptions to this dimension, using the example of surgeons and runners who must be aware of time, despite achieving a flow state. Participants in this study did not need to be aware of time and instead expressed discrete feelings of momentarily being in and out of flow and losing track of time. Participants directly linked how much they enjoyed the class and whether it challenged them, to how the sense of time passed which suggests transformation of time may occur discretely in these moments (Elkington 2010). Nuances occurred with the description of transformation of time in this study with participants describing time as ‘disappearing’ rather than just speeding up or slowing down. The question remains of when this discretionary feeling occurs within the yoga experience and how this could be managed to create positive perceptions of this experience.

### **Autotelic Experience**

An autotelic experience is one that “is intrinsically rewarding” (Jackson and Csikszentmihalyi 1999, p. 30) and is linked to enjoyment (Lucznik et al. 2021). The enjoyability of yoga was shared as important to all participants in the present study which furthers the understanding of what brings people to leisure and maintains behaviour (Lapointe and Perreault 2013).

Participants showed a long-term commitment to practising yoga suggesting an autotelic experience, which continually rewarded them after each class. The finding in this study that yoga had rewarding transformative properties on and off the mat agreed with

Elkington's (2011) observation that flow has the distinct ability to transcend boundaries. This study identified that participants enjoyed yoga and thought it had positive psychological and physical benefits, as found by previous research (Field 2016) linking it to the dimension of an autotelic experience.

Enjoyment created an intrinsic reward for participants in this study but contrary to Csikszentmihalyi's description of an activity that is "done not with the expectation of some future benefit, but simply because the doing itself is the reward" (Csikszentmihalyi 1990 p. 67) this PhD research found that there was an expectation of benefit. Participants expressed expectations of future benefits to their mental and physical health and how the practice may positively affect them, particularly linked to ageing. This finding suggests that while yoga was linked to an enjoyable autotelic experience, participants also felt it benefitted them as a short and long-term transformative experience.

## **Conceptual Issues With the Use of the Flow Dimensions in Yoga**

While this study found similarities between flow and the yoga experience, it also found issues with definition of flow dimensions and variance in how the flow experience has been applied in previous research. In this PhD study, the questions that framed the literature review were: What is flow and how does it emerge?. In the resulting discussion chapter (Chapter 8) the answers to these questions were not straightforward. Firstly, there appeared to be a lack of consistency in the interpretation of the flow dimensions, which has been suggested to impede a clear understanding of flow research (Swann et al. 2012). Secondly, the divergence in findings of previous research on the flow experience (Elkington 2011; Abuhamdeh 2020) have resulted in a wide variance of the conclusions of previous research.

A lack of consistency in defining the dimensions of flow was found while conducting this PhD research, according to both the original description by Csikszentmihalyi (1975) and also examining how flow dimensions have been interpreted in previous research

contexts. The problematic description of the flow dimensions is partly due to the evolution of the framework. Csikszentmihalyi (1975) in his earlier writings grouped all dimensions and only later (Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi 2002), classified some of the dimensions as conditions for flow, clear goals and feedback, and challenges and skills balance, which were then discussed individually from the other dimensions of flow. However, most research has failed to consider the distinction between conditions vs dimensions (Abuhamdeh 2020) and continues to use the original dimensions indiscriminately. Furthermore, in this research the dimension of immediate feedback did not emerge in online yoga but did not appear to impinge the emergence of the other flow dimensions. This supports the previous questioning of whether conditions of the flow experience were in fact needed to allow flow to occur.

A further source of confusion was how the wording of the flow dimensions semantically misaligned to describing yoga and in particular online yoga as a non-competitive leisure activity. This created two concerns in this research: one that due to the inductive stance of IPA these dimensions could not be verified from extant literature (Smith 2004). Secondly, some dimensions, such as immediate feedback, and loss of self-consciousness more naturally align with application in a physical space rather than online context. The lack of consideration for a digitally enabled flow experience has emerged both as a research gap but also a gap in the application of the flow experience framework.

In addition, while conducting this research it was noted that much of the previous quantitative and qualitative research on the flow experience described dimensions differently whilst writing and in research questions. The disparities in the description of the characteristics of the flow framework illuminate what Elkington describes as a major limitation of Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) framework due to "its lack of elaboration and detailed reflection on process and procedure" (Elkington 2010, p. 342). The issue with defining flow experience dimensions has also extended to the differences in interpretations leading to variance in research findings. Flow continues to be "not an easy concept to examine" (Jackson et al. 1998, p. 377) returning to the question of whether the flow experience can in fact be measured. A significant variance occurs across research on the flow experience with Vlachopoulos et al. (2000) study of flow and

exercise found “the nine-factor model and the hierarchical model did not show an adequate fit to the data” (p. 815).

While Csikszentmihalyi suggested that yoga is an example of the flow experience he also suggested that “the details of how the experience is produced are unique to yoga, just as they are unique to every other flow activity” (1990, p. 106). This raises the question of whether set flow dimensions can fully measure a range of individual leisure activities. Previous studies exploring yoga and the flow experience were quantitative (Jackson and Eklund 2002; Phillips 2005; Butzer et al. 2016) and disagreed with the findings in this study by ranking clear goals and feedback as important characteristics of flow. The lack of clarification of the nuanced meaning of the flow experience has been in part, the critique of the framework (Elkington 2011). The critique has not been aided by the range of quantitative measures used, Csikszentmihalyi himself suggested there are “no hard and fast measures of flow” (1992, p. 182).

Flow has been inextricably linked to providing rich and enjoyable experiences, but the dimensions of flow paint an arguably simplistic picture of an optimum experience which was not felt in this research. In this research the use of the flow experience as a conceptual framework, whilst valid, did not seem to adequately represent the individual lived experience of yoga participants in particular online yoga participants.

## **Summary**

In this chapter, the cross-group (shared) and non-shared findings of the lived yoga experience of online and classroom yoga have been discussed and then conceptually reviewed using each of the dimensions of the flow experience,

In summary, five characteristics of flow were important in yoga participants’ accounts in this study: challenge and skills balance, autotelic experience, merging of action and awareness, transformation of time, and concentration. Four other dimensions of the flow experience: clear goals and feedback, a sense of control and loss of self-

consciousness were less apparent or absent in the data. While the findings align with Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) belief that yoga and the flow experience are aligned, this research contests the ability of the original description of the flow dimensions to fully reflect the modern yoga experience.

The flow experience remains an integral part of leisure studies but, as highlighted in this discussion, the use of the flow experience as a conceptual framework begins to highlight issues with the interpretation and scope of the framework (Elkington 2010; Abuhamdeh 2020). While the framework is not seen as inherently limiting, this research suggests that the modern digital context needs to be considered within the redefinition of the dimensions of flow to allow for clearer interpretation in yoga and online leisure research.

## **Chapter 9: Conclusion**

The aim of this research was to explore the lived experience of yoga with the use of the flow experience as a conceptual framework. An IPA methodology allowed deep and rich findings to emerge that address gaps in knowledge about yoga as a leisure experience and offer a novel approach of using IPA as a way to access the elements of the flow experience in yoga.

This conclusion firstly returns to the aims of this research, then summarises the key research findings and assesses the original contribution to existing yoga literature. This will be followed by exploring how the findings of this study have resulted in the proposed reframing of the flow experience dimensions to be inclusive of yoga and other modern leisure experiences which include online leisure participation. Related to this re-framing, the key contribution will be summarised, and the value of the study will be concluded alongside the limitations of the research. The thesis ends by offering recommendations for future research and a reflection on the research.

### **Research Aims and Objectives**

This study set out to explore the lived experience of yoga online and in a classroom and how elements of the flow experience could be explored using IPA as a methodological choice. The research findings were enabled by participants collating six weeks of vlogs where they discussed their yoga experience immediately after class, followed by interviews with the researcher which allowed a deeper reflection to uncover the meaning of their individual yoga experience.

The Literature Review (see Chapter 2) argued that the existing literature on the yoga experience is limited, with the majority of research generated from the medical field. To address the research gap, this research's aim of understanding the lived experience of

yoga employed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith et al. 2009) to capture the diverse individual meanings of participants, and two interrelated research aims were designed.

*To explore mid-life women's lived experiences of online and classroom-based yoga*  
and

*To apply IPA as a methodology to analyse yoga and the flow experience*

Six research objectives were designed to meet the two overall research aims and will be further referred to in this conclusion.

- 1) *To critically review the literature on the modern yoga experience.* This objective was met in the literature review section in Chapter 2.
- 2) *To explore the present lived yoga experience of yoga practitioners on and offline.* The themes that emerged from the phenomenological research are discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.
- 3) *To conduct an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the experience of yoga on and offline.* The findings of this IPA study are detailed in Chapter 6 and further discussed in this chapter under the Methodological Contribution section.
- 4) *To identify how space and place exist within online and classroom-based yoga.* This objective was discussed in Chapter 8 and further explored in this chapter, in the contributions to yoga research.
- 5) *To analyse the experience of yoga for research participants through the flow experience conceptual framework.* This objective was discussed in Chapter 8 and further explored in this chapter, in the reframing of the flow experience.
- 6) *To evaluate the value and contribution of using IPA as a methodology to access yoga and the flow experience within a contemporary leisure context.* While this has been addressed in the findings (Chapters 6, 7 and 8) the aim of this chapter is to fully explore this core objective.

## Evaluating the Contribution to Yoga and Leisure Research

The contribution of this study is that it extends the understanding of the modern yoga experience online and in the classroom. As previously identified in Chapter 2, literature has charted a departure from yoga's philosophical roots to its modern-day form which has physical and emotional effects. Yoga literature has been dominated by academic silos (Quilty et al. 2013) and medical research silos (Gupta et al. 2018) observing yoga through the context of a medical or mental health condition rather than observing the experience itself. The changing, more liquid nature of yoga participation and limited understanding of modern yoga, particularly online yoga, led to the identification of gaps in the existing research. This study addresses those gaps by adding to the existing literature in two ways: by exploring the meaning of the modern lived experience of yoga for participants and by examining the online yoga experience.

The first aim of this thesis was to explore mid-life women's lived experiences of online and classroom-based yoga. This IPA study has highlighted key observations of the lived experience of yoga, through the conceptual discussions which contribute to meeting the research aim of the study. This study has provided a deeper insight into the lived experience of modern yoga participants and contributes to our understanding of yoga as an increasingly popular leisure activity.

This study appears to be the first study to explore the online and classroom yoga experience and therefore has four unique contributions to existing yoga literature. The first is that online and classroom-based yoga is a transformative, positive and embodied leisure practice (conceptual discussion on p.134 and p.172). The second is that space and place are experienced differently in the contemporary communities of modern yoga which is influenced by socio-cultural connection. (conceptual discussion on p.140 and p.177). Thirdly that mid-life women's experience of yoga is complex but is seen as positively managing ageing at a time when life and identity change is prevalent (conceptual discussion on p.138 and p. 172). Finally, that the role of spirituality is



changing in modern yoga (see Chapter 2). The core contributions to yoga and leisure studies will now be summarised.

### **Yoga as a Transformative, Embodied Leisure Practice**

The concept of the transformation began in this research with a sense that participants felt an evolving sense of self, becoming more self-aware and embodied in their yoga experience. Embodiment as a part of the transformative experience of yoga emerged in both groups and connects to the appearance throughout yoga literature (De Michelis 2005; Cope 2006) as an important part of the yoga experience but has been limited in research in modern yoga.

As discussed in the cross-group analysis, the complexity of the self and the sense of embodiment was not simple for participants in this study, which extends the simpler view of embodiment portrayed by traditional yoga literature (Easwaran 2007; Singleton 2010). Participants appeared to recognise the dualism of separation between mind and body, for example describing body parts as “it” and “they”. This supports Young (1980), who suggested that the female body’s existence can be subjective and objective with both positive and negative meanings (Neumark Sztainer 2018) associated with the body. In parallel, the monistic alignment of the mind and body extended the simpler view of embodiment as extended from the corporeal body. The connection of the mind and body was one of the core benefits participants expressed and this view of embodiment drew parallels with the Heideggerian concept of Dasein or the essence or way of being (Zuckermann, 2015). However, the presence of the body in this research aligned with the extended Merleau Ponty (1962) philosophical view of Dasein of ‘flesh in the world’. This study extended the view of the embodied self in literature by finding that participants expressed an emerging liquid form of embodiment as more than the fleshy body by recognising the influence of external factors such as space and place in the individual lived experience.

Participants viewed yoga as a physically and emotionally transformative leisure activity which enabled them to self-manage physical and emotional challenges. While tourism studies have linked yoga and transformation in tourism literature (Smith and Sziva 2016;

Dillette et al. 2019), despite the growing popularity of yoga (Park et al. 2015), the transformative effects of yoga have not been extensively researched and it has not been prevalent in yoga or leisure literature. This study contributes to the understanding of transformation but sheds new light on how transformation can be felt in the yoga experience on and off the mat.

This is significant as according to the World Health Organisation:

"Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. An important implication of this definition is that mental health is more than just the absence of mental disorders or disabilities" (WHO, 1984)

When considered together, this definition of health, and the finding that yoga is positive, transformative leisure activity is significant. The over-emphasis of medicalised yoga research, as discussed in the literature review contrast to Liu et al. (2022) who suggested an under-emphasis in leisure academia. This PhD study attempts to fill the gap in the literature left by the predominantly quantitative, medicalised yoga research by exploring yoga as an embodied and transformative leisure experience. The insights revealed from this study suggest that yoga can transcend the physical into an embodied experience that provides transformational physical benefits such as strength, and flexibility and emotional benefits such as relaxation, calm and stress-relief.

Yoga as a leisure activity has been compared to aspects of positive psychology given its aim of improving well-being (Diener et al. 2002; Sharma 2008), with Impett et al. (2006) directly linking yoga to increased awareness of self and well-being. These authors concluded that the more often participants practised yoga, the greater their awareness of internal body sensations and the greater their positive well-being. Although well-being was not the focus of this research the core findings of this study of transformation, embodiment, self-care, and transformation all link to well-being and suggests that yoga has untapped potential as a leisure activity and deserves more attention from both leisure literature and health and leisure providers.

### **The Role of Space and Place and Connection**

This study offers a unique contribution to leisure research by observing two groups who experienced space and place differently: classroom yoga and online yoga participants. The literature review (Chapter 2) found that a lack of exploration of modern online yoga exposed there is a gap in the current yoga research which does not represent the estimated 40% of people choosing to practise yoga online (Financeonline.com 2022). The opportunity of online yoga is vast and provides an accessible option to adopt yoga as a leisure activity in the home.

The majority of yoga literature is primarily bound by the constraints of a specified yoga space, with limited acknowledgement of online yoga. This study provided insight into the experience of online yoga for participants, which was seen as unique by participants as it provided them easy access, the ability to create a sense of place, and choose the level or purpose of the class, which allowed a greater personalisation and agency over the experience for participants.

Participants in this study created and protected space for yoga within the home. Whilst the concept of liminoid phenomena aligns with the changing liquidity surrounding space and place of yoga participation, from the classroom to online, the specific descriptions of space did not. Due to the scarcity of literature examining online yoga, it did not fit preconceived concepts of liminal (Yuen and Johnson 2015) or third space (Elden 2009) and instead involved. Similarly, to Schultz and McKeown (2018), this suggests the need for further research into how online and physical worlds are being bridged by online leisure. This study concluded that yoga needs to be reimagined as an online leisure activity. This supports the need for leisure studies to reflect our changing society and how people participate in leisure (Silk et al. 2016). The exploration of the lived online yoga experience is one of the most significant findings emerging from this research. This research has provided a deeper insight in how the online yoga experience can be understood and how a liquid 'multi-space' can impact a sense of place and could further develop the understanding of online yoga.

The phenomenological approach of this PhD research examined the meaning of space and place for participants linking the socio-cultural elements such as connection to other people and the teacher. In the classroom group the need for identification as a part of a group was evident in classroom participants' expressions and linked to the importance of shared purpose described in much of the yoga literature (Van Puymbroeck et al. 2013; Alsobrook 2015; Gard et al. 2022). This supports the more liquid view of community, and the assertion that shared lives can deepen relationships within leisure (Iso-Ahola 1993). While positive relationships and friendships were built, this research found that classroom participants also experienced self-consciousness, vulnerability, and self-doubt, as found in previous research (Coombs and Thorn 2014; Uebelaker et al. 2021).

The finding that negative social dynamics were part of the classroom experience challenged the broad assumption that leisure activities are positively impacted by the presence of others. Reframing this dimension allows solo leisure to be recognised as having individual benefits (Coble et al. 2003). The online group differed by practising yoga alone, bypassing social connection, or in some cases actively avoiding it. This aligned more closely with Coble et al.'s (2003) study on leisure alone, which suggested the benefits of autonomy, agency, and freedom. This finding diverges from previous leisure research (Johnson and Glover 2013; Moadel et al. 2017) which suggests leisure is positively benefitted by other people and adds further understanding to the previous yoga research which focuses on group activity.

This research introduces a new interpretation of online yoga as a leisure activity practised at home and alone, which were viewed as both desired and positive aspects of the leisure experience for participants. This study extends existing yoga research, which is mainly classroom-based, by adding new knowledge in the conclusion that online participants who practice yoga online make a conscious choice to do so, allowing for more control, freedom, and accessibility of their individual leisure experience.

The title of this research is to explore the contemporary communities of yoga, namely online and classroom, and an important part of that community, that was supported in this research, was the teacher. Connection to the teacher, was strongly felt in both

groups, agreeing with previous literature (Sharma 2008; Cox et al. 2022). A novel finding in this PhD study was that the strength of this sense of relationship was not lessened by the online environment. This is significant as the parasocial (Gleason et al. 2017) relationship with the teacher has not been previously researched. This questions the role of the teacher and the need to be physically present to establish an effective relationship, which is a unique finding in the exploration of online leisure and has implications for yoga providers.

The conclusion of this research of the importance of space and place in the observed emerging communities suggests beyond specifically defining space, broad parallels exist to the concept of liminoid phenomena. The concept of liminoid phenomena is described by Turner (1982) as creating 'communitas' where participants are "totally absorbed into a single, synchronised, fluid event" (p.48). The similarity of the description of communitas and the flow experience has been further supported through Turner's work (1979; 1982; 2012) and supports the connection made in this research.

This research has furthermore extended the understanding of the lived modern yoga experience for leisure studies and illustrated the need for leisure studies to further explore the meaning of space and space in online leisure. The conclusion was that being online created core differences in the yoga experience, namely the need to create space and place, increased freedom, accessibility and choice, a desire to practice at home and alone, and the nature of a parasocial relationship with the teacher.

### **Women's Experience of Yoga**

This research was unique in its sample of mostly women aged 40–50 years old, with previous yoga studies linking women with ageing (Humberstone and Cutler-Riddick 2015; Cox et al. 2022) having researched an older demographic. This study offers new insight of mid-life women's experience of yoga which illustrated the negative and positive identity of ageing and the prioritisation and associated guilt of leisure time.

The original contribution to the literature from this research is that for women yoga participants who are potentially menopausal (NHS 2022), ageing and identity are intertwined and complex. This group of women's life stage is embedded in change (Parry and Shaw 1999) whether physically through menopause, age, or life events. This had implications on participants motivations to start and continue with yoga and their complicated sense of self and identity, providing a unique viewpoint to observe the yoga experience. Key implications were negativity and fear which were expressed around ageing but were countered with participants feeling as though yoga was a positive remedial measure to self-manage the inevitably ageing body.

A novel finding was that there were pluralities in positive and negative aspects of ageing for mid-life women in their yoga experience. In addition to both groups viewing yoga as a leisure activity that enabled self-care and self-management, examples of aspirational ageing with the presence of older people were present in the classroom group. This was observed in leisure research on senior games (Dionigi, 2013) and identifies alternative attitudes towards ageing bodies in leisure. Although not conclusive, this finding is original in yoga research and suggests visibility of older participants may be beneficial in disrupting societal assumptions of group leisure activities for women. This supports Humberstone and Cutler-Riddick's (2014) assertion that older women have potential to view their body as "not one of decline and lack of control but of mutable accomplishment and integration of body and mind" (p. 1221). As a leisure activity dominated by mid-life women, an opportunity exists for the yoga industry to provide a positive view of how yoga can help self-manage mid-life both physically and emotionally. This study acknowledges the issues of an ageing population and addresses the concern that leisure studies must stay relevant (Gibson 2006). A more positive view of the management of ageing through leisure is needed (Wearing 1995) which could enable more tailored and beneficial experiences for this demographic and offer yoga as a health promoting leisure activity for mid-life women.

Part of the womens experience of yoga was guilt. Associative guilt (Henderson et al. 1989; Bialeschki 1991) emerged more prevalently in the classroom group, who

experienced self-consciousness and situational challenges that questioned the prioritisation of leisure for participants. While guilt did not clearly emerge from the online group, the gendered management of space and place of leisure in the home meant participants had to negotiate both time and space for their leisure time. This finding appeared to directly oppose the experience of the male yoga participants in Kidd and Eatough's (2017) yoga study, where yoga was prioritised over other aspects of the participants' lives and suggest women's experience of yoga is situated in the constructs of gender.

The lack of research linking mid-life or menopausal women and yoga is surprising given the parallels in demographics and the call that more research is needed to understand how yoga influences mid-life women (Cox et al. 2022). Research that has been carried out indicates yoga can decrease menopausal symptoms (Booth-LaForce et al. 2007; Crowe et al. 2015) and could be considered a coping mechanism and to improve health and manage stress in menopausal women (Crowe and Van Puymbroeck 2019).

The observation of the overall experience of yoga rather than symptoms of menopause in this research suggests yoga provided a positive leisure experience to support women at a point where their physicality and identity are being challenged and changing. The participant accounts and interpretation of meaning illustrate that mid-life women's experience of yoga is multi-faceted; this research contributes to understanding how mid-life women's lived experience of yoga is embedded in identity and ageing.

This research has provided an insight into how space and developing a sense of place for women's yoga experience were inextricably linked and of importance to both groups which has not been qualitatively researched before in leisure literature.

### **The Place of Spirituality in Modern Yoga**

The final contribution is considered due to the presence of spirituality in the literature review (Chapter 2) but the absence in the findings of this research. This finding was unexpected due to the foundation of historical yoga texts (De Michelis 2004; Singleton 2010).

Traditional yoga literature views spirituality as a key part of transformation in the individual yoga experience, reflecting the spiritual foundation of yoga (Easwaran 2007; Singleton 2010). However, a significant and unexpected finding in this PhD research was that spirituality was not a core theme. The lack of participant expressions of the word spirituality and, in some cases, hesitation or reticence of the “airy-fairyness” of yoga, signalled a departure in how participants perceived spirituality in modern yoga. Elements considered spiritual (by the researcher) such as self-awareness, reflection, transformation, philosophy, and transcendence were present and clearer for participants to express. This dissonance may be because the term spirituality needs further explanation for a Western research sample and requires wider semantic connotations to be interpreted by researcher. This supports a need to consider how beliefs and values contribute to the meaning-making (Liu 2015) of the yoga experience.

The lack of expression of spirituality is a finding which supports other research (Healas 2005; Singleton 2010; Campbell 2015) that concluded modern yoga does not have the same belief system and philosophy portrayed in the historical texts. This PhD research provided a deeper insight by considering the development of the modern yoga experience by exploring the online yoga experience, which has previously not been researched in depth. While needing further investigation this may support Lacasse et al.’s (2019) suggestion that yoga online could change the face of yoga by presenting a more physical context and contribute to the diminishing role of spirituality. The findings in this research question the role that spirituality plays in the modern experience of yoga as lived by modern Western participants, providing a novel dimension to previous research. This suggests that the meaning of spirituality in the modern yoga experience needs to be re-examined in online yoga by considering the wider secularised society.

The understanding of modern yoga has been extended in this research and has therefore achieved the first aim of this thesis which was to explore mid-life women’s lived experiences of online and classroom-based yoga. The contributions discussed namely transformation, embodiment, space and place and age were a central part of the lived yoga experience for mid-life women in this study. The contemporary online and classroom yoga communities identified unique challenges and benefits such as



accessibility, freedom, guilt, and prioritisation. This illustrates the need for yoga and health care providers to be aware of and manage these core elements to harness the potential of yoga as a positive leisure activity for mid-life women.

## **Reflections on the Modern Lived Experience of Yoga and Reframing The Flow Experience Dimensions**

The previous contributions to yoga literature will now be extended to include how this study contributes to flow experience and leisure research to further address the title of this research study and the objectives. This study suggests that whilst yoga, both in a classroom or online, aligns with the flow experience (see Chapter 8) the relative language used to describe dimensions for flow does not fully account for the modern yoga experience. Following the analysis of the dimensions of flow, two issues emerged from the research regarding the use of the flow experience framework, firstly the interpretation of the dimensions of flow in this study and secondly the divergence in previous research findings. The findings of this PhD study suggest yoga and flow are connected but the sharp boundaries of the description of the flow dimension (Abuhamdeh 2020) were not fully reflective of the lived experience. This questions whether the flow experience framework needs to be redeveloped (Elkington 2011; Abuhamdeh 2020).

The significant contribution to the flow experience emerging from this study is the researcher view that the flow experience dimensions should be reframed to capture and reflect modern yoga and more expansively online leisure experiences. The discussion and academic critique of each of the flow dimensions, throughout this study enabled the researcher to suggest amendments or expansion of each of the dimensions to reflect the changing nature of leisure studies, particularly digitisation. To recap, the original dimensions as proposed by Csikszentmihalyi (1990) are: challenge and skills balance, clear goals, immediate feedback, action and awareness merging, concentration, sense of control, loss of self-consciousness, transformation of time and autotelic experience.

The following reframing of the flow experience dimensions is based on the findings of this research only and the researcher is aware that the suggested reframing is specific to this research and therefore understands the limited application to wider leisure activities. This research is a small study and is not intended to suggest an overall reframing of the well-established flow experience framework but rather illustrate how the flow dimensions could have been altered to reflect the findings from this study and offers a discussion point for future adaptation.

The reframed dimensions of the flow experience (see Figure 12 below) will be discussed below and follow the order of the original dimensions which were explored in Chapters 3 and 8).

# YOGA AND THE FLOW EXPERIENCE - REFRAMING OF THE FLOW DIMENSIONS



*Figure 13: Yoga and the Flow Experience – Reframing the Flow Experience Dimensions – Researcher Adaption of Csikszentmihalyi (1990)*

## **Being Appropriately Challenged**

The original description in the flow experience framework of this dimension was “challenge and skills balance” (Csikszentmihalyi 1990). The use of the word “skills” in conjunction with “challenge” felt restrictive as it appeared to be focusing on requiring a level of skill as an external output, which may alienate some participants. Challenge is a salient quality of the leisure experience (Barnett 2005) and was felt by all participants in

this research as multi-layered, both external and internal, but not necessarily dependent on a level of skill. Challenge took two physical forms, firstly physical challenge, which explored participant achievement of challenge in the class, but also how physical limitations challenged them. The second layer of challenge was situational, expanding into age, gender and how constraints such as time and access to yoga were situated in the experience.

The nuance of what challenge meant to participants created a delicate balance in the layers and appropriateness of the challenge rather than just restricted to skill. This agreed with Engeser and Rheinburg (2008), who suggested flow should be measured on a skill/challenge continuum rather than inferred as an absolute balance. The recognition of the complexity of the meaning of challenge in this research, involving both internal and external factors, concluded that the framework could allow for more experiential understanding and application in leisure activities. The reframing to “being appropriately challenged” allows for a recognition of multi-layers of external and internal challenge. This recognises that different challenges may arise depending on the individual and the leisure experience and is not restrictive through age, medium of consumption, ability, or experience.

### **Intrinsic and Extrinsic Feedback**

This original framework dimension of “clear goals and feedback” seemed ill-fitting to both classroom yoga and particularly online yoga in this research. Due to the non-competitive nature of yoga participants the terms failed to align with a well-being directed leisure activity such as yoga. “Goals” as a term suggests the engagement in goal setting should be seen as a variant in the task or leisure activity rather than a variant in the flow experience (Abuhamdeh 2020). In addition, the findings of this research suggested that participants were embarking on a practice which was not goal directed towards one goal but towards a sense of embodiment and overall well-being. Vansteenkiste et al.’s (2007) study on the impact of intrinsic versus extrinsic goal framing in exercise, concluded that focusing on external goals included ego and undermined performance in comparison with framing the same activity in terms of the

intrinsic goal of health and well-being, which was more apparent in this research. The dimension of intrinsic and extrinsic feedback supports the fact that some women are less motivated by socially constructed sports-focused goal perspectives than men (Duda 1988). The removal of the term “goals” softens the implication that the achievement of a prescribed goal should dictate the leisure activity.

The original dimension described feedback as needing to be “unambiguous” (Jackson and Csikszentmihalyi 1999) and “immediate” (Csikszentmihalyi 1999). Both of these terms infer a two-way physicality to feedback which is not available in the one-way interaction of online yoga, as illustrated in this research. The expansion of the term “clear goal and feedback” to “intrinsic and extrinsic feedback” recognises that feedback can emerge from physical cues and external factors and requires a more embodied understanding of yoga as a leisure practice, a core finding in this research. This also recognises the critique that feedback “varies considerably in different activities” (Csikszentmihalyi 2002 p.56) and therefore allows for a greater level of individualisation according to the elements of the leisure activity undertaken.

### **Being Present – Focus and Concentration**

The original framework simply states “concentration” as a flow dimension, but the researcher felt that in this study this was restrictive and did not allow for the full cognitive exploration of the experience found in this research. The previous flow research alluded to a competitive context (Swann et al 2012), giving a perceived structure to the term “concentration” but concentration does not apply as clearly to a non-structured leisure activity devoid of set outcomes.

The change of the externally focused “concentration” term to the internal focus of “being present” allows this dimension to recognise that, to concentrate, you must first be self-aware and focused on the leisure activity. In this research, as identified in the earlier contributions, self-awareness emerged as a strong theme, seemingly allowing participants to be more aware, present and receptive to a flow experience. The recognition of how the role of self and the role of emotion affects flow is scarce, with

Abuhamdeh declaring that “one defining feature of flow is the absence of self-awareness” (2020, p. 5). This changed dimension could change the direction from outwardly “concentrating” to internally focusing by “being present”. This recognises the important role of the self and allows the creation of a more mindful states of well-being which allow rather than expects “concentration”.

### **Being Connected – Action/Awareness Merging**

The dimension of “action and awareness merging” emerged strongly in both groups connecting the philosophical essence of yoga experience, flow, and phenomenology of conscious alignment. The reframing to the words “being connected” in this dimension suggest the importance of connection to self, acknowledging that in flow the “mind and body work in harmonic unison” (Hunter and Csikszentmihalyi 2000, p. 15) acknowledging flow cannot happen without connection. As illustrated in this research, yoga defines mind and body alignment as a conscious and continuous state (Jain and Jain 1973). Arguably “merging of action and awareness” is a trait output rather than a positive psychological state. Being connected allows a recognition of this consciously aware state that is the aim of flow and yoga and offers an extension of flow as a “way of being” (Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi 2002). This extends to a link to the phenomenological Dasein concept of ‘being’ and therefore suggests a continuity rather than a limited output.

This PhD study findings agreed with the philosophical alignments between the aim of yoga and flow to positively impact well-being. While this study was not designed to explore well-being *per se* the connection to well-being is identified in the core contributions of this study including embodiment and transformation. This reframed dimension highlights the similarity to the aim of yoga to other well-being directed leisure activities such as mindfulness and meditation as a path of self-actualisation (Stevens 2017). This would expand the dimension to be more accessible and may further contribute to expanding the positive literature associating other well-being focused activities such as mindfulness and flow (Aherne and Lonsdale 2011; Schutte and Malouff 2023). The acknowledgement of the link between mindfulness and flow

(Bernier et al. 2019) would allow greater access, scope and understanding of what action and awareness may mean to the individual in terms of how they define and feel connection.

### **Embodied Awareness of Self**

The original dimension “loss of self-consciousness” assumed a subtractive, external focus, in contrast in this study an important part of participants’ meaning making in their lived experience of yoga was gaining an awareness of an embodied self.

Self-consciousness did emerge from the classroom group, suggesting some participants felt self-conscious and judged by others. However, the dimension could not be experienced in the online group as they practised alone in their own home, reflecting the limited application of the original dimension in online leisure. In this research a sense of awareness of oneself preceded an identification of a state of consciousness for participants, which agrees with the wider view that consciousness is a part of the individual's embodied awareness of self. Therefore, as previously discussed, the dimension has been reframed and expanded to 'awareness of self' which incorporates 'loss of self-consciousness' to widen the dimension and reflect what was found specifically in this research. The expansion of this dimension to reflect an embodied awareness of self (Morley 2001) is more inclusive to online leisure practices that are not within group settings, an issue raised as critique in previous flow studies researching solo leisure experiences (Walker 2010).

The route to experiencing an embodied sense of self was acknowledged as a central theme in this PhD research but was messy, contradictory and multifaceted. Flow research has been remiss of examining the experience of embodiment in the short and longer term acknowledging “studies on the embodied nature of flow are still in the early stages” (Chirico 2015, p. 10). The “embodied awareness of self” as a flow dimension would allow a broader, more experientially led understanding of yoga as an embodied leisure practice, widening the application of the flow experience in modern leisure.

### **A Sense of Physical and Spatial Agency**

The original dimension “a sense of control” did not emerge in this study, as participants did not associate the yoga experience with control. The difference between the previous dimension of “control” and the changed term “agency” can be illustrated by the difference in definition. “Agency” is described as a belief or capability that we can cause things to happen, whereas ‘control’ is directive action or decisions to achieve outcomes (Osman 2014).

This is illustrated by one of the key differences in the online group in this research which suggested online yoga allowed for agency which created a sense of freedom for participants to choose the type of yoga practiced, and where and when they practised. This is a significant finding due to the lack of exploration in leisure studies of online yoga. The revised wording of “a sense of physical and spatial agency” acknowledges the responsibility of the individual to direct their own experience. In addition, the change reflects that the experience is embedded in socio-cultural meaning through space and place (Glover and Parry 2009) as illustrated and previously discussed in this research (see Chapters 6 and 7) and as a research objective and resulting core contribution.

This revised dimension expands the existing dimension to allow capturing leisure activities where control may not be as relevant (i.e., low risk or non-competitive). The term “a sense of physical and spatial agency” encompasses the more liquid nature of modern leisure, as previously discussed, where accessibility, structure, space and meaning of place are more fluid, particularly online.

### **Transformation**

Transformation as a dimension was identified as a core theme in this research extending into a sense of physical and emotional transformation of self (see Chapters 6 and 7). Although “transformation of time” (the original dimension) was experienced, this was a small part of how transformation was felt, so changing this dimension to “transformation” aims to capture the full transformative effects of yoga. The expansion of this description is specific to this research and recognises the assertion that leisure is



itself transformative (Edginton and Chen 2008) and transformation is seen as a core part of the yoga experience as described by traditional texts (Feuerstein 2008).

The reframed dimension of “transformation” does not discount the original “transformation of time” as this is still a central part of achieving flow but merely widens this dimension to recognise that transformation of time can be viewed as a part of a transformative embodied leisure experience which should be not restricted. The expansion of this dimension recognises the aim of yoga and leisure to include aspects of positive transformation both physically and emotionally.

### **Individual Autotelic Experience**

The participants expressed that they enjoyed yoga, and it made them feel better therefore aligning with the properties of an intrinsically rewarding “autotelic experience”. Both groups commitment to yoga was evident, with participants describing it as “a way of life” that they would “always do”, suggesting participants viewed yoga as a serious leisure activity (Stebbins 1982).

However, the original dimension of “autotelic experience” describes an activity that is so enjoyable it becomes intrinsically motivating and in *Flow – the psychology of happiness* Csikszentmihalyi (2013) infers an arguably simplistic relationship between flow and happiness. Despite evidence of a serious commitment to yoga, in this study the yoga experience was not always intrinsically motivated, and some participants felt that “they should do yoga”. This suggested a less straightforward or enjoyable experience than the flow experience framework would suggest involving guilt, expectation, frustration, distraction and negative body identity. This study extends the simplistic view of this dimension by concluding that, whilst flow was sometimes reached, it was not straightforward for mid-life women, but messy, difficult to achieve and fleeting.

This study therefore supports the critique from Abuhamdeh (2020), who challenged operational and conceptual issues of flow and questioned whether flow was discrete or continuous. Recent literature (Collins et al. 2019; Baumann 2021) has questioned

whether particular personalities are more open to experiencing flow; therefore, autotelic personalities exist. This observation has raised that individual differences exist “either in the *need* (achievement motive) or in the *ability* (self-regulation) to experience flow” (Baumann 2021, p. 231).

The change to the dimension wording from an “autotelic experience” to an “individual autotelic experience” reflects the fact that individuals may approach and experience flow differently according to their personality type and that the flow experience may be a discrete state experienced individually rather than a continuous generalised state. Therefore, changing this dimension to one that recognises individual difference both in the leisure participant and individual leisure activity reflects and links to the liquid nature of the yoga experience demonstrated in this study and would allow extension of the use of the framework for further research.

To summarise, this PhD study has contributed to the understanding of the flow dimensions alignment and limitations in the exploration of both yoga online and in the classroom as a distinct leisure activity. This is a valuable contribution as:

“although yoga has been shown to be a viable technique for improving the performance of the mind and body, little attention has been directed to studying the relationship between yoga and the psychological states of flow” (Butzer et al. 2016 p.191)

The second aim of this research was to apply IPA as a methodology to analyse yoga and the flow experience. This aim was realised through the use of IPA to allow a deep, rich account of the essence of yoga and the flow experience and concluded that the five characteristics of flow were important in yoga participants’ accounts in this study: challenge and skills balance, autotelic experience, merging of action and awareness, transformation of time, and concentration. Four other dimensions of the flow experience (clear goals and feedback, a sense of control and loss of self-consciousness) were less apparent or absent in the data.

While the flow experience aligned with the yoga experience in this study a culmination of the critique of the flow experience (see p. 200), the cross-group analysis (see p. 186), and the analysis of the existing flow framework dimensions (see p. 193) illustrated the need for the existing flow framework to be extended to fully explore yoga, and particularly online yoga, as a leisure practice.

The identification of these limitations led the researcher to use the findings of this research to suggest reframed dimensions. This contributes to flow experience research by widening the application to capture the rich depth of the lived yoga experience and in particular the online experience more closely. The online flow experience has been largely ignored by researchers, the existing research (Novak and Hoffman 1997; Procci et al. 2012) has examined primarily gaming but a gap exists within the flow research to be able to explore online leisure activities. This research contributes to the research on the online flow experience and therefore addresses the need for leisure research to react to the increase in the digitisation of leisure (Silk et al. 2016). Whilst the researcher recognises the small scale of this study, and does not dispute the established theory of flow, several issues have been identified with the framework for use in this particular research. Therefore, the reframing of the flow dimensions, based on the findings of this research on yoga and the flow experience, allowed an adaption of the framework whether yoga was experienced in a group or alone, online or in a classroom.

## **Methodological Contribution**

The second aim of the thesis was to apply IPA as a methodology to analyse yoga and the flow experience. Methodologically, two novel elements became apparent in this research that are significant methodological contributions. The first is that there is a need for the flow experience to be researched as the phenomenological concept it was first imagined to be within leisure studies, and the second is that vlogs, as a novel research method, contribute to the understanding of the flow experience. The use of

distinct phenomenological research methods to capture yoga and the flow experience resulted in a methodological contribution to both flow and leisure studies.

The use of IPA as a phenomenological research methodology allowed the meaning of yoga to be viewed as a lived experience by participants, contrary to the previous quantitative focus on the effects of yoga interventions, which is portrayed in the majority of yoga research (Ross and Thomas 2010). The ability to examine individuals' lived experience deepens the understanding of the flow experience and enables research of flow and leisure to be furthered academically.

Smith (2011) stated that one of the most important areas of future IPA research was in health promotion and preventative health behaviour, however, IPA has been limited in use exploring the flow experience or within leisure studies. This highlighted the finding from this research that yoga was used as a physical and emotional self-management tool and that it was also intrinsically motivating for participants as a health promoting leisure activity. The methodological approach of this study (see Chapter 4) of using vlogs as a data collection method to capture participants' yoga experiences enabled an original contribution to understanding the sense of self in yoga. Gibson (2005) argued that video diaries allowed for a more direct understanding of participants' accounts without the presence, influence and control of an interviewer. Arguably, the self-directed vlogs used in this PhD study provided a clearer lens through which to view the self in relation to leisure practice and were a valuable part of understanding yoga and the flow experience.

The second methodological contribution from the triangulated data collection methods was the use of vlogs to capture the immediacy of the flow experience and interviews to capture retrospective and reflective flow. This approach is unique in both flow and IPA research, therefore providing a distinct methodological approach and contribution as a way to capture the essence of flow. The use of vlogs offered insight into how visual research could benefit IPA research to allow personal reflection unimpeded by the researcher's presence and provided deep and rich reflection by participants as evidenced by this study.

Pink (2001) describe video diaries as a reflexive method and in this research different levels of reflection were evident. The first level of reflection was the self-awareness where participants expressed how they felt after their yoga practice. The second level involved the process of completing the vlogs themselves which enabled a channel for reflection and visual record which became part of the interpretation. As one participant explained she perceived yoga was a reflective practice and therefore the vlogs “were a reflection of a reflection” and deemed it more powerful than journaling which she had tried before. A commonality between all research participants in this research was that they were often surprised by the content of their vlogs. This was expressed as either that they were surprised at their emotions or feelings, or they saw a pattern with one participant realising how negative she often felt at the start of her yoga class. Also, commonality was expressed in participants realising the transformative properties of their yoga experience where the mere act of recording their thoughts enabled them to realise the difference yoga made to their lifeworld. The vlogs supported the double hermeneutic nature of IPA by providing a further channel to reflect and recognises that a data collection method expands IPA as a methodological choice rather than relying purely on the interview (Atkinson and Silverman 1997).

Whilst vlogs are not without critique with Holliday (2000) concluding there is an element of performativity they also concluded that video diaries enabled a loss of inhibition. This was noticeable in this research with participants in some cases being more open on their vlogs than they were in interviews supporting the potential of participants freedom with methods with an ‘absent’ researcher (Gibson 2005). Vlogs can be seen as empowering (Jones et al 2015) but more recent research has suggested they may also be therapeutic. Taylor et al. (2018) concluded from their research on breastfeeding that mothers felt the method made them feel they were talking to someone without judgement or interruption and therefore the act of creating the video diary was a mirror and a motivator. This was true in this PhD research as participants felt as though the process of doing the vlogs encouraged the act of reflection and gave them freedom of self-expression without limitation.

The use of vlogs in this research enabled the experience to be situated in a social context (Rich et al. 2000) and allowed a form of co-creation and participation within this IPA study. Whilst written diaries are commonplace in qualitative research, there is surprisingly “little published IPA work to date utilizing diaries” (Smith et al. 2009, p. 57). The use of vlogs extends the use of written diaries and makes this research distinct in methodological choice from previous leisure, flow and IPA research.

To summarise, the methodological significance of the use of IPA has emerged from this research two areas. Firstly, the use of IPA in leisure studies has been limited and this research hopes to show that it allows a rich and detailed view of the leisure experience which has methodological value in leisure studies. Secondly the use of vlogs as a data collection method in IPA and qualitative research is novel and suggests a greater potential for creative and innovative research methods to be part of IPA research and to enable further insight into the lived yoga experience.

## **Limitations**

Whilst limitations of IPA as a methodological choice have been discussed in Chapter 3, the broader limitations evaluating study design and execution require exploration which may preclude definitive conclusions. Two main limitations were found to be present which need consideration when interpreting the results of this thesis, the methodological choice of IPA and the use of the flow experience as a conceptual framework.

Firstly, the methodological choice of IPA was felt justified, given the research objectives, but one that is not definitive. The aim of IPA studies is not to create a generalised account but an idiographic interpretation of the yoga experience which has meaning for the participant. This study would be viewed as a large IPA study (Smith et al. 2021) and could mean that a level of deep interpretation and detailed analysis has been missed by the researcher despite the attempted idiographic focus. Additionally, IPA is unique in the double hermeneutic approach whereby “the researcher is trying to make sense of

the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them” (Smith 2011, p. 10). IPA acknowledges the researcher’s insider (Pavlidis and Olive 2014) status role with their own beliefs, assumptions and interpretations of the data (Smith 1996). It must be considered that the researcher has practised yoga for 25 years and taught yoga for 9 years, which will have an impact on the researcher’s perspective and interpretations. This allowed the researcher a full understanding of the participants perspective but to ensure any potential bias was monitored, the researcher kept a reflexive diary (see sample extract Appendix K) throughout the study to be aware and mindful of impartiality and ensure validity.

Secondly, the researcher viewed the use of the flow experience in the study as not obstructing the inductive nature of IPA and the interpretations of the research, but rather allowing a way to further deepen and add meaning to the data. However, the use of theory is unusual in IPA, which meant that this study of the yoga experience is unique but also it is open to methodological critique. Smith (1999) suggested that analysis should not try to fit a pre-existing theory but focus on the emerging themes that arose organically.

The researcher felt the use of flow as a conceptual framework in the discussion chapters (see Chapters 6,7 and 8) felt justified as “external theory may be used as a lens through which to view the analysis, and metaphors may be elaborated” (Finlay 2014, p. 131). To stay true to the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of IPA, the data collection in this research was not directed by the flow experience framework but rather used it as a conceptual framework in the relevant discussion chapters. This also countered criticisms that IPA could be vague (Brocki and Wearden 2006; Paley 2016) and sees the use of an established leisure concept as situating the research within leisure studies.

To summarise IPA is “a forward-thinking research methodology that has the potential in understanding and interpreting the experience of people” (Tuffour 2017, p.4). IPA was justified as being a way to access the lived experience of yoga participants but as a methodological choice “has been predominantly used within health psychology”

(Heffron and Ollis 2006). This study contributes to the creative use of IPA outside of health psychology and demonstrates how IPA could be used to enable the rich and deep understanding of the leisure experience, which is also health and psychologically situated.

The homogeneity of the sample created a solely white, female group of participants. The sample was purposively selected and was representative of yoga participants (Yoga Journal 2016), but a noted lack of diversity was evident in gender, age and ethnicity. Despite the popularity of yoga as a leisure practice, participation is still under-researched with Park et al. (2015) observing that little is known about the “characteristics and correlates of people who independently choose to practise yoga” (p. 460). Whilst this study can provide preliminary findings that represent the current demographic, it could also enable understanding of how to tailor and expand the leisure activity to other, potentially more diverse, populations.

## **Implications and Recommendations for Future Research**

The recognition in the conclusion of this thesis is that, whilst this research has important implications for the understanding of the yoga and the flow experience in leisure studies, there is additional latitude to further this research for both yoga and the flow experience framework.

The previous section outlined the researcher’s suggestion that the flow experience would benefit from being reframed. In particular the online flow experience requires further research to be able to ascertain whether the flow experience framework allows online leisure experiences to be captured and to future-proof the flow experience framework in the rising digitisation of leisure. As the potential reframing has been extensively discussed, the remaining recommendation will focus on yoga as a leisure activity.



Yoga is an increasingly popular leisure activity which “has been understudied in leisure academia” (Liu et al. 2022 p. 416). This research has extended the broadly medicalised yoga literature to explore the meaning of modern yoga as a leisure experience in the classroom and online, addressing a gap left by previous studies to explore the modern yoga experience phenomenologically.

Further research is required to deepen the understanding of modern and online yoga, which may benefit from longitudinal studies to understand how yoga has meaning in people’s lives over time. Four key recommendations for further research would be made. Firstly, that space and place of the yoga experience warrant further research to directly explore online yoga; secondly, the more in-depth examination of the role of spirituality in modern yoga; thirdly, the closer examination of yoga and midlife women and, lastly, the expansion of yoga as a leisure experience into more diverse populations. These four recommendations emerged from this research and frame the implications and recommendations which will now be discussed.

The apparent lack of research exploring how the dynamics of space and place affect yoga and the associated socio-cultural meaning suggests the first recommendation for a need for research to explore these elements and to contribute to the understanding of the lived yoga experience. In particular, the online yoga experience should be further explored to enable yoga and leisure providers to understand how online yoga can be incorporated and be enhanced in the home environment to enable a greater adoption and maintenance for individuals. Of importance to online yoga providers would be the examination of how the parasocial relationship with the teacher can be further developed and how (if required) a feeling of positive online community can be built. This would enable the potential longitudinal limitations of online yoga as a leisure activity (such as connection with others) to be addressed and enhance the potential of that experience for online users.

Secondly, studies linking yoga and spirituality have begun to strongly emerge as a part of leisure literature (Liu et al. 2022) and would benefit from further research. The role of spirituality in modern yoga by UK participants is questioned by the findings in this

research, which contrast the link between historical yoga and spirituality (Cope 2018). But continued debate remains that leisure “will be interpreted as one of the primary means through which contemporary secular life is made and remade” (Rojek 1999 p. 2). The role of specified or affiliated spirituality remains in question and suggests that the modern yoga experience has changed. The relationship to spirituality requires further research to enable health and leisure providers to reflect what role spirituality has to play in modern yoga.

The observation of a gendered difference and the role of ageing suggests a third need for further research of the role of yoga for mid-life women. This was raised in different ways in this study. Firstly, classroom participants felt guilt and self-consciousness which requires investigation into how much this limits their leisure experience. In addition, the online group felt the need to negotiate time and space in the home. Both of these aspects reflect that gender issues are present in the yoga experience but emerge in different ways according to space and place of practice. Further research could explore how these issues impact the individual’s yoga experience from a gendered perspective.

An incidental parallel of the age of sample in this PhD study (women aged mostly 40–50 years) and the average age of the menopause held significance in this research. This suggests further research examining the link between yoga, ageing and the menopause would be beneficial. Women felt that yoga helped them to positively self-manage the effects of ageing and transformed them physically and emotionally contributing to their well-being. A more specific longitudinal study of peri-menopausal or menopausal women may illustrate how yoga can positively impact women in mid-life and beyond and may therefore be valuable to health care and leisure providers.

The final observation emerges from the homogenous sample of both this research and yoga as a leisure activity. Leisure studies has been criticised for its whiteness (McDonald 2009) and its inability to recognise and represent more diverse populations. Yoga is a clear example of this, as a leisure activity which is a practice involving mostly mid-life, white women. This has led to yoga being seen as an activity that reproduces inequalities

(Berger 2018). The potential of future research with a more diversified sample could extend current yoga research to understand how the benefits of yoga can be expanded to wider and more diverse populations and communities.

## Concluding Reflection

I finish by reflecting on the research process as a yoga enthusiast and advocate by observing that this research moved me from a yoga teacher to a researcher. In addition to this changing perspective, I am aware of my demographic similarity to my participants in age and gender. This could create a dichotomy of challenges faced as an insider to the community I have studied (Pavlidis and Olive 2014) or in my view that my insider perspective allowed deeper understanding and reflection on that community. My continual reflection on my place within this research made me question myself and my identity and allowed for much deeper and richer encounters with participants than I expected.

The extent to which participants allowed me into their life through the vlogs and interviews was a privilege that allowed me to understand the power of both research and yoga. I experienced many moments where I felt challenged beyond my ability and, ironically, the techniques I have learnt through years of yoga practice allowed me to move through and persevere. As a yoga teacher, I often remind myself that I am a forever student of yoga and tell my students “yoga is not about touching your toes it’s about what we learn on the way down”. This thesis has enforced the sense that commitment, vulnerability and challenge have been a necessary part of my learning and PhD journey which have ultimately changed me as a person.

In summary, this study has fulfilled its aim to explore yoga and the flow experience with an interpretative analysis of two contemporary communities, classroom and online yoga. In addition, it has brought a new understanding of the space and place parameters of the practice of digitally enabled leisure through the detailed lived experiences of modern yoga participants.

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## Appendix

### Appendix A – Participant Information Sheet (PIS)



## Participant Information Sheet

### The title of the research project

Exploring yoga as a flow experience – a phenomenological study of contemporary yoga communities

### Invitation to take part

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please do not hesitate to ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether you wish to take part.

### What is the purpose of the project?

The purpose of this project is to gather research findings for my PhD thesis. The aim of the thesis is to explore yoga as a flow experience in on and offline settings. The research will ask you to record six short video diaries (vlogs) following your yoga practice. The vlogs should last between five and ten minutes in length and should be completed after attending six yoga classes. This will then be followed up with an interview with the researcher, to discuss your vlogs and your overall experience of yoga, which will take between 45-60 minutes. The overall duration of the research (including six Vlog entries will be between 3 weeks and a maximum of 8 weeks, depending on your regularity of vlogs), The vlogs and interviews will allow the researcher to capture and explore the experience of yoga classes and how they are described by yoga students. The research aims to create more understanding of what the yoga experience is and whether that experience differs in a traditional class or online settings.



### **Why have I been chosen?**

Two groups will be formed, one being people who practice yoga online and the other being people who practice yoga offline (in a traditional class setting). There will be seven people in each group totalling 14 in total for the research. You have been chosen because you practice yoga, are between 25-60 yrs. old and have been practicing yoga for a minimum of a year at least once a week and are not a current yoga student of the researcher. As a researcher, I am keen to capture your experience of your yoga classes to help to understand elements of the yoga experience in more depth.

### **Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a participant agreement form. We want you to understand what participation involves, before you make a decision on whether to participate.

If you or any family member have an on-going relationship with BU or the research team, e.g. as a member of staff, as student or other service user, your decision on whether to take part (or continue to take part) will not affect this relationship in any way.

### **Can I change my mind about taking part?**

Yes, you can stop participating in study activities at any time and without giving a reason.

### **If I change my mind, what happens to my information?**

After you decide to withdraw from the study, we will not collect any further information from or about you. Data which may already have been collected will be anonymous and therefore likely to still be used for this investigation.

As regards information we have already collected before this point, your rights to access, change or move that information are limited. This is because we need to manage your information in specific ways in order for the research to be reliable and accurate. Further explanation about this is in the Personal Information section below.

### **What would taking part involve?**

Participation in this study will require you to undertake two elements

- 1) Six 5-10 min Vlog (video diary) entries describing your yoga experience after your yoga class. Once recorded on your device, you will be asked to send your Vlog via WhatsApp to the researcher. For each Vlog you record you will be asked to do the same thing - record your thoughts about your experience before, during and after that particular yoga practice. You will be asked to record at least once a week (twice a week maximum) so that you record six Vlog entries in total.
- 2) A 45–60-minute interview with the researcher via Zoom where you will be asked more broadly about your yoga experience.

No preparation is required to take part in this study.

### **Will I be reimbursed for taking part?**

No

### **What are the advantages and possible disadvantages or risks of taking part?**

Whilst there are no immediate benefits to you participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will be interesting and allow you to reflect on your own yoga experience and practice. The findings from the study, hopefully, will be helpful to both yoga instructors and organisations who offer yoga classes. The research should develop our understanding of what is important in the yoga experience, from a yoga student perspective.

Whilst we do not anticipate any risks to you in taking part in this study, you will be sending Vlog entries to the researcher via WhatsApp. This will be password protected and stored securely; it will be deleted once transcribed, you will be anonymous throughout the study and no personal information will be released.

### **What type of information will be sought from me and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research project's objectives?**

Information about your yoga practice and the meaning of that experience to you will be sought. This is relevant as it will provide the details about yoga students

own lived experience of yoga, which will enable the researcher to explore the holistic experience of yoga.

### **Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?**

The Vlog will be generated and recorded by you, on your device, which will then be sent via WhatsApp to the researcher. The subsequent interview will be recorded on Zoom, to allow the researcher to transcribe it. The video recordings of your activities made during this research will be used only for analysis and the transcription of the recording(s) for illustration in conference presentations and lectures. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one working outside of this project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

The Vlog entries you submit, once transcribed, will be deleted, and will not be used for any other purpose.

### **How will my information be managed?**

Bournemouth University (BU) is the organisation with overall responsibility for this study and the Data Controller of your personal information, which means that we are responsible for looking after your information and using it appropriately. Research is a task that we perform in the public interest, as part of our core function as a university.

Undertaking this research study involves collecting and/or generating information about you. We manage research data strictly in accordance with:

- Ethical requirements; and
- Current data protection laws. These control use of information about identifiable individuals, but do not apply to anonymous research data: “anonymous” means that we have either removed or not collected any pieces of data or links to other data which identify a specific person as the subject or source of a research result.

BU’s [Research Participant Privacy Notice](#) sets out more information about how we fulfil our responsibilities as a data controller and about your rights as an individual under the data protection legislation. We ask you to read this Notice so that you can fully understand the basis on which we will process your personal information.

Research data will be used only for the purposes of the study or related uses identified in the Privacy Notice or this Information Sheet. To safeguard your rights in relation to your personal information, we will use the minimum personally

identifiable information possible and control access to that data as described below.

#### *Publication*

You will not be able to be identified in any external reports or publications about the research without your specific consent. Otherwise, your information will only be included in these materials in an anonymous form, i.e., you will not be identifiable. The information you provide on both the Vlog and the interview will be anonymised.

Research results will be published in the PhD thesis once completed

#### *Security and access controls*

BU will hold the information we collect about you in hard copy in a secure location and on a BU, password protected secure network where held electronically.

Personal information which has not been anonymised will be accessed and used only by appropriate, authorised individuals and when this is necessary for the purposes of the research or another purpose identified in the Privacy Notice. This may include giving access to BU staff or others responsible for monitoring and/or audit of the study, who need to ensure that the research is complying with applicable regulations.

Data collected will be anonymised to ensure protection of the participants. Participant created vlogs will be sent to the researcher only, via WhatsApp, which is password protected and will then be stored on a password protected computer until they are transcribed, they will then be deleted.

#### *Sharing your personal information with third parties*

As well as BU staff working on the research project, we may also need to share personal information in non-anonymised form with examiners of the PhD thesis only.

#### *Further use of your information*

The information collected about you may be used in an anonymous form to support other research projects in the future and access to it in this form will not be restricted. It will not be possible for you to be identified from this data. To enable this use, anonymised data will be added to BU's online Research [Data](#)

[Repository: this is](#) a central location where data is stored, which is accessible to the public.

#### *Keeping your information if you withdraw from the study*

If you withdraw from active participation in the study, we will keep information which we have already collected from or about you, if this has on-going relevance or value to the study. This may include your personal identifiable information. As explained above, your legal rights to access, change, delete or move this information are limited as we need to manage your information in specific ways in order for the research to be reliable and accurate. However, if you have concerns about how this will affect you personally, you can raise these with the research team when you withdraw from the study.

You can find out more about your rights in relation to your data and how to raise queries or complaints in our Privacy Notice.

#### *Retention of research data*

**Project governance documentation**, including copies of signed **participant agreements**: we keep this documentation for a long period after completion of the research, so that we have records of how we conducted the research and who took part. The only personal information in this documentation will be your name and signature, and we will not be able to link this to any anonymised research results.

As described above, during the course of the study we will anonymise the information we have collected about you as an individual. This means that we will not hold your personal information in identifiable form after we have completed the research activities.

You can find more specific information about retention periods for personal information in our Privacy Notice.

We keep anonymised research data indefinitely, so that it can be used for other research as described above.

#### **Contact for further information**

If you have any questions or would like further information, please contact myself Juliette Hecquet [jhecquet@bournemouth.ac.uk](mailto:jhecquet@bournemouth.ac.uk) or my supervisor Jayne Caudwell [jcaudwell@bournemouth.ac.uk](mailto:jcaudwell@bournemouth.ac.uk)

*In case of complaints*

Any concerns about the study should be directed to Mike Silk Deputy Dean for Research & Professional Practice, Business School, Bournemouth University by email to [researchgovernance@bournemouth.ac.uk](mailto:researchgovernance@bournemouth.ac.uk).

**Finally**

If you decide to take part, you will be given a copy of the information sheet and a signed participant agreement form to keep.

Thank you so much for considering taking part in this research project.

**Appendix B – Participant Agreement Form (PAF)**

Version 1.0Jhec

33444



**Participant Agreement Form**

Full title of project: (“the Project”) ***Exploring yoga as a flow experience – an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis study of contemporary yoga communities***

Name, position and contact details of researcher: Juliette Hecquet, Lecturer and PhD student, [jhecquet@bournemouth.ac.uk](mailto:jhecquet@bournemouth.ac.uk)

Name, position and contact details of supervisor: Jayne Caudwell, Associate Professor in Social Sciences, [jcaudwell@bournemouth.ac.uk](mailto:jcaudwell@bournemouth.ac.uk)

To be completed prior to data collection activity

**Section A: Agreement to participate in the study**

You should only agree to participate in the study if you agree with all of the statements in this table and accept that participating will involve the listed activities.

I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet (Version1.0 Jhec) and have been given access to the BU Research Participant <a href="https://www1.bournemouth.ac.uk/about/governance/access-information/data-protection-privacy">Privacy Notice</a> which sets out how we collect and use personal information ( <a href="https://www1.bournemouth.ac.uk/about/governance/access-information/data-protection-privacy">https://www1.bournemouth.ac.uk/about/governance/access-information/data-protection-privacy</a> ).
I have had an opportunity to ask questions.
I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can stop participating in research activities any time without giving a reason and I am free to decline to answer any particular question(s).

I understand that taking part in the research will include the following activity/activities as part of the research:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recording 5-10 minute vlogs (video diary entries) (once a week, maximum twice a week) of myself talking about my yoga practice which I will record on my own device and will then send to the researcher via Whats App</li> <li>45-60 min interview with the researcher via Zoom where I will be recorded both audio and video</li> <li>My words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages and other research outputs but it will be anonymous, and my real name will not be used.</li> </ul>	
I understand that, if I withdraw from the study, I will also be able to withdraw my data from further use in the study <b>except</b> where my data has been anonymised (as I cannot be identified) or it will be harmful to the project to have my data removed.	
I understand that my data may be included in an anonymised form within a dataset to be archived at BU's Online Research Data Repository.	
I understand that my data may be used in an anonymised form by the research team to support other research projects in the future, including future publications, reports or presentations.	
	Initial box to agree
I consent to take part in the project on the basis set out above (Section A)	<input type="checkbox"/>

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of participant  
(BLOCK CAPITALS)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date  
(dd/mm/yyyy)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of researcher  
(BLOCK CAPITALS)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date  
(dd/mm/yyyy)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Once a Participant has signed, please sign 1 copy and take 2 photocopies:  
Original kept in the local investigator's file  
1 copy to be kept by the participant (including a copy of PI Sheet)

## Appendix C – Transcript Notation System

Authors own - adapted from Braun and Clarke (2013)

Name	Speaker's name followed by a colon (use Interviewer/Int) start a new line every time a new speaker starts speaking, and start each new turn of talk with a capital letter
Order	Each line to be numbered even if no-one is speaking, allow a line gap between each speaker
Small pause	(.) A full stop inside brackets denotes a micro pause, notable but of no significant length.
Long pause	(pause) This is a pause long enough to time and subsequently show in transcription.
Speed of speech	> < Arrows surrounding talk like these show that the pace of the speech has quickened
	< > Arrows in this direction show that the pace of the speech has slowed down
Unclear speech	( unclear ) Denotes that the words spoken here were too unclear to transcribe
Context/explanation of term	(( )) means some context needs to be added
Emphasis on a word	<u>    </u> When a word or part of a word is underlined it denotes a raise in volume or emphasis
Innotation	↑ When an upward arrow appears it means there is a rise in intonation. ↓ When a downward arrow appears it means there is a drop in intonation
Non-verbal utterances	Phonetically describe such as err or um with dots if also pausing
Cut off speech	Where people are struggling with words – try to capture phonetically
Laughter	(h) Humour - bracketed 'h' means there was laughter
Non-verbal gestures/interaction	If non-verbal gestures seem significant note in an additional column on the transcript in direct relation to time of verbal account.
Hand signals	Describe if any signals are being made (hand signals)
Gestures	Describe facial expression or any physical gestures (expression)
Eye gaze	Any notable changes in direction of gaze (eyes move..)
Bodily position	Considering environment and significant changes in body language (body language)



## Appendix D – Full Transcript Katy vlogs and Interview

Vlog entry 1 Weds 4/8/21 12am

Hello Juliette. I just thought I would (errm.. ) try a video and see how it works out and if it's okay, (umm) then I'll know that the format works for you. So my (umm) thoughts before doing my yoga today were (umm) I better do my yoga or I feel guilty if I don't do it and (um...) and then have I got enough time I've got other jobs to do, now I must fit in - all that kind of stuff. And then during the class, the first the first thought I had was, the teacher's got an **absolutely perfect body**(Holds hands up ..umm) . Will my (..)my body ever look quite like that? (err) I (...) did feel a lot better after the class because it really alleviated the guilt that I had felt earlier. And I actually (umm) felt like that yes, I am a disciplined person, I can do this every day (errm) and my joints felt better I just felt more easy in my joints and more flexible. I actually felt calmer as well. All the thoughts that I've got loads to do today actually felt like well, I have got a lot of things to do today. But I'll get more done being in a calmer mood (ummm) I've just written a few things down so I'm just looking. Oh, yeah (errmm) the, it, was an online class, a Peloton class. And she did half moon pose and she went into half moon pose from parsvokasana (yoga pose) . And what I was thinking was she, it's harder for me to balance when I do it that way but that's interesting. Why when I go straight into the pose can I balance and why when I go from parsvokasana, does it make me feel like I can't balance very well. (errm ) And the muscle in the standing leg, very deep was feeling it and was making me wobble a little bit. But I was just thinking that's interesting that I can feel that. So I was very focused on what I was doing with the yoga. Oh, and a few things that she said (umm) that really resonated with me so every time we came up into Cobra(yoga pose) , she said to tuck the tail bone down, which was really good for me, because otherwise I was arching my lower back and that instruction was fantastic because it meant that I actually was tucking my tailbone before I was coming up so I was then tightening my abdomen as well at the same time so it was a really good... . And lots of times she gave really good breath reminders exactly at the point when I had stopped breathing and I remember thinking (...) it's quite odd the way I actually forget to breathe during (umm) yoga in a pose. And then when someone says, breathe, you think, (H) how have I actually forgotten to breathe, but anyway, so yeah, I liked her corrections. (Ummm...) Yeah, I think (umm) I think that's what I think you need. I don't know. If it's not right, and you want me to do other things, then just let me know. But I just thought I'd send this one as a trial and a test to see if it's along the right lines. Okay, thank you I'm (name mentioned) by the way. Hi and bye.

Vlog Entry 2

Hi, Juliette, I just thought I would (umm) do another video. (umm) excuse the hat on in the sunshine. So today I chose to do a. (umm)again, I've written a few notes, I'm just looking down a 30 minute, peloton online class,(umm) a flow class, (...)which I did in my living room, and someone across the road was having some building work done. So

it's a bit noisy, which wasn't exactly conducive to the class, but it was okay. (Umm) and I rolled my Mat out to do the class and my dog always thinks that it's for him so I have to spend some time trying to get convince him to sit somewhere else (Umm) I always choose to do the beginners class, even though I probably could stretch myself and do, literally stretch myself, and do an intermediate.(...)But I think I just take it easy. And also, I think that maybe I'll be able to keep up better. And also that my(umm) alignment will be better if I just stick to beginners. So that was my thinking, for class - to do beginners.

(umm) (...)I did lose the internet, actually, at the end of the class as well (umm) so I didn't actually do, shivasana (relaxtion pose) I was gonna do it on my own. And then I felt a bit like, oh, no I'm not gonna do it because you know, the screen had gone (...) so the moment had gone really. Luckily, the internet only went at the end of the class so that was good. I actually recently come back from (umm) Cornwall, I was visiting a friend. So I actually did intend to do some yoga online while I was away, but I didn't get round to it - did a lot of long car journeys and a lot of (umm)walking. So it was really nice to be stretching out on the mat, actually (umm)and yeah, it was, it was really good. And actually felt when I was doing a down dog that (umm,,) my heels don't usually touch the floor, but they're actually getting closer. So I think having a break of a week and going back to it was (umm)was really actually quite good, because I think I noticed (umm) that progress more than I would have if I'm doing every day. (umm) but I was feeling a lot stiffer like in the shoulders and things like that before the class. And I actually felt that that definitely eased after the class(...).

I'm conscious that I've only done three minutes but also, but I don't really have much else to say. So I'll have to really think about think about the timings (h)and think about more, more to say I'm gonna leave it there because otherwise I'm just going to ramble. Okay, thank you. from (name). Bye bye, Juliette

### Vlog 3

It a bit windy here so I may have to go inside. Okay, so this week has been quite challenging for me, I've had some work problems, and (umm)my daughter hasn't been well. So (umm) it's actually hit upon something that I've realised that it's when there's a lot of chaos in my life, that I really, really benefit (umm...) from doing meditation in yoga. And when I've got lots of stuff going on, and lots of chaos, it is fantastic to do (umm...)getting centred and things like that, because the chaos just doesn't go away, obviously but it goes to the background, and makes me think that, you know, things like this, too shall pass and look at the bigger picture and although when I go back to work, of course, the problem is still there. But I actually don't care about the problem as badly as I did before I did the meditation. So (umm) that's what I've realised that yoga yoga and meditation does for me is that, because I'm only focused on that, at that time, and I can (umm...) go into the stillness, basically, (umm) that it really stops me taking things personally, it is (...) just really, really great, actually. And I think that I wish everyone could discover it. Because when you have problems that seem unsurmountable, and you have chaos going on in your world, it's just fantastic to (...)seek out this still place where you can, (...)those things can fade into the background. And (umm) yeah that's it really (..)it's especially, it's especially for (...)me as well, it's my time, so I'm not dealing with other things and other people, I am

coming back to myself. And then when I come back to deal with other people and to deal with the other people and problems, then I'm in a much better place a much more detached place where I'm not(...) where I'm more effective, because when you're in chaos, and things start to get overwhelming, you're actually becoming less effective (...)because you can feel that everything's getting on top of you and so you don't actually make the best decisions. But once you've taken that time out and come back to the situation, you are more effective, because you(...) um I don't know what it is, I think you just can see that (umm) you can see the wood for the trees, if that's the correct expression. (umm...) yeah, I think I've already said that you just don't take things as personal and when you're in a more centred place. and again, I can see that I've only got four minutes. I seem to speed through these and not have very much to say. But even if (umm) it's just yoga that you do, at least then you are focused on what you're doing. Your mind has to be clear because you're actually trying to breathe and move at the same time and you can't do that and think about all the chaotic things that are going on in your head. So you literally have to clear your head, in meditation, it's a little bit more difficult, I think that things persisted in my head for a little while. But during the pranayama (yoga breathing) first and then the meditation was quite effective because with the pranayama it's also I'm having to focus right I'm doing kapalabhati (yoga breath work) I'm doing alternate nostril breathing. So they are things that I have to focus on, I have to focus on the breath and then after I've done those, and then in a place where I can do my meditation, and my mind is clear by then. So obviously, those things come back into your head, but they're actually then you're in a place where you can say, Okay, I'm thinking about that now, but I'm going to let that go. Because I know it's still going to be there when I go back to it, so yeah, that those are my thoughts this week. So (umm yeah)Okay, thank you. From (name) again, bye Juliet. Thanks a lot.

#### Vlog Entry 4

Hi, Juliet,its (name) here. Okay, so thoughts about yoga this week. (umm..)So a couple of things I've been thinking is that I have definitely use the yoga for detachment. So this week, I had something that (umm...) triggered some, some negative feelings in me. And I did some yoga, did some meditation did some pranayama. And I was really able to, I mean, I was working on it. But I was able to distance myself from my emotions and distance myself from the feeling and almost objectively look at it and just feel a whole lot better about the situation and to behave gracefully, rather than feeling grudgey, or anything like that so that was good. And the other thing that I that I did this week was, I had a day where my eating was quite bad and (umm) I find that when I did yoga, the next day, I was just kind of thinking, well, that's really good. I'm drawing a line under it and doing something positive and just moving on with it I'm not sort of thinking, oh, gosh, I've eaten really badly. That means I'm just gonna carry on spiralling down. So I just noticed that my camera keeps going light and dark I don't know why. Anyway, um, yeah so I think yoga is quite good for drawing a line under (umm..) under bad, yeah, especially bad eating, things like that. And to get back into a positive vibe, and think, okay, well, this is a positive thing that I'm doing now. So moving, moving swiftly on. I

think as well, doing the pranayama (yogic breath) really helps me to and the yoga to realise that sometimes I'm in shallow breath, and (..) helps me to remember to breathe fully . On a physical level with yoga, I was thinking back to when I sort of first started yoga and I definitely started because I had aches and pains and my knees, aches and pains in my shoulders. And I was feeling really stiff. And actually, I was thinking back and I and I actually have ohh keep saying actually, again, I don't have those feelings anymore, I feel quite fluid in my shoulders, my knees are much better now. And so you know, yoga is definitely, definitely on a physical level helped me. And I know a lot of other people have been helped by as well. And I think I feel when I do yoga and meditation that I'm taking responsibility for my own physical and mental well being. So for that reason alone, it's, it's a positive thing. And also, you know, as you age, you just feel grateful that you can still do yoga, because you know, a lot of people as they get older, can't move as much as they used to be able to or can't get into yoga postures and

and you know, I can still get into most of them. Okay, shoulder and elbow stand (hh..) might prove difficulty on the wheel, the back bend. But you know, I'm okay with that I'm glad that I can move. (...) And I want to carry on doing yoga because I want to continue moving, as we all do. Yeah, so really, I think in conclusion, today ahh I've actually only done four minutes as well as it felt like I've been twittering on for ages. But at least I'm probably going to make it to five this week. (umm) Yeah, but I just feel when I'm doing yoga, but it is you know, it's a positive thing. It is improving and, and having a good influence on my life. So if I've done something that I feel is a bit more of a like body thing and I feel like it's a bit of a negative thing, or not exercised that for a few days, then I feel that when I do yoga, those are positive things. (.....) I'm just looking at my notes to see if I've missed anything out but I think those are my thoughts for this week. So, sorry about the camera going dark and light all the time, I have no idea why that is happening it's not even like anything's moving in doors. But anyway, thanks a lot. And thank you for your little videos that you do, because it really helps me to feel that I'm just not I'm not, you know, talking into the ether that, that it's going somewhere and I just, you know, sometimes get these terrible feelings that I'm (..). I'm not giving you the information that you need. So the little bit, the little bit of little videos of encouragement are really good. So thanks for those Juliette. And I hope you've had a good week too. And I will see you virtually anyway, next week. Okay, thank you. Bye

Vlog Entry 5 3/9/21

Sorry, it's a bit late this week, I've had quite a lot going on I I went away to a wedding. And I didn't manage to fit in much yoga either, actually (..). Yeah, so anyway, I'm here now. And the week is not over so I'll do another one next week. (err) Yes so what have I been thinking about yoga? Because there's been a lot going on this week, it's been quite nice to have a reminder from you actually, to think, all right, okay, I've got to do some yoga, because I've got to do some feedback on it. So on a week, where I might have dropped the ball and not done yoga, it was you were quite good in sort of (...)giving me the push to, to take some time out and do yoga and it was nice, actually, because, yeah, I needed it, I needed to take some time. It's just always good to have a

moment that's for you and for you to be able to pause, connect with the breathing and, you know, move (..)tight bones and muscles. (ummm)and also, to become curious about what's going on ..what's going on in in life that I feel that I haven't got time to stop and do (umm) yoga, which, which I need to do is important, and why I've skipped a few sessions, and why I have skipped a few this week, as well. (umm....)What is more important than, you know, doing that, because actually, when you get caught up in business of life,(umm) I find that lots of things start to, I start to find everything annoying and that's why because I haven't had time to collect my thoughts to slow down and when I am in a good place, I will actually observe myself getting annoyed about something and saying, okay, that's interesting, getting annoyed by that. Whereas when I'm in overwhelm mode, I'm just annoyed. I don't even think about why I just, I just am. So yeah, it's just so important for reflecting. bringing my attention back to, to the here and now into my mind. Still still busy, the buisness going on in the mind. And, (umm)and also the movement that releases tension and it's especially needed when there's a lot going on. So actually, it's more important, actually, to do. To do that, yeah. And I was kind of thinking, because my yoga teacher that I used to go to is going back into the studio now and she's been kind of canvassing to say, you know, come back to the, to the lessons. And (umm)I was trying to think whether I want to carry on just doing yoga online, or whether I would like to go back to class or I could do a combination of both, I suppose. But you know, I do in a way miss the social part of going to the yoga class because I would see everyone and we would probably go for a coffee afterwards and have a chat. So that is missing from my life and that was nice. Also, I think that when I'm in a studio working with other people around me, I tend to work a bit harder because (umm...)well, it's really, really rather superficial, but I suppose it's because I feel that you know, people are watching and so I should you know, try my hardest kind of thing. Whereas when I'm at home, I probably I think I still try hard but like I probably don't have to think about how I look from the outside in so there's less pressure in that respect. And some days when I'm not really feeling like it like doing yoga I will probably slack off a little bit when I'm doing it online. Yeah, and also, I don't have to look a certain way I can, I can do yoga in my pyjamas if I want to. But actually, that sort of brings me back to the discipline of yoga, which is something that is what I like about yoga, I like it, that it's something that I can aspire to. So, I would like to be more disciplined in body and mind and that's why I like doing yoga, because there is there is(umm) an ideal body, and there is an ideal mind that I'm aiming for. And (umm)in my head, I probably will never get there, which is fine but I like to have that thing to aspire to. And I like yoga, because it is body and mind it's not just, I mean, I like other exercise as well. And you know, sometimes when you're running or when you're cycling, it can be meditative, because it is a repetitive action. But (umm)yoga, you are a bit more focused in on your breathing and your movement at the same time so your mind is less likely to wander. (umm) Yeah, and also, I was thinking like, when you go into a class, it can be a little bit competitive and yoga isn't a competitive thing. So I quite like it at home, because I'm only competing with myself I mean, I don't compete with others in a class, but that can be created, among other people a competitive atmosphere. I don't tend to get involved in that now, because I'm older and (err) I'm not trying to prove anything, I'm not trying to prove that I can hold a handstand longer than anybody else so that is less of a problem now, I think it was more of a problem when I was younger. But yeah, it's

very much that's why I like yoga as well, because it is an individual journey. It's not something that you are competing with anyone else. I also quite like in yoga that you kind of take what you learn in yoga, and meditation into your life so you, you're learning lessons, and you're learning to become aware so that when you go out and you're living in the world, that you (...)don't just react to everything that happens that you respond to that you sort of think about why you're feeling a certain way, and then decide upon how you will respond so you are taking a slower approach to thinking, Okay, I'm feeling this feeling about that. I don't need to react right now. I'm gonna think about how I feel about that. And yeah, I think I've done eight minutes okay, so I'm gonna wrap it up then. And I will send you I don't know how many we're doing in total but if you want another one next week, then I will send you another video next week. Okay, thanks, Juliette. Bye. Have a good week next week.

Vlog 6 9/9/21

Hello, Juliette so its (name) again. (umm)And I think this is my last Vlog. So (umm)today, what did I think about yoga? So today, I woke up this morning, and I felt a bit headachy and unwell and (umm) I didn't know whether it was because it was a hot night, you know, quilt off quilt on. Whether it was what are something I'd eaten the day before anyway, I couldn't work it out. (umm)but my first thought was, I don't want to do yoga. (...) and I tried not to think and just do yoga so to begin with, I did a chair yoga, because I thought, well, you know, this is not going to tax me and then I've still done yoga so I did the chair yoga and actually felt better so I thought I could do a flow now so I did a yoga flow class. And then I thought, you know what, today, every everybody ..well, I've got two older children, and they were at the house for the first time in what feels like ages. And I thought, I'm just going to take advantage of the fact that I feel like I've got some headspace and some physical space in the house so I then did a restorative class, and then I did a lovely relaxation. By the end of it, I did not have a headache. So, you know, that was fantastic. And (umm) because I have time today as well, I actually confess that I hadn't read the poem you originally sent the John Rodel poem and (umm) I read that and it really resonated with me. I thought, God, it's fantastic. And it kind of exactly sums up what Yoga means to me, because it's kind of what I've just said, it's like I woke up I was thinking, is it a tension headaches? Or is it my head?

Is it (umm) you know, things going on in my life that are upsetting me is it's something I've eaten, is it my gut? And you know, the solution is just breathe and just go and breathe and move and do yoga. And then you know, you don't need to be thinking, all of those things.

Yeah, so I loved that thanks for that poem.I absolutely love it I've just written a few notes and trying to think what else I was thinking. (...) Oh, I did get interrupted (umm) so when I was just thinking, ahh great both my grown up children are out the house today. But my husband's still working from home. And he did come and interrupt me doing yoga. But I remember learning I think it was worse, because I had thought, great, everybody's gone out. I can do this thing without because normally I do get interrupted and Mom, where's this? (raises hands)Where's that? Have you done the washing blah, blah, blah, (hh) the middle of yoga. So I was looking forward my expectation was that I would do a class without interruption. But I did get an

interruption. But one thing that a yoga teacher taught me was that when you get an interruption to think of it as a thunderstorm and just think, oh, it's thundering, you know, and and that's helped me a lot because it stops you from getting angry because he you know, it's it's not important to get, I mean, nobody in their right mind would get angry at a thunderstorm and you shouldn't really get angry and interruption. It's just what it is. So I remembered that lesson, and that's probably because I was well into my yoga session. And so that was fine. (umm) yeah, so I think that really to sum it up (umm) yoga to me, what I was thinking after the class, after I've done it my headache had flown was that it's my place of solace really it keeps me sane I think that if I didn't do yoga, well, God forbid I was ever in prison or anything like that. I mean, or, you know, I don't know,(...)if I was in a situation, I always think that, you know, I would just do my yoga every day, because that would help me that's what I always think Yoga is it's just, you know, it's, it is sanity. It is a way to get away from problems from negative thoughts, from your own opinions from other people's opinions, from chaos, and from just curveballs that are sent to you in life. So it's, (umm)yeah, it keeps it simple and it is just, you know, breathing in and out and moving. And yeah, it just it just brings brings peace.(..) So I hope Juliette that I have been able to give something(umm) I was never quite sure if I was giving you what you needed for your research, but I hope that it has been of some help and I look forward to the next stage and speaking to you with your little questions. So I will see you then. Have a good weekend now. It's nearly the weekend. Okay, thanks bye bye.

Transcription from Katy KS interview 17/9/21 – 44 mins

Interviewer

Okay, so, um, so first question, what I'd like to, just for you to explain to me about the story of what Yoga means to you?

Katy: 1:00

Well, I first discovered yoga, when I was living in a new city, and I didn't really know anybody and I was feeling quite down and I thought, you know, I'm going to go to yoga and I was in my 30s. And I started going, and the teacher was absolutely lovely and (umm)I just found that after the class, I would be sad, but in a nice way, but like, sort of, yeah, releasing stuff and it just felt addictive to me after that, you know, and I just, I tell a lie actually, I did start it earlier, I went to the shivananda centre in my 20s, because I lived in Putney. And I went there and then it was when I moved to Newcastle to do some studying that I felt a bit lonely because I didn't know anybody and I went along and that's kind of when I had the revelation. I mean, I loved it going to the shivananda, as well but it was in Newcastle, where I sort of thought, oh, my God, this is releasing something. It's amazing. And then I did a teacher training course but I decided after, I really enjoyed the course, and especially the philosophy, I was drawn to the philosophy part of it. And I didn't want to teach afterwards, I just wanted to do it for me, really. So yeah, but I think that's it and now it's just a part of my life where I, I wanted to do the teacher training so that I would get into the habit of doing it everyday because I wasn't very consistent with my practice, I kept leaving it for ages, like letting other things crash into my life and not keep it regularly. But actually doing

the teacher training course, did deliver what I wanted it to, which was to make me disciplined in it, and to do it every day. And I do that now. So I'm in a good place with it. So that it is part of my life.

Interviewer: 3:03

So how many years ago was that when you started practising regularly?

Katy: 3:12

Um, (...) I have practised regularly now for about (...)about five to six years.

Interviewer: 3:29

And can you describe your overall experience of yoga?

Katy: 3:41

(ummm....)I don't know. I don't know if I understand the question.

Interviewer: 3:46

So considering you started five or six years ago, practising regularly (..)to now how the how has that experience changed or evolved?

Katy: 3:58

( Um,)I think it's always been a positive in my life. But I recently found out actually that within the shivananda centre, there was, you know, some claims of sexual, yeah, which really put me off, put me off. But at the same and I do think there is an issue with the guru being the all, you know, I do have an issue with that, actually, because, and it doesn't, all have that shivananda I loved it and I love the discipline of it. There is something amiss for me with the philosophy of that Guru is everything so that women tend to think, oh, I have to do this because that's the guru said, you have a problem with that side. But for me individually doing yoga, I tried to sort of not think about that part of it. I just tried to think for me it's a positive because I'm getting to know myself with Meditation, and I'm exercising my body with the you know, practice. So I keep it positive within within me but at the back of my head, there is things that you know, the other guru guy, I watched that video as well on Netflix, you know, and I just think there's a problem with yoga in that respect. You do have to have a teacher, but you don't have to have somebody, you know, ruling your world kind of thing. So it's about that really, I think it's about people need to find the freedom with knowing themselves to be able to assert themselves and say, actually, I know that's wrong. And I don't understand why people that study it, get to a place where they feel vulnerable and feel that they've you know, yeah, I don't know if that answered the question.

Interviewer: 5:53

Yeah, it does and I'm just thinking about, you know, you said, you kind you feel like it's a positive experience. Has your beliefs about that experience, your own personal experience changed over time?

Katy: 6:09



Yeah, definitely, definitely. I think, in my 20s, when I did the shivananda, I was like, this is the best thing. And I'm going to throw my all into all this and I'm going to do, you know, their teacher training. And at the time, I didn't have the funds to do it. And I didn't, I wasn't in a position to be able to go away to India for a month, although I would have really done that if I had. And now I'm pleased, that I didn't have the funds, because I think God would have some, you know, I was vulnerable. I was in my 20s, I was probably be thinking like that as well. I think as a mature person, I feel, yeah, I've changed. I don't think that I would ever think that a guru is the be all and end all and do anything that I didn't want to do you know, because I've found myself more now in my older age, and so, in a way, and it's something that I had considered paying for my children to go and do the teacher training with the shivananda, just a month in India and not for them to be teachers but just because I thought it was a good, positive thing to do. And finding out that I was thinking, oh my god, I could have been sending lambs to slaughter. So actually(H) , I think through age, I discovered that you you just have to, I don't know you get a maturity where you do something to a level to yourself for you. You know, I think you could get caught up in all of that. It's like any can't think of the word but those places that take people they drink those Gatorade, what's that? what's the word I'm trying to look for? Cult (..)so it's like any cult, that's a bit cultish and that it can sweep you up and become a negative experience. But if you're confident and you're older, then for me, it's just a positive now, which is great

Interviewer: 8:14

okay. And, and thinking about, obviously, you did your vlogs for me and thinking about how you reflect on doing those vlogs How did you find it?

Katy: 8:30

(umm..) some of them, I was just busy, and I didn't actually do too much reflect, reflecting which I felt a bit guilty about actually, because I thought, I don't know if I'm just waffling on here because I haven't really prepped anything, you know. (umm) so I was just kind of saying what, you know, I thought before, during and after, like ad lib, you know, so a couple of them I sort of sat down a bit and you know, thought about it a bit more. (umm...) I'm sorry, what was the question?

Interviewer: 9:04

that's okay, so so its like (..) did you notice any patterns in the vlogs as you said during and after your experience?

Katy: 9:15

Yeah, I'm pretty sure that my my mind is a bit of a circle that I think the same things (h) over and over again. (umm) you know, I say this to my husband whenever we're in the car whenever you pass a certain building, he'll say the same thing.(h) your mind always go Yeah, and I do it as well and so I think I do probably was thinking that I was thinking God I probably said that last time I was repeating myself, but yeah, I think before it's like any exercise for me beforehand. I'm sort of thinking, oh, God, have I got time. All that, do I feel like it I don't really feel like it and then afterwards, obviously, I feel better because I've done it, and it feels good, because you've been able to stop and clear your mind. And yeah, and you get that detached feeling of like, I don't need to be

thinking all these dizzy thoughts, you know, I just need to be (..) **here (taps head)**. I think that's what it does for me.

Interviewer: 10:20

Okay? And can you tell me more about why you regularly practice yoga?

Katy: 10:27

That was something that I actually wanted to do and I do it because it makes me feel like I'm getting somewhere. So (umm) and it's interesting, because you know, you're not always doing the same part of your body. So for example, the other day, I did some camel and I hadn't done camel for ages and I was surprised at how I wasn't as good as I was when I left off last time doing camel. And that kind of annoyed me a little bit. I thought I could do this, I could do this better before so in a way, it kind of challenges me all the time, because I think I don't like it that I've become stiffer, and I can't do it as good so I think rather than other I mean, you get that with other exercise as well. You get that with them you know anything you get better if you do it more but I think with yoga because you do do different parts of the body that you tend to concentrate on one thing for a while, you might get obsessed with doing a handstand or something and then you'll move on to a backbend. And and yeah, so I think it keeps me interested because it's interesting, because it's a bit different.

Interviewer: 11:45

And as you said, you obviously do other exercises, and other classes. What are the differences for you, between your yoga class and your other classes that you do?

Katy: 12:00

(umm) I suppose I think in my head that they are just exercise and with yoga, there's always the spiritual side, in the background, in like, the teacher will always say something about, you know, think about your heart space, or your ..this, this and in normal exercise, you won't necessarily connect to anything like that you will just do the physical exercise. So for me, I just quite like that. I just quite like it because it feels more whole holistic.

Interviewer: 12:43

Yeah. Okay. And can you tell me about the reasons why and I know you mentioned this in your Vlog, the reasons why you practice yoga online.

Katy: 12:57

Yeah, well, I just started doing that because it was my husband's fiftieth. and I bought him a peloton bike for the, you know, 50 and he hasn't been on it recently much (h). It's become my present I bought for him for me. So I've Yeah, result (h) ,always buy something that you want. So I've actually ended up going on the peloton. And because it was lockdown when his 50th was, and I have been doing an zoom class. And I found the zoom just a little bit I don't know it was all younger people and I felt really conscious of my age being with all these younger people and uncomfortable with it, you know, we have a looked so lovely and I started to get self conscious. So I actually thought, oh, I can do the peloton yoga actually, now I've got this. And so I just Yeah, I

was comfortable with it because I haven't ever done any live classes. I just do all the, you know, recorded classes, and I'm quite happy with that and then sometimes I just do my yoga that I did for my training sometimes I just do it on my own. And it's a different experience. and I quite like it and I haven't gone back to class yet. I think I will. Because it is a different experience, which I also enjoy. And usually the classes I go to aren't women my age, so don't have that, you know, conscious I know that nobody was thinking anything about my age. It was me I know it was coming from me but that was just how I felt. So that's really why I've been doing it online.

Interviewer: 15:00

Um, what would you say the differences are for you are going to an online class versus in person class?

Katy: 15:09

Yeah, so the differences are the social, obviously, because, you know, you get to see friends and (umm) I think I said on the blog, you know, we'd go for a coffee afterwards or something and have a chat. And yeah, that was really nice. And, and there's been a lot a lack of that during lockdown, obviously and so, I quite like that and I work harder, definitely work harder in a class, but not necessarily for my good more because I want to make the shape look good for other people, which, you know, I recognise is not the, you know, but I do that I just can't help it, I do it and, you know, I look at other people oh, there's a nice leggings or, you know, things. I'd like those, where did you get those? and all that sort of stuff? whereas, you know, online? You don't do it? Not as much, you know, not as much of that goes on. So it's just different. In that respect, I can see your dog

Interviewer: 16:14

Yes. She's just lying on the bed. (h, umm...), and thinking about your classes that you do online? What's important to your experience, considering physical factors such as space in the environment you're practising? How important is that?

Katy: 16:40

(umm) it is important in the respect that I said to you that day that everybody was out of the house, I felt like I could just relax into it because when everyone's here, obviously, I'm available, because I'm **Mum(shouts)**, and I need to get lalalala (moves heads from side to side) whatever my teenage children want. So and they want it now has to be paused, you know. And that's my fault I recognise that I don't have to, I could just say go and do yoga, but I do. And yeah, so and even hearing someone, if I'm in, I'm in the living room, hearing someone in the kitchen puts me off. So it is important, and it is good that when you go out to a space, it's literally we're doing yoga here. Yeah, this is not a living room. In yoga, so I do appreciate that in a live experience that, you know, it's a bit more.. the classroom is the learning kind of thing, than my living room. But you know, once everyone's away, and I'm just doing it there, that's great. That's just as good in a way is even better, because you can go, you don't, you're not trying to make a good shape. You're just trying to work to your own edge. And that way, I can get a lot more progression in myself, because I don't care what I look like and if I need

to block to make this, you know better I just go grab a block and I do it, you know, so I can have a bit more of a play around trying to get a move or a position on my own.

Interviewer: 18:23

And do you have one place in the house where you practice your yoga,

Katy: 18:27

I've got a couple of places. So I've got a box room upstairs, that is my like , I've turned it into my meditation room. And so I can also do yoga in there, but I can literally touch you know(stretches arms out) . So it's a bit cramped, but I sometimes would do yoga there. And then because the peloton is I can get it on a big TV screen I like doing in the living room because it's big and yes, I do it there and I do it there. And sometimes we've got a big shed and sometimes I do out in the big shed as well. So I've got one of those It's got a beam and I've got one of those dangling Yogi things inside sometimes we'll do that in there as well.

Interviewer: 19:15

Okay and in terms of your your own practice, and you've already mentioned it a little bit how does being challenged,(..) add or detract from that experience?

Katy: 19:29

I like being challenged so for me, that's quite a good thing I think that is that yeah, I mean, I like being challenged by myself, not necessarily in a race. But yeah, if I get better at something, or something starts to click with me and I think oh, I get it. I really feel like I'm getting further in this move now than I was before that's what keeps me going. In a way, it gives me the incentive to continue. (umm) if I see progress. Yeah.

Interviewer: 20:09

And what about the fact that you, you mentioned you practice online? What about the absence of other people? How does that affect your experience?

Katy: 20:22

It's just different I think it's, it's not as good for socialising(h). And it's better for me to **progress** on my own because, like I said, I can just do you know, if, if, if I was trying to do handstand, or something like that, I don't really want people to see me struggling in a handstand and so like, I'm not going to do that in the studio but I'm going to do that. And I'm going to use all the props, the chair that this, that, that and the other to help me. So that's the difference that I can grunt and groan and (h) use what I want to use look ridiculous. And that helps me but until it's perfected, I'm not going to do it anywhere where other people are going to see me, you know its different

Interviewer: 21:17

Okay. Is there anything else that that for you contributes to your yoga experience?

Katy: 21:28

(umm) ..I think because I've got a couple of friends that haven't, that know that I've done yoga training, they will ask me, you know, what am I supposed to be doing in this

move or that movement, I do quite like, teaching not, not to be a teacher of a class. But I do quite like teaching. I like it. If my husband says, ohh, I've got a really stiff this, that or the other, and I'll say, Oh, you need to do this exercise or that exercise. And when I was doing my teacher training, and my husband helped me, he was a student for me and I quite liked that he was he was (...)experiencing what I'd experienced, like, because he he's quite stiff, and he does an office job. So he was experiencing that beginning part of like, how it really helps you to feel more, you know, and I liked that. I thought that's, I'm offering that to someone. And that's quite a rewarding experience, you know, that you can pass it on. And you can help people with it.

Interviewer: 22:33

So kind of passing on your knowledge that you've gained?

Katy: 22:37

Yeah, yeah, I don't, you know, philosophy wise as well. I'm not saying I'm a great philosopher. But if someone's got a problem with something, and I can sort of say, oh, you know, think about it in this way, or that way, and it's helpful to them, then I quite like I quite like that. Maybe it's a bit superior, but I quite like it.(laughs)

Interviewer: 23:01

And can you explain to me when you're doing your classes? Where are your thoughts in the class?

Katy: 23:13

(umm) (...)mainly on the yoga, which is another good reason why I like it, because I can't think, oh, where did you get your leggings from? If I'm in a position, and I'm trying to do the breath at the right you know, it's like, the other the only other thing I've experienced, like, you know, is deep sea diving. And, you know, you've literally got to breathe, because obviously, and you're aware of your breathing, because you can hear it through the tank. And it's quiet because you know, fish are not rowdy so it's that that's the you know, that is the yoga experience is like being under sea Under the sea. You only want to hear your breathing and focus on what you're doing. That's why it stops me being able to think about all my, yeah, whatever comes in your head.

Interviewer: 24:16

That's a really good analogy. Yeah, of thinking about, you know, how your mind has to be focused on your physicality and your breath. And describe the role the teacher plays for you in the class. Um,

Katy: 24:38

(umm...)I like it if teachers know more than me, philosophically, because that's the bit I'm drawn to. So I don't really mind ohh here's my dog's (points) mind and (...)you know, If they're not as good physically, but they've got it in the mind that I'm learning that for me, that's what I go for. If I meet a teacher like that I'm, I'm hooked. If it's just physical, I'll go just for the physical, and I'll still do the yoga, but I will feel a little bit disappointed if they don't give me a nugget of, you know, something where I go,

oohhhh, yeah yeah, that's something I can apply to life or oh, yes, I needed to hear that today. Like that.

Interviewer: 25:35

I like. Yeah. And in terms of thinking about the teacher, how do you like goals to be set for you in the class, or potentially things like intentions?

Katy: 25:56

(err) So the zoom teacher that I had quite often did that she would send an email saying, right, this week we're focusing on(...) and for me, I never felt like, because we're all at different stages. I never felt like that worked for me really particularly so I wasn't I sort of felt like such shame. She writes these lovely big, long emails, but they don't mean anything to me, because I don't know it just wasn't. I wasn't at the same places of I don't know, I don't know why it didn't work, actually. I mean, I had another teacher that also would focus on that and actually did when I was in the class, pinpoint where I was not getting, and that was good because then he would say, well, you need to do more of d.d.d.d. (moves hands in chopping motion) . But I think the other woman used to say, this is what we're focusing on. But then I don't know, I just never felt like it was followed through. It was followed through, she did do it in the class but for me, there was I don't know, something was a disconnect with, whereas it was a connect with the other guy

Interviewer

What is that about ?

Katy

It might be about (..) Yeah, thinking about it, just talking about it. Now, I think it might have been about him saying, Oh, **you** need to do (points and stares aggressively)\_ . Okay, yeah, I can see where you're going wrong. **You** need to do the dah, dah, dah. Ah, to be fair, she also did say those things, but I, for some reason, just didn't feel like it was (..) I agreed with him. I didn't agree. necessarily, with what she had said, you know, just for my own progress. I thought, Oh, yeah. Then it might even been a one time that he noticed something. It might have been a coincidence. And that, you know, that connected? Yeah. Yeah.

It just been that. One thing that not say that, you know, she's not a good teacher, she is a good teacher, is just that I disconnect on what she was doing the theme and the intention. And with the other teacher in comparison, I definitely felt yes, we're focusing on this. He's seeing what everyone's doing. And he's picking you know, but he's more experienced than her. So that could be just a factor

Interviewer: 28:43

So given the fact that you're doing yoga online, whether that zoom or whether that's, you know, recorded classes online, how do you feel about that feedback within those classes?

Katy: 28:57

(Um), I mean, peloton, you don't really get any feedback I mean, just doing it, and zoom, you do get feedback. So that's, you know, and also there's a there's an element of social in zoom well, you know, so it's not as good as live, but it's better than just what, when I say better, I mean, better socially, but I, because I've done the teacher training, I suppose I feel like, I know I'll be safe, because I'm not going to do anything, you know, but I do sometimes think if I hadn't done the teacher training, and I was doing this, this might not be enough for me. I might need a bit more feedback. But because I remember, okay, you know, I need to be doing this but I mean, I can always teach myself but use them as a guide.

Interviewer: 29:51

(umm) Okay, and how aware are you of your environment during the classes you take online

Katy: 30:04

I think online, not very aware of my environment just yeah, maybe things like if I have to pause it to do something, or my dog walks in, or they sit on my mat, he always sits on my mat and he's old and he's really grumpy so if you accidentally Oh yeah, he snaps at you and it's really scary. So that's, that's the only thing in my environment that I like (raise hands to face) I've just maybe been bitten by a dog do so. Yeah, that's not great. But yeah, mostly, I'm not really aware. Maybe I'm doing something and the couch just happens to be in a really good place for me to lean on it, then. Yeah, I think, Oh, that's good. That just universe put that prop there for me.

Interviewer: 31:01

(h) Why do you think you're perhaps not as aware of your environment whilst you're doing your class?

Katy: 31:09

Just because I'm focusing on what I'm doing, I suppose that I've gone in (puts hands to heart) . And I'm listening to my breath and I'm trying to and I'm, I'm focused at the person in the screen as well, and what they're doing not always because sometimes I just listen and do it but if I'm unsure if I've got this right, am I doing the right thing? Then I'll just glance at the screen. Oh, yeah, I've got it right. Or Oh, no, I'm not even in the right, you know, position posture or whatever I say yeah, sometimes I just use it as an audio.

Interviewer: 31:47

And how about how aware of your own self you during the class? Whether that's physically or mentally?

Katy: 32:01

(umm...) I don't think I am aware of myself much. Really I mean, how what I didn't know how aware I could be because I mean I can't see it from the outside in. So (..) and yeah, I mean, I think I think I noticed when I've drifted off? I'm not in it, if.., why am I

thinking about that? I don't need to be thinking about that. I need to be thinking about this. So yeah, I mean, I noticed a shift or not focus, then I tried to focus in again.

Interviewer: 32:39

Okay. And how about time? how aware of time are you during your class

Katy: 32:45

Well I know, when I put how much I'm putting the class on for so there'll be like, I'll look at the clock and think, right, okay, I've got I've got time for 45 minute, 20 minute, or, you know, and however much time I've got before I have to go and do whatever I've got to do then . I'll just do that size of class. And so I'm aware that Okay, I'm going to finish it this time and then I can forget the time, because I know that this class is a 20 minute class. And I know that what I've got to do is fine, because it's in 30 minutes or whatever. So that yeah, I can forget time, because I know it will finish. Yes. So I kind of,

Interviewer: 33:30

um, do you think sometimes time me the passes more quickly or slowly? And why would that be in the class itself?

Katy: 33:39

Yeah, I mean, if I'm not enjoying the class, it's so slow. And I just think ohhh shall I turn this off, because it's just not doing it, you know, for me? And I think noooo. So I've rarely switch it off. But there have been times when I've thought of doing this now. And then other times when obviously you think oh, shivasana (yoga relaxation) already (h) Yeah.

Interviewer: 34:08

And do you have awareness of why that may be? What will contribute to either one class going really quickly and thinking, Oh, my gosh, we're here at relaxation,

Katy: 34:18

oh, enjoyment, this enjoyment, I think so if I'm enjoying it, time is going to go quickly. If I'm finding it a chore. It's going to go slowly.

Interviewer: 34:29

Okay. And how does yoga challenge and or reward you

Katy: 34:37

and I think the reward is in feeling better. And I feel like I've got less aches and pains and I (...) just i I think that I cope with things much better during the meditation as well and the pranayama. It's just calming I'm just less volatile, and I'm more of a smooth temperament. And those are the rewards. I think. Do you say what are the downsides?

Yeah, so the challenges are that you always want to be as good as the teacher, you know, you always want, what can I do that they can do that? Why can't I do that? you know, that's frustrating. But then you have to think, well, everybody's built differently



and, you know, maybe they could just do that, when they were born and they just built it. Yeah, I think flexible people anyway, are attracted to yoga. So like, you're always going to see these flexible people and actually, the people that should be doing it are stiff people. So you know, whatever you're doing, wherever you're getting, I just try and think well, that's, you know, that's better than yesterday, or at least, you know, you're doing it still. And that means that I think (..) I don't want to be in a mobility scooter when I'm older. And I'm starting to think of that now so I'm just, you know, for me, it's challenging to do some of the postures, but at the same time, I like to challenge myself because I don't want to be an old person that can't move. If I make it that far (h) .

Interviewer: 36:38

Yeah. And you when you described why it rewards you you said it makes you feel better. And you mentioned both physical factors, and also kind of emotional factors. Why do you think that there is those two elements, what contributes to that?

Katy: 36:58

I think it is, that's why I love the philosophy, because the philosophy is the detached thing that I think that when things get to you, it means you're attaching to it, you're being all up and involved in your problems, and you're creating more because your mind's going mental in a downward spiral over something. And I think what that does is kind of draw the line under it, and just stops you and think, you know, you stop thinking and you're more in (...) you know, it sounds a bit mushy, but you're in your, you're trying to connect your actual soul. You know, you, you are then trying to think, well, you know, my mind is trying to sort this problem out, but actually, what would my soul do? and then you realise, actually, my soul would not be flapping about like a fish out of water over this, my soul would be just accepting it and letting go. And that's what helps me I think that's the reward is that I can go, I don't have to do all this, you know, (...)stressing, I really don't, I could just be accepting and detaching and all those good things.

Interviewer: 38:26

And how much does breath play a role in that?

Katy: 38:31

I love pranayama so, you know, I, I just do half an hour of pranayama before I meditate, and it's just just gets me to a place to a calm place. (umm) the breathing, I just think it's, it's a good tool it's a fantastic tool to it's just a way of concentrating on the breath, and focusing in on the breath and nothing else. And then, you know, you're there kind of thing you're in, you're ready to meditate, because you've taken the journey away from the chaos.

Interviewer: 39:13

And tell me about what would be your ideal yoga class.

Katy: 39:23

(umm) I used to love the shivananda yoga class because it's almost(..) it's almost wrong, but it's like an army. It's like, **everyone does everything**. **Everyone** does headstand, you know, everyone does shoulder stand. It's not like, and if somebody is having difficulty, it's like, No, no, no, you can do it, you know. And because I did that in my 20s I quite liked that because I was sort of thinking, yeah, you know, they've got this attitude of like, you can do it. You can do it. But I think as I've gotten older, I now sort of think Well, actually, that isn't safe for everyone to, you know, do the headstand, it isn't really safe for everyone to be forced into, you know, shoulder stand and all that sort of thing so I think I've moderated my view. But I did used to love that discipline of, we're doing this (slaps hands together) , and we're all gonna do that but I did quite like that there's a part of me that still kind of likes that, because you put your body through your paces, you know. And it's like, you do this set thing. And it's almost like, you can go through it robotically, because you have these set needs and I did used to quite like that because if you then go to the what I kind of do now is, you know, the hatha and obviously, you're keeping it really safe, because I want to be able to walk when I'm older. I don't want to break, I don't want to have a neck that hurts, blah, blah, blah, all those things. So obviously, I'm trying to be safe now but I do miss the, you know, and the set routine of like, right, tick,(ticking action with hands) I've done that set routine, and I did it all. So now it's like, oh, I can just concentrate in on my hips today, or I'm just doing better. And it's nice. I like it but I think I just Yeah, I don't know. It's like, I suppose when you're in the army and you do that fitness every day, you want to do it because you get into a habit of doing it so but no, the gentle yoga is good. It's just I have to sort of stop wanting to put myself through the paces. I guess.

Interviewer: 41:32

It's hard, isn't it? and final question so we're on final question. Can you tell me or summarise really how yoga makes you feel?

Katy: 41:48

I suppose it makes me feel like I've got a hobby. It makes me feel like I'm part of a community because you know, there's other people that you meet in the classes and things like that (umm....) I think it makes you feel like people that are also interested in yoga have something in common with you, because they're probably going to be interested in the philosophy and that kind of stuff. So straightaway, you know, you're going to have something in common, probably with that person. So yeah, I can I think that's all I can think of.

Interviewer: 42:30

And what about for you personally, how yoga makes you feel on a personal level, having practised yoga for as long as you have?

Katy: 42:39

Yeah I think on a personal level, it's like, I feel like I've got a skill set. You know, when I said to you, if I had to go to prison, or has been kidnapped me, which is bizarre thoughts. I know. But it's always one of those things that I think I've got it, I can do it so if I was in a cell for 24 hours a day, I'd be doing that. And I'd be keeping myself sane and it almost feels like I've got a secret weapon that I use to keep myself sane.

Interviewer: 43:14  
(dog barks) sorry.  
I mean, she was doing so well.

Katy: 43:18  
Its been a long time

Interviewer: 43:21  
yet so you ..sorry. You felt you were saying you feel like you've got this power type thing? Yeah.

Katy: 43:27  
Yeah, it's like a secret weapon because I know if I'm somewhere I'm... well as long as no one's watching I'm going to do it to stay sane if I'm in a situation that makes me feel insane I know I got a way of staying sane. So I just feel like any difficult situation that will be my go to and it'll be you know, available to me because it's there. I've learned to (..) you know, I've got it, philosophy a bit of it .

Interviewer  
Yes. Amazing. I'm just going to stop recording because that's it...

## Appendix E – Example of Experiential Statement Notation in NVivo

Transcription from Julie Vlog

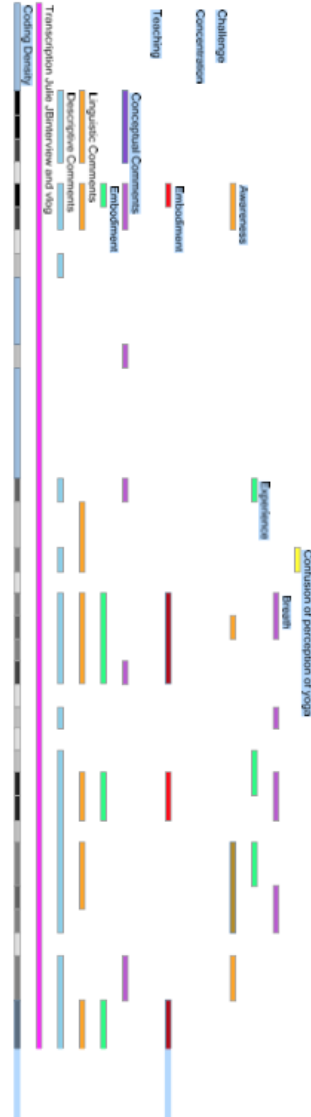
Vlog entry Monday 9.08.21

So (umm) I just finished my yoga class, which is yoga on the beach tonight,<sup>1</sup> (umm) pretty sort of amazing class (h) I have to say. Like for me, usually when I do yoga<sup>2</sup>, I find there's a sort of sense of stillness<sup>3</sup> and a sense of going inwards<sup>4</sup>. (umm) but cos, it was such a wild evening, and the waves were so loud and were sort of all crashing onto the beach. It kind of forced me to sort of go outside of myself in my practice,<sup>5</sup> and just be really aware of kind of I don't know life around me, I guess. And it was just, I think, for that reason, it was just really exhilarating in a way that I wouldn't describe yoga as being exhilarating<sup>6</sup>. (umm) I would describe it and lots of other ways to say sort of calming and peaceful and centring<sup>7</sup>. (umm) and it was, it was definitely (...)not calming. But yeah, I kind of, I feel really sort of alive and yeah and yeah, and I don't know<sup>8</sup>.. just sort of quite an amazing place after that yoga session so (umm) yeah, that's probably it. Really. I'm not sure I could add to it. Yeah, it was amazing. It was just wonderful to be outside<sup>9</sup> and just to have that experience (sigh..) of the sea and the waves in the water, but be able to do a practice with all of that going around you yeah (...) wonderful

Vlog Entry 2

Morning, so just did yoga in the park class today which is very nice. It's a community yoga<sup>10</sup>. So it's free class so people just turn up (Umm) it was kind of, I wasn't, I wasn't, probably wasn't really feeling it<sup>11</sup> when I, I think when I went along, but I kind of know and sometimes when I have that resistance to do yoga<sup>12</sup> or to doing any sort of any sort of physical activity, really, I know that's probably what is I need to be doing but, but today, (umm) my practice today was very much with my breath which it isn't always, I was really using ughahii(yoga style of breath) breath today to try and centre myself<sup>13</sup> and that was, so that was definitely more of a focus for me, then (umm) sometimes, the postures can be (umm)because there's that very kind of mindful sense of where my body is<sup>14</sup> and isn't a sense of certainly for me in my yogamoving which, which, clearly it needs to be. But sometimes that's at the expense of the breath, say, and using the breath today just gave my practice a slightly different focus. So it was really nice (umm) and as we kind of sort of work through, I think my head was quite scattered so I was aware that I was just constantly kind of being pulled away into different thoughts.<sup>15</sup> So really trying to use practice the breath to bring me back.<sup>16</sup> I mean, it was, you know, it was a kind of, sort of fairly sort of gentle asanas (yoga postures) so it wasn't anything particularly demanding or where you really have to kind of think about what you needed to do for the for the pose, really, and I think I've been doing yoga for such a long time. Sometimes there's a sort of automatic sense of automatically<sup>17</sup> going into the pose whereas, say today, I was kind of, very consciously using the breath to move into the pose.<sup>18</sup> And what I did notice is, is that right at the end, when we did sort of Standing Forward Fold the teacher sort of said, you know, trying to get your hands on, which I did, and I just had this real sense of being very connected to the ground<sup>19</sup> in a way that I certainly hadn't been when I started off the yoga so that, so that was that felt really good. So coming away from the actual practice, I certainly feel more centred (umm) and less or monkey mind than I did when I started, say, yeah, so as always, I

1 / 20



## Appendix F – Example of Coding Report in NVivo

Classification	Aggregate	Coverage	Number Of Coding References	Reference Number	Coded By Initials	Modified On
				2	J	08/12/2021 11:13
of kind of find a bit of quiet						
<hr/>						
<b>Nodes\\Step 2 - Initial noting\\Descriptive Comments\\Teaching</b>						
	No	0.0600	17			
				1	J	15/11/2021 08:47
with somebody I haven't worked with before.						
				2	J	15/11/2021 11:16
clearly a very confident, very experienced teacher. (umm) and that sort of came across I think, also I was just really able to kind of give myself to the practice						
				3	J	08/12/2021 11:17
I'm really missing being taught in a particular way.						
				4	J	15/11/2021 11:17
haven't really found a teacher who I feel that I'd really want to keep going back to that (ummm) but she is someone who I would really to work with.						
				5	J	15/11/2021 11:51
really good teacher. I really liked her style of yoga, I really liked her style of teaching. And she explained everything really well so it's definitely something I'm going to pursue a little bit more						
				6	J	16/11/2021 14:33
And then I think just because of how she, her practice was and how she taught her(..), I just then became kind of more interested in the sort of philosophy of yoga if you like, and then it becoming more it became more of a sort of mindfulness practice (umm)						
				7	J	17/11/2021 09:43
I do really enjoy that those all taught classes, it just, you know, you know, I think that when I'm on my own that perhaps some habits can form around it that maybe I just don't kind of thing engage with it in quite the same way						
				8	J	17/11/2021 10:38

I just really prefer being in classes are taught,

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9

J

17/11/2021 11:13

don't often get those kinds of messages elsewhere.

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10

J

24/11/2021 10:43

I just feel a real affinity to the practice or real affinity to the teacher and then, you know, it's kind of, yeah, it's just a really lovely feeling you know,

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Reports\Coding Summary By File Report

## Appendix G – Example of Personal Experiential Theme Table – Katy

### KATY ONLINE PERSONAL EXPERIENTIAL THEME TABLE

#### PET 1. YOGA HELPS ME SEE THE WOOD FROM THE TREES (019)

##### EXPERIENTIAL STATEMENT A – YOGA CHANGES THE WAY I THINK

I don't know what it is, I think you just can see that (umm) you can see the wood for the trees, if that's the correct expression. (umm...) yeah, I think I've already said that you just don't take things as personal and when you're in a more centred place. No 0.0126-2Yoga helps me see the wood from the trees No 0.0126 – 1

Yoga is it's just, you know, it's, it is sanity. It is a way to get away from problems from negative thoughts, from your own opinions from other people's opinions, from chaos, and from just curveballs that are sent to you in life. So it's, (umm)yeah, it keeps it simple and it is just, you know, breathing in and out and moving. And yeah, it just it just brings brings peace.

I needed it, I needed to take some time. It's just always good to have a moment that's for you and for you to be able to pause, connect ,breathe and, you know, move (..)tight bones and muscles. (ummm)and also, to become curious about what's going on ..what's going on in in life that I feel that I haven't got time to stop and do (umm) yoga Taking me time 0.0120-1

when you have problems that seem unsurmountable, and you have chaos going on in your world, it's just fantastic to (...)seek out this still place where you can, (....)those things can fade into the background. And (umm) yeah that's it really (..)it's especially, it's especially for (...)me as well, it's my time, so I'm not dealing with other things and other people, I am coming back to myself. 0.0120-3

I just found that after the class, I would be sad, but in a nice way, but like, sort of, yeah, releasing stuff and it just felt addictive to me after that, Processing my thoughts No 0.0026

the yoga experience is like being under sea Under the sea. You only want to hear your breathing and focus on what you're doing. That's why it stops me being able to think about all my, yeah, whatever comes in your head. Yoga is like being under the sea 0.037-1

when you get an interruption to think of it as a thunderstorm and just think, oh, it's thundering, you know, and and that's helped me a lot because it stops you from getting angry because you know, it's it's not important to get, I mean, nobody in their right mind would get angry at a thunderstorm and you shouldn't really get angry and Yoga helps me deal with distractions as passing storms No 0.0093

## EXPERIENTIAL STATEMENT B – YOGA IS MY SECRET WEAPON TO GROUND ME BACK TO MY SELF

it's like a secret weapon because I know if I'm somewhere I'm well as long as no one's watching I'm going to do it to stay sane if I'm in a situation that makes me feel insane I know I got a way of staying sane. So I just feel like any difficult situation that will be my go to and it'll be you know, available to me because it's there. I've learned to (...) you know, I've got it, philosophy a bit of it . Yoga is my secret weapon No 0.0069-1

when I've got lots of stuff going on, and lots of chaos, it is fantastic to do (umm...)getting centred and things like that, because the chaos just doesn't go away, obviously but it goes to the background, and makes me think that, you know, things like this, too shall pass and look at the bigger picture Yoga as a remedy to stress 0.0051

So this week, I had something that (umm...) triggered some, some negative feelings in me. And I did some yoga, did some meditation did . And I was really able to, I mean, I was working on it. But I was able to distance myself from my emotions and distance myself from the feeling and almost objectively look at it and just feel a whole lot better about the situation. Trying to improve my mental health 0.0152-1

I actually don't care about the problem as badly as I did before I did the meditation. So (umm) that's what I've realised that yoga yoga and meditation does for me is that, because I'm only focused on that, at that time, and I can (umm...) go into the stillness, basically, (umm) that it really stops me taking things personally, it is (...) just really, really great, Experiencing mindfulness through yoga 0.00162-2

with yoga, there's always the spiritual side, in the background, in like, the teacher will always say something about, you know, think about your heart space, or your this, this and in normal exercise, you won't necessarily connect to anything like that you will just do the physical exercise. So for me, I just quite like that. Yoga as a spiritual practice 0.0120-2

when you have problems that seem unsurmountable, and you have chaos going on in your world, it's just fantastic to (...)seek out this still place where you can, (...)those things can fade into the background. And (umm) yeah that's it really (..)it's especially, it's especially for (...)me as well, it's my time, so I'm not dealing with other things and other people, I am coming back to myself. And then when I come back to deal with other people and to deal with the other people and problems, then I'm in a much better place a much more detached place where I'm not(...) where I'm more effective, because when you're in chaos, and things start to get overwhelming, you're actually becoming less effective (...)because you can feel that everything's getting on top of you and so you don't actually make the best decisions. But once you've taken that time out and come back to the situation, you are more effective, Yoga is a place where I can escape and reflect 0.0163

I think as well, doing the pranayama (yogic breath) really helps me to and the yoga to realise that sometimes I'm in shallow breath, and (..) helps me to remember to breathe fully . The role the breath plays 0.0080



EXPERIENTIAL STATEMENT C – FEELING TRANSFORMED AND UNITED BY YOGA

in my 20s, when I did the shivananda, I was like, this is the best thing. And I'm going to throw my all into all this Learning in yoga 0.0075

I think before it's like any exercise for me beforehand. I'm sort of thinking, oh, God, have I got time. All that, do I feel like it I don't really feel like it and then afterwards feel better because I've done it, and it feels good, because you've been able to stop and clear your mind. Feelings of transformation by doing a class 0.0246-4

I thought, I'm just going to take advantage of the fact that I feel like I've got some headspace and some physical space in the house so I then did a restorative class, and then I did a lovely relaxation. By the end of it, I did not have a headache. So, you know, that was fantastic. 0.0048-1

I can do this every day (ermm) and my joints felt better I just felt more easy in my joints and more flexible. I actually felt calmer as well. All the thoughts that I've got loads to do today actually felt like well, I have got a lot of things to do today. But I'll get more done being in a calmer mood (ummm) Feeling more prepared for the day 0.0161-1

in yoga that you kind of take what you learn in yoga, and meditation into your life so you, you're learning lessons, and you're learning to become aware so that when you go out and you're living in the world, that you (..)don't just react to everything that happens that you respond to that you sort of think about why you're feeling a certain way, and then decide upon how you will respond so you are taking a slower approach to thinking, Okay, I'm feeling this feeling about that. I don't need to react right now. I'm gonna think about how I feel about that Yoga has changed other areas of my life 0.0171-1

make me disciplined in it, and to do it every day. And I do that now. So I'm in a good place with it. So that it is part of my life. 0.0171-2

I like yoga, because it is body and mind it's not just, I mean, I like other exercise as well. And you know, sometimes when you're running or when you're cycling, it can be meditative, because it is a repetitive action. But (umm)yoga, you are a bit more focused in on your breathing and your movement at the same time so your mind is less likely to wander. Mind and body as one 0.0110

I feel better because I've done it, and it feels good, because you've been able to stop and clear your mind. And yeah, and you get that detached feeling of like, I don't need to be thinking all these dizzy thoughts, you know, I just need to be (..) here. I think that's what it does for me. 0.0110 – 2

I think I feel when I do yoga and mediate on that I'm taking responsibility for my own physical and mental well being. So for that reason alone, it's, it's a positive thing. Yoga is for mind and body 0.010

**Appendix H – Example of Group Experiential Theme Table – Katy highlighted for cross-reference**

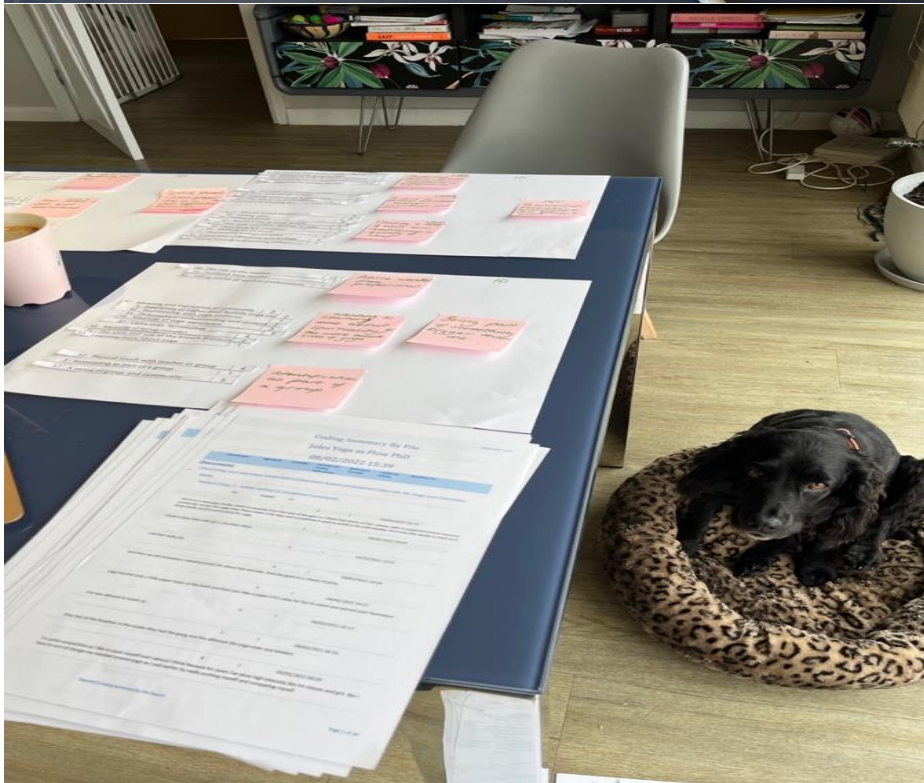
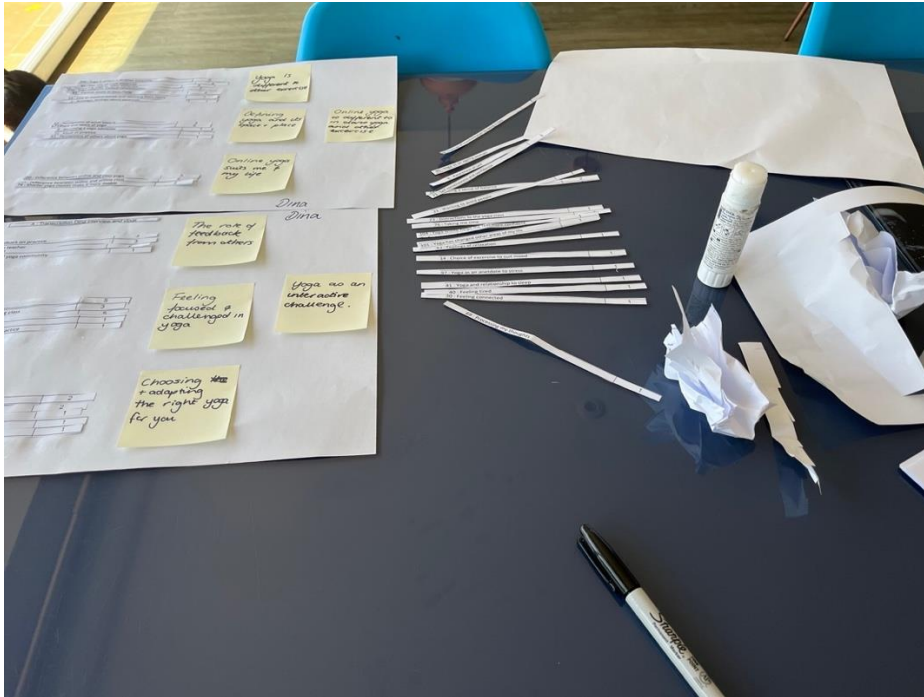
**Appendix H - Example of Group Experiential Theme table – Online Participants**

**GET 1: Reflection and transformation of self through yoga (highlighted Katy as example)**

		<b>Theme A Creating a sense of self-transformation through yoga</b>	
<b>Ppt</b>	<b>PET no.</b>	<b>Personal Experiential Theme</b>	<b>Experiential Statements</b>
Cathy	O1	1.Yoga makes me feel transformed – Physically and mentally	1A. – The effect of yoga as a spiritual practice
			1b - Yoga and managing my mental health
			1C. - Feeling transformed after a yoga class
Caitlyn	O6	<u>3 – Embodied transformation of self</u>	7A - REALISATION OF SELF – INSPIRATION TO FRUSTRATION
			7B – PHYSICAL LIMITATIONS AND EMBODIMENT IN YOGA
			7C – FEELING TRANSFORMED BY DOING A YOGA CLASS
	O4	<u>1- Yoga is more than just an exercise</u>	5C – YOGA AND ME TIME REFLECTIONS ON MY MENTAL WELLBEING
Charlie	O18	3 – Creating a sense of self-transformation through yoga	19A – The need for ‘me’ time
			19B – Feeling transformed after yoga
			19C – Yoga and the whole self – mind and body
Dina	O15	3 – Transformation of self though yoga	16A – Feeling transformed after class
			16B – Rebalancing back to self
			16C – How yoga has changed me
<b>Katy</b>	<b>O19</b>	<b>1. – Yoga helps me see the wood from the trees</b>	<b>20C – Feeling transformed and united by yoga</b>
Darcy	O11	2 – How yoga changes my whole sense of self	12A –Feeling physically strong
			12B – Yoga affect my innate sense of self
			12c – Body image expressed in yoga
Darcy	O10	1. – I see yoga as an essential part of my life – on and off the mat	11B – Making time for myself

**Appendix I – Example of Clustering Personal Experiential Statements to Personal  
(photos from personal collection)**

**Experiential Themes by hand – Katy**



120 : I need to do yoga	3
85 : Taking me time	1
118 : Come back to myself	2
80 : Reflections of personal yoga practice	1
77 : Processing my thoughts	1
125 : Yoga is like being under the sea	1
122 : Yoga helps me deal with distractions as passi	1
119 : Emptying your mind	1

Yoga changes the way I think

Katy

126 : Yoga is my secret weapon	1
104 : Yoga as a remedy to stress	1
95 : Trying to improve my mental health	2
28 : Experiencing mindfulness through yoga	3
96 : Dealing with negative mental health	3
84 : Spiritual identification through yoga	3
105 : Yoga as a spiritual practice	2
111 : Yoga grounds me back to myself	1
124 : Yoga is a place where I can escape and reflect	2
32 : Feel guilty if I dont do yoga	1
92 : The role the breath plays	2

Yoga is my secret weapon to ground me back to myself

Yoga helps me see the wood from the trees

6 : Awareness of self	2
62 : Learning in yoga	3
49 : Feelings of transformation by doing a class	5
38 : Feeling more prepared for the day	2
112 : Yoga has changed other areas of my life	3
67 : Mind and body as one	2
114 : Yoga is for mind and body	2

Feeling transformed + united by yoga

## Appendix J – Prevalence Table

(prevalence to be used to show representation across large sample groups (Smith et al. 2022)– Online Participants

<b>Online Group Experiential Theme 1</b>	<b>Prevalence - participants represented in sub-theme</b>
<b>Reflection and transformation of self through yoga</b>	
<b>Sub-theme A</b>	Cathy, Caitlyn, Charlie, Dina, Katy, Darcy
<b>Sub-theme B</b>	Tia, Katy, Darcy

<b>Online Group Experiential Theme 2</b>	<b>Prevalence - participants represented in sub-theme</b>
<b>Yoga continues to challenge me physically and emotionally as I age</b>	
<b>Sub-theme C</b>	Cathy, Caitlyn, Charlie, Dina, Tia, Katy, Darcy
<b>Sub-theme D</b>	Tia, Cathy, Katy, Dina

<b>Online Group Experiential Theme 3</b>	<b>Prevalence - participants represented in sub-theme</b>
<b>The uniqueness of doing yoga online</b>	
<b>Sub-theme E</b>	Cathy, Caitlyn, Charlie, Dina, Tia, Katy
<b>Sub-theme F</b>	Cathy, Dina Tia, Charlie, Caitlyn, Katy. Darcy
<b>Sub-theme G</b>	Dina, Caitlyn, Tia, Charlie, Katy, Darcy

<b>Classroom Group Experiential Theme 1</b>	<b>Prevalence - number of participants represented as part of sub-theme</b>
<b>Accepting and evolving sense of self</b>	
<b>Sub-theme H</b>	Beau, Diane, Hannah, Sasha
<b>Sub-theme I</b>	Sasha Beau, Holly, Diane, Poppy
<b>Sub-theme J</b>	Sasha, Poppy, Hannah, Beau, Julie
<b>Classroom Group Experiential Theme 2</b>	<b>Prevalence - number of participants represented as part of sub-theme</b>
<b>A sense of human and spatial connection and guidance</b>	
<b>Sub-theme K</b>	Beau, Hannah, Julie, Sasha
<b>Sub-theme L</b>	Poppy, Holly, Beau
<b>Sub-theme M</b>	Sasha, Diane, Hannah, Julie, Beau. Holly

<b>Classroom Group Experiential Theme 3</b>	<b>Prevalence - number of participants represented as part of sub-theme</b>
<b>The 'felt' effects of yoga – embodiment, challenge, and impact on mental health</b>	
<b>Sub-theme N</b>	Poppy, Holly, Diane, Beau, Julie, Hannah
<b>Sub-theme O</b>	Julie, Beau, Holly, Sasha, Diane
<b>Sub-theme P</b>	Poppy, Hannah, Sasha, Beau

## Appendix K – An Extract of Researcher Reflexive Journal

### PILOT AND PLANNING

30/6/21

I have been running three pilots who are currently doing vlogs for me. I have noticed people are unsure of what exactly I am wanting from the vlogs and need guidance. This will need to be considered when conducting research. I have also noticed that the vlog content is quite similar and does not seem to change in terms of what is discussed – I have asked people in the pilot only to do three vlogs but for my research I am expecting participants to do six vlogs. I am wondering whether this is too much, and I should only ask them to do three or four? I feel as though if I ask participants to do 6 this will become frustrating for them and may perhaps detract from the content of the interview. Need to discuss with my supervisors.

30/7/21

Have transcribed all vlogs per participant as they come to me and have presented them as a continuous document i.e., Vlog 1 then vlog 2 and have read over them to prepare for interview, I am still concerned that I am not getting enough content from the vlogs and that they are repetitive so have emailed supervisors my thoughts before I meet with them.

12/8/21

Interview with first pilot participant went really well and lasted about an hour. The participant recounted that they had really enjoyed the process of vlogging as it gave them time to reflect on the yoga classes they attended. I was surprised just how open they were and how much they shared of their own personal journey and struggles and how that directly related to their yoga experience. The questions seemed to be fairly clear but as I transcribed the interview, I noticed that I am not very clear when answering questions or clarifying what questions meant as I try to talk too much and explain if they question meaning which I think looking back sounds a little confusing. I also noticed that in this scenario I have asked leading questions which shows perhaps nerves and inexperience so going forward I need to ensure that I keep the questions simple and not elaborate too much. I transcribed the interview using my notation system and again was surprised how long the transcription took. This was a very interesting interview but did take just over an hour so will need to measure time for the next pilot to ensure that the length is less.

14/8/21

Conducted the second pilot interview today which was a bit more challenging as the participant was less descriptive in their answers and I found that I had to repeat and explain quite a few of the questions as they kept forgetting what they were talking about and going off on tangents which felt like the interview was more disjointed and felt like they had less depth. Again, found myself perhaps leading the interview too much and have to make sure that I am comfortable in the main research to be silent, which I think is due to my own nervousness and wanting to fill the gaps. I noticed this participant mentioned the image of yoga and those who do yoga more implying she liked the perception of being someone who 'did yoga' which brought up feelings of judgement in me that this was more superficial but have to be aware this is just my opinion and have to detract from this. This participant said the vlogs were difficult to know what to say so I have to think about how to provide more guidance to participants without being prescriptive. I transcribed the interview which was 45 mins long so this was reassuring in terms of interview length as it seems as though we will get enough content from the questions I have, and the interviews will not be too long.

20/7/21

Had a meeting with my supervisors to discuss whether the vlogs should be changed to a shorter duration 4 instead of a total of 6 that I proposed. My concern was that the vlogs would just repeat themselves and actually would detract from the main interview and make the interview less valuable. The discussion was whether the participants would actually start to become less guarded and actually whether even if it is similar sometimes it is the mundane where the most valuable research can be gathered. My supervisors made the point that actually have a longer length of vlogs i.e., the six I had originally proposed would give participants time to open up as they continued with the process. It was agreed that I should stick with the proposed length of vlogs but perhaps to try and have more contact with the participants at the beginning of the research to make them feel more comfortable about both what I was asking them to do but also for them to start to build a relationship with me and make them feel more comfortable. I have thought about this and have decided that once I have their vlogs a way to build rapport with them and make them feel more comfortable to share that I will send them vlogs back just to say hello and to say thank you for their vlog so that they can see me and get to know me a little better to allow them to be more open both at the vlogging stage and their interview stage.

25/7/21

I have started to recruit for my participants, and I am aiming for seven offline and seven online. I have put posts on a local community site, a (digital) fitness group and my own personal page. I have been really delighted with the response and have had twenty people reply to my request. I am mindful I don't want to over recruit and therefore swamp myself with participants so will just stick to the areas I have recruited from and then if I don't get enough, I can work from here. I have drafted emails to send to people to gauge interest and those that responds positively I have sent them the PAF and supporting documents. I have also created a spreadsheet so I can track

communications, who has agreed to do research and added in columns to confirm how many vlogs they have done so I can easily track the progress of the participants and communicate with them effectively.

30/7/21

I have already had ten people sign their PAF and one has even done and sent own vlog. I have noticed those that do digital classes online are much more able to send back forms and have asked much fewer questions about the vlogs, perhaps just meaning they are more digitally able and used to working with smart phones, digital forms etc. I have spoken to a few people and sent a few emails just to simplify what and how to do the vlogs but have just reiterated what was on the PIS sheet as I am conscious that I am not leading them too much.

#### DURING RESEARCH

9/8/21

I have set up a system to ensure that I am tracking where people are in their interviews and that I am emailing them personalised emails to keep contact, to say thank you and to encourage them to do the next one. The content of the emails is very brief but just entitled thank you for completing Vlog number 1 or 2 etc – I will do this every week so that it becomes a normal reminder for those people doing the vlogs. I have also ensured that once people have sent their first vlog by whats app that I have recorded a vlog back and sent it to them to say that I have got it and thank them for doing it, as feel this will make people feel more at ease and start to form a more familiar relationship with me which will hopefully a) make them feel more comfortable so that they keep doing their vlogs b) that when it comes to interview that they feel more comfortable with me. This is because I am aware that I do not know these people at all and have never met them and a vlog is quite personal and intimidating to do so I want to help make the participants more comfortable. I am receiving a lot of vlogs and a lot of people on their first one are saying things such as “I’m not sure if this is what you want”, “Let me know if you need more” so I do feel as though my vlog reply helps alleviate any worries they may have.

16/8/21

The people I have sent vlogs back to have all responded positively and have said that it is good to meet me (virtually), and it made them feel better as one participant said otherwise, “I feel like I’m talking into the ether - now I feel like I am talking to you”. I will therefore do at least one more vlog to each participant to continue that feeling and familiarity and comfort for my participants. Interestingly after I have sent a vlog reply their next vlog is more personal and some are starting to share more about their lives as well as being perhaps more descriptive in their following vlogs.

31/8/21

First interview -Dina



I read through all the six vlogs before conducting the interview to familiarise myself with the case. The interview went well and lasted 43 mins, the participant did need to be encouraged to answer and again I found myself talking too much which I need to be aware of at times once I transcribed the interview, I saw areas I could have probed more. I will do this for each case.

7/9/21

Second interview - Caitlyn

This participant shared quite personal information on her vlogs about her life, her emotional state and her feeling's so I was expecting her to be the same in the interview but actually in the interview she seemed more guarded and less expressive. She explained that she is on medication for anxiety and that avoids social situation as she finds them difficult, in places in the interview it seemed as though she was perhaps answering some questions with how she wanted to be perceived rather than how she truly felt as in places her answers were contradictory. I wonder if this is because the interview was a different dynamic with someone she doesn't know, and the vlogs were more vacuous and felt as though they weren't really going anyway so perhaps made this participant more able to share. I am reflecting on therefore whether the vlogs in some cases may give me more detailed information and perhaps real information than the interviews as they are more open and potentially less intimidating than a one-to-one interview?. This perhaps also suggests that the value of the vlogs in terms of depth per case maybe be more than I first anticipated and actually supports my supervisors view that the depth could be achieved in vlogs but perhaps also suggests that for some the real lived experience can be accessed more easily with this form of self-journaling which the vlogs provided even more than the depth interview

This interview was interesting as it really explained how this person saw yoga as necessary in her life for her well-being and viewed it was the only real alone time she has. She explained that although she is often alone – working from home, driving to get kids there is always a purpose and it always involves others and yoga is her only time to be “alone, alone”. She expressed she needs this time and space and she saw yoga as dedicated time to be silent and to give back to herself. Suggests perhaps a need for allocated alone time is sacred. She was also fairly negative about her body image and saw a clear distinction between running which she hated and saw it as weight management and yoga which for her kept her calm and was a chance to take time to care for her self.

30/9/21 Cathy interview

This interview was really good it seemed to flow really well with very little prompts needed. I found that the participant was very clear and articulate in her responses and seemed incredibly self-aware. Interestingly she had tried journaling her yoga practice in the past but found the practice of vlogs easier and more revealing and has said that she will continue with this practice of vlogging as she found it so helpful. She felt that knowing she was thinking about her experience made her think more clearly about how she was currently feeling and what she needed from the practice and as she practices online, she could therefore find a practice which suited her and what she felt she needed at the time. This is interesting as seems to stress the nature of the vlogs as

immediate reflections but also as this participant pointed out that the vlog enabled her to sit and think about her practice which she said she doesn't do. There seems to be connections to interpretations and the double hermeneutic here. The participant said almost reflecting about the reflection on the class almost increased her sense of value of the class and further inspired her to want to do more yoga. Need to pick this up as a number of the participants have commented on how the act of reflection through doing the vlogs have made them want to practice more and realise the value of yoga to them even more. The participant also mentioned that although she practices online, she feels part of a virtual community, but this is the first time this has come up in an interview for online.