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## The potential of Iyengar yoga as an aid for trauma recovery

Natasha Larkin

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# THE POTENTIAL OF IYENGAR YOGA AS AN AID FOR TRAUMA RECOVERY

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BA/LLB, UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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This thesis is presented as part of the requirements for the award of the degree of Masters of  
Philosophy (Education) at the University of Wollongong

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## CERTIFICATION

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I, Natasha Larkin, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Masters of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, School of Education, at the University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualification at any other academic institution.

## ABSTRACT

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The past two decades has seen an explosion of research on yoga as an aid for people recovering from trauma. Specifically for Iyengar yoga, a popular style based on the teachings of B.K.S. Iyengar, there is a small but growing body of quantitative literature suggesting it is an effective intervention for addressing trauma related symptoms. This literature, however, gives insufficient attention to the role of pedagogy and relational dynamics in learning Iyengar yoga as a trauma aid. There are currently no published studies that examine the pedagogic skills used by Iyengar yoga teachers in teaching students with trauma. This is significant because Iyengar yoga is known for its substantial body of therapeutic knowledge and has an international network of teachers, some with considerable experience teaching students with trauma. This study seeks to address that gap by examining the potential of Iyengar yoga for students with trauma as told through the perspectives of eight Australian Iyengar yoga teachers with experience teaching students with trauma, along with document analysis of key Iyengar yoga texts. Drawing on Shilling's (2007) concept of body pedagogics and Lusted's (1986) theory of pedagogy, this study examines the interrelationship between Iyengar yoga culture, its specific pedagogic means, its intended embodied changes and outcomes, and the dynamic relations in which Iyengar yoga teachers and their students negotiate issues of power and agency. This examination reveals how, amongst other pedagogic skills, Iyengar yoga teachers bring their skills in observation to *read* their students' bodies to understand the disposition and capacity of their students with trauma and to individualise their approach to teaching. These decisions are mediated through the subjectivities of both teacher and student and the context of the learning exchange. In examining these concepts, this study seeks to contribute an Iyengar yoga teachers' voice to the emerging qualitative literature on yoga for trauma.

# LIST OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

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asana – posture. The third of the eight limbs of Patanjali's yoga.

ahamkara – ego or self

avidya – suffering

buddhi – intelligence. Part of consciousness

B.K.S.I.Y.A.A. – BKS Iyengar Yoga Association of Australia

citta/chitta – consciousness; the mind in its total sense, comprising or mind, reason and ego-maker

dharana – concentration; complete attention. The sixth of the eight limbs of Patanjali's yoga

dhyana – meditation. The seventh of the eight limbs of Patanjali's yoga

Isvara – the Supreme God

manas – mind. Part of consciousness

niyama – five ethical self disciplines, consisting of: purity, contentment, self-discipline, self-study, surrender to God. The fourth of the eight limbs of Patanjali's yoga

pranayama – rhythmic control of breath. The fourth of the eight limbs of Patanjali's yoga

pratyahara – withdrawal of the senses. The fifth of the eight limbs of Patanjali's yoga

prakriti – nature, consisting of three qualities (sattva, rajas and tamas)

purusa – the Seer, the Soul

samadhi – profound meditation. The final of the eight limbs of Patanjali's yoga

yama – five ethical disciplines consisting of: non-violence; truthfulness; non-misappropriation; celibacy; and non-greediness. The first of the eight limbs of Patanjali's yoga

Definitions paraphrases and extracted from *Light on Yoga*, (Iyengar, 1966, pp. 443- 465) and *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* (Iyengar, 1993, pp. 319-350)

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

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Over the past two decades, interest in yoga as an aid for trauma recovery has flourished. This interest has emerged from diverse fields, including health professionals, researchers, and yoga teachers. Iyengar yoga, a style based on the teachings of Indian yogi, B.K.S. Iyengar, is one of the most popular forms of yoga taught around the globe and is known for its large body of therapeutic knowledge (de Michelis, 2005). Iyengar yoga is taught through an international network of teachers, some with considerable experience teaching students with trauma. There is also a growing body of quantitative literature suggesting Iyengar yoga is effective for trauma related symptoms (Shapiro and Cline, 2004; Woolery et al., 2004; Bowden et al., 2011; Michalsen et al., 2005, 2012; Harner, Hanlon & Garfinkel, 2010; Shapiro et al., 2007; Shapiro et al., 2008; Streeter et al., 2010, 2017, 2020; Nyer et al., 2018). These studies position yoga as a standardised ‘intervention’ and give insufficient attention to the role of pedagogy and relational dynamics in trauma recovery. There are currently no studies that specifically examine the way Iyengar yoga teachers are teaching their students who have experienced trauma. Drawing on Shilling’s (2007) concept of body pedagogics and Lusted’s (1986) theory of pedagogy, this study seeks to address the gap in research by examining the interrelationship between Iyengar yoga culture; its specific pedagogic means; the intended embodied changes and outcomes for students with trauma; and the relational dynamics in which teachers and students navigate issues of power and agency told through the perspectives of eight Australian Iyengar yoga teachers and document analysis of key Iyengar yoga texts.

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## TRAUMA

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Since the birth of modern psychiatry in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, prominent figures including Janet, Breuer and Freud recognised that trauma was qualitatively different to stress and played a critical role in emotional and psychiatric disturbances (van der Kolk, Herron & Hostetler, 1994). Despite this early recognition, our contemporary understanding of trauma emerged only four decades ago in the wake of veterans returning from the Vietnam War and the attention drawn to interpersonal violence by feminists in the 1980s (van der Kolk & Fisler,



1995). Since that time, our understanding of the manifestations and impacts of trauma have expanded considerably, facilitated by the emergence of new technologies such as brain scans, and the insights of health professionals working with traumatised people (van der Kolk, Herron & Hostetler, 1994).

The term 'trauma' derives from the Greek word for wound or hurt, but today the term is broadly used to include wounds of an emotional, psychological and physical nature (Gangii, Gopika & Chandran, 2021). What is striking about the significant body of literature on emotional and psychological trauma that has emerged over the past two decades is the infrequency in which the term *trauma* is defined. One notable exception is van der Kolk and Fisler (1995) who state that "trauma arises from an inescapable stressful event that overwhelms people's coping mechanisms" (p. 55). Macy et al (2018) adopt the definition of the US Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration that defines trauma in the following terms:

Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being. (p. 7 as quoted in Macy et al., 2018, p.36)

Leading trauma expert, Bessel van der Kolk, explains that trauma is not the "story of something that happened back then" but is the "current imprint of that pain, horror, and fear living inside people." (Psychotherapy Networker, 2014). In his book *The Body Keeps the Score*, van der Kolk further observes that trauma "results in a fundamental reorganisation of the way the mind and brain manage perceptions. It changes not only the way we think and what we think about, but also our capacity to think." (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 21).

The formal diagnosis of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was first introduced into the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual in 1980. Since that time, the disorder has undergone some significant changes in formulation and is the subject of ongoing debate (Pai, Suris & North, 2017). The central qualifying criteria is an exposure to a *traumatic event*, which is defined in the current version, DSM-5, as "actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violence" (Pai, Suris & North, 2017). This makes it clear that stressful events that do not involve immediate threat to life do not meet the definition of trauma for the purposes of a diagnosis of PTSD. It is well recognised that not all people who experience trauma meet the clinical

definition of PTSD and that the majority of research on PTSD has occurred in Western nations (van der Kolk & Finkelhor, 1995).

It is estimated that most people will experience some form of trauma in their life (Frazier et al., 2009). Traumatic events include exposure to war, natural disaster, accident and forced relocation (Telles, Singh & Balkrishna, 2012). There is also increasing recognition that people can experience vicarious trauma through exposure to traumatic events in their working life in diverse professions including health care, journalism and law (Pearlman & Lerman, 1995; Finkelstein et al., 2015; Maguire & Bryne, 2017). Judith Herman's (1992a) ground-breaking research has sparked awareness of the severe and ongoing impact of repeated and prolonged trauma from childhood abuse and neglect, which she has coined "complex trauma" (p. 377). Trauma professionals and researchers have also brought attention to the transgenerational effects of trauma, such as the ongoing effects of colonisation for First Nations people (Atkinson, 2002) and the intergenerational impacts of the Holocaust on the children and grandchildren of survivors (Sigal & Weinfeld, 1989).

The ongoing impacts of trauma vary amongst people and may include re-experiencing the trauma in the form of nightmares and flashbacks, avoidance of socialising and intimate relationships, poor sleep, anger, hyper-vigilance, psychosis, anxiety, depression, substance disorders and suicide (Centre for Substance Abuse Treatment, 2014; Taylor et al., 2020). Herman (1997) explains that traumatic events "overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection and meaning" (p.33). In Western medicine, traumatic experiences commonly result in a diagnosis of anxiety, depression and PTSD (Macy et al., 2018). Trauma, however, is also often undiagnosed, although the extent of this remains unclear (Frazier et al., 2009). It is outside the scope of this study to examine the significant and growing body of research around the causes of trauma, its different forms, ongoing impacts and the multitude of approaches to addressing these impacts. For the purposes of this study, I adopt a broad understanding of trauma in its various forms, irrespective of a diagnosis, and with an awareness that the impacts and recovery vary widely amongst individuals. Throughout this thesis, I have used phrases like 'students who have experienced trauma' or 'people with trauma' rather than terms like 'survivor'. I recognise that my choice of expressions sometimes makes for clumsy writing and inadequately captures the diversity in people, experiences and stages of recovery that they attempt to

describe. Nevertheless, by using these terms I attempt to recognise that it is *people* who have traumatic experiences and while some people may prefer a term like ‘survivor’, others do not.

Indian and Western researchers first became interested in the use of yoga as a medicalised intervention for physical and mental health in the early 2000s (Gard et al., 2014). Around the same time, prominent trauma professionals, particularly from the field of psychiatry and psychotherapy, began to recognise that talk-based therapies were ineffective for many trauma survivors (Levine, 1997, 2008; van der Kolk et al. 2014, Rothschild, 2000). These clinicians have proposed that this is because trauma is “trapped” (van der Kolk, 1994, p. 253) or “remembered” (Rothschild, 2000, p. 1) by the body as well as the mind. This understanding prompted exploration into somatic practices, such as yoga, to aid trauma recovery. This has prompted the growth of a considerable body of research that seeks to examine the effectiveness of yoga for trauma using scientific methods. This research is further discussed in the literature review below.

Today there is also considerable interest in teaching yoga for trauma. A review of online advertisements reveals that yoga teachers from a diverse range of styles of yoga now offer courses specifically to address trauma. Much of this interest has been prompted by the research and writing of prominent trauma psychiatrist, van der Kolk, whose book *The Body Keeps the Score* (2014) signals the potential of yoga as an aid in trauma recovery. van der Kolk’s (2014) research has informed the development of a specific form of yoga for trauma, called Trauma Sensitive Yoga (Emerson & Hopper, 2011; Emerson 2015). Trauma-Sensitive Yoga draws from trauma theory, neuroscience and attachment theory (Emerson & Hopper, 2011). Key pedagogical principles of this style include: safety and choice for participants; an absence of adjustments; and the use of invitational rather than directive language in instruction (Emerson & Hopper, 2011; Emerson, 2015). An example of the influence of Trauma Sensitive Yoga in the contemporary yoga space is evidenced by an online search of Facebook sites for yoga and trauma. One group called ‘Trauma Informed Yoga’, citing 3.1K members in February 2021, describes itself as “A thriving community space for all yoga teachers and students to share ideas and resources on how unresolved trauma impacts our personal and professional practice so we can collaborate in cultivating safer spaces for every body” (Trauma Informed Yoga, 2019). Another Facebook group called ‘Trauma Sensitive

Yoga' with 1.4k members, states its purpose is to "share ideas, resources, and experiences about using yoga to help heal trauma – for both adults and kids". In both groups, members regularly refer to the work of van der Kolk and his colleagues (Trauma Sensitive Yoga, 2013).

What is striking about these online forums for yoga teachers interested in trauma is the lack of presence of Iyengar yoga teachers. This is marked as Iyengar yoga is one of the most widespread and popular form of yoga and is known for its substantial body of therapeutic knowledge (De Michelis 2005; Iyengar, 2006). Some very experienced Iyengar yoga teachers have experience teaching students who have experience trauma. For example, Iyengar yoga teachers taught people in the relief camps following the earthquake in Gujarat, Indian in 2001 and in New York following the 911 attacks (Mehta, 2017). More recently, Iyengar yoga teachers in Australia taught their students during and after the summer bushfires of 2019/2020 and on a global level, Iyengar yoga teachers have been teaching their students with trauma and grief associated with illness and death due to Covid-19 (Steinberg, 2020b). I would argue that the absence of Iyengar yoga teachers in the online spaces devoted to yoga for trauma reflects something significant about the culture of Iyengar yoga as a social institution and how it conceptualises and pedagogically addresses trauma. That is, Iyengar yoga teachers are addressing trauma in their students in ways that may conceptually and pedagogically differ from teachers that are shaped by contemporary yoga for trauma discourses, such as Trauma Sensitive Yoga.

A comprehensive review of the scholarly literature and teaching materials for Iyengar yoga teachers reveal that there is very little written material on Iyengar yoga for trauma. This research seeks to address that gap by adopting an embodied pedagogical lens that draws on document analysis of key Iyengar yoga texts along with the perspectives of eight Iyengar yoga teachers in Australia who have experience teaching students with trauma. In adopting this approach, this research seeks to address the over-arching question – what is the *potential* of Iyengar yoga for trauma? As Iyengar yoga is a form of embodied learning set within a social institution, I am drawn to a theoretical framework that allows me to examine the culture of Iyengar yoga and how it passes its skills, techniques and values from one generation to the next. Adopting Shilling's (2007) definition of 'body pedagogics' allows me to examine the culture of Iyengar yoga as a social institution, how it conceptualises trauma, the specific pedagogic means that teachers use to transfers the skills, techniques and dispositions of

Iyengar yoga to students with trauma and the embodied changes and outcomes of this process. As Iyengar yoga culture is primarily enacted at the classroom level, I am also drawn to Lusted's (1986) definition of pedagogy to examine the dynamic interactions between Iyengar yoga teachers and their students with trauma *in relationship* as co-producers of knowledge. This theory also invites an examination of how Iyengar yoga teaches and students negotiate issues of power and agency in the learning exchange. This examination of power and agency is important to understanding the potential of Iyengar yoga for trauma as traumatic events can leave people feeling powerless and disconnected from themselves and others (Herman, 1997). It is therefore important to understand how relational dynamics between Iyengar yoga teachers and their students with trauma can facilitate or impede the capacity of the student to re-build their sense of power and connection to themselves and others. In adopting this theoretical approach, I am motivated by a practical purpose – I seek to address my own curiosity as an Iyengar yoga practitioner/teacher to better understand how to best address trauma in my students. This research also offers some guidance and insights to other Iyengar yoga teachers interested in this subject. From a research perspective, this study seeks to contribute to the growing international interest in yoga for trauma by offering an Iyengar yoga perspective. This requires an explanation on how Iyengar yoga differs from other styles of yoga. I then review the current research on yoga for trauma before concluding with my research questions.

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### MODERN POSTURAL YOGA AND IYENGAR YOGA

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Yoga scholar, De Michelis (2005), maps the historical development of contemporary yoga and offers a typology to understand how it has evolved over time. She coins the term Modern Yoga, which is divided into meditational yoga (with an emphasis on sitting meditation) and postural yoga (with an emphasis on asana poses). Iyengar yoga, based on the teachings of Indian yogi, B.K.S. Iyengar (1918– 2014), is a form of 'Modern Postural Yoga'. By this, De Michelis (2005) means those forms of yoga that developed from the 1920s onwards, were founded in South East Asia, draw inspiration from Hinduism and place a strong emphasis on asana (postural) practice (De Michelis, 2008, pp. 21-22).

B.K.S. Iyengar learnt yoga from his brother-in-law, T. Krishnamacharya (1888-1989) of Mysore often referred to as the "father of modern yoga" (Singelton & Fraser, 2014).

Krishnamacharya was from a reputable Vaisnava Brahmin family, who was introduced to yoga at an early age and studied yoga under Rammohan Brahmacari for seven and half years in a cave near Tibet (Singleton & Fraser, 2014). He was ordered to return to Mysore to teach yoga where he was invited by the maharaja to teach and given a wing at the Jaganmohan Palace. It was here that he became teacher to some of the most influential figures in contemporary transnational yoga, his son Desikachar, Pattabhi Jois, founder of Ashtanga yoga, and B.K.S. Iyengar (Singleton & Fraser, 2014). Although much of Krishnamacharya's life is shrouded in myth, yoga scholars have noted that his approach evolved over six decades of teaching and involved: a focus on asana as an embodied form of learning; a discourse of yoga for strength and health; the influence of the native Vainavasa Hindu philosophy; and the importance of learning directly from a teacher. These aspects are also prominent features of B.K.S. Iyengar's method, who lived with his teacher for three years from the age of sixteen until he was sent to teach in Pune in 1937 (De Michelis, 2003).

Like his teacher, the primary scriptural source of Iyengar's method is the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, dated 500-200 BC (Iyengar, 1966; De Michelis, 2005). The sutras outline the eightfold path of yoga, consisting of: yamas (restraints on behaviour); niyamas (observances); asana (poses); pranayama (control of breathing); pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses); dharana (concentration); dhyana (meditation); and samadhi (complete absorption) (Iyengar, 1996).<sup>1</sup> The central focus of B.K.S. Iyengar's method of yoga is the practice of asana (Iyengar 1966; 2003; 2013). It is through asana that Iyengar claims the other limbs of Patanjali's yoga are experienced or can become available. Singleton (2010) investigated the rise of the primacy of asana in modern transnational yoga and found it to be unprecedented in pre-modern forms of yoga. He examined the cultural context in which it arises and argues that the focus on asana came about as a result of Indian yogi innovators, such as Iyengar's teacher T. Krishnamacharya, mixing Indian Hindu yoga with European body techniques, including gymnastics and wrestling, from the 1890s onwards as part of the Indian nationalism movement to build stronger bodies as a form of resistance. In this sense, Modern Postural Yoga is a product of teachings handed down from generations of Indian yogis based on

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<sup>1</sup> I have used the English spelling when referring to Sanskrit words though out this thesis, except for in direct quotes.

ancient scriptures and subject to ongoing interpretation and change, along with interaction and influence of a modern, globalised world (de Michelis, 2005).

Iyengar brought his own innovation to the practice of asana. His interpretation of yoga is distinguished from other popular styles of Modern Postural yoga, such as Ashtanga yoga, by its use of different sequences for different physical and psychological purposes, its emphasis on alignment and integration in the body, its canon of restorative poses along with its use of props (blankets, belts, blocks) to give practitioners access to a pose despite their ability (Iyengar 2013; Shapiro, 2007). The significance of his approach to yoga is that it is a practice-based technique. It does not require students to adopt any philosophical or religious beliefs. For students with trauma, it offers a method of practice that does not rely on cognitive reasoning or language. Students are able to learn Iyengar yoga without the need to re-tell the narrative of their traumatic experiences as the method directs attention to the body as the primary site for learning. The use of different sequences, the large canon of poses and the way individual poses can be taught with props makes Iyengar yoga highly adaptable to people with severe physical limitations, such as can be the case for people who have suffered traumatic events. These concepts will be further explored in Chapter Four where I examine the specific pedagogic means used by Iyengar yoga teachers for students with trauma.

De Michelis (2005), contends that Iyengar yoga is the most influential and international of all Modern Postural Yoga styles. The influence is attributed to the way B.K.S. Iyengar, systematised his style in a series of books, most famously *Light on Yoga* (1966). Since its publication, *Light on Yoga* has been considered the standard reference text for asana practice in yoga communities around the globe (de Michelis, 2008). The influence of Iyengar yoga is also due to the way B.K.S. Iyengar openly engaged with Western students and the media and established an international system for accrediting teachers, which lead to the dissemination of his style internationally (Lea, 2009). Today, the innovative techniques that Iyengar contributed to the practice of postural yoga, such as his use of props and restorative poses, are also widely used by other methods of Modern Postural Yoga. These aspects of the culture will be considered in more detail in Chapter Four in relation to Iyengar yoga teachers working with students with trauma.

In the past two decades, there has been an increasing interest in researching the effectiveness of Iyengar yoga for a broad range of medicalised conditions. These include the efficacy of Iyengar yoga for managing recovery for cardiac patients (Khattab et al., 2007), lower back pain (Williams et al., 2005), osteoarthritis in the knee (Kolasinski et al., 2005), rheumatoid arthritis (Evans, et al., 2010), gait in the elderly (Di Benedetto et al., 2005) and managing cancer (Duncan, 2008; Speed-Andrews et al., 2010). There has also been an interest in the effectiveness of Iyengar yoga for mental health conditions, including stress, anxiety and depression (Shapiro and Cline, 2004; Woolery et al., 2004; Bowden et al., 2011; Michalsen et al., 2005; Harner, Hanlon & Garfinkel, 2010; Shapiro et al., 2007; Shapiro et al., 2008; Streeter et al., 2010; 2017; 2020 Michalsen et al 2012; Nyer et al., 2018). There is, however, currently no qualitative research on Iyengar yoga for trauma and, more specifically, no research on the pedagogical approaches of Iyengar yoga teachers in addressing trauma in their students or the embodied experiences and outcomes for these students. To address this gap, this study draws on the perspectives of Iyengar yoga teachers and document analysis. To assist in this examination, I draw on the existing literature on yoga for trauma and the literature on Iyengar yoga as an embodied form of learning. This literature will be discussed in the next section.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

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My literature review draws upon two main bodies of empirical research. First, the research on the effectiveness of yoga for trauma concerning all styles of yoga, with a specific focus on those studies that examine the effectiveness of Iyengar yoga. This research is relevant to the present study on the potential of Iyengar yoga as it concerns the efficacy of Iyengar yoga to relieve symptoms commonly associated with trauma, as measured by known scientific measures, and the specific bodily mechanisms through which Iyengar yoga works to alleviate trauma. This is important because people with trauma are potentially very vulnerable and measures that are intended to relieve the symptoms should be effective to reduce further suffering. The second body of research addresses how Iyengar yoga is practiced or learnt as an embodied learning experience. Although this literature does not specifically address trauma, it addresses the pedagogical means through which Iyengar yoga is taught and how it is embodied by those learning and practicing the method.



Here I pause to recognise that for the purposes of this study, I have only accessed the literature published in Western journals. I am conscious that there is also considerable research being conducted on yoga by Indian researchers which is published in Indian journals and not readily accessible to an English-only speaking researcher.

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### THE EMERGING RESEARCH ON YOGA FOR TRAUMA

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The past two decades have seen an emerging interdisciplinary interest in researching yoga for trauma, drawing on diverse styles of yoga (Balasubramaniam, Telles & Doraiswamy, 2013; Macy et al., 2018; Nyuyeng, et al., 2018). A significant proportion of this research is quantitative, coming from the medical and psychological fields and concerned with measuring the effectiveness of yoga for trauma using physiological and psychological measures through known scientific means (Macy et al., 2018). These studies are important as they speak to the interest in understanding yoga's effectiveness through a medical/scientific lens. These quantitative studies draw upon a diverse range of yoga styles, including Kripalu yoga (Reinhardt et al., 2018); Sudarshan Kriya Yoga (Telles et al., 2010); and Trauma Sensitive Yoga (van der Kolk et al., 2014). In this research, yoga is positioned as the 'intervention', with its duration ranging from as short as two days to less than three months in most cases (Cramer et al., 2003; Macy et al., 2018). Reflecting the different styles of yoga used in the interventions, the curriculums are also varied, with some using breathing components, chanting and meditation, whereas others more heavily based on asana practice (Macy et al., 2018; Nyuyeng et al., 2018). Some interventions also incorporate non-yoga techniques, such as counselling (West Liang & Spinazzola, 2017). The effectiveness of the intervention is measured by physiological and psychological changes, such as heart rate variability (van der Kolk et al., 2014), or self-reported changes measured through known psychological instruments such as the Becks Depression Inventory (Telles et al., 2010).

In attempt to consolidate and draw conclusions based on this body of literature, a number of systematic reviews have sought to evaluate the effectiveness of yoga (of all styles) for psychological outcomes of trauma, such as PTSD, anxiety, depression and distress (Telles, Singh & Balkrishna, 2012; Longacre et al., 2012; Macy et al., 2018; Nyuyen-Feng, Clark & Butler, 2018). Macy et al. (2018) conducted a systematic meta-review of 13 literature reviews concerning yoga for trauma and related symptoms of PTSD, depression and anxiety. The

reviews examined 185 distinct studies, mostly published in the period 2000-2012. The authors conclude that this body of research indicates that yoga shows potential for improving depression, anxiety, PTSD and the psychological impact of trauma, “at least in the short-term” (p. 52). Summarising the literature, the authors offer insight into how yoga works to address trauma related symptoms. They note that yoga is not like gymnastics as it has a mental component that requires intentional thought. This component offers the possibility to alter cognition by decreasing negative thoughts and encouraging adaptive thinking. They also speculate that the physical nature of asana practice promotes positive physiological changes by altering neurotransmitters in the brain and assisting to regulate the body’s physical stress response (Macy et al., 2018). The authors note, however, that their ability to form conclusions on the effectiveness of yoga for trauma was severely hampered by the diversity of styles of yoga and the methodological designs. For the purposes of this study, a focus on Iyengar yoga as a distinct style of yoga offers the opportunity to consider the quantitative literature on Iyengar yoga. This is important as people with trauma are potentially very vulnerable and safeguarding their interests requires measures that are effective in aiding their recovery. Understanding the quantitative literature on effectiveness therefore, is an important perspective on the potential of Iyengar yoga for trauma.

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#### RESEARCH ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF IYENGAR YOGA

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Eleven published studies examine the effectiveness of Iyengar yoga for trauma related conditions (anxiety, stress, depression). Three of these studies were randomised-controlled trials (Streeter et al., 2010 and Michalsen et al., 2012; Streeter, 2020); and the remaining eight were quasi-experimental (Shapiro and Cline, 2004; Woolery et al., 2004; Bowden et al., 2011; Michalsen et al., 2005; Harner, Hanlon & Garfinkel, 2010; Shapiro et al., 2007; Shapiro et al., 2008; Streeter et al., 2017; Nyer et al., 2018). Three of these studies examined the effectiveness of Iyengar yoga for perceived stress, seven studies measured depression (both minor and major); and six studies measured anxiety. None of these studies specifically measured PTSD, although Streeter et al (2017) examined major depressive disorder and Nyer et al (2018) examined suicide ideation in the same sample of participants, some of whom had PTSD.

None of the articles reporting these studies give detailed accounts of the pedagogic approaches used by the Iyengar yoga teachers in the interventions. Some articles described the curriculum of sequences, which included a combination of standing poses, backbends, forward bends and inversions. The interventions ranged from once a week for five weeks to three times a week for three months. Little if any detail is given about the teacher, apart from noting their accreditation or years of experience. Like the studies referenced above in relation to yoga more generally, these studies utilised known medical and psychological instruments to measure the effects of the Iyengar yoga intervention on their participants' psychological states, such as the self-administered Beck Depressive Inventory to measure depression (Harner, Hanlon & Garfinkel, 2010; Woolery et al., 2004, Streeter et al., 2017) or the Cohen Stress Scale (Michalsen et al., 2012).

In the three studies that measured the effectiveness of Iyengar yoga for perceived stress, two found promising results (Michalsen et al., 2005, 2012). The only mixed methods study (Harner, Hanlon & Garfinkel, 2010) showed no linear change in perceived stress in incarcerated women, despite the self-reports of improvement in stress by the participants. In two of these studies, the authors note how the small sample sizes limited their generalisability (Michalsen et al., 2012; Harner, Hanlon & Garfinkel, 2010). All seven studies that measured depression reported significant improvements after the Iyengar yoga intervention (Woolery 2004; Shapiro et al., 2007; Michalsen et al., 2012; Harner, Hanlon & Garfinkel, 2010; Streeter et al., 2017; Nyer et al., 2018). Streeter et al. (2017) and Nyer et al. (2018) specifically note that the Iyengar yoga intervention in their studies had no significant side effects, suggesting it is a safe practice for people with depression. Significantly, all the participants in all seven of these studies had no previous experience with Iyengar yoga, suggesting it is effective for depression when learnt by beginners over short periods of time. Anxiety was measured in six studies (Woolery, 2004; Shapiro et al., 2008; Harner, Hanlon & Garfinkel, 2010; Streeter et al., 2010; Michalsen et al., 2005, 2012); however only Streeter et al (2012) measured anxiety as a primary measure, and this was a small sample of nine participants. These studies suggest Iyengar yoga has real promise for anxiety, but further research is needed. Read together, this literature suggests that Iyengar yoga shows considerable promise for trauma related conditions, particularly depression but also stress and anxiety. Only Harner, Hanlon and Garfinkel (2010) drew on qualitative data in a mixed-

methods design. Interestingly, this study found that the quantitative measure (which reported no reduction in perceived stress) was not supported by the participants' descriptions of themselves as feeling less stressed following the intervention. This points to the need for more qualitative studies on Iyengar yoga to capture more nuanced perspectives that are not drawn out through quantitative approaches.

The Iyengar yoga quantitative literature echoes and in some cases furthers the broader yoga literature on how yoga works to bring about changes to trauma related conditions (Streeter et al., 2012; 2020). This includes the role of yoga in reducing stress and bringing about increased function of the autonomic nervous system through stimulating the vagus nerve (Streeter et al. 2012; Khattabb et al. 2007) and the impact of yoga on increasing the activity of the GAMA system to facilitate homeostasis in the body (Streeter et al. 2020). Some studies have also pointed to the specific characteristics of Iyengar yoga that facilitate improvements in moods. These explanations include the intentional focus required by Iyengar yoga, the role of mastery, along with the emphasis on lifting and opening of the chest facilitated through active poses such as standing poses and backbends to deepen breathing (Shapiro and Cline, 2004; Streeter et al., 2010).

The quantitative literature on all forms of yoga along with the specific Iyengar yoga literature signifies an increasing interest in studying yoga as an aid for trauma and related conditions through a medical and scientific lens. More specifically for Iyengar yoga, the literature suggests that Iyengar yoga is effective after a short period of learning for the trauma related conditions of stress, depression and anxiety. Some researchers, however, have pointed to the limitations of a scientific methodology for evaluating the holistic, diverse and spiritually based practice that falls under the contemporary umbrella called 'yoga' (Kirkwood et al, 2013; Macy et al, 2018). As Macy et al. (2018, p.52) observe "the scientific requirements necessary to rigorously investigate yoga's effects might intentionally dismantle its potential benefits". This points to the need for research to consider not only the effectiveness of yoga as an outcome, but as an embodied *process*. It also points to the need to examine yoga's effectiveness for trauma recovery not only through the lens of scientific instruments, but also through the lived experiences and outcomes of its participants. This research, which is beginning to emerge, draws attention to the less measurable aspects of yoga for trauma relief, including

the role of the social aspect of yoga and the role of acting in synchronicity in trauma recovery (Stevens & McLeod, 2019).

Perhaps unsurprisingly given its close links to Western medical trauma researchers, much of the emerging qualitative literature focuses on the experiences of participants doing Trauma Sensitive Yoga as an adjunct aid in recovery to talk-based therapies (Rhodes, Spinazzola & van der Kolk 2014; Guiden & Jennings, 2016; West, Liang & Spinazzola 2017). West, Liang and Spinazzola's (2017) qualitative study examined the experiences of 31 women with PTSD associated with chronic childhood trauma undertaking a 10 week course of 90 minutes of psychotherapy combined with 40 minutes of Trauma Sensitive Yoga. Their description of the yoga classes offers insights into the pedagogic principles valued by this method. The classes, delivered by an instructor who was both a mental health counsellor and a yoga teacher, focused on key Trauma Sensitive themes such as "having a body", "be-friending the body" and the "body as resource" (p.180). Other pedagogical foci included the use of invitational language, a focus on safety and the absence of practices that signified the spiritual traditions of yoga, such as chanting and Sanskrit words. The participants reported a range of positive impacts, including feelings of gratitude and compassion, greater ability to connect with their own inner self and connection to others, greater acceptance of themselves, including acceptance of their trauma, more centredness and a sense of empowerment. Studies such as this one are important because they offer the perspective of the trauma survivors as students of yoga and point to pedagogical principles that reflect contemporary trauma-informed approaches that are drawing from a psychotherapeutic Western medical perspective. They signal a pedagogical approach that draws inspiration from Western trauma research and science and invite engagement from counsellors and health care workers to adopt their methods as part of their therapeutic treatment of people with trauma (Emerson and Hooper, 2011; Ong, 2020). This, it may be argued, represents a privileging of Western medical knowledge about how to address trauma developed through professional therapeutic work, such as counselling and psychology, as foundational skills in teaching yoga for trauma. This, I would argue, is a significant departure from the Iyengar yoga method, which privileges the experience of the yoga practitioner/teacher above any other form of knowledge in the transmission of the method. There is currently no qualitative literature on students' learning Iyengar yoga for trauma recovery or the pedagogical principles used in

Iyengar yoga for students with trauma. There is, however, a small body of literature that sheds light on how Iyengar yoga is taught as an embodied form of learning, which provides insight into the pedagogical principles and embodied practices valued in the Iyengar yoga method. This literature is discussed below.

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#### IYENGAR YOGA PEDAGOGY LITERATURE

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The qualitative research on Iyengar yoga as an embodied form of learning is in its infancy. Hodges' (2006) thesis examines the experiences of middle aged women practicing Iyengar yoga and their changing notions of "the self". She draws a distinction between Giddens' (1991, 1994) "reflexive project of the self" with an emphasis on "becoming" as a means for perpetual self-improvement and the notion of "being" in Eastern practices. She concludes that, for the women in the study, the practice of Iyengar yoga offered a complex interplay between the process of "becoming" and "being". Initially the women were motivated to commence practicing for reasons that aligned with Giddens' notion of "becoming". The experiences and outcomes reported by the women also reflected this notion of "becoming", described in terms such as increased flexibility, strength, healing from conditions along mental and emotional benefits. The emotional benefits, which became an increased focus for the women the more they practiced, included reduced stress, a greater ability to cope and confidence in their aging process. The practice, however, also opened up the possibility of "being", an experience of being completely focused in the moment. These moments extend beyond the notion of "becoming" and were described by some participants as "beyond the body". They hold transformative potential in what Hodges' describes as experiences that "dissolved the boundaries of subject-object, mind-body" (p. 217). Hodges concludes that the cumulative effect of these moments of self-observation through practice over time allowed the women to witness themselves and detach from their emotions in a range of experiences in their lives.

Hodges notes, however, that the relationship between "becoming" and "being" presented a complex paradox. The moments of "being" offered a relief from the pressures of "becoming" and yet also impacted on their aspirations of "becoming". As the women's level of self-awareness developed, they came to see their bodies as a functioning process rather than a physical object and this facilitated a healthier relationship to the self. It also facilitated

changes in how they functioned in their lives, such as greater efficiency in life or better ability to cope with family life, that align with their individual goals of “becoming”.

This study is important for the present study as it captures the lived experience of women practicing Iyengar yoga. It offers a qualitative account of women’s experiences and the outcomes of practicing that go beyond the quantitative literature concerned with efficacy through a scientific lens for beginner students. Hodges’ study draws attention to the way that embodied changes and outcomes of practicing Iyengar yoga evolve and deepen over time in complex ways that move between Western notions of self-improvement and Eastern notions of being present. It also points to the complexities of examining the embodied outcomes and changes of an Eastern practice through Western eyes. For the purposes of my study, Hodges’ study offers insight into the experiences of the participants in finding greater emotional stability over time and how the process of witnessing the self allows for a greater sense of connection with the “self”. For students with trauma, fostering emotional stability and a greater sense of connection to the self is an important part of recovery.

In one of the few qualitative studies to consider Iyengar yoga pedagogy, Tate’s (2016) ethnographic study drew on transformative learning theory to examine the experiences of pregnant women learning Iyengar yoga in the US. Her methodology includes observations, interviews, phenomenological inquiry and textual analysis. In an article on the study, she concludes that the Iyengar classes offered the women participants a supportive non-formal learning space that facilitated greater self-autonomy and power through embodied changes in the form of stronger bodies, increased medical knowledge and increased connectedness to others. Tate (2016) observes that the focus of the Iyengar method is on practice, with a focus on alignment and precision, over theory or philosophy. Other key pedagogical techniques include a predominately bio-medical discourse, physical discipline, reflection, introspection and intellectual enquiry. She observes that transformation using the Iyengar method is both visible through the changes to the physical, material body, and yet also elusive through changes at a non-tangible level of the self. Here Tate draws on the Iyengar concept of ‘involution’, the concept that the pathway for transformation starts with changes at the physical body which then facilitate changes to more subtle, non-physical realms of the self (Iyengar, 2005). She notes that transformation is not present in every class. Rather, she sees it as represented in the embodied transformation of the teachers’ bodies as they

demonstrate and navigate the room. This she attributes to the teachers' own dedicated practice and the rigor of their years of training. She also observes that the non-formal learning environment allows teachers to "pick and choose" (p. 150) from the Indian-based teachings, resulting in some concepts being adopted in the West as "universal" while others are treated as culturally irrelevant to a Western audience (p.104).

Tate's (2016) research is of particularly relevant to my research as it is one of the only qualitative studies that draws attention to the pedagogical techniques used in Iyengar yoga to transfer embodied knowledge between teachers and students. It also frames Iyengar yoga as a learning exchange where the primary focus is for the student to gain conscious awareness of the patterns of their physical body as a gateway for changes in mental and non-physical patterns. This is significant for my study as I am interested in how Iyengar yoga as a learning exchange between teachers and students may address the ongoing emotional and mental impacts of trauma through the body.

In a theoretical paper, Ergas (2013) examines B.K.S. Iyengar's method of yoga as a form of "body-orientated pedagogy" (p. 4). In this approach, Ergas' interest lies not in the end result of practicing but on *how* one learns *through* the body. He points out that Iyengar's first lesson is to "listen to the body as *subject*" (p. 8), meaning to listen to the sensations in the body. For B.K.S. Iyengar, thoughts are deemed untrustworthy whereas through the body an individual may come to know their true nature. This, according to Ergas represents a radical over-turning of the Cartesian privilege afforded to thinking over the body. By privileging the body over the mind, Ergas contends that Iyengar's pedagogical approach places "Descartes in a headstand" (Ergas, 2013, p. 4).

Ergas examines Iyengar's concept of the 'brain of the pose'. By this it is meant that each pose (asana) can be seen as having a focal point for instruction. The elbow, for example, can become the brain of the pose by being the starting point for detailed and specific instructions. This sets off what Ergas terms a "mindful chain reaction" throughout the body, depending on the particular form of the pose (2013, p.8). The mind is directed to move to each of these specific parts. In doing so, the student is directed to focus on the bodily sensations at each part and making a response to that sensation. The student may, for example, observe strain in the pose. They can decide to back off and relax at the point of



strain or the ego part of the mind may intervene and the student may be caught up in trying to push them self into some kind of idealised version to gain control over their body or approval from the teacher. If the student is caught up in thoughts then this decision can be difficult whereas if they can re-establish the focus on sensations by listening to the body, then the answer is evident. The more experience with this process, the more the student learns to distinguish between bodily sensations through being present to the body and the emotional disturbance of thoughts through the functioning of the mind. This allows the student to make decisions based on discernment and not simply habitual reactions to the turmoil of the mind and emotions. Ergas argues that this is an ongoing educative experience and what may feel right one day may not feel right the next. This process of tuning in to the sensations in the absence of a pre-conceptual knowing, produces a form of 'embodied mindfulness' that overrides the chatter of the mind. This facilitates what Ergas calls "education towards and in *presence*" (p.4). Ergas (2013) concludes that B.K.S. Iyengar's pedagogical approach treats the body as *subject*. He goes on to propose that the body-orientated pedagogy approach may be utilised in both spiritual and non-spiritual settings (such as schools) to supplement and complement the privilege afforded to thinking and thoughts.

Ergas' conceptualisation of Iyengar yoga as 'body-orientated pedagogy' is directly relevant to my research as it points to the philosophical foundations of Iyengar yoga, based in classical yoga philosophy, and how the specific pedagogical means used to teach Iyengar yoga inform the embodied experiences and outcomes of the practice. It highlights the way Iyengar yoga affords privilege to the body and sensations over memory, thoughts and emotions and how this is facilitated through specific verbal instructions. These institutional and pedagogical means are relevant to understanding how Iyengar yoga is taught as an embodied practice and the experiences and changes resulting from this process through Shilling's (2007) body pedagogic framework. I return to these concepts in Chapter Four in relation to the central pedagogic means through which Iyengar yoga is taught and the embodied changes and outcomes of practicing the method.

In another study, Lea (2009) uses ethnographic and interviews to examine Iyengar yoga techniques through the lens of the Foucauldian concepts of "practices of the self" and "care for the self", as interpreted through Deleuze. For Foucault (1988), "practices of the self"

open up the possibility of knowing and accessing 'truth' through one's subjective lived experience rather than through cognitive reasoning and systems of belief. These practices facilitate transformation where the individual becomes reconstituted into something other than what they were. This occurs through the three functions of what Foucault calls "care of the self". The first function, termed the 'critical function' involves unlearning through eradicating one's undesirable habits and false opinions. The second is the function of struggle, a non-linear and ongoing struggle with no absolute truth. The third is the curative/therapeutic function. This is an ongoing process with no end point (Lea, 2009, p.75).

Drawing on Foucault's notion of the critical function, Lea observes that Iyengar's method recognises us as embodied, and develops a critical gaze through mapping the coordinates of the body in the present moment. The detailed attention to the position of the body, facilitated through a series of specific and technical adjustments brings awareness to habitual patterns and opens the possibility to dissolve these patterns (Lea, 2009, p. 77). Lea goes on to examine the Iyengar technique of withdrawing the senses in asana and a focus on the breath as pedagogic means to facilitate sensitivity, awareness of the body and concentration. Lea maintains that for Iyengar, watching oneself and "unpicking the familiar" allows us to become aware that who we are is only a "contingent arrangement" and this has liberatory potential (p. 78). Lea goes on to note that learning Iyengar yoga raises the possibility of being caught up in another form of modern knowledge through striving for perfection or where the student is concerned with seeking the teacher's approval. In this way, there is a real risk that Iyengar yoga participants are locked in a form of conformity and limitation rather than liberation.

Addressing the second of Foucault's functions, Lea notes that as a method of learning, Iyengar's yoga has no end point and this offers real challenges for those who seek progress. With respect to the curative function, Lea notes that Iyengar's writing mirrors Foucault's notion that the modern world is deadening by eliminating the body's intelligence. However, she notes that Iyengar's conceptualisation of an inner, essential and fixed self at the core of each person is contrary to Foucault's notion of the self as being transformed into something "other than" the self (Foucault, 2005 as cited in Lea, 2009, p. 88). Lea concludes that the relationship between Iyengar yoga and care for the self is ambiguous and fragile. Constant

work and applied attention are required to maintain self-mastery and not fall into forms of knowing and yet the possibility of self-examination is evident.

Lea's study offers useful insights for my study as it identifies the medicalised and philosophical discourses of Iyengar's writing and how this relates to the technical pedagogical means of Iyengar yoga as an embodied form of learning. She points to key pedagogical skills and techniques, including the internal mapping of the body, withdrawing the senses, controlling the breath, focus and attention. She examines how these skills and techniques offer the possibility for transformation through coming to know the self in ways that disrupt the normal power relations of knowledge. Her study also points to the ongoing challenges of learning an embodied technique that is technical, detailed and has no end-point. These aspects can disrupt the intended transformative potential of the practice. Further, she notes that not everyone has equal access to practices of the self; they require a level of privilege, a freedom from the duties of caring for others and work. These limitations may have real and practical barriers for the potential of Iyengar yoga for aiding people with trauma. For the purposes of my study, Lea's observations assist to frame the learning of Iyengar's teachings as a method with specific embodied pedagogic means but for which lived experience and outcomes may not always align with the intended purpose.

Read together, Hodges (2006), Tate (2016), Ergas (2013) and Lea (2009) highlight Iyengar yoga as a form of embodied learning with transformative potential. They point to the specific pedagogic means through which the method is taught and how these relate to the intended or actual embodied experiences and outcomes of students. They also point to challenges experienced in learning Iyengar yoga as an embodied practice aimed at transforming consciousness. Further, they demonstrate how, although Iyengar yoga is systematically described in a series of texts, it is transferred, enacted and re-produced at the classroom level between teacher and student.

Although these studies touch on the potential of Iyengar yoga for facilitating emotional stability, they do not directly address how Iyengar yoga is taught for students with trauma. My searches indicate that there is currently no published research on how Iyengar yoga conceptualises trauma, the pedagogic means through which Iyengar yoga teachers are teaching people who have experienced trauma and the potential change that may be

available for these students. This is significant given the prominence of Iyengar yoga as a style of yoga, its body of literature that addresses the relationship between body, mind and consciousness and the international network of Iyengar yoga teachers, many who have experience teaching students with trauma. This study seeks to address the gap by investigating how Iyengar yoga teachers are teaching students with trauma through interviews with eight Iyengar yoga teachers based in Australia along with a document analysis of significant Iyengar yoga literature. In the following section I outline my personal motivation for undertaking this research.

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### PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

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As this research touches directly on my personal life, it is important to give some attention to the personal motivation and investment I have in this research. I have practiced Iyengar yoga since 2000. I see myself as a practitioner rather than a devotee. I have never learnt directly from B.K.S. Iyengar, who died in 2014, but most of my teachers were his direct students for many decades. In 2008 I had the fortune to attend a week-long conference taught by Geeta Iyengar, the daughter of Mr Iyengar and herself a master teacher within the Iyengar community.

In 2008, I started a teacher training course with Pixie Lillas, a senior teacher in the Australian Iyengar yoga community. This was a period of intense learning and practice. Towards the end of the formal instruction, a period of about three years, I started to teach part-time. In 2018, after being in training for a decade, I passed my accreditation to be a Level 1 teacher. Throughout this same time, I was working in international development, mainly with families impacted by HIV/AIDS in Ethiopia. I became interested in understanding trauma and I was fascinated to discover the work of psychiatrist van der Kolk and his colleagues in the development of Trauma Sensitive Yoga to address trauma. As part of this literature, I came across Emerson and Hopper's (2011) book *Overcoming Trauma Through Yoga*. I was confronted by the casualness that they declared Iyengar yoga to be unsuitable for survivors of trauma, declaring it as competitive, concerned with alignment and citing its use of props as potentially trauma-inducing (p.31). This conflicted with my direct experience of Iyengar yoga

that has supported me during stressful events in my life. I also knew of many other practitioners who had found benefits in Iyengar yoga during traumatic times.

There was also a shadow to this perspective. By this time, I had been in the Iyengar yoga community for about 15 years and had experienced a number of different teaching styles. I had heard stories of the belittling and shouting used by Mr Iyengar and I had experienced this from some senior teachers. Confusingly, I'd experienced that some of these same teachers had the capacity for profound teaching. I found myself often questioning the pedagogy of Iyengar yoga –what was Iyengar yoga pedagogy? How did this relate to its capacity to heal and its potential to harm?

In 2015, I volunteered to teach a free yoga class at the Illawarra Multicultural Society for Afghani and Syrian refugee women, many of whom had been exposed to trauma and torture. In preparing for these classes I went about searching for resources on the Iyengar yoga approach to teaching for trauma, but I could find nothing substantial to guide my approach. This struck me as strange as I was aware that Iyengar yoga teachers had taught survivors of the 2001 Indian earthquake in India and in the aftermath of 9/11. Closer to home I knew of a couple of Australian Iyengar yoga teachers working with survivors of sexual assault and childhood violence. It occurred to me that there was knowledge and experience of how to tailor Iyengar yoga for trauma but this was as yet not in a form that could be shared. I wanted to draw out this knowledge to see how it might guide my understanding of the potential of Iyengar yoga for trauma. It was during a conversation after a yoga class with Jan Wright, that she encouraged me to undertake this research.

As I began to get into the research, stories emerged in 2019 about the sexual abuse of women by Manousos Manos, one of the world's most senior Iyengar teachers based in the US. This coincided with the #MeToo movement, although it became evident that there had also been earlier allegations (Remski, 2019). This is one of many cases of sexual abuse involving senior teachers in the wider yoga community. Almost no style of yoga has remained untainted by the revelations of the #MeToo movement. I had attended a Manos workshop in 2016 so I had some insight into why he was considered a profound senior teacher. A formal investigation was commissioned by the National Association of Iyengar Yoga US and this found that Manos had sexually abused six women under the guise of adjusting them in

his classes (Iyengar Yoga National Association of United States, 2019a). Manos was stripped of his certification by the Iyengar Institute in Pune. It remains a sad and divisive discussion in the Iyengar community, particularly for the women who have suffered and for his students of many decades. This has prompted debates in the wider yoga community and discussions within the Iyengar yoga community about power and agency in yoga classes.

My intention with this research is not to ignore the debates surrounding these incidents but to draw attention to the *potential* of Iyengar yoga to address trauma, both philosophically and also in practice told through the knowledge and experience of Australian teachers. In doing so, I seek to include the accounts of teachers who do not all have established reputations in the international Iyengar yoga community. Nor are they necessarily representative of Iyengar yoga teachers globally or within Australia. They are, however, accounts that reflect the knowledge and experiences of teachers who have directly encountered students with trauma and have given consideration to how they should teach these students. I have included these observations in this section on personal reflections rather than in my methods section because it relates more closely to the fundamental driving force behind this research – I want to better understand how to practice and teach for trauma by drawing on those teachers who have something positive to offer.

To understand the potential of Iyengar yoga as an embodied practice passed down from one generation of practitioners to another, I required a theoretical framework that focused on embodied pedagogy. This drew me to the work of Chris Shilling (1993, 2005, 2007, 2017) with its focus on the body in an emergent material context. In particular, I was drawn to Shilling's (2007) concept of body pedagogics as it offered a framework to understand how Iyengar yoga, as an embodied educative experience, is transmitted from one generation of students to the next. I am also interested in how knowledge is produced through the exchanges between teachers and students. Lusted's (1986) theory of pedagogy provided the means to understand these exchanges as dynamic relations that navigate power and agency. These theories will be discussed in detail in chapter Three but have necessarily informed my research questions, which are discussed in the next section.

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## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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My research questions are designed to understand both how Iyengar yoga philosophically conceptualises trauma and how this is translated into embodied pedagogies by Iyengar yoga teachers working with students who have experienced trauma. By doing so, this thesis contributes to knowledge that can inform the practical application on the potential of Iyengar yoga for trauma. My central research question is: *What is the potential of Iyengar yoga for trauma?* To address this, I have four sub-questions which are framed in the language of my theoretical framework, discussed in the next section. The language in the first three sub-questions is drawn directly from the three pillars of Shilling's (2007, p.11) definition of body pedagogics. The fourth sub-question draws on the language of Lusted's (1986) theory of pedagogy and addresses the practical application of the knowledge derived from the first three questions. These four sub-questions are:

1. How does Iyengar yoga culture conceptualise trauma?
2. What are the central pedagogic means through which Iyengar yoga transmits its skills, dispositions and techniques to students who have experienced trauma?
3. What are the embodied experiences and changes of students who have learnt Iyengar yoga as an aid for trauma recovery from the perspective of Iyengar teachers?
4. How do the dynamic interactions between Iyengar yoga teachers and their students with trauma produce transformative knowledge for both teacher and student?

To address each of my questions, I have drawn on the knowledge of teachers within the Iyengar yoga community based in Australia along with a textual analysis of key Iyengar yoga literature.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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As Iyengar yoga is a somatic practice that has developed in the context of a specific social and cultural institution, I begin this chapter with a discussion of Shilling's theory of corporeal realism and body pedagogics (1993, 2005, 2007, 2017) as it recognises the materiality of the body in an emergent social context. I then turn to Lusted's (1986) theory of pedagogy to examine how Iyengar yoga is enacted at the classroom level, in the dynamics between teachers and students as co-producers of knowledge in the learning exchange.

#### SHILLING'S THEORY OF CORPOREAL REALISM

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Shilling's (1993, 2005, 2007, 2017) theory of corporeal realism recognises the material body as a site of learning and cultural transmission. To place this into context, since the early 1980s, the sociology of the body has rapidly grown as an area of interdisciplinary interest (Shilling, 1993; Peterson, 2007). Inspiration for this research stems from a multitude of theoretical influences, including: Mauss' "techniques of the body" (1973 [1934]); Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach (1962, 1963); feminism influenced by de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949); John Dewey's pragmatic educational philosophy (1938/1986; 1910/2012); and post-structuralism drawing most significantly from Michel Foucault (1975, 1977, 1980, 1988) (Shilling 1993, 2005, 2007, 2017).

In *The Body and Social Theory* (1993), Shilling maps what he calls the "absent-presence" of the body in the various ways it has been represented in sociology (p.9). By this he means that the body has not been ignored but its materiality has not been a central focus. Shilling proposes a new theoretical approach that he calls "corporeal realism" that recognises the centrality of the body and its materiality but views the embodied subject within an emergent social context (1993, 2005, 2007).

Expanding on the notion of corporeal realism, Shilling proposes a theory of "body pedagogics", which he defines as:



[the] central pedagogic means through which a culture seeks to transmit its main corporeal techniques, skills and dispositions, the embodied experience associated with acquiring or failing to acquire the attributes, and the actual embodied changes resulting from this process (2007, p. 11).

This definition is concerned with the interplay between three main elements: culture; the pedagogic means through which techniques, skills and dispositions are transmitted; and the embodied experiences and changes resulting from this learning (Shilling, 2005, 2007). While Shilling's definition invites an examination of these elements as separate concepts, his interest lies in exploring how these factors interact and influence each other to enable knowledge to be transmitted across generations (Shilling, 2005, 2007). Shilling uses the term 'pedagogics' rather than 'pedagogy' to signal an embodied approach that is distinguished from the largely cognitive focus of educational pedagogy (Mellor and Shilling, 2010). The term 'culture' in this context refers to the "customary bodily practices, norms, rituals and beliefs of a social group" (Shilling & Mellor, 2007, p. 523). This definition draws attention to the significance of experience and embodied aspects of culture, along with its intellectual and cognitive aspects (Shilling & Mellor, 2007). By "skills, techniques and dispositions", it is evident from Shilling's writing that he is interested not only in the technical abilities that are transferred through embodied learning but also the emotional and psychological dispositions and orientations of the culture that are transferred through this process (Mellor & Shilling, 2010). Shilling's definition of body pedagogics invites an enquiry into the external elements of culture before turning attention into how they are then internalised by its members (Mellor & Shilling, 2010). Seen in this way, the transference of specific skills, techniques and dispositions within a specific cultural context produce different embodied experiences, orientations and outcomes for its members (Mellor & Shilling, 2010). This approach offers insights into how a specific culture is transmitted and maintained from one generation to another within a broader social and cultural context through specific, embodied pedagogic means. For the purposes of this study, this theoretical approach invites an examination of Iyengar yoga as a cultural institution that centres around an embodied set of skills, techniques and dispositions that are passed to students through specific pedagogic means. It also draws attention to the lived experiences and outcomes of that ongoing educative process and how these are interrelated to the institutional values and pedagogic means used by Iyengar yoga teachers.

Shilling has applied his theories in the institutional education context to examine the relationship between society, schools and curriculum (2003, 2008, 2010). His corporeal realism theory and concept of body pedagogics has had a profound influence on the interdisciplinary interest in the body. In particular, his approach has been drawn upon by researchers interested in exploring the interface of education, society, and embodiment, including: in the context of physical education (Kirk, 2004); examinations of the body in the context of culture and schooling (Petherick, 2005; Evans, Davis & Rich, 2009) and cultural and sporting activities outside of formal learning institutions, such as ballet (Aalton, 2007), boxing (Wacquant, 2004) and sailing (Andersson, Östman & Öhman 2015).

Body pedagogics has also been used as a framework for examining the transference of religious practices as embodied learning from one generation to the next. This is directly relevant to my research because, although Iyengar yoga is not a religion, its institutional nature along with its spiritual foundations mean it shares much in common with religion as a social phenomenon. Shilling and Mellor (2007) adopt the body pedagogic framework to compare modern technological culture with two distinctly different religious cultures – Taoist culture and Charismatic Christianity. In doing this, they seek to examine how embodied religious experiences offer a counter to the absence/presence of the body in modern technological culture where employment and paid work is the main pedagogic means through which culture is transmitted. Of particular interest to this research is their examination of Taoist culture as, like Iyengar yoga, it has a religious/spiritual foundation that sits outside of Western Christianity and is concerned with transcendence beyond the material body. Shilling and Mellor observe that Taoist culture is based around a concept of actionless action, a complex concept that can be broadly described as living in an egoless state in harmony with the world. The pedagogic means through which this culture is transmitted between generations include breathing exercises, along with somatic practices such as Chi Gung and Tai Chi. Shilling and Mellor identify the major embodied experiences learnt through these practices as a “sense of *being*”, along with increasing connectedness to one’s surroundings (2007, p. 539, italics in original). They observe that the resulting outcome of these practices is framed in terms of a “state of *immanence* with respect to the environment” (p. 539, italics in the original). Although there is no guarantee that this will occur, it allows a person to meet hardship and opposition with equanimity, a state that is in

stark contrast to the rational state of modern technological culture. The significance of this study to my research is that it demonstrates how Shilling's definition of body pedagogics may be utilised to explore religious based body practices that stand outside or in opposition to rational Western technological culture. It also offers a discussion on how culture and pedagogical means are linked to concepts of immanence and transcendence in religious based somatic practices. The authors observe that although these concepts are touched upon by Deleuze and Guattari's (1988) concept of a "body without organs" and Weber's (1964, 1991 [1904]) work, they are largely underexplored in the sociological literature and deserve greater attention. They also argue that examining religious practices through the framework of body pedagogics reveals that these somatic practices are more than merely reactions to modern technological culture. Rather, they invite new areas of research on the sociology of the body that seeks to understand the meaning and connectedness derived from the lived experiences of these practices.

In another paper, Mellor and Shilling (2010) draw from Durkheim's concept of religion as a "social fact" to compare the embodiment of Islam and Christianity through their specific pedagogic means. Their interest in body pedagogics lies not only in embodiment as a locale for cultural transmission, but also as an "experiential mediator" of this process (Mellor & Shilling, 2010, p.28, *italics in original*). They observe that the embodied practices of Islam, such as prostration, ablution, fasting and rhythmic rocking, are pedagogic means through which this religion is internalised by its members. In contrast, Christianity is embodied through the communion, baptism and prayer. They conclude that an analysis of these religions through the lens of body pedagogics reveals that they are more than different belief systems, but the different pedagogic means shape the lived experience and embodied outcomes of their members, which they refer to as "religious habitus". This concept of religious habitus is explained as follows:

In general terms, the habitus (a concept dating back to Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas) refers to a socially structured bodily disposition that organises each generation's senses into particular hierarchies, predisposes people towards particular ways of knowing and acting, and promotes particular orientations to the world. (Mellor and Shilling, 2010, p.34).

In a subsequent paper, Shilling (2017) notes that this concept of habitus was reformulated by Bourdieu (1984, 1996) and came to be associated more with unconscious dispositions.

Shilling (2017) notes that, despite these different formations, they both concern a “formative or transformative effect that is *totalizing* in terms of the individual’s personality conceptualized in its broadest terms” (p. 85, italics in original).

Framed in this way, the concept of body pedagogics seeks to explain how the embodiment of religious practice shapes the ontological and epistemological orientation of its members in order to transmit the culture (Shilling & Mellor, 2007). Mellor and Shilling (2010) observe that the production of a particular religious habitus is not a guaranteed result of a particular pedagogic means. Rather, an individual’s disposition and orientations are complex and depend on their individual psychology along with wider social and cultural factors (Mellor & Shilling, 2010). These individual dispositions and social and cultural factors mediate the pedagogic means to produce different embodied experiences, outcomes and degrees of acculturation for individual members.

In a further paper, Shilling (2017) reflects on the growth in body pedagogic studies and their diverse methodological and theoretical influences. He contends that some comparability may be offered through the lens of situated epistemological analysis (SER) and practical epistemological analysis (PEA), found in the work of Andersson & Östman (2006), Maivoisdotter & Wickman (2011) and others. SER and PEA draw from John Dewey’s pragmatic approach to embodied learning (Shilling, 2017). SER has an institutional focus and recognises that individuals are acculturated into cultures in the real-world, within distinct material environments and with specific institutional perspectives that value some forms of knowledge at the expense of other forms. This enables the identification of “indicators of progress”, that is, are markers of progression, such as educational goals or religious ideals (p. 78). PEA recognises that embodied experiences occur in relationship with another person – a teacher, coach or other figure. It invites enquiry into how these encounters are structured through five variables that shape the learning experience. These five phases are termed: encounters; ends in view; standfast; how gaps emerge; and connections/enquiry. These variables recognise the importance of the episodic and situational learning exchange. They draw attention to how participants engage with the inherent assumptions and values of the culture, how they address setbacks and experiences of incompetency and the connections they make through this process. Read together, SER and PEA narrow in the body pedagogic enquiry by focusing on the material reality of the institutional means and how this plays out

through specific encounters of learning. Together these approaches give insight into how habits are formed through embodied learning. Shilling (2017) warns against assuming that these constitute a *habitus*, which he explains requires a form of “totalizing” of a person’s personality (p. 85).

This paper is significant for my research as it offers an overview of the body pedagogic research. It positions the body pedagogic framework as an overarching macro-approach that may be supplemented and complemented by more micro-inquiries, such as SER and PEA that examine how the institutional culture and pedagogic means are enacted in situational, dynamic and episodic encounters between people in relationship with each other.

To summarise, body pedagogics offers a framework for understanding how culture is transmitted through embodied pedagogic means from one generation to the next. In the context of my research, it invites an examination of the institutional culture of Iyengar yoga and how this culture is internalised for its members through specific pedagogic means aimed at embodying specific skills, techniques and dispositions in its students. More specifically, it invites an examination of how the pedagogic means seeks to orientate Iyengar yoga students to the values and dispositions of Iyengar yoga’s conceptualisation of how to address suffering and trauma. Shilling’s body pedagogic framework recognises that the culture is not always successfully transmitted from teachers to students. Individual factors, such as a student’s capacity, disposition and the wider social and cultural landscape may also play a role. Teachers are also diverse in their own dispositions, skills and experience in teaching. This means that the relationship between teachers and students is likely to be dynamic, shaped by individual dispositions, institutional settings and the social and cultural context.

Iyengar yoga, however, is not only an embodied practice but also an embodied site of learning. In this study I take up Shilling’s (2017) invitation to look beyond the body pedagogic framework to how Iyengar yoga culture and its specific pedagogic means is enacted between teacher and student *in relationship* with each other through dynamic and relational exchanges in the classroom level. To do this, I have adopted Lusted’s (1986) theory of pedagogy. I was drawn to this approach because this study is concerned with the perspectives of Iyengar yoga teachers and does not capture the perspectives of the students, which would offer fertile material in the SER and PEA enquiries. I was also drawn to Lusted’s

(1986) approach as it extends the notion of pedagogy beyond a mere transmission from teacher to students and invites attention to how teachers and students *produce* knowledge *together* in an embodied relationship (Wright, 2009). This invites an enquiry into issues of agency, power and the potential for the learning exchange to be transformative for both student and teacher.

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### LUSTED'S THEORY OF PEDAGOGY

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In *Why Pedagogy?* (1986), Lusted argues that the concept of pedagogy is critically important because it “draws attention to the *process* through which knowledge is produced” (p. 2, original emphasis). Lusted proposes a model of pedagogy that consists of three interconnected, dynamic and equally important elements – the teacher, the student and knowledge. Knowledge, according to Lusted, is not a priori and static but is produced through the exchange between teacher and the student. Viewed this way, both the teacher and the student are producers of knowledge. This means that the teacher’s methods and techniques are of central interest but they are “inseparable from what is being taught and crucially, how one learns” (1986, p.3). This invites an exploration on how the exchange between the teacher and student can bring about the possibility of transformation for either of them, despite their positioning as ‘teacher’ or ‘student’. The implication of this approach is that for Lusted, the search for a general pedagogy is pointless. Instead, he calls for attention to both specific and open-ended pedagogies that acknowledge the cultural positioning of the student and are sensitive to difference and context.

Lusted’s theory of pedagogy disrupts the traditional view of learning - what he calls the “all-knowing” teacher and the “empty vessel” student (1986, p. 3). This is not to deny that there exists a power dynamic between the student and the teacher. Rather, Lusted contends that pedagogy, as he conceptualises it, becomes the prism through which issues of agency, power dynamics and the production of knowledge can be examined. These issues of agency and power are important for my study as students with trauma are potentially highly vulnerable and require safeguarding against further harm. Trauma over-rides the capacity of a person to exercise their own agency and control, along with their connection to themselves and others (Herman, 1997). Understanding how issues of agency and power play out between Iyengar yoga teachers and these students, therefore, is important for understanding the potential of

Iyengar yoga to facilitate a sense of control and connection for people recovering from trauma.

Lusted's theory has been widely cited in educational research concerning a diversity of subjects including media studies (Buckingham, 1998); post-graduate teaching (Green and Alison, 1995), human movement studies (Tinning, 2010), health education (Wright, 2009, 2014) and dance (Garrett & Wrench, 2016). The last two acknowledge the embodied nature of learning and extend Lusted's theory to somatic practices.

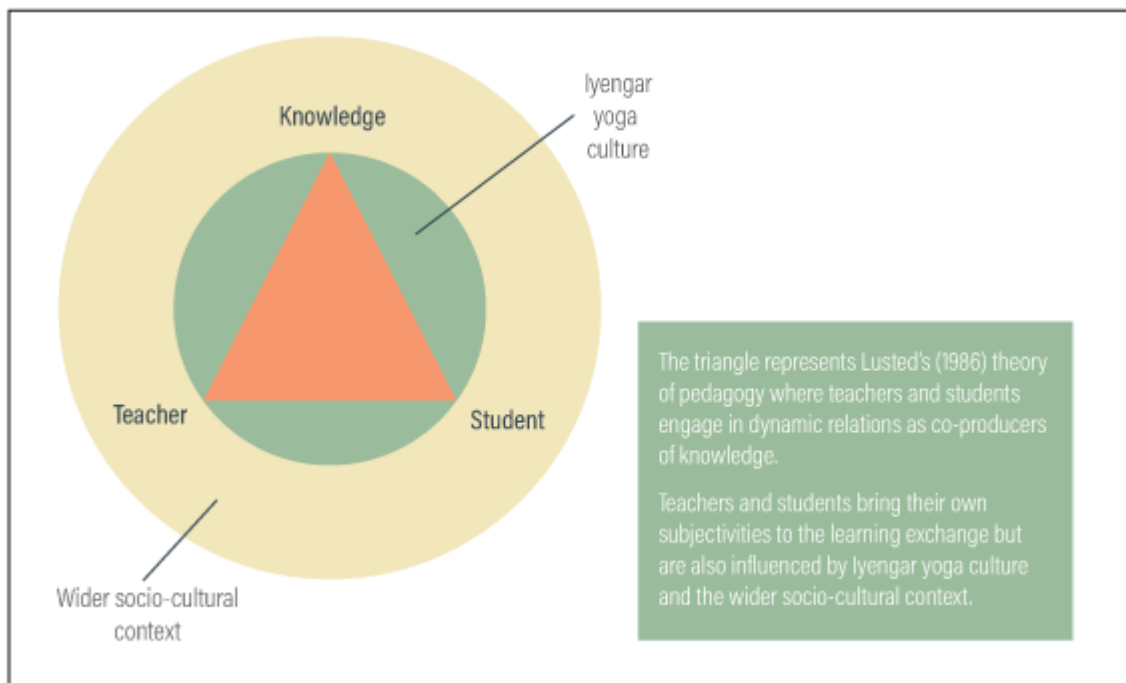
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### COMPATIBILITY OF THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

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Significantly for my research, both Lusted's theory of pedagogy and Shilling's theory of body pedagogics extend the relevance of pedagogy from formal institutions into social and cultural settings (such as the yoga class) (Lusted 1986; Shilling 1993, 2005). Through Shilling, I am able to view the teachers and students as embodied within a social context while recognising them as having a physical, material reality that allows for experience, agency, consciousness and transformation. His definition of body pedagogics directs my attention to his three key concepts: Iyengar yoga culture and how it conceptualises trauma, the pedagogic means through which the skills, techniques and dispositions of Iyengar yoga are transmitted for students with trauma; and the embodied experiences and changes that result from learning Iyengar yoga as an aid for trauma. From Lusted, I am able to drill down to the classroom level to understand the production of knowledge as the product of the relational dynamic between Iyengar yoga teachers and their students with trauma. This will allow me to examine more closely how their situational and contextual exchanges operate to negotiate agency and power, as told through the perspectives of the teachers and key Iyengar yoga documents.

A visual representation of how my theoretical frameworks complement each other is below.



Significantly, both Lusted and Shilling are centrally concerned with the transformative potential of learning for the student. This is critical for my research as we might assume that in coming together to explore the possibilities of lyengar yoga for trauma, both the teachers and students are primarily interested in relieving the embodied suffering associated with trauma in its various forms and regaining a sense of control, meaning and connection over their lives.

Adopting Shilling's framework of body pedagogics (2007) and Lusted's (1986) theory of pedagogy to understand the potential of lyengar yoga invites a qualitative approach as it seeks to understand the effectiveness of lyengar yoga beyond the scientific lens of effectiveness and through an embodied sociological approach that encompasses the institutional, social, cultural and lived experiences of participants in the learning exchange. This theoretical framework informs the methods used in this study, which are discussed in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER THREE

### METHOD

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In this chapter, I outline my research methodology and how it connects with my research questions and theoretical framework, before addressing how I went about my data collection, analysis and the ethical issues associated with my research.

#### RESEARCH APPROACH

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Consistent with Lusted's theory of pedagogy, my purpose is not concerned with identifying some version of objective truth about how to teach Iyengar yoga for trauma, nor is it searching for a single pedagogy. Rather, I am interested in exploring the possibilities of Iyengar yoga as an embodied learning experience to aid trauma, as told through the accounts of Iyengar yoga teachers. Adopting Shilling's (2007) framework of body pedagogics focused my attention on the interaction between Iyengar yoga culture, the pedagogic means through which Iyengar yoga is transmitted between generations of students and the embodied changes and outcomes resulting from practicing Iyengar yoga. Drawing on Lusted's (1986) theory of pedagogy, I was also interested in how knowledge is produced through the dynamic and situational encounters of Iyengar yoga teachers and their students with trauma, as told from the teachers' perspectives. These research concerns require a qualitative approach as they are not concerned with testing a hypothesis or demonstrating the efficacy of a particular practice. Rather, they seek to understand the institutional and pedagogical approaches used by Iyengar yoga teachers and to draw out the different perspectives of Iyengar teachers on how these cultural means are adapted and enacted in the dynamic and situational encounters in classroom with their students who have experienced trauma. This research, therefore, offers a starting point for qualitative research that captures the experiences of Iyengar teachers in teaching students with trauma. This research does not seek to be representative of the international Iyengar yoga teaching community, nor an institutional perspective. While I also recognise that to more fully explore the potential of Iyengar yoga for trauma, it would be important to capture the perspectives of students with

trauma, this however was beyond the scope of this Masters study, but clearly presents opportunities for future research.

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## DATA COLLECTION

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### DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

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In understanding the cultural institutional of Iyengar yoga, how it conceptualises trauma and its pedagogic means, I have drawn primarily from Iyengar yoga texts, written predominately by B.K.S. Iyengar, his family and senior Iyengar yoga teachers. This involved re-reading a number of texts that I had not read since my teacher training, over a decade ago, such as B.K.S. Iyengar's *Light on Yoga* (1966), *Light on Pranayama* (1983), *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Pantanjali* (1993), and *Light on Life* (2005). I also drew on new material I had not previously encountered, including writings from senior teachers and video recordings of senior Iyengar teachers sourced online (Goode, 2015; Steinberg, 2020a, 2020b; RMIYA, 2020). In addition, I drew from academic sources that addressed the history and philosophy of contemporary yoga. In this textual research process, I was seeking to understand how Iyengar yoga conceptualises trauma as a social institution. Following Shilling (2007), I was also seeking to understand the pedagogical means of Iyengar yoga as an embodied form of learning with a specific focus on textual that address how Iyengar yoga teachers might address trauma in students. This document analysis was most heavily relied upon in addressing my first two sub-questions which focus on how Iyengar yoga culturally conceptualises trauma and central pedagogic means employed for addressing trauma. To address the remaining three sub-questions, which are concerned with the embodied experiences and outcomes of Iyengar yoga for trauma, along with the production of knowledge at the classroom level between Iyengar teachers and their students, I have also drawn on institutional textual sources but relied more substantially on the perspectives of the Iyengar yoga teachers interviewed for this research.

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### PARTICIPANT INTERVIEWS

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My intention in recruiting my participants was to engage teachers with some knowledge or experience on Iyengar yoga for trauma. My intention was not to be exhaustive or representative of the Iyengar yoga teaching community globally or within Australia. While it

would have been beneficial to speak to members of the Iyengar family to gain their institutional perspectives, my research was confined to Australian teachers, given the constraints of an M(Phil). In this sense, my research offers a snapshot of perspectives from Australia. This has two implications. First, although it attempts to capture the knowledge of senior teachers as key knowledge holders, it is not an official institutional perspective, such as when accounts or directives are made from the Iyengar family or the Institute in Pune. Second, aspects of the culture discussed in this research may not be representative of Iyengar yoga in other parts of the world.

As the purpose of my research is to gain the greatest amount of understanding on the potential of Iyengar yoga for trauma from the perspective of Iyengar yoga teachers, I started with identifying Iyengar yoga teachers that I knew would be sources of rich information on the subject (Mertens, 2005). In March 2019 I sent an email to the Iyengar Yoga Association of Australia explaining my research and asking for their support to identify potential participants for my research. They allowed me to contact their membership base, consisting of about 380 certified Iyengar yoga teachers in Australia. From that email, I received some responses from members suggesting people I might speak to. I followed up with those suggestions.

I also contacted individual teachers who, I knew to have some experience working with people with trauma. These were teachers whom I knew personally through my network of teachers in the Iyengar yoga community in Australia. I also approached a number of senior teachers who I either personally knew or knew of their reputation. A senior teacher also recommended other senior teachers who I could invite to participate, an approach Mertens' (2005) calls "snowball sampling" (p. 319). In addition, I looked at teacher's online profiles to identify teachers who indicated they had some experience working with trauma.

In general, I found it difficult to recruit participants who were not senior teachers and whom I did not know personally. I can only speculate why this is the case – perhaps it could be explained by the discomfort with some yoga practitioners in research, seen as elitist and a distraction from the main focus, being practice (De Michelis, 2007). Perhaps it was more pragmatic - many Iyengar yoga teachers are running their own businesses, teaching classes that span from morning to night so additional obligations are unwanted. I also think there is

some discomfort in teachers who are not senior teachers speaking on behalf of Iyengar yoga as the hierarchical nature of the culture means the Iyengar family and senior teachers are the usual spokespeople for the Iyengar yoga teaching community.

I originally envisaged that there would be two distinct groups of teachers – senior teachers with institutional knowledge who could speak to Iyengar yoga philosophy and pedagogy and a separate group of teachers, including non-senior teachers, with experience teaching people with trauma. What emerged as I started my interviews was a more complex picture. No matter what their level of accreditation in Iyengar yoga, the teachers I interviewed all had significant and substantial experience in practicing and teaching. Every participant had an idea of what Iyengar yoga might offer in extreme stress and trauma and all teachers had direct experiences teaching students with trauma of various kinds. Reflecting back, it is not surprising that teachers with considerable years of teaching experience, as was the case with most my participants, had encountered students with trauma in their everyday teaching experience.

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#### WHO ARE THE TEACHER PARTICIPANTS?

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All eight teacher participants in the study are Iyengar yoga teachers based in Australia. Six participants were women and two were men. At the time of the study, they were aged between 45-70 years. They held different levels of qualifications, although this does not necessarily reflect their experience in practice and teaching. Not all teachers pursue the ongoing levels of accreditation in the Iyengar yoga system so two participants held a Level 1 accreditation but had over 20 years of teaching experience.

The teachers were based in different locations around Australia, including major cities, regional areas and coastal towns in New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory or Victoria.

The four senior teachers had, on average, practiced Iyengar yoga for 40 years and taught for 35 years. Three of these teachers run dedicated Iyengar yoga schools in major cities. These include a busy timetable of daily classes aimed at different levels of students, engaging junior teachers to teach some classes and teacher training programs. The fourth senior teacher runs a weekly program across two different locations. Three senior teachers were offering

specific therapy classes for students at the time of the interview. The fourth teacher had offered this in the past but now preferred to integrate students needing therapy into general classes. All four teachers taught Iyengar yoga full-time.

The four teachers that were not accredited at a senior level also had considerable experience, having practiced on average for 24 years and taught for 14 years. Two teachers ran their own studios in regional towns and the other taught classes in larger regional areas. All but one teacher taught Iyengar yoga as their main occupation.

Apart from their experience and qualifications in Iyengar yoga, the teacher participants had diverse occupational backgrounds. These included backgrounds in naturopathy, law, osteopathy, psychotherapy, insurance, social work and youth work. Although I didn't specifically ask about their religious backgrounds, one teacher strongly identified herself as a Catholic and another considered herself a Buddhist.

All four senior teachers had made regular visits (often yearly) to the Iyengar yoga Institute in Pune to practice under the Iyengar family. All had been direct students of B.K.S. Iyengar and later Geeta Iyengar over their decades of experience. While some senior teachers referred to Mr Iyengar as "Guruji" (meaning Guru), others did not adopt this practice. None of the non-senior teachers had visited Pune but three had been taught by Geeta Iyengar while in Australia in 2008. None of these teachers referred to Mr Iyengar as their guru. They did, however, express their respect for the teachings of the Iyengar family and for their senior teachers in Australia.

Only one of the eight teachers held specific classes for students who had been referred to her by a psychologist. For most teachers, their experience of teaching students with trauma centred around their existing students, some whom they had taught for several decades, who continued to attend class after a traumatic event occurred. Other times, students sought out the teacher in the aftermath of a traumatic event, such as one husband and wife who sought out a senior teacher after the death of their child and another woman who sought out a teacher after suffering PTSD as a first responder in her work. In addition, some teachers had experience teaching people who had experienced trauma as a collective, such as teachers who continued their general classes through bushfire affected areas in summer 2019/ 2020.

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## INTERVIEW METHODS

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To address my research questions, I conducted semi-structured long form interviews with eight Iyengar teachers between December 2019 and October 2020. I interviewed my participants face-to-face or via skype or zoom. Each interview went from between 90 minutes to 180 minutes. Following each interview, I jotted down comments and notes in my research diary to capture my impressions of the interviews.

In the interviews with the four Senior Teachers, I was conscious that I was nervous. I wasn't surprised by this since senior teachers have significant profiles and reputations within the Iyengar yoga teaching community. I was very conscious of my position as a junior Iyengar yoga teacher relative to these teachers. As a Level 1 teacher, which is the base level of accreditation, what stands between me and the Senior Teachers who participated was not just a label of seniority but some 20-40 years of more experience in practicing and teaching. I knew they were all busy, some with international teaching commitments, and that participating in my research was part of their ongoing obligations and responsibilities as senior members of the Iyengar yoga community. I felt grateful for their participation and conscious to make good use of my time in the interviews. For those teachers who were not senior teachers, I knew most of them personally, some quite well for over a decade. I knew they were participating because we had a friendship through our connection in the Iyengar yoga community. I was grateful for their support of my research.

Although all interviews involve power dynamics, there wasn't a clear dynamic across all the interviews. Some teachers were clearly accustomed to being interviewed for research and more generally for articles and publications as representatives of the Iyengar yoga community. In some cases, the senior teacher had published their own writings on Iyengar yoga. Their confidence on the topic meant that I did not always feel I was leading the interview process. In one interview, a senior teacher took the reins from the beginning and spoke generously for nearly two hours about his understanding of Iyengar yoga philosophy and how he teaches therapeutically, along with addressing trauma more specifically, before I asked my first question. In this dynamic, which I found utterly engaging and fruitful, I was aware that I was the student and he was the teacher. Listening back over the interview, I was

disappointed to discover that as this interview progressed, I began to interject in ways that were more concerned with my attempt to seek his approval, perhaps as a way of regaining some control over the interview, rather than really listening and asking questions that extended on the concepts he was discussing. As a consequence, I missed some opportunities to draw out more material that was relevant to my research and this offered some insights for subsequent interviews.

All eight teachers treated the interviews seriously and wanted to make sure they have given me enough information for my research. A number of participants offered me the opportunity to observe their classes to better understand how they teach. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to take up these offers as Covid-19 restrictions interrupted classes for most of my data collection time and this was not part of my ethics approval. In different circumstances, I think observations would have allowed me to see gain invaluable insights into the teachers' different approaches and their relational dynamics with their students to supplement the teachers' accounts.

I was aware that for all teachers, Iyengar yoga has been incredibly transformative in their personal lives and they are highly dedicated to teaching the Iyengar method. For some teachers, representing Iyengar yoga in a wholly positive way was an undertone in their responses. I was also aware that they might take a different perspective if speaking with their close colleagues in the Iyengar yoga teaching community and not recorded for research. Other teachers seemed more comfortable with offering critiques of the culture or reflecting on the negative publicity Iyengar yoga had received following the revelations about senior teacher, Manouso Manos, as part of the #Meetoo movement.

I transcribed all the interviews using a combination of online transcribing services and provided each teacher participant with a draft transcript for their comments or amendments. No-one had any comments or amendments. I did not do any follow up interviews but I did consult documents referred to by the teacher participants in their interviews. In one case I purchased some resources created by the teacher participant.

## DATA ANALYSIS

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I initially coded each teacher's transcript and relevant documents inductively, to identify particular themes, and also deductively in line with my research questions (Creswell, 2017). I used QSR Nvivo 11 to assist with organising my coded data although most of my coding took place manually by cutting and pasting each interview under each research question. There was considerable overlap, with several passages appearing under more than one heading. This is not surprising as my research questions are drafted to reflect each of Shilling's separate and yet overlapping concepts in his definition of body pedagogics – culture, the pedagogic means for transmitting techniques and skills and embodied change. It was only through undertaking this exercise that I really came to understand the depth in which these concepts overlap in the context of Iyengar yoga and trauma.

Once I had done this with my interviews, I went back to the Iyengar yoga writings to identify what they could contribute to each of the research questions. I was struck by the superficiality with which I had first addressed these texts and the abundance of relevant information on each subheading. In writing up my research, I went back and forth between the interview passages and the document analysis to find key concepts and to identify any significant points of similarity and distinction.

## VALIDATION OF THE STUDY

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Drawing on Creswell (2017), I used reflexivity, alternative analysis and thick description as techniques for validation. Reflexivity was an important aspect of my research approach. As Angen (2000) notes, in the context of interpretative research, this is not carried out in the pursuit of objectivity but to acknowledge the researcher's own understanding of the topic and how this changes throughout the research process. Along with a research diary, I had regular supervision meetings with my supervisors. These meetings were invaluable for helping me shape my research process, assisting me to bring a critical awareness to the subject and for bringing me back to my research questions and theoretical framework.

As my research is not concerned with arriving at an empirical "truth" of how Iyengar yoga should be taught for trauma, I am not concerned with triangulating the teacher's accounts



through the perspective of the students (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Rather, I am interested in what Iyengar yoga may offer to students recovering from trauma. It is hoped that the perspectives of students learning Iyengar yoga as a trauma aid will be captured in further research. Having said this, an important part of being an Iyengar teacher is being an Iyengar practitioner. Along with drawing from their experiences of being teachers, the participants regularly also drew from their own perspectives as students and practitioners. At times this included how they have used Iyengar yoga to address the traumatic events they have experienced in their own lives.

Of central interest to me is that my research may be written in a way that is accessible to my participants and the wider Iyengar yoga community. This is to embrace Angen's (2000) reformulation of validity in the context of qualitative research by ensuring my research topic has practical implications and I capture the diversity of human experience of my research participants, using substantive documentation. It also means drawing conclusions that "provide new possibilities and remain open to alternative or more expansive interpretations" (Angen, 2000, p. 392). In pragmatic terms, this means writing in a way that is intended to bridge the gap between the requirements of a rigorous academic study and the Iyengar yoga teaching community. I am aware that this research may not be read by anyone other than my supervisors and examiners and yet I have written it in the hope that if someone from the Iyengar yoga teaching community did pick it up to read, they would find it practically useful and not be put off by the language and tone.

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## LIMITATIONS

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Given the time restraints for an M(Phil) and resource limitations, my research was limited to Australian Iyengar teachers. Although I originally intended to travel to meet some participants and to attend a conference of Iyengar practitioners led by Abhijata Iyengar in May 2020, this was not possible due to the COVID-19 restrictions. I was also limited by the unwillingness of some potentially very information rich teachers to be participants in my study. In one case this was due to the teacher recovering from surgery during the interview process and in another case the teacher wanted to maintain her own intellectual property around this research topic.

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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I obtained ethics approval at UOW as a pre-requisite to my research. I also obtained support from the Ethics Committee of the B.K.S. Iyengar Yoga Association of Australia for my research.

My research does not capture the perspectives of the yoga students who are learning Iyengar yoga as a trauma aid given the significant ethical hurdles in including trauma survivors as research participants (Seedat et al., 2004) and the tight timeframe of a M(Phil) thesis. The decision to exclude this important perspective has not been taken lightly as the students would undoubtedly provide invaluable insight into their experience of learning Iyengar yoga as a trauma aid, including challenges they face, and any embodied changes they may have experienced. It is hoped that future research will build on this initial research to adequately capture this perspective.

While conducting observations of teachers in their trauma classes would also provide invaluable data, I decided not to pursue this approach due to the ethical issues associated with observing trauma survivors (Seedat, et al., 2014). This is particularly the case for trauma survivors of childhood or sexual assault where being “observed” may have been part of their original traumatic experiences (Herman 1992, 1997). Video recordings of the teaching would present similar ethical challenges in seeking and obtaining consent from trauma survivors and data storage (Creswell, 2017). In addition, much of my data collection occurred between March-November 2020, when Covid-19 restrictions meant that many classes were not running or conducted online and travel to participants was not possible.

The participants who are senior teachers hold positions of respect and power within the Iyengar community. They are all financially comfortable, articulate and educated. Similarly, the non-senior teachers are accredited Iyengar yoga teachers, many with significant teaching experience. Although these participants are not vulnerable, they have all spent many years, in some cases several decades, dedicated to their teaching and building their skills and reputations as Iyengar yoga teachers. For most teaching Iyengar yoga is their primary livelihood. For all the teachers, ethically capturing their accounts and maintaining their

anonymity overlaid my research choices (Angen, 2000; Creswell, 2015, 2017). I was conscious of the need to maintain participant's anonymity as the Iyengar community is small and participants may be easily recognisable from even brief background details.

This leads me to the next chapter, the results of my analysis of the teacher interviews along with key Iyengar yoga texts through the prism of my theoretical framework.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

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Shilling's (2007) definition of body pedagogics provides a framework for examining how the institutional culture of Iyengar yoga becomes embodied in its students through specific pedagogic means and the lived experience and outcomes resulting from this process. More specifically for this study, body pedagogics offers a framework to examine the culture of Iyengar yoga and how it conceptualises trauma, how this informs the specific pedagogic means utilised by Iyengar yoga teachers for students who have experienced trauma and the embodied experiences and outcomes for these students. The three pillars of Shilling's definition of body pedagogics – culture, pedagogic means, and embodied experience and change - inform the language of the first three sub-questions of my research questions. This chapter will address each of these three concepts in separate sections, with an awareness that Shilling's theory is concerned with the interplay of these concepts.

In this chapter, I have first examined each pillar of Shilling's definition of body pedagogics as it applies to learning Iyengar yoga more generally, before turning my attention to how this applies more specifically for students with trauma. I have adopted this approach as Iyengar yoga is not a method developed specifically for trauma, such as with Trauma Sensitive Yoga, but a method developed by B.K.S. Iyengar, an Indian yogi, that is grounded in Indian philosophy within an evolving social and historical context. It is therefore important to understand the institutional and pedagogical means of Iyengar yoga more broadly to give context to how this is adapted and tailored for students with trauma.

Shilling's body pedagogic enquiry is a macro-theory to explain the cultural transmission of Iyengar yoga between generations of students through embodied pedagogic means. As Iyengar yoga is a social institution that is primarily enacted within the social relations of a yoga class or private instruction, it is also important for this study to look more closely at the production of knowledge between teachers and students in relationship with each other. To do this I have turned to Lusted's (1986) theory of pedagogy that conceptualises the production of knowledge as the product of an emergent and dynamic relationship between teachers and students. This micro examination invites a closer inquiry into how Iyengar yoga

culture is enacted, produced, transformed and realized in *practice* at the classroom level between individual teachers and their students. In the context of this study, this approach invites an examination of how the dynamic and situational interactions between Iyengar yoga teachers and their students who have experienced traumatic events is potentially transformative for both student and teacher (Lusted, 1986). This enquiry also draws out more specific issues of power and agency in the learning exchange between Iyengar yoga teachers and their students with trauma. This examination responds to my fourth sub-question. Together these sub-questions address the overarching question for this research concerning the *potential* of Iyengar yoga for trauma.

As a starting point, I turn my attention to the first pillar of Shilling's definition of body pedagogics and examine the institutional culture of Iyengar yoga before examining how these cultural means shape the conceptualisation of trauma through a lens of suffering.

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### IYENGAR YOGA CULTURE

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The term "culture" in body pedagogics refers to the "customary bodily practices, norms, rituals and beliefs of a social group" (Shilling & Mellor, 2007, p. 523). Viewed in this way, culture refers both to the cognitive aspects of culture, along with the embodied aspects. A definition of culture that acknowledges the embodied aspects is critical for this study as Iyengar yoga is centrally concerned with an embodied practice, yet it has evolved within a specific cultural and historical context.

To understand the culture of Iyengar yoga, it is important to first examine how it has evolved from the practice of an individual Indian yogi to a global social institution. This historical examination helps to explain the cultural, philosophical and pedagogic values of Iyengar yoga as it has evolved over time. This is relevant as these values shape the way Iyengar yoga conceptualises trauma and the specific pedagogic means used by Iyengar yoga teachers to address trauma. This in turn shapes the experiences and outcomes of students learning Iyengar yoga as an aid for recovering from traumatic events.

De Michelis (2005) argues that the historical development of Iyengar yoga can be seen as typifying the development Modern Postural Yoga forms in general. In her book *A History of Modern Yoga*, De Michelis (2005) maps the historical development of Modern Postural Yoga

as consisting of three main phases: popularisation; consolidation and acculturation. The first phase, popularisation, from the 1950s to mid-1970s, is marked by the appearance of numerous schools of different styles of Modern Postural Yoga, both Indian and non-Indian, along with Western travelers to India who were interested in learning yoga. In this period, contact between students and teachers (gurus) was largely personal in nature. The second phase, consolidation, from the mid-1970s to 1980s, is characterised by a process of establishing more permanent institutional structures. In this period, teacher training courses were developed. Indian teachers tended to be revered but due to the growing number of students, contact between teachers and students tended to be less personal. The third phase of acculturation, from the 1980's to 2005 (when De Michelis' book was published), is marked by greater mainstream acceptance of yoga as complementary medicine, including by the medical field. In this period, yoga schools tended to re-orientate themselves in response to feedback from students and the larger public, which brought about a professionalisation of yoga teaching, along with a stronger emphasis on technical proficiency and greater institutionalisation. In this phase, some leading Western teachers of Modern Postural Yoga, including Iyengar yoga, established themselves as leaders on the grounds of technical knowledge and professionalism rather than charisma and religious knowledge. Their relationships between teachers and students in this period shifted from that of a 'spiritual pupil' to a client-professional relationship. This phase also sees the emergence of criticism of the Indian-style of guru, seen as authoritarian. De Michelis (2005) examines the historical development of Iyengar yoga and concludes that it represents a strong example of these three phases of development. Key aspects of the contemporary institutionalised culture of Iyengar yoga are examined in more detail below.

For the purposes of this research, De Michelis' (2005) analysis helps to position Iyengar yoga within a larger historical and cultural context of the evolution of Modern Postural yoga forms more generally. De Michelis points to how, while Iyengar yoga may have its roots in ancient Indian spiritual traditions, it reflects the social and cultural influences of an increasingly globalised world that has embraced Modern Postural Yoga forms of all kinds. This is relevant to the analysis of Iyengar yoga through the body pedagogics framework as it suggests that Iyengar yoga culture is evolving and dynamic. It is not simply the teachings of its founder but a social institution that reflects and is responsive to the historical, social and cultural forces of

its time. Understanding Iyengar yoga as an evolving culture that reflects these distinct but overlapping historical phases also assists in placing key Iyengar yoga texts used in this study into their historical context. For example, *Light on Yoga* (1966), written in what De Michelis (2005) calls the popularisation phases, was written before the formal institutionalisation of Iyengar yoga and its widespread global uptake. Its intended audience is anyone who is interested in practicing yoga in Iyengar's method. Later writings, such as *Light on Life* (2008) speak more directly to Iyengar yoga practitioners and, in particular, the Iyengar yoga teaching community. They are a call to uphold and maintain the Iyengar yoga methods in the context of the greatly expanded, diverse and commercialised global yoga industry.

Understanding Iyengar yoga's historical development also gives context to the perspectives of the teacher participants in this research. Some senior teacher participants first accounted Iyengar yoga in the popularization phase and were taught directly by B.K.S. Iyengar in a period before yoga had a significant global reputation and was widely accepted in the West. Some of these participants developed personal and longstanding relationship with B.K.S. Iyengar and members of his family. They received their permission to teach directly from B.K.S. Iyengar and became key figures in establishing the Iyengar Association of Australia, which administers Iyengar yoga at the national level. This level of immersion, their longstanding personal relationships to the Iyengar family, their role in upholding the cultural values of the Iyengar family have presumably shaped their understanding not only of the technicalities of practicing and teaching Iyengar yoga, but also the values of Iyengar yoga as a cultural institution. Other participant teachers joined Iyengar yoga later, in the popularisation and acculturation phases when there were already many thousands of international students and Iyengar yoga was institutionalised through the establishment of the Ramamani Memorial Iyengar Institute in Pune and through national Iyengar yoga associations. By this time, yoga was widely accepted by the general community. These teachers went through formal teacher training courses held by senior Western teachers according to guidelines issued from the Iyengar family through the Institute. This has no doubt shaped their understanding and experience of Iyengar yoga culture in different ways to the senior teachers who were early adopters of the method. This is relevant to the current study as it highlights the ways in which the culture of Iyengar yoga have evolved over time and the historical point in which a person enters the culture shaped the different pathways to becoming a teacher. Although it

is outside the scope of this study, it suggests that these different ways of engaging with the culture and pathways to becoming a teacher may shape teachers in ways that produce different understandings of the Iyengar yoga culture and how it is to be taught to the next generation of students.

In the introductory chapter, I outlined how B.K.S. Iyengar formed his style of yoga, based on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali and as an evolution of the teachings he received from his teacher, T. Krishnamacharya of Mysore. I also outlined how Iyengar yoga as a method differs from other forms of Modern Postural Yoga. I now expand on these concepts to examine the culture of Iyengar yoga as a contemporary social institution, including the skills, techniques and dispositions it seeks to pass to new generations of students. As a starting point, I first examine the foundational textual sources of Iyengar yoga and how these have been interpreted by B.K.S. Iyengar in the formation of his method.

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#### FOUNDATIONAL TEXTS

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Philosophically, Iyengar cites the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali (dated between 500-200 BC) as the main historical spiritual source for his teachings (Iyengar 1966,2001). In this way, Iyengar yoga represents an interpretation of classical yoga. He also draws from other scriptural foundations, including the Bhagavad Gītā (400-200 BC) and the Hathayoga Pradipika (dated around 15<sup>th</sup> century) (Iyengar, 1966). The Yoga Sutras consist of 196 succinct aphorisms on yoga (Iyengar, 1996). The Sutras have been subjected to different translations over time, including Iyengar's translation, *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* (Iyengar, 1996). Iyengar's translation of Sutra 1.2 (yogah chittavrtti nirodhah) reveals that Patanjali's yoga is centrally concerned with consciousness. Iyengar's translation of this definitional sutra is:

*Yoga is the cessation of movements of consciousness* (Iyengar, 1996)

Patanjali's yoga, and by extension, Iyengar's yoga, is ontologically based on three main concepts, prakriti, purusa and Isvara (Feuerstein, 1980; Iyengar 1966). Prakriti is nature and capable of change. It has three qualities (gunas), consisting of luminosity (sattva), rajas (vibrancy) and inertia (tapas) (Iyengar, 1966, 25). The body and the mind are part of nature. They experience sensations, thoughts and emotions. They are part of the instability of nature. They are the object and not to be confused with the true self, purusa, the soul (Iyengar 1996). Purusa refers to a fixed, constant inner self. It is beyond feelings, thoughts



and sensations. It is conceived as “absolute, pure knowledge” (Iyengar, 1996, p. 27). In *Light on Life*, Iyengar maintains that the practice of yoga is concerned with exploring the relationship between nature and the soul so the practitioner can experience the interconnectedness between them (2005, p. 9). Isvara refers to the Universal god, that is not a judgmental creator god as in Christian/Judo tradition but a god who permeates everything, including the human spirit (Iyengar, 1966). Yoga, according to Iyengar, is to prepare the body and mind (which are together part of nature) to connect to the soul to become one with God to secure liberation (Iyengar, 1966). Accordingly, Iyengar’s yoga is deeply grounded in Indian philosophy and spirituality.

Patanjali’s Sutras describes the eightfold pathway of yoga to freedom where nature can meet the soul. This is both a philosophical and practical path. The eight petals of yoga are yama (ethical restraints on behaviour), niyama (personal observances), asana (poses), pranayama (control of breathing), pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses), dharana (concentration), dhyana (meditation) and samadhi (complete absorption) (Iyengar, 1996). Iyengar’s yoga represents an interpretation of this path, taking the experience of practicing asana as the prism to experience and access the other petals of yoga (Iyengar, 1966; Goode, 2015). This means that for Iyengar, each of the other limbs of yoga are learnt through the primacy of asana practice. Pranayama, according to Iyengar yoga, is a powerful practice and made available only when the body has been conditioned sufficiently by asana (Iyengar, 1966; 1985). Meditation, the withdrawal of senses and concentration are taught in asana practice rather than as distinct practices. In this sense, asana in the Iyengar yoga method is often referred to as “meditation in action” (Lillas, 2018). The yamas and niyamas refer to the ethical dimensions of yoga and include non-violence, moderation and cleanliness. In the Iyengar method, they are also cultivated through asana practice. That is, as one becomes a proficient practitioner of asana, the ability to discern and detach opens a more ethical way of living (Iyengar, 1966).

Although Iyengar drew the primacy of asana from his teacher, T Krishnamacharya, Iyengar himself was a substantial innovator in developing his approach to yoga. His particular method, which he developed and refined throughout his life, is detailed in the body of writings he produced along with writings by other members of the Iyengar family and senior

teachers (De Michelis, 2005). Together these texts make up key syllabus writings for Iyengar yoga teachers and comprehensively describe the cultural values of Iyengar yoga.

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### IYENGAR YOGA TEXTS

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Iyengar Yoga is conveyed primarily through English to a transnational audience (Singleton 2010). B.K.S. Iyengar wrote 14 books on his approach to yoga, the most famous being *Light on Yoga* (1966), a vade mecum for practicing his method (Singelton, 2010; p. 91). *Light on Yoga* has been translated into 19 different languages and has sold over 3 million copies worldwide (Banerjee, 2014). It is commonly referred to as the 'bible of yoga' for its idealised presentation of asana (De Michelis, 2005) and a key reason for the successful global transmission of Iyengar yoga.

A feature of Iyengar's writing and teaching is the combination of spiritual and philosophical writing alongside a Western medical discourse around the body (Lea, 2009). Take for example, *Light on Yoga* (1966). The first part is concerned with explaining the subject of yoga in terms of Patanjali's eight limbs of yoga. The second, and far more substantial part contains 601 photos of Iyengar performing over 200 poses. These photos are accompanied by details of how to technically practice the pose and the medical effects of the pose along with, in some cases, an explanation of the Sanskrit or scriptural source for the name of the pose. This combination of medicalised discourse alongside references to ancient Indian scriptures indicates how Iyengar's method is the product of the yogic teachings handed down through the lineage of his teacher and his openness to embrace and engage with Western medical science. Other key texts that make up the Iyengar yoga syllabus for teachers include *Light on Pranayama* (Iyengar, 1985), *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* (1993) and Geeta Iyengar's *Iyengar's Yoga: A Gem for Women* (1983). Geeta's book and her influence as a master teacher in the Iyengar yoga community has contributed a specific body of knowledge on how women should practice throughout the various stages of women's lives, including menstruation, pregnancy and menopause (Iyengar, 1983). In addition, Iyengar yoga literature includes writings by other members of the Iyengar family, senior teachers across the globe along with *Yoga Rahasya*, a journal of Iyengar yoga articles published through the Institute. These texts together make for a significant and comprehensive body of Iyengar yoga literature that map out the philosophical underpinnings along with the technical pedagogic

means of the Iyengar yoga method. Although these books are widely used in the broader yoga community, they represent syllabi texts for Iyengar yoga teachers.

In addition to the key texts written on Iyengar yoga, other important institutional means for maintaining and reproducing the culture of Iyengar yoga are the hierarchy of Iyengar yoga teachers and the formal accreditation process of Iyengar yoga teachers.

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### ACCREDITATION AND HIERARCHY OF TEACHERS

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As was outlined in the introductory chapter, Iyengar yoga is hierarchical and based on a family lineage. B.K.S. Iyengar was succeeded by his daughter Geeta Iyengar and his son Prashant Iyengar, and more recently by his grand-daughter, Abhijata Iyengar. They govern Iyengar yoga internationally through the Ramamani Memorial Iyengar Yoga Institute, named after B.K.S. Iyengar's wife. In the modern highly commercialised market of yoga teacher training, Iyengar yoga stands out because it controls and administers its own accreditation of teachers through guidelines set by the Institute and administered by national Iyengar yoga associations. Today the Institute's website states that there are Iyengar yoga teachers accredited in 95 countries in the world (RIMYI, 2020). In contrast, most other styles of Modern Postural Yoga are regulated at the national level, through peak industry organisations, such as Yoga Australia.

Under the current system of accreditation, Iyengar yoga teachers can be Levels 1-4. Level 1 teachers are expected to understand how to teach for common conditions, such as bad knees and backs, but only Senior teachers (Levels 3 and 4) are permitted to teach pregnant women or specific therapy classes. Senior teachers, who generally have several decades of experience in practicing and teaching in the Iyengar yoga method, are positioned as key knowledge holders on Iyengar yoga philosophy and practice. They also maintain connections with the Iyengar family, sit on assessment panels and hold executive roles on national associations to ensure compliance with directives and guidelines set down by the Institute in Pune (RIMYI, 2020). It is through this hierarchy of teachers regulating who may teach in the Iyengar yoga method and limiting that authority to teach, that the integrity of B.K.S. Iyengar's teachings is sought to be maintained by institutional means.

Iyengar yoga is also known in the yoga community for the rigor of its training and accreditation of teachers. Becoming an Iyengar yoga teacher generally takes several years of training and regular practicing with a senior teacher before sitting an assessment before a panel of senior teachers. My personal experience was that the process of teacher training through to accreditation took a decade. On my first attempt at assessment, the panel advised that my teaching was satisfactory, but my practice needed more work before I could be accredited. They gave me specific things to work on - greater integration of the bones of my limbs into the joints to avoid injury; practice less intensely; continue to work with my senior teacher to get more feedback. I worked on these points and passed the following year. I offer my own experience as it captures something about the culture – institutionally there is no commercialized desire to accredit teachers but rather, a culture that acts to carefully gatekeep who may teach in the name of Iyengar yoga. Teachers, as the main conduits of the method from one generation of Iyengar yoga students to the next, are required to *embody* the method and this is assessed through their practice at assessment. It is through these institutional means that Iyengar yoga seeks to maintain standards in teachers that reflect the teachings of B.K.S. Iyengar across the diverse social and cultural settings in which Iyengar yoga is taught across the world.

To reinforce the importance of staying true to B.K.S. Iyengar's teachings as reproduced through a hierarchy, teachers are encouraged to stay under the guidance of senior teachers and experienced teachers take regular trips to Pune to study directly under the Iyengar family as part of their ongoing learning as practitioners and teachers. Members of the Iyengar yoga family also travel the world to teach students of the method. Some direct students of Iyengar yoga had a devotional relationship with Mr Iyengar while he was alive and continue to refer to him as 'Guruji' meaning guru. Other students refer to him as 'Mr Iyengar'. In the interviews for this study, some teachers spoke of gratitude for the teachings they had received from B.K.S. Iyengar, his family and senior teachers. They also spoke of the responsibility they carried as accredited Iyengar yoga teachers in transmitting the method to their students. For these teachers, teaching Iyengar yoga is a life's work, something seriously undertaken and with reverence to the method they had been entrusted to teach. Some teachers also spoke of their responsibility as an Iyengar yoga teacher as founded on a bond of respect and trust with their students, akin to a professional fiduciary relationship.

The comprehensive body of literature, the clear hierarchy of international teachers, the rigor required to become an accredited teacher along with the ongoing responsibility to uphold the teachings of B.K.S. Iyengar through practice and teaching speak to a comprehensive culture that can draw from its own sources and resources to facilitate their ongoing learning and teaching. This is a strength of the culture and yet could also be viewed as insular and resistant to self-reflection.

Iyengar yoga is not without its significant critics, both from outside of the Iyengar yoga community and from past and current students. B.K.S. Iyengar was known to have at times a fierce teaching style. Some commentators have pointed to the hierarchical nature of Iyengar yoga and the demanding teaching style of B.K.S. Iyengar and some senior teachers to claim that Iyengar yoga represents a form of “pedagogy of dominance” (Farhi, 2019) or “somatic dominance” (Remski, 2019). The teachers who participated in this research, however, rejected that as representative or an integral part of Iyengar yoga pedagogy. In their eyes, Iyengar yoga pedagogy was not fixed to the teachings of the Iyengar family, which they saw as culturally specific to Indian culture and of its time. Rather, they pointed to the diversity in the Iyengar yoga teaching community. When reflecting on how they had formed as teachers, the teachers spoke of how their teaching had evolved over time, based on their own subjective experiences of how they wanted to be treated as students, their practice over decades, along with their subjective understandings of the world and the Australian context in which they taught their students.

Read together, the institutional nature of Iyengar yoga along with the substantial literary writings on both theory and practice produce a homogeneous system of theory and practice when compared to other styles of Modern Postural Yoga (De Michelis, 2005). Despite these formal cultural aspects of Iyengar yoga, however, the teacher interviews revealed that Iyengar yoga is a broad topic and can be taught in diverse ways that reflect the subjectivities of the teachers. Teachers differed in their temperaments, personal experiences, cultural influences and philosophical influences. While some teacher participants had been Iyengar yoga teachers for most of their professional working life, others taught alongside their other work or came to teaching later in life. The range of other professions was also diverse, from osteopathy to law, youth work and administration. Teachers also brought their own influences to their teaching from their own practice and also from their other influences

including Buddhism, poetry and Christianity. This ability to draw from other influences indicates the primacy of asana as *embodied* experiential learning. This focus allows Iyengar yoga to be adapted to different cultural settings.

Having considered some of the key institutional means through which Iyengar yoga is transmitted from one generation to the next, I now turn attention to the conceptualization of the body, mind and consciousness in Iyengar yoga culture before examining how it understands trauma through a broader lens of suffering. This in turn informs the pedagogic means in which Iyengar yoga teachers address trauma in their students.

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### THE BODY, MIND AND CONSCIOUSNESS

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Drawing from Patanjali's Sutras, Iyengar yoga conceptualises the body as multi-dimensional, beyond the physical body known to Western medicine. The body is understood as five different layers, or sheaths, called kosas. These five kosas are: the anatomical, structural sheath (annamaya kosa); physiological sheath, (pranamaya kosa); mental or emotional sheath (manoyama sheath); intellectual sheath (vijnanamaya kosa); and the pure or blissful sheath (anadamaya kosa) (Iyengar, 1996). Iyengar (2005 p.5) explains that the demarcation of these sheaths is hypothetical and that each blends into each other. The practice of yoga, according to Iyengar, is to integrate the kosas (Iyengar, 2006; Goode, 2014). In *Light on Life*, Iyengar explains:

When these bodies or sheaths are misaligned or clash with one another, we inevitably encounter the alienation and fragmentation that so trouble our world. We, on the other hand, we are able to bring the various sheaths of our body into alignment and harmony with one another, the fragmentation disappears, and unity is established. The physical body (annamaya kosa) must connect with and thereby imprint upon the energetic and organic body (pranamaya kosa) which must, in turn, accord with the mental body (manmaya kosa), the mental body with the intellectual body (vijnanamaya kosa) and the intellectual body with the blissful body (anandamaya kosa). Likewise, if there is no communication between the blissful body and the physical body, then the blissful body cannot bring its illumination to the motion and action of the physical body, and there is darkness in life and not Light on Life. (Iyengar, 2006; p.4)

Iyengar yoga conceptualises consciousness (citta) as consisting of three parts. They are mind (manas), ego or self (ahamkara) and intelligence (buddhi). Iyengar describes mind as "mercurial by nature, elusive and hard to grasp" (2005, p. 15). The mind is made up of three

layers. The first layer is perception, or the lower mind, which can digest information and think. The second layer is the intellect, which allows reflection and insight. The third layer, referred to as the 'I-maker' personalises the experiences of the first two layers (Iyengar, 2010; Goode, 2015). According to classical yoga based on Patanjali's Sutras, the three layers of the mind form an illusionary sense of self. They are part of nature and not of the soul. The problem, according to Iyengar (and classical yoga) is that we take the object (nature) to be the subject (self or soul). It is only when the intellect intervenes through yoga practice that this delusion can be revealed (Iyengar 2003; Ergas 2013; Goode 2015). The body, mind and consciousness, therefore, become the mechanism through which a deeper reality of the soul may be accessed through yoga practice.

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### NORMALISATION OF SUFFERING

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Neither Patanjali's Sutras nor Iyengar's writings make any direct reference to the term 'trauma' as it is understood in contemporary medical terms. This is interesting given Iyengar regularly refers to other Western medicalised notions of mental suffering, including stress, depression and anxiety. This may also reflect the historical time in which Iyengar was writing between 1966 when *Light on Yoga* (Iyengar, 1966) was published and 2006 when *Light on Life* (Iyengar, 2006) was published. Since that time, there has been significant increase in our understanding and discussion of trauma and the impact of traumatic events (Macy et al, 2018).

Iyengar's writings, however, offer substantial guidance on how he would conceptualise trauma through his discussions on emotional suffering more broadly. Philosophically, Iyengar's writing on suffering draws from Patanjali's Sutras to discuss mental and emotional suffering and afflictions (kleshas). Patanjali's Sutras outline the five causes of pain as: avidya (ignorance); asmita (egotism); raga (attachment); dvesa (aversion); and abhinivesa (instinctive clinging to life) (Iyengar, 1966, p. 5). Iyengar (1993) contends that the primary cause of suffering is avidya, which he defines as "the failure to understand the conjunction between the seer and the seen: purusa and prakrti" (p. 24). Suffering, therefore, is understood not as caused by an external force or event, but in the way an individual responds or makes sense of such an event at the level of their consciousness. This is not to say there is not a recognition that suffering is not activated by external forces, such as the

actions of others and natural disasters. In both the Yoga Sutras and key Iyengar texts, suffering is viewed as inevitable, ubiquitous, part of the condition of being human. The pathway of yoga, is to gain detachment from this suffering. In *Light on Yoga*, Iyengar states:

The pain is there as a teacher, because life is filled with pain. In the struggle alone, there is knowledge. Only when there is pain will you see the light. Pain is your guru. As we experience pleasures happily, we must also learn not to lose our happiness when pain comes. As we see good in pleasure, we should learn to see good in pain. Learn to find comfort even in discomfort. We must not try to run from pain but to move through and beyond it. This is the cultivation of tenacity and perseverance, which is a spiritual attitude towards yoga. This is also the spiritual attitude towards life. (2005; p. 47)

Iyengar's writings also place disease and suffering as part of a person's karmic condition, reflecting his native Hindu spirituality. In *Light on Life*, Iyengar explains this in the following way:

Every illness is in reality a part of ourselves; it is part of our manifestation. According to yogic philosophy, diseases and suffering are the fruits of our past action. In that sense we are responsible for what we have created. If we affront affliction through yoga, we awaken a new awareness of tolerance and endurance, as well as a true sympathy for others in their afflictions. These qualities indicate the degree of development we have reached. So why not take adversity positively? Certainly it is an alarm signal, but it also contains the seed for its own resolution and transcendence. (Iyengar, 2005, p. 52)

This normalisation of suffering was echoed by the teachers in the interviews. Some teachers commented that they considered that all their students were traumatised, to greater or lesser extents. This was not to say that the teachers were not aware that some students had experienced major and significant traumatic events that present monumental interruptions to life, including death of a child, sexual abuse, serious accidents and natural disasters. Some teachers discussed how they themselves had experienced profoundly traumatic events. For some, these events were the catalyst for taking up yoga, whereas others were already Iyengar yoga practitioners. They made sense of these events as part of the condition of living that may be overcome through the practice of asana in the Iyengar method. A number of teachers spoke of their aversion to contemporary discourses around yoga for trauma outside of the Iyengar method as methods that placed the trauma as all defining, failing to see the student beyond the trauma, as an attachment model, rather than the pursuit of the yogic path, which is concerned with overcoming suffering through detachment. Other teachers



commented that these forms of yoga fail to take account of the critical role of the teacher, reducing yoga for trauma to set of guidelines that can be delivered by mental health practitioners to clients with no understanding of yoga as a subject. In their view, it was critical that the teacher was knowledgeable about the subject of *yoga* and the relationship between teacher and student was critical to the transmission of learning. This highlights the importance of the teacher/student relationship in the Iyengar yoga method and the cultural importance placed on experience for a teacher to be effective in teaching students, particularly, where they may have complex needs, such as, in the case of trauma.

To summarise, an examination of the institutional culture of Iyengar yoga identifies the skills, techniques and dispositions that it values and seeks to maintain. Institutionally, it is hierarchical and seeks to control who may teach the method through the process of accreditation of teachers. Its philosophical foundations are grounded in ancient Indian scriptures but it also reflects a global modern world. Iyengar yoga does not seek to convert its members to Hinduism or any specific religious beliefs. It is a form of practice based learning using asana as an embodied and experiential form of learning that acts as a gateway through which a practitioner may develop or experience the other limbs of yoga. Iyengar yoga views the body as beyond physicality and suffering as part of life, to be accepted and embraced as an opportunity to learn. Its teachings maintain that through the practice of asana in the specific technical method developed by B.K.S. Iyengar and maintained through members of the Iyengar family and senior teachers, a practitioner may learn to detach from this suffering, to recognise that they are more than their physical body, their mind and their experiences. This is premised on an understanding that beyond the physical body and mind is an existence that transcends the known world and that this existence is perfect, not touched by the fluctuations of experience and emotion. In this sense, trauma is not all defining; it is part of suffering that becomes embodied but it does not touch the true self. The implication is that Iyengar yoga maintains that it is through regular practice of yoga that a person may come to recognise the patterns that are imprinted through life experiences and unravel these patterns as a pathway to knowing their deeper, true self.

Having considered the culture of Iyengar yoga and the institutional skills, techniques and dispositions it values, attention is now turned to the second pillar of body pedagogics – the *central pedagogic means* through which the culture is transmitted to its students with

trauma. This turns our attention from the external and philosophical aspects of the culture towards how it is internalised in its members through an embodied pedagogy with a view to directing the dispositions and orientations of its members (Mellor and Shilling, 2010).

### ASANA AS THE CENTRAL PEDAGOGIC MEANS

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The central pedagogic means through which Iyengar yoga is transmitted is through asana. It is through the regular and consistent practice of asana that Iyengar yoga maintains the other limbs of yoga are experienced or become available to the student (Iyengar, 1966). Iyengar explains that the reason for the primacy of asana is that the body is concrete and accessible. In his words: “To the yogi, the body is a laboratory of life, a field of experimentation and perpetual research” (Iyengar, 2005; p. 22).

The importance of having an experience of asana over an intellectual knowledge of the subject was discussed by Senior Teacher One in the following way:

Our first teacher, said “Don’t read for the first two years, a random amount of time, we'd been practicing every day. “Don’t read, wait until you've got, you know, kind of real questions”, in other words [pause] wait until you have experiences that you can match the words and the philosophy to your experience rather than reading about something and saying “I wonder what that is? Was that meditation?”

This passage draws attention to the reason yoga is taught through asana - to acquire knowledge through direct personal experience (Goode, 2015, p1). For the more experienced practitioner, one’s own body becomes the primary text through which knowledge may be derived. This knowledge can then be cross referenced back to other sources, such as the spiritual teachings or Iyengar writings. It also emphasises that asana as the central pedagogic means of Iyengar yoga is designed to give students the skills and techniques to listen and trust their bodies – to privilege their embodied experience over cognitive reasoning or belief. This is what Ergas (2013) refers to as reversing the Cartesian privilege afforded to cognitive thinking over bodily experience, in his words to “place Descartes in a headstand” (p.4).

Iyengar yoga teachers utilise specific pedagogic means to teach asana that are intended to facilitate a listening to and knowing of the body above cognitive processes. These specific pedagogic means include different sequences aimed at addressing different physical and

mental conditions, inversions and restorative poses, along with specific and detailed verbal instructions and adjustments. Each of these specific pedagogic means will be examined as they reveal the skills, techniques and dispositions that are culturally valued by Iyengar yoga as a social institution and sought to be embodied in students learning the Iyengar method.

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### INDIVIDUALING SEQUENCING

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Unlike other forms of Modern Postural Yoga, such as Ashtanga and Bikram yoga, Iyengar yoga does not use set sequences. Teachers may develop sequences from a canon of 200+ poses. Each pose may be adapted based on the teacher's assessment of the physical and mental capacity of the student through different variations on each pose and props. In practical terms, this means there are literally thousands of possible sequences available to a teacher. Sequences may be designed around curative and therapeutic outcomes, such as a class for hips or backs, or to address mental/ emotional conditions such as depression, anxiety or stress. In designing a sequence, the teacher considers a range of factors, including the experience of the students, their dispositions, the intended outcome of the sequence, the props available and the situational context in which the learning is taking place. This represents a highly individualised approach to learning asana compared to other forms of Modern Postural Yoga.

Two asanas, headstand (Salamba Sirsasana) and shoulderstand (Salamba Sarvangasana), are particularly important in the Iyengar yoga method as they are considered to have curative potential. These poses are not taught to absolute beginners due to their difficulty but are markers of competency in the Iyengar yoga method, frequently held for 5 minutes. In *Light on Yoga* (1966), Iyengar describes the benefits of headstand first in terms of the “ancient books” and the Bhagavad Gita and goes on to say:

Regular practice of Sirsāsana makes healthy pure blood flow through the brain cells. This rejuvenates them so that thinking power increases and thoughts become clearer. The asana is a tonic for people whose brains tire quickly. It ensures the proper blood supply to the pituitary glands in the brain. Our growth, health and vitality depend on the proper functioning of these two glands. (p.151)

Shoulderstand is also described in *Light on Yoga* (1966 p. 171) first philosophically as “one of the greatest boons conferred on humanity by our ancient sages” followed by a scientific explanation that maintains that the chin lock helps to bathe the thyroid gland in blood supply

and the inversion assists with blood flow to the heart without strain. This, according to Iyengar, soothes the nervous system. He cites a wide range of ailments to be cured by shoulderstand including headaches, hypertension, irritation, shortness of temper, nervous breakdown and insomnia (Iyengar, 1966, p. 171). While these poses may be physically demanding at first, over time a student may develop the capacity to hold them for longer without strain. It is through this process of learning over time that these inversions become restorative. In addition to headstand and shoulderstand, Iyengar yoga has a large canon of restorative poses that are designed to rest and release the body. Props, including blocks, belts and bolsters are regularly used to facilitate these poses (Iyengar, 2005). These poses are considered to have nourishing and restorative effects on the body and nervous system through facilitating an opening and quietening that does not require strain or effort on behalf of the student (Iyengar, 1966, 2003). The importance of restorative poses and supported inversions is also evident in B.K. S. Iyengar's list of asanas for emotional stability, included at the end of *Light on Life* (2005, pp. 267- 270). Inversions and restorative poses, therefore, act to counter the physical demands of other poses, such as standing poses and dynamic backbends. They offer an opportunity to be within the physical body without exertion. They facilitate a disposition of quietness, an opportunity to withdraw the senses from the physical world, to connect with the inner consciousness of the self (Iyengar, 1966).

Teachers use their own direct experience of practicing in the Iyengar yoga method to inform the pedagogic decisions they make with their students. In the interviews, teachers described how they had learnt from their own bodies over the passage of time and through life's major experiences, which offered them insights into how to approach their students at these stages in life. This was particularly the case for women who had maintained a practice from early adulthood through to pregnancy, motherhood and menopause. The experience of practicing brought new or confirmed knowledge to complement knowledge from their earlier practice, along with teachings they had received and Iyengar yoga literature. Although I did not ask the teachers specifically about trauma in their own lives, a number of teachers revealed that their approach to teaching students with trauma was shaped by their experiences of what they had found to be effective in practicing Iyengar yoga during difficult and traumatic times in their own lives. For example, Teacher Six revealed that she needed to "get moving" rather than do restorative poses when she came to Iyengar yoga as a beginner with PTSD. Another

teacher revealed that she was an experienced practitioner and teacher at the time she lost a child and found backbends to be an effective way to deal with her trauma and grief over time. The teachers also recognized that while their own subjective experiences might offer some guidance and suggestions on how to address their student with trauma, their own experiences might not be relevant to their students and other pedagogic principles were important in addressing trauma in their students.

In developing sequences for students with trauma, teachers discussed the need to weigh up a range of factors, including the experience of the student, the type of traumatic experience and the physical and emotional state of the student. In general, teachers considered that people in agitated or depressed states benefited most from sequences that were physically engaging to awaken the body and create stability, before any restorative poses. This was particularly the case for beginner students who tended to fall into memory and thinking in restorative poses without first exerting the physical body. In developing sequences for trauma, teachers described how they focused on poses that are stabilizing of the physical body rather than a focus on passivity. Examples of poses found to be useful included supported standing poses that require the student to ground through the feet, supported Uttanasana and supported Adho-mukha Svanasana (dog pose)<sup>2</sup>. Students with compromised mobility could use a chair to sit or to push against the wall and do supported dog pose. Teacher Five found her students with trauma were particularly fond of Ardha Chandrasana (half moon pose) against the wall as the pose involves the challenge of a balance on one leg but the wall offered stability from falling. The teachers also discussed how their decisions on what asanas they would introduce to their students with trauma may also reflect the types of trauma the student had experienced. For example, some teachers noted that they would avoid hip opening poses such as Baddha Konasana (bound ankle pose) to beginner students who had experienced sexual assault as this could be too exposing to vulnerable and private areas of the body. Students who had encountered unexpected traumatic experiences, such as assaults or combat related trauma, might benefit from doing their asanas against the wall to avoid a feeling that the back of their bodies was exposed to the room. In the beginning, sequences for these students might avoid poses where the head is inverted to avoid being

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<sup>2</sup> A supported pose is generally a more passive version, often using props. This allows for strain to be removed. In some cases, it may be used to allow the head to rest. For examples, see BKS. Iyengar's sequence for emotional stability in *Light on Life* (2005, pp.267-270)

disorientated in the room. Over time and with greater trust and familiarity, however, students may not need these safeguards and poses that were once unsafe might feel safe for the student. This unwillingness to declare any poses as inappropriate for students of trauma over the longer term reveals an important aspect of Iyengar yoga culture and its embodied pedagogic means - nothing is fixed. What may be out of reach for a student in the beginning may become available with practice and experience in the hands of an experienced teacher over time. This reflects the cultural value of seeing Iyengar yoga as a form of embodied education that takes place through practice over time in relationship with an experienced teacher. In this sense, Iyengar yoga is not an 'intervention' as might be reflected in the quantitative literature but an ongoing process that opens up new embodied possibilities over time. This points to the highly situational, episodic and context specific nature of teaching Iyengar yoga for students with trauma.

The context specific nature of Iyengar yoga sequencing is highlighted in the only published sequence developed by B.K.S. Iyengar for trauma. This sequence was originally developed by B.K.S. Iyengar in 2001 when 20 Indian teachers were sent to teach Iyengar yoga to survivors of the Gujarat earthquake living in relief camps in the South of India. The sequence was then modified by Iyengar to be distributed to Iyengar teachers in the US following the 911 bombing of the World Trade Centre (Mehta, 2017). The sequence, published in an article by Rajvi Mehta, senior Iyengar teacher based at the Institute in Pune and editor of the Yoga Rahasya journal explains the reasons for the modification in the following way:

There were practical differences between the Indian and American situations. In India, we were to teach in relief camps where we did not have access to props; we had to win over the members of the camp to 'try and experience' yoga as they were still struggling to meet their daily needs of food and shelter! While in New York, the people had an access to a yoga class and many were regular practitioners. One could do much more justice to them. (Mehta, 2017, p.141)

The modified sequence for New York is described in Appendix 1 to this study and contains a number of supported inversions, including headstand, shoulderstand and variations on those asanas. A few observations can be made about this sequence. First, it was intended to be taught in a group classroom context in the immediate aftermath of a collective trauma to students with some experience of Iyengar yoga. It is not, for example, designed for students who have experienced sexual assault or childhood trauma. Second, it highlights the

importance of supported inversions (such as headstand and shoulderstand) in emotional regulation for experienced students of Iyengar yoga. Thirdly, while it contains some specific instructions for teachers to convey to their students, it also instructs teachers to step away from expectations that students will be doing an idealized form of asana. Teachers are expected to be able to read their students and adapt it according to their individual needs and capacity, including their ability and experience.

In developing sequences for students with trauma, the teacher interviews emphasized the importance of opening the student's chest to facilitate deeper breathing, to counter the physical slumping associated with depression and to build courage in the student. This approach is also supported in the research that discusses Iyengar yoga as a medicalised intervention to treating depression and anxiety (Woolery et al. 2004; Michalson, 2012). What this research doesn't reveal is how individualised each pose is taught depending on the students' capacity. This is revealed in the following passage by Senior Teacher One:

There's a question of balancing out, depending on the person, so as a broad thing, all right, it would be really good to open their chest. But how much will depend on, partly their willingness to take on, but where they're at. So you don't want to give them a huge backbend to start with because it may be way too much, it opens up too many doors.

This passage indicates that asana poses can have profound emotional and psychological impacts on a student and these need to be understood and moderated by teachers depending on the capacity of their students. This is particularly the case for students with emotional vulnerability, as is the case with students recovering from traumatic events. It is the role of teacher to 'read' the students physically and emotionally to make decisions about what choices of asana may be beneficial. How this is done by teachers is discussed in more detail below in Chapter Four by drawing on Lusted's theory of pedagogy.

While some research points to the importance of breathing exercises in trauma recovery (Macy et al., 2018), my analysis of the Iyengar yoga texts and the teacher interviews clearly indicated that pranayama and distinct breathing exercises were not part of the Iyengar yoga method except for students with some years of experience. Reflecting on their experience with students who had experienced trauma, a number of teachers discussed how they avoided even directing students with trauma or emotional disturbance to focus on their

breath in asana as this often resulted in the student becoming overwhelmed. Rather, they relied on their choices of asana to open the chest in ways that facilitated deeper breathing without the specific focus on the breath. This might be done through the standing poses or through the use of props, such as bolsters and blocks that can open the back of the body into a passive form of backbend without the need for physical exertion. The importance of opening the chest, particularly in backbends, is woven through the Iyengar yoga textual sources and is also identified as a potentially important bodily mechanism in the quantitative literature on the Iyengar yoga literature for trauma related conditions, particularly depression (Shapiro & Cline, 2004).

In addition to sequences and the highly individualized way that Iyengar yoga poses are taught, another important pedagogic means in Iyengar yoga is the use of verbal instructions and physical adjustments.

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#### SPEAKING TO THE BODY - VERBAL INSTRUCTIONS AND ADJUSTMENTS

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While Iyengar yoga is often characterised as concerned with physical alignment, the underlining objective is the alignment of the five kosas of the body – from the physical body to the consciousness and from the consciousness back to the physical body. This is explained by Iyengar in *Light on Life* as follows:

The goal of asana practice is doing them from the core of your being and extending dynamically through the periphery of your body. As you stretch, in turn the periphery relates messages back to the core. From head to heels, you must find your centre, and from this centre you must extend and expand longitudinally and latitudinally. If extension is from the intelligence of the brain, expansion is from the intelligence of the heart. While doing asana, both the intellectual intelligence and the emotional intelligence have to meet and work together. Extension is attention and expansion is awareness, I often say. It is the bringing of attention and awareness to the tips of your body and activating the skin (2005, p.33).

This quote reveals that while asana is an embodied form of learning that activates the physical body, the technical way it is done in the Iyengar method is aimed at communicating beyond the physical body to the other kosas of the body, including the intelligence and the emotional realm. This is done through bringing awareness and attention to the entire physical landscape of the body, both internally and externally, from the core to the periphery and back the other way. This technique of practicing asana is designed to develop a capacity



to listen to the body rather than be caught up in the realm of thinking or memory. It also facilitates a familiarity with the body, both the external aspects and the internal aspects. For students with trauma, this practice is designed to bring the student into their body, to be in the present moment and to override the demands of the mind. Two of the main pedagogic ways that Iyengar yoga teachers seek to bring their students into contact with their physical body is through specific verbal instruction and physical adjustments.

A defining feature of the way Iyengar yoga is taught is the level of specificity and detail in the verbal instructions given to students. For beginner students, the teacher's instructions will be directed at obvious parts of the body, such as how to move the feet, legs, arms and shoulders. For more experienced students, these instructions become more nuanced, such as the direction to move the skin, organs or more elusive parts of the body like the tail bone. Initial instructions are directed to setting up the structure of the pose but then instructions turn to refining and adjusting the body while in the pose, referred to as 'repose' (Iyengar, 1989, p. 55).

An example of the detail of repose can be seen in this transcript of a short video found on Youtube of Senior Teacher Lois Steinberg teaching Adho Mukha Svanasana (dog pose) to experienced students.

[instructions to individual student] You can use the lower rope Ramona.

[instructions to everyone once they are in the pose] Spread the fingers, open the palms, be on the inner rims of the hands, stretch through the inner arms, elbows straight, get the elbows locked in, so elbows closer to each other but forearms wider, lift through the inner arms, lift through the inner arms, roll the outer deltoid to the floor, roll the outer deltoid towards the floor and lengthen it up into the torso at the same time, lengthen it up into the torso at the same time, elbows straight, elbows straight, and lengthen the outer deltoid towards the floor and up into the back. Now get the heel down.

(talking to a student) take the heels out a little there, your right heel in line with the small toe, don't let it turn in,

[instructions to everyone] now press the heels down on the floor, press the heels down on the floor and roll the skin of the tops of the feet in, you have to spread the ball mounds of the feet from the big toe to the small toe, press the heels down, roll the skin of the tops of the feet in and move the base of the shin bone back, move the big toe back to the heel, get the heel down, base of the shin bone back, middle shin, top shin, now knees back, and open the backs of the knees

[instructions to everyone while adjusting individual student] Get the outer shins in, you have to get the outer shins in but the knees out, outer shins in, that s it, outer shins in, knees out

[instructions to individual student] Come on Kate, get those heels down, heels down and knees straight, thighs back

[instructions to everyone] Now lift the front ribs up to the front of the thigh, get the outer armpit down to the floor and lengthen the inner armpit and move the centre armpit down to the floor, bring the head down, turn on the arms and legs and hands and feet, abdomen soft, head quiet and bring the head down to the floor, open the centre armpit down to the floor. Then jump or step to Uttanasana ... (Steinberg, 2020a)

To put these instructions in context, this teaching was filmed as a demonstration of teaching for social media. The students are advanced and perhaps handpicked for their capacity. Overall they are quite young and it seems no-one has any major limitations. It is not a therapy class. By way of example, however, it demonstrates how students are taught to refine the pose and open up its internal framework within the pose by taking their attention to specific parts of the body. Steinberg uses repetition to emphasis what she sees in her students' bodies and at times gives at times provides individualised instructions ("You can use the lower rope Ramona"; "Come on Kate, get those heels down, heels down and knees straight, thighs back"). She is also instructing the whole class based on what she is seeing happening in front of her in individual students and giving instructions to the class based on what she is observing in these bodies. The instructions are direct, anatomical and aimed at the body. There is an economy in the words and she uses the active tense. Her language does not speak to the mind (such as "relax your mind" or "be present") but speaks directly to the physical body, giving both the specific part and the direction of movement. Her instructions are intended to teach the students to develop the skill to map the external and internal landscape of the body by taking their mind to specific parts of their physical body. This is described as "filling the container of the body with the mind" (Goode, 2015, p. 11).

On the level of the physical body, these instructions are designed to bring alignment to the body to facilitate an opening of the internal architecture of the body to bring space and facilitate the breath (Iyengar 1966; 2005). They are also designed to facilitate integration in the physical body, to connect bones into joints and to reduce strain. In speaking to experienced Iyengar yoga practitioners and teachers in a conference that was uploaded on

Youtube, Geeta Iyengar observes that this focus on alignment should not override the more important purpose of these instructions – to “awaken the elemental body” (Bartex Miklas, 2018). By this she means to energise and enliven the physical body to facilitate integration with the other layers of the body. The direct and specific anatomical instructions are also a form of mind-training. They are used to develop the skills and techniques of focus and concentration in the student. This means that asana practice becomes a form of meditation in action (Iyengar, 1966).

A number of teachers discussed how they backed off from a lot of instruction for people in a therapeutic context or where they observed emotional stress. Some teachers spoke of the space between instructions as being equally important to the instruction as this allowed their students to come into contact with their bodies. Other teachers discussed the need to step back from some perceived notion of a “perfected asana” or alignment where students were injured or had emotional distress. This is captured by Senior Teacher Two in the following passage:

I had a woman last night. Endometriosis, grade 4, she's had major surgery, endless surgery to remove legions. And I say, she's actually, a combination of, when I met with her, she's demoralised, exhausted, her sense of identity's completely, just wrecked. And what we're going to do, is not make her do good asanas, we're going to bring her into her legs. And we slowly get her to sit with sensations that in the past stretching her abdomen, discomfort in the abdomen is enough to make her curl up. Can she come closer to a sensation in the body without it being a threat? And the way you do that is systematic. You don't overstretch them, you make the environment really systematic.

As this passage reveals, therapeutic teaching may involve backing off from the demands of verbal instructions and a focus on alignment, but this does not mean the student is left to their own interpretation on how to perform the pose. Rather, the teachers focus was to bring the student into contact with her physical body through her legs as a way of developing the student's embodied sensory awareness. This focus on the sensory awareness allows the student to begin to discern – to distinguish between sensation and emotional responses. To be in the present moment. In the context of trauma and emotional stability, other teachers emphasised the importance of teaching in a way that kept the student in the present moment through verbal instruction that directs the students' consciousness. This was discussed by Senior Teacher Four in the following way:

But what's most important is that, is that you are kind of directing the flow of their awareness, you know, that you're sort of taking them and you're keeping them sort of on a track, okay from keeping that thread going. And if you lose them, you know, you come back and you take them again. Probably people in general might think, 'Oh, well, you know, if you're suffering trauma it's good to, you know, rest and put your head down. And we all know that, that doesn't work because of people's heads, are spinning and their circular thoughts and reliving events. And one thing, you know, like you don't want them to be doing that. You want to be directing their consciousness and sort of not, not letting them off the hook in that way. You sort of, you keep them going. And I think that's setting up a template for how to deal with ... those thoughts, or that memory or whatever. And that you can actually control, you can learn to control it the same way you sort work on your arm. And so you just kind of trying to take those sort of patterns, of you know, physical patterns first and kind of show them that you can change them.

As these two passages from the teacher interviews reveal, the underling purpose of bringing students into their physical body and holding their attention is to train students in the skills, techniques and dispositions of Iyengar yoga - concentration and focus to stay in the present moment; the ability to distinguish between sensation and emotion; the capacity to detach from emotions and physical pain; and agency over one's own body. Taught in this way, asana as the central pedagogic means becomes the template for training the mind and controlling thoughts and memories in life away from the yoga mat. For students of trauma, this offers the possibility of training the mind in ways that can counter the negative mental experiences associated with trauma and a means of detaching from the pain and suffering associated with traumatic events. Examined in this way, the specific ways that asana is taught for students with trauma and suffering orientates them towards a disposition that conceptualises detachment and agency over one's body and mind as the pathway to address the inevitable suffering that is part of the human condition.

In addition to verbal instructions to map the body, teachers use their bodies to physically adjust students while they are learning asanas. Teachers may use their hands or parts of their bodies to adjust, such as their hips, legs and feet. A central principle for adjustments outlined in the *Basic Guidelines for Teacher of Yoga* written by B.K.S. Iyengar and Geeta Iyengar (2002) is that the adjustment must be done "with purity of mind" and only where there is a need, such as when the student has not responded to verbal instruction (Iyengar & Iyengar, 2001, p.11). All the teachers discussed the importance of adjustments as a way of communicating directly from their body to their students' bodies so students have an

embodied *experience* of their instruction without the need to cognitively interpret the teacher's instructions. This practice reinforces the privilege afforded to the embodied experience of learning asana over cognitive processes.

Contemporary discourses in the wider yoga community have challenged the notion that students give implied consent to be adjusted in asana (Remski, 2019; Farhi, 2019). This has occurred in the context of the #Metoo movement in which almost all major styles of yoga have exposed abuse by some senior teachers. Institutionally, adjustments remain an important pedagogic tool in Iyengar yoga. This point was emphasized by Abhijata Iyengar in her opening speech for the Iyengar Yoga National Association of the United States conference in 2019 in the aftermath of the findings against Manos. (IYNAUS, 2019a). The teacher interviews revealed how situational and context specific their decisions are around adjusting students, particularly new students and those perceived as vulnerable. I return to this discussion in the context of Lusted's (1986) theory of pedagogy below.

Examining the specific way that asana is taught in the Iyengar yoga method and in particular, how these are tailored for students with trauma reveals how the cultural values of Iyengar yoga are reflected in its pedagogic means. The primacy of asana and the specific way it is taught means that Iyengar yoga is an ongoing educative experience that privileges embodied experience above cognitive thinking or reasoning. The different sequences, variations of poses and the use of props makes for a highly individualised form of yoga. This allows teachers to adapt their teaching to students with trauma, including their level of experience, disposition, physical and mental state and the situational context in which learning is taking place. For students with trauma, this means sequences that teach skills and techniques to stabilize the body, open up the physical architecture of the chest to counter depression and facilitate deeper breathing. The specific way that verbal instructions and adjustments are tailored for students of trauma are also designed to teach the skills, techniques and dispositions valued in Iyengar yoga culture for addressing trauma as a form of suffering. Verbal instructions and adjustments are designed to speak directly to the body – to teach students with trauma to listen to their body, to bring awareness to the entire exterior and interior landscape of the body and to develop an ability to discern between sensation and emotion. These skills and techniques are designed to facilitate a disposition of detachment from suffering.

Having examined the specific way that asana is taught as the central pedagogic of Iyengar yoga and the skills, techniques and dispositions it seeks to transmit from one generation to another, I now examine the third limb of body pedagogics – the embodied experience and change that is the outcome of learning Iyengar yoga for students with trauma.

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### EMBODIED EXPERIENCES AND CHANGE

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As this study is concerned with the perspectives of Iyengar yoga teachers, along with the institutional knowledge as revealed through document analysis, an examination of the embodied experiences and change is limited to these perspectives. A more comprehensive examination of this third limb of body pedagogics would draw from the perspectives of students with trauma learning Iyengar yoga. This offers the opportunity for future research. For the purposes of this study, the teacher participants drew from their observation and experiences in teaching students with trauma but also reflected on their own experiences as practitioners and students of the Iyengar yoga method.

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### EMBODIED EXPERIENCES

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The teachers described how learning asana through the specific pedagogic means of Iyengar yoga opens the possibility for a range of different embodied experiences. They described how the dynamic nature of the method and the focus on opening the physical architecture of body allows students to experience a sense of freedom and lightness in the body. For students with depressive conditions, such as is commonly associated with trauma, the way sequences are designed to lift and open the chest can act to counter their embodied heaviness and slumping. The specific way verbal instructions are given as active instructions to map the entire periphery and internal landscape of the physical body, along with adjustments, are designed to speak directly to the body to facilitate an experience of being anchored in the body. This allows for an experience of discovering sensitivity and awareness in parts of the body that were previously elusive and unknown. The process of mapping the entire body also demands a level of continual focus that allows the student to experience concentration and freedom from thought and memory. These experiences, the teachers maintained, are available to students from their very first asana class but also developed and deepened in students as they become more proficient in the method over time. For students

with trauma, the teachers described how the specific pedagogic means of Iyengar yoga offer the opportunity to experience being in the present moment, rather than in the memories of their trauma or caught up in emotions associated with their traumatic experiences.

This is not to say that every experience of learning Iyengar yoga is positive or therapeutic for every student with trauma. Some students may experience frustration in learning a method that takes regular and consistent practice to develop proficiency and lacks obvious markers of achievement. This was recognized by some teachers in the interviews and is also reflected in the literature on Iyengar yoga as an embodied form of learning (Lea, 2009). As was also the case in the literature, the teachers acknowledged that some students may become caught up in the status of the teacher or work too hard to seek their teacher's approval rather than listening to their own body (Lea, 2009; Ergas, 2013). The teachers also recognised that for some students with trauma, their bodies were perceived as unsafe and painful; they could experience overwhelming emotional pain if teaching was not paced and tailored appropriately. This points to the way that subjective factors may influence students' experiences of learning Iyengar yoga as a trauma aid. These subjective factors include: the individual student's disposition; the nature of their trauma and the impact; and the student's stage of recovery.

For those students who do take to the method and continue to learn Iyengar yoga, developing proficiency in the method allows for deeper and more profound experiences in practicing asana. One experience that the teachers identified as developing over time was greater agency over one's body in practicing. This agency develops as the student develops the skills and techniques to do more advanced poses including inversions, a capacity to listen to one's own body, to bring attention to the entire exterior and internal landscape of the body and to maintain focus of the mind on the body in asana. These skills allow a student to make decisions about how to adapt their own practice in asana, to back off in parts of the body that are straining or to bring additional effort to parts of the body that are underactive to facilitate more integration in the physical body. It is through agency and control over one's own body that a student evolves from learning from the teacher to learning from their own body (Iyengar, 2005; Goode, 2015). Senior Teacher Two described this as: "I'll observe you, I'll witness you, until you learn to witness yourself".

For students with trauma, this agency includes attunement to the specific ways that trauma has manifested in their physical body and an ability to discern between the sensations of the body and the emotions that arise in asana practice. This capacity to witness the self is described by Goode (2015) as follows:

As we develop our Yoga practice the aim is to develop a capacity for 'svdhyaya' (self study). Commitment to a disciplined practice provides the capacity to watch the rise of emotions and thoughts and recognise that emotions and thoughts give rise to ideas of self. As our practice deepens the subjective nature of perception becomes an object of study. We begin to examine the interplay of our I-ness within the practice experience, and as we put down our I-ness, we are free to become absorbed within our experience and learn to access the deeper intelligence of the body so that an experience of integration ensues. (p.2)

Goode's (2015) reference to I-ness here links back to the conceptualization of the mind in Iyengar yoga philosophy as containing three components in which the I-ness (ego maker) makes sense of sensations, experiences and emotions from the components concerned with perception and intellect (Iyengar & Iyengar, 2001). For students with trauma, therefore, practice over time opens the opportunity to experience the self as something that exists beyond experiences, emotions, thoughts and experiences, including those connected to their trauma. It offers the opportunity for a deeper connection to a self, perceived as pure and infinite. Goode's passage above also addresses how the experiences of ongoing practice of asana in the Iyengar yoga method develop the ethical dimensions in Patanjali's eight limbs of yoga, – the yamas which include self-study and self-discipline. Goode's explanation points to the link between episodic embodied experiences and more profound embodied change over time, which he describes as an experience of integration. It is these embodied changes that I now turn to consider.

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### EMBODIED CHANGES

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In *Light on Life*, Iyengar describes how the aim of yoga is to work from the physical body, the periphery, through the layers of the body (kosas), to the soul (Iyengar, 2005, p. 3). He describes the goal of yoga in the following way:

Yoga allows you to rediscover a sense of wholeness in your life, where you do not feel like you are constantly trying to fit the broken pieces together. Yoga allows you to find an inner peace that is not ruffled and riled by the endless stresses and struggles of life. Yoga allows you to find a new kind of freedom that you may not have known ever



existed. To a yogi, freedom implies not being battered by the dualities of life, its ups and downs, its pleasures and suffering. It implies equanimity and ultimately that there is an inner serene core of one's being that is never out of touch with the unchanging, eternal infinite. (Iyengar, 2005, p. xiv)

Here Iyengar's description of the change available to a practitioner echoes the philosophical underpinnings of the method - that each person, at their core, has a perfect and pure existence that may be uncovered through the practice of yoga. Iyengar's writings and the teacher interviews reveal that Iyengar yoga is premised on a belief that deep change is possible through the practice of asana (Iyengar 1966, 2001, 2005). While philosophically Iyengar's writings describes the ultimate fruits of yoga as emancipation (kaivalya) in a spiritual sense, he observes that the practice of asana brings about incremental change (Iyengar, 2005). He states:

After all, the goal of yoga may be the ultimate freedom but even before this is achieved, there is an incremental experience of greater freedom as we discover even more self-control, sensitivity and awareness that permit us to live the life we aspire to, one of decency, clean-honest human relations, goodwill and fellowship; trust; self-reliance; joy in the fortune of others; and equanimity in the face of our own misfortune. (Iyengar, 2005, p. 11)

For students with trauma, teachers echoed this description of change as a trajectory. They described the change they witnessed as including greater stability, vitality, integration, a sense of being present, agency and confidence. What is striking about these descriptions is that they all elude the measures of efficacy trials based on standardised yoga interventions for yoga for anxiety, depression and trauma. They are changes that can be observed and sensed but not always measured in Western medical terms. They represent changes both at the physical level but also the mental and emotional levels of the person.

The teachers also noted that through ongoing practice, students with trauma developed a greater sense of connection with their bodies and a deeper capacity to trust and listen to the body. Over time these experiences of connection become imprinted into the layers of the body and replace the existing imprints of experience that have taught the student not to trust their body, such as traumatic experiences.

The textual sources and the teacher interviews spoke of changes that might be characterized as habits or the more deeply transformative concept of *habitus* referred to in the body

pedagogic literature (Mellor & Shilling, 2010; Shilling, 2017). For some students with trauma, Iyengar yoga may offer an opportunity for an embodied practice that gives relief from the physical and mental symptoms associated with trauma through a regular class under the guidance of a teacher. For others, a deeper level of acculturation through practice may produce a habitus that has a transformative effect on the way the student lives their life. This orientation invites a commitment to practice and living an ethical life in accordance with the ethical precepts of yoga, the yamas and the niyamas. It is therefore, through practice that the practitioner comes to witness themselves and learn detachment from their thoughts, emotions and experiences which orientates them to making ethical life choices off the yoga mat. In the words of Senior Teacher Three:

“You do the practice, and as long as you’re not hooked on just the outcome of your practice, no fruits, just going along, there’s a changing. You don’t want to be eating meat, or whatever you don’t want to be doing, you don’t want to be sleeping with your neighbour’s husband, or whatever, you know, something alters inside you.”

Senior Teacher Three’s description of how asana practice can facilitate more profound ethical changes indicates that these changes are brought about by the culmination of practice over time. Her words also reveal the interplay between the concepts of “becoming” and “being” recognised in Hodges’ (2006) study on middle-aged women practicing Iyengar yoga. Senior Teacher Three states that change comes “as long as you’re not hooked on just the outcome of your practice”. This recognises that while students may be drawn to a practice like Iyengar yoga for tangible outcomes, such as strengthening their bodies or relieving symptoms of trauma, the changes they experience may also produce more intangible outcomes that impact on the ethical way a person lives their life.

Both the textual sources and the teacher interviews recognize that learning asana in the Iyengar method requires a level of dedication and willingness on the part of the student that is not for everyone. Some teachers observed that students who were accustomed to moving and working their bodies often had a better fit in terms of temperament for the practice. Some teachers described the practice as “work” or “muscular”, referring to the physical demands of the practice.

Willingness is not solely about a student’s physicality, students also need to have a mental and emotional willingness to practice Iyengar yoga. This may begin with a willingness to trust

in the process of Iyengar yoga, to trust the teacher's decisions for the student until the student has some level of understanding and agency to trust in their own decisions. Given the broken trust and safety associated with many forms of trauma, particularly interpersonal violence and childhood trauma, this may present some significant barriers for some students. Similarly, the ongoing educative nature of Iyengar yoga may present some barriers for students looking for more immediate results.

In summary, the above analysis examines how the culture of Iyengar yoga, as a hierarchical and spiritual based practice based on the teachings of B.K.S. Iyengar is internalised into the next generation of students through the specific ways that asana is taught as the central pedagogic means. It draws attention to how teachers use sequencing, individualising poses, verbal instructions and adjustments to transmit the skills, techniques and dispositions of Iyengar yoga. These skills, techniques and dispositions include an ability to perform asana with a level of proficiency including inversions, greater awareness and familiarity with the entire physical body, concentration and focus. While the focus of these pedagogic means is the physical body through asana practice, the intended outcome is beyond the physical body to permeate the mind and the more subtle realms of existence. In this way, asana practice is a gateway for orientating the student to the cultural values of Iyengar yoga – to develop a discipline in practice, to train the mind in focus and concentration, cultivate agency, an ability to detach from emotions and to live ethically. This provides a blueprint for using Iyengar yoga to address the physical and mental impacts of trauma.

Using the body pedagogics framework provides an idealised explanation of the transmission of Iyengar yoga culture from one generation of practitioners to the next. As Mellor and Shilling (2010) observe, there is no guarantee that this culture will be transmitted in this way. The extent to which Iyengar yoga is taken up by an individual student is impacted by a range of factors, including their individual temperament, their capacity and the wider social and cultural context. The subjectivities of the teachers are also relevant to the success in transmission to their students with trauma. Iyengar yoga culture is not simply handed down or transmitted from teacher to student as a fixed and stable set of principles. Rather, the culture is enacted through the teaching exchange and this produces new knowledge. To explore the production of knowledge in the learning exchange between Iyengar yoga

teachers and their students with trauma, I now draw on theoretical resources provide by Lusted's (1986) theory of pedagogy.

#### PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE, AGENCY AND POWER IN IYENGAR PEDAGOGY

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As a social institution, Iyengar yoga has a formal institutional culture in which the accreditation and the hierarchy of teachers acts to maintain its cultural values. The emphasis on learning asana with a qualified teacher over scriptural readings means that in practical terms, Iyengar yoga culture is *enacted* in the yoga classroom between teacher and student *in relationship* to each other. This means that to closely examine the potential for Iyengar yoga for trauma, it is important to look more closely at the relations between teachers and students and how they produce knowledge together. To do this, I turn to Lusted's (1986) concept of pedagogy to give substance to the relationship between teachers and students and explain how their interactions are relational dynamics through which issues of agency and power are negotiated (Wright, 2009). These are important concerns as people who have experienced traumatic events have often been stripped of their agency and sense of connection with themselves and others (Herman, 1997). Healing from trauma, therefore, requires re-building a sense of safety and connection to the self along with others.

Examining how Iyengar yoga teachers and students interact through relations of power and agency, therefore, is critical to our understanding of the potential of Iyengar yoga beyond the physiological changes and bodily mechanisms examined in the quantitative literature. I also want to draw attention to how the episodic and situational exchanges between teachers and students can facilitate transformations in consciousness for both student and teacher. This brings to the surface the subjectivities of both teacher and student and the specific context in which learning occurs.

I am aware that to fully utilize the resources of Lusted's (1986) theory of pedagogy would ideally involve capturing the perspective of Iyengar yoga students with trauma. This would allow greater attention to the students' subjectivities and their individual experiences of learning Iyengar yoga as a tool for addressing traumatic events. However, as pointed out above, this is beyond the scope of this study and so the focus is primarily on the perspectives of Iyengar yoga teachers who have experience teaching students with trauma and the ways

they talked about the relationship between teacher and student and its implications for how knowledge is produced.

The above examination of Iyengar yoga for trauma through the body pedagogic framework points to the importance of the specific context and the individualised way that Iyengar yoga is taught for trauma. From this perspective, what becomes crucial is the capacity of teachers to adapt and tailor their teaching for students with trauma through specific pedagogic means such as different sequences, drawing on a large canon of poses that can be adapted for different levels of experience, and the use of props. At the same time, Iyengar yoga teachers are diverse and bring their own level of subjectivity to the learning exchange, such as their background, philosophical influences, the historical moment they entered Iyengar yoga culture and their experience in practicing and teaching the method.

Lusted's (1986) view on pedagogy offers the opportunity to more closely examine the specific context of learning Iyengar yoga for trauma at the classroom level. Given the focus of this study is on teachers' perspectives, this offers the opportunity to look at the specific pedagogic choices teachers make with their students who have experienced trauma and how this produces knowledge in both the teachers and students. For the purposes of this examination, I have drawn most heavily on the teacher interviews conducted for this study. This has allowed me to draw out how they perceive their roles as producers of knowledge before looking more closely at the specific pedagogic means they use to address their individual students with trauma. Two specific pedagogic means will be examined as examples of how Iyengar yoga teachers and students engage in dynamic relations to produce knowledge. The first is how teachers read their students' bodies; and the second is how adjustments are used in context. These two means offer insight into the situational and contextual way that Iyengar yoga teachers and students with trauma navigate issues of agency and power.

The importance of the teacher student dynamic as the way Iyengar yoga is enacted in the yoga class was described by Senior Teacher Three in the following passage:

I think it's quite important who the teacher is [pause] That that teacher takes this art form or this thing seriously ... I always learn by transmission, I have to say ....You learn by the vibration, in a way....

But I think you've got to be careful with that as well, because you're only the transmitter. You're not the thing itself, and we all get hooked in that one.

This passage highlights the way that teaching Iyengar yoga is an exchange between embodied teacher and embodied student. Senior Teacher Three speaks of the method as being transmitted from teacher to student and this includes through “vibration”, drawing attention to the role of intangible and elusive aspects of the embodied learning exchange. In this passage, Senior Teacher Three describes herself as the embodied “transmitter” and clearly distinguishes this from the Iyengar yoga method. In the last words, that trail off “and we all get hooked in that one”, Senior Teacher Three signals the inherent relationship of power between Iyengar yoga teachers and their students and the potential for this to be misused by a teacher. As Lusted (1986) points out, this relationship of power exists in any relationship between teacher and student. This was acknowledged by all teacher participants in the interviews. Some teachers commented that not all Iyengar yoga teachers taught in ways that would facilitate healing for people with trauma. They also reflected on how they had developed as teachers by replicating what they saw as positive aspects of the teachings they had received and rejecting aspects they found unproductive from their own teachers. They also suggested that what may have been tolerated in the earlier years of Iyengar yoga was no longer always appropriate in contemporary teaching practices. This points to the way teachers are influenced by various factors, including their own experiences and the wider social and cultural values of the time.

The importance of acknowledging and respecting the power dynamic was commented upon by all teachers in their interviews. This was particularly the case for students who were vulnerable, such as students recovering from traumatic events. Teachers are often privy to deeply personal information about the student through the body without any discussion with the student. Some teachers emphasised that in many cases it is helpful but not necessary to know the personal narrative of the student; the teachers were not clinical therapists and the student’s body told the narrative in ways the teachers could read. A number of teachers also reflected on the fiduciary like relationship this placed them in with their students, particularly when there was evidence of trauma and emotional suffering. This is highlighted by Senior Teacher Two in the following passage:

I deliberately keep a degree of distance because some things I might need to say to you, are not social. And I also operate inside your social, sort of, guard. I get to see things that people who are intimate with you, don't get to see. I get to see you in unguarded ways. I get to see you with yourself. And I go, be careful with that knowledge and be careful with that position. And I think you do not lay claim to that trust. It's negotiated and it can be lost.

This passage draws attention to how the yoga class offers the opportunity for students to engage in a deeply personal practice that may be revealed to the teacher through the students' bodies. This represents a profoundly intimate exchange that occurs between the students' body and the teacher's perceptions and sensory observation. In other words, an exchange between the embodied student and the embodied teacher. This exchange is mediated through a social contract of trust and respect between teacher and student because the relationship is one of power. The teachers acknowledged that their students are potentially very vulnerable and this may be revealed through the body in ways that the student doesn't consciously frame for the teacher. This was eloquently described by Senior Teacher Two in his words "I get to see things that people who are intimate with you, don't get to see. I get to see you in unguarded ways, I get to see you with yourself." This comment also indicates that one of the most important pedagogic skills for a teacher is their ability to read their students' bodies. This skill of reading bodies will be examined in more detail to understand how Iyengar yoga teachers and students produce knowledge in the Iyengar class.

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### READING BODIES AND BEYOND

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In making decisions on what sequences to teach and which variations might be appropriate for each student, the teachers in their interviews spoke of how they gather information about their students in different ways. This often began with a discussion with the student but then moved to relying on non-verbal exchanges between teacher and student. A number of teachers identified their capacity to visually observe their students' bodies as an important skill they had developed over years of teaching.

Reading bodies can mean looking at the physical structure of the body to observe how the various components, the bones, muscles and ligaments are formed. It can also mean observing the tone of the skin, the flow of blood in the face and the muscles around the eyes (Iyengar & Iyengar, 2001) This observation gives the teacher an understanding of the functioning of the body - where the person is open and where there is limitation, where the

body is underworking and where it is overworking and strained. Senior Teacher Two described the way he observed his students' bodies in the following way:

So if you're asking people how asking me how do I watch people, I watch. Now, I wouldn't say it's just your facial expression. But I watch how you interact, now a lot of the times when I've got a trainee or a teacher with me I say to them, don't adjust them. I want you to watch them. Watch how they behave with themselves. Do they push? When they face discomfort, do they react? Do they eyes change? Watch the breathing change. So, knowing that the senses interact, when you come near, especially with injury, when you come near threat, you often become heightened. And the heightened state makes you hyper-alert. And I watch your senses interact.

This paragraph from Senior Teacher Two points to the way reading bodies is an embodied practice of the teacher. He describes using his senses, particularly observation to observe how tension comes to manifest in his students. The purpose of this is twofold – first to understand what asanas may be within the student's capability, but secondly, to bring the student's awareness to this tension so they begin to understand their own physical and emotional limits. Here lies the foundations of the production of knowledge in both teacher and student as they together navigate the individual capabilities, patterns of strain and responses of the student.

Understanding the capacity and disposition of a student through reading their body was described by all teachers as a visual skill developed by Iyengar yoga teachers over time but it also involved more elusive exchanges. This was described by Senior Teacher Three in the following way:

I think it's visual, I think its feel .... I'm conscious when a body doesn't want to work, when you're frightened or whatever, I don't push or shove or anything. It's aesthetic, it's the visual, you hear the story to know lives a little bit. But it's visual I think....I don't think about it. It s just an odd kind of feeling, I can see when there's fear in the body, and I can see when there's ... whatever .... resistance, irritation, that sort of thing. I let people have their way, I'm not pushing them in any way, that's pushing people to do things. But I do try to invite them into something better or deeper.

Here the teacher describes the exchange as visual but also as “an odd kind of feeling” that allows the teacher to “see” when there is fear, resistance and irritation in the body. Other teachers echoed this comment, describing the way they had developed a capacity to read their students bodies. This was described as being visual but also accomplished in other ways



that were difficult to express and which evolved through experience. This phenomenon is highlighted by Teacher Four in the following passage:

But you just the more you teach, the more you see. And so I mean, I don't know exactly how to describe what that is. But I mean, it is kind of seeing, you know, it's quite funny because you can kind of see what's happening under baggy pants and stuff like that. You know whether that leg's working or not. ...And so, and you can sort of see whether they're sort of falling through their hips or something like that even though, you know, they haven't got, you know, short shorts on or something like that. ...You can still somehow see it. And, and I don't know exactly how that works, but you can....

I mean sometimes that stuff is just really, really obvious. ...And I suppose that the kind of the more, the more integrated somebody becomes you, you just kind of look at them and you go, 'Well that's all right . Like, you know and if you're in a class situation, you know, you know you're seeing someone who's neck is sort of, like, who's shoulder is pushed right into their neck and sort of straining away and they can't you, know, and so, and the other person, another person is kind of looking free. Then, you know, you could probably look more at that person and find something that you kind of, your attention is really taken to that the person that's struggling.

What is striking about the three quotes from the senior teachers above are the different ways the teachers describe how they read their students' bodies in asana. They speak both in terms of anatomical function (the leg is working, the hip is falling) but also in non-anatomical terms, such integration, strain, resistance and irritation in their students. This process of reading bodies is thus as an embodied exchange of information, from the students' bodies to the teacher's senses. It is not merely an intellectual exercise but an embodied skill. It is often described as difficult to articulate, beyond language and a skill that evolved over time. The purpose of this skill, the teachers suggested, is twofold. First, it allows the teacher to understand the students' capabilities, both physically but also emotionally and mentally. Secondly, it provides the means to bring the students to some awareness of this capability and limitation through beginning to observe their own self. To foster agency students so they may begin to observe their own bodies, mind and emotions. In this sense, the production of knowledge in the learning exchange facilitates agency students to be *in relationship* with themselves.

A further example of the context specific and individual approach used by Iyengar yoga teachers in the cases of trauma was discussed by Teacher Six, who had taught several students with trauma and continued classes during the bushfires of Summer 2019/2020. She

described how she observed the mental and emotional state of her students when they first came into class and set up in Supta Badha Konasana (supine bound ankle pose), a preparatory pose that students set up in when they are first waiting for the class to start. The pose involves lying over a bolster with the soles of the feet together, arms out to the side with palms facing up. She described watching how emotions manifested in the physical postures of her students:

Ok, first time when you lie down, arms down. It's not everyone, but it's something to look at. Arms down means you're not safe. Arms over your hands, over your abdomen means that you're not safe to lie out with your arms up and your palms out. You're open, you're really vulnerable. So I see that in say one out of every six new beginners and it's the first thing I address. I say just try it. Some people their hands roll and then they can't do it. Also, the eyes, if they're looking all over the place, eyes can't still, because eyes tell you, I could see it in somebody. You've got the extreme as well, the person that comes in that the chest is so collapsed. It's not always just because they've been a laborer ... I often have a chat to that person later and I'll often find out.

This passage draws attention to the way that in the yoga learning exchange, emotional disturbance and suffering may first be revealed to the teacher through the student's body, which may or may not be followed by a verbal exchange between teacher and student. This passage also reveals that in the context of a collective trauma, such as the bushfires, the way that trauma is embodied is different between students and this needs to be observed and moderated by the teacher.

In terms of responding to emotional distress and trauma, some teachers emphasised the need to give the student space to develop stability, confidence and agency over their bodies. This was described by Senior Teacher Three in the following way:

I just take it in, how you were presenting to me, and I'd let that lead me .... I'd give you room, a lot of room, to do what you needed to, and then I'd support you to do the things that would support you to get more stability in your body, or confidence, because confidence is about ..... It's like a bank balance .... I think you've got to build up the other side of confidence. The security, the safety. You leave that to be ... The trauma side to be built up by the caring side.

In this passage, Senior Teacher Three identifies her need to be aware of the students' suffering and to facilitate stability and healing in the student but it is the student's own body that is doing the actual work of healing – through creating more stability and developing more confidence, letting the caring side do the work of helping the trauma side. This offers

important insights into the role of the students' agency in healing from the suffering associated with trauma. The teacher is not imposing a set of practices and principles. They are observing, giving space, facilitating the student's own embodied agency. A teacher's ability to respond in this way is nuanced and developed over time. Some senior teachers discussed how more junior teachers might have good intentions to assist their students with trauma but they often lacked the capacity to respond in a nuanced ways that respected the students' agency. This was described as "over-riding the person" or "applying principles and practices that leave the person behind". Additionally, a number of teachers criticised what they saw in contemporary yoga for trauma approaches outside of Iyengar yoga for focusing on principles and practices without the yoga teaching experience and observational skills needed to read students and understand their capacities. Senior Teacher Two described some contemporary approaches in the hands of inexperienced teachers as "no more than a crutch for the teacher's confidence so they feel they are actively doing something in the room rather than for the benefit of the student". In contrast, the Iyengar method emphasizes a more individualized approach to teaching that the teacher develops over years of teaching and observing different students. In this way, teaching is an evolution. Teachers draw upon the knowledge produced from exchanges with individual students who are recovering from traumatic events to shape their subsequent learning exchanges with that individual student but also with future students with trauma. The application of this knowledge to future students requires further refinement and tailoring to address the specific context and the individual student's subjectivity. For the student, this individualized learning exchange is intended to produce a greater awareness of their own embodied self, from the periphery of the physical body to their mind and deeper consciousness. This is intended to facilitate agency, confidence and detachment from emotion. In this way, the individualised learning exchange between teachers and students with trauma offers the potential for deep embodied transformation to counter the negative ongoing effects of trauma.

In addition to reading their students' bodies, teachers described the specific and contextualised way they use adjustments as a pedagogic means for teaching students with trauma. This offers a further opportunity to consider the production of knowledge, power and agency in the learning exchange between Iyengar yoga teachers and their students who have experienced traumatic events.

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## ADJUSTMENTS IN CONTEXT

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The importance of physical adjustments in Iyengar yoga culture was discussed in the above examination of body pedagogics. Despite contemporary discourses that warn against using adjustments, particularly for students recovering from traumatic events, the teacher interviews in this study revealed a more context specific and subjective approach to adjusting. All teachers indicated that they do not generally adjust beginner students as they first needed to develop a relationship of trust with the student to feel comfortable being adjusted. Some teachers reflected on how contemporary discourses on adjusting had prompted them to consider it was important to first check for consent before adjusting students, whereas other teachers outright rejected this approach and considered it undermined the relationship of trust that they had built with their students over time.

The teachers also reflected on what they had learnt through experience teaching students over time. Senior Teacher Four observed his students with trauma being comforted and stabilised when he placed his feet on the feet of the student. This offered stability in an area of the body that was both visible to the student and non-confronting. Other teachers discussed how adjusting students with some familiarity with Iyengar yoga could bring about a level of stability. This might involve using an open hand or a prop to ensure the touch was clear and with purpose to the learning. There was also a recognition that adjusting should avoid any area of sensitivity or vulnerability for all students, such as breasts and genitals.

Some teachers commented that students may be more open to being adjusted by female teachers than male teachers and this factored into their decisions. For example, whereas Teacher Five, a woman in her late 60s who taught students with trauma referred to her from a private psychologist, described adjusting as central to her approach to her students after she had developed a relationship with them, Senior Teacher Four, a male teacher in his 60's, described how he very rarely adjusted someone in a private class unless he knew them very well. He also described how when teaching women private classes, he would often do the poses alongside the student to mitigate any intensity or awkwardness. This points to the way that, although adjustments are an important part of Iyengar yoga culture, they are used in nuanced and context specific ways for students in ways that reflect the subjectivities of teachers and students.

There is also a recognition that done in the wrong way, even with the right intent, adjustments could damage the relationship of trust and safety between Iyengar yoga teacher and students. Teacher Seven, who had a background in working with vulnerable people, described how in her early years of teaching she had accidentally triggered a flashback in a relatively inexperienced student by adjusting her from behind. This had resulted in the student never returning and had prompted the teacher to only adjust her longer term students. In this way, the learning exchange produced knowledge but in a way that ended the learning exchange between teacher and student.

The teacher's accounts of how they tailor adjustments to their individual students shows the context specific way that adjustments can be used in the Iyengar yoga method. Seen in this way, adjustments are a way of communicating between the embodiment of the teacher to the embodiment of the student. To be done in way that facilitates the learning exchange, the teachers emphasised that adjustments need to be done with sensitivity and by respecting the subjectivities of the student, including their level of experience and with an understanding of how they might be received by the individual student. In this sense, adjustments offer a profound opportunity for knowledge to be produced directly between the bodies of the teacher and student. This can facilitate learning between them in a form that transcends language. To adjust in a way that misreads the subjectivities of the student, however, is to risk harming the student and losing them to the ongoing learning exchange between teacher and student. In this way, harmful adjustments can represent a form of knowledge production that dismantles the ongoing relationship between teacher and student. While the teachers indicated that these sorts of mistakes could offer them a powerful learning opportunity in their teaching careers, they recognized that this offered little compensation to the individual student who was lost in the process.

The above analysis through Lusted's (1986) theory of pedagogy offers a starting point for considering the nuanced ways that Iyengar yoga teachers and their students engage in dynamic relations. This examination reveals that while the culture of Iyengar yoga and its embodied pedagogic means and outcomes, as viewed through the body pedagogics framework, has significant potential for students with trauma, Iyengar yoga is enacted and transmitted *in relationship* between teacher and student in specific situational and contextual exchanges. Lusted's (1986) theory of pedagogy extends the concept of pedagogy

from the mere transmission of embodied knowledge to a dynamic and co-producing relationship that involves navigating issues of agency and power between individual teacher and student. The way Iyengar yoga teachers read their students' bodies along with context specific approaches to adjusting students offers insights into these dynamic relations and signals the importance of the individual teacher and student subjectivities in addressing trauma in the student.

On the one hand, we might view the hierarchical and institutional nature of Iyengar yoga as contradictory to Lusted's view on pedagogy. While this has some merit in a Guru-based lineage system, it fails to capture the individual accounts of teachers on how they developed their own approach to teaching Iyengar yoga over decades of teaching *in relationship* with their students. Here we might see that a learning Iyengar yoga through the prism of asana is an evolutionary process. In the beginning, teachers position themselves as top-down teachers whose role is to transmit the technical skills of practicing asana. To do this, teachers draw upon a number of pedagogic techniques, including sequencing, verbal instructions, adjustments and reading their students' bodies, both visually and in more elusive sensory ways. This process is designed to give the student an embodied experience of yoga, through igniting the physical body in a conscious way from the very first encounter with Iyengar yoga. Over time, and where there is a successful transmission of the teaching, the student acquires their own understanding of their physical internal landscape but also the landscape of the mind through focus and an ability to witness themselves. They learn to detach from their emotions and suffering. This is not merely the transference of knowledge but the production of new knowledge as it is the subjective experience of the student but also offers feedback to the teachers. This transmission back to the teacher might be through verbal discussion but mostly it is communicated through the students' bodies that are *read* or *sensed* by the teacher. The teacher reads the language of the body to understand what has been taken up by the student but also what has not been embodied by the student. This informs their future choices with that particular student but also produces knowledge that teachers can use to inform their teaching of future students. In this sense, teaching is an evolution, always being refined. This is set within the broader social context where pedagogic choices are being challenged in response to contemporary discourses, such as the #Meetoo movement. The extent to which an individual teacher may be influenced by these wider cultural forces,

however, is also influenced by a number of factors, including their experience in teaching, their level of acculturation, their individual disposition and previous working history.

Having examined Iyengar yoga through the body pedagogic framework and Lusted's (1986) theory of pedagogy, in the next chapter I bring this knowledge together to address my overarching research question – what is the potential of Iyengar yoga for trauma, as told through the perspectives of Iyengar yoga teachers and document analysis?

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

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In the course of writing up this thesis, I was reminded of the currency of my central research question when I stumbled on a series of video recordings of senior Iyengar yoga teacher, Lois Steinberg, hosting Q&A sessions on Iyengar yoga therapy during Covid-19 lockdown in the US (Steinberg, 2020b). Steinberg, an Iyengar teacher of some 38 years teaching experience, is known for her knowledge of Iyengar yoga therapeutics as a scholar/teacher and having worked closely with the Iyengar family over years. Amongst the incredibly diverse mix of questions from Iyengar yoga teachers around the world were a steady stream of questions on how to tailor Iyengar yoga for their students dealing with the trauma, grief, depression, sadness and anxiety associated with Covid-19. It spoke to the interest in the Iyengar yoga teaching community of how to address trauma in their students and their lack of clarity on the subject. It was also a reminder that while I was undertaking this research over a period of years from the relative safety of Australia, for others it was a pressing need to access information as they grappled with the immediate needs of their students who were directly impacted by the pandemic.

What then might we conclude about the potential of Iyengar yoga for trauma? As a starting point, the quantitative literature suggests that Iyengar yoga is an effective intervention for stress, depression and anxiety, all conditions commonly associated with trauma. The literature on depression suggests that Iyengar yoga is a safe practice and can be effective for beginners, even when practiced over a short period of time (Streeter et al., 2017; Nyer et al., 2018). A comprehensive understanding of the body mechanisms for how Iyengar yoga works to address these conditions is still being explored but the research suggests that Iyengar yoga can reduce stress by increasing the function of the autonomic system through the vagus nerve and increasing neuro-transmitters in the brain to facilitate homeostasis in the body (Khatabb et al., 2007; Streeter et al., 2012; 2020). Some researchers have pointed to the specific nature of Iyengar yoga in facilitating these changes, including the intentional focus along with the emphasis of lifting and opening the chest and deepened breathing facilitated through standing poses and backbends (Shapiro & Cline, 2004; Streeter, 2010). These



studies, while useful in understanding Iyengar yoga from a scientific perspective, frame Iyengar yoga as an “intervention”, generally undertaken for no more than three months and measured using known scientific measures (Streeter et al., 2010, 2017; Shapiro et al., 2007; Michalsen, et al., 2012; Nyer et al., 2018). They offer important insights into how quickly and effectively Iyengar yoga can facilitate physiological and emotional changes that benefit students with trauma but they fail to capture the role that pedagogy and relational dynamics between teachers and students may play in the potential of Iyengar yoga for trauma. This study seeks to address that gap by adopting a qualitative embodied approach that examines the interrelationship between Iyengar yoga culture, pedagogic means, embodied outcomes and changes, along with relational dynamics from the perspectives of eight Iyengar yoga teachers in Australia who have experience teaching students with trauma, along with document analysis.

An examination of Iyengar yoga through Shilling’s (2007) body pedagogic framework reveals that while Iyengar yoga culture and writings may say little specifically about trauma as understood in Western medical discourse, it has much to say about suffering as a condition of being human. Trauma as part of the conceptualisation of suffering in Iyengar yoga is ubiquitous. This reflects the spiritual foundations of Iyengar yoga, based on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali along with other Indian philosophy, and is reproduced in the Iyengar yoga literature and reflected in the teachers’ interviews (Iyengar 1966, 2005). Iyengar yoga offers a solution to this suffering through the regular and sustained practice of asana as the gateway to experience all the eight limbs of Patanjali’s yoga. Iyengar yoga as a social institution maintains that through practice, with its focus on the physical body as a laboratory for exploring consciousness, a person may become free from suffering. Philosophically, this is premised on the conceptualisation that beneath one’s physical body, thoughts, emotions and experiences is a pure untouched self that is accessible through asana practice in the Iyengar method.

Iyengar yoga is a highly institutionalised form of Modern Postural Yoga. The institutional hierarchy of teachers and system of accreditation along with the substantial writing of B.K.S. Iyengar, his family and senior teachers, form a comprehensive system of yoga that is not mirrored in other styles of Modern Postural Yoga (de Michelis, 2003). These institutional means act to maintain and uphold B.K.S. Iyengar’s teachings despite the diversity in teachers

and the locations that his style is taught around the world. They also mean that becoming an accredited Iyengar yoga teacher requires many years of experience in practicing the method and learning to become a teacher. Senior teachers, as key knowledge holders, have several decades of practicing and teaching the Iyengar yoga method. The substantial textual writings along with the network of international teachers means that Iyengar yoga teachers have rich and extensive institutional resources on which to draw in forming their pedagogic approaches. Although asana is the central pedagogic means of other forms of Modern Postural Yoga, an analysis of the specific pedagogic means used by Iyengar yoga teachers reveals a distinct style of embodied learning that is characterised by a combination of Western medical discourse with ancient spiritual writings, an emphasis on restorative poses, different sequences designed for different conditions, the use of props, specific and detailed verbal instructions, along with physical adjustments. These pedagogical means allow for a highly individualised style of learning yoga. Specifically, for students with trauma, Iyengar yoga texts and the teachers interviewed in this research emphasised the need to develop sequences that acknowledged the experience and material context in which learning was taking place and to moderate the use of verbal instructions and physical adjustments to the individual student.

Central to the institutional culture of Iyengar yoga is the importance of an experienced teacher who has themselves embodied the method. The teachers interviewed for this study rejected the idea that yoga can assist trauma through a set of formulistic principles, practices and sequences or in the hands of inexperienced yoga teachers, despite their good intentions.

This is not to say that there were not some general practical principles that emerged from the Iyengar writings and the teacher interviews. The principles and sequence offered by B.K.S. Iyengar on how to teach students after 9/11 offer some concrete guidance to teachers with experienced Iyengar yoga students in the immediate aftermath of collective trauma. These include working with the eyes open and a focus on stabilising students, with the inclusion of inversions for experienced students. Alongside this institutional perspective is the knowledge and experience described by the teachers that included working with people who had experienced other forms of traumas, including interpersonal violence, frontline emergency work and child loss. The teachers described how they engage their sensory and extra-sensory skills of observation to read their students' bodies, at a physical level and beyond their

physicality to make their choices about how to teach their students. Although they described different approaches that reflected the student's level of experience, disposition and capacity, the general approach was to bring a level of stability and energy to the body, including sequences that were designed to open the physical architecture of the chest to facilitate breathing and counter depressive conditions. More experienced students and practitioners could practice inversions like headstand and shoulderstand, often supported. Less experienced students could practice more accessible variations on these poses. Raw beginners, however, needed a focus on active poses rather than restorative sequences to avoid falling into memory and thoughts. Teachers engaged the use of props and the wall to facilitate stability in their students while practicing asanas.

According to both the texts and the teachers, the individual choices of curriculum are highly dependent on the capacity and experience of the student. Pranayama is not introduced to beginner students in the Iyengar method as it is considered a powerful practice that requires the body to be first prepared through experience in asana. While experienced students with trauma may be directed to observing the breath, the teachers described how this could be overwhelming for beginners and instead they focused on sequences that deepened the breath and facilitated an opening of the student's chest. These pedagogic approaches reflect the key Iyengar yoga writings and also the quantitative research on the effectiveness of Iyengar yoga for trauma related conditions (Streeter, 2012; Michalson et al., 2012).

The pedagogic means of the Iyengar method are designed to facilitate specific pedagogic experiences for students with trauma, including a capacity to listen to the body, to trust the knowledge of the body over the mind, a sense of freedom, the ability to be present and focus. Over time and with regular practice, these experiences offered the possibility of more profound changes or habits. These include a dedication to practice, agency over one's own body, an ability for more sustained concentration, a capacity to discern between sensations and emotions and to detach from the fluctuations of thought and emotions. These skills, techniques and dispositions offer the potential for profound and transformative relief from the suffering and pain associated with trauma. In this way, the pedagogic means are designed to orientate the student to the cultural values of Iyengar yoga, including how to deal with suffering.

The embodied experiences and changes observed by the teachers concerned the inter-relationship between the physical body and consciousness. They sit outside of the knowledge and measurement of Western scientific discourse reflected in the quantitative literature. This is not to say that these quantitative studies do not offer useful insights. Iyengar yoga has a comfort and interest in medical discourse as can be evidenced by Iyengar's writings (Iyengar, 1966, 1993, 2003). But yoga is not a 'prescription' but an embodied practice set within an institutional culture and taught in dynamic relationship between teacher and student. The very essence of yoga is about *relationship* – the relationship between the teacher and student but more centrally over time, the development of a relationship with *oneself*. To examine the potential of Iyengar yoga for trauma, therefore, we need to step beyond the institutional means and the pedagogic principles and to look at the situational, episodic and dynamic relations between individual teachers and students as co-producers of knowledge and in a learning exchange that navigates issues of power and agency. Examining power and agency is central to understanding the potential of Iyengar yoga for trauma as students who have experienced trauma require safeguarding from further harm. To return to Judith Herman's words, traumatic events "overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection and meaning" (1997, p. 33). By this, she draws attention to the lived experiences of trauma that impact on how the person experiences living in their body, how they connect with others and the meaning they derive from their life that lie beneath any formal diagnosis associated with their trauma. Understanding the potential of Iyengar yoga as an aid for trauma, therefore, requires consideration of how pedagogy and relational dynamics between teachers and students may facilitate or impede the capacity for a student to rebuild their sense of control over their bodies and lives and make connections with themselves and others to rebuild meaning in their lives.

Lusted's (1986) theory of pedagogy invites an inquiry into how teachers and students co-produce knowledge in relational dynamics that involve the negotiation of power and agency in the learning exchange. The teachers revealed that through years of experience in teaching Iyengar yoga, they developed highly nuanced abilities to read the stress, strain and lived experience of trauma in the physical bodies of their students. They emphasised that this placed them in a fiduciary like relationship with their students that required respect, care and a bond of trust for learning to take place. They also recognised that not all Iyengar yoga

teachers taught in ways that would safeguard the vulnerability of students with trauma. Teachers, as well as students, bring their own subjectivities to the learning exchange and these mediate issues of agency and power in situational and contextual exchanges. An examination of how teachers approached adjustments revealed the highly contextual and subjective way teachers approach their students. Rather than a blanket principle of no adjustments, teachers weighed up different considerations in deciding if they would adjust an individual student and in what ways. These factors included the students' subjectivity, level of experience and physical and emotional condition, along with the teacher's own subjectivity. In the case of students with trauma, adjustments or physical touch are not about perfecting the student's pose, but about facilitating stability and integration. This is not to say that the teachers claimed they always got it right with adjustments. Teaching is a process of ongoing learning and pedagogic tools, including adjusting, get fine-tuned over time, through a process of trial and error. The teachers acknowledged that for students with trauma, getting it "wrong" in adjustments could be highly detrimental for the student, so adjusting should only be done when the teacher and student had developed a relationship of trust and the teacher had sufficient experience to adjust in a way that would not over-ride the student.

The teacher accounts and Iyengar yoga texts invite a more nuanced discussion on the use of touch and adjustments in teaching yoga from the 'no touch' discourse that has flourished in the wake of the # Metoo movement. This points to the opportunity for further research that more fully explores the different ways that adjustments and, more generally, touch, is used in the yoga learning exchange and the implications for agency and power relations. This discussion is also taking place in other realms, most notably physical education classes in school environments (Andersson, Öhman & Garrison, 2016).

Lusted's (1986) theory of pedagogy extends the notion of pedagogy beyond the mere transmission of knowledge from teacher to student to understand how teachers and students co-produce knowledge through their relational dynamics. Learning may begin in a top-down dynamic between teacher and student, particularly for beginners, but the teachers spoke of how the pedagogic means of Iyengar yoga are designed to build the students' agency over their own body and mind. This is facilitated by knowing their own bodies through mapping the entire external and internal landscape of the body, listening to the sensations arise and developing detachment from emotions. These specific pedagogic means

constitute an embodied form of learning specific skills. Iyengar yoga for trauma isn't about lying over bolsters to 'feel good' or 'doing what you want' in practicing asana. Teachers emphasised the importance of being *effective* for students. By this they mean facilitating some change through the physical body, while respecting the physical, mental and emotional limits of the student. Both the Iyengar yoga literature and the teacher interviews emphasised the profound belief in change and the need for the student to be open to the possibility of change. Although the quantitative literature and the teacher interviews suggest that change is available within a short time of learning Iyengar yoga, more profound and lasting change is generally understood to take time and require persistent and continued practice (Hodges, 2006). Like all educative practices that take time, Iyengar yoga requires an initial commitment to turning up regularly to learn from a teacher. This may present some challenges for students with trauma as many of the ongoing effects of trauma can disrupt a person's ability to make a regular commitment. This is not unique to Iyengar yoga and this challenge is well documented in the intervention studies that report issues with motivation and high attrition (Li and Goldsmith, 2012; Macy et al., 2018). The teachers noted that while Iyengar yoga can be tailored for anyone, it doesn't suit everyone's personality or disposition. It required a willingness to engage, to come into connection with the physical body and to undertake an educative process in relationship with a teacher. Further research may also consider other barriers to an ongoing commitment, including socio-economic and geographical factors.

From my own perspective as a relatively junior Iyengar teacher in comparison to many of my research participants, this research presents me with some practical insights. The culture of Iyengar yoga offers no shortcuts. Just as there is no shortcut to practicing Iyengar yoga for profound embodied change, there is also no short-cut to becoming an experienced teacher. Teaching Iyengar yoga, just like practicing Iyengar yoga, is an embodied skill. It relies on developing the senses and the body to read and interpret the dynamics and capacity of the students and to tailor teaching to address the individual student. Many of the pedagogical skills used by Iyengar yoga teachers, such as reading students' bodies, individualising poses and adjusting students, might be intellectually gleaned from textbooks but they can only be fine-tuned and embodied in teachers through teaching hundreds if not thousands of students over years of teaching. As a starting point, however, this research sought to

understand those pedagogic skills in context – to zoom out and examine the broader institutional culture and values of Iyengar yoga and to zoom in to the way they are enacted in relations between teachers and students at the classroom level, as told through the teacher’s perspectives. This study offers a starting point for understanding the potential of Iyengar yoga for trauma. It points to the need for future research that captures the lived experiences of students/practitioners learning Iyengar yoga as an aid for trauma. On a personal level it has clarified my understanding as an Iyengar yoga practitioner/teacher on how to address trauma in my students through the Iyengar method. I also hope it might offer some practical insights to other Iyengar yoga practitioners and teachers interested in this subject.

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## APPENDIX 1

### B.K.S. IYENGAR'S SEQUENCE FOR TEACHERS IN AFTERMATH OF 911

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B.K.S. Iyengar's sequence for trauma distributed after 911 attacks to Iyengar yoga teachers in the US (Mehta, 2017, p.142).

- Śavāsana
- Supta Baddha Konāsana (with support for the spine)
- Supta Vîrāsana (with support for the spine)
- Prasarita Paddottanāsana (with head support)
- Uttanasana (with head support and legs spread apart)
- Adho Mukha Svanāsana (with head support)
- Viparita Dandāsana Chair (with head support)
- Śirsasana – Viparîta Karani
- Setu Bandha Sarvangāsana
- Sarvangāsana – Viparita Karani
- Prānāyāma – Antara kumbhaka with a very short kumbhaka after the inhalation.

See depictions of these asanas in B.K.S. Iyengar's sequence for emotional stability extracted from *Light on Life* (2005) at (2005, pp. 267-270).

Mehta (2017) also reports that B.K.S. also offered the following pedagogic guidelines for teachers in New York in the aftermath of 911:

- *The emotional strength in these students needs to be built up and that is what we need to work at.*
- *Do not make them do standing asanas or backward bending asanas in this state.*
- *All asanas (including Savasana) should be done with eyes open. They can focus their eyes at any point in front or on the ceiling. They tend to relive the terrible memories when asked to close their eyes.*
- *Ask the students to imagine as if their eyes are located at the temples and ask them to "open their eyes".*
- *Do not insist on a perfect asana in the current situation. What is important is that they can do the asana and stay in it as long as they can.*

*While breathing in any asana (especially supine) – ask them to breathe in such a manner that the breath touches the lateral side of the chest during inhalation. (p. 142)*