

Article

Trauma-sensitive yoga as a complementary tool for survivors of sexual violence and other forms of trauma: Anti-oppressive, culturally sensitive, and inclusive holistic healing

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Abstract

Trauma-Sensitive Yoga (TSY) is a therapeutic practice that integrates yoga with trauma-informed care, offering survivors of sexual violence and other traumas a holistic pathway to healing. This paper explores TSY in social work and related care professions, its potential benefits, and ethical considerations. A critical discussion of cultural appropriation highlights the importance of honoring yoga's origins while ensuring accessibility and inclusivity in Western therapeutic settings. The paper examines how TSY can support survivors by reclaiming body awareness, self-agency, emotional regulation, and work to dismantle experiences of intergenerational trauma. The research discussed in this paper indicates yoga can not only assist with trauma recovery but also can contribute to reclaiming or even enhancing one's sexuality. Studies also suggest that integrating TSY with psychotherapy may enhance trauma recovery. Yet, there are concerns regarding accessibility, facilitator training, and the potential for harm if not conducted through an anti-oppressive, culturally sensitive lens. Given the growing recognition and body of research for TSY as a complementary therapeutic tool, this paper argues for its integration into trauma-informed social work and related fields. Ethical practice requires TSY to be delivered by well-trained facilitators who prioritize client autonomy and cultural humility. As a yoga instructor and future social worker, I advocate for a holistic, inclusive approach to healing that acknowledges the complexities of trauma and empowers survivors through movement and mindfulness. Moving forward, further research and accessible professional training are needed to ensure TSY is implemented ethically and effectively within the field of social work and related professional care settings.

Keywords

trauma-sensitive yoga, anti-oppressive and inclusive yoga, culturally sensitive social work, trauma-informed social work, healing from sexual violence and other forms of trauma

Résumé

Le yoga sensible aux traumatismes (TSY) est une pratique thérapeutique qui intègre le yoga aux soins tenant compte des traumatismes, offrant aux survivants de violences sexuelles et d'autres traumatismes une voie holistique vers la guérison. Cet article explore le TSY dans le travail social et les professions de soins connexes, ses avantages potentiels et les considérations éthiques. Une discussion critique sur l'appropriation culturelle souligne l'importance d'honorer les origines du yoga tout en garantissant l'accessibilité et l'inclusion dans les cadres thérapeutiques occidentaux. L'article examine comment le TSY peut soutenir les survivants en récupérant la conscience du corps, l'autonomie, la régulation émotionnelle et en travaillant à démanteler les expériences de traumatismes intergénérationnels. La recherche indique que le yoga peut non seulement aider à la guérison des traumatismes, mais aussi contribuer à la récupération, et l'amélioration de la sexualité d'une personne. Des études suggèrent en outre que l'intégration du TSY à la psychothérapie peut améliorer la guérison des traumatismes, mais il existe des préoccupations concernant l'accessibilité, la formation des animateurs et le risque de préjudice si elle n'est pas menée dans une optique anti-oppressive et sensible à la culture. Compte tenu de la reconnaissance croissante et du corpus de recherche de la TSY en tant qu'outil thérapeutique complémentaire, cet article plaide en faveur de son intégration dans le travail des services sociaux tenant compte des traumatismes. La pratique éthique exige que la TSY soit dispensée par des praticiens bien formés qui donnent la priorité à l'autonomie du client et à l'humilité culturelle. En tant que une instructrice de yoga et future assistante sociale, je plaide pour une approche holistique et inclusive de la guérison qui reconnaisse la complexité des traumatismes et renforce les capacités des survivants par le mouvement et la pleine conscience. Pour aller de l'avant, des recherches supplémentaires et une formation professionnelle accessible sont nécessaires pour s'assurer que le TSY est mis en œuvre de manière éthique et efficace dans le domaine du travail social et dans les milieux de soins professionnels connexes.

Mots-clés

yoga sensible aux traumatismes, yoga anti-oppressif et inclusif, travail social sensible à la culture, travail social tenant compte des traumatismes, guérison de la violence sexuelle et d'autres formes de traumatismes.

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Introduction

Trauma-Sensitive Yoga (TSY) is an embodied practice that integrates mindfulness, choice-based movement, and breath work to support trauma survivors in reconnecting with their bodies (Emerson, 2015). Inspired by traditional yoga practices, TSY has grown in popularity and recognition as a therapeutic tool for individuals who have experienced sexual violence (SV) and

other forms of trauma (Barudin, 2023; Dhikav et al., 2009; Donnelly et al., 2019; Nguyen-Feng et al., 2018; Nicotera & Connolly, 2020; Nicotera et al., 2022). As both a yoga instructor (E-RYT 200, CYI-50) and a future social worker, I believe in the healing potential of TSY to help survivors process bodily sensations, rebuild personal agency, and support their healing journey. TSY can offer a safe space for exploring both the physiological and psychological effects of trauma.

The integration of yogic practices in Western trauma care raises concerns regarding cultural appropriation and ethics. Yoga has ancient historical and philosophical roots in South Asian traditions (Barkataki, 2020), yet in its adaptation into clinical, therapeutic, and studio settings you may often find it led by white, Western facilitators. This creates the risk of disrespecting yoga's origins, contributing to cultural appropriation, and reactively perpetuating various forms of trauma, the opposite of the purpose of TSY. Therefore, this paper draws from academic literature, interviews, and trauma research, to argue that TSY can be practiced and implemented in a Western setting with a culturally sensitive, culturally informed, anti-oppressive, and ethically responsible framework to ensure that this holistic practice is the most mindful and effective as it can be. This paper begins by establishing the need for holistic approaches to healing and examining the impacts of trauma on survivors. It then outlines the background, development, and core principles of TSY, followed by a review of evidence supporting its benefits for survivors of sexual violence. The discussion then expands to examine why TSY must be intersectional, inclusive, and adaptable in practice, including the application of anti-oppressive frameworks. Building on this foundation, the paper explores trauma-sensitive and culturally responsive yoga practices, including consideration of yoga's historical roots. The final sections examine the relevance of TSY for intergenerational trauma and sexual functioning before concluding with implications for practice and future directions. This structure is intended to move from foundational knowledge to applied and specialized considerations, providing readers with both context and practical relevance.

How trauma impacts survivors: The need for a holistic approach to healing

When someone experiences trauma it affects not only their cognitive functioning but also their nervous system, emotional responses, and their body (Kearney & Lanius, 2022; Van Der Kolk, 2014). Sexual violence, in particular, has a profound effect on survivors. It can create negative psychological and somatic symptoms (Cleveland Clinic, 2024; Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs, 2022). Yoga, more specifically TSY, has the potential to be used as a therapeutic tool in professional social work and clinical practices to help survivors of trauma to reset, regulate, and reconnect with themselves (Van Der Kolk, 2014).

Van Der Kolk (2014) offers an approachable, yet comprehensive understanding of trauma in their book, *The body keeps the score*. They explain that trauma disrupts the nervous system, often leaving survivors in a chronic state of fight, flight, or freeze. This dysregulation can lead to heightened anxiety, dissociation, hypervigilance, and alexithymia, which is the inability to describe, identify, or express one's own emotions (Van Der Kolk, 2014). Sexual violence-based

trauma can result in many adverse symptoms such as chronic pain, gastrointestinal issues, numbness/bodily dissociation, muscle tension, decrease in sexual desire, and anxiety, to name a few (Cleveland Clinic, 2024; Van Der Kolk, 2014; Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs, 2022.). This illustrates why talk therapy alone may not be enough to support the healing process and why healing from sexual violence, or any physical trauma must also involve the body. Consider, if someone emotionally hurts you by calling you a mean name, would putting a bandage on your forehead help you heal? No. Therefore, we can reasonably claim that if someone harms your body, addressing only the emotional and/or cognitive impact may be an incomplete approach to recovery. This is not to say that the emotional and mental toll of sexual violence should be minimized, but rather to acknowledge that true healing should include both body and mind. This is where respectful, anti-oppressive, trauma-sensitive yoga can be paired with therapy to create a more holistic approach to healing.

Understanding TSY: Foundations, purpose, and founders

TSY, trauma-conscious yoga, and trauma-informed yoga (TIY) are all terms often used interchangeably. TSY is specifically designed to support trauma survivors by creating a safe space to explore movement and reconnect to their bodies (Emerson, 2015). It is a body-oriented, evidence-based therapeutic intervention tailored for survivors of complex trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), emphasizing safety, choice, and agency over physical alignment or performance (Mulvihill et al., 2025; Ong, 2020). Unlike traditional yoga, TSY does not focus on specific postures or performance but rather on choice, empowerment, and exploring movement in an embodied experience (Emerson, 2015). By engaging the parasympathetic nervous system, TSY can reduce hyperarousal, support emotional regulation, and create opportunities for survivors to reclaim the agency of their bodies (Van Der Kolk, 2014). This demonstrates a clear connection to the strength-based approach, focusing on survivors' ability to heal, develop self-regulation skills, and rebuild a sense of self. TSY also has an emphasis on mindful self-awareness and self-care, which are pillars of both yoga and social work practices.

The term trauma-sensitive yoga was coined in 2002 by David Emerson, 200 E-RYT (Jackson, 2014). Emerson is a co-founder and the director of yoga services at the Trauma Center in Brookline, MA, where they use yoga as a complementary tool in a clinical context (Jackson, 2014). The practice of TSY was developed by David Emerson, Dr. Bessel Van der Kolk, and Dr. Richard Miller, who is the CEO of the Integrative Restoration Institute and co-founder of the International Association of Yoga Therapy (Jackson, 2014). The goal of TSY is to help practitioners become comfortable in their bodies. TSY is understood by these experts as "a serious clinical intervention and an adjunctive aspect of a broader psychodynamic therapy" (Emerson, as cited in Jackson, 2014, p. 8).

Emerson is widely recognized as being at the forefront of TSY and has written several books on the practice for both survivors and professionals (Jackson, 2014). They had a 10-year career as a social worker before becoming a yoga instructor and currently work at the Trauma Center Trauma Sensitive Yoga (TCTSY) (Emerson, n.d.). TCTSY offers certified training in TSY. This

program covers ethical considerations, understanding trauma neuroscience, examining body-based yoga postures, breathing exercises, and is grounded in trauma theory, attachment theory, and hatha yoga (Trauma Center Trauma Sensitive Yoga & Center for Trauma and Embodiment, 2022).

TSY for SV survivors: What statistics and research says

Sexual violence continues to be a significant issue in North America. Data from the Government of Canada (2024) shows that 4.7 million women in Canada have experienced sexual assault since the age of 15. 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals face nearly three times the risk of physical or sexual assault compared to others (Government of Canada, 2024). Indigenous women are three times more likely to be sexually assaulted than non-Indigenous women. People with disabilities experience sexual violence at more than twice the rate of those without disabilities (Government of Canada, 2024). These statistics highlight the urgent need for accessible, inclusive, and trauma-informed interventions that address psychological, somatic responses and systemic issues. The data shows that sexual violence is not rare or isolated; it affects millions of people across Canada (Government of Canada, 2024). Support services and interventions cannot be “one size fits all.” Instead, there is an urgent need for services that are accessible (easy to physically, financially, and culturally access), inclusive (designed with diverse identities and lived experiences in mind), and trauma-informed (recognizing how trauma affects the brain, body, and behavior). Sexual violence is widespread and unequal in who it harms most (Government of Canada, 2024). Therefore, effective responses must address not only emotional and psychological impacts, but also body-based trauma responses (somatic effects) and larger systemic factors like discrimination, colonialism, and ableism.

A quantitative study by Nicotera and Connolly (2020) used a TIY intervention created specifically for female sexual assault survivors. This practice was delivered in a community group context. They reported statistically significant changes in their participants' emotional regulation and their skilled awareness. Skilled awareness is the ability to consciously acknowledge and understand one's own emotional and physical reactions to possible triggers or reminders of a traumatic experience (Nicotera & Connolly, 2020). Emotional regulation and skilled awareness both have the potential to reduce PTSD symptoms. Similarly, a qualitative study by clinical social workers in the United States followed 23 female sexual assault survivors as they engaged in an 8-week TSY program (Nicotera et al., 2024). The outcome revealed that “TSY groups can be beneficial to survivors of trauma, allowing them to gain new awareness of their experiences in the aftermath of trauma and tools to manage those experiences by connecting with their body and mind” (Nicotera et al., 2024, p. 162). Furthermore, Braun et al. (2021) examined the impact of TIY on veteran women with a history of military sexual trauma. Their findings indicated that participants experienced improvements in symptom severity, diet, exercise, alcohol use, sleep, pain, and a reduction in medication use. Qualitative interviews highlighted themes of stress reduction, mindfulness, and self-compassion (Braun et al., 2021). Quantitative data suggests that the yoga sessions resulted in the reduction of negative emotions

and contributed to improved affect regulation, decreased shame, and increased mindfulness. The study concluded that TIY is both a feasible and acceptable intervention for veteran women with military sexual trauma and offers potential benefits for mental health and overall well-being through bolstering mindfulness, emotional regulation, and reducing stress (Braun et al., 2021).

TSY offers meaningful benefits not just for survivors, but also for the professionals who support them. Nguyen-Feng et al. (2019) explored this in a qualitative study that examined using TSY as a complementary mental health intervention for survivors of intimate partner violence. Researchers interviewed both yoga instructors and group psychotherapists to better understand how TSY could fit into a community-based therapy program. The 12-week program included 90-minute therapy sessions paired with 30 to 40 minutes of guided yoga. The findings revealed that providers viewed TSY as a powerful tool for healing, benefiting both clients and facilitators. Some challenges were noted but the overall impact was positive, making TSY a viable addition to community mental health services.

This represents only a portion of the growing body of research reporting positive and statistically significant findings related to the use of TSY. As with many emerging practices, there is ongoing discussion and evaluation regarding its effectiveness and application. For example, Macy et al. (2015) conducted a meta-review of 13 literature reviews, which examined 185 separate studies which assessed yoga as an intervention tool for the effects of trauma and mental health symptoms. They concluded that “the evidence of yoga as an intervention for trauma, as well as the mental health symptoms and illnesses often associated with trauma, is encouraging but preliminary.” (p. 35) They report that the research they reviewed lacks specificity regarding trauma and is not as thorough as it could be (Macy et al., 2015). Furthermore, Steele et al. (2022) conducted a four-week TIY study with nine female college students, focusing on heart rate variability, and found no significant effect on heart rate variability, either after a single session or over the full duration of the study. It is worth noting the small sample size of this study, as well as its limited diversity by only using female college students makes its generalizability questionable.

These critiques highlight the need for continued research to ensure that TSY is both effective and accessible for those who need it most. Research should continue to bolster and evolve our understanding of the potential use of TSY as a therapeutic practice for trauma survivors. Trauma recovery is complex, multifaceted, and requires an amalgamation of approaches to address the diverse needs of survivors. TSY is just one piece of the puzzle of trauma recovery.

Yoga for healing: An intersectional, inclusive, and adaptive approach to understanding

The popularity of TSY has grown exponentially since 2002, reaching all corners of the map and a multitude of diverse individuals. The practice of yoga has since been adopted and reshaped to fit the needs of individuals and groups with diverse social locations. One such example of this is Parker’s 2020 book, *Restorative Yoga for Ethnic and Race-Based Stress and Trauma*. It is an amalgamation of research, personal narratives, and applicable yoga practices. Parker (2020)

presents yoga as an accessible tool for self-care and resilience, offering a trauma-informed approach specifically designed for individuals and communities experiencing race-based stress/trauma. Another inclusive and tailored read is Ballard's (2021) book, *A queer dharma: Yoga and Meditations for Liberation*. This book uses queer theory to explore how yoga can be a tool for liberation alongside self-empowerment. By integrating queerness, mindfulness, and social justice, Ballard (2021) encourages their readers to build themselves a life rich with authenticity and self-compassion.

Diving deeper into intersectional approaches to yoga, Jessica Barudin's 2023 doctoral thesis centers on the *First Nations Women's Yoga Initiative* (FNWYI). They provided an 80-hour trauma-informed program paired with land-based learning. This pilot study followed twenty Kwakwaka'wakw and other First Nations women. Using both a qualitative approach and an Indigenous research paradigm, the research looks at the participants' experiences in the realms of wellness, healing, and language revitalization. In addition to yoga, the program also focused on embodied language learning through Kwakwaka'wakw values, ancestral practices, chants, and songs. Their findings suggest that blending Indigenous knowledge with yoga and trauma-informed practices can support community wellness, trauma healing, and language revitalization among First Nations women (Barudin, 2023).

Donnelly et al. (2019) conducted a retrospective analysis of the *LoveYourBrain* yoga program to determine its feasibility, accessibility, and impact on individuals with traumatic brain injury (TBI) and their caregivers. The study reviewed data from 1,563 participants enrolled in 156 programs across 18 U.S. states and three Canadian provinces. Findings revealed overwhelmingly positive outcomes, with participants rating the program highly (9.3/10) and reported significant changes in their quality of life, resilience, mood, and cognitive function. Caregivers included in this study also emphasized improvements they noticed in their physical and psychological well-being. These results suggest that *LoveYourBrain* yoga offers a valuable approach to rehabilitation for TBI survivors.

Through my yoga training and certifications, I have come to appreciate that, in addition to the inclusive approaches listed in this section, other diverse approaches to yoga may support individuals with varying backgrounds and abilities. Other adaptive and inclusive approaches/styles options may include chair yoga, which provides accessible movement for individuals with mobility challenges; yin, restorative, and gentle yoga, which focus on deep relaxation and gentle postures; pre- and post-natal yoga, which is designed for pregnancy, focusing on breathwork, gentle movement, pelvic floor health, and relaxation. Within any of these approaches, practitioners can always feel free to use posture variations and props, such as blankets, blocks, bricks, bolsters, and/or straps to provide comfort, support, and further accessibility in their yoga practice. Using props and variations may work for some but it is important to be mindful that the use of them can risk drawing visible attention to certain students, resulting in feelings of othering, shame, affecting power dynamics and even risks your practice reinforcing ableism (Heyman, 2024).

The adoption of adaptative and inclusive approaches to yoga can help facilitate healing for diverse needs, populations, and forms of trauma. This further highlights the crucial consideration that for TSY to be truly effective, it must be anti-oppressive, actively concerning itself with the systemic injustices that contribute to trauma in the first place.

Integrating anti-oppressive approaches into trauma-sensitive yoga for survivors of sexual violence

For survivors of sexual violence, the integration of anti-oppressive principles in TSY is especially needed. Sexual violence-based trauma is often exacerbated by societal factors such as victim-blaming, gender-based discrimination, and systemic barriers to justice and healing. Without a framework that acknowledges these harmful realities, TSY risks reinforcing, rather than alleviating, the disempowerment that survivors may experience. An anti-oppressive approach ensures that yoga spaces are not only trauma-sensitive but also actively work to dismantle power imbalances that contribute to and perpetuate harm. By centering consent, body autonomy, and choice in every aspect of the practice, TSY can become safer and even more impactful for survivors.

Ethical considerations must be made to offer authentic, anti-oppressive TSY. Emerson (2015) explains the importance of using invitational language, avoid controlling, commanding, or directive language, instead focusing on leaving space for the client to cultivate autonomy, curiosity, and awareness, especially since trauma could be understood as an extreme lack of choice. I have found that by offering students choice in yoga classes, it cannot only build trust and rapport with my students, but also facilitate the opportunity for them to build trust in their body and themselves. Emerson (2015) offers examples of invitational language including, “when you are ready,” “you may wish to,” “perhaps”, and “maybe”. Facilitators of TSY are prompted to be mindful of encouraging participants to stay in the present moment and to stay grounded by focusing on the now. Instructors are also encouraged to create a safe practice area by ensuring the space is warm, welcoming, and well-lit. During practice, it is also advised to avoid physical contact, avoid corrections, and provide clear information and clear expectations for the practice. Emerson (2015) also highlights the importance of focusing on forms instead of traditional “poses”, this reduces performance pressure and potential triggers for clients.

Anti-oppressive yoga emphasizes social justice, accessibility (including socio-economic consideration), and inclusion, aiming to create spaces where individuals from all walks of life feel acknowledged and supported (Valin, 2020). It challenges systemic inequalities by encouraging awareness of oppressive systems, through self-inquiry, critical thinking, and mindful inclusion (Valin, 2020). By integrating anti-oppressive principles, TSY becomes a tool not only for personal growth but also for social change, promoting equity, inclusivity, and justice both on and off the mat. A yoga practice which does not have a heart of social justice, is not a complete or true yoga (Cook-Cottone & Tylka, 2025).

Another important aspect to consider for yoga to be anti-oppressive is the need to know and respect the origins of yoga, to actively avoid cultural appropriation.

TSY and cultural appropriation: Respect for the origins of yoga

While yoga originates from South Asian traditions, its adaptation in Western spaces often lacks cultural acknowledgment (Barkataki, 2020). Individuals engaging in TSY must ensure that their practice respects the historical and cultural roots of yoga. Historically yoga was practiced in a cultural, spiritual, and community-based context (Barkataki, 2020). Traditionally, yoga practice is an eight-limb lifestyle approach for creating a purposeful, ethical, and meditative life. These “limbs” include ethical restraints (*yama*), observances (*niyama*), postures (*asana*), breath control (*pranayama*), sensory withdrawal (*pratyahara*), concentration (*dharana*), meditation (*dhyana*), and liberation (*samadhi*) (Allen, 2025; Barkataki, 2020; Iyengar, B. K. S., 1993). Yoga is much more than just physical exercise/postures (*asana*). Yoga was not for sale. Yoga in Western culture has been commercialized and commodified. Avoiding appropriation also means making practice accessible to marginalized communities, considering socioeconomic and physical barriers. When yoga is an expensive or exclusive practice, it becomes inaccessible to people, including those from the cultures that developed it. In cities like Calgary, Alberta, most drop-in yoga classes cost around \$25 for a one-hour session, with few studios offering sliding-scale pricing and even fewer offering accessibility options for individuals with disabilities. TSY must be affordable, community-centered, culturally informed, and inclusive to mindfully serve diverse populations effectively.

To be culturally informed, it must also be acknowledged that the primary developers of TSY, David Emerson, Dr. Bessel van der Kolk, and Dr. Richard Miller, all use he/him/his pronouns and live and work in America as white-passing, seemingly straight, seemingly able-bodied, cis-gendered men. This is of note because much of the modern trauma-sensitive framework has been shaped by Western clinical perspectives rather than the holistic, community-centered healing practices that yoga originally embodied (Barkataki, 2020). Without acknowledging this, there is a risk of reinforcing colonial behaviors of extracting knowledge from marginalized cultures and removing the voices of those who have historically practiced and preserved yogic traditions.

In my opinion, if you are using or adapting practices from another culture, it is essential to not only learn and respect the origins but to also take action to be actively anti-oppressive. This could mean supporting South Asian teachers/organizations, engaging in authentic and culturally rooted educational opportunities, offering accessible and inclusive yoga spaces, and acknowledging yoga’s spiritual and cultural roots. This avoids stripping yoga down to just a physical or therapeutic practice. Unfortunately, I have personally observed many uninformed Western practitioners boil yoga down to just “a great workout”, unaware that comments like this reinforce cultural appropriation. In over five years of teaching yoga, I have never ended a class by saying "Namaste". This is because, in Western yoga spaces, it is often used without a full understanding of its meaning and cultural significance. Instead of using it as a mindless closing phrase, I choose to end my classes by offering a variation of understanding of the translation of “namaste”, by bowing to my students and saying, “from my heart to yours”. I believe that this offers an opportunity for students to understand a variation of “namaste”, which directly translates from Sanskrit to “I bow to you” or more traditionally, “I bow to the divine light within

you” (Pikörn, 2025). This feels more authentic to the space I share with my students, while still honoring yoga’s roots. This is an important practice in practicing cultural appreciation versus cultural appropriation (Deshpande, 2019).

Jivana Heyman (2021), stresses the importance of making yoga accessible to all, particularly those who have been excluded due to race, gender identity, ability, or socioeconomic status. Ensuring that TSY is inclusive and culturally informed requires recognizing who has shaped its Western development, actively uplifting diverse voices, and honoring yoga's spiritual and historical roots.

TSY has the potential to be a profoundly healing practice, but its impact depends on both its trauma-informed approach and its cultural integrity. Practitioners and facilitators must remain aware of how systemic privilege, accessibility barriers, and cultural appropriation intersect with all forms of yoga in Western spaces. By fostering relationships with yogic scholars, creating space for diverse voices, and ensuring that trauma-sensitive yoga is not just adapted but also informed by its origins, the practice can maintain ethical roots while supporting healing for all individuals.

Intergenerational trauma: Who can benefit from healing beyond just the survivor?

TSY offers a safe space to process bodily sensations, rebuild a sense of agency, and potentially reclaim comfort with your own body and sexuality. Trauma is complex and can impact various areas of a person's life. Reconnecting with one's body and sense of self can play a crucial role in healing, facilitating personal growth, and improving interpersonal relationships. Another important reason for addressing trauma is so that you do not pass it on to future generations.

Intergenerational trauma is the transmission of trauma from a survivor to their descendants, it is also known as transgenerational or multigenerational trauma (Marschall, 2024). Individuals affected by intergenerational trauma may exhibit symptoms, behaviors, and emotional or psychological responses linked to trauma experienced by past generations, extending beyond just parents or grandparents. (Marschall, 2024). Jessica Barudin’s 2023 thesis, *Braiding knowledge through breath, language, and movement: Culturally rooted, trauma-informed yoga for First Nations women*, explores the impact of intergenerational trauma and examines how TIY can support healing, particularly for Indigenous women and two-spirit peoples.

Isobel et al. (2018) reviewed 77 studies on intergenerational trauma, trauma interventions, and attachment interventions to assess the importance of addressing the transmission of relational trauma. Their findings highlight that preventing the passing down of trauma across generations is the most important intervention. When left unaddressed, trauma extends beyond individuals, shaping the experiences of families, communities, and entire cultures, often reinforcing cycles of pain and disempowerment (Keaney et al., 2024).

For survivors of sexual violence, this means not only processing their own experiences of trauma but also confronting trauma inherited from previous generations. The emotional, psychological, and physical manifest in relationships, self-perception, and coping mechanisms

(Keaney et al., 2024). By addressing both personal and generational trauma, TSY can provide a healing approach that embraces these interconnected layers, empowering survivors to break the trauma cycle and create healthier futures for themselves and their loved ones.

TIY: Bringing sexy back

Sexual violence can have profound and long-term effects on survivors' sexuality and sex lives. Individuals may experience feelings of shame, fear, or disconnection from their bodies, which can impact their ability to engage in healthy sexual relationships and intimacy. Beyond working to neutralize and dismantle trauma responses and symptoms, TSY has the potential to enhance and reclaim one's sexuality and sex life (Dhikav et al., 2009; Dhikav et al., 2010). Survivors of sexual violence who have experienced dissociation from their bodies may be able to tear down walls and develop a renewed sense of pleasure, trust, and connection with themselves, their partners, or both.

TSY offers a pathway to reclaiming one's sexuality by encouraging survivors to explore movement and reexperience body sensations in a safe environment. Using curious movement, breathwork, and mindful self-awareness practices, TSY helps individuals rebuild a sense of ownership over their bodies. Over time, this reconnection can not only help survivors heal from trauma but also enhance their sexuality and sexual intimacy by promoting a sense of empowerment, agency, and greater comfort with physical connection. There are many potential benefits to survivors' sexual health. Tabatabaie et al. (2024) conducted a randomized clinical trial that reported yoga as a viable, safe, cost-effective, comprehensive treatment plan for managing erectile dysfunction and premature ejaculation. Another quantitative study by Dhikav et al. (2009), found that yoga had a significant positive impact on women's sexual health. After completing yoga sessions, participants showed improvement in all six areas of sexual function, including desire, arousal, lubrication, orgasm, satisfaction, and pain reduction. The benefits were even greater for women over 45, compared to younger participants. The researchers concluded that yoga can be an effective way to enhance overall sexual well-being. Dhikav et al. (2010) noted that yoga appears to be an effective method of improving all domains of sexual functions in men as well. Tabatabaie et al. (2024) advise healthcare professionals to integrate yoga into health education programs for marriage and family counseling after discovering in their randomized clinical trial that yoga combined with pelvic floor exercises, enhances sexual function and self-esteem in reproductive-age women. As reported by the previously reviewed research, yoga is a safe, advisable, accessible practice that requires no special equipment and can serve as a valuable tool for healthy sexual functioning for all people (Dhikav et al., 2009; Dhikav et al., 2010; Tabatabaie et al., 2024).

Given the ever-growing evidence supporting yoga's impact on sexual function, TSY can be an impactful tool for enhancing sexual health and satisfaction. The mindfulness cultivated through TSY can encourage a heightened awareness of bodily sensations, which can translate to deeper intimacy and enhance overall sexual pleasure. Integrating yoga into sexual wellness practices could improve sexual confidence, satisfaction, and connection.

Conclusion

Beyond the mat: Integrating TSY into professional practice with considerations for social work and therapy

TSY offers a powerful complementary approach to clinical therapy for survivors of sexual violence. By addressing the physiological impacts of trauma, TSY helps survivors rebuild bodily awareness, regulation, and agency. While TSY offers many benefits, it may not be suitable for all survivors. Some individuals may not be ready to reconnect with their bodies, and for some, certain yoga practices or embodied experiences may feel re-traumatizing. For example, if someone has experienced a sexual assault, Reclined Butterfly pose, where the student lays on their back, places the bottom of their feet together, and allows their knees to fall open to their respective sides, might feel vulnerable, triggering, or even unsafe. Without proper training, facilitators risk causing harm instead of healing. Ethical TSY requires facilitators to be trauma-informed, culturally aware, and committed to anti-oppressive practices. Some clients may be positively affected by this practice, however for some, it may not work for them, and that is acceptable. Healing is not a single road, it is more like hiking up a mountain, with many twists and turns, ups and downs before you reach the summit. If TSY is not approached mindfully, clients could end up harmed, and people could feel religiously or culturally appropriated by the Western use of yoga, and the subsequent development of TSY. The approach to TSY must be educated, properly trained, mindful, anti-oppressive, culturally sensitive, affordable, and accessible.

TSY is a viable practice to help support those who are experiencing not only SV-based trauma but also other various forms of trauma. More research needs to be conducted to further bolster the understanding of its applicability and potential impact. It is a seemingly valid therapeutic tool that should be more accessible to care professionals. A few options to integrate TSY into helping professions could include clinicians training in TSY themselves, they could partner to work alongside a TSY-certified teacher or a yoga therapist or refer out to one. I believe that obtaining the proper credentials to facilitate TSY is of the utmost importance. During my experience filming a TSY-inspired class, I found it incredibly difficult to change my usual instructive guidance into choice-based offerings. Based on this challenging experience, I do not think it is possible for a generally certified yoga teacher to ethically offer TSY classes. In my opinion, pairing talk therapy with trauma-sensitive yoga is a more comprehensive approach to healing, by considering both the body and the mind in the healing process. If care professionals choose to add TSY to their toolbox, it must be anti-oppressive and administered with respect and dignity. This approach undeniably pairs with the CASW code of ethics (2024), especially Guiding Principal 1 of Respecting the Dignity and Worth of All People and Guiding Principal 7 of Providing Competent Professional Services. TSY should integrate an anti-oppressive framework and then be integrated into trauma-informed social work care.

As a yoga instructor (E-RYT 200, CYI-50) and future social worker, I believe in the potential of TSY and its ability to work as a complementary tool in social work practice for, not only survivors of SA but also survivors of trauma in general. The use of TSY has the potential to reset

and reintroduce oneself to their body in a safe and meaningful way. It has the potential for clients to reinterpret and reexperience the sensations of their physical being, with themselves and perhaps once they feel safe to do so, with others. After teaching a restorative yin-style class, I spoke to a student about the concept of being present. This sparked the idea of the difference between tuning in and tuning out. When we practice mindfully in the present moment, we are not only tuning out the external world, and anything that will not serve us through the duration of our yoga practice, but we must also tune in to ourselves, our bodies, and the present moment. Dr. Van Der Kolk (2014) states, “I often tell my students, the two most important phrases in therapy, as in yoga, are “Notice that” and “What happens next?”. Once you start approaching your body with curiosity rather than with fear, everything shifts” (p. 280).

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