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The Well-being of College Students Who Participate in a Regular Yoga Nidra Practice

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**THE WELL-BEING OF COLLEGE STUDENTS WHO PARTICIPATE IN A REGULAR
YOGA NIDRA PRACTICE**

by

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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May 2024

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THE WELL-BEING OF COLLEGE STUDENTS WHO PARTICIPATE IN A REGULAR
YOGA NIDRA PRACTICE

DEDICATION

The following is dedicated to Dhumavati Devi, the Divine feminine, creative force behind deep rest and letting go. Thank you for the gift of non-doing.

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ABSTRACT

College students experience significant stress, which affects their health and executive functioning. The purpose of this study was to explore if students could improve their well-being through a yoga nidra intervention. Yoga nidra is a deep relaxation practice with conscious awareness. Twelve students from a Midwestern college campus participated in a yoga nidra non-credit class. Students were expected to participate in two yoga nidra sessions per week for 50-minutes per session over the course of 12-weeks for a total of 24-yoga nidra sessions. The study was conducted through an action research qualitative study. Participants completed pre- and post-reflections on their subjective experience for each yoga nidra session. To examine changes in well-being participants were asked to report on their physical, mental, emotional, energetic, and spiritual well-being throughout the 12-week yoga nidra intervention. Additionally, three participants took part in a focus group to share their own observations pertaining to how the yoga nidra practices influenced their well-being. Findings suggested that yoga nidra heightened physical awareness, relieved tension, improved focus, regulated emotions, and enhanced spiritual connection. This study highlighted the need for more mindfulness training to support college students in managing their dis-ease.

Keywords: college students, well-being, yoga nidra, action research

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Well-Being of College Students who Participate in a Regular Yoga Nidra Practice

Adults ages 18-34, post COVID-19 pandemic report the highest rates of stress compared to other age groups (i.e., 35-44, 45-65, and 65+) (*Stress in America™ 2023: A Nation Recovering from Collective Trauma*, 2023). Younger adults who are part of a college environment might not be aware of yoga nidra, since it is not a well-known practice. Research has been underdeveloped in the realm of how college students experience yoga nidra, which is a deep relaxation practice with conscious awareness. Some studies have provided evidence that yoga nidra can encourage a blissful state, ideal for overcoming external stimulation that causes stress-related symptoms (Ganpat, 2020; Saraswati, 2009). There have been quantitative studies conducted with college students practicing yoga nidra for durations between one-day to eight-weeks (Dol, 2019; Dwivedi, 2020; Eastman-Mueller et al., 2013; Ganpat, 2020; Michael et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2007). Results indicated that yoga nidra is beneficial for stress reduction and improving mood. However, it was not widely known how the process of yoga nidra impacts the well-being of college students, which this study sought to discover. This study added to the unique knowledge base of college students' personal and subjective yoga nidra experience through a qualitative action research design.

Statement of the Problem

One of the issues that college students face today is stress, which is the body's physiological response to stimulus (Olpin & Hesson, 2020). Stress impacts college student's well-being and academic success (Dol, 2019). College students can lack coping skills and may need positive ways to relieve stress such as personal counseling, mindfulness practices, focused breathing, meditation, and other therapies. However, many students are unfamiliar with yoga

nidra, which is a deep relaxation practice. Yoga nidra has been effective in reducing stress and improving sleep in patients with post-traumatic stress disorder (Reist et al., 2017). Yoga nidra as well as other mindful based activities have been effective in helping people lower stress, reduce anxiety, and improve mood (Caldwell et al., 2010). The practice of yoga nidra is a unique way for students to self-regulate. The practice calls one to surrender to all external stimulus, relax, and access a specific state of consciousness known as turiya (Saraswati, 2009). Self-regulation requires monitoring one's current state to an end state (Balcetis & Cole, 2009). The way we offer support to college students could be shaped by an understanding of how students perceive their own well-being by utilizing relaxation practices.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used in this study is the holistic learning theory, which has a strong element of transformative learning within its scope. The holistic learning theory attempts to educate the whole student with an understanding that all things are connected (Johnson, 2019). This learning is an exploration of how human existence is created by the perceptions of consciousness. The transpersonal or transformative element of learning expounds on holistic learning theory by utilizing the state of consciousness to make sense of one's unique talents and gifts (Johnson, 2019). Transformative learning is about authentically shifting the way one interacts and serves the greater good of the world. One must have a clear and calm state of mind to exemplify the best version of themselves and carry forward their unique skills and abilities. Through experiential learning, yoga nidra moves outward focus to internal awareness of consciousness. During yoga nidra there is the capacity for personal transformation by acknowledging inner wisdom, which easily arises during this state of internal awareness (Mezirow, 1997).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to find out if college students report improvements in their own well-being through proactive mindful-based approaches, specifically yoga nidra. Yoga nidra is not a widely known practice, but it can help people relax. The process of yoga nidra generally involves the participant finding a comfortable, supportive, supine position. Once situated, the participant is guided by a teacher or recording. A typical guided relaxation process for yoga nidra will include a blend of the following:

- connect to heartfelt desire
- set an intention
- tap into inner tranquility
- body scan
- breath awareness
- welcome emotions
- witness thoughts
- invite joyful presence throughout body and beyond
- embrace conscious awareness
- integration and reflection (Integrative Restoration Institute, 2022)

If students managed their well-being through a deep relaxation practice such as yoga nidra, perhaps they would see changes in their physical, mental, emotional, energetic, and spiritual health.

Research Question

RQ1: Do college students who participate in a regular yoga nidra practice over 12-weeks experience improvement in their well-being?

Variables

In this study, well-being is defined as changes in self-reported ability to recognize and regulate physical, mental, emotional, energetic, and spiritual state. The experience of yoga nidra can include sensations in the body, control of the breath, level of relaxation, awareness of cognition, and any insight that is revealed during the practice of yoga nidra. During the intervention participants were asked to monitor their physical, mental, emotional, energetic, and spiritual state. The physical state means any apparent sensation in the body (e.g., areas of tension, expansiveness, weakness, freedom, lightness, and dullness). The mental state means any apparent activity in the mind (e.g., scattered/focused, restless/calm, distracted/one-pointed). The emotional state means the presence of any strong emotion/mood or lack thereof. The energetic state refers to how the body is responding to the flow of the breath (e.g., stuck/unchanging, calm/content, robust/energized, expansive/motivated, or integrated). Spiritual state refers to the subtle sense of self-awareness beyond body, mind, and breath.

Significance of the Study

Very little research has been conducted on the experience of yoga nidra from a qualitative standpoint. College students and the role of yoga nidra in their lives has not been studied to any great extent. Most yoga nidra studies conducted with college students were for short durations. This study was conducted for 12-weeks, comprising a total of 24-yoga nidra interventions, each lasting about 50-minutes, allowing more time for learning and integration. Through experiential learning, students have a better chance of adhering to the practice of yoga nidra beyond the study. The experiential learning provided participants with direct experience with the practice rather than simply reading or hearing about it. This study was offered in-person in an environment controlled for comfort and privacy thus allowing for the best possible outcomes of

the practice. However, approximately half of the participants utilized recordings from the live and in-person sessions due to scheduling conflicts.

Research Ethics

Permission and IRB Approval

The researcher completed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to conduct the research (see Appendix A). In addition, Bemidji State University provided support for the research to take place at the institution (see Appendix A). The researcher recruited volunteer participants through flyers posted around a Midwestern college campus.

Informed Consent

Participants were provided an informed consent letter, which explained the purpose of the study, the time commitment, the participants' role, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time. In addition, the consent form explained that confidentiality would be maintained and there were no known risks to participation (see Appendix B).

Limitations

The research was limited to a Midwestern college university and volunteers, therefore inducing the possibility of self-selection bias. Therefore, the population was reflective of the demographics of the institution and those willing to participate. Another limitation was finding a consistent time for all interested participants to attend the sessions as a group.

Terminology

Stress

According to Olpin and Hesson (2020), stress is the body's physiological response to stimulus. The interpretation of the stimulus as a stressor can cause someone to perceive a situation as difficult or threatening. Distress negatively impacts the health and performance of an individual and eustress has qualities that can encourage or positively influence a person; the physiology of the body is heightened during stressful situations to manage the positive or negative demand (Olpin & Hesson, 2020). Furthermore, Olpin and Hesson presented common college student stressors such as technology usage, money, academic demands, relationships, and time management; even if people are exposed to the same stressor, the individual's perception will determine how stress impacts their health and well-being. When distress manifests in the body it can cause "feelings of fear, anger, sadness, worry, numbness, or frustration" (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2023, para. 1).

Yoga Nidra

Yoga means to yolk or unite. Nidra is a Sanskrit word that means sleep. Yoga nidra translates to yogic sleep (Desai, 2017; Miller, 2022; Saraswati, 2009; Stanley, 2021). Yoga nidra "works by taking you to brainwave states similar to those in sleep, where the biology of your body makes it easier to disengage from thoughts" (Desai, 2017, p. 2). The practitioner is guided to a state of complete non-doing through internal breath awareness and sensation in the body (Desai). Yoga nidra is a deep relaxation practice and "is described as a state of conscious sleep, with deep awareness and inward lucidity" (Ganpat, 2020, p. 214). In agreement, Saraswati (2009) describes the practice as "psychic sleep or deep relaxation with inner awareness" (p. 1). The practice consists of the practitioner lying in a comfortable, supine position perhaps

supported by blankets or pillows for the head, neck, and knees. The practitioner then listens to a guided relaxation from either a recording or a live teacher. The practice generally lasts 20-30 minutes. However, some practices can last 45-60 minutes.

Saraswati (2009) expounded on the definition of yoga nidra by describing the importance of relaxation in a systematic manner, turning inwards, away from external stimulation so that the practitioner is aware of their body and sensations as well as their being conscious during yoga nidra. Furthermore, Saraswati (2009) described the potential of yoga nidra to “develop the memory, increase knowledge and creativity, or transform one’s nature” (p. 2).

Breathing Techniques

Breathing techniques are guided practices on ways to control the breath. There are many ways to shape the breath. To this study, the techniques involved awareness of the breath or sensing the flow of air through the nostrils, observing qualities of the breath, controlling the length of the inhale or exhale, moving the breath to areas within the body, or adding sound to the breath.

Normative Sleep

There are two primary factors that define normative sleep. The first factor is that when one is experiencing normative sleep, they are unconscious. The sensory organs of sight, smell, touch, taste, and hearing are not actively responding (Saraswati, 2009). One stops perceiving external stimulation and one loses track of time during sleep (Walker, 2018). Brewer and Lasica (2021) echoed this by stating, “sleep is a state of reduced responsiveness to the environment, decreased voluntary muscle activation, and largely inhibited sensory modalities. Hence, it is a state of altered consciousness” (para.1).

Mindfulness

The four domains of mindfulness as described by Kabat-Zinn (1994) are “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (p. 4). Mindfulness has been a way of life amongst ancient cultures “where conscious attention and awareness are actively cultivated” (Brown & Ryan, 2003, p. 822). A fifth domain of mindfulness according to Brown and Ryan is nonreactivity, i.e., witnessing thoughts while remaining unattached.

Hatha Yoga

In modern, western culture, hatha yoga is known as a more traditional practice of moving the body with the breath through a series of postures and in some cases, it is used to prepare for meditation. The word hatha comes from the Sanskrit language, “*ha* represents prana, which is the vital force and *tha* represents the mind, the mental energy” (Muktibodhananda, 2013, p. 7). Yoga means to yolk or to unite. Hatha yoga is a culmination of life force merged with the mind, which creates oneness, a state of higher consciousness.

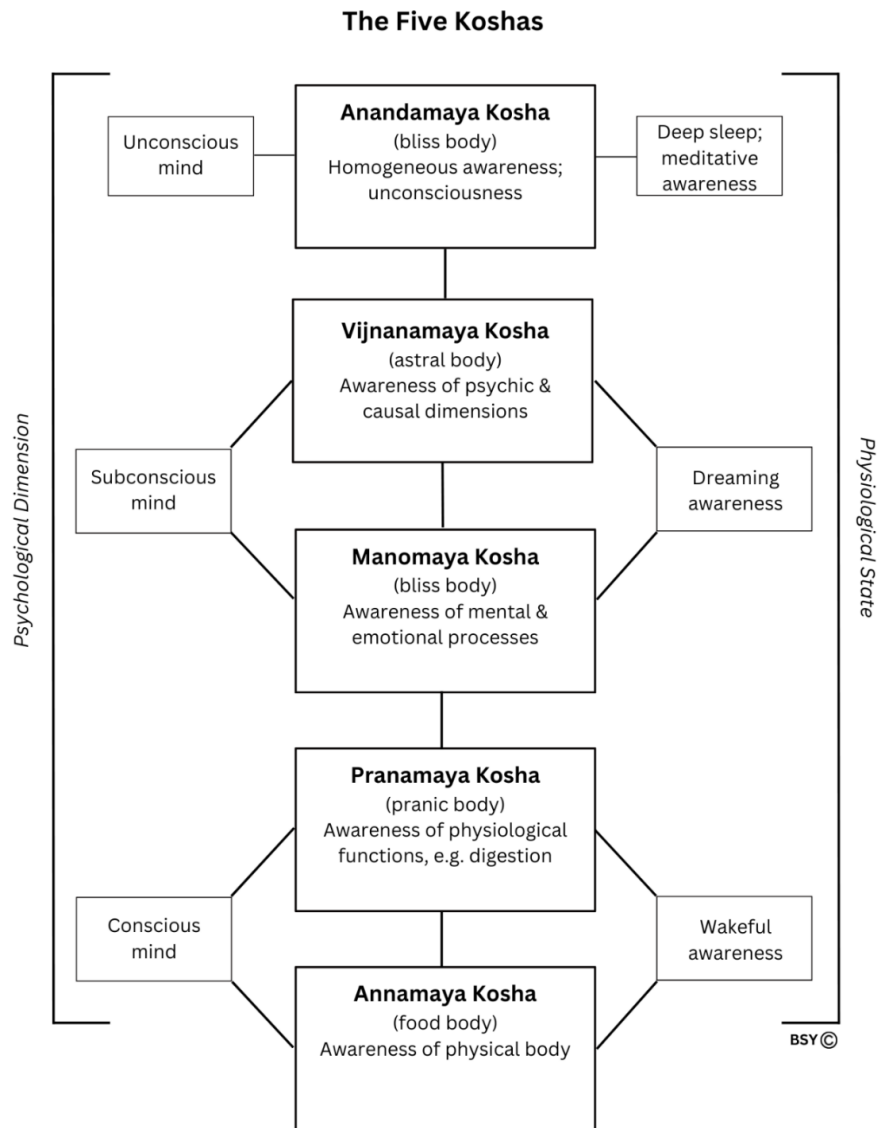
Koshas

There are five koshas. Kosha means sheaths or layers of consciousness that move the energetic anatomy, oscillating between the gross and subtle (Desai, 2017; Stanley, 2021). Each kosha is identified through the Sanskrit language and has meaning: “Ananda (Bliss), Vijnana (Wisdom), Mana (Mental), Prana (Energy), and Ana (Physical) bodies respectively.” The koshas serve as sheaths or filters, which are layers of access and protection for the soul (Desai, 2017). The koshas are categorized by varying degrees of containers. As Beaudoin (2022) described the gross body, the visible container is the annanamaya kosha; the subtle body, which is unseen, yet felt is the experiential container and includes the pranayama, manomaya, and vijnanamaya

koshas; the causal body, the existential container is the ananandamaya kosha. Access to these bodies depends on the level of consciousness of the beholder (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

The Five Koshas



Note: From *Yoga nidra* (p. 54), by S. Saraswati, 2009, Yoga Publication Trust. Copyright 2009 by Bihar School of Yoga. Reprinted with permission.

Antar Mouna

In Sanskrit, antar means *inner* and mouna means *silence* (Saraswati, 2009). Antar mouna is a process of reducing external stimulation by noticing the gross surrounding and gradually moving awareness inward. Achieving antar mouna means the five sense organs still perceive external stimulation, but the stimulation does not disrupt the state of mind (Saraswati, 2009).

Consciousness

Consciousness refers to a state of the mind. The state of consciousness depends on the level of awareness of the mind, which is often associated with waking, dreaming, and sleeping. However, there is a fourth state, turiya. Turiya is the state between waking and normative sleeping (Saraswati, 2009). As Saraswati described, the conscious state of yoga nidra is the line between sleep and awake, accessed through deep relaxation (see Table 1).

Table 1

States of Consciousness

Stage	State of consciousness	Psychological dimension	Brainwave pattern	Realm of experience
1	Awake	Conscious mind	Beta (13-20 c.p.s.)	Sensory awareness, external knowledge
2	Yoga nidra	Superconscious mind (turiya), hyponagogic borderline between sleep and awake	Alpha (8-12 c.p.s.)	Deep relaxation, visionary states, conscious dreaming, archetypal imagery
3	Dreaming sleep	Subconscious mind	Theta (4-7 c.p.s.)	Release of emotions, suppressed fears and desires
4	Deep sleep	Unconscious mind	Delta (0-4 c.p.s.)	Awakening of instincts and primitive desires

Note: From *Yoga nidra* (p. 171), by S. Saraswati, 2009, Yoga Publication Trust. Copyright 2009 by Bihar School of Yoga. Reprinted with permission.

Well-being

Due to self-reporting measures, well-being is subjective and there is no one definition for well-being (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2018). However, according to Dwivedi (2022), well-being refers to one's state of health, "a homeostatic state of equilibrium which sets the human being in maintaining and building harmonious stability at the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual levels" (p. 73). During this research study, the following student states of well-being were explored specifically: physical, mental, emotional, energetic, and spiritual. Participants provided their own subjective perspective before and after each yoga nidra session. These states overlap with most of the koshas, which were introduced to the participants during the yoga nidra practices. In addition, participants were invited to share insight pertaining to other aspects of their overall well-being, such as sleep, nutrition, study habits, and time management.

Physical State

Body sensing is a way of checking in with the body, it is a way of "awakening your innate capacity for listening, hearing, and responding to ever subtler cues your body is sending you" (Miller, 2022, p. 109). Physical health is associated with the annamaya kosha, which is the food body (Stanley, 2021). The physical state means any apparent feeling in the body (e.g., areas of tension, expansiveness, weakness, freedom, lightness, and dullness).

Emotional State

The emotional state means the presence of any strong emotion/mood or lack thereof. There is no kosha that focuses solely on this state. However, one may infer that the emotional state could be combined with the mental body, manomaya kosha. For the purpose of this study, the emotional state will stand on its own.

Mental State

The mental state means any apparent activity in the mind (e.g., scattered/focused, restless/calm, distracted/one-pointed). The mental state is related to the manomaya kosha, the mental sheath i.e., our perception that affects thinking (Desai, 2017). By observing thoughts, one can become aware of how the mind is influencing their life (Stanley, 2021).

Spiritual State

Spiritual state refers to the subtle sense of self-awareness beyond body, mind, and breath. This is related to the anandamaya kosha, the bliss body. The experience of the bliss body involves a state where one is “limitless and boundless” (Stanley, 2021, p. 39).

Energetic State

The energetic state refers to how the body is responding to the flow of the breath (e.g., stuck/unchanging, calm/content, robust/energized, expansive/motivated, or integrated). The energetic body is known as the pranayama kosha. This is a subtle force and “speaks through bodily sensation without language, such as gut feelings or impulses” (Desai, 2017, p. 67). Stanley (2021) described the pranayama kosha as subtle energy, the desire to animate the body.

Conclusion

To understand the well-being of college students who participate in yoga nidra, it was necessary to first review the gaps in the research. The intention of this study was to address the need for a qualitative research design to articulate the first-hand experience of college students in a longitudinal yoga nidra study. Understanding the shared language around the variables helped the students identify and describe components of the experience. The terminology was important to convey, particularly because yoga nidra has not been widely known in Western culture. Since students who participated in the yoga nidra sessions were provided pre- and post-test reflection

exercises, it was important that they understood the distinction between: physical, mental, emotional, energetic, and spiritual states.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Synthesis of Literature

As mindfulness techniques and yoga are becoming more popular there has been an increase in research to determine their effectiveness on college students' perceived stress (Breedvelt et al., 2019; Chong et al., 2011; Deckro et al., 2002; Park et al., 2017). Park et al. (2017) shared "after 8 weeks of yoga, participants improved in interoceptive awareness and emotion dysregulation, and after 8 weeks of CBSM [cognitive-behavioral stress management], self-regulation (restraint) increased" (p. 18). Similarly, Deckro et al. (2002) conducted a six-week study utilizing a relaxation response technique and a cognitive behavioral intervention with college students. Upon completion, students reported significantly lower psychological distress, anxiety, and perception of stress. Smith et al. (2007) determined in a study, both yoga and progressive muscle relaxation are effective ways to reduce stress, improve anxiety, and improve health status. In addition, yoga demonstrated positive effects on mental health.

From the literature chosen for this review there were five common techniques used to gauge college student stress levels: yoga nidra, breath awareness, normative sleep, mindfulness techniques, and movement-based approaches such as traditional hatha yoga. Nearly every study utilized a quantitative process utilizing pre-existing instruments.

Many of the studies primarily comprised of women participants and lacked cultural diversity. In the spring of 2022, the researcher conducted a mini-pilot study, and the three volunteer participants were also White women. Therefore, to be more equitable, the researcher chose to intentionally invite Black, Indigenous, and people of color to participate in this research.

Many of the interventions in this literature review were conducted for shorter periods of time, typically eight-weeks or less. In most cases, the yoga nidra interventions were independent

practices, which meant uncontrolled environments and greater possibility of disruption of the practice or falling asleep. This study was conducted in a classroom setting, with a controlled environment and cues during the practice to help the participants remain awake to access turiya. However, sessions were recorded for those unable to attend live and in-person.

College Student Stress

College students have a high level of stress in their lives due to the demands of time, class assignments, work, finances, family, and social life. Furthermore, results from an annual survey conducted by The American Psychological Association (APA) (2018) indicated that Generation Z, representing the population born between 1997 and 2012, experienced the highest level of stress compared to other adult generations. Generation Z had higher rates of feelings of stress pertaining to “mass shootings,” “rise in suicide rates,” “climate change and global warming,” “separation and deportation of immigrant and migrant families,” and “widespread sexual harassment and assault reports” (American Psychological Association [APA], 2018, p. 3). Moreover, Generation Z conveyed the lowest likelihood of reporting positive mental health and the highest probability to seek care from a mental health professional (APA).

According to an American Psychological Association (2020) report, stress levels of Generation Z had been on the rise between 2018 and 2019 and when the COVID-19 global pandemic surged in 2020, Generation Z reported escalations in uncertainty, stress, and depression. The American Psychological Association (2020) attributes the rising change to growing up “during times of disruption and unrest,” including stressors such as increased deaths by suicide, reports of sexual misconduct, or changes in abortion control (p. 3).

The literature also points to the residual implications of stress. Deckro et al. (2002) indicated that disease manifestations can include symptoms of stress, even as subtle as

headaches, conditions that disturb normal sleep patterns, and viral infections. Likewise, Segrin (1999) indicated that anxiety and depression in college students is linked to heightened levels of stress. Further concerning, the more intense the stress the more likely students report suicidal ideation and hopelessness (Dixon, 1992). Stress is also connected to unhealthy behaviors such as irregular sleeping routines, eating processed foods, use of tobacco, alcohol consumption, and use of narcotics (Bistricky et al., 2017). Furthermore, Jagad (2020) explains that mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being, which “affects how we think, feel and act; it determines how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices” (p. 433).

Studies that have implemented mindfulness and other relaxation techniques demonstrated effectiveness in improving perceived stress (Caldwell et al., 2010; Deckro et al., 2002; Oman et al., 2008; Palmer & Roger, 2009; Smith et al., 2007). Mindful activities such as Pilates, hatha yoga, yoga nidra, and tai chi focus on slowing down the breath and engaging the parasympathetic nervous system (Caldwell et al., 2010; Eastman et al., 2013). These activities are common ways to reduce external stimulation that provoke the flight or fight state of being. The cortisol levels drop, and homeostasis is restored thus reducing adverse effects from high levels of stress.

In the research setting, the instructor must be cognizant of their influence over students' emotional states (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2021). The instructor must do more than teach content by cultivating an environment that allows for social emotional learning. This can be done by using a compassionate tone of voice, evoking a calm facial expression, and maintaining a relaxed stance (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2021). Students cannot learn when distressed and they can pick up on the cues of their environment (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2017). Since yoga nidra is most commonly a guided practice to evoke relaxation, it is imperative that the instructor be in a clear, calm, and

relaxed state themselves. It is also vital that the environment be still, dark, quiet, and warm to be able to withdraw from the external to the internal senses known as pratyahara in Sanskrit (Stanley, 2021).

Many interventions on stress management have focused on outcomes rather than process. However, Larson (2015) sought to explore the effectiveness of college students practicing stress management techniques through independent learning. Larson investigated how students managed stress by using a 20-minute technique twice a week for eight-weeks. The students journaled about their experience. Initially, students had a steep learning curve meaning it took some time to gain command of the technique. After eight-weeks, students became familiar and refined their skills, but could still use assistance adapting the technique on demand (Larson, 2015). The students were able to choose an unfamiliar technique from the following list: yoga/tai chi, progressive muscular relaxation, imagery and visualization, meditation, and autogenic training.

The techniques Larson (2015) used were comparable to the yoga nidra intervention conducted, since some of those aspects (imagery, relaxation, visualization) were part of the preparation or actual practice of yoga nidra. Initially, during this study students in the yoga nidra intervention were provided structure to practice. However, the students were also provided recordings of the movement exercises, breathing techniques and yoga nidra practices. Over time, students from this study may find themselves continuing independently with the recordings, practicing by memory or creating their own yoga nidra practices.

The approaches reviewed as part of this study included: yoga nidra, breath awareness, normative sleep, mindfulness, and movement. The researcher wanted to learn about the demographics, methodologies, and instruments that have been used to assess college student

stress and well-being. Since breathing, mindful movement, and meditation are used as preparatory practices for yoga nidra it was important for the researcher to explore these topics and find out how they have been researched. Being that yoga nidra is about accessing turiya, the fourth state beyond waking, dreaming, and sleeping, it was valuable to include how normative sleep has been researched in the realm of stress and well-being.

Well-being

During this research study, the following student states of well-being were explored specifically: physical, mental, emotional, energetic, and spiritual. The research showed varying reports on how well-being was defined. To explore how adults classified well-being Ryff et al. (1995) conducted interviews with 1108 adults of varying ages and generated six dimensions of well-being related to positive functioning: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Jagad (2020) expounded on the notion by stating well-being is an individual's "effort to realize their own real potential" (p. 434).

Using the Personal Growth Initiative (PGI) general wellness scale, Jagad (2020) took a mixed methods approach to explore the psychological well-being of 120 college students, which primarily addressed "the extent to which people feel that they have meaningful control over their life and their activities" (p. 433). Also using existing instruments, Adams et al. (2000) measured the relationship between spiritual and psychological dimensions of wellness. Spiritual wellness was assessed using the Life Attitude Profile and the Life Orientation Test, psychological wellness was evaluated by the Sense of Coherence Scale, and finally, overall wellness was measured with the Perceived Wellness Scale.

Asikainen et al. (2019) offered college students a seven-week online program to explore the well-being as it related to identifying personal values, implementation of values related to

academic classes, mindfulness, overcoming negative thoughts, and self-awareness. Data were collected using a variety of pre-existing quantitative instruments; for well-being specifically, the general population (GP) was adapted from the Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation (CORE) (Sinclair et al., 2005). Journaling responses were collected that pertained to student academic success.

Within the literature, there was no one-size fits all definition or tool that universally defined or captured the college students' well-being experience. Olpin and Hesson (2020) utilized five dimensions of wellness: physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual. Adams et al. (2000) utilized physical, social, psychological, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual to frame their study. An area lacking in the research was understanding students' energetic well-being. The energetic state refers to how the body is experiencing desire which materializes as sensation within and around the body. Energy is another way of saying life force. Most often, people understand energy as the flow of the breath (e.g., stuck/expansive, calm/jagged, robust/shallow, weak/motivated, or integrated). However, more accurately, energy is not the breath itself, but the desire to breathe that comes before the flow of the breath. Energy can also be experienced in a situation where someone is too choked up to speak. It is not that the person cannot speak, but the desire to speak is blocked by the way the energy is manifesting in the throat. Therefore, the researcher chose to include the energetic aspect in the research design for this study along with the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual states of wellness. The articles about college student well-being lacked data on the subjective perception of college students' experience with their personal well-being.

Yoga Nidra Approaches

According to Dol (2019) yoga nidra is a useful method for improving personal stress and self-esteem amongst college students. In a study conducted by Smith et al. (2007), after delivering 10-weeks of relaxation techniques results showed improvement in stress, anxiety, physical and mental health, and sleep aptitude among participants. At the time of the follow-up (six-weeks post intervention) participants reported sustainable health benefits, which suggests the participants continued to utilize the relaxation techniques after the intervention (Smith et al., 2017).

Yoga nidra can serve as an intervention to help students manage stress, depression, and worry. Eastman-Mueller et al. (2013) found statistically significant pre- to post-test improvements in perceived stress, worry, and depression using an eight-week mindfulness iRest yoga nidra intervention. Yoga nidra is an effective proactive strategy for helping students relax and improve self-regulation. Research shows that college students who participate in yoga nidra practices report higher levels of emotional intelligence (Ganpat, 2020). Ganpat, hypothesized that “YN [yoga nidra] may be an effective practice to enhance emotional intelligence among university students, which may have positive effect on their academic performance” (p. 214).

Other aspects of well-being have been measured such as a quantitative yoga nidra study by Dwivedi (2020) that lasted one month with a total of four-yoga nidra sessions. The approach Dwivedi used focused on the aspects of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellness. The aspect of energetics was not included and was captured in the approach of the present study. The Likert scale developed by Dwivedi produced highly reliable results in developing the theoretical construct. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used, which is a statistical technique used to validate the scale’s structure and consistency among factors that are measured. Ultimately,

Dwivedi recommended yoga nidra as a method to improve well-being on physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual levels.

During a 14-day period, Michael (2017) performed a yoga nidra intervention for college nursing students to determine if the process would impact their stress level using quantitative methods. The yoga nidra intervention was one aspect of a longitudinal study for the cohort. The experimental group received one pre-test in the morning and the following evening at the start of the intervention. After seven days of yoga nidra practice, the participants were provided one post-test in the morning and another in the evening. The Likert instrument was created by the research team and tested for validity with a test-retest method. It was vague how the information was communicated to the participants. The participants were given an audio cassette with a recorded yoga nidra practice to use for seven days on their own. It was unclear if all participants practiced all seven days of the study and how that was tracked. Another option may have been to facilitate the yoga nidra in a classroom setting. This could have also given researchers the ability to observe the process taking place for guaranteed participation and notice if participants fell asleep during the process. Therefore, the researcher chose an in-person yoga nidra intervention for the present study.

Breath Awareness Approach

Raghuraj and Telles (2008) explored specific breathing techniques compared to breath awareness and regular breathing. They measured for the following variables “heart rate variability, skin conductance, finger plethysmogram amplitude, breath rate, and blood pressure” (Raghuraj & Telles, 2008, p. 65). More often breathing techniques are being used as coping mechanisms for stress. For thousands of years breathing techniques have been taught during yoga practice (Muktibodhananda, 2013). However, at the time of this quantitative study, limited

data had been collected to determine whether these specific controlled breathing exercises influenced blood flow. Therefore, 21 men volunteered to be included in a study to compare right, left, and alternate nostril breathing to involuntary breathing. Involuntary breathing occurs without trying to control the breath; it is the breathing that occurs when the autonomic nervous system is engaged.

Raghuraj and Telles (2008) conducted a straightforward research design. The participants had extensive training in the breathing techniques and the studies were conducted at the same time daily to reduce inconsistencies. A limitation was the demographic was narrow. The men had participated in yoga for a minimum of three months, which means one can assume they were all reasonably healthy and familiar with breathing techniques. In addition, participants had to meet certain nasal airflow criteria to participate. The most notable outcome of the study was right nostril breathing increased systolic and diastolic pressure, alternate nostril breathing decreased systolic and diastolic pressure, and left nostril breathing decreased systolic and diastolic pressure. This study produced evidence that shaping the breath can influence blood pressure, which could be useful in helping people regulate their blood pressure. Blood pressure plays a significant role in self-regulation of the nervous system.

Normative Sleep Approach

Initial research has shown that college students' inadequate sleep patterns and quality are associated with tightness in the body, mood imbalances, short temper, lack of motivation, and decrease in quality of life (Buboltz et al., 2002). This suggests that students with poor sleep quality lack ability to skillfully self-regulate a productive, relaxed, and healthy quality of life.

The Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index is a personal inventory of sleep performance and sleep interruptions and has been used in multiple sleep studies with different audiences (Buboltz

et al., 2002). According to Darwall-Smith (2021), “research into sleep and learning indicates that declarative memory, which stores facts and events, is reinforced by slow-wave sleep” (p. 54).

Slow wave sleep is the third stage of sleep and occurs most in the first half of a night of sleep (Walker, 2018). However, alcohol, sleeping pills, or a distracting sleep environment could disrupt the natural flow of the sleep cycle (Vail-Smith et al., 2009). Anxiety and worry often make it difficult for people to fall asleep (Ben Simon et al., 2013; Eastman-Mueller et al., 2013; Nyer et al., 2013). When people with anxiety and worry wake up in the middle of the night it can be difficult to fall back asleep. Therefore, it is important for college students to be able to relax and avoid consumption that interferes with sleep because sleep affects learning (Eastman-Mueller et al., 2013).

In a systematic review of sleep studies, Friedrich and Schlarb (2017) were concerned with the magnitude of students reporting cases of insomnia and nightmares, which leads to mental health challenges and poor functioning with classes. Although many techniques existed to promote sleep, the authors were interested in comparing 27 interventions with the intention to study the effects on insomnia including four main categories: “(1) sleep hygiene, (2) cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), (3) relaxation, mindfulness and hypnotherapy and (4) other psychotherapeutic interventions” (Friedrich & Schlarb, 2017, p. 4). A mixed methods approach was taken utilizing the qualitative data from questionnaires and journals. The quantitative data were collected with actigraphy and polysomnography tests. A minimum of 10 college students needed to be included in the study for it to be included in the review. The analysis was developed from “the Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions” (Friedrich & Schlarb, 2017). It was determined that cognitive behavioral therapies had the largest effects on sleep

improvement, psychotherapeutic interventions had moderate outcomes, relaxation techniques had little to very substantial results, and sleep hygiene had modest to moderate impact.

The study by Friedrich and Schlarb (2017) included 22 articles that tested healthy students. Five of the articles included samples of students with sleep disorders. Also, there were different measures used in the studies for conclusions. Friedrich & Schlarb reported, at times it was difficult to differentiate between the four main categories evaluated. The findings determined that CBT was effective and should be considered as a primary treatment option with supporting treatments from the other categories. This review determined that more research needs to be conducted for interventions for students with insomnia.

In a study conducted by Phan et al. (2019), college students who had more than six and a half hours of sleep per night had better cognition retention measured by a spatial span test (SST). According to these findings sleep influences the ability to manage stress. Stress influences the ability to get quality sleep. Further research is needed to explore at the effect of a consistent, regular relaxation practice such as yoga nidra and the impact of college students' sleep quality and quantity.

Brown et al. (2002) wanted to address the issues of insomnia amongst college students by researching students' awareness and implementation of sleep hygiene practices. The authors used the Pittsburg Sleep Quality Index and The Sleep Hygiene Awareness and Practices Scale (SHAPS) to look at the relationship between sleep hygiene and sleep quality. Seventy-four subjects from a university in the southeast United States of America with most of whom identified as Caucasian women completed survey packets and four-weeks later completed a second survey packet. The first section of the SHAPS included questions about students' knowledge of behaviors that impact sleep such as naps or variable bedtimes. The second section

included questions pertaining to knowledge of foods that impact sleep. Cronbach's α coefficient and a stepwise multiple regression analysis were conducted. According to Brown et al., sleep practices were strongly related to sleep quality, while simply having knowledge of sleep practices, in contrast were less impactful on sleep quality.

The study by Brown et al. (2002) focused more on awareness of sleep practices rather than practical application of sleep practices, which aligned partially with the intent. Brown et al. used the health belief model as a framework to determine the willingness for participants to change their sleep behavior. If participants were aware that sleep habits can impact health, perhaps they would be more likely to incorporate behaviors for better sleep patterns. Rather than utilizing an intervention approach, the researches only provided participants with information about the adverse effects of poor sleep hygiene. In the future, perhaps students could select one, two, or three behavior changes to implement to see if there is a change in sleep quality. For more comparison of pre- and post-results, the students' data could have been grouped together by intervention strategy or by factors that caused sleep disturbances. Awareness of sleep hygiene as a behavioral intervention by itself was not enough to be effective in improving sleep.

There is enough evidence to show that relaxation reduces stress. It may be time to look at what relaxation can do for other factors that affect college students such as memory, creativity, and sleep performance. According to Phan et al. (2019) favorable sleep is directly correlated with memory retention. Sleep is becoming more well known as another aspect of student wellness. If managing stress is an indicator for sleep performance, then perhaps addressing stress is the solution. Ultimately, college students need education, support, and opportunity to embody coping skills that reduce stress, improve sleep, and potentially improve academic performance.

Mindfulness Based Approach

According to Caldwell et al. (2010):

One such intervention is Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), a formalized psychoeducational group intervention in which participants receive training in formal meditation techniques such as body-scan meditation, sitting meditation, walking meditation, and Hatha yoga with simple stretches and postures. (p. 433)

Utilizing the MBSR and Easwaran's Eight Point Program, Oman et al. (2008) completed a comparison to study college students' response to stress and forgiveness. Sessions lasted 90-minutes weekly for eight-weeks. The outcome of the study indicated there were no significant differences between the two methodologies. Both methods were effective in reducing stress and increasing forgiveness. During the pre-test, post-test, and eight-week follow up participants responded to the Perceived Stress Scale (10-item version). The forgiveness aspect was unique to this study. It is unclear why forgiveness was measured in the study, particularly for a general college student population.

In a similar fashion, Deckro et al. (2002) conducted a mind/body intervention which included a relaxation response and cognitive behavior techniques to assess college students' perceived stress. Those who participated in the intervention and/or utilized the skills for the duration of the experiment had lower psychological distress, anxiety, and decreased stress (Deckro et al., 2002). This implemented biological measures by taking inventory of oxygen intake, pulse, blood pressure, and number of breaths per minute, which are measures for health and well-being. Therefore, this study was more than a collection of students' opinions about how they felt. An inventory of health statistics was collected to support the correlation between perceived stress and physical exam results.

Previous research supported that progressive muscle relaxation, deep breathing, and guided imagery has been beneficial in helping people relax. However, limited research compared the efficacy of these three techniques relative to each other (Toussaint et al., 2021). Sixty undergraduate students of similar health were randomly assigned a technique: progressive muscle relaxation, deep breathing, or guided imagery. The control group received no intervention. A quantitative meta-analysis was conducted of stress reduction practices. According to Toussaint et al., (2021) “progressive muscle relaxation and guided imagery showed an immediate linear trend toward physiological relaxation, compared to the control group, and the deep breathing group showed an immediate increase in physiological arousal followed quickly by a return to initial levels” (p. 1).

The baseline assessment, intervention, post-intervention assessments by Toussaint et al. (2021) were effective strategies for gathering the data. One limitation was the sample group was primarily healthy, White, undergraduate students with jobs on campus. Also, in the future, perhaps other types of mindful relaxation techniques could be offered, such as yoga nidra. Researching student’s ability to recognize stress and utilize self-regulation interventions could add to the current literature.

Palmer and Roger (2009) used instruments such as the Perceived Stress Scale and the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) to understand how mindfulness impacted coping styles. The findings “revealed significant positive relationships between mindfulness and rational coping, and significant negative relationships with emotional and avoidant coping and perceived stress” (Palmer & Rodger, 2009, p. 198). Those who scored high in mindfulness also scored low in perceived stress. As a result of this study, the recommendation was for the campus counseling services to offer more mindfulness-based interventions during sessions with students.

This study was unique in that without using an intervention it explored the relationship with avoidant coping and perceived stress. As a follow-up study, a mindfulness awareness training could be implemented with those who tested high on avoidant coping and another perceived stress test could be offered. These mindful based approaches by Palmer and Rodger (2009) were effective in reducing stress.

The Perceived Stress Scale has been a frequently used instrument among many of these studies, which led to quantifiable results. However, the research on mindfulness-based approaches is lacking qualitative data that describes the experience of college students when utilizing these strategies. Thus, the researcher chose to conduct a qualitative study to develop a more holistic understanding of the experience of college students utilizing the yoga nidra approach as a mindfulness intervention strategy.

Movement Based Approaches

Forms of physical movement were used as independent variables in a study conducted by Caldwell et al. (2010) to determine outcomes of the dependent variables of sleep, mood, and stress. Caldwell et al. completed two 15-week studies that involved college students enrolled in elective courses that fulfilled the physical activity/wellness requirement. The study concluded that students who participate in mindful movement had “significant improvements in mood and perceived stress, [which] in turn, explains better sleep quality at semester’s end” (Caldwell et al., 2010, p. 441). These activities included Pilates, hatha yoga, and tai chi, which focused on slowing down and pairing breath with movement. This inward focus activated the parasympathetic nervous system and reduced external stimulation, which provokes the flight or fight state of being.

Students involved in the study by Caldwell et al. (2010) completed a pre-survey, midpoint survey, and post-survey. The survey measured sleep quality, self-efficacy, mood, and stress. Utilizing a t-test and mixed model analysis determined that all three courses led to significant increased mindfulness between the pre-survey and post-survey, insomnia decreased, negative arousal decreased, relaxation was greater, “in summary, changes in Tiredness, Negative Arousal, Relaxation and Perceived Stress were all significant mediators of the effect of increased mindfulness on improved sleep quality at the end of the semester” (Caldwell et al., 2010, p. 440).

Again, using movement as the focus, during fall 2017, Tong et al. (2020) studied healthy college students and the implications of yoga and physical fitness exercises on stress, mindfulness, and self-compassion with a quantitative analysis. One experiment evaluated stress before and after a single 60-minute intervention of yoga and physical fitness. Students self-selected either yoga or physical fitness for their activity. Those who participated in the yoga study had more significant reduced stress (indicative of greater mindfulness) than the fitness group (Tong et al., 2020). The second experiment was conducted over 12-weeks with both yoga and fitness groups. The results were the same as the first experiment. Those who practiced yoga had better outcomes for mindfulness and reduced stress. A future study could explore data about the motivation for participation in either class (yoga or fitness).

Another hatha yoga-based program, Community Approach to Learning Mindfully (CALM), was introduced to educators as part of a qualitative analysis by Schussler et al. (2020). The study reflected that higher participation led to better outcomes. Improvements were noticed in the areas of increased present moment awareness, perceived stress, emotional fatigue, productive sleep, and stronger confidence within their teaching environment. The CALM program was offered for 20-minute sessions, 4-days a week over the course of 17-weeks. CALM

is a “mindfulness-based yoga program,” and focuses on the mind and body connection (Schussler et al., 2020, p. 1077). The attendance was tracked as a variable. Therefore, attendance was not required. Through participation, many reported they felt a sense of belonging. A sense of belonging encompasses a community and shared experiences with other learners and teachers (Tokuhamma-Espinosa, 2021).

The common theme that emerged amongst these previous studies was that a yoga intervention was used as an independent variable and perceived stress was used as the dependent variable. There is enough evidence to show that relaxation reduces stress. It may be time to look at the qualitative context and how different forms of relaxation affect college students beyond stress reduction.

Theoretical Framework

Holistic learning theory aligns with the yoga nidra study conducted within this dissertation. The researcher offered students yoga nidra classes, a deep relaxation practice with conscious awareness. Even though relaxation was a benefit of the practice, the intent was to allow integration and development of the whole person (Johnson, 2019). Beyond the obvious benefit of relaxation, Arora (2023) described, the process of yoga nidra allows realization and sovereignty. One chooses yoga nidra if the goal is self and only pure self or if the goal is filled emptiness; yoga nidra is a “tool for awakening” (Arora, 2023, para. 3). This aligns with the characteristic of holistic education that nurtures the development of the whole person.

Holistic learning theorists posit, “true learning is said to have occurred when educational experiences elicit a transformation of consciousness” (Johnson, 2019, p. 119). During yoga nidra the intention was for consciousness to remain aware specifically for the purpose of transformation. The notion of a holistic framework is based on the principle of

interconnectedness. According to Johnson, there are three types of connections: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and transpersonal. This yoga nidra study conducted by the researcher addressed all three connections.

According to Johnson (2019), teaching as transformation invites students to uncover the highest version of themselves and live wholeheartedly as agents on a personal level as well as within their communities. The aim of transformation is to recognize the interconnectedness of all creation (Narve, 2001). Knowledge transpires when a person's rational mind has evolved, and an individual has "a greater understanding of care for self, others, and the environment" (Johnson, 2019, p. 152). The notion of transformation is a shift in consciousness. Transformation occurs when a person accesses their *vijnanamaya kosha*, or inherent knowing. This state is awareness of a person's own distinct qualities and an understanding of their role in the world.

Yoga nidra is a practice with a goal to reach a state of the superconscious mind, the fourth state known as *turiya*; which occurs at the "threshold of sense consciousness and sleep consciousness" (Saraswati, 2009, p. 172). Often, it is difficult to measure this level of transformation. Consciousness is not something that can easily be explained. It is something that must be experienced. However, the yoga nidra teacher can provide conditions, guided practices, and reflective tools that support students' perception of their transformation. Transformation is an internal process, which means removing external stimulation: a practice known as *pratyahara*. Forms of *pratyahara* such as *antar mouna*, inner space awareness, breath awareness, and rotation of consciousness support transformation and were included in the yoga nidra practices for this study.

The impact of transformative learning is demonstrated when a learner's paradigm shifts after connecting pre-existing knowledge and new knowledge. This yoga nidra intervention was

an experiential learning process. Students combined their existing knowledge base with the introduction of yoga nidra practices, which was an “active process involving thought, feelings, and disposition” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 10). Students were provided the opportunity to contemplate, to make meaning, and examine their beliefs and assumptions about yoga nidra and the effect of the practices on their own well-being by typing pre- and post-reflections in the Qualtrics (software for conducting surveys online) instrument (Mezirow, 1997).

Analysis of Literature and Recommendation

Researchers widely agreed that utilizing traditional (hatha) yoga, yoga nidra, and mindfulness techniques including behavior modifications was an effective way to lower stress and improve well-being amongst college students. It was unknown in many cases whether students sustained the use of the techniques beyond the studies.

According to Harkness et al. (2016), participants actively engaged during the yoga intervention reported improved well-being; the interventions were only beneficial when put into practice. However, after the completion of the yoga intervention, participants reported decreased involvement in yoga practices and declined well-being. Harkness et al. speculated that once the yoga was unavailable the participants felt a loss, a desire left unfulfilled. The participants perhaps were unable to continue yoga due to limited access to classes or expenses associated.

Perhaps, more studies can be conducted on the barriers to embodying the practices. Other options may be to look at motivation or strategies to increase adherence to techniques. Although, the one study that had the biggest impact on adherence was performed by Park et al. (2017) who noted, “yoga and CBSM were both effective for improving measures of health-related physical function and activity at postintervention and 4-month follow-up” (p. 19). It may be that since the intervention took place as incoming college students, they were able to adhere more easily as this

was their first experience formulating habits as a college student. Therefore, they did not have to unlearn unhealthy behavior and then get introduced to new, healthy behaviors.

Previous studies utilized pre-existing, or tested instruments. A common tool utilized was the Perceived Stress Scale use by Eastman-Muller et al. (2013), Harkness et al. (2016), Oman et al. (2008), and Palmer & Rogers (2009). An equally common tool was the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) utilized by Harkness et al., Oman et al., Palmer & Rogers, and Tong et al. (2020). The research design in all cases was trustworthy and replicable.

Recommendation for future research would be to include more men in the studies and include more underrepresented student populations such as first-generation college students, students with disability, low-income students, or Black, Indigenous, and people of color. In addition, comparing interventions introduced at different stages of the college experience may be beneficial. Perhaps, a multi-stage longitudinal study could be implemented that could link coping techniques to academic success, retention, and graduation rates.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Working in higher education, the researcher was curious about the college student experience. The researcher is a yoga teacher and teaches a variety of yoga postures, breathing techniques, meditation, guided relaxation, and restorative yoga classes. Given that many people from Generation Z report being overwhelmed with stress and uncertainty the researcher wanted to understand how these relaxation techniques impact college students who generally fit this age demographic (APA, 2018).

Research Design

The researcher conducted a qualitative design using action research. Action research comprises of “real-life issues that have an impact on people’s lives and threaten their well-being” (Stringer & Ortiz Aragon, 2021, p. 4). Action research in this case involved the researcher’s role as the yoga nidra instructor researching her teaching practice and making changes from within. Stringer (2007) indicated that action research is an orderly tactic to examine how people find practical solutions to situations they encounter in their daily routine. Further noted by Stringer and Ortiz Aragon (2021), action research allowed for organized exploration and probing to learn productive ways of finding solutions to difficulties faced by the community. In this scenario, the state of well-being that college students were facing was addressed.

The phases and rotations of an action research method afforded a blueprint to support participants in tracking their development (Stringer & Ortiz Aragon, 2021). In the case of this present study, college students explored the implications of yoga nidra on their physical, mental, emotional, energetic, and spiritual states of well-being. The experience included awareness of sensations, flow of breath, state of relaxation, and any insight that surfaced during the practice of yoga nidra. Using action research in conjunction with the interpretivist qualitative paradigm, the

researcher was able to construct meaning from a subjective perspective of those engaged in the experiential learning (Suarez-Sousa & Bradbury, 2022).

Much of the yoga nidra interventions completed in the past have been quantitative. The research lacks information that truly describes the experience of Midwestern college students who participate in a longitudinal yoga nidra study. The most comparable studies found were conducted by Eastman et al. (2013), Ganpat (2020), and Dwivedi (2020). Eastman et al. offered one class per week over eight-weeks that covered educational components that did not necessarily focus on a regular yoga nidra practice. In a more condensed timeframe, Ganpat conducted six yoga nidra sessions per week for six-weeks. The most comparable outcomes studied were included in the qualitative approach used by Dwivedi, which focused on the aspects of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellness.

College students participated in two yoga nidra sessions per week for 50-minutes each over the course of 12-weeks for a total of 24-yoga nidra sessions. Participants completed a qualitative pre-practice and a post-practice reflection for each session. The practice reflection asked for current state of physical, mental, emotional, energetic, and spiritual wellness before and after each session. Participants were asked to journal briefly in each area (see Appendix C).

Participant Sampling

College students from a medium sized public, upper Midwest college were included in the study. The researcher attended meetings with McNair Scholars, Council of Indian Students, International Program Office, Black Student Union, Sustainability Services, and Veteran's Club for intentional recruiting. McNair Scholars serves three categories of students: first generation, low-income, and students underrepresented in graduate education. The Indigenous Nursing Program forwarded an e-mail to students enrolled in the program with information

inviting the students to participate in the study. The same e-mail went to the campus faculty and staff listserv, which included departments such as the Student Center for Counseling Services, Student Activities, and the Honor's Program to share with students. The researcher made an announcement at a fall start-up session where some faculty were gathering in a workspace. Afterwards, the researcher was invited by faculty to speak to nursing students, social work students, and honor's students during their class periods. The researcher posted flyers around campus about the study two-weeks prior to the start of data collection. After contact information for interested students was gathered, the researcher sent e-mails to students with the informed consent and a survey addressing students' availability to attend the yoga nidra sessions.

Students were able to opt-in to have their data included in the study by signing an informed consent form (see Appendix B). To reduce the burden for participating, students were offered minor compensation. If the participant completed all 24-yoga nidra sessions, they received a \$50 stipend. The researcher also received approval for 25 yoga mats from the Give Back Yoga Foundation. The researcher was able to loan mats to students to use while they were participating, which made their involvement more accessible. If they missed because of class conflicts, an illness, or an emergency, they were able to make-up the session with a class recording independently on their own time.

Action research afforded itself well to this intervention because it addressed the active participation of college students and their experience before and after each class. The data analysis involved deductive research starting with codes that addressed physical, mental, emotional, energetic, and spiritual wellness. As other themes and codes emerged, inductive codes were used to interpret the data collected.

Threats to Internal Validity

Subject mortality was a threat due to scheduling conflicts and the duration of the intervention. The meeting space was only available for three-time blocks during the day. Synchronizing participants' schedules with a mutually agreed time was challenging. The likelihood of participants dropping out of the study increased due to the 12-week commitment. To address this threat the researcher recruited a larger sample size than was needed.

Another threat to internal validity included subject mortality due to falling into normative sleep during the yoga nidra intervention. Participants were asked during the yoga nidra practice to keep one elbow bent to reduce chances of falling into normative sleep. If they drifted into normative sleep the hand would start to fall and alerted them to remain awake.

Another potential internal threat was data collector bias. The researcher chose to lead the yoga nidra sessions as the researcher is trained in this area. The researcher has a personal routine and practices yoga nidra about seven days a week. For the researcher, this experience has provided her with many benefits such as increased relaxation, empowerment, heightened intuition, and improved memory. As a highly active person, yoga nidra has grounded the researcher and helped to balance her lifestyle. The researcher would look forward to the practice as a way of easing into the day. Prior to conducting this study, the researcher was only aware of their own lived experience of yoga nidra with the lens of a middle-aged adult with strong intrapersonal skills. The researcher believed her experience could likely be very different than a traditional college student. Finding another trained instructor presented some challenges, since few people in the geographic area are trained in this technique. The researcher's axiological approach was to remain objective during this action research. The lens the researcher used was one of curiosity with the intent of understanding the lived experience of college students who engaged in a

regular yoga nidra practice. To ensure that the reports reflect the participants' voices, member checking was included in the analysis (Stringer & Ortiz Aragon, 2021).

Setting

The yoga nidra intervention took place in a large, quiet, open space at the students' college campus. However, a number of participants were unable to attend in-person, and therefore, participated off-site by watching recordings of the classes. An orientation meeting was held the week before the intervention began in the same classroom scheduled for the yoga nidra practices. The orientation intended to help participants get familiar with the space, comprehend the purpose of the study, know the expectations for personal reflection, understand the nature of practices, and learn how to make-up a session if they were unable to attend in-person.

Participants were led through joints and glands, breathing techniques, and yoga nidra, receiving the same instructions whether in-person or participating with recordings. However, based on their location, age, gender, intrapersonal skills, stress level, energy level, and previous experience with relaxation, all these factors may have impacted their interpretation of the experience.

Instrumentation

The purpose was to offer four different yoga nidra practices with a variation of breathing techniques, so that participants received some redundancy and familiarity, but practices were mixed up for slight variety to reduce boredom. The researcher led the participants in some basic joints and glands movements or yoga postures to prepare the body for breathing techniques and yoga nidra practice. Since continuous fluctuations in neuroplasticity of the brain occur, students may have absorbed learning at different rates (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2021). It may have taken a student a few tries to gather the information offered during the yoga nidra practices and absorb it.

Learning cannot occur during multi-tasking or while the mind is wandering. It was best to repeat information in case a student did not have complete focused attention (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2017). Therefore, the yoga nidra instructor needed to factor in plenty of time and opportunity for repetition to help students improve and build for future understanding (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2021).

Schedule of Yoga Nidra Sessions

The researcher led the participants for about five-minutes through some gentle physical warm-ups (e.g. such as arm swings, torso rotations, marching in place, hip rotations, or seated yoga postures) to prepare participants for the breathing exercises and yoga nidra. Each session was 50-minutes in length. Two sessions a week were offered with very similar guidance according to a schedule of yoga nidra sessions (see Table 2).

Table 2

Yoga Nidra Rotation

Week	Breathing Technique	Yoga Nidra Practice
Cycle 1		
1	Three qualities of breath	Essentials
2	Diaphragmatic breath	
3	Combination breath (ujjayi, surya, and chandra)	
Cycle 2		
4	Three qualities of breath	Self-compassion
5	Diaphragmatic breath	
6	Combination breath (ujjayi, surya, and chandra)	
Cycle 3		
7	Three qualities of breath	Grounding and stability
8	Diaphragmatic breath	
9	Combination breath (ujjayi, surya, and chandra)	
Cycle 4		
10	Three qualities of breath	Empowerment
11	Diaphragmatic breath	
12	Combination breath (ujjayi, surya, and chandra)	

The three breathing exercises for this study invited the practitioner to an inward state of awareness. The focus on the breath separated the practitioner from external stimulus thus accessing more mindfulness or present moment awareness. All three breathing techniques involved participants sitting in a meditation posture with eyes closed or eyelids lowered. The three qualities observed during the practice include the rhythm, sound, and emotional quality of the breath. Diaphragmatic breathing created a focus on the breath originating from the diaphragm, expanding the lower ribs causing the lungs to fill with air (Sovik, 2005). The diaphragmatic breath focused on lengthening the exhale and awareness at the abdomen. There was a slight hold on the inhalation and then the breath is lengthening on exhale to soften the diaphragm. The combination breath involved adding a slight sound and constriction to the breath and then visualizing the breath moving back and forth between the two nostrils in a specific pattern. See Appendix D for a full description of each of the breathing techniques.

The four yoga nidra practices had a slight variation on the protocol to support the essence or intention of the practice. Each of the practices included most of the following components: preparation, inner resource, intention, antar mouna relaxation, breath awareness, rotation of consciousness, witness consciousness, visualization, awareness of senses, and finish. See Appendix E for the scripts for the essentials, self-compassion, grounding and stability, and empowerment yoga nidra practices.

A subject instrument was used in the form of a pre- and post-test reflection journal. A laptop was provided in the classroom in case a student arrived without a device. There were five open-ended qualitative questions on the pre-reflection and seven open-ended qualitative questions on the post-reflection. The five questions from the pre-reflection were repeated on the post-reflection for comparison. Participants were asked to briefly describe their current state of

physical, mental, emotional, energetic, and spiritual well-being. A few examples of these states were provided as writing prompts on the pre-reflection. On the post-reflection, participants were asked to include any other insights or shifts in perception that unfolded and if anything was noteworthy to reference another time (Stryker, 2016). The reflection prompts were designed to take participants two to three minutes to complete. At the conclusion of the 12-weeks, the researcher categorized data based on stages of completion, which mirrored the yoga nidra schedule. Those who completed only the essentials series were grouped together. Those that completed both the essentials and self-compassion series were grouped together. Those that complete the essentials, self-compassion, and grounding practices were grouped together. Those that completed all four yoga nidra series were grouped together. Then, the researcher looked for overall codes and themes.

The researcher organized a focus group at the end of the 12-weeks, and she included six open ended questions. The questions were developed to learn about a sample of participants' own observations. Participants were asked if other aspects of their lives such as academic success, sleep management, mental health, nutrition, and general health were influenced by the yoga nidra intervention (see Appendix F).

Data Collection

The data were collected from participants using Qualtrics (an electronic software survey tool) pre- and post-test. Those who participated in-person brought devices with them to the class and were provided time to complete the reflections. This information was recorded for the off-site participants, who were expected to complete the reflections in a similar manner to the in-person participants.

The instrument used was adapted from Stryker (2016). The in-person focus group was facilitated by the researcher and the session was audio recorded. A Desire 2 Learn (D2L) online learning platform was created, so the yoga nidra recordings could be stored. This is the same platform that the students use for their academic courses so that access was familiar and convenient. In the event a student had to miss a class, they could access the recording from this module, which also housed the links to the pre- and post-test instrument.

Data Analysis

The researcher opted to not use any coding or transcription software. The predefined set of deductive codes included: physical, mental, emotional, energetic, and spiritual state pre- and post-intervention. The inductive *in vivo* coding emerged from the data collected. All data were organized and categorized in Excel to identify distinct relationships and themes. Once the data were coded, the researcher was reflexive by examining her own personal beliefs that may have inadvertently affected the research. Once the narrative was drafted, member checking occurred to ensure accurate representation of the participants' experience.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher followed appropriate protocols for studying human subjects including the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative, Institutional Review Board approval, and requested informed consent. The ethical consideration pertained to the students invited to participate in the study to ensure they did not feel coerced into participating. The students needed to opt-in and understood there was no penalty for withdrawing. The students understood that if they completed all 24-yoga nidra sessions and reflections, they would receive the \$50 stipend, which is a small enough dollar amount that serves as an incentive without being coercive. If

they were unable to complete all sessions and support the data collection, they did not receive a stipend. However, the students were still invited to continue participation when possible.

Feasibility

What made this present study the most feasible was having a dedicated group of students who were incentivized to participate. At the time of the study, the researcher worked at Bemidji State University (BSU) and had a strong relationship with the student support departments on campus. The researcher was confident that she would be able to access students at BSU. Since the research was conducted over 12-weeks, it was important that the participants have a consistent schedule with time available to attend the yoga nidra sessions. In the event that a participant missed the scheduled yoga nidra session, then they had access to the recorded session to complete the practice independently and stay on track. The techniques of relaxation classes that have been offered at BSU in the past have been very popular. The researcher predicted students would be drawn to a yoga nidra class in a similar manner. Even if they dropped out, the researcher wanted the participants to have access to the yoga nidra recordings. That way, if they saw benefit from the practice, they could continue on their own whenever time allowed. The goal of the research was to have 20 participants commit to the yoga nidra intervention. If half of the participants dropped-out or chose not to follow-through completely, the researcher still had an appropriate amount of data to analyze. Fourteen students completed the informed consent form and were added to the D2L platform. After eight-weeks participation dropped to five students.

Attractiveness

This present study helped the researcher as a professional yoga teacher to understand the role that yoga nidra plays in college students' lives. The researcher aspires to become a full-time

faculty member at a university, teaching courses in health, wellness, recreation, or physical education. Having the opportunity to conduct research with college students who participate in a regular yoga nidra practice has grown the researcher's level of expertise and command of the subject matter. In addition, the researcher wanted to provide education to the community at large that yoga is skillful action that can lead to lifestyle improvements beyond what is typically known as a fitness endeavor. Regardless of the outcome of the study, participants had the opportunity to learn about and practice a relaxation technique that has been proven effective at improving well-being, reducing stress and lowering anxiety at no cost to them. In addition, to reduce the barriers of continuing to practice beyond the study participants were able to keep the recordings. Participants were encouraged to use their stipend to purchase a yoga mat or blanket to support their independent practice if they chose to continue beyond the research study.

Conclusion

As a yoga teacher who works in higher education, the researcher was curious about how the practice of yoga nidra impacted college students' well-being. Action research gave participants a practical, longitudinal experience with yoga nidra while enhancing the understanding of their well-being with pre- and post-practice reflections as well as a focus group. College students suffer from stress. Stress deteriorates sleep. Sleep is essential for wellbeing and research supports that proper sleep cycles influence learning and cognition (Phan et al., 2019). Relaxation is a remedy to stress. If students learn to relax, could they improve their overall well-being? College students could benefit from strategies that are affordable. In addition, while college students are still in a heightened state of transformation, they could more easily be empowered to take proactive measures for their overall health and well-being. First, the lived experience of college students who engage in relaxation techniques must be understood.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Many college students experience stress since there is significant uncertainty of the future due the aftermath of a global pandemic, world conflict, racial discrimination, the cost of living, and climate change (*Stress in America™ 2023: A Nation Recovering from Collective Trauma*, 2023). As mentioned throughout the first three chapters, there are many stress reduction techniques that have been explored that benefit college students. However, research surrounding the well-being of college students who participate in a longitudinal, qualitative research study utilizing yoga nidra as an intervention has been underdeveloped. The purpose of this action research qualitative study was to explore if students could improve their well-being through a deep relaxation practice such as yoga nidra. In this study, to examine changes in well-being, participants were asked to report on their physical, mental, emotional, energetic, and spiritual lived experience throughout the 12-week yoga nidra intervention. In addition, an open-ended focus group took place after the yoga nidra interventions. Specifically, this study focused on the following research question:

RQ1: Do college students who participate in a regular yoga nidra practice over 12-weeks experience improvement in their well-being?

This qualitative question lends itself to subjective interpretation on behalf of the researcher as the instrument (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher led the yoga nidra sessions, examined the participants' reflections, and conducted the focus group. Action research in this case involved the researcher's role as the yoga nidra instructor researching her teaching practice and making changes from within. Action research gave participants an embodied, longitudinal practice of yoga nidra while enhancing the awareness of their well-being with pre- and post-practice written reflections and discussion during a focus group.

Researcher's Role

The researcher is a service professional who works full-time in higher education; the researcher is also, however, a professional yoga teacher who specializes in yoga nidra. This present study helped the researcher understand the influence yoga nidra has on the lives of college students. The researcher chose to lead the yoga nidra sessions as she is trained in this area. Since January, 2020 the researcher has maintained a personal daily yoga nidra practice. For the researcher, this experience has provided her with many benefits such as improved stress management, amplified self-confidence, strengthened intuition, and improved memory retention. As a busy person, yoga nidra has created stability for the researcher and helped her to regulate her own homeostasis. The researcher uses her own yoga nidra practice as a way to set the tone of the day, which includes a form of self-care (i.e., relaxation and intention). Prior to conducting this study, the researcher was only aware of her own lived experience of yoga nidra through the lens of a middle-aged woman with a deep understanding of the role the koshas play throughout the stages of yoga nidra. The researcher believed her experience would likely be more advanced than a traditional college student who was likely to have a novice background in yoga.

It was not feasible to have another yoga nidra teacher conduct the interventions since there were no other known trained teachers in the geographic area. The researcher's axiological tactic was to remain objective with the process of bracketing during this venture (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The lens the researcher used was one of inquisitiveness with the resolve of understanding the lived experience of college students who engaged in a regular yoga nidra practice. The researcher refrained from reading through any of the participants' reflections until the data collection ended to avoid inadvertently influencing the outcome.

Yoga nidra on the surface may seem like a person simply reading a script. However, the methodology involves timing, tempo, tone, the ability to hold space for silence, and most importantly an embodied experience. Without the yoga nidra instructor having these skills, the practices may not have been as effective or landed in a way that resonated with the participants.

Participant Demographics

This present study included college students from a mid-sized public university located in the upper Midwest. The researcher visited student organization meetings, faculty meetings, and college classes to explain the study and encourage participation. The researcher sent recruitment e-mails to the campus listserv and posted flyers on the campus bulletin boards. The researcher e-mailed interested participants the informed consent and requested schedules. Informed consent was signed by 14 students who were added to the online learning platform to access all of the resources for the study including the links to the pre- and post-reflections, links to the Zoom recordings, announcements, and supporting documents. Twelve students participated in the study ranging from three sessions to the full duration of the study. Five participants completed at least 21 of the 24 practices. Three students participated in the focus group. After the intervention was completed, the researcher sent a demographics survey for all participants to complete. Seven participants completed the survey. Of the participants who completed the demographic survey, 85.7% identified as women and 14.3% as non-binary. The students' ages ranged from 18-35 years. All the participants identified as White. All of the participants were undergraduate students. One participant was married, 14.3% and the rest of the participants were single/never married, 85.7%. One participant, 14.3% was employed part time and the other participants, 85.7% were students not employed (see Table 3).

Table 3*Participant Demographics*

What is your gender?	n	%
Man	0	0
Woman	6	85.7
Non-Binary / Third Gender	1	14.3
Prefer not to say	0	0
Age During Fall 2023	n	%
18	2	28.5
19	2	28.5
20	2	28.5
35	1	14.3
Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?	n	%
yes	0	0
no	7	100
How Would you Describe Yourself?	n	%
White	7	100
Black or African American	0	0
American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0
Asian	0	0
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0	0
Other	0	0
Year in College Fall 2023	n	%
First-year	3	42.8
Second-Year	1	14.3
Third-Year	2	28.5
Fourth-Year	1	14.3
Fifth-Year	0	0
Graduate Student	0	0
What was your marital status in the fall of 2023?	n	%
Single (never married)	6	85.7
Married, or in a domestic partnership	1	14.3
Widowed	0	0
Divorced	0	0
Separated	0	0
What was your employment status in the fall of 2023?	n	%
Employed full time (40 or more hours per week)	0	0
Employed part time (up to 39 hours per week)	1	14.3
Unemployed and currently looking for work	0	0
Unemployed not currently looking for work	0	0
Student	6	85.7

Research Methodology

Pre- and Post-Reflections

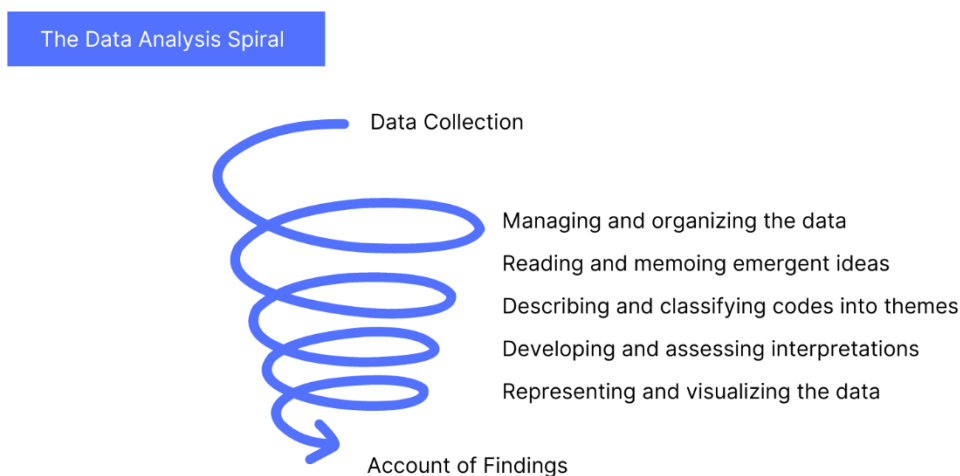
The pre- and post-reflections were collected through Qualtrics. The researcher printed all of the data, which began with the deductive codes of physical, mental, emotional, energetic, and spiritual states. The researcher looked for *in vivo* codes that were exact words used by the students from their lived experience for each deductive code (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The participants provided brief statements for each deductive code and therefore capturing the codes was straightforward. The researcher made notes in the margins of the printouts of the data and tallied the frequency of any repetitive codes. The researcher then placed all the codes in an Excel spreadsheet and calculated the frequency of a code for each yoga nidra session and totaled the overall usage of those *in vivo* codes. To ensure accuracy, the researcher counted the codes marked in the margins of the paper and made sure there was a numeric match in the Excel spreadsheet.

The researcher then sorted the data from the largest to smallest usage of the *in vivo* codes. Those *in vivo* codes were placed into emerging themes. For example, the word *relaxed* was used with the highest frequency. However, other words such as “soft,” and “relieved” were words that conveyed a similar or same meaning, which were grouped into *relaxed* as a theme. In other cases, there were limited repetition of phrases, but again conveyed a similar or same meaning. For example, “tired,” “defeated,” “heavy,” “sluggish” were grouped as an overarching theme of *fatigue*. However, “fatigue” was only used once as a code in a particular data set. Almost all the codes were straightforward enough to be grouped together amongst overarching themes. Only on a few rare occasions did the researcher need to find the best fit for a theme for a code that was not a perfect match. The data were then depicted in tables for presentation. Ultimately, the

analytic strategy involved organized *in vivo* codes placed in an Excel spreadsheet, which was reduced to themes, and presented in tables (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data analysis spiral was used from the start of data collection to the finish with findings presented (see Figure 2). In the process, the researcher relied heavily on her intuition to interpret the data and connect patterns to extract emerging themes (Patton, 2015).

Figure 2

The Data Analysis Spiral



Note. From: *Qualitative inquiry & research design* (p.186) by Creswell, J.W., & Poth, C. N., 2018, Copyright 2018 by California: Sage Publications.

Focus Group

The data analysis spiral was the strategy used to prepare and organize the focus group data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The focus group was recorded through Zoom and then transcribed by hand by the researcher. Once the data were typed out and printed, the researcher created memos in the margins for each question and then placed the *in vivo* codes in an Excel spreadsheet. The frequency of the codes was tallied. Codes were matched to overarching themes interpreted by the researcher. Finally, the data were placed in a table for presentation.

Findings

Pre- and Post-Reflections

Twelve students participated in the yoga nidra sessions during the semester and all survey data were collected using Qualtrics. Each student was assigned a research number by drawing a number out of a hat and therefore their responses were anonymous. Participants three and eight completed the fewest yoga nidra session with a total of two each. Participants five, seven, and 12 completed all 24 sessions based on what was recorded in Qualtrics. The participant numbers six, 11, and 14 were not drawn and therefore, not applicable.

On the survey, the question regarding the participant's research number was not required, which may have caused a slight discrepancy in the reported participation (i.e., the number of pre-practice survey responses did not match the number for the post-practice survey responses). Since the responses from the reflections were anonymous the researcher was unable to link the statements represented in the findings to specific individuals. Overall, data consisted of 160 pre-practice reflections and 154-post practice reflections from the 12 students for the duration of the yoga nidra interventions. Table 3 shows the frequency of participation in reflections completed by each participant. Participant 15 completed 26 pre- and post-practice reflections even though there were only 24 sessions total. Likely, the participant repeated two recorded practices by mistake. The pre-reflection completion frequency was slightly different. However, after the study was completed, the researcher realized the research number question was not required. Therefore, some responses may not have been captured (see Table 4).

Table 4*Reflections Completed*

Participant Number	Pre-Practice Reflections	Post-Practice Reflections
1	6	6
2	3	3
3	2	2
4	13	13
5	24	23
6	NA	NA
7	24	24
8	2	2
9	6	6
10	23	21
11	NA	NA
12	24	21
13	7	7
14	NA	NA
15	26	26
Total	160	154

During the pre- and post-practice reflections, students were asked if they participated in-person and live or off-site and recorded. Pre-practice data were collected 159 times indicating that 80 responses were generated from in-person and live participation and 79 responses from off-site and recorded participation. Likely, a participant skipped this question since there are only 159 responses compared to the 160 responses from the question regarding the participant's number. The post-practice data collected totaled 158 responses, with 79 responses from in-person, live participation, and 79 responses from off-site, recorded participation. Possibly, a student did not complete the post-practice reflection for one practice or skipped the question.

Table 5*In-Person Live or Recorded Participation*

Participation	Pre-Practice	Post-Practice
In-person & live	80	79
Off-site & recorded	79	79
Total	159	158

During the pre-practice reflections, students were asked to describe their physical state prior to doing the practice. The highest number of codes for all the pre-practice deductive codes: physical, mental, emotional, energetic, and spiritual was reported for the physical state totaling 657 codes, which developed into 11 themes. Out of the total number of codes the highest frequency indicated students were experiencing a significant amount of dis-ease with 234 codes out of 657 total which was about 35%. The theme *dis-ease* spawned from *in vivo* codes from the student's exact word choices such as "tension," "weakness," "nervousness," "shaky," "tight," "soreness," "stiff," and "stress." The *relaxed/calm* theme was least represented during the pre-practice reflections with 11 codes out of 657 total which was less than two percent. The *relaxed/calm* theme spawned from the following *in vivo* codes: "relaxed," "soft," and "relieved" (see Tables 6 and 7).

Table 6*Pre-Practice Physical State*

Themes	Frequency of codes
Dis-ease	234
Upper body tension	74
Tension in the torso	64
Awareness of lower body	62
Fatigued	53
Open/Expansive	45
Unpleasant surface sensations	41
Awareness of arms	34
Awareness of whole body	29
Balanced	10
Relaxed/Calm	11
Total	657

Table 7*Description of Themes for Pre-Practice Physical State*

Themes	Codes	Evidence
Theme 1: Dis-ease	Tension Weakness Nervousness Shaky Tight Soreness Stiff Stress	I feel tense and compressed. Neck tension, slight tension headache. Pressure in my nasal passages, soreness in my knees, and cramping in my lower abdomen. I feel slightly shaky and a bit warm. Weakness in my limbs and tightness in my joints. I'm tense and stiff. The only exception [feeling loose and relaxed] would be the sensation in my mid/lower back from nervousness/stress.
Theme 2: Upper body tension	Shoulder Neck Head Upper back	I feel most tense in my shoulders, particularly around the shoulder blades. I feel a sense of tension and weight in my shoulders and neck. I also have a bit of a headache. I feel physically tense in the upper back area.
Theme 3: Tension in the torso	Back Spine Chest	I have a backache and other body aches and soreness I am currently suffering from physically. Very tense in my back and spine. Physically my chest is tight and warm.
Theme 4: Awareness of lower body	Legs Knees Feet	My legs (especially thighs) feel a little weak. Feeling some weakness in my knees and ankles today. My arms and feet feel free of tension.
Theme 5: Fatigued	Tired Deflated Heavy Sluggish	Physically, I feel tired and deflated or like I am running on E. Currently, my physical state is fatigued and heavy. I also feel a bit sluggish.
Theme 6: Open/Expansive	Lightness Freedom Expansive	More lightness on my shoulders. I feel relative freedom in my body today. My physical state is expansive and light.
Theme 7: Unpleasant surface sensations	Dry Itchy Prickly	My skin feels a bit dry. Skin is slightly itchy and uncomfortable. Today, I feel cold and a bit prickly under my skin.
Theme 8: Awareness of arms	Arms Elbows Hands	Tension in arms, especially left side. My right elbow is a bit achy. My hands and fingers also feel a bit stiff.
Theme 9: Awareness of whole body	Body Joints	My body feels worn and heavy. Physically, there is tension in my joints and muscles that is achy and dull. My body feels a bit on edge (there's a bit of a pit in my stomach).
Theme 10: Balanced	Good Comfortable In-tune	Pretty good, not stressed or relaxed, just ready. Overall am comfortable. I am more in-tune with my senses than usual today, and I feel comfortable in my body.
Theme 11: Relaxed/Calm	Relaxed Soft Relieved	Currently, my body in general feels loose and relaxed. My physical state is soft and warm, loose and relaxed. I am feeling relieved.

During the pre-practice reflections, students were asked to describe their mental state prior to doing the practice. Participants reported data that generated 369 codes that described their pre-practice mental state. Out of this total the highest frequency indicated students were experiencing a scattered state with 60 codes out of 369 total which was about 16%. The *fatigue* theme was least represented with 20 codes out of 369 total which was a little more than five percent. A majority of the codes, 70% pointed to themes of a negative mental state including *scattered, restless, distracted, unfocused, stressed, overwhelmed, and fatigued*. Fewer codes, 30% pointed to themes of a more positive mental state including *focused* and *relaxed/calm* (see Table 8 and 9).

Table 8

Pre-Practice Mental State

Themes	Frequency of codes
Scattered	60
Focused	58
Restless	55
Relaxed/Calm	52
Distracted	40
Unfocused	34
Stressed	28
Overwhelmed	22
Fatigued	20
Total	369

Table 9*Description of Themes for Pre-Practice Mental State*

Themes	Codes	Evidence
Theme 1: Scattered	All over Easy to distract Disjointed Swirling	My mental state is all over the place. Thoughts have been all over the place, and I've been very easy to distract. I feel a bit disjointed today. My mental state and thoughts keep swirling all around.
Theme 2: Focused	Focused One pointed Determined	I am feeling focused. I am feeling very one pointed. Focused and determined on multiple different aspects.
Theme 3: Restless	Restless Expansion...possible Yearning	I also feel quite restless. Expansion of mind possible. Yearning for expansion of body and senses.
Theme 4: Relaxed/Calm	Calm Collected Organized In-tune	Feeling surprisingly calm and collected. I feel calm and organized. Put together. In-tune with thoughts.
Theme 5: Distracted	Disturbed Mentally blocked Spacy Hard to reach	I also feel like I could very easily be disturbed. Mentally blocked from thinking clear. My mental state is spacy, hard to focus, but not scattered. Thoughts hard to reach.
Theme 6: Unfocused	Difficult staying on task Lack direction Hard to focus Trouble focusing	Difficult staying on task. Lack direction. Hard to focus. Trouble focusing.
Theme 7: Stressed	Crying Unwell	Verge of crying. Physically unwell. A lot on my mind.
Theme 8: Anxious	Anxiety Irritated Annoyed	I am overwhelmed with anxiety. Irritated, annoyed. I am anxious, although it is calming down a bit. Mild anxiety.
Theme 9: Overwhelmed	Stuck Worried	Stuck. Worried. Mind full of thoughts.
Theme 10: Fatigued	Putsy Weighed down	Could use a pick-me up. More putsy than usual. Weighed down.

During the pre-practice reflections, students were asked to describe their emotional state prior to doing the practice. Participants reported data that generated 339 codes that described their pre-practice emotional state. Out of this total the highest frequency indicated students were *anxious* or *stressed* with 55 codes for each out of 339 total. The *relaxed/calm* theme was least represented with 19 codes out of 339 total. The themes that pointed to a negative emotional state included: *anxious*, *stressed*, *overwhelmed*, *sad*, and *fatigued* represented 59% of the total codes. The themes that pointed to a more positive emotional state included *excited*, *happy*, and *relaxed* which represented 24% of the codes. The themes that pointed to a more neutral emotional state included *lacking strong emotion* and *content* which represented 17% of the codes (see Table 10 and 11).

Table 10

Pre-Practice Emotional State

Themes	Frequency of codes
Anxious	55
Stressed	55
Overwhelmed	46
Excitement	34
Lacking strong emotion	32
Happy	29
Content	24
Sad	21
Fatigued	21
Relaxed/Calm	19
Total	336

Table 11*Description of Themes for Pre-Practice Emotional State*

Themes	Codes	Evidence
Theme 1: Anxious	Anxious Nerves	Anxious to imagine being relaxed at times that are not designated. Low anxiety. Nerves racked.
Theme 2: Stressed	Stress Crying Intense	I am experiencing a blend of stress and determination, driven by urgency of academic deadlines. I also feel like if anything were to go wrong, even slightly, I will start crying. I am feeling intense about everything right now.
Theme 3: Overwhelmed	Highly emotional Strong emotions Overwhelmed	Highly emotional, but only inside. Strong sense of emotions. I am in a very stuck mood. Emotionally overwhelmed by my current events, reoccurring events.
Theme 4: Excitement	Excited Feels wonderful Get things done	I am going home for the weekend and I'm excited. Sun shining feels wonderful. I have things I need to do and I'm going to get them done.
Theme 5: Lacking strong emotion	Impartial Numb No emotion	Impartial. Numb, no specific feeling. No emotion.
Theme 6: Happy	Love Positive mood Strength and power	Might be in love. Positive mood. Sense strength and power.
Theme 7: Content	Level Steady Open	Level headed. Steady Presence. Open to many feelings.
Theme 8: Sad	Down Bummed	A bit down. Bummed out. Lack of belonging.
Theme 9: Fatigued	Drained Depleted Worn	Emotionally drained. Depleted. Worn, but still active.
Theme 10: Relaxed/Calm	Relaxed Accomplished Weight lifted	Relaxed, the emotions are subtle, but persistent. Feeling accomplished above all else. Weight lifted off shoulders mentally.

During the pre-practice reflections, students were asked to describe their energetic state prior to doing the practice. Participants reported data that generated 320 codes that described

their pre-practice energetic state. Out of the total number of codes the highest frequency indicated students were feeling *energetic/overstimulated* with 52 codes out of 320 total which was about 16%. The theme *energetic/overstimulated* spawned from *in vivo* codes from the student's exact word choices such as "energized," "unhinged," and "hyper." The *unchanging* theme was least represented with 10 codes out of 320 total which was around three percent. The *unchanging* theme spawned from the following *in vivo* codes: "meh" and "unchanging" (see Tables 12 and 13).

Table 12

Pre-Practice Energetic State

Themes	Frequency of codes
Energetic/Overstimulated	52
Fatigued	46
Low energy	44
Motivated	40
Stuck	40
Content	39
Restless	26
Relaxed/Calm	23
Unchanging	10
Total	320

Table 13*Description of Themes for Pre-Practice Energetic State*

Themes	Codes	Evidence
Theme 1: Energetic/Overstimulated	Energized Unhinged Hyper	Energized, hard time sitting still. Somewhat unhinged. Almost hyper.
Theme 2: Fatigued	Lethargic Worn	Lethargic. Worn out. Yearn to close eyes and rest.
Theme 3: Low energy	Not enough energy Lack physical energy Not enough	Can move around, but not enough energy to interact with people. Lack physical energy, but have mental energy. Not depleted, not enough to keep motivated throughout day.
Theme 4: Motivated	Focused on Effort Hardworking Motivation Possibilities	Focused on effort. Hardworking. Motivation is strong. Possibilities to be expansive.
Theme 5: Stuck	Blocked Unable to act Lack direction	Energy trying to break free, but it is blocked. Unable to act on motivation. Lack direction.
Theme 6: Content	Balanced Controlled Even	Balanced between physical and mental energy. Controlled energy. Even paced.
Theme 7: Restless	Lazy Want to be moving Unproductive energy	Hovering between just lazy and do nothing and I want to go run. Want to be moving. Energy wise, I feel energized, but in a non-positive way; like unproductive energy.
Theme 8: Calm/Relaxed	Calm Rested Peaceful	I'm calm and content. Well rested. Since it's night, I am feeling calm and peaceful.
Theme 9: Unchanging	Unchanging Meh	Pattern of unchanging existence. Meh, blah.

During the pre-practice reflections, students were asked to describe their spiritual state prior to doing the practice. Participants reported data that generated 221 codes that described their pre-practice spiritual state. The spiritual state generated the fewest number of codes out of the five deductive codes: physical, mental, emotional, energetic, and spiritual. The responses pertaining to the spiritual state totaling 221 were significantly lower than the physical state,

which were presented earlier in this chapter totaling 657 codes. Out of the total number of pre-practice spiritual codes the highest frequency indicated students were *lacking/disconnected* with 90 codes out of 221 total, which was about 41%. The theme *lacking/disconnected* spawned from *in vivo* codes from the student's exact word choices such as "spiritually sleeping," "not noticing," and "confusion." The *desire for spiritual connection* theme was least represented with 18 codes out of 221 total which was around eight percent. The *desire for spiritual connection* theme spawned from the following *in vivo* codes: "ready" and "explorative" (see Tables 14 and 15).

Table 14

Pre-Practice Spiritual State

Themes	Frequency of codes
Lacking/Disconnected	90
Hovering/Distant	37
Connected to something greater than myself	26
Aware/Connected to self	25
Spiritually connected	25
Desire for spiritual connection	18
Total	221

Table 15*Description of Themes for Pre-Practice Spiritual State*

Themes	Codes	Evidence
Theme 1: Lacking/Disconnected	Spiritually sleeping Not noticing Confusion	Spiritually sleeping. Not noticing or aware too much. Confusion.
Theme 2: Hovering/Distant	Further away Too thin I don't think it's my own spiritual stuff	Aware, but spiritual presence is further away. Spiritual state too thin to focus and attain. Aware of something watching, but I don't think it's my own spiritual stuff.
Theme 3: Connected to something greater than myself	Grounded Nature's cycles More connected	Grounded on earth and in reality. Rain reminder of the beauty of nature's cycles. Breath helps me feel more connected to the world.
Theme 4: Aware/Connected to self	Self-aware, but not spiritual Self-aware My well-being Introspection	Self-aware, but not spiritual like I should be. Self-aware of my mind. Connected to my well-being. In a state of introspection.
Theme 5: Spiritually connected	Spiritual senses In tune	Content with spiritual senses. Spiritually things are happening as they should. I feel in tune.
Theme 6: Desire for spiritual connection	Ready Explorative	Ready to be awakened. Spiritually need to awaken with conscious effort not difficult. Explorative, but lacking direction.

During the post-practice reflections, students were asked if they were able to remain awake for the duration of the practice. Overall, data were collected 158 times indicating that 100 responses, 63.3% were generated from participants who were able to remain completely awake. Forty-four responses, 27.85% indicated participants were mostly able to remain awake. Fourteen responses, less than nine percent, indicated that participants were barely able to remain awake. Nobody indicated that they were unable to remain awake at all (see Table 16).

Table 16*Post-Practice Ability to Remain Awake Throughout the Practices*

Remained Awake	Frequency
Completely	100
Mostly	44
Barely	14
Not at all	0
Total	158

During the post-practice reflections, students were asked to describe their physical state after doing the practice. The highest number of codes for all the post-practice deductive codes (physical, mental, emotional, energetic, and spiritual) was reported for the physical state totaling 323 codes, which developed into 11 themes. Out of the total number of codes the highest frequency indicated students were experiencing a significant decrease in tension with 68 codes out of 323 total which was about 21%. The theme *less tense* spawned from *in vivo* codes from the student's exact word choices such as "looser," "released," and "rest from tension." The *no impact physically* theme was least represented with six codes out of 323 total which was less than two percent. The *no impact physically* theme spawned from the following phrases, "not altered" and "unphased" (see Tables 17 and 18).

Table 17*Post-Practice Physical State*

Themes	Frequency of Codes
Less Tense	68
More body awareness	54
Relaxed/Calm	42
Open/Expansive/Stretched	39
Stronger/More stable	29
More control of body movement	24
Lighter	18
Still dis-ease	18
Invigorated	16
Breathing improved	9
No impact physically	6
Total	323

Table 18*Description of Themes for Post-Practice Physical State*

Themes	Codes	Evidence
Theme 1: Less Tense	Looser Released Rest from tension	Neck and shoulders looser. Released negative emotions. Some rest from tension I was carrying.
Theme 2: More body awareness	Aware Influence on body Holding onto negative emotions	More aware of body and what it needs physically. More aware of my influence on my body. Could tell my body was holding onto negative emotions and they would jolt during the practice.
Theme 3: Relaxed/Calm	Relax Ground	Body scan helped sense and relax muscles. Feeling shoulders and spine ground felt very relaxing. Relaxation in most spots of tension.
Theme 4: Open/Expansive/Stretched	Stretch Flexible	Helped stretch muscles. More flexible. Body Stretched.
Theme 5: Stronger/More Stable	Balanced Confident Feel solid	More balanced. More confident in body's inherent strength. Feel solid in my own body.
Theme 6: More control of body movement	More controlled Move more Deliberatively Move more intentionally	More controlled in limbs and movement. Able to move more deliberately. Easier to move more intentionally.
Theme 7: Lighter	Less dense Lighter Airy	Less dense. Lighter in my movements and joints. Airy.
Theme 8: Still dis-ease	Still tight Discomfort	Comfort during practice, but still tight. Jaw still tight. Still some discomfort.
Theme 9: Invigorated	Feel better Geel great Like I took a shower	Feel better. Feel great. Kind of like I took a shower.
Theme 10: Breathing improved	Breath clearer Deeper Balanced	Breath clearer. Breath even/deeper. More balanced and in control of breath.
Theme 11: No impact physically	Not altered Unphased	Not altered. Unphased.

Description of Themes for Post-Practice Physical State

During the post-practice reflections, students were asked to describe their mental state after doing the practice. Participants reported data that generated 276 codes that described their post-practice mental state. Out of this total the highest frequency indicated students were experiencing a *relaxed/calm* state with 72 codes out of 276 total which was about 26%. The *no change* theme was least represented with four codes out of 276 total which was less than two percent. A majority of the codes, 85% pointed to a positive mental state reflected in the following themes *relaxed/calm*, *improved focus*, *mind clearer*, *more ease*, and *more positive*. Twelve percent of the codes pointed to insight that was gained (e.g., *thoughts are connected to senses*). Less than seven percent of codes made up the themes *still dis-ease* and *no change* (see Table 19 and 20).

Table 19

Post-Practice Mental State

Themes	Frequency of codes
Relaxed/Calm	72
Improved focus	60
Mind clearer	36
More ease	35
More positive	31
Thoughts are connected to senses	27
Still dis-ease	11
No change	4
Total	276

Table 20*Description of Themes for Post-Practice Mental State*

Themes	Codes	Evidence
Theme 1: Relaxed/Calm	Slowed down Content Soothed	Brain slowed down. Content. Mind feels soothed.
Theme 2: Improved focused	More control Grounded Present	More control over mind. More mentally grounded. Present.
Theme 3: Mind clearer	Big picture Less groggy Thoughts	See the big picture. Less groggy. Crisper thoughts.
Theme 4: More ease	Break Turn off Forget about worries	Break from 1 million thoughts. Could turn off extra brain feed. Forget about worries for a bit.
Theme 5: More positive	Better outcomes More positive Capable	I'm more likely to have better outcomes. Helped think of myself in more positive and objective light. More capable of sorting through thoughts and desires.
Theme 6: Thoughts are connected to senses	Intentions and thoughts Connection Thoughts and emotions	Clearer image in my mind of intentions and thoughts. More connection to thoughts, feelings, and actions. Stronger connection between thoughts and emotions.
Theme 7: Still dis-ease	Unfocused Drowsy	Still unfocused. Hard time catching thoughts. Drowsy.
Theme 8: No change	Unchanging	Stable and unchanging. Unchanging state.

During the post-practice reflections, students were asked to describe their energetic state after doing the practice. Participants reported data that generated 273 codes that described their post-practice energetic state. Out of this total the highest frequency indicated students were experiencing a *relaxed/calm* state with 73 codes out of 273 total. The least represented theme was *still dis-ease* with 10 codes out of 273 total. The themes that pointed to a positive emotional state included *relaxed/calm*, *positivity*, *improvement*, and *stronger/stable*, which represented

82% of the total codes. The themes that pointed to a more negative or no change included *no change* and *still dis-ease* which represented 10% of the codes. The theme that pointed to insight into the emotional state included *aware*, which represented less than 8% of the codes (see Table 21 and 22).

Table 21

Post-Practice Emotional State

Themes	Frequency of codes
Relaxed/Calm	73
Positivity	57
Improvement	55
Stronger/Stable	39
Aware	21
No change	18
Still dis-ease	10
Total	273

Table 22*Description of Themes for Post-Practice Emotional State*

Themes	Codes	Evidence
Theme 1: Relaxed/Calm	Able to think No longer restless Let go	Able to think without becoming emotionally overstimulated. No longer restless and unsettled. Let go of stress.
Theme 2: Positivity	Good mood Lifted Acceptance	Good mood will carry me through rest of day. Lifted my spirits. Open to love, acceptance.
Theme 3: Improvement	Easier More open Healthy	Easier to navigate. More open to dealing with stress. Handling uncomfortable things in a healthy way.
Theme 4: Stronger/Stable	Stabilized Regulate More control	Emotions stabilized. Helped me emotionally regulate. More control over feelings.
Theme 5: Aware	More aware Realize where my emotions are coming from Present	Still upset, but more aware of it, allowing it to pass through my body. Today's session helped me to settle into that feeling [of joy] and fully realize where my emotions are coming from and how they affect my senses and physical condition as well. Present, listening, subtle awareness.
Theme 6: No change	Flat mood A hint of emotion	Still kind of flat mood. I feel a hint of emotion, but can't place what it is.
Theme 7: Still dis-ease	Anxious Sad Emotionally exhausted	Still anxious. Sad and anxious. Emotionally exhausted.

During the post-practice reflections, students were asked to describe their energetic state after doing the practice. Participants reported data that generated 276 codes that described their post-practice energetic state. Out of the total number of codes the highest frequency indicated students were feeling *invigorated* with 56 codes out of 276 total which was about 20%. The theme *invigorated* spawned from *in vivo* codes from the student's exact word choices such as "motivation," "more energized," and "more charged." The *still dis-ease* theme was least represented with five codes out of 276 total which was less than two percent. The *still dis-ease*

theme spawned from the following *in vivo* codes “anxious” and “bringing down energy” (see Tables 23 and 24).

Table 23

Post-Practice Energetic State

Theme	Frequency of Codes
Invigorated	56
Relaxed/Calm	45
Balanced	37
Improvement	31
Fatigued	31
Focused	27
No change	27
Energetic/Overstimulated	17
Still dis-ease	5
Total	276

Table 24*Description of Themes for Post-Practice Energetic State*

Themes	Codes	Evidence
Theme 1: Invigorated	Motivation More energized More charged	Helped reinvigorate my motivation. I feel motivated and slightly more energized as well. More charged and energetic.
Theme 2: Relaxed/Calm	Mellowed Calmness	My energy has definitely mellowed out. I feel motivated, but in a subtle way, where a sense of calmness exists. This practice helped calm my energy.
Theme 3: Balanced	Reign in Settle down Refined	Helped me reign in excess energy. Helped me stop and settle down. Refined the nature of my energy.
Theme 4: Improvement	Soft energetic Neutral	Able to apply light soft energetic feeling. Practice helped convert anxious energy into more neutral calm energy. Feel like I got an extra 2 hours of sleep.
Theme 5: Fatigued	Might not last Sleepy Exhausted	Energy might not last. Almost sleepy. I am feeling exhausted and like I need a minute to regain my composure.
Theme 6: Focused	Purposeful Better sense Clearer sense	Purposeful direction of energy. Better sense how I use my energy. Clearer sense of how much energy I have and how I am using it.
Theme 7: No Change	Same Still Didn't give me the spark	About same. Still physically and emotionally. Didn't give me the spark I expected.
Theme 8: Energetic/Overstimulated	Good amount Caffeine Too much coffee	Good amount of mental/physical energy. Too much caffeine. Too much coffee.
Theme 9: Still dis-ease	Anxious Bringing down energy	Anxious, need time to do everything. A small weight is bringing down energy that hasn't completely disappeared. Could use a channel for motivation.

During the post-practice reflections, students were asked to describe their spiritual state after doing the practice. Participants reported data that generated 233 codes that described their post-practice spiritual state. Out of the total number of codes the highest frequency indicated

students were feeling *connected to world/universe/earth* with 33 codes out of 233 total which was about 14%. The theme *connected to world/universe/earth* spawned from *in vivo* codes from the student's exact word choices such as "more connected to earth," "connection between my body and the world," and "my place in the universe." The *lacking* theme was least represented with five codes out of 233 total which was less than two percent. The lacking theme spawned from the following *in vivo* codes "removed" and "not fully aware" (see Tables 25 and 26).

Table 25

Post-Practice Spiritual State

Themes	Frequency of Codes
Connected to World/Universe/Earth	44
Grounded	35
Aware	30
Connected to self	30
Closer/Less distant	22
Connected to spirit	21
Positivity	21
No change	16
Connected to other people	9
Lacking	5
Total	233

Table 26*Description of Themes for Post-Practice Spiritual State*

Themes	Codes	Evidence
Theme 1: Connect to World/Universe/Earth	More connected to earth Connection between my body and the world My place in the universe	More connected to earth through breathing and my actions. I feel connection between my body and the world around much more clearly than before the practice. Reflection to figure out my place in the universe and next steps.
Theme 2: Grounded	Ground Body Restabilize myself	Felt I could melt into the ground. More grounded in body. Reassess and restabilize myself overall.
Theme 3: Aware	Aware of higher self Something watching Insight	Aware of higher self-unable to grasp it. Aware of something watching over me. I have some insight now.
Theme 4: Connected to self	More in tun Reconnect to my true self Self-aware	More in tune with body and mind. Reconnect to my true self and desires. Self-aware out of my body and mind.
Theme 5: Closer/Less distant	Less distant Within an attainable reach More hopeful	Spiritual sense is less distant. Spiritual sense within an attainable reach. More hopeful that I have ideas to practice my spirituality.
Theme 6: Connected to spirit	Open understanding Connect to the most innate me Showing itself in protective ways	Awareness of mental, physical, spiritual connections. Open understanding between all 3 channels. Allowed me to connect to the most innate me that lives in my heart. Spiritual self-showing itself in protective ways.
Theme 7: Positivity	Can manifest positivity Loved Brighter	I can manifest positivity through my own positive actions. Supported and loved. My light is brighter.
Theme 8: No change	None Didn't last	None. During practice able to step out of myself briefly, but it didn't last.

Description of Themes for Post-Practice Spiritual State (continued)

Theme 9: Connected to other people	I can reach out Spirituality with others My culture believes	I can reach out to others as I need. I like that I have found a place to practice my spirituality with others. Spiritually, I feel this is what my culture believes also.
Theme 10: Lacking	Removed Not fully aware	I feel removed spiritually. I need to work on my spiritual reactions. Not fully aware.

During the post-practice reflections, students were asked to describe any other insights or discoveries that unfolded during or after the practice. Participants reported data that generated 157 codes that described their other discoveries. Out of the total number of codes the highest frequency indicated that students were feeling more aware of their physical body, developing 26 codes out of 157 total, which was about 16%. The theme for being *aware of the physical body* spawned from *in vivo* codes from the student's exact word choices such as "control," "tense," "awareness," and "body." *How students experienced turiya*, the state between waking and dreaming through deep relaxation was least represented with six codes out of 157 total, which was less than four percent. The *turiya* theme spawned from the following *in vivo* codes: "subtle drift," "conscious dreaming," and "lucid thoughts" (see Tables 27 and 28).

Table 27*Post-Practice Discoveries*

Themes	Frequency of codes
More aware of physical body	26
Breathing influences other states	22
Biggest challenge was focusing the mind	20
Students experienced transformation	20
Yoga nidra was a resource to access the subtle body	18
Yoga nidra was a spiritual practice	15
Yoga nidra helped students understand emotions	11
Students experienced pratyahara	10
Students accessed the vijnanamaya kosha (wisdom body)	9
How students experienced turiya (conscious dreaming)	6
Total	157

Table 28*Description of Themes for Post-Practice Discoveries*

Themes	Codes	Evidence
Theme 1: More aware of physical body	Control Tense Awareness Body	Felt more aware and in control of specific muscles and areas when relaxing. Unaware of tense shoulders until breathing. Insight awareness of my whole body felt quite significant. Felt more attentive to my body.
Theme 2: Breathing influences other states	Relax Emotion Focusing on my breath Clarity	During breathing able to relax my body and mind. I realized emotion in my breath I was unable to detect. Focusing on my breath helped thoughts float away. Breathing helped me gain clarity on my mental state and emotions.
Theme 3: Biggest challenge was focusing the mind	I need to focus more Struggled Distractable	I need to focus more on resting my mind and clearing thoughts during practice. I struggled not letting thoughts wander. It was challenging to focus; I was distractable.
Theme 4: Students experienced transformation	Secure Shift Growth	I am more secure in my anxiety and should stop beating myself up over it. Discovered ability to shift my mind consciously towards path of intention. This practice helped me realize all the growth I've done throughout the class.
Theme 5: Yoga nidra was a resource to access the subtle body	Resource Looking inward Mental	The body is a resource just like the mind. Sometimes looking inward is just as important as thinking logically. These practices are more mental than physical.
Theme 6: Yoga nidra was a spiritual practice	Meaningful spiritual change Strongest spiritual change Truest self	First time I truly had meaningful spiritual change happen. Strongest spiritual change of all the practices so far. Felt connected to my deepest, truest self.

Description of Themes for Post-Practice Discoveries (continued)

Theme 7: Yoga nidra helped students understand emotions	Emotions Draining Exploring	I unlocked neuropathway to emotions. Carrying stress, mistakes, hurt feelings is draining. I want to continue exploring my feelings and shame around love in the future.
Theme 8: Students experienced pratyahara	Quieted down Focus Draw mind back	Had a lot of thoughts, but they quieted down minutes into the practice. I was able to focus on the guidance today and I feel a lot better because of it. Repeating a mantra is a good way to draw mind back when attention is lost.
Theme 9: Students accessed the vijnanamaya kosha (wisdom body)	Feel solid Good ideas I see things more clearly	Today's practice helped me feel solid in my manifestation decision; it's the right path for me. I have good ideas I would like to jot down during the practice. I see things more clearly in my safe place. I better understood my sociology homework.
Theme 10: How students experienced turiya (conscious dreaming)	Subtle drift Dreaming Lucid thought state	Something about this unit makes me subtle drift off without being aware of it. Felt like dreaming while paying close attention to my breath. A lucid thought state, able to think without being tethered.

During the post-practice reflections, students were asked to describe any other noteworthy or unique aspects of the practice to reference another time. Participants reported data, which generated 95 codes that described their noteworthy reflections. Out of the total number of codes the highest frequency indicated students found *relaxing can be freeing* with 25 codes out of 95 total which was about 26%. The theme for *relaxing can be freeing* spawned from the student's exact word choices such as "get unstuck," "relaxing," "accessible," and "flow." *How students experienced pratyahara*, the withdrawal from external senses to internal awareness was least represented with five codes out of 95 total which was around five percent. The pratyahara

theme spawned from the following student word choices: “didn’t lose anything,” “repeating statement,” and “intentional about not letting my mind wander.” (see Tables 29 and 30).

Table 29

Post-Practice Noteworthy Reflections

Themes	Frequency of codes
Relaxing can be freeing	25
Yoga nidra supports transformation	16
Visualization and empowerment enjoyable	15
Challenge to focus	13
Deep breathing supports self-regulation	12
The practice effortlessly unfolds with relaxation	8
Students experienced pratyahara (internal awareness)	6
Total	95

Table 30*Description of Themes for Post-Practice Noteworthy Reflections*

Themes	Codes	Evidence
Theme 1: Relaxing can be freeing	Get unstuck Relaxing Accessible Flow	Sometimes moving around then sitting down is the way to get unstuck. By relaxing one thought you can use it to train another. Life force within is always accessible, it just takes awareness to feel it. It is easier not to force your mind, but to flow with it.
Theme 2: Yoga nidra supports transformation	I have changed I made great bounds Mind more accepting	This final practice helped me reflect on myself and how much I have changed. I made great bounds in awareness in myself, my abilities and in my empowerment statement. Hearing about love existing in past, present, future and beyond was easier to hear this time. Mind more accepting of timeless love existing.
Theme 3: Visualization and empowerment enjoyable	Safe place Circle thing Loved the empowerment	I liked the image of a safe place. I liked the circle thing [circle of protection]. Loved the empowerment specific language.
Theme 4: Challenge to focus	Struggle Bring my mind back Took me a bit	Struggling with mind wandering. I had to intentionally bring myself back. Took me a bit to get into it.
Theme 5: Deep breathing supports self-regulation	Breathing helps focus Grounding Tension in body relax	Breathing helps focus attention from thoughts towards presence. The deep breathing was very grounding. Could feel a lot of tension in my body relax as I exhaled.
Theme 6: The practice effortlessly unfolds with relaxation	Dreamlike feeling Floating Truly connecting	I noticed a dreamlike feeling throughout the practice. Felt like my body was floating, calm waves washing over me. Entering the cave of the heart, my chest got tighter truly connecting with my deepest self.
Theme 7: Students experienced pratyahara (internal awareness)	Didn't lose anything Repeating statement Intentional about not letting my mind wander	Didn't lose anything from the practice because of wandering mind. Repeating statement was able to draw awareness to it and drown out distractions. I was really intentional about not letting my mind wander.

Focus Group

During the focus group, students were asked to describe yoga nidra. The data were collected via Zoom and transcribed by hand. Data generated 14 codes to describe yoga nidra. Students found yoga nidra similar to meditation with six codes out of 14, which was about 43%. The *meditative quality* theme arose from *in vivo* codes such as “like meditation,” “mind focuses on relaxing,” and “focusing on an empowerment statement.” Yoga nidra as a *self-regulatory* practice emerged from three codes out of 14 which was 21%, which came from the following *in vivo* codes: “self-regulatory,” “thoughts and feelings,” and “patterns in how I am feeling” (see Tables 31 and 32).

Table 31

Focus Group Description of Yoga Nidra

Themes	Frequency of codes
Meditative quality	6
A shift from the external to the internal	5
Self-regulatory practice	3
Total	14

Table 32*Description of Themes for Focus Group Describing Yoga Nidra*

Themes	Codes	Evidence
Theme 1: Meditative quality	Like meditation Mind focuses on relaxing Focusing on an empowerment statement	Definitely like meditation especially with breathing techniques. (P3) Mind focuses on relaxing, which is almost like meditation. (P3) Focusing on an empowerment statement has a meditative quality too. (P2)
Theme 2: A shift from the external to the internal	Taking it into your mind No attention on outside distractions Train your mind	You are focusing on that empowerment statement and taking it into your mind. (P3) Without paying attention to outside distractions, worries, or stress. (P2) It will take a little bit to train your mind, but it's worth it, because it's very calming. (P1)
Theme 3: Self-regulatory practice	Self-regulatory Thoughts and feelings Patterns in how I am feeling	I'd also describe it as a self-regulatory practice, re-regulating thoughts and feelings. (P1) I got that, too [re-regulating]. (P2) Also, [I learned] more about how I'm feeling and noticing different patterns in how I am feeling. (P3)

During the focus group, students were asked to describe profound or beneficial aspects of yoga nidra. Participants reported data that generated 13 codes on the profound or beneficial aspects of yoga nidra. Out of the total number of codes the highest frequency indicated students saw yoga nidra as an opportunity for *relaxation* with eight codes out of 13 total which was about 61%. The theme *guided self-care* spawned from *in vivo* codes from the student's exact word choices such as "turn off," "guided," and "tell me what to do" represented with five codes out of 13 total which was around 38% (see Tables 33 and 34).

Table 33*Focus Group Profound or Beneficial Aspects of Yoga Nidra*

Themes	Frequency of codes
Relaxation	8
Guided self-care	5
Total	13

Table 34*Focus Group Description of Themes for Profound or Beneficial Aspects of Yoga Nidra*

Themes	Codes	Evidence
Theme 1: Relaxation	You don't hold as much stress Nice to relax Body relax	You don't hold as much stress in your points, able to perform tasks more easily afterwards. (P3) It's a nice way to relax. (P2) Literally, feeling my body relax. (P1)
Theme 2: Guided self-care	Turn off Guided Tell me what to do	It's a really good way to be able to actually start to turn off a little bit... and just focus on yourself. (P3) It's nice having time cut out and guided in a way. (P2) Having someone tell me what to do, it's been very, very profoundly helpful to relax like that. (P1)

During the focus group, students were asked to describe the most challenging aspects of yoga nidra. Participants reported data that generated seven codes on the most challenging aspects of yoga nidra. Students indicated they were challenged to focus during the practice which generated all seven codes out of seven total which was 100%. The theme for *challenge to focus* spawned from *in vivo* codes from the student's exact word choices such as "focusing on guidance," "thoughts would stray," and "letting thoughts come and let them go" (see Tables 35 and 36).

Table 35*Focus Group Most Challenging Aspects of Yoga Nidra*

Themes	Frequency of codes
Focusing	7
Total	7

Table 36*Focus Group Description of Themes for Challenging Aspects of Yoga Nidra*

Themes	Codes	Evidence
Theme 1: Focusing was most challenging	Focusing on guidance	Focusing on the guidance the first couple of weeks. (P2)
	Thoughts would stray	In the gaps of silence my thoughts would stray a lot in the beginning. (P3)
	Let the thoughts come and let them go	That was the hardest thing for me to teach myself to do, just ok focus in again, let the thoughts come and let them go. (P1)

During the focus group, students were asked to describe any insight to their well-being as a result of doing yoga nidra. Participants reported data that generated seven codes on how yoga nidra impacted their well-being. Students indicated they were more relaxed and calmer with all seven codes accounting for 100% of the total. The theme for *relaxed/calm* quality spawned from *in vivo* codes from the student's exact word choices such as "reduced stress," "mornings a lot calmer," and "improvement in sleep with less tension" (see Tables 37 and 38).

Table 37*Focus Group Insight to Well-Being*

Themes	Frequency of codes
Relaxation/Calm	7
Total	7

Table 38*Focus Group Description of Themes for Insight to Well-Being*

Themes	Codes	Evidence
Theme 1: Relaxation/Calm	Reduced stress Mornings a lot calmer Improvement in sleep with less tension	I noticed it helped my stress a lot, especially this semester has been a really, really crazy one. (P3) It has definitely made my mornings a lot calmer. (P1) I noticed an improvement in sleep with less tension in my neck. (P2)

During the focus group, students were asked to describe what they learned about themselves as a result of doing yoga nidra. Participants reported data that generated eight codes on what students learned about themselves by practicing yoga nidra. All the responses indicated that students were *more aware of dis-ease* with eight codes out of eight codes, totaling 100%. The theme for *more aware of dis-ease* spawned from *in vivo* codes from the student's exact word choices such as "where I hold tension," "I pay closer attention to my weaknesses," and "distractable" (see Tables 39 and 40).

Table 39*Focus Group Significant Things Participants Learned About Themselves*

Themes	Frequency of codes
More aware of dis-ease	8
Total	8

Table 40

Focus Group Description of Themes for Significant Things Participants Learned About Themselves

Themes	Codes	Evidence
Theme 1: More aware of dis-ease	Where I hold tension I pay closer attention to my weaknesses Distractable	I learned where I hold tension, when I am stressed and what I actually need to do to release some stress. (P3) I pay closer attention to my weaknesses and strengths that are linked with my joints, muscles, and flexibilities. (P2) That I am in fact very distractable when my mind is left in silence. (P1)

During the focus group, students were asked the likelihood of continuing yoga nidra. Participants reported data that generated eight codes out of eight total, which was 100% *likely to do some or all of the practice as needed*. This theme spawned from *in vivo* codes from the student's exact word choices such as "breathing," "different aspects," and "a few times a week" (see Tables 41 and 42).

Table 41

Focus Group Likelihood Continuing Practice

Themes	Frequency of codes
Likely to do some or all of the practice as needed	8
Total	8

Table 42*Focus Group Description of Themes for Likelihood Continuing Practice*

Themes	Codes	Evidence
Theme 1: Likely to do some or all of the practice as needed	Breathing Different aspects A few times a week	I really enjoy the breathing exercises. (P2) There are definitely different aspects of it that you can just do spontaneously throughout the day to really help. (P3) Probably a high chance of me doing it on my own, probably not every day, but at least a few times a week. (P1)

During the focus group, students were asked to offer anything else such as recommendations for the facilitator or other students for doing yoga nidra. Participants reported data that generated eight codes out of eight which was 100%, on thoughts or recommendations for yoga nidra, which pointed towards the theme, *how practices helped students*. This theme spawned from *in vivo* codes from the student's exact word choices such as "grounding techniques was helpful," "self-compassion can be really helpful," and "be gentle with myself" (see Tables 43 and 44).

Table 43*Focus Group Comments or Recommendations*

Themes	Frequency of codes
How practices helped students	8
Total	8

Table 44*Focus Group Description of Themes for Comments or Recommendations*

Themes	Codes	Evidence
Theme 1: How practices helped students	Grounding... helpful Self-compassion... helpful Be gentle with myself	The grounding techniques was helpful for someone who experiences a lot of stress or even a lot of anxieties or different distractions... just being aware that you can actually hold onto the earth. (P3) The self-compassion can be really helpful if you are struggling being kind to yourself. (P2) The self-compassion was really good, especially if you are harder on yourself than you are on other people and you just need a reminder like, I can be gentle with myself too. (P1)

Prominent Themes

Each question in the pre-practice reflections, the post-practice reflections, along with the focus group generated numerous themes based on the volume of codes that were generated from the qualitative analysis. Initially, 12 students began the study, but only five completed 21 or more of the 24-yoga nidra sessions offered. About half of the participation was completed live and in-person and the other half completed recordings off-site. There was no differentiation of the data for in-person or recorded participation since that was not the focus of this study. The section below offers a comparison of the most prominent themes drawn from the students' physical, mental, emotional, mental, and spiritual state pre- and post-practice reflections. In addition, the most prominent themes drawn from the discoveries, noteworthy aspects, and the focus group are presented.

Physical State

The data collected for the students' physical state pre-practice generated 657 codes creating six overarching themes. The most prominent theme pre-practice was *dis-ease* with students reporting "tension," "weakness," "nervousness," "shaky," "tight," "soreness," "stiff," and "stress." The data collected for the students' physical state post-practice generated 323 codes created 11 overarching themes. The most prominent theme was *less tense*. Students used words such as "less tense," "looser," "released," and "rest from tension."

Mental State

The data collected for the students' pre-practice mental state generated 369 codes and created seven overarching themes. The most prominent theme was *scattered* when students used words such as "all over," "easy to distract," "disjointed," and "swirling" to describe their mental state prior to the yoga nidra practice. A majority of the post-practice codes, 85% pointed to a positive mental state reflected in the following themes *relaxed/calm, improved focus, mind clearer, more ease, and more positive*.

Emotional State

The data collected for the students' pre-practice emotional state generated 336 codes creating 10 overarching themes. The most prominent pre-practice theme was *anxious* after students reported "anxious" and "nerves." The data collected for the students' post-practice emotional state generated 273 codes creating seven overarching themes. The most prominent theme was *relaxed/calm* with students using words such as "able to think," "no longer restless," and "let go" to describe their emotional state.

Energetic State

The data collected for the students' pre-practice energetic state generated 320 codes creating nine overarching themes. The most prominent theme was *energetic/overstimulated* when students reported their condition as “energized,” “unhinged,” and “hyper.” The data collected for the students' post-practice energetic state generated 276 codes creating nine overarching themes. The most prominent theme was *invigorated* with students reporting feeling “motivation,” “more energized,” and “more charged.”

Spiritual State

The data collected for the students' pre-practice spiritual state generated 221 codes creating six overarching themes. The most prominent theme was *lacking/disconnected* with students using words such as “spiritually sleeping,” “not noticing,” and “confusion” to describe their spiritual state. The data collected for the students' post-practice spiritual state generated 233 codes creating 10 overarching themes. The most prominent theme was *connected to world/universe/earth* when students used phrases such as “more connected to earth,” “connection between my body and the world,” and “my place in the universe” to describe their spiritual state.

Other Discoveries and Noteworthy Aspects

The data collected for the students' other discoveries generated 157 codes creating 10 overarching themes. The most prominent theme was connected to *more aware of the physical body* with students using words such as “control,” “tense,” “awareness,” and “body” to describe their experience. The data collected for the students' noteworthy description generated 95 codes creating seven overarching themes. The most prominent theme was *relaxing can be freeing* with students who used words such as “get unstuck,” “relaxing,” “accessible,” and “flow” to describe their experience.

Describe Yoga Nidra

The data collected during the focus group for the students' description of yoga nidra generated 13 codes creating three overarching themes. The most prominent theme was *yoga nidra is a lot like meditation* when students chose words such as "like meditation," "mind focusing on relaxing," and "focusing on an empowerment statement" to describe yoga nidra.

Beneficial Aspects of Yoga Nidra

The data collected during the focus group that pertained to the beneficial aspects of yoga nidra generated 13 codes and created two overarching themes. The most prominent theme was *relaxation* with students using words such as "you don't hold as much stress," "nice to relax," and "body relax" to describe their experience.

Challenging Aspects of Yoga Nidra

The data collected during the focus group that pertained to the beneficial aspects of yoga nidra generated seven codes which created one overarching theme, *focusing*. The students described having difficulty focusing and used phrases such as "focusing on guidance," "thoughts would stray," and "letting thoughts come and let them go."

Insight to Well-being

The data collected during the focus group that pertained to insight on the students' well-being generated seven codes and one overarching theme. The only theme was *relaxation/calm* when students used words such as "reduced stress," "mornings a lot calmer," and "improvement in sleep with less tension" to describe their experience.

Learning About Self

The data collected during the focus group that pertained to insight on what the students learned about themselves generated eight codes and one overarching theme. The theme *more*

aware of dis-ease spawned from *in vivo* codes such as “where I hold tension,” “I pay closer attention to my weaknesses,” and “distractable” to describe what students learned from the experience.

Likelihood of Continuing

The data collected during the focus group pertaining to whether the students would continue doing the yoga nidra practices generated eight codes and one overarching theme, *likely to do some or all of the practice as needed*. Students used phrases such as “breathing,” “different aspects,” and “a few times a week” which indicated how they see themselves using the practice in the future.

Participant Comments or Recommendations

The data collected during the focus group that pertained to comments or recommendations generated eight codes and one overarching theme. The theme *how practices helped students* arose with phrases used such as “grounding techniques was helpful,” “self-compassion can be really helpful,” and “be gentle with myself.”

Synthesis

Prior to practice students indicated discomfort in their body through tension and stress. They reported feeling scattered and disjointed mentally. Emotionally, the students reported feeling anxious and nervous. Energetically, students prior to practice were overstimulated and spiritually disconnected. After practice, students reported decreased tension, feeling calmer and more relaxed. Emotionally, students felt more calm, content, and peaceful. Energetically, there was a shift from overstimulation to more of a channeled energy towards invigoration and motivation. Spiritually, students felt more connected to the earth/world/universe as a result of

doing the yoga nidra practices. Other discoveries included having more physical awareness and the practices were helpful in creating a relaxed and calm state, which was freeing.

From the focus group, students reported yoga nidra was similar to meditation with the inward mental focus. Students appreciated the time to engage in guided self-care, where they could just show up and relax. The most challenging aspect of the practice was learning how to focus and keep the mind from wandering. After time, focusing became easier. As a result, students became more capable of creating a relaxed and calm state in their daily lives. Students gained the ability to recognize dis-ease within their bodies and mind. The students reported a high likelihood of continuing to utilize parts of the practice such as the breathing, joints and glands exercises, or completing a full yoga nidra practice as needed. Lastly, the students felt that the self-compassion and grounding practices were helpful and supportive.

Validity

As an interpretive qualitative researcher, the researcher utilized self-reflection to contribute to the validation of the work to ensure personal interjections only occurred when the researcher as the instrument developed the overarching themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By utilizing frequency of *in vivo* codes, the researcher was able to ensure that all data were captured in the findings. This also reduced the possibility of confirmation bias by the researcher. The focus group ultimately corroborated the interpretation of the findings from the pre- and post-reflection surveys. In addition, member checking took place to confirm trustworthiness of the findings presented in chapter four. Therefore, triangulation with pre- and post-survey responses, the focus group, and member checking was used as the method used to create reliable results.

Conclusion

Data were collected from August through November 2023 with 24-yoga nidra sessions offered as the intervention. Students were able to participate live and in-person or recorded and off-site. There were 12 participants initially, half of whom completed the study in-person and half who completed the study off-site. The students wrote one to two sentences that described their experience pre- and post-practice, which generated *in vivo* codes. The codes were consolidated to create overarching themes. Students reported on their physical, mental, emotional, energetic, and spiritual states. At the end of the intervention, students participated in a focus group and reported insights, benefits, challenges, and recommendations pertaining to yoga nidra. Validation of data were corroborated through triangulation.

Students expressed new understanding of their physical body as well as other shifts that took place mentally, emotionally, energetically, and spiritually. The students were inclined to use parts of the practice, such as breathing or joints and glands exercises or a complete practice spontaneously when needed. Interpretation of the spectrum of results will be shared and discussed in chapter five.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This dissertation was a qualitative process focused on discovering the changes of well-being of college students from the Midwest who participated in a 12-week yoga nidra intervention. The researcher has gained an understanding of how college students experience yoga nidra practices and how it affects their physical, mental, emotional, energetic, and spiritual states. Although the results derived from this study were generated from the lens of college students, many of the discoveries are relevant for any novice yoga nidra practitioner. The insight gathered is helpful for offering future yoga nidra classes in a collegiate environment as well as in community yoga studios. Furthermore, when the researcher becomes a yoga teacher trainer, she will offer sound advice to other teachers in support of their respective students.

Through 12-weeks of qualitative action research with 24-yoga nidra interventions with pre- and post-practice reflections and an open-ended focus group the following research question was addressed:

RQ1: Do college students who participate in a regular yoga nidra practice over 12-weeks experience improvement in their well-being?

The pre- and post-practice reflections were collected through Qualtrics. The focus group was held in-person and recorded via Zoom, then transcribed by hand. Although Zoom automatically transcribed the session some phrases were omitted or inaccurate if a participant spoke softly. The session was about 30-minutes long and the transcription totaled 12-pages of content. The inductive *in vivo* coding emerged from the data collected. All data were arranged to identify distinct patterns and themes. The data analysis spiral was used in conjunction with subjective interpretation on behalf of the researcher as the instrument (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Triangulation was used with the surveys, focus group, and member checking to corroborate validity of the findings.

Interpretation of Findings

The themes that emerged from the students' reflections about discoveries regarding the yoga nidra are not particularly surprising from a yoga nidra teacher's perspective. However, from a research perspective, the themes that arose were missing from the current literature. As mentioned previously, many of the studies conducted up to this point were implemented with quantitative methods. The themes that emerged from this qualitative study not only corroborated past studies on the benefits of yoga nidra (Deckro et al., 2002; Smith et al., 2007), but also explain *how* yoga nidra was beneficial.

Physical State

The participants shared more about the awareness of the physical body than any of the other aspects that were studied: mental, emotional, energetic, and spiritual. Referring to the koshas, the annamaya kosha or the physical sheath is the most gross, meaning the most tangible or accessible to experience. To move into the other koshas often one must move beyond the physical layer. Initially, the researcher was planning to include only a breathing technique and the yoga nidra practice in order to fit each intervention into a 50-minute time block. The yoga nidra essentials session was the first offered and shorter than the other practices.

Just before the action research began, the researcher decided to include some joints and glands exercises and/or yoga postures at the start of the classes. It turns out, this was a good decision. In many of the comments from the students indicated they felt more open and expansive after doing the practices. Some of the exercises helped release tension in the body as indicated by the most prominent theme in the post-practice physical state data (see Figures 3 and

4). The mindful movement prepared participants for more of the subtle body practices such as breathing and specific aspects of the yoga nidra practices, which further enhanced their ability to receive the information from the body. In addition, the students reported feeling more relaxed/calm and lighter which was likely a product of having adequate time while consciously in the parasympathetic state (Caldwell et al., 2010; Eastman et al., 2013). There were some instances where students reported no change or still dis-ease after completing the practice. Some students may have been facing more chronic issues or perhaps did not get the full benefit of the practice if they were in a space that was not completely free of distractions. Moving forward, the researcher recommends that all yoga nidra practices begin with a physical practice of joints and glands exercises, or yoga postures to help the practitioners transition from external stimulus to internal awareness.

Figure 3

Pre-Practice Physical State

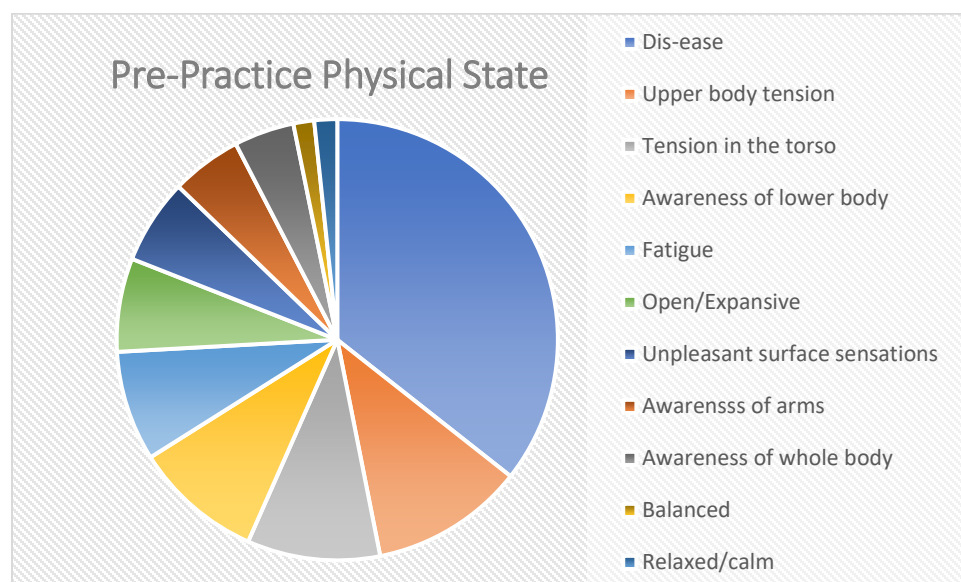
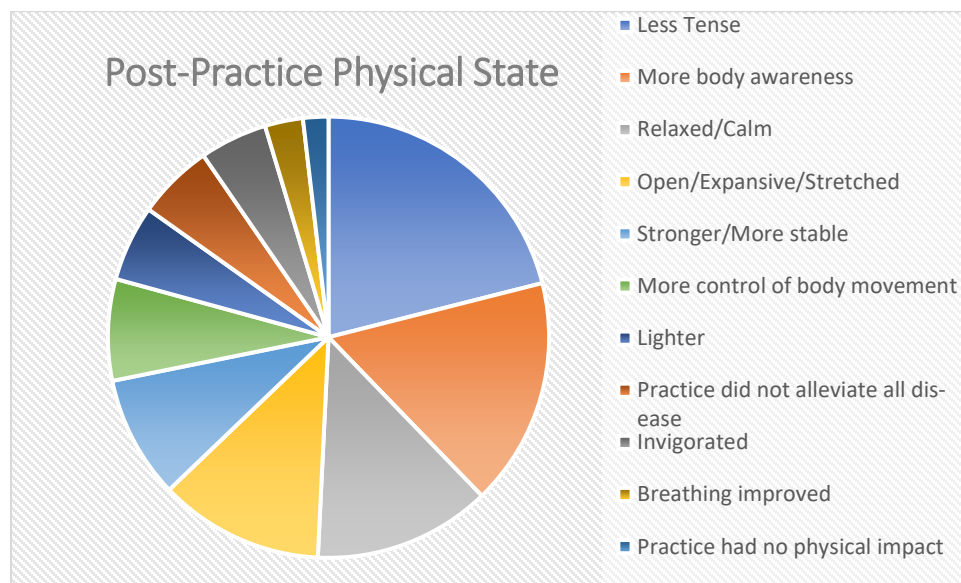


Figure 4*Post-Practice Physical State***Mental State**

Based on the findings from the pre- and post-practice mental state reflections there was a strong indication that yoga nidra is a practice that supported relaxation of the mind, improved focus, allowed the mind to settle, the mind became clearer, the mind became more at ease, and even more positive. Students reported the relief they received from the “brain feed” and felt “more control over the mind,” and stated, “mind feels soothed.” The yoga nidra practice was a process of reducing external stimulation, especially for those who attended in-person.

Those who watched the recording had to use an electronic device. They may have received notifications from e-mail or instant messages that could have disrupted the practice, which could be the reason some students reported no change or were still experiencing dis-ease. Students were not specifically asked about their mental health status. However, for people with depression lying flat on the back for extended periods of time is not recommended. Kraftsow (n.d.) explains “when people become depressed, they most often experience a state of

sympathetic suppression. They may have physiological symptoms such as fatigue, lethargy, sleep disturbances, gastrointestinal distress, and/or decreased libido or sense of pleasure” (para. 6). For people with depression postures that lift the chest can invigorate the body to help balance the nervous system (Kraftsow, n.d.). In the future, the researcher will include depression as a contraindication for the practice and suggest that students prone to depression elevate themselves in their supine position or complete the practice in a chair or sitting against a wall. Lastly, the students also reported understanding their thoughts are connected to the senses, which is not unlike the research conducted by Dol (2019), who asserted that yoga nidra improved self-esteem amongst college students. Ultimately, with a little more guidance to support different mental health challenges such as depression and creating a controlled environment for the students, yoga nidra can help people calm and clear scattered, restless, and distracted minds (see Figures 5 and 6).

Figure 5

Pre-Practice Mental State

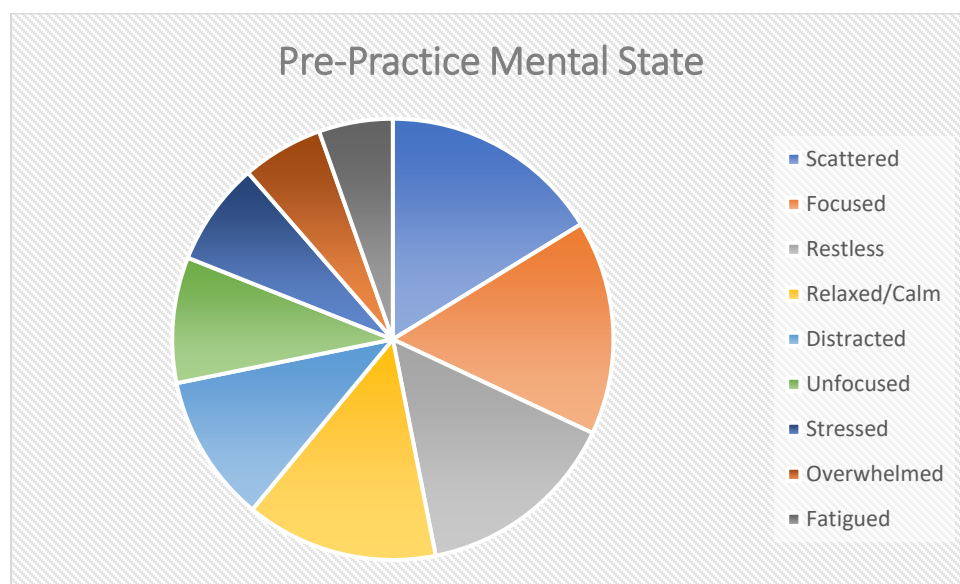
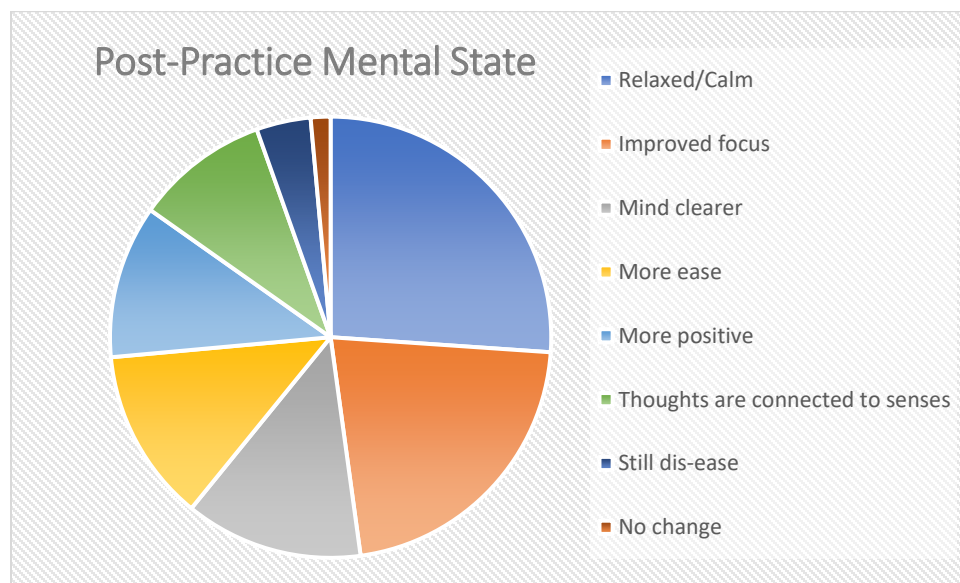


Figure 6*Post-Practice Mental State***Emotional State**

The *relaxed/calm* state, which was the least represented theme during the pre-practice with 5.6% of the total codes falling into this category. The *relaxed/calm* state moved to the most represented theme during the post-practice reflection, with 26.7% of the total codes falling into this category. Other themes during pre-practice pointed to a positive or neutral emotional state such as *excitement*, *happy*, and *content*. However, the most prominent pre-practice theme was *anxious* after students reported “anxiety,” “nervousness,” and “unsteadiness.” Aside from *relaxed/calm*, the post-practice themes that were related to a positive emotional state included *positivity*, *improvement*, and *stronger/stable*, which represented about 82% of the total codes. Initially, the researcher was surprised by these findings because the only reference to emotional state was during the breath awareness exercise that was offered eight times during the 24-interventions.

On the other hand, the practices were designed to bring participants into homeostasis and balance, therefore, the theme *stronger/stable* was not as surprising. In addition, the researcher followed the recommendation to support the students' social emotional learning by presenting herself as emotionally regulated, such as arriving early for class in a calm and collected state, using a soothing tone when speaking, and maintaining a relaxed demeanor (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2021). The breath awareness practices, the yoga nidra practices, reflections, as well as the demeanor of the instructor were likely culprits for influencing the findings that pointed towards balance and improvement of the emotional state. Based on these findings, the researcher recommends creating an environment conducive to exploring the emotional state when offering yoga nidra classes. Further details regarding the pre- and post-reflection themes for the emotional state are presented below (see Figures 7 and 8).

Figure 7

Pre-Practice Emotional State

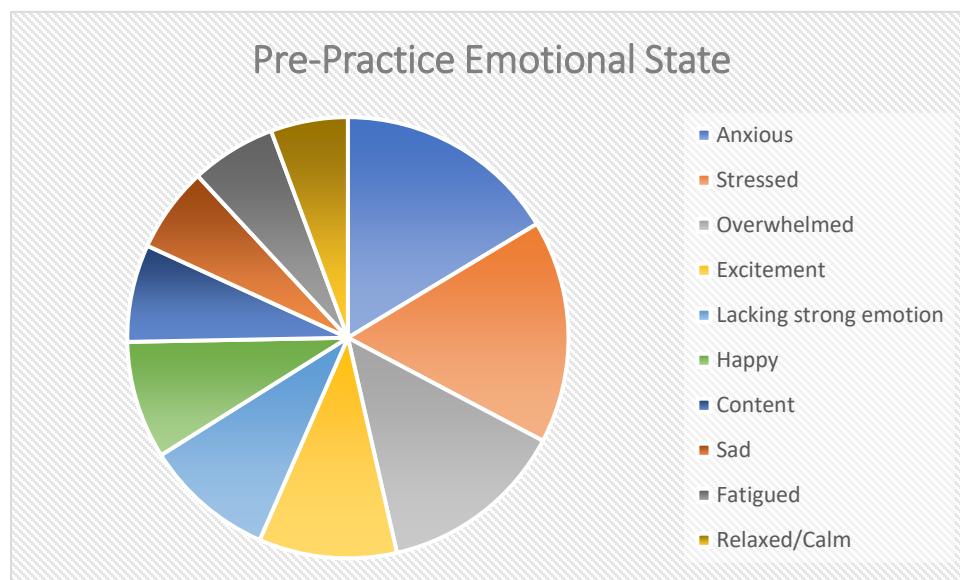
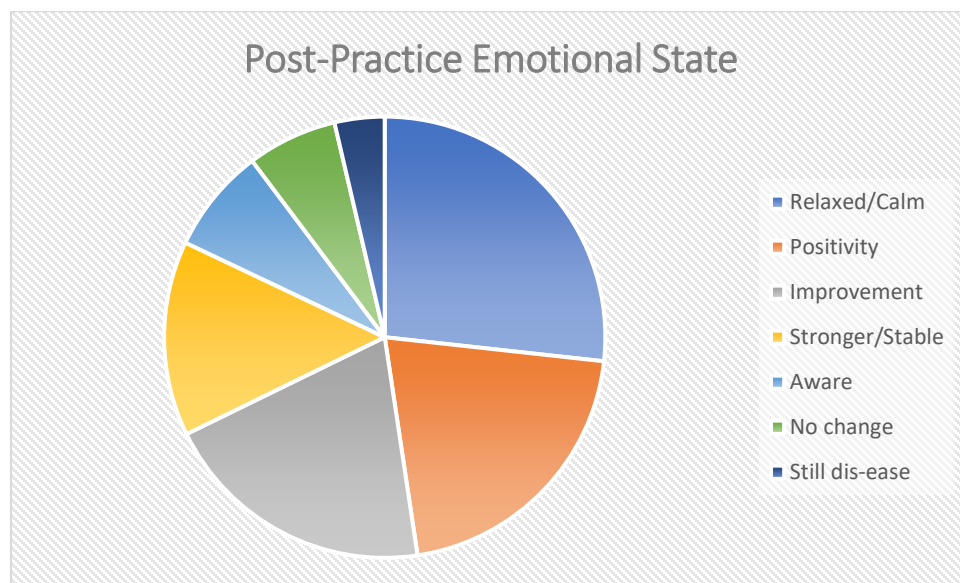


Figure 8*Post-Practice Emotional State***Energetic State**

The energetic state refers to the subtle force that is not visible, but often described as the desire to animate the body and associated with the pranayama kosha (Stanley, 2021). Initially, the participants described their energy negatively with the following themes *energetic/overstimulated, fatigued, low, stuck, and restless* which emerged from 156 codes out of a total of 268, which was 58%. The themes *motivated, content, and relaxed/calm* emerged from 102 codes, which was 38% of the total energetic codes. The *unchanging* theme was made up of 10 codes and four percent of the total codes prior to completing the practices.

After the practice the positive themes *invigorated, relaxed/calm, balanced, improvement, and focused* rose to 71% of the total post-practice energetic codes, which was a 33% increase from the pre-reflections. The negative themes *fatigued, energetic/overstimulated, and still dis-ease* made up 19% of the total post-practice energetic codes, which was a 39% decrease from the pre-reflections.

The *no change* theme rose six percent compared to the pre-practice theme *unchanging*. These two may not be synonymous with each other, however the researcher classified these as neutral themes rather than negative or positive.

Since the practices were designed to bring about homeostasis it makes sense that the participants made a shift from loosely controlled energy to more refined energy feeling *invigorated, relaxed/calm, balanced, improvement, and focused*. These results reflect the descriptive experience of college students, which has not been identified in previous literature. There has been evidence with the perceived stress scale that improvements occur when mindfulness techniques were utilized, which was strictly quantitative (Breedvelt et al., 2019; Chong et al., 2011; Deckro et al., 2002; Park et al., 2017). However, this study contributed to the understanding of the language students used to explain the shifts that occurred as a result of the yoga nidra practices (see Figures 9 and 10).

Figure 9

Pre-Practice Energetic State

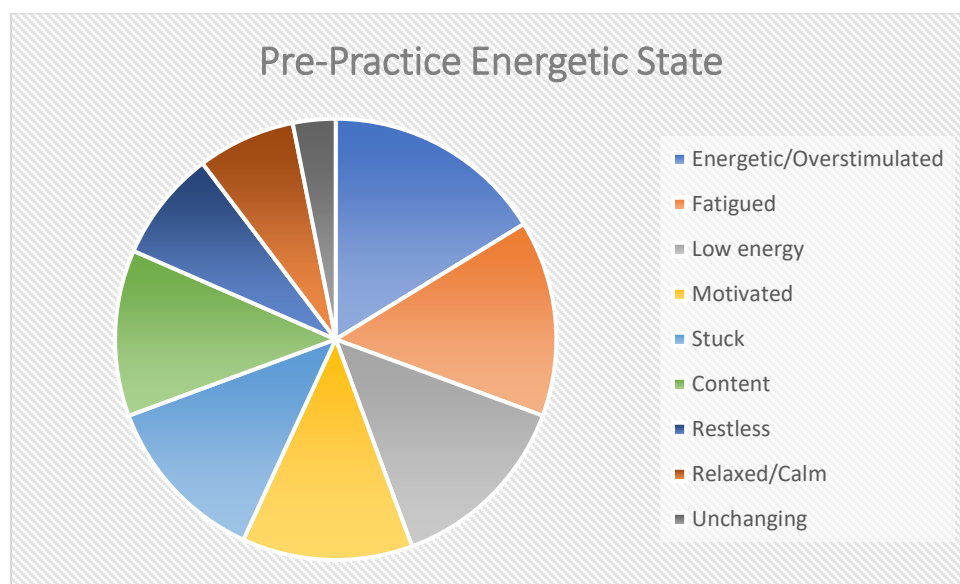
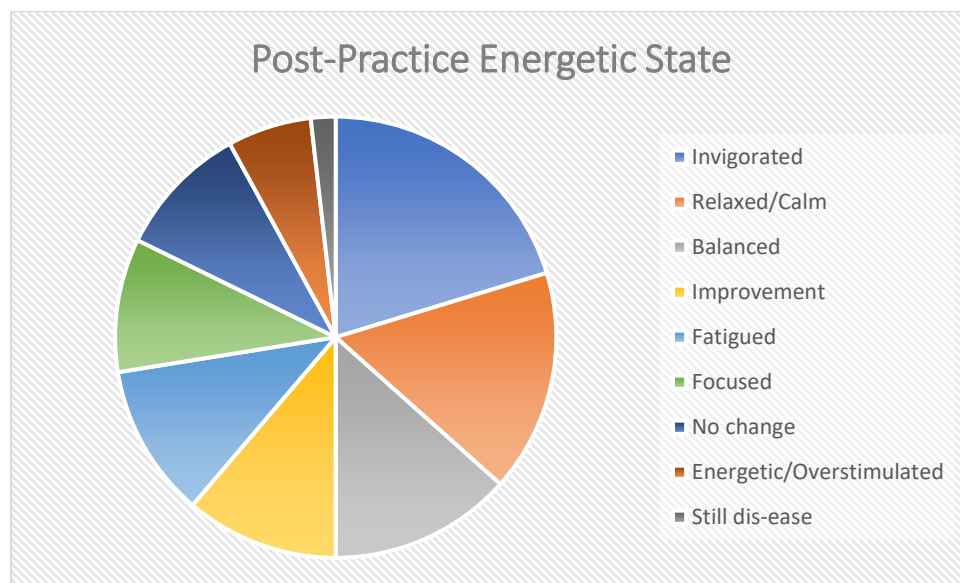


Figure 10*Post-Practice Energetic State***Spiritual State**

The spiritual state was most related to the anandamaya kosha, the bliss body, where one experiences pure self-awareness and ultimate liberation. Stanley (2021), referred to this state of being as “limitless and boundless” (p. 39). The spiritual state can be difficult to access given that it is the least tangible. It requires a trust in the unknown with no use of the physical senses such as seeing, tasting, hearing, smelling, or feeling by touch. It is no surprise that the students reported a *lacking/disconnected* spiritual state pre-practice, since students were immersed in the physical world with a plethora of external stimulation. In the stillness and silence, which is often beyond measure, without the barrier of the physical realm a channel can be accessed and opened for spiritual connection. In the yoga nidra practices the inner resource component of the practices plus silence was an invitation for a spiritual connection. The silence during the interventions lasted between one to three minutes for two reasons. Sessions were only 50-minutes long and the practices needed to be compact to fit the time frame. Also, silence longer than three minutes for a

novice practitioner might increase the likelihood they would drop into normative sleep. Over time, the students became more trained to stay present. If the sessions were a full hour, the researcher would have extended the silence between four and six minutes. Beyond six minutes even for a seasoned practitioner would increase the likelihood of falling asleep.

The theme for *lacking/disconnected* fell from 41% of codes pre-practice to 2% post-practice, which further explained the benefits of yoga nidra that have not been previously introduced in scientific research (see Figures 11 and 12). This information also echoed the aim of holistic learning theory with students who recognized the interconnectedness of all creation (Narve, 2001). The *in vivo* codes such as “connected to self,” “connected to spirit,” and “connected to other people” illustrated the state of awareness of a person’s unique talents and characteristics. The students applied meaning, and related to the world around them, which exemplified the framework of holistic learning theory (Johnson, 2019).

Figure 11

Pre-Practice Spiritual State

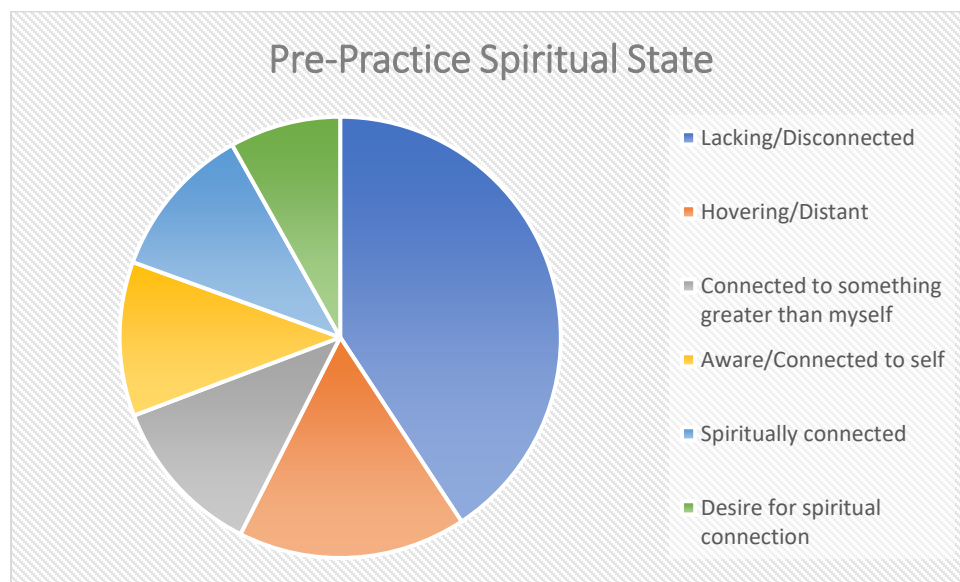
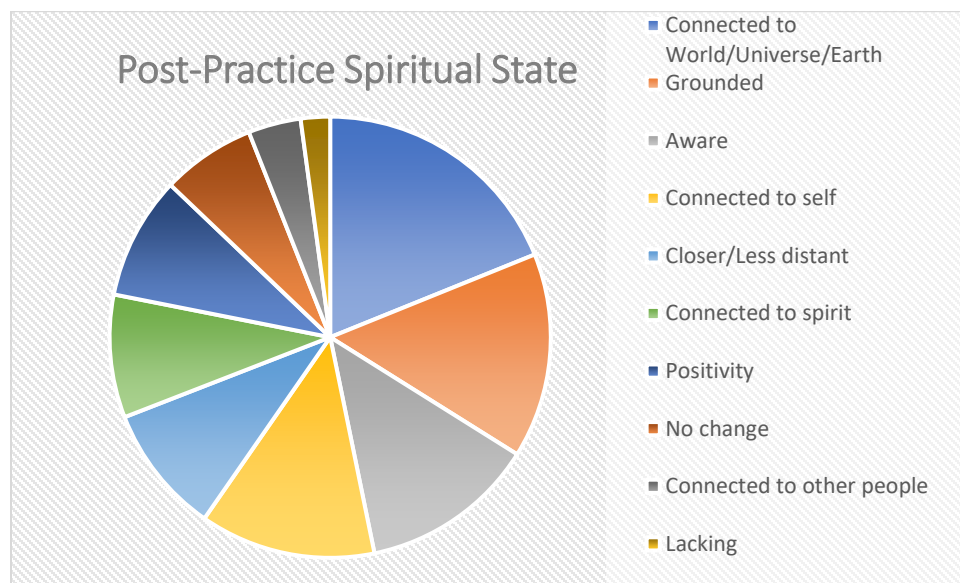


Figure 12*Post-Practice Spiritual State***Other Discoveries**

During the post-practice reflections, students were asked to describe any insights or discoveries they gained as a result of doing the practices. In addition, they were asked to describe any unique or noteworthy aspects of the practices they might reference another time. This was a broad open-ended question and, in many cases, affirmed the validity of the previous findings in the pre- and post-reflections for the physical, mental, emotional, energetic, and spiritual states.

More Aware of Physical Body

This finding, *more aware of physical body* in the noteworthy aspects of yoga nidra only reinforced the information that was presented in the pre- and post-practice reflections regarding the physical state. As mentioned earlier, the physical body was the most gross and tangible. Three of the practices included rotations of consciousness, which directed attention to different parts of the body (Miller, 2022). As students moved their awareness they noticed where they were holding tension in the body as presented in the evidence in chapter four.

Breathing Influences other States

As Raghuraj and Telles (2008) illustrated during a study measuring systolic and diastolic pressure, it was known that shaping the breath can influence blood pressure. However, this present study expounds on the qualitative data pertaining to how students experienced shifts in other senses as a result of shaping their breath. Students explained the influence of the breath as follows “During breathing able to relax my body and mind,” “I realized emotion in my breath I was unable to detect,” “Focusing on my breath helped thoughts float away,” and “Breathing helped me gain clarity on my mental state and emotions.”

Biggest Challenge Was Focusing the Mind

The theme *biggest challenge was focusing the mind* in the noteworthy aspects of yoga nidra reinforced the information that was presented in the pre- and post-practice reflections regarding the mental state. As mentioned earlier, the mental body was part of the subtle body and less tangible than the physical body. Pre-practice many students described their mental state as “scattered,” “restless,” “distracted,” “unfocused,” “stressed,” “overwhelmed,” and “fatigued,” which represented 70% of the codes. It is no wonder the students were challenged to focus the mind.

Students Experienced Transformation

Students were not specifically asked about personal transformation as part of their yoga nidra journey. However, students commented on ways they evolved as a result of the practices, which aligned with the transformative learning within the scope of the holistic learning theory. Transformative learning emphasized a shift in the way one interacts and impacts their communities and beyond (Mezirow, 1997). During this study, students acknowledged inner wisdom as illustrated with the following statements “I am more secure in my anxiety and should

stop beating myself up over it,” “Discovered ability to shift my mind consciously towards path of intention,” and “This practice helped me realize all the growth I have done throughout this class.”

Yoga Nidra Was a Resource to Access the Subtle Body

The middle layer of the koshas pranayama (energetic body), manomaya (mind/emotional body), and vijnanamaya (wisdom body) are considered the subtle body. As mentioned previously, the annamaya (food body) was the most tangible. However, students were able to experience beyond the obvious and rational. For example, one student shared, “sometimes looking inward is just as important as thinking logically,” which conveys their ability to harness their intuitiveness or in other words access their vijnanamaya kosha.

Yoga Nidra Was a Spiritual Practice

The theme *yoga nidra was a spiritual practice* shared by students as a noteworthy aspect of yoga nidra reinforced the information that was presented in the pre- and post-practice reflections regarding the spiritual state. As mentioned earlier, the spiritual body was the most subtle and least tangible. Some of the practices included witness consciousness, which allowed attention in spaciousness which opened the connection to spirit (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Through witness consciousness students noticed the ways in which they were connecting to something greater than themselves as presented in the evidence in chapter four.

Yoga Nidra Helped Students Understand Emotions

The theme *yoga nidra helped students understand emotions* in the noteworthy aspects of yoga nidra reflections reinforced the information that was presented in the pre- and post-practice reflections regarding the emotional state. As mentioned earlier in chapter four, the emotional body was not particularly emphasized during the practices. However, the practices were designed

to shift participants into homeostasis or balance and paired with the pre- and post-practice reflections likely influenced the awareness of emotions.

Students Experienced Pratyahara

Pratyahara was used to invite the state of internal awareness, which was achieved by eliminating external stimulation. Every practice involved gentle physical movement, a breathing technique, and a guided relaxation with conscious awareness. All the practices included a form of antar mouna, which has been referred to as inner silence (Saraswati, 2009). Essentially, the students were guided to this state. It may have been more difficult to achieve if the student was doing the recording in an uncontrolled environment. However, the classroom was a large open room, generally warm, the lights were dimmed for yoga nidra, and there were very few distractions for the duration of the intervention. Pratyahara was likely achieved with intention and the ideal conditions. Given the access to the guided practice along with a controlled environment this finding was not surprising.

Students Accessed the Vijnanamaya Kosha (Wisdom Body)

The vijnanamaya kosha is the wisdom body or the inherent knowing of the human experience. The participants were neither asked specifically to comment on the wisdom body nor was it explained in great depth at any time during the intervention. The vijnanamaya kosha is easier experienced than explained because it is basically a spark of inspiration or knowledge that arises spontaneously from intuition. Therefore, there was no formal cue to experience the vijnanamaya kosha during the practice. Rather after some preparation such as down regulating the nervous system with calm breathing, antar mouna, and relaxation the researcher allowed space to witness consciousness which gave students the opportunity to allow for the inner voice to be heard (Brown & Ryan, 2003). With the amount of information available from the digital world

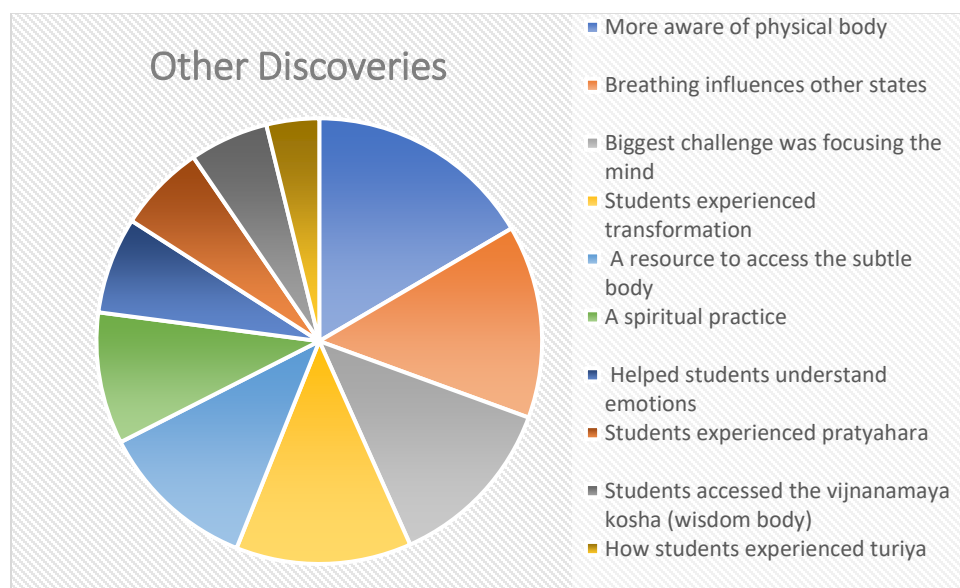
accessing intuition seemed like a lost art to the researcher. The fact that some students experienced the vijnanamaya kosha was another aspect in the previous literature that had not been well documented. The researcher was pleased students shared their experience to help revitalize peoples' capacity to trust their intuition.

How Students Experienced Turiya

Turiya is the fourth state. It is a state of consciousness that rides between waking and dreaming. As Saraswati (2009) explained, turiya is “deep relaxation, visionary states, conscious dreaming, archetypal imagery” (p. 171). The researcher was glad to see some students shared their specific experience with turiya (see Figure 13). Students were not asked specifically to share about any visions or conscious dreaming, because the researcher was more curious if the practice would naturally unfold rather than telling the students what to expect. The choice to leave this information out of the questionnaire was an attempt to avoid directing the possibility of unnatural responses.

Figure 13

Other Discoveries



Noteworthy Aspects

During the post-practice reflections, students were asked to describe any unique or noteworthy aspects of the practices they might reference another time. This was a broad open-ended question and, in many cases, affirmed the validity of the previous findings in the pre- and post-reflections for the physical, mental, emotional, energetic, and spiritual states.

Relaxing Can be Freeing

Yoga nidra in a sense was a practice of surrender. Students were invited to bravely enter a space that was still, dark, quiet, and warm. While in the space, students were guided to release tension in the body, free the mind of invasive thoughts, and insert intentions that supported positive transformation. The students articulated information that had not been included in previous studies such as “by relaxing one thought you can use it to train another” and “it is easier not to force your mind, but to flow with it.” Again, previous data showed that yoga nidra was relaxing, but telling *how* relaxing is beneficial has been addressed in this study, e.g., “freeing.”

Transformation

The theme, *transformation* emerged from the findings that pointed to how students changed, improved self-awareness, and became more accepting of themselves. This theme, *transformation* reflects the notion of the holistic learning theory and the principle of interconnectedness (Johnson, 2019). In the comments from students presented in chapter four, it is apparent they developed a stronger intrapersonal connection.

Visualization and Empowerment Enjoyable

All the previous research pointed to benefits of mindfulness practices, but did not touch on what people enjoyed about the practices. This study articulated aspects of yoga nidra that resonated with the students, which further enhances what has been previously discovered. In

addition, it may behoove future researchers to include the aspects the students found enjoyable, e.g., “safe place,” “the circle [of protection],” and “empowerment specific language.”

Challenge to Focus

The challenge to focus has been brought up numerous times by the students in the pre- and post-practice mental state reflections, during the noteworthy reflections, as well as during the focus group. This information is particularly insightful to the researcher and the strongest evidence that students need more mindfulness training to combat overstimulation of the mind.

Deep Breathing Supports Self-Regulation

Although Raghauraj and Telles (2008) conducted a study that showed that the breath can influence blood pressure there was no commentary presented from the participants about their own observations. This study demonstrated that students became aware of their breath and the ways in which they found it beneficial, producing qualitative data from the lens of the participants e.g., “breathing helps focus,” “the deep breathing was very grounding,” and “I could feel a lot of tension in my body relax as I exhaled.” At no point were students asked specifically to comment on their breath, but it was influential enough for the students to make a point to include it in their reflections pertaining to discoveries.

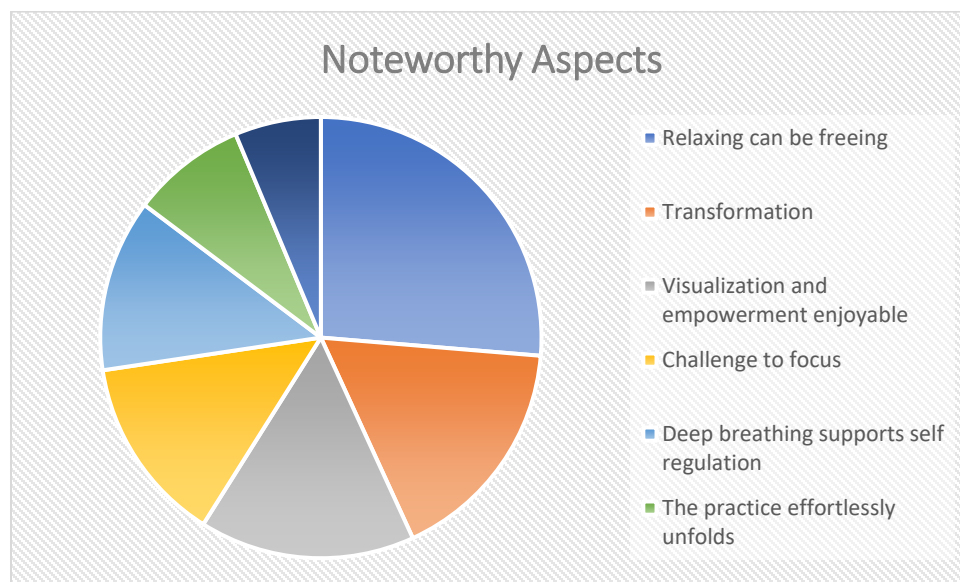
The Practice Effortlessly Unfolds

As relaxation was induced, the researcher was curious how the students would experience sensation, turiya, and the vijnanamaya kosha. However, there were no specific questions that required the students to speak about any of these three topics. The *effortlessly unfolding* was a marker that the practices moved students to the state of turiya or helped them reach transpersonal connection or spiritual state (Johnson, 2019; Saraswati, 2009). The students shared parts of the practices they experienced that were not guided, but occurred happenstance. For example,

participant comments in the post-practice reflections included “I noticed a dreamlike feeling throughout the practice,” “Felt like my body was floating, calm waves washing over me,” and “Entering the cave of the heart, my chest got tighter truly connecting with my deepest self” (see Figure 14).

Figure 14

Noteworthy Aspects



Focus Group

The focus group was held at the end of the 12-week intervention. It was held in-person and recorded over Zoom. The researcher hand transcribed the session since Zoom did not capture all the phrases or at times captured phrases incorrectly. Three students attended the focus group. Although their participation may not have represented the entire sample, their feedback did corroborate with findings previously presented in the pre- and post-practice reflections.

Describe Yoga Nidra

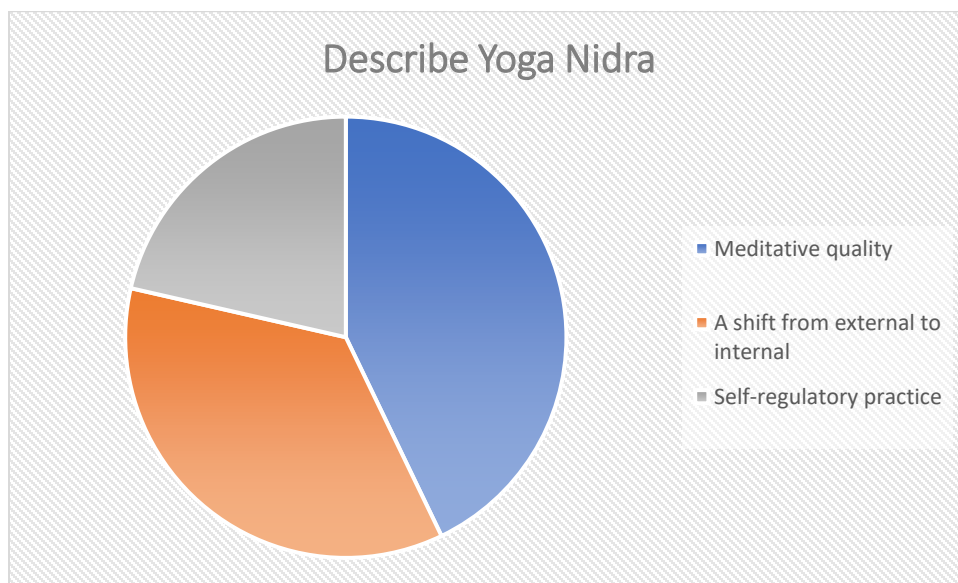
Students indicated in the focus group that yoga nidra had a meditative quality by focusing the mind internally. Students indicated in the focus group that by taking a pause from life to do

the practice they were able to “re-regulate thoughts and feelings.” Moreover, students reported in the focus group that yoga nidra had the capacity to focus the mind, “without paying attention to outside distractions, worries, or stress.” The goal of meditation is to create oneness, a state of higher consciousness (Muktibodhananda, 2013). The goal of yoga nidra is enlightened sleep or conscious dreaming and the mind is borderline between sleep and awake (Saraswati, 2009).

Furthermore, yoga nidra was relaxation in a systematic manner while the practitioner remained consciously aware of their body, sensation, and thoughts. The most common thread between meditation and yoga nidra is the *shift from external to internal inward* focus, which was identified by the students and presented as the second theme for describing yoga nidra. The students were accurate. They emphasized the meditative quality as a component of the practice and recognized it was not meditation itself. Finally, the students were accurate in describing yoga nidra as a *self-regulatory practice* and commented on their ability to notice thoughts and feelings and shift their focus to a more balanced state. According to Desai (2017), yoga nidra “works by taking you to brainwave states similar to those in sleep, where the biology of your body makes it easier to disengage from thoughts” (p.2). The insight pertaining to yoga nidra as a self-regulatory practice is not new information, but how the students described their experience as a self-regulatory practice had not been shared in past literature (see Figure 15).

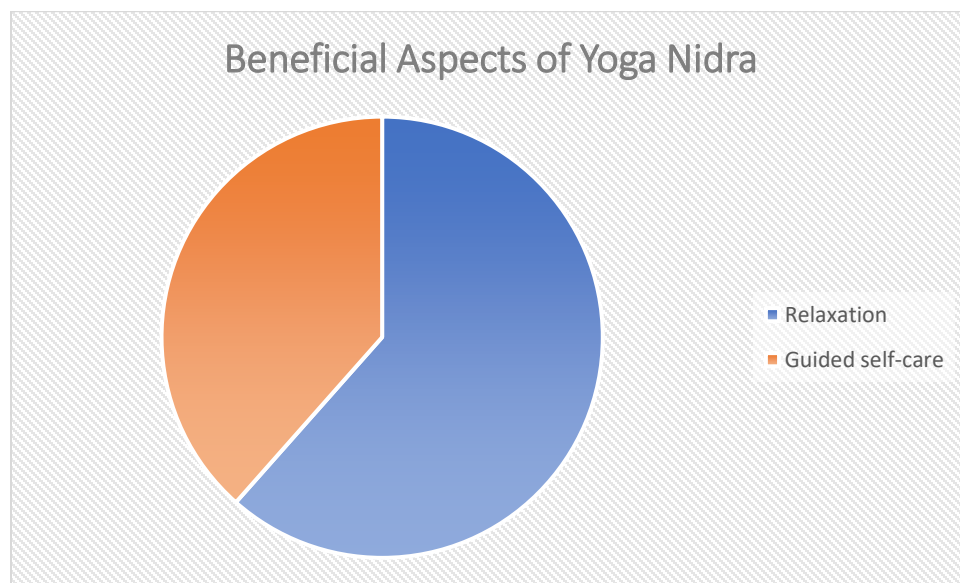
Figure 15

Describe Yoga Nidra

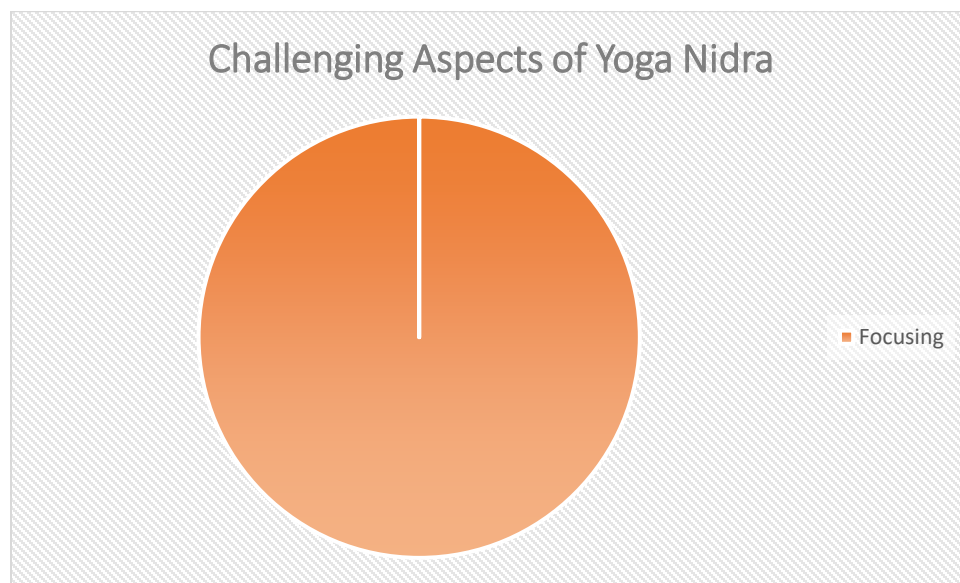


Beneficial Aspects of Yoga Nidra

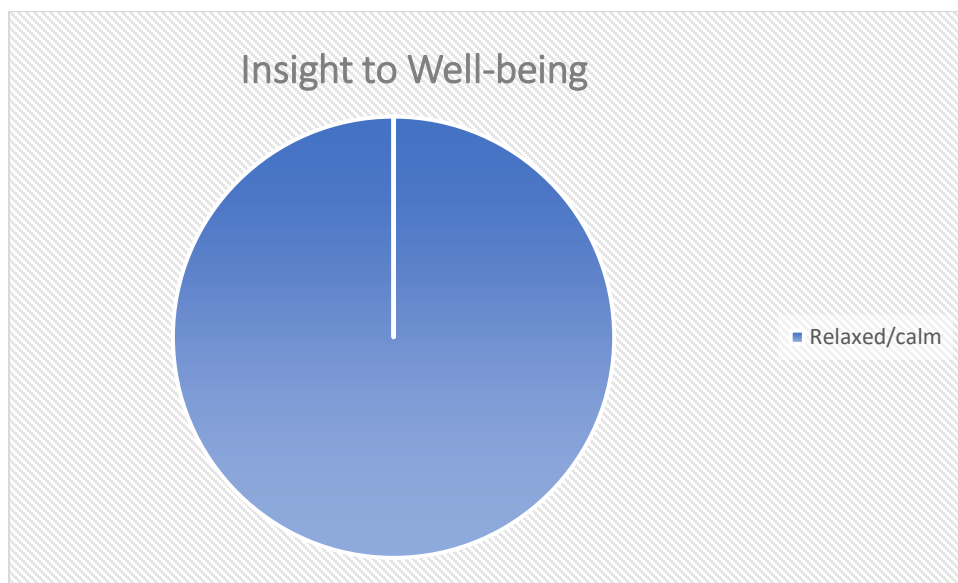
Previous research conducted by Eastman et al. (2013), Ganpat (2020), and Dwivedi (2020) already indicated that a primary benefit of yoga nidra was *relaxation*. However, this research expounds on what was meaningful about relaxation. The students reported during this study the value of having permission to relax and being guided was a way of exercising self-care. The students liked having the freedom to show up and experience the practices without having to guide themselves (see Figure 16).

Figure 16*Beneficial Aspects of Yoga Nidra**Challenging Aspect of Yoga Nidra*

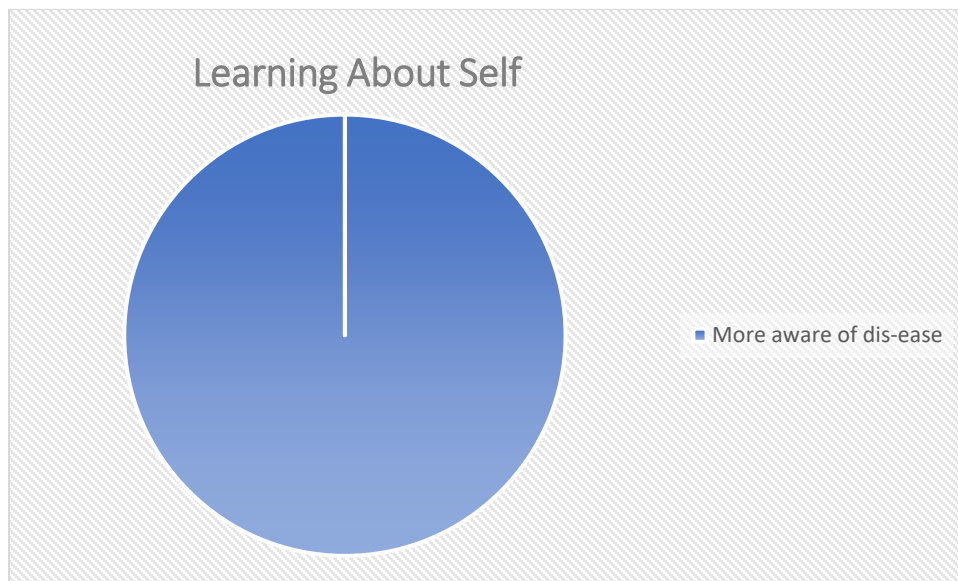
Given that about 72% of the pre-practice codes led to themes that described the mental state as *scattered, restless, distracted, unfocused, stressed, overwhelmed, and fatigue* it did not come as a surprise that focusing was the biggest challenge for the students. However, students did indicate that over time by continuing to do the practices and train themselves, eventually focusing became easier for them. Again, this is an area of knowledge that has not been articulated in previous studies. It has been known that students are stressed and anxious and techniques comparable to yoga nidra, such as breathing, imagery, relaxation and visualization have been proven beneficial for practicing stress management (Larson, 2015). However, the capacity for yoga nidra to help students train their minds to become more focused and refined had not been previously explored (see Figure 17).

Figure 17*Challenging Aspect of Yoga Nidra**Insight to Well-being*

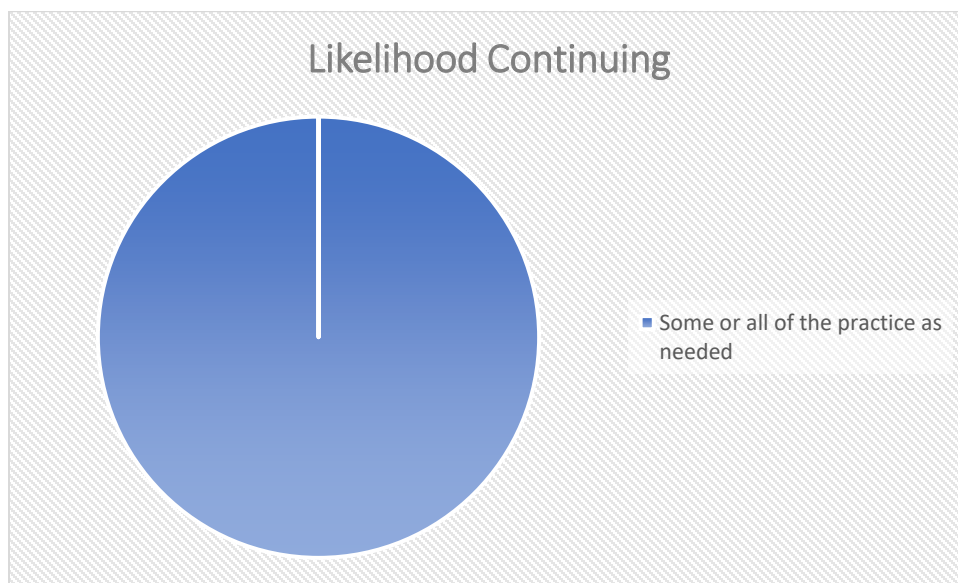
The theme that arose was *relaxation/calm* which pertained to the insight to well-being of the students, which further solidified findings from previous studies on the benefits of mindfulness practices (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). This insight did not add anything new to what had been previously discovered in the literature (see Figure 18).

Figure 18*Insight to Well-being**Learning About Self*

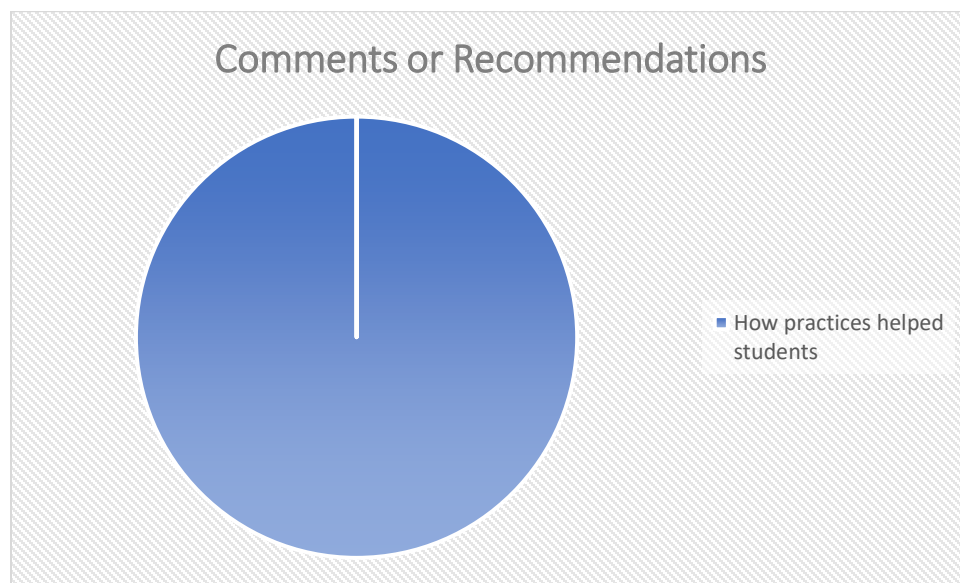
The focus group attained qualitative perspectives on the way yoga nidra influenced the students' understanding of themselves. Yoga nidra helped the students become *more aware of dis-ease* such as tension, weaknesses, and sensitivity to distractions (see Figure 19). By having the ability to notice *dis-ease* then students were able to consciously make shifts to create greater ease in their lives. This is one of the ways the "Look-Think-Act" framework of action research was so powerful (Stringer & Ortiz Aragon, 2021, p. 122). Students reflected on their current state through pre-practice reflections (look), then learned from the lived experience of yoga nidra (think), and then were able to choose how to respond to the issues (act) they uncovered or learned during the process.

Figure 19*Learning About Self****Likelihood of Continuing***

The students articulated they were likely to use parts of the practices such as solely breathing or solely joints and glands exercises when needed, particularly if they were feeling tense or stressed. Given the time constraints the students reported that doing parts of the practice or a full practice two or three times a week was most realistic (see Figure 20). During the study, the students learned about 18 joints and glands or yoga poses, three breathing techniques, four yoga nidra practices that included numerous components (e.g., breath awareness, rotation of consciousness, and visualization), plus were offered a bonus session on creating a personal empowerment statement that included another breathing technique and meditation. The researcher was intentional about giving the students exposure to a variety mindfulness tools, so that students were able to compare and eventually choose some practices they enjoyed and therefore likely to continue.

Figure 20*Likelihood of Continuing**Comments or Recommendations*

The students reported on how the practices resonated with them personally (see Figure 21). The voice of the participants in this way has never been captured in any previous literature. Again, it has been shown that yoga nidra is a compelling practice for social emotional learning (Ganpat, 2020). However, the statements from the students from this study exemplify how the practices helped them. For example, “The grounding techniques was helpful for someone who experiences a lot of stress or even a lot of anxieties or different distractions” (Participant 3, 2023). Another student articulated, “The self-compassion can be really helpful if you are struggling being kind to yourself” (Participant 2, 2023).

Figure 21*Comments or Recommendations*

Ultimately, students indicated improvement in their physical, mental, emotional, energetic, and spiritual well-being. In some cases, students experienced no change post-practice compared to the pre-practice reflections. Furthermore, students reported their ability to access their intuition and experienced transformation that helped positively shift their unconscious patterns.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

The study was limited to a Midwestern college university and volunteer participation, therefore inducing the possibility of self-selection bias. Therefore, the population was reflective of the demographics of the institution and those willing to participate. Even though the researcher made concerted efforts to recruit diverse students by attending student club meetings such as Council for Indian Students, Black Student Union, and the International Student Organization there was no representation from Non-White students as reported in the demographics in chapter four.

Another limitation was finding a consistent time for all interested participants to attend the sessions as a group. The campus dance studio had limited availability, but was an ideal environment to hold the classes. The scheduling did prohibit involvement from students who were interested, but had a conflict. Offering the virtual options was necessary to have enough participation to generate data for analysis. However, some students who could not attend in-person were not interested in the virtual option.

One delimitation was based on the researcher's decision to conduct the intervention over the course of 12-weeks requiring approximately 24-hours of engagement from each student within a semester. By the time the fourth unit was offered, there were only five students consistently participating. The study was a significant time commitment. Even though the researcher promised a \$50 stipend to those who completed all 24-sessions, more than half of the students dropped out of the study.

The focus group only had participation from three students, since it was conducted at the end of the 12-weeks and many of the students had dropped out of the study. Although, the poll to find a mutual meeting time indicated that six students were available during the time block, only three students actually attended.

Ultimately, the biggest challenges of this study were the length of time required and the adherence of the participation from the volunteer sample. These challenges will be addressed in the recommendations for action or further study.

Implications

This study on yoga nidra corroborates with previous research about the primary benefits of the practice such as engaging the parasympathetic nervous system (Caldwell et al., 2010; Eastman et al., 2013). While in a parasympathetic state, endorphins are circulated to ease pain

and lower stress. However, this study added to what was previously known by explaining how students experienced yoga nidra with qualitative data, which expounded on previous research.

Recommendations for Action

As a yoga nidra instructor the researcher made notes on a few areas she would change in her teaching practice: contraindications, diversity, and access. Contraindications serve as warnings that there could potentially be adverse effects from doing the practices based on a person's current condition. The researcher would like to see more participation in yoga nidra classes from Black, Indigenous, people of color, and men. Offering yoga nidra as part of course curriculum or affordable group wellness classes would give students more opportunities for exposure.

Although yoga nidra is a relatively safe practice and the instructor included a safe space during the practice that students could return to in the event of panic or anxiety, she did not place as much emphasis on the possibility students may be prone towards depression. There was one report throughout the entire study that the breathing technique may have made the student feel worse. It is possible that if they were prone to depression the longer exhale may have aggravated them. Therefore, the researcher will include more information on contraindications. Although no students reported pregnancy, the supine position is not appropriate after three months of pregnancy. The researcher plans to make a hand-out with suggestions for various conditions to ensure students are supported and capable of doing the practices to meet their individual needs.

Since very little diversity existed in the research sample, the instructor recommends recruiting and training more yoga nidra teachers that represent Black, Indigenous, and people of color, and men. The researcher recommends having different teachers lead parts of the practices. Yoga nidra teacher training is extensive, but other teachers could lead the joints and glands or

yoga postures, or the breathing techniques. In the future, the researcher would work towards including diverse teachers and their biographies in the promotion, so students from different backgrounds could relate more easily. If that were not feasible, the researcher would perhaps invite one of her own teachers as a special guest for a bonus class or question and answer session. Being more intentional about having representation of teachers for diverse audiences needs to have more emphasis.

Students had a difficult time making it to the yoga nidra sessions in-person due to scheduling conflicts. In addition, their participation was voluntary. It may be more feasible for the researcher to offer yoga nidra guest lectures unit within pre-existing courses such as techniques of neuromuscular relaxation, stress and coping, a lifestyle for wellness, or skills for life: yoga. Another option would be for campus recreation to include yoga nidra as part of their group fitness and wellness class schedule. Many students are still unfamiliar with yoga nidra and providing them with more exposure to relaxation could be beneficial, especially for students who are tense, stressed, overstimulated, and lack focused minds. Students commented that they would be more likely to continue doing the full practices if they had a designated time and location.

Spirituality is another aspect of wellness that developed over the duration of the study. Offering classes on a regular on-going basis, perhaps in the evening could help students attend more classes thus increasing the likelihood of transformation and spiritual connection. Holistic learning theorists posit, “true learning is said to have occurred when educational experiences elicit a transformation of consciousness” (Johnson, 2019, p. 119). The notion of the holistic framework is based on the principle of interconnectedness. As mentioned previously, there are three types of connections: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and transpersonal (Johnson, 2019). Due to the nature of the holistic learning theory, it may make sense for students to explore

yoga nidra outside of their regular class time to delve into the different types of connections. The key areas that could be improved upon while teaching yoga nidra include being forthright and communicative about potential side effects, finding ways to increase participation from broader audiences outside of White women, and offering more yoga nidra practices as part of current curriculum or extra-curricular classes through campus recreation programming.

Recommendations for Further Study

There still seems to be a gap in the literature that includes diverse audiences. Perhaps, offering a more compact yoga nidra intervention, (e.g., fewer weeks with more practices) could be beneficial and retain more subjects for the duration of the study. Recordings of practices could still be an option for students interested in participating, but cannot attend in-person. Comparing results of in-person and recorded off-site is another option that could be explored in the future.

Since the sample size was small and relatively homogenous, the researcher recommends conducting a study with a more diverse population. The students that adhered to the practices and completed the demographic survey all reported identifying as White. It may be beneficial to train other instructors who are Black, Indigenous or people of color, which may be helpful in attracting a more diverse sample. Secondly, a 12-week intervention was too long for a group of volunteer participants to remain committed. It may be beneficial to have a convenience sample, (e.g., a pre-existing group that meets regularly) and include a longitudinal study as an add-on to their regular meetings. Possibly offering a more lucrative incentive for participation could be helpful as well.

Based on the participation during the first half of this study, students were able to manage a six-week commitment. Perhaps, a shorter intervention with three practices per week for 18-sessions could be impactful. Conceivably, a researcher could focus on one practice for a longer

period of time and include more questions regarding the benefits of the specific practice. For example, before offering the self-compassion series, the researcher could ask questions to gauge more insight about students understanding of self-compassion and current practices for a baseline and then ask again at the end of the series.

The recordings of the practices appeared to be an effective choice for students, as confirmed by half of the participants choosing this option. The researcher would not rule out the possibility of offering virtual yoga nidra classes in the future. However, the researcher recommends placing more emphasis on doing the practices before an evening meal to decrease the likelihood of falling asleep, ensuring a designated time and space to complete the practice for consistency and comfort, while also minimizing distractions.

There is still a need for more thorough qualitative data from students, especially those from diverse backgrounds. The research of yoga nidra could expound upon some of the findings from this study such as how students experience turiya, how students experienced transformation, and what is causing the tension or overstimulated minds of college students.

Researcher's Reflections

The researcher has been practicing yoga nidra since January 2020. Her first experience with yoga nidra was part of an empowerment workshop for personal manifestation. Although the practice was relaxing, she was particularly drawn to the process of reciting silently a firm statement or resolve during the practice, something she wished to achieve or become within six to 18-months. Therefore, she did the same recorded practice consistently until her desire was fulfilled. The researcher noticed throughout the practice she repeated daily for 16-months that from time to time she would hear something new in the recording. For example, at a time when she was feeling defeated and wavering about whether her desire would come to fruition, she

heard the words, “beyond a shadow of a doubt” during the practice (Boigenzahn, 2020, Track 1 Introduction). At that moment, the researcher realized she needed to change the way she perceived her finances in order to achieve her resolve. The researcher has other examples of how yoga nidra has created shifts in her own life such as improved resiliency handling adversity, sparks that inspired creative projects, improved flow, and better balance of breathing, strengthened connection with spirit, and ancestral healing. In general, the researcher found the practices to be supportive to the nervous system with the body held by the earth.

It was important for the researcher to allow students to consistently complete practices with some repetition to ensure there was adequate time for the students to embody the intention of the practice. The researcher chose the essentials practice for the first unit, because it was a little shorter than the other practices and not as much silence, so that students could begin to train their brains to stay focused without falling asleep. Then, the self-compassion practice was offered to allow students to experience themselves as the source of unconditional love. The grounding practice was offered in the third unit to align with the autumn season, which is typically characteristic of cool air, blowing wind, and change which can be uprooting. Inviting the students to connect to the earth was chosen to help bring them into balance due to the transition in the environment. Lastly, the empowerment series was offered as a means to shift the unconscious, helping students gain certainty and belief in themselves and their potential.

Ultimately, the researcher considered the following question she posed during her own contemplation, “what is the use of a college degree if you do not love yourself or if your life is void of purpose and meaning due to unfulfilled desires?” This is what inspired the researcher to pursue this action research study. The present study was impactful for those that saw it through. The researcher was pleased to hear those students felt more love, optimism, confidence, focus,

and relaxation. Although only a few were impacted profoundly by the experience the researcher was confident those improvements will stand the test of time due to the actual embodiment of the shifts that took place. Change is difficult for most people. Largely in part people are told what they should be doing rather than being guided through an actual change process. That is why action research was the most appropriate methodology, so that students could have a lived experience and be able to reflect upon and articulate what occurred during the yoga nidra practices. If students were simply told yoga nidra is something they should try, the likelihood of them getting started on their own would have been greatly reduced. Even the researcher did not know where to begin with yoga nidra. It was not until she was led through a practice that she was able to fathom its transformative potential.

Conclusion

The results of this 12-week qualitative action research intervention indicated that yoga nidra improved awareness of the physical body and ability to relieve tension. Students reported being overstimulated mentally. They learned how to relax and calm their mind thus improving focus. Students became more aware of their emotions and the ability to regulate them by exercising self-care (i.e., yoga nidra and breathing techniques). Students were able to refine unproductive energy or low energy and bring themselves into a more balanced energetic state. Initially, students reported lacking spiritual connection. Students reported connection to themselves, others, and the world around them improved exponentially after the practices, especially for those who completed the last unit on empowerment. In addition to the improvements of the five key areas of students' physical, mental, emotional, energetic, and spiritual well-being, students accessed their vijñanamaya kosha. Students learned from the wisdom of their body and showed signs that they were positively reshaping their unconscious.

This information is particularly insightful to the researcher and the strongest evidence that students need more mindfulness training to combat overstimulation of the mind.

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Appendix A1: Institutional Support



OFFICE OF THE PROVOST & VICE PRESIDENT FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

November 18, 2022

To Whom it May Concern:

This letter is to grant Angie Clark permission to conduct an action research study, about the experience of college students who participate in a regular yoga nidra practice over 12-weeks at Bemidji State University during the 2023-2024 school year. I understand this study poses no physical risk to those students involved or to Bemidji State University. As part of this study, I authorize the researcher(s) to conduct yoga nidra sessions, collect pre- and post-intervention journal reflections, and conduct a focus group. Individuals' participation in the study will be voluntary and at their own discretion. I also understand all information gathered for this study is confidential and will only be used for the purpose of this study.

Sincerely,

Randy Westhoff, Ph.D.
Associate Provost and Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs
Professor of Mathematics

1500 Birchmont DR NE #3
Bemidji, MN 56601
218-755-2016
Randall.Westhoff@BemidjiState.edu



MINNESOTA STATE

Bemidji State University,
A member of Minnesota State

Appendix A2: Institutional Review Board Approval**Institutional Review Board**

DATE: December 19, 2022

TO: Boyd Bradbury, Principal
Investigator Angie Clark, Co-
investigator

FROM: Dr. Robert Nava, Chair
Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB

ACTION: **APPROVED**

PROJECT TITLE: [1928697-1] What is the experience of college students who participate in a regular yoga nidra practice over 12-weeks?

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

APPROVAL DATE: December 19,
2022 **EXPIRATION DATE:**

REVIEW TYPE: Exempt Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB has **APPROVED** your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Exempt Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to the Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to the Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB.

This project has been determined to be a project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of .

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact the [Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB](#). Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been issued in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Minnesota State University Moorhead's records.

Appendix B: Informed Consent



Informed Consent Letter

“What is the experience of college students who participate in a regular yoga nidra practice over 12-weeks?”

Dear Participant,

The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that you are free to decide not to participate or withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with me or with Bemidji State University.

The purpose of this study is to understand how college students respond to a 12-week yoga nidra practice. The action research qualitative research design will incorporate pre- and post- journal reflections and a focus group to understand the lived experience of students. Students will journal about their physical, mental, emotional, energetic, and spiritual state.

Yoga nidra is not a widely known practice, but with little effort it can help people relax. The process of yoga nidra generally involves the participant finding a comfortable, supportive, supine position. Once situated, the participant is guided by a teacher or recording. A typical guided relaxation process for yoga nidra will include a blend of the following:

- connect to heartfelt desire
- set an intention
- tap into inner tranquility
- body scan
- breath awareness
- welcome emotions
- witness thoughts
- invite joyful presence throughout body and beyond
- embrace conscious awareness
- integration and reflection (Integrative Restoration Institute, 2022)

Data collection will occur August 2023 through December 2023. Two yoga nidra sessions will be offered a week over the course of 12-weeks. These individual sessions will last approximately 50-minutes each. Times will be determined by maximum availability of all participants. One focus group will last approximately 60-minutes after the 12-week yoga nidra sessions.

Do not hesitate to ask questions about the study at any time. I am happy to share findings with you after the research is complete. Because this study is part of a doctoral research study, only the researcher will know your identity as a participant. Your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way. Findings will result in public presentation and possibly publication. Participants will be listed as participant 1, participant 2, etc.

Any information obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will not be disclosed. We will do our best to keep your personal

information confidential. You may use a pseudonym if desired. To help protect your confidentiality: (1) storage of data and notes will be kept in a secured location accessible only to the researcher; (2) purging of all personally identifiable information from transcripts and research reports. This project will involve making an audio recording of the focus group conversation. The digital audio recording, accompanying notes, and transcriptions will be kept on a password-protected computer. Information from this study will be kept until May 2025, when all information will be destroyed. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue or refuse to participate in the focus group at any time.

There are no known risks and/or discomforts associated with this study. The expected benefits associated with your participation is to give greater understanding to the researcher how college students respond to yoga nidra techniques. In addition, it is an opportunity for you to participate in a qualitative research study and gain exposure to how this type of research is conducted.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: One of the goals of this study is to create and sustain a welcoming supportive, and inclusive environment. In accordance with Bemidji State University's Equal Opportunity and Non-Discrimination policy: No person shall be discriminated against in the terms and conditions of employment, personnel practices, or access to and participation in, programs, services, and activities with regard to race, sex, color, creed, religion, age, national origin, disability, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. In addition, discrimination in employment based on familial status or membership or activity in a local commission as defined by law is prohibited.

Student Mental Health and Stress Management: As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance or reduce a student's ability to participate in daily activities. At BSU the Student Center for Health and Counseling (755-2053) is available to assist you with concerns. You can learn more about the broad range of mental health services available on campus at http://www.bemidjistate.edu/students/services/health_counseling/

Students with Special Needs: I would like to make sure that all materials, discussions and activities that are part of the class are accessible to you. Students with disabilities that affect their ability to meet expectations of the study should notify me as soon as possible. If you would like to request accommodations or other services, please contact Disability Services in Decker Hall 202 at accessibility@bemidjistate.edu or (218) 766-2139.

Whom to contact about general questions about this study: Co-Investigator: Angie Clark, 218-755-2851, angie.clark@bemidjistae.edu.

Whom to contact about your rights in this experiment: Principal Investigator: Dr. Boyd Bradbury, 218-477-2471, bradbury@mnstate.edu or Chair of MSUM Institutional Research Board: Dr. Robert Nava, 218-477-4308, irb@mnstate.edu.

Acceptance to Participate: *Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above, and you have given consent to participate. You may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty after signing this form.*

I am willing to be part of the 12-week yoga nidra intervention knowing that I am expected to participate in-person for a total of 24-sessions. In the event I am unable to attend in person, I understand a recording will be made available to me. In which case, I will be able to complete the intervention on my own as soon as possible. However, I fully understand that attending in person is preferred for validity of results.

I am willing to participate in a focus group.

If willing to participate in the study, please circle times you are available for fall semester 2023:

Tuesdays/Thursdays 9-9:50 a.m.

Tuesdays/Thursdays 10-10:50 a.m.

Tuesdays/Thursdays 11-11:50 a.m.

Tuesdays/Thursdays 2-2:50 p.m.

Tuesdays/Thursdays 3-3:50 p.m.

In signing this agreement, I also affirm that I am at least 18 years of age or older.

Please include the best way to reach you: _____

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

Thank you,

Angie Clark
angie.clark@bemidjistate.edu
218-755-2851

Reference

Integrative Restoration Institute. (2022). *The 10 step iRest protocol*. irest.org. Retrieved December 7, 2022, from <https://www.irest.org/irest-10-step-protocol>

Appendix C1: Pre-Practice Reflection

Figure 1

Pre-Practice Questions

Pre-Practice Reflections

Using your own words, in 1-2 sentences, describe your current physical state (e.g., areas of tension, expansiveness, weakness, freedom, lightness, dullness, etc.).

Using your own words, in 1-2 sentences, describe your current mental state (e.g., scattered/focused, restless/calm, distracted/one-pointed).

Using your own words, in 1-2 sentences, describe your current emotional state (i.e., describe the presence of any strong emotion/mood or lack thereof).

Using your own words, in 1-2 sentences, describe your current energetic state (e.g. stuck/unchanging, calm/content, robust/energized, expansive/motivated, or integrated).

Using your own words, in 1-2 sentences, describe your current spiritual state (i.e., the subtle sense of self-awareness beyond body, mind, and breath).

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Note: Adapted from *Tantra shakti: The power and radiant soul of yoga* (pp. 127-129) by R. Stryker, 2016. Copyright 2016 by ParaYoga. Adapted with permission.

Appendix C2: Post-Practice Reflection

Figure 2

Post-Practice Questions

Briefly describe how the practice impacted you in each of the following areas.

Briefly describe how the practice impacted you in each of the following areas.

Physically.

Mentally.

Emotionally.

Energetically.

Spiritually.

List any other insights, discoveries or challenges (i.e. new awareness, understandings, shifts in patterning or perceptions) that unfolded during or after the practice.

Please jot down any noteworthy or unique aspects of the practice that you would like to reference at another time.

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Note: Adapted from *Tantra shakti: The power and radiant soul of yoga* (pp. 127-129) by R.

Stryker, 2016. Copyright 2016 by ParaYoga. Adapted with permission.

Appendix D1: Three Qualities of the Breath

Centering:

Sit comfortably with the spine tall. Take a moment to reflect on your posture. Make any adjustments now so your spine is tall and body free of tension. Close the eyes or lower the eyelids. Relax completely.

Active Practice:

- Notice the breath without changing the breath. Watch the breath as if you were an observer.
- Rhythm: Is the breath smooth, rough, are there breaks in the breath, pauses, tightness, tension, expansion, is it deep, full... observe
- Sound: Vibrations, ripples in the quality of the mind? Where is the sound in the chest, nostrils, in the body or mind? Dryness, Stickiness, external internal. Eliminate the sound if it's distracting.
- Emotional quality: feeling, mood, mind state, noticing anything that arises at the end of the inhale or the end of the exhale, maybe you can see what you're feeling: tired, energized calm, tense, or...
- Allow the breath to become a 1 to 1 ratio. Allow the inhale and exhale to become the same length. For example, if you have a 4-count inhale and 6-count exhale, works towards a 5-count inhale and a 5-count exhale. Continue for 2-3 minutes.

Appendix D2: Diaphragmatic Breathing

Centering:

Sit comfortably with the spine tall. Take a moment to reflect on your posture. Make any adjustments now so your spine is tall and body free of tension. Close the eyes or lower the eyelids. Relax completely.

Active Practice (3-5 minutes):

- Right hand on the heart.
- Left hand on the naval.
- Focus on breath originating from the diaphragm.
- Inhale through the nostrils (5 counts)
- Hold (2 counts)
- Exhale through nostrils (8 counts) and allow the abdomen to soften.
- Continue.

Appendix D3: Combination Breath: Ujjayi, Surya & Chandra

Centering:

Sit comfortably with the spine tall. Take a moment to reflect on your posture. Make any adjustments now so your spine is tall and body free of tension. Close the eyes or lower the eyelids. Relax completely.

Active Practice:

- 3 rounds Ujjayi (ocean breath or victorious breath). There is a slight constriction in the back of the throat (gentle hissing sound) while breathing in and out of the nostrils.
- 5 rounds Chandra Bhedana (moon piercing, inhale left, exhale right). Visualize the breath moving through the left nostril on inhale and moving through the right nostril on exhale.
- 3 rounds Ujjayi.
- 5 rounds Surya Bhedana (sun piercing, inhale right, exhale left). Visualize the breath moving through the right nostril on inhale and moving through the left nostril on exhale.
- 3 rounds Ujjayi.

Appendix E1: Yoga Nidra Essentials Practice

Essentials Practice for Beginners

Lie down on your back, arms by your side, palms face up, feet wider than hips, shoulder blades down your back. Be sure that your head and neck are comfortable. Make any adjustments so that you will not have to move during the practice. Close your eyes. Bend one elbow to help keep you aware throughout the practice. If the body tries to slip into unconsciousness, the hand will start to fall keeping you aware. Remain aware throughout the practice. The body sleeps, the mind sleeps, awareness remains aware.

Get comfortable. Relax the facial muscles. Become aware of your body. Notice where you may be holding any tension or contraction. Wherever you feel or sense where are any less than completely comfortable.

Take a moment to embody the feeling of refuge, a place where you feel safe, where you can connect to your hearts' desire; a place inside you that knows no suffering, pain, or sorrow. A place of your own divinity-in your own unique way. You can return to this space anytime during the practice. Refuge is always present and available to you.

Relax. Begin now to let go. Allow the body to open to the earth.

Have the intention to be present. Be effortless and present. Relax into present moment awareness.

Be aware that your body is resting, opening to earth. Your mind gradually becoming quiet.

Please become aware of sound. Body and mind remain effortless, falling into deeper and deeper rest. You are aware of listening to sound. Listening without reacting to what you hear. You gradually become aware of sound becoming more distant. You are transitioning from an outer focus to an internal focus. Reacting to awareness. The sounds will come and go. Abide in restful awareness and being.

Please become aware of your body breathing. Sensing the flow of inhale and flow of exhale. Observe the unique qualities of both inhale and exhale. Exhale is calming soothing, helping you empty and let go. Each time you exhale sense the body and mind letting go of all tension, all concern, all contraction. Your inhale is strengthening and rejuvenating, just being in awareness of the breath. Your abdomen is soft gently rising and falling, while your chest is still, clear and still. Continue to watch your breath and see the abdomen gently rising and falling. Just effortlessness and awareness of the breath.

Please become aware of your body, aware of sensation. Notice that some sensations are familiar while some are unique. Continue to rest and be aware of sensation.

Now please become aware of how you are holding yourself. Be aware of any areas of tension or contraction. Be conscious of the choice that in this moment you will hold onto nothing. Relax. Be aware the more you relax the more you are supported. The more you let go, the more deeply

you rest because your body is not moving your mind can rest.

Your body and your mind are dissolving into sleep. As both body and mind drift into sleep you remain aware of your breath. Chest is still, abdomen rises and falls.

Relax so that the rhythm of the breath can be as comfortable as it could possibly be. The more you relax the softer and more subtle the breath becomes.

You have settled into deep sleep only a trace of awareness remaining. The effortless flow of breath moves through you. You are not the breather. My body breathes. I am spacious awareness experiencing my body breathe. (~1 minute pause)

Gently begin to relax the breath. Take a few slow, even smooth breaths. Have the intention to breath down towards your hands and your feet. As you become more aware of the breath the breath will spontaneously deepen, but don't rush, take your time. Roll over to your side, take a few moments to reground yourself. Stretch or rub your hands together and slowly move back into life.

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Appendix E2: Yoga Nidra for Self-Compassion

Yoga Nidra for Self-Compassion to Touch the Soul

Lie your body on the earth on your back, so that you can begin to soften, to release, to remove tension in the body. Make your space luxurious. Place a blanket underneath the body for softness, behind your ankles, knees, head and/or neck. Cover the body to feel nurtured and stay warm. You can also cover the eyes. Remain aware throughout the practice. The body sleeps, the mind sleeps, awareness remains aware. Bend one elbow to help keep you aware throughout the practice. If the body tries to slip into unconsciousness, the hand will start to fall keeping you aware.

Position the body in any way to find comfort so there is no desire to move. If you feel the desire to move, feel free to do so and return to stillness. Take the next few moments to find the luxurious comfort however you would like. Pause. You are moving towards absolute ease.

During this yoga nidra practice, find yourself aware of a calm sensation permeating through the whole body. Rest in the center of the heart allowing the presence of self-compassion to touch the soul.

With the body at ease begin to listen to the sounds outside of the room. Listen to any sounds without judging them or trying to decipher the sounds. Just listen. Invite the sounds to be. Pause 15 seconds.

Now allow awareness to move towards the sounds within the room, again not judging. Inviting the sounds to be. Notice the transition from the external moving waking life into the internal, curious unknown revelation.

Now allow your awareness to come to the body. Feel the body in a sacred space. Recognize the sensations that are familiar, such as the clothes touching your skin maybe sensations of the body resting on the floor. Other sensations are completely unique.

Recognize the sensations that arise out of contraction or holding. Have the intention to let go of all contraction, all holding. Relax. Pause 15 seconds. Be aware of the body breathing. Become conscious of the unique sensations of the breath. The unique qualities. Exhaling is a kind of emptying. Inhale a filling. Each exhale a letting go. Each inhale a quality of renewal, being replenished. Sense the body open and resting effortlessly. Pause 30 seconds.

As you exhale sense the body softening. Feel the conscious release of the head, the spine, the length of both arms, the pelvis, the legs. Sense the body giving its weight over to the earth and the earth rising to up to hold the body. Feel the support of the earth. Know that you are held. Pause 20 seconds.

Continue to soften with each exhalation allowing the earth to rise and hold your body. Continue to grow the feeling of support. Pause 15 seconds.

- Please become aware of the forehead, point between the eyebrows and at the same time aware of the spiritual heart. Sense there is a line that links the two. Relax the pathway that links the heart and mind.
- Sense the right-side forehead (right temple) and same time awareness of the heart and the link between the two. There is nothing you need to visualize, just awareness that links the right side of forehead and heart. Relax all three: heart, right side forehead, and link between both.
- Right cheek. Relax it. Link between the right cheek and the heart.
- Right side and heart and relax the link.
- Right thigh and heart, relax.
- Right calve and heart, relax.
- Experience the heart effortless.
- Right ankle to the heart. Relax all 3.
- Left ankle and heart and link between.
- Left calve.
- Left thigh.
- Left side and heart. Effortlessness.
- Left cheek and heart and line between the two.
- Left side of the forehead and the heart and the path that links them. Relax.
- Midbrain and heart.
- Feel or see all the points simultaneously connected to the heart. Relax.

Be aware of spaciousness.

Become of any place in the body that still may be holding tension or tightness. Direct your exhale to those spaces and feel the earth holding you as you exhale and that space in the body softens. Continue to use your exhale to release and let go. Continue to soften the body and know that it is held in this sacred space.

Awareness at the Center of Heart-Spiritual Heart Center a white light, expand on inhale, contracts on exhale, as you continue to breath, the light expands and fills the whole body. On the exhale it contracts down to a single, tiny point of light. Like a balloon filled with light, expanding on inhale and contracting down to a tiny single point of light. Continue to see the light, on inhale it expands beyond the physical confines of the body. The light has expanded out, surrounding the body. As the light expands, see, feel or sense yourself cocooned in the light. Perhaps the light shifts to a golden feeling of light. On the exhale the light contracts back to the single point of light in the heart. Continue to experience the sensation of the heart. On next inhale perhaps the light expands to edges of the room. Let the light expand as far as you can see or feel. Let it contract down to a tiny, tiny light, like a tiny star at the center of the heart. Slowly allow yourself to draw your awareness to that tiny, tiny single point of light. As you look more closely at the tiny, shining light, you notice it is in the shape of a tiny golden egg. As you look inside the golden egg, you see there is a tiny version of you sitting crossed legged. As you see this tiny version of you, just notice that this version of you is completely peaceful, joyful, completely at ease. This tiny version of you has three things to tell you. Perhaps you can repeat

them after, yourself. I no longer wait to be perfect in order to love myself. I accept myself exactly as I am, right here and now. I treat myself as if I am someone who is deeply loved. See that tiny version of you inside of the golden egg. I no longer wait to be perfect in order to love myself. I accept myself exactly as I am, right here and now. I treat myself as if I am someone who is deeply loved. I love myself. Just rest here with yourself. See yourself inside this tiny golden egg, completely peaceful, completely joyful, completely in love with yourself. Rest in this heart space, knowing that you are protected here, surrounded by love, surrounded by light, surrounded by truth.

Continue to abide in the golden egg. As you see it or feel it, you are unified awareness. There is an experience of absolute certainty neither past nor future based that your intention is manifest, you are love itself. This love exists in the present, the past, in the future and beyond. Pause 1 minute.

Slowly come back to breath. Breathing with the certainty that your intention is being fulfilled. I am love and love lights my soul. Allow the breath to expand to the extremities.

Roll over to your side, take a few moments to reground yourself. Stretch or rub your hands together and slowly move back into life.

Note: Adapted from *Destiny*, by R. Stryker, 2022, Sanctuary. 2022 by R. Stryker. Adapted with permission. Adapted from *Self Love Meditation*, by T. Stanley and T. Rashid, 2020. Copyright 2020 by Tracee Stanley. <https://traceeyoga.com/>. Adapted with permission.

Appendix E3: Yoga Nidra for Grounding and Stability

Yoga Nidra for Grounding and Stability

Come into your yoga nidra nest. Lie down on your back, arms by your side, palms face up, feet wider than hips, shoulder blades down your back. Be sure that your head and neck are comfortable. Make any adjustments so that you will not have to move during the practice. Close your eyes. Remain aware throughout the practice. The body sleeps, the mind sleeps, awareness remains aware. Bend one elbow to help keep you aware throughout the practice. If the body tries to slip into unconsciousness, the hand will start to fall keeping you aware.

Take three deep breaths: inhaling and filling your lungs, exhaling, and emptying your lungs with a deep sigh out. Be aware of your breath, each time you exhale, feel a wave of relaxation sweep through your body as you release and let go. (10 breaths)

Invite stillness into your body. Be aware of the space your body is occupying. (2 minutes)

Imagine that you are drawing a circle of protection around your body. This circle can be made of anything you wish: fire, Divine light, your favorite flowers, fresh soil, limbs of trees, or a wall of clay. Whatever calls to you, establish this circle of protection around yourself. See and feel yourself inside the circle. (1 minute)

As you become more still, begin to feel the breath as it enters your nostrils. Feel it travel into your lungs, where it dissolves. Then follow its path all the way to somewhere outside your body, where it dissolves again. You are not controlling the breath. You are merely watching it move in and out of your body. Feel your navel rise and fall as you breathe in and out. (2 minutes)

Feel yourself lying on the earth. Slowly scan through your body and become aware of how you are holding it. You may recall the body parts that felt constricted during the earlier body awareness exercise. Feel free to let your body adjust for one more layer of comfort. (2 minutes)

Let your awareness move toward sound, noticing all the sounds around you without judgment. Allow your awareness to move from sound to sound to sound. Let all the sounds be there. You are on the inside of the circle; the sounds are on the circumference. (1 minute)

Remember your sankalpa: I honor and acknowledge my body as a sacred vessel that houses my inner light. I invite deep rest into every cell of my being. I trust that I deserve to be supported, nurtured, and held unconditionally. I *know* the earth can hold me.

Be aware of the parts of your body that are touching the floor. Begin at your feet and scan upward. Feel your heels touching the floor and silently repeat the mantra LAM (lum). Feel the next point where your body contacts the floor and repeat LAM. Continue all the way until you get to the top of the head:

Calves and floor, LAM
 Back of your thighs and the floor, LAM
 Buttocks and the floor, LAM
 Parts of your spine touching the floor, LAM
 Shoulder blades and the floor, LAM
 Back of your head and the floor, LAM

Feel all of these parts becoming heavier as you repeat the mantra LAM. Notice your body breathing. As it receives an inhalation, sense the earth rising up to hold and cradle you. It's as though the involuntary act of inhaling is calling the earth toward you.

As your body exhales, ask it to surrender into the earth. Every in-breath invites the earth to support you even more. Every outbreath is a trusting acceptance that you deserve to be held. Begin with the number 27 and begin to count backward:

Inhale 27; exhale 27.

Inhale 26; exhale 26.

Each time you exhale, a layer of constriction and tension is released from your body and mind. By the time you get to zero, the body and mind are completely free. If you lose your place when counting, start again from 27.

Once you get to zero, feel the earth holding you unconditionally. (3 minutes) Feel your body and the earth breathing as one. (5 minutes)

Now begin to transition out of the practice, notice everything during this transition. Welcome yourself back. Notice the breath. Notice your body. Notice the earth beneath you. Begin to deepen your breath. (1-2 minutes)

Slowly roll to your right side and sit up.

Take the next few minutes to journal about your experience.

Note: From *Radiant rest: Yoga nidra for deep relaxation & awakened clarity* (pp. 106-108), by

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Appendix E4: Yoga Nidra for Empowerment

Yoga Nidra for Empowerment

Lie down on your back, arms by your side, palms face up, feet wider than hips, shoulder blades down your back. Be sure that your head and neck are comfortable. Make any adjustments so that you will not have to move during the practice. Close your eyes. Bend one elbow to help keep you aware throughout the practice. If the body tries to slip into unconsciousness, the hand will start to fall keeping you aware. Remain aware throughout the practice. The body sleeps, the mind sleeps, awareness remains aware.

Remember it is important that your body is completely comfortable and at ease, so that you can remain still for the practice. Feel gravity softening the body, the body opening to the earth. Relax the jaw. Lips and teeth slightly part. The tongue widens. Even your eyes drop into the eye sockets.

Feel the whole body and become aware of your breath. Please take a deep breath in. As you exhale feel the whole body soften, the mind release tension. Repeat this two more times. Complete inhale and release all contraction and stress. Now feel your body just resting. Feel the whole body and effortless breath.

You are now going to count backward on your breath. Start at the number 10. Each exhale you are going to go backward on your breath. Next exhale 9. Next exhale 8. Each exhale is like peeling away another layer of an onion. The closer you get to zero the more the body and mind are established in complete ease. At zero feel you are resting in complete stillness and ease.

Now you are ready to practice your sankalpa. A sankalpa is a positive statement or affirmation. Something that you are dearly committed to achieving in the next 6-18 months. In order to plant the seed of intention, first establish the feeling of gratitude. Feel grateful for everything that has led to this moment now. Grateful for actions, events, decisions that have led you to the present. Steeped in a feeling of gratitude, mentally repeat your sankalpa three times. At the same time feel the outcome you desire. Feel the happiness that will come once your desire is fulfilled. Repeat the exact words of your sankalpa precisely with absolute certainty that your resolve will come to pass. Pause. Now give thanks that you have already achieved your desire.

You are going to move awareness through the body. Don't try to concentrate, just listen. See or feel the body part I describe and continue to deepen your relaxation. Move your awareness to your mouth. Become aware of your tongue. Lower row of teeth. Upper row of teeth. Both lips. Space between your lips. Tip of the nose. Whole nose. Both cheeks. Right ear. Left ear. Right eye lid. Left eye lid. Right eye. Left eye. Right eyebrow. Left eyebrow. Space between the eyebrows. Whole forehead. Both temples. Top of the head. Back of the head. Move to your right hand. Right hand thumb, index finger, middle finger, fourth finger, little finger, palm of the hand, back of the hand, wrist, forearm, elbow, upper arm, shoulder, armpit, right side ribs, waist, hip, right groin, right thigh, kneecap, calve muscle, ankle, heel, sole of the foot, top of the foot, big toe, second toe, third, fourth, fifth. Left hand thumb, index finger, middle finger, fourth finger, little finger, palm, back of the hand, wrist, forearm, elbow, upper arm, shoulder, underarm, side ribs, waist, hip, left groin, left thigh, knee cap, calve muscle, ankle, heel, sole of the foot, top of

the foot, big toe, second toe, third, fourth, fifth, back of the head, right shoulder blade, left shoulder blade, whole spine, right buttock, left buttock, right heel, left heel, forehead, both temples, right inner ear, left inner ear, roof of the mouth, throat, right collar bone, left collar bone, right chest, left chest, middle chest, naval, upper abdomen, lower abdomen, right leg, left leg, both legs together, right arm, left arm, both arms together, the whole front body, the whole back body, the head, the whole body. Be aware of the whole body. Short pause.

Begin the process of mental alternate nostril breathing. See the breath rise through the left nostril and descend through the right nostril. Then in through the right and out through the left. Don't try, just feel. Feel these two lines of the breath distinctly. The breath starts from a point 3-6 inches below the tip of your nose and rises to the space between the eyebrows in the forehead. In the left, out the right. In right, out left. No trying. Just awareness of the breath and relaxation. Relaxation and the alternating ascent and descent of breath. Continue. Just awareness of the breath and relaxation. Pause 1 minute.

Feel the breath rising and falling through both nostrils. Bring your awareness to the space directly in front of your forehead and eyes. Find the empty or black space just about 6 inches in front of your forehead. Imagine this space as the screen of the mind. It is a screen of consciousness, where all dimensions of the mind can be seen and known. On that screen, visualize the color blue... see blue... visualize white... see the screen of the mind white...see the color gold fill the screen of the mind...gold, see gold...see the screen of the mind emerald green...see the screen of the mind violet...now see the screen of the mind rose...screen of the mind rose...screen of the mind violet...see the screen of the mind green...now see gold... see white, see white... now blue...screen of the mind black...see black on the screen of the mind. Imagine that the screen of the mind is empty because you are empty of all intention and effort. Your senses have withdrawn. You are effortless. As you relax and observe that space, witness any shapes or colors that appear on the black, empty screen of the mind.

Please bring your awareness back to the present. Now, feel the whole body is weightless. Feel the head weightless. The right and left palms are weightless. The whole body is weightless. The body is so light that you are now aware that there is space between your body and the surface you are lying. Create this space and feel weightless. Pause 20 seconds.

Now, imagine the body heavy. Feel as though your whole body is sinking into the earth. Every part of the body, arms, legs, torso, and head are being drawn down to the center of the earth. Even the eyes and eyelids are heavy. Feel the whole body heavy. Keep feeling that the whole body is incredibly heavy. Intensify the feeling of heaviness. Pause 20 seconds.

Now feel formless Completely thoughtless and formless. Feel the boundary of the body dissolving and merging with the space around it. You are now one with the vast endless sky. Your body, mind and soul are at peace. Pause 20 seconds.

Turn your attention to the cave of the heart. In the heart sense a red mist billowing out of the cave. A billowing red mist, like a thick red fog. Searching for self-knowledge, you enter through the red mist into the cave. Here, you will receive guidance or discover the answer to an important question, any question. In the cave of the heart, the mist clears revealing an illumined being or

sacred image or symbol. Feel its significance and power. If you have a question, ask it now. If you don't have one and wish to, you could ask yourself, where is the source of peace? Instantly an answer comes. Don't judge it, just trust and listen. The answer has come from your highest self. Continue to receive whatever you need while you rest in the cave of the heart. Pause 45 seconds.

Become aware of the breath. Be aware of the body breathing. Now you are going to repeat your resolve, your sankalpa. First establish the feeling of gratitude. Everything is perfect just as it should be. Slowly repeat your resolve clearly three times. Use the exact same words as you did at the beginning of the practice. Mentally repeat them with the absolute certainty that this desire will come to pass. See and feel the joy and excitement of your sankalpa as reality. Pause 45 seconds. Now give thanks that your resolve has come to pass. Thankful as you have already achieved your desire.

Relax all effort. Take a moment to see a bright golden flame behind your naval. Feel this grounding and recharging your senses and mind. Feel the light growing in intensity until this light fills the whole body.

Now allow your awareness to return to the breath. Sense the breath descending towards your hands and feet. Without opening your eyes, clearly see the room around you. Slowly move your body, gradually stretching yourself. There is no hurry. When you are sure you are awake, sit up slowly and begin to open your eyes again. The practice of yoga nidra is now complete.

Note: Adapted from *The four desires* (pp. 166-171) by R. Stryker, 2011, Hay House. Copyright 2011 by Rod Stryker. Adapted with permission.

Appendix F: Focus Group

The focus group questions were asked of participants after all the interventions were completed.

Focus Group Questions

1. How would you describe yoga nidra to a friend?
2. What was the most profound or beneficial aspect of the yoga nidra practice?
3. What did you find most challenging about doing yoga nidra?
4. Describe any insight into your overall well-being having done the yoga nidra practices... can be anything such as sleep, nutrition, study habits, time management, etc.
5. What was the most significant thing you learned about yourself during this yoga nidra class?
6. What is the likelihood of you continuing yoga nidra on your own? What would you keep the same or do differently?

Follow-up Questions or Comments

1. Would you explain further?
2. Would you give an example of what you mean?
3. Would you say more?
4. Is there anything else?
5. I don't understand.