

**Perceptions of the Environment:
An Ethnographic Study of Sensory Awareness and Environmental Activism
Among South Florida Yoga Practitioners**

by

Meagan L. Weisner

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
The Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

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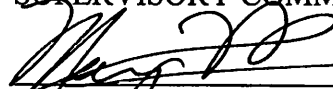
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This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor, Dr. Mary Cameron, Department of Anthropology, and has been approved by the members of her supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of The Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

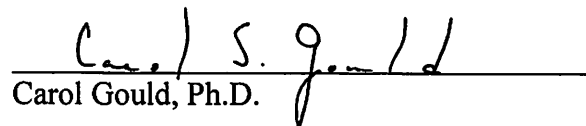
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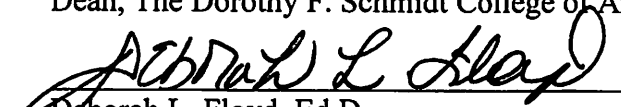
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Abstract

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The practice of yoga is an increasingly popularized movement within the West that incorporates the desire for physical fitness, spiritual consciousness, and environmentalism. Emanating from the New Age movement, the popularity of yoga has proliferated as a subculture that seeks to encourage mind–body wellbeing while representing an ethos that assumes environmental responsibility. This thesis examines the techniques of modern yoga and the influence that *asana* (posture) and meditational relaxation have on the senses and subsequently on environmental awareness and activism.

Ethnographic work was conducted at a South Florida Yoga Center where thirteen interviews occurred with practitioners before and after yoga to examine changing sensory perceptions. It was found that for at least half of the participants, a sensory enhancement occurred after yoga that enabled participants to describe their environment using detailed descriptions through their senses, rather than general statements. However, when surveys

were conducted to measure environmental activism between a group of yogis and the general public, yoga practitioners did not show a greater, overall contribution to securing a sustainable planet than the control group. Results indicate that although yoga allows some to view themselves as part of the environment through a heightened sensory awareness, this increased consciousness toward the natural world does not translate into enhanced environmental activism toward the planet.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my family, especially my patient and loving husband who has always encouraged and supported my educational endeavors and to my parents, for teaching me to love and appreciate nature.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Modern yoga exists as a fusion of techniques that physically empower the practitioner and calm the mind, while employing an array of philosophical teachings to assist one on their path to corporeal and spiritual wellness. In the West, yoga is renowned as a self–ameliorative practice that promotes care, not only of oneself, but of all sentient beings within nature. Through *asana* (postures), *pranayama* (breathwork) and meditation, yoga leads its practitioners into an experience that encourages one to disconnect from external stimuli and dwell within the deeper dimensions of the inner body. This thesis examines the relationship between yoga practitioners and their environment, asking whether yoga produces an enhanced sensorial awareness that translates into enhanced environmental awareness and activism.

Often, yoga is linked to the assumption that environmental actions within western culture are definite traits of the yoga practitioner. This belief comes without validation, although many yoga practitioners appear to be environmentalists. Yet, little evidence exists to support their role as being true conservationists. This thesis research sought to examine whether yoga is a practice that has the potential to create more environmentally conscientious and sustainable roles within society. To address where environmentalism situates itself within the western culture of yoga, this research entails two main components. First, it examines the sensory awareness of yoga practitioners by recording

environmental perception before and after yoga. Secondly, it compares the environmental activism present among a group of yoga practitioners to that of a control group of non-yogis. Results indicate that, although yoga is believed to promote a representation of care toward oneself and beyond, the enhanced sensorial awareness that yoga produces does not increase environmental activism.

The yoga practitioner in the United States has a history of connecting with environmentalism. Kay Milton defines environmentalism as “a quest for a viable future, pursued through culturally defined responsibilities” (1993: 2). The environmental movement that began in the United States in the 1960s emerged alongside American counterculture with the emphasis on “getting back to nature” (Baer 2003: 234). Holistic practices, especially Eastern medicine, meditation, and yoga were popularized alongside the movement. More recently, popular perception has solidified the yoga practitioner as an embodied example of physical health and an active disciple of nature. Yoga further attracted western practitioners as it merged with the New Age movement in the 1980s known as “a period of massive change in the future where people will live in harmony with nature and each other” (Aldred 2002:62). New Agers trusted in various practices, such as yoga and meditation, to be used for spiritual growth and personal transformation. The mainstream perception of the yogi as a nature-loving, conscientious individual is reinforced through New Age culture and through the green consumerism that carefully produces and labels products as “environmentally-friendly.” The modern yogi today is equipped with products designed for yoga: organic food and clothing, mats made out of rubber trees, glass water bottles, among other items. These products often display labels

that denote environmental consciousness which consequently, reinforces the modern perception of yoga as an environmental subculture within the United States.

To accurately depict how yoga practitioners are situated within the framework of environmentalism, I conducted fieldwork over the course of three months at a yoga center in south Florida. This yoga center is advertised as a community offering donation based classes, allowing individuals from any economic background to join. Participant observation, interviews, and surveys were conducted to examine the sustainable (and non-sustainable) practices of the yogis, and how these relate to sensory perception. A control group of non-yoga practitioners was also surveyed to compare their environmental practices with those of the yoga practitioners. I conducted all surveys within the south Florida region, and the demographics of the participants in both the control group and the experimental group were not significantly different. In addition to understanding the degree of environmental activism, sensory perception of the yogis was also addressed. I conducted interviews before and immediately after yoga classes where I asked the participants to describe their surroundings. From the results, I concluded that sensory perception is enhanced within most practitioners immediately after yoga. However, when the practices of environmental sustainability were considered, I further concluded that the enhanced sensory awareness that is produced by yoga does not directly produce enhanced environmental activism.

This research produced a wide variety of puzzled looks, criticism, and praise; most commonly, the comments I received at the yoga center were, “Oh yes, most definitely, yoga practitioners are more environmental.” I define environmental activism as the types of sustainable practices adopted by an individual and the frequency as to

which these practices are utilized. Sustainable activities include reducing energy use, recycling, lowering transportation emissions, lessening consumption, among others. The assumption that those who practice yoga actively participate in creating a more sustainable planet is a common belief expressed by south Florida yoga practitioners. However, when these yogis were questioned about their own sustainable actions toward the planet, a paradox in this thesis became apparent. Yoga practitioners did not show an overall greater contribution towards environmental sustainability than the control group, despite their belief that yogis are more environmental. Results indicate that yoga leads one on a path to surrender and accept what *is*, and in some cases creates a more environmentally passive practitioner.

The Research Problem and Significance

Is yoga capable of producing an enhancement in one's sensory perception and can that be used to foster an awareness that re-conditions the human perception within the environment? People in western societies view the environment in different ways but most often believe they are separate from it (Ingold 1993). Not viewing oneself as part of the environment can lead to the unwise use of natural resources. I suggest that our human actions toward the environment are a product of our perception and examine the potential that sensory awareness might have in changing one's perception to produce individuals within society who are more conscientious about the environment and sustainability.

The complex sentiment that humans hold toward environmental issues generates responses that highlight the existing environmental perceptions among people, including those individuals that are resistant to climate warming. The phenomena of climate change

such as sea level rise, soil erosion, deforestation, and biodiversity loss are proven to affect human life. Environmentally sustainable actions have great potential to preserve our earth's ecosystems, yet require life-changing commitments on community and individual levels.

Investigating individual perceptions of those who instigate environmental destruction certainly has a valid purpose in relation to predicting ecological destruction. However, evaluating the perceptions of environmental activists has the potential to identify what factors foster and instill the characteristics of environmental responsibilities. Environmental awareness is often paid slim attention as we navigate through the world with complex modes of technology. Unlike our hunter-gatherer ancestors, humans today can dwell comfortably without ever stepping foot into a forest and relying on their keen senses to guide them. Therefore, sensory awareness in the modern world has been altered, and perhaps transformed into a phenomenon that affects the ways in which we perceive our surroundings. By looking at the ways in which individuals are able to transform their perception toward a concern for nature, perhaps we can understand what strengthens the human emotional connection to nature, and consequently use this as a tool to encourage environmental prosperity and sustainability.

For this thesis, the practice of yoga was selected with the intent to understand if enhanced sensory perception did, in fact, result from yoga and if that could translate into greater environmental action. Movement, sound and gesture offer humans a way to interact with their environment, and in order to exist as sentient beings humans must not detach from their environmental conditions (Ingold 2000). Yoga offers a way for one to physically express and creatively arrange the body into postures while consciously

directing their attention to a more centered and inclusive position within the environment.

The human–environment relation is a social and behavioral dynamic requiring an interdisciplinary inquiry to understand (Craik 1972). To properly address this study on environmental activism, sensory perception and yoga, this research draws on the fields of cultural anthropology, sensory anthropology, and environmentalism. By examining the ways in which humans interact within their environment, this research can contribute to our understanding of how perceptions might be altered to foster environmental sustainability. Although the original inquiry of this research anticipated yoga practitioners would hold a position that works to change environmental degradation, the results proved otherwise. Yoga practitioners did not exhibit a position of enhanced environmental activism despite evidence of demonstrating an enhanced sensory perception. It is my hopes that this research will encourage the field of anthropology to further inquire what practices exist in the world that foster a perceptual change and how we can further understand the relationship between perception and environmental activism.

Thesis Organization

This thesis is organized into six chapters. Chapter Two is divided into two literature review sections – one that provides a very brief history of yoga, and the other which includes important literature about environmental anthropology and sensory perception. The overview of yogic history includes information about the significant, ancient texts that have had a profound effect on shaping the way we view and practice yoga today. In addition to this, background information has been included that explains

the transnational journey that yoga has made from the former ascetic, religious practice in India to a modernized, physical and New Age practice in the West. The literature focusing on sensory perception is drawn from the work of several sensory and environmental anthropologists to explain the workings that environmentalism has in relation to sensory perception.

Chapter Three discusses the methodology of this study. This chapter consists of four parts which explain data collection, the dynamics of the population group that was studied, interview analysis, and survey analysis. Detailed information is given about how participant observation, survey, and interview processes were conducted.

Chapter Four explains the shift in sensory perception that yoga practitioners experienced before and after two different types of yoga classes. Two groups of interviews occurred, one that took place before and after *vinyasa* yoga classes and the other was before and after gentle yoga classes that incorporated extended meditational relaxation techniques. The results of the interview process is expanded upon in this chapter.

Chapter Five discusses the connection between the New Age movement and environmentalism. This chapter draws on information from participant observation and from surveys administered about the culture of New Age yoga and the environmental practices of yoga practitioners. This chapter examines modern yoga in south Florida, the movement of environmentalism, and the conscious awareness that is produced by the practice of yoga and what that signifies for sustainable actions.

Chapter Six summarizes the research and results. It also offers suggestions for future research. The Appendices is comprised of interview questions and the survey, followed by cited references.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

This literature review requires the merging of complementary, yet distinct topics: yoga, environmentalism, and sensory anthropology. For this reason, I have chosen to address the background of yoga separately from sensory anthropology and environmentalism. Writing a thorough, but brief history of yoga requires assiduous effort in sorting through a considerable amount of literature that can be ambiguous and sometimes, anecdotal. Therefore, the history of yoga draws upon various sources and is re-told using information from publications by prominent yogis who have shaped modern yoga (Iyengar 1966, Prabhavananda and Isherwood 2002, Satchidananda 1978) and various anthropologists who can be considered “masters” of yogic history (Alter 2004; Strauss 1997, 2002). Additionally, information has been included to address the transnational migration of yoga and how the practice situates itself among the New Age movement within the West today.

Within the section on sensory anthropology, various literature from the field of environmental anthropology is included to elicit a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamic relationship between the senses and human perception of the natural and synthetic world. In this section, I have aimed to highlight relevant works of various sensory and environmental anthropologists to show that human interaction with the

environment is ultimately a result of how the environment is perceived through the senses (Classen 1997; Howes 1991, 2010; Ingold 2000, 2011; Milton 1993, 2002; Pink 2010).

Yoga: A Historic Overview

Yoga is a practice that has captured western attention since the 17th century with the rise of colonialism and was made more popular when placed on exhibit at the Chicago World Fair in 1893 (Alter 2004). Developed in ancient India, this physical form of bodily movement is more arduous than it appears, and not necessarily just in the physical sense, but mentally as well. The complexity of yoga does not reside entirely within the ability to undulate the body into advanced postures, but rather to create a conscious state of being. In Sanskrit, yoga means “union” or “to join” together the body and mind (Iyengar 1966:19). As the conversation surrounding sensory anthropology often relates to the human connection (or disconnection) with the natural world, yoga implies a state of “oneness” facilitated through enhanced body and mind awareness.

Ancient texts indicate that yoga emerged out of South Asia and “crystallized into a school of thought sometime between 150 and 500 C.E.” (Alter 2004: 4) as a mental practice evoking a state of transcendental consciousness that requires incredible self-discipline. Yoga’s history is equivocal, weaving together asceticism, meditation, devotion, spirituality, and physical manipulation among various other components. The belief that yoga can be reduced to one original, ancient practice has proved to be erroneous. In fact, there never existed a “pure” yoga, because it has always existed as a transforming derivative of an earlier discipline (Lieberman 2008). The history of yoga exists as an intermittently recorded history and also as an oral tradition, passed from guru

to student and complemented by older texts in which the content could be directly used to accompany a practice (Alter 2004).

Cornerstones to the practice of yoga and dating back centuries, the *Bhagavad-Gita* and *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* were texts used to justify and support didactic instructions between guru and disciple. This same technique is ascribed to today in a slightly different form where modern yoga strives to link the practice to tradition. The importance of these two books are continually emphasized by modern yogis and are paramount to their interpretations of the origins of yoga. This classical literature mentions limited instruction on the physical *asana* practice but more definitively refers to the art of mental control through meditation. The notion that the physical practice of yoga is deeply rooted in these philosophical texts is a common cultural depiction of yoga today.

The *Bhagavad-Gita* is one of the most revered texts among yoga practitioners. It is rooted in Hinduism and emphasizes a philosophical and religious view of eighteen types of yoga, one being the yoga of devotion, described as acts of compassion toward all living creatures (Prabhavananda and Isherwood 2002). This text, lacking in specificity toward *asana*, emphasizes three fundamental types of yoga: *karmayoga* (the yoga of action), *jnanayoga* (the yoga of knowledge), and *bhaktiyoga* (the yoga of devotion) (De Michelis 2008). It is recognized for “bearing on the development of character, civic-minded public service, work ethics, and what might generally be regarded as ‘life skills’” (Alter 2008: 46). While this text may be metaphorically applied to explain postural practice today, it is also appropriately presented as a model for finding peace within. Sarbacker (2008:169) claims yoga in the *Gita* is “represented by Krsna to Arjuna as not a means of avoiding the violence that warfare between his and his cousins’ families

portends but rather as a way of finding peace and liberation within the parameters of his duty (*dharma*) of fighting the battle. [Yoga is] not a mode of outer, but inner renunciation.” This text stands as central, idealized scripture that is widely consumed by yogis today to complement and encourage a deeper understanding of Indic religions and the variations of the yogic discipline (De Michelis 2008).

The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali highlights the importance of exercising self-control over the mind. Alter (2008:46) states the relevance of yoga today can be found within the second aphorism of the text “which indicates the need to control fluctuations or modifications of the mind.” This can be interpreted in various ways, in which the ambiguity extends into today’s practice, inviting a diverse range of explanations that cover moral, ethical, and social problems. This text is central to the pedagogy within yoga teacher training, especially the schools that incorporate breathing techniques into the practice of physical movement and alignment, such as Iyengar and Ashtanga yoga (Burley 2008).

The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali has been modified and translated numerous times, and although imprecise, it is known as the quintessential text to understanding the authentic aspiration of “anglophone yoga” (Singleton 2008:77). Recent translations (Satchidananda 1978) aim to explain yoga through various ways of control, among these: mental control through meditation, compassion, and *karma*. *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, like many other texts associated with yoga, expresses a state of mental control which can be accomplished through physical, postural practice. This physical practice that is now a global phenomenon is most commonly referred to as Modern Yoga. In the proceeding paragraphs, I will refer to Modern Yoga to mean the postural practice as well as the

definition by De Michelis (2008:19) as a practice “rooted in South Asian cultural contexts and more specifically draw[ing] inspiration from certain philosophies, teachings and practices of Hinduism.”

The journey of yoga into the United States began with Swami Vivekananda at the Chicago Parliament of Religions in 1893 (De Michelis 2008) where he displayed various *asanas* and promoted Hinduism. In 1896 he published *Raja Yoga* in the English language which became an inspiring text and path for yoga to infiltrate western culture (De Michelis 2008). Within Vivekananda’s book is an interpretation from *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* that emphasizes *astangayoga*, the physical, postural practice. This literature marks the beginning of the transnational movement of modern yoga as it proceeded from Swami Vivekananda at the turn of the nineteenth century to a more syncretic and influential practice throughout the twentieth century.

The success of yoga in the West was continued by other prominent yogis emerging out of India to demonstrate and instruct others about their interpretations of the physical, mental, and philosophical practice. Swami Sivananda wrote influential publications in the 1930s and started the Divine Life Society, adding to the popularity of yoga across the West (Strauss 2002). Sivananda was considered a guru, or a master of yoga, and his students sought to carry on his teachings embedded with a fusion of their own styles. Tirumalai Krishnamacharya was another figurehead and his students played a major role in globalizing yoga. The most famous of his students was Pattabhi Jois, whose style of yoga we know today as *Ashtanga*, and B.K.S. Iyengar, who labeled his yoga *Iyengar* (Nevrin 2008).

Most of the modern yoga instructors today are certified to teach a version of either *Ashtanga* or *Iyengar* yoga. These two styles remain foundational to modern yoga but continue to evolve and branch out further into a synthesis of various methods usually emphasizing a slightly different technique within *asanas* (postures), *pranayama* (attentive breathing) and *svadhyaya* (chanting) (Nevrin 2008).

The history of yoga is an evolving practice that requires physical and mental dedication. Yoga promotes an altered state of consciousness through techniques like *asana*, *pranayama* and cross-legged, seated meditation. These techniques can lead the practitioner into a state of “union” between the body and mind, which is the ultimate goal of the yogi. However, postural yoga in the United States today does not always emphasize the importance of creating a mind–body connection through meditation.

Meditation gained tremendous attention in the United States as part of the counterculture movement of the late 1960s. This movement opened up a widespread acceptance of disciplines and related philosophies that incorporated the arts, environmentalism, a desire for peace, and an inquiry into yoga. Images of the Beatles posing in an Indian ashram popularized meditation taught by the Yogi, Maharishi Mahesh (Harrington 2008). Although modern yoga today uses *asanas* as the primary focus of the practice it is often paired with other techniques that assist the practitioner in meditating. This re-emergence into the world after yoga can be experienced as an altered state of consciousness and heightened engagement within one’s surroundings. Postural yoga practitioners often see the training as a form of moving meditation, focusing attention inward to direct the body through a sequence of postures (Nevrin 2008). Many

practitioners today seek yoga as a holistic health practice, meant to release stress and tension within the body through movement and subsequently, meditation.

The physical practice of yoga and the practice of meditation are tightly woven into the New Age movement today. Emerging out of the 1980s, followers of the movement utilized eclectic beliefs and practices from various cultures to make personal and spiritual transformations (Aldred 2002). The New Age demographic consists mainly of middle to upper middle class Americans, baby boomers, and college educated individuals who strongly believe in using consciousness and enlightenment to create positive change within society. The motivation to improve not just society but also the planet is complemented by consumer tools for the journey. Although quantitative research is limited in defining exactly what New Agers purchase, merchandise such as books, crystals, and music all contribute to consumption of the movement (Mears and Ellison 2000). Baer (2003) recognizes the New Age movement can also be referred to as the Holistic Health Movement, as it too trusts in Eastern practices such as yoga for stress reduction. The New Age movement pays a certain regard to health and wellbeing of oneself and also to the ecological wellbeing of the planet. The intersection of yoga and environmentalism is a cohesive and established resting place within the paradigm of the New Age movement. Strauss (2005) recognizes that features of yoga and ecology are shared as principles of universality or inclusivity of all, spiritual rather than religious emphasis, person–planet connection, and a praxis orientation of *doing* what you believe in.

The brief history of yoga presented here serves to highlight the factors that have shaped the emergent practice that exists today. Sarbacker (2008:178) provides a succinct

explanation for the history of yoga: “There is no authentic yoga aside from the organic, living traditions that have been intimately intertwined with the ‘tradition texts’ or dominant philosophical and other discursive and bodily paradigms that have been characteristic of their historical moments.”

Yoga’s history is deeply rooted in India and has been pulled and re-planted through centuries of modification and syncretism. Today, yoga is being transformed by western commodification and modernization in India, but has been predominantly shaped by Hindu roots and admired figures like Vivekananda, Sivananda, and their disciples.

Sensory Anthropology and Environmentalism

Anthropologists are engaged in research that seeks to understand why humans perceive their environment in a variety of ways (Howes 1991, 2010; Howes and Classen 1991; Ingold 1991a, 1991b, 2000, 2011; Kuznar 2001; le Guen et. al 2013; Milton 2002; Washburn 1999). Environmental perception is complex and cannot be properly understood without first identifying the meaning behind the word “environment.” Mühlhäusler and Peace (2006:458) state there is ambiguity and anthropocentrism in the terms “nature” and “environment.” This ambiguity creates the challenge that is present in changing the environmental perceptions of those that believe humans are the center of nature rather than the reverse. Although definitions of the environment vary across disciplines and within anthropology, this thesis will use the word *environment* to refer to a person’s organic and synthetic surroundings in order to understand the “indivisible totality” (Ingold 2000:19) or unity, of the organism and those surroundings.

Researching how environmental perception causes some people to value nature, while others ignore it, and some destroy it requires that we ask what senses are engaged in the creation of these perceptions. *The Perception of the Environment* (Ingold 2000) is a compilation of essays that advances anthropological understandings of how human perceptions are developed from cultural, geographical, and ancestral ways of being in the world. Ingold (2000:9) considers the ways in which humans consciously relate to their environment to be a suitable topic for cultural analysis. He asserts that how one acts within one's environment is determined by how one perceives that environment, and understanding how some humans separate "culture" from "natural" may suggest how the division can be overcome. Perception and the senses are bound together in cognition, and the culture of modern yoga practitioners today contain strong attachments and attitudes toward environmental sentiment that may result from their sensory engagement in yoga.

In order to advocate for a shift in consciousness that encourages humans to restore ecological vitality, research must be conducted towards understanding which perceptions are adaptable to encourage a mindset that includes humans to be a part of nature. If anthropology can collectively determine why and how some people love nature more than others, then perhaps this will suggest a plan for how to encourage and enhance environmental change on an individualistic level. Kay Milton (2002) recognizes emotion as the primary reason for influencing how individuals interact with nature. Naturally, each person harbors their own feelings toward their environment such as loving, detached, or otherwise. Anthropologist, Nurit Bird-David (1993:121) states, "In the traditional Western view, nature and humankind have been 'seen' as detached and in opposition. Furthermore, they have been viewed within a 'subject-object' frame: nature

‘seen’ as a resource to be utilized, controlled, possessed, dominated, managed and (more recently) looked after by humankind.” Depending on the culture, different senses are emphasized and utilized accordingly, creating heterogeneous environmental perspectives across the globe.

The literature on the anthropology of the senses provides insight and models for the study of this topic. This sub-field emerged in the early 1990s and was once labeled by David Howes’ (1991) as “sensorial anthropology.” Despite the name changes, this anthropological branch is interested in the senses as a means of inquiry, not just an object of study (Classen 1997). This “interdisciplinary field” as Sarah Pink refers to it (2010:331), uses long term ethnographic fieldwork but is being “surpassed by ‘sensory’ methods developed across the ‘ethnographic’ disciplines.....[which] use methods that depart from social anthropology” (2010:332).

Sensory perception, a complex and multifaceted concept, is an ever-changing phenomenon that crosses more disciplines than anthropology alone. Medical research conducted by neurologists states that the senses should be understood through their interconnection to human perception (Cytowic 2010). This suggests that medical science and social science can complement one another and lead to new findings advancing our understanding of how human perception and the senses are connected.

Recently, elements of traditional yoga practice such as *pranayama*, or breathwork, have been linked with enhancing sensory perceptions like visual contrast, concentration, and memory (Telles et al. 2011). By understanding cultural interpretations associated with the senses, the anthropology of the senses can contribute to “the study of

transformative healing and trajectories of healthcare seeking and patterns of referral in pluralistic healthcare arenas” (Nichter 2008:163).

Sensory anthropologists Howes and Classen (1991) have constructed a “paradigm for sensing” that is divided into ten categories: language, artifacts and aesthetics, body decoration, childrearing practices, alternative sensory modes, media and communication, natural and built environment, rituals, mythology, and cosmology. This research emphasizes the sensory category of the natural and built environment as a guideline for examining the sensory profile of the yogis as it relates to, and influences their perceptions. Anthropology plays a critical role in contributing to the literature of understanding environmental perception. It strives to identify factors that play a role in determining what senses are utilized and how they contribute to the perceptions, feelings and actions toward the environment and beyond. Howes states, an “anthropological approach to the senses is also increasingly being applied to the analysis of issues of social concern, including poverty, social violence and the environment” (2010:339).

The research surrounding sensory perception requires an interdisciplinary approach that examines cultural sensitivities and medical paradigms. The practice of yoga has become part of the anthropological literature that considers how yoga affects perception (Jentoft 2004; Siven and Mishtal 2012). This thesis contributes to the existing body of information about environmental perceptions and their relationship to environmental attitudes.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Research in environmental perception is challenging and, “given this enormous interest [in environmental perception], the ambiguity inherent in measuring this phenomenon is paradoxical” (Sanchez and LaFuente 2010: 732). Therefore, it was necessary to collect qualitative and quantitative data to accurately analyze yoga as it relates to sensory enhancement and environmental activism.

Data Collection

Qualitative research consisted of participant observation, interviews, and surveys within a south Florida yoga community. A control group of individuals who do not practice yoga was also identified and asked to participate in the survey. This control group consisted of members from the Lifelong Learning Society at Florida Atlantic University and various university students. A letter of cooperation was obtained from both the Lifelong Learning Society and the South Florida Yoga Center (SFYC). Fieldwork began upon approval from the Florida Atlantic University’s Institutional Review Board on August 22, 2014.

Participant observation occurred between two and four times per week over the course of 12 weeks at the SFYC. This yoga center has been renamed to protect the identity of the business and all members of the community. During this time, I

participated in dozens of yoga classes and other events that were offered within the community: meditation classes, themed yoga classes (incorporating music and costume), potlucks, movie night, garden cleanup, and talent shows that were offered monthly. In between yoga classes, I spent many hours in either the lounge area or in the garden area outside talking with people and observing others inquire about yoga, demonstrate postures, and interact with one another. An interview (Appendix B) with the owner of the yoga center, whose name has been coded as Ben, provided further insight into the inner workings of this yoga studio and “healing arts center.”

This yoga center is advertised as a cooperative studio with 75 consummate instructors offering creative and traditional classes for any level practitioner. Despite the trending demands of hot yoga and other popular methods, the SFYC avoids offering only the typical, mainstream postural classes but also seeks to deliver a way to “live” yoga. The SFYC confirms its ingenuity by offering yoga by donation, despite the studio’s location in an affluent city in south Florida. The studio advertises as a cooperative; however, it is a for-profit business that offers yoga at a donation rate so anyone can attend.

This yoga center was originally selected for this research because it incorporates a wide variety of New Age practices along with yoga (nutritional counseling, medical qigong, spiritual journey work, massage, acupuncture, etc.). These extra services are offered at the studio and draw an increasing number of people into the center, adding to the dynamism of the culture. In addition, this yoga center appeared to have an interest in environmental activism through their non-profit affiliate. However, through this interview I learned that the non-profit Ben had started, which organized yogis to

volunteer on a variety of community service projects including environmental improvements, was no longer a concrete organization. Rather, it had morphed into his vision of a spatially constructed yoga center. The importance of SFYC as a physical structure stemmed from Ben's vision for creating a conscious community and a successful business.

Researching sensory perception involves a systematic process of interviewing participants. Interview questions, which can be found in Appendix A, occurred among 13 yoga practitioners before and after two different types of yoga classes. The first group consisted of seven participants who completed a physically challenging *vinyasa* yoga class, and the second group consisted of six participants who completed a slower, gentler yoga class. One of the design components to the interview process was to understand if an enhancement in sensory perception was contingent upon the style of yoga and the length of meditational relaxation within the class. I refer to "meditational relaxation" as the practice of three different techniques that are often employed in a yoga class. These techniques that can help an individual reach a meditative state are: cross-legged seated meditation, *pranayama* (yogic breathing) and *sivasana* (relaxation posture). The group of *vinyasa* yoga participants completed only one meditational relaxation technique in the form of *sivasana*, which lasted an average of nine minutes. Whereas, the other group of gentle yoga students completed all three meditational relaxation techniques and included an average of eleven minutes of *sivasana*, eleven minutes of *pranayama* and eight minutes of cross-legged seated meditation.

All 13 participants were voluntary, over the age of 18 and signed a consent form with the understanding that no compensation would be provided. Each participant was

interviewed individually and asked the same questions. The range of questions related to sensory awareness without directly mentioning “the senses.” Participants were aware they would be asked a series of questions asking them to describe their setting, but no further indications were given about the specificity of the questions until the interview process began. The original design of the interview process was to interview each participant three times; one interview before yoga, another interview immediately after yoga and a third interview one day later. The purpose of this was to find out if an enhanced sensory perception did occur after yoga. The interview one day later addressed the time frame for which this perception enhancement lasted. However, due to time commitments (or lack thereof) only two people were available for a third interview. To ensure confidentiality, names of yoga interviewees were coded with pseudonyms.

Quantitative data was gathered in the form of a survey (Appendix C) administered using Survey Monkey. All participants were over the age of 18 years. Surveys were administered as paper copies at the yoga center over the course of one evening. Individuals were asked to complete the survey and 37 people participated. I manually entered the information into the Survey Monkey website. To compose a control group, emails were sent out in October 2014 through Florida Atlantic University’s Lifelong Learning Society and the Department of Anthropology seeking participants who do not practice yoga. The survey link remained active for 60 days. The email prompted recipients to click on a Survey Monkey link that would allow them to complete the survey. Control group respondents were disqualified if they answered “yes” to practicing yoga. The control group consisted of 26 participants.

The survey inquired about the demographics of each respondent and their sustainable practices. Sanchez and LaFuente (2010:732) define an “environmentalist” as someone who is an “ecologically conscious individual...[and] is someone who engages in a wide range of pro-environmental behaviors as well as holding certain values and attitudes that different theories have associated to this type of conduct.” The responses on the survey asked about the frequency of environmental practices and were organized as a Likert scale. The Likert scale was scored out of five where “one” corresponded with “never” practicing the activity described in the question and “five” corresponded with “always.” Each respondent answered questions about how often they practiced certain actions such as: recycling, energy conservation, environmental education, and food and consumption practices.

The Study Population

Table 1 represents the demographics of each group of survey participants. These survey questions asked participants to disclose their race, age, highest level of education, and annual household income. Since it was not mandatory to answer every question, some did not disclose demographic information. The race and ethnicity category displayed similar results between each group. The majority of yoga practitioners (70%) described themselves as Caucasian as well as the majority of the control group (77%). The ages of the yoga practitioners were distributed throughout each group, whereas a greater number of people (42%) in the control group were in the category of 56 years of age and older. The level of education displays a similar trend where the majority of the control group is concentrated in one area (42% had a bachelor’s degree) and the

education level of the yogis is distributed throughout all of the categories. Annual household income indicates that 54% of yogis and 36% of the control group earn over \$75,000.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Survey Participants

Variables	Yogis (N=37)	Control Group (N=26)
Caucasian	26 (70%)	20 (77%)
African-American	0	0
Asian-American	1 (3%)	0
American Indian	0	0
Hispanic or Latino	2 (5%)	2 (8%)
Other	2 (5%)	2 (8%)
Age		
18-25	7 (19%)	8 (31%)
26-35	6 (16%)	5 (19%)
36-45	2 (5%)	1 (4%)
46-55	6 (16%)	1 (4%)
56+	9 (24%)	11 (42%)
Education		
High school	3 (8%)	0
Some college	9 (24%)	6 (23%)
Bachelor's	7 (19%)	11 (42%)
Masters	5 (14%)	8 (31%)
Doctorate	3 (8%)	1 (4%)
Annual Household Income (USD)		
0-25,000	4 (11%)	8 (31%)
25,000-50,000	7 (19%)	6 (23%)
50,000-75,000	6 (16%)	3 (12%)
75,000+	20 (54%)	9 (36%)

In addition to the survey participants, 13 yoga practitioners were asked to volunteer as interviewees for this research. The original research was designed to interview 10 practitioners, but time permitted for an additional three, for a total of 13. Interview participants compose two groups; seven people were interviewed before and after a *vinyasa* yoga class and six were interviewed before and after a gentle yoga class. Table 2 shows the demographics of the *vinyasa* yoga participants.

Table 2. Demographics of *Vinyasa* Yoga Participants

Gender	Race	Nationality	Number of participants	Mean Age
Male	White	American	1	33
Female	White	American	5	44
Female	White	British	1	48

All interview participants were asked to disclose their race, gender, nationality and age. Table 3 shows the demographics of the gentle yoga participants. Each group consisted of one male and had an average total age of 43 years for the *vinyasa* group and 42 years for the gentle yoga group. The interview and survey demographics are consistent with Lisa Aldred’s (2002) research that estimates New Agers in the United States are mostly Caucasian. White Americans compose 77% of the total interview participants and 70% of the yoga survey group.

Table 3. Demographics of Gentle Yoga Participants

Gender	Race	Nationality	Number of participants	Mean Age
Male	Black	American	1	24
Female	White	American	4	50
Female	Asian-Pacific Islander	American	1	26

Data Analysis: Interviews

Interviews were transcribed verbatim to reveal specific patterns and themes. Field notes and interview notes were read through, coded, and analyzed based on topics that were of significance to this thesis. Field notes were treated as data sets to be examined and interpreted for existing patterns and variations. All codes were done manually without the use of a software program.

The methods of “open coding” and “focused coding” were taken from *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 2011). Open coding was used to

categorize areas of interest. A careful, line-by-line analysis of all field notes and interview notes allowed for topics to be categorized with the attempt to “capture as many ideas and themes” as possible (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 2011: 175). Numerous patterns were identified that consisted of highlighting any mention of environmental practices, community, conversations about the natural world, sensory perceptions, self-identity, among others. Once general themes were identified, focused coding was completed to allow for a more precise analysis of the themes. These procedures of coding were helpful in drawing accurate conclusions about the community of yoga practitioners.

Interviews were designed to compare the responses before and after yoga; therefore, analysis used codes that had been pre-selected. Since the questions were sorted in a way aimed to extract the interviewee’s sensory perceptions of the environment, thematic arrangement of the questions were ordered by codes. For example, the interviews began by asking someone how they were feeling, followed by asking them to describe their surroundings. The answers to these questions were coded accordingly as “self-perception” and “environmental perception.” While the respondent described their surroundings, notes were taken to record if any sensory engagement occurred such as: looking around, breathing deeply, touching objects, and so forth. These notes were recorded within the interview transcriptions. When analysis was later performed, these jottings were useful in making comparisons to not only the verbal perception that occurred before and after yoga, but also the physical, sensory interaction within the environment.

Data Analysis: Surveys

Quantitative analysis was used to determine results for the portion of the survey that used the Likert scale. Results were calculated by either Survey Monkey or myself and revealed the average scores as a percentage for each question. Determinations of which group had a particular environmental action were made by identifying the higher score. Some questions required the respondent to type in an answer, such as their ethnicity, or respond to a yes/no question. These questions displayed the demographics and also inquired further into environmental practices that could not be answered on a Likert scale. Some of the questions listed included “If you have children do you feel as though you educate them about the environment?” and “What is your highest level of education?” Analysis of these questions had to be evaluated by using basic quantitative mean and mode calculations.

All patterns identified within this study are a result of the qualitative and quantitative research conducted and this information will be expanded upon in the subsequent two chapters.

Chapter Four

Yoga and the Senses: Shifting Perceptions about

Nature, Self, and the Environment

Ben: *[After yoga] the flavor and the colors – everything is more vivid. So, there is this enlivening. But I would put forth that the way to that is by withdrawing from them (the senses). So you are able to be, to set your relationship to the senses. (September 2, 2014 SFYC)*

Before conducting interviews with the yoga practitioners to study the relationship between sensory perception, nature, and self, I sat down with the founder of the yoga studio, Ben. His comment above was in response to a question I asked him about whether or not yoga activates the senses, or withdraws a person from their senses. Although he believed that yoga helps the practitioner do both, he explained that during yoga one must withdraw from the senses in order to have an enhanced connection to the senses after. Throughout this research, Ben was aware of the questions this thesis intends to address. Therefore, I was able to ask him outright what he thought about sensory perception, nature, the environment, and where environmentalism situates itself within the culture of yoga. Is there a sensorial enhancement that occurs from yoga? Does this extend into enhanced environmental activism and concern toward the planet? He also agreed not to inform members of the yoga studio about the details I was aiming to collect about sensory perception so that their responses would not be altered in any way.

Ben's experience as a yoga instructor, practitioner, and studio owner offered a unique perspective to this study about yoga and sensory awareness. Ben is renowned within his community of yogis. He leads yoga teacher trainings and is seen by many as a south Florida yoga figurehead. He receives accolades from many yogis within the community, and those who have completed his yoga teacher training make some of the most profound remarks, including, "he is liberated!" and "he changed my life with the yoga teacher training." Ben's belief is that *pratyahara*, withdrawing from the senses, is a practice that is necessary to turn one's awareness to what he refers to as the inner dimension to feel a reconstituted "wholeness" once an individual reemerges into their environment. Yoga and meditational relaxation practices invite the practitioner to experience what they conceptualize as the interiority of the body while shutting down the senses.

This experience is thought to be made more accessible at the South Florida Yoga Center (SFYC) where the environment is controlled with dim lighting, soft music, and a comfortable room temperature – making the possibility of detaching from the senses more obtainable. Angélique Lalonde's dissertation (2012) about yoga and embodying *asana* identifies the importance that the ashram setting serves. An ashram "is purposefully designed for sensual wellbeing, encouraging a move inwards, towards developing proprioceptive awareness and skill (sensing the position of parts of the body in space and intentionally moving them to achieve energetic, skeletal and muscular alignment)" (Lalonde 2012:169). The setting of the SFYC reflects the quiet space and mission of an ashram to encourage yogis to achieve a state of wellbeing through *asana* and meditational relaxation techniques.

The enhanced sensory awareness that some yoga practitioners say they experience is not because yoga is a practice where one learns to directly enhance the sense of taste, smell, sight, hearing and touch. Rather, yoga provides a way for the practitioner to disengage from external stimuli and focus the attention within. It is through the movement of postures and focus on physical alignment that the practitioner can experience the interiority of the body and breath. This temporary disengagement from the outer world and the senses is a pathway that leads to an enhanced sensorial experience after a yoga class. Ben believes that yoga offers a way to withdraw from the senses so that we don't use them to satisfy the needs of the ego, or the unconscious self. Therefore, it is the withdrawing of the senses in yoga that leads one to connect to the present self and ultimately, everything else:

Ben: *The nature of the senses is outward going, so when you are rooted in "ahamkara," or the ego structure of your identity, that becomes the foundation of your being. You look out through the senses and you see "other" and it creates this false perception of separateness which causes suffering. So then the practice, the limb of "pratyahara," is the withdrawal from the senses.....the turning around of one's awareness so you redirect your awareness back to the very source that produces it. That's the withdrawal part and that's what reconnects you to the already present self.....the awareness then turns back out. (September 2, 2014 SFYC)*

Meditational Relaxation

Modern yoga utilizes various techniques to produce postural and spiritual transformations. *Asanas* are the primary attraction for many practitioners who attend yoga studios in the United States, however, meditation is also a popular practice. Postural and meditational forms of modern yoga were established in the early twentieth century and began to develop from the 1920s onward (De Michelis 2008). Meditational forms of

modern yoga are specific to particular communities that use their own forms of meditation practice (De Michelis 2008). Three meditation techniques were incorporated into the classes at the SFYC and are referred to as “meditational relaxation” in his thesis. These three forms of meditation practice include *pranayama*, *sivasana* and cross-legged seated meditation.

Cross-legged seated meditation is a technique used at the SFYC where practitioners sit on their yoga mats at the beginning of class, close their eyes and focus their attention inward. The instructor offers guidance by speaking slowly and encouraging students to “let go” of thoughts and emotions while instructing students to hold the spine straight and the abdomen engaged. This technique is prominent in restorative and gentle yoga where calming the mind is a central focus of the class.

Pranayama is another meditational relaxation technique which translates as “attentive breathing” (Nevrin 2008:120). This meditation exercise includes various breathing techniques but was most often performed at the SFYC as *ujjayi*, a breathing technique that creates a sound (Nevrin 2008). *Pranayama* can bring the mind to the present moment and Brown and Gerbarg (2009: 54) state yogic breathing “is both a form of meditation in itself and a preparation for deep meditation.”

Sivasana, also known as “corpse pose” is a passive posture which does not require manipulation of the breath. In this *asana* a practitioner relaxes the body, while lying on their back, often accompanied by an instructor encouraging one to bring the mind into present-tense awareness. *Sivasana* helps one develop the ability to feel or sense their body (Mooney 2003: 99). While this may not be a direct meditational experience for some, many yogis use this restorative posture to return the breath to its natural rhythm,

while connecting the body and mind to the breath, freeing the mind from thought.

The Interview Groups: Vinyasa and Gentle Yoga

The first group of interviews were conducted among seven practitioners who completed a *vinyasa* yoga class. Abby, a 46-year-old mother of two practices yoga three times per week to help heal her old tennis injuries. Heather is a 23-year-old yoga instructor at the SFYC. Emma, a 34-year-old mother of two began yoga four weeks prior to our interview. Janet is a 62-year-old woman who grew up in the Rocky Mountains and now resides in Florida. Carrie is a 57-year-old who has been practicing yoga since the mid-1980s and attends several yoga studios near her home. Isaac, a 33-year-old, began practicing yoga to help improve his breathing for free-diving. Sarah is a 48-year-old mother of twins who moved to Florida from England and practices yoga at least three times per week.

The second group of interviews occurred among six participants who completed a gentle yoga class that devoted more time to meditational relaxation. Participants included 26-year-old Patty, who has been practicing yoga for two years and is currently completing a course to become a certified yoga instructor. Lucy is a 64-year-old woman who practices yoga four days per week. Gina, a 23-year-old college student practices yoga every Saturday and Sunday at the SFYC. Debora is a 57-year-old woman who began practicing yoga one year ago in her home. 57-year-old, Laura is a friend of Debora who has been practicing yoga for 14 years. Wayne is a 24-year-old African-American yoga instructor who practices daily and spends most of his free time at the SFYC.

In the proceeding sections, I will explain the direct relation between the practice of yoga, meditational relaxation, and the effects on the practitioners' sensory awareness. Direct observations are used to elicit the direct connection between yoga, the senses, and the transforming perceptions of the environment, nature and self.

Gathering Perceptions

Throughout the process of researching perceptions, there was a continual reevaluation of my own placement within the study. I remained objective by recording field notes that aimed to describe and operationalize the practitioners' experience. Procedures for conducting interviews and recording information remained consistent for both the *vinyasa* interviewees and those that were interviewed from the gentle yoga class.

Interview participants were identified by asking individuals before class if they would like to participate in an interview about yoga. Many yogis arrived early to secure a place for their mat inside the studio and then find a place to sit in the lounge area. The early arrival of many practitioners and their willingness to talk about yoga made this fieldwork experience not only less challenging as an ethnographer, but also offered insights into the culture of south Florida yoga. According to Aldred (2002:62), "New Agers" in the United States focus on individual and personal transformation and have a desire to realize their full human potential. Participation in a study such as this offers a way for yogis to contribute to the social and cultural shift that New Agers see as possible (Mears and Ellison 2000). Practitioners displayed an enthusiastic willingness to participate in the study and most participants insisted I use their real name, despite my decision to code all identities.

Sensory awareness and environmental beliefs of each participant were gathered by asking the individual to describe certain topics such as: the setting (location), how they are feeling, their feelings towards environmental sustainability, and how they define “nature.” Participants were not asked questions that would directly lead them to think about their senses; rather questions were posited so that they would describe their relationship to the environment *through* their senses.

Ethnography must be accompanied by written or verbal expression in order to be anthropologically meaningful (Pink 2006). Ethnographic observations were recorded by transcribing each interview and taking notes about the physical movements of each participant to provide non-verbal sensory information about their interaction with the environment. Notes were made when the participant would engage their surroundings by looking around or explain colors, smells and particular noises. Participants’ body movements were often limited to eye movement, hand movement and gestures since interviews usually occurred sitting on the floor, in chairs, or outside in the garden. Pink (2006) notes that doing sensory fieldwork means that the ethnographer must feel the others’ experience, rather than just watch it and therefore, I participated in all of the yoga classes that the informants took part in. The methodology explained here is to give the reader a transparent understanding of how these perceptions were captured and how they contribute to the analysis of understanding the sensory perception of yoga practitioners.

Results of Sensory Awareness in Vinyasa Yoga Practitioners

Shifts in perception and sensory awareness were understood by breaking down the interview questions into four categories: the self (how one is feeling), sensory

descriptions of the environment (their immediate surroundings), nature (as defined by the participant), and views regarding environmental sustainability and activism. Seven participants were interviewed before and after a *vinyasa* yoga class, their answers were categorized accordingly, and meditational relaxation times were recorded.

Three practitioners displayed a greater sensorial awareness of their environment; however, all practitioners experienced a shift in perception in at least one of the four categories. The three that exhibited an enhanced sensory perception have been coded as Abby, Heather and Janet and they participated in classes that had meditational relaxation times of 11 minutes, 11 minutes and 12 minutes, respectively. Those that did not experience an enhanced sensory perception of their environment were Sarah, Isaac, Carrie and Emma with meditational relaxation times of 8 minutes, 3 minutes, 12 minutes and 5 minutes, respectively.

Meditational relaxation times were recorded to illustrate how the length in meditational relaxation might play a role in causing an enhanced sensory awareness. The meditational relaxation technique incorporated into the *vinyasa* classes was *sivasana*—no *pranayama* or cross-legged seated meditation was incorporated. Interestingly, three out of the four *vinyasa* participants that practiced meditational relaxation for at least 11 minutes showed an enhanced sensory perception toward their surroundings. All participants who spent less than 11 minutes in meditational relaxation did not show an enhanced sensory awareness. Table 4 shows the results of sensory awareness and shifting perceptions of the *vinyasa* participants in greater detail.

Table 4. Sensory Enhancement of *Vinyasa* Yoga Participants

Participants	Shifting Perception of Self	Sensory Enhancement of Immediate Surroundings	Shifting Perception of Nature	Enhanced Concern Toward Environmental Sustainability	Meditational Relaxation Time (in minutes)
Abby	X	X		X	11
Heather	X	X		X	11
Janet	X	X			12
Emma	X				5
Carrie	X		X		12
Isaac	X				3
Sarah	X		X		8

Shifting Perception of Self

All *vinyasa* yoga practitioners expressed a change in the way they felt after yoga. Overall feelings about oneself shifted toward a more positive, focused, and relaxed state of being. Yoga offers a way for the practitioner “to get back into their body” (Persson 2007:48) and awaken their bodily consciousness to foster “a sense of focus and clarity, which is said to support not only the meditation process...but also everyday life and interactions” (Persson 2007:48). Each interview participant experienced a shift in perception of self regardless of the amount of time spent in meditational relaxation. Before the yoga class, all participants were asked: “How do you feel right now?”

Abby: *Mentally stressed because I have two daughters and one is struggling with the start of high school and she got a few bad grades. So we were discussing it this morning. And then, physically, my joints hurt and I'm stiff.*

Heather: *I'm a little tired. I just woke up [laughter]. But you know, happy. Generally the same as any time, just a little tired.*

Janet: *A little tense in my arms and shoulders. A little foggy-headed.*

Immediately after yoga, these same participants answered the question: “How do you feel right now?”

Abby: *Um, like a wet noodle [laughter]. At peace, I guess.*

Heather: *Blissful.*

Janet: *Relaxed, but energized. More clear.*

These three participants displayed a change in the way they feel, transitioning towards answers that demonstrate a more restful and centered position. This shift was apparent in these three women as well as the other four participants of the *vinyasa* yoga group. Isaac, Emma, Carrie and Sarah did not show any signs of an enhanced sensory perception toward their environment, but they did experience a shifting view of how they were feeling. Before, yoga these four participants were asked: “How do you feel right now?”

Emma: *Good. I feel energized.*

Carrie: *Like, I’m glad that I got here and got a parking spot. A little bit – not really stressed, but just a little bit. [I’m] a little bit stressed.*

Sarah: *I feel pretty chilled out. Not stressed.*

Isaac: *Good, mediocre. Just getting out of work on a Monday so a little overstressed.*

After yoga, the same question was asked: “How do you feel right now?”

Emma: *Physically loose. [Emotionally] stable.*

Carrie: *Good. Relaxed, like I got what I came for.*

Sarah: *I feel relaxed, like I could just go to sleep. It’s nice. I feel nice and relaxed.*

Isaac: *Good. I feel good coming out of this like, low energy in class. But I’m still low energy, but I’m calm, peaceful.*

Of the seven *vinyasa* yoga participants, not one individual emerged feeling “more stressed” after the class, in fact everyone vocalized a way in which they felt *better*. The

mind—body connection that yoga cultivates brings a transformative experience to the practitioner as some yogis are able to mediate a balance between the breath and the body through this physical practice. “The mindful body” is one of the six inter-related concepts that is useful to medical anthropology and sensorial anthropology (Nichter 2008:164). “Within one’s mindful body the sensorial, the cognitive, and the emotional dimensions of our being in the world are coextensive and exist in dynamic relationship” (Nichter 2008: 165). Yoga creates a way to bring the elements of the mindful body into conscious existence contributing to a more positive perception of self.

Enhanced Sensorial Awareness of the Environment

Participants were asked to describe their surroundings before yoga and explanations consisted of non-visual sensorial feelings about the environment but visual exploration of the setting was minimal. Most participants gazed downward despite the distractions of others walking by, music playing, incense burning, the air conditioning running, and various other sensory stimulants occurring. The lack of sensorial descriptions was an overall trend in this study and many participants used inexact and sensory-detached words to describe the environment such as, “hippie-ville,” “peaceful,” “freedom,” and, “nice vibes.” Three participants showed an enhanced sensory awareness of their surroundings after yoga by their changing descriptions of the interview setting. Before yoga, descriptions of the setting and what they found pleasant include:

Abby: *Um, a sense of calmness. A sense of peace and the feeling of a non-judgmental place to be. [The] coziness [is pleasant].*

Heather: *Serene. Um, calming. Safe. The ambiance, the setting the people [are pleasant].*

Janet: *I'm at [South Florida Yoga Center], which has a nice vibe. Everyone that comes here has a special feeling about them. I don't know, it just has a good feeling. The music [is pleasant]. To me it's just the feeling, it's hard to describe.*

After yoga, the descriptions of the setting were more explicit and accompanied by the participant looking around and sometimes, touching or pointing at objects. When the same questions were asked after yoga, distinct and univocal terms were used including:

Abby: *The colors seem more vibrant. Is that odd? A sense of community [is pleasant] with all the people coming out together, after sharing [the class].*

Heather: *[The surroundings are] bright and loving. Everything [is pleasant].*

Janet: *[The temperature] feels cool. The people are happy. The air feels clear. The fans are blowing. Well, I actually like the other room better. The jewelry, the crystals, the scents, the books. [In here] I actually don't like the colors that much.*

Interestingly, after yoga some participants were more expressive about what was unpleasant or bothersome within their surroundings. Regardless if their sensory awareness was enhanced, three participants did not describe anything that disturbed them before practicing, but after class they were more tuned into the “annoyances” that were present:

Janet: *I actually don't like the colors that much [looking at the walls]. Too many voices. But actually, it feels like right now there is a lot of junk everywhere. It's cluttered, it feels cluttered.*

Carrie: *I'd paint those stools. I'd paint them red or orange. At least I'd paint the tops. Rustoleum – it's the best product ever.*

Isaac: *I'd slow it [the environment] down a lot.*

Carrie and Isaac did not display an enhanced sensorial awareness after yoga but identified what bothered them within the environment. Isaac felt that the environment of

the yoga center was too busy and would prefer if it was not so chaotic. Over a dozen people walked by conversing and laughing during Isaac's interview, as well as Janet's interview, and contributed the feeling of a busy environment. Isaac's desire for a "slower" environment and Janet's disapproval of the "junk everywhere" were responses to the amount of people present and the large display of colorful artwork and decorations. Similarly, Carrie's critique of the bar stools displays her feelings that the studio would be more pleasing if the aesthetics were altered.

The setting of the SFYC is unique and includes two yoga studios, a garden, and a retail center teeming with popular and ecologically-minded products. Items for sale include: yoga mats without polyvinyl chloride (PVC), locally made green juices in glass bottles, organic sunflower sprouts, hemp clothing, organic skin-care products, and many artisan gifts like paintings and jewelry made by the yoga instructors. Lisa Aldred (2002) states that many New Agers believe there is no separation between spiritual and economic development, nor is there anxiety or guilt for using spirituality for economic gain. The SFYC is financed mainly through donations and the retail center offers a way to boost revenue and promote conscious consumerism. Many of the yogis that arrive early for classes browse this room and purchase items for sale. However, despite the merchandise that complements ecologically-minded living, does yoga in south Florida contribute to sustainable activism and consciousness?

Shifting Perceptions of Nature and Environmental Sustainability

To better understand if one leaves the practice of yoga more empathetic toward the natural world and one's environment, part of each interview was dedicated to

gathering the participants' perspective about nature and sustainability. Kay Milton (2002:84) raises the question, "Are deep ecologists suggesting that emotion and feeling can somehow transcend the boundaries of the organism?" Is it somehow inherent that if a human responds towards organisms with awareness and empathy they will feel obligated to act merciful toward them? Each participant was asked to explain their definition of nature to understand if yoga causes an individual to shift their perception of nature.

Altering human perception is a rare event as beliefs about the natural world are conditioned by one's experiences and are deeply engrained from an early age. Tim Ingold's work (2000) states that our knowledge of the natural world is not necessarily a cultural construction, but instead comes from our capacity to understand the meaning of information that occurs through direct perceptual engagement and having things *shown* to us. Individual definitions of "nature" vary and each interview participant was asked to state their own description of how they viewed it. Explanations most often included trees, the forest, green things, and other objects that incorporated the external world. Before yoga, all seven *vinyasa* participants referred to nature as "out there" and not inclusive of humans. However, after yoga, two participants changed their perception of nature to include themselves. Before yoga, Sarah and Carrie were asked: "How do you define nature?"

Sarah: *Anything that is naturally grown, or just our surroundings, I suppose. Anything organic to me seems like nature as well.*

Carrie: *My definition of nature is, kind of the external world. Things that occur without us having a lot of control.*

After yoga, the same question produced answers that allowed Sarah to question herself as a part of nature, and Carrie to view herself as a small part of it.

Sarah: *Nature to me is anything that is not man-made. Like, the trees, the forest, the beaches, there's man-made beaches in places but anything that is just there, wild. I suppose I'm a part of nature, but I don't know. Do we go back to the earth when we die? I don't know, really.*

Carrie: *[It's] something that is bigger than I am or [bigger than] anybody else is – and of course it's bigger. I try to be respectful of it. Let it win.*

Sarah and Carrie display a shifting perception about their definition of nature after yoga. They both attempt to question and define where humans are positioned within nature and include a more comprehensive definition after yoga. However, despite these changes, no correlation was made between their shifting definitions of nature and enhancement towards environmental activism. Neither Sarah nor Carrie were identified as having an enhanced sensory perception of their surroundings, or a greater concern toward their environment.

Two participants, Sarah and Isaac were immediately identified as having environmentally active lifestyles before yoga and therefore, it was not possible to conclude that yoga contributed to their activism. Sarah is vegan, grows her own vegetables, and her family shares one household car without air conditioning. She is aware of numerous environmental issues, especially population growth. Sarah believes that having twins did not contribute to the environment's wellbeing. "I shouldn't have had children. I mean, I don't think my children will have children, because they are really, you know [environmentally conscious]. The planet is overpopulated and we are just killing it. People do have too many children" (SFYC September 14, 2014). Isaac expressed a deep concern toward consumption and plastic packaging and he also works as an engineer, improving power efficiencies. Out of the remaining five participants, three showed a deeper concern toward the planet after yoga. Interview responses before

yoga for Abby, Heather and Emma are listed below and answered the question: “Do you think you make a contribution to securing a sustainable planet?”

Abby: *Not as much as I should. Is that a good answer?*

Heather: *I do my absolute best. But at the same time, there is balance and as one person I can only do my one person part and that is continually striving to be more and more.*

Emma: *I hope I do. [As far as problems occurring within nature] nothing specific comes to mind.*

After yoga, the same respondents answered this question again, but displayed more compassion and concern toward the health of the planet. These results may not provide conclusive evidence that yoga contributes to more environmental activism on the planet, but for some, their responses were more detailed and demonstrate that a shift in perception occurred. This suggests that yoga is not necessarily creating more environmental activism, but may be contributing to a mindset that allows one to view the natural world from a selfless perspective. After yoga, respondents answered, do you think you make a contribution to securing a sustainable planet?

Abby: *I could do more – as I drink my bottled water. I’m sorry, I should have a glass container.*

Heather: *In my best abilities. The lack of sustainability [bothers me]. The desensitization to and the depersonalization of the resources and materials we use. The fact that a lot of people aren’t connected with where their food comes from, where their products come from. How much we use, how much we don’t – like, how much we waste without thinking about it. Like, there is a plastic island in the pacific that is half the size of the United States.*

Emma: *I think so [that I make a contribution to sustainability]. Yes, [there are problems occurring within nature that bother me] but it’s a very big concept.*

Of these three participants that showed greater consideration toward sustainability, Abby and Heather also experienced an enhanced sensory awareness. These results do not provide enough evidence to show that the enhanced sensory awareness that some practitioners experience after yoga contributes to an enhanced environmental activism. To further support this, the third practitioner who experienced heightened sensory awareness showed a more environmentally passive stance towards sustainability. Janet expressed less concern towards sustainable actions and believes that she makes a beneficial contribution to the planet by allowing people to be as they are. After yoga, she expressed that what is important to her is being more open, accepting of others, and treating people with more kindness.

The results of sensory enhancement in *vinyasa* yoga practitioners show that three out of the seven participants displayed a heightened sensory perception after yoga and used additional senses such as sight, hearing, and touch while describing their surroundings. Three participants showed a stronger concern for environmental sustainability after yoga, but only two of those participants experienced *both* enhanced sensory perception and greater environmental empathy. Although less than half of the practitioners experience a heightened sensory awareness, all participants demonstrated a change in their perception of self. Additionally, two participants shifted their definition of nature towards a more inclusive view that included themselves as part of the natural world.

Results of Sensory Awareness in Practitioners after Gentle Yoga

The second group of yoga practitioners interviewed for this study completed a

gentle postural class which incorporated all three types of meditational relaxation: *pranayama*, *sivasana* and cross-legged, seated meditation. Meditation is not a direct focus of this study but these techniques offer a way for yoga practitioners to have a meditative experience by focusing on their body and/or their breath. Three types of *pranayama* breathing exercises occurred for various lengths of time: *Ujjayi*, *Anuloma Viloma*, and/or *Kapalabhati*. The most common *pranayama* at the SFYC was *ujjayi*, where the practitioner inhales and exhales deeply, usually through the nose while constricting the throat. When compared to the *vinyasa* session, the *asana* portion of the gentle class was shorter, the movement was slower, and the overall meditational relaxation time was 29 minutes – as opposed to nine minutes in the *vinyasa* classes.

Anthropologist, Henry Vyner describes meditation as, “The structure of the mind’s dualistic experience of itself...a situation in which the mind’s awareness, or watcher, watches the appearance and disappearance of the meanings that the mind creates and presents to itself in the form of the thoughts, images, feelings and emotions that appear in and as the stream of consciousness” (2002:4). Many forms of meditation exist and this research only analyzes three forms of meditational relaxation techniques that many south Florida yoga studios incorporate into their *asana* practice. Not only does meditational relaxation complement the desire for an “authentic” yoga experience, it also strengthens the mind—body connection that many practitioners seek. During yoga, meditational relaxation can exist as a designated extension of the class where practitioners are directed to sit cross-legged (or in a variety of other poses), close their eyes and draw their attention inward. Other times, meditation it is a free-standing class

itself. Nonetheless, it is a significant part of the yogic experience, yet many south Florida yoga studios dedicate the class solely to physical *asana*.

Interviews occurred among six practitioners before and after the gentle yoga class. All six participants experienced a shifting perception of self and four people also experienced an enhanced sensorial awareness. Patty, Lucy, Debora and Laura exhibited an enhanced sensory awareness of their surroundings with meditational relaxation times of 30 minutes, 23 minutes, 33 minutes and 33 minutes, respectively. Wayne displayed a shifting perception of nature. After yoga, his definition changed to indicate he believed nature encompasses *everything*. However, this shifting perception of nature was not correlated with a greater concern toward environmental activism. None of the gentle yoga participants displayed an enhanced concern toward environmental sustainability. In fact, Gina and Wayne both expressed a more passive attitude toward environmental devastations. These results are shown in Table 5 and will be expanded upon in the proceeding sections.

Table 5. Sensory Enhancement of Gentle Yoga Participants

Participants	Shifting Perception of Self	Sensory Enhancement of Immediate Surroundings	Shifting Perception of Nature	Enhanced Concern Toward Environmental Sustainability	Meditational Relaxation Time (in minutes)
Patty	X	X			30
Lucy	X	X			23
Gina	X				23
Debora	X	X			33
Laura	X	X			33
Wayne	X		X		33

Shifting Perception of Self

All gentle yoga participants experienced a shift in their perception of self. Similar to the *vinyasa* group, the overall explanation of how each individual was feeling shifted

towards a more relaxed and focused temperament. Before yoga, each individual was asked: “How are you feeling?”

Patty: *Relaxed.*

Lucy: *Good. My heart is beating a little bit [faster] that’s all.*

Gina: *I feel okay, a little bit tired.*

Debora: *Great.*

Laura: *Good.*

Wayne: *I feel pretty good. I feel pretty relaxed [but] a little apprehensive. Like, unsettled a little bit. Calm, but you know, like when you are – like when you feel like you have to prove something to yourself but you don’t really have to prove something to yourself, but you feel like you have to. [I feel] like that.*

After yoga, the same question was asked again: “How are you feeling?”

Patty: *Relaxed. I feel like I was able to shake some cob webs out of some places that weren’t flowing before. I’m kind of like, feeling into those spaces. Physically, [I feel better] in my hips and shoulders. Mentally, [I’m feeling] into old baggage and attachment that doesn’t serve me.*

Lucy: *Light as a feather, centered and strong. [This feeling] will last a few hours.*

Gina: *Relaxed. Just coming out of the class made me feel more content of everything.*

Debora: *I could go to sleep. It [the setting] feels a little calmer, doesn’t it?*

Laura: *Peaceful. I’m relaxed. It doesn’t get any better than that.*

Wayne: *I feel not apprehensive and entirely clam. I feel at ease with myself. There’s the rain.*

After yoga, each practitioner gave a more descriptive account of how they were feeling. Responses indicate that gentle yoga, which incorporates three types of meditational relaxation, contributes to a calmer and more relaxed sense of self. Verbal

descriptions from each participant were accompanied by smiling, laughing, and explanations of how they physically and/or mentally improved.

Enhanced Sensorial Awareness of the Environment

The four participants who experienced an enhanced sensory awareness of their environment had presented environmental descriptions similar to the *vinyasa* practitioners. Therefore, regardless of which yoga class caused a heightened sensitivity to one's surroundings, descriptions were similar in both groups of yoga participants. Each sensory enhanced individual described their environment by using at least one more sensory descriptor after yoga. The descriptions of the surroundings by Patty, Lucy Debora and Laura went from general, overall feelings about the conditions of the setting, to a more precise explanation of what was being experienced through the senses. Before yoga, each participant was asked to describe their surroundings and what they found pleasant. Responses include:

Patty: *My surroundings are pretty comfortable. It's a pretty safe space. Gardening, welcoming, non-threatening. Pretty open [and] free. I love the shade and the breeze.*

Lucy: *[There are a] lot of different colors. It looks like it is thoughtfully put together. It creates an environment in a way, but also keeps you flowing. It's clean.*

Debora: *Um, this is a beautiful surrounding. I feel it's very intimate and quiet and aesthetically, extremely pleasing. It's beautiful. Even though there is not windows and I'm such a window person [but] I can deal with that here. It's nice.*

Laura: *It's very tranquil and peaceful. It's relaxing. It's a good escape to come here and do yoga. It's very pleasant, the colors, [and] the whole environment.*

After yoga, participants were asked once again to describe their surroundings. Responses include:

Patty: *I feel like – I feel like the whirring is very loud. I'm much more aware of the fan going. I'm pretty sure it was going the first time you asked me that question, too. But I wasn't as sensitive to the fan sound [before yoga]. [I'm] relaxed...definitely physically, into my hips and my shoulders...I can't find anything to bitch about. It's a little cool in the day now, so it's nice.*

Lucy: *[The setting is] like coming in from the busy world into a haven where you can just feel comfortable and that's the thing of yoga. It's a non-judgmental state of mind. [Right now] I'm dry, physically, and usually I'm not. But I think the room was a little bit warm. I'm looking forward to having something to drink. Oh, there's a lizard in here! I hope he makes it.*

Debora: *[The walls are painted] blue. Its fine, it's great. Same as before [but I would add] a water fountain.*

Laura: *Peaceful. [There is] incense [burning]. [It is] quiet, peaceful.*

Each participant described their surroundings using additional senses after yoga.

For example, Patty used visual descriptions before yoga. After, she used her auditory system in addition to her vision to describe the sound of the air conditioning fan. All four practitioners showed they were more visually engaged by using additional body movements after yoga to describe the setting. Some participants pointed at the objects they were describing while breathing deeply and looking in all directions. Laura noticed the smell of incense burning and Debora commented on the color of the studio walls. Lucy explained the details of her inner environment and her desire for a beverage as her “environment” after yoga encompassed both the setting and her body. The results of these four practitioners show that each description of their environment went from unspecified, ethnocentric viewpoints of how they thought it *seemed*, to a description of how it *felt*, through use of the senses.

Perceptions of Nature and Environmental Sustainability

Personal descriptions of “nature” were incorporated into the interviews to understand if yoga and meditational relaxation cause an individual to change their perception of nature. Kay Milton (2002:28) explains, “We are expected to feel our strongest moral obligations towards those objects that are most obviously persons, usually our fellow human beings....but some nature protectionists argue that we hold moral responsibilities towards other things as well, such as plants, species, ecosystems, life in general and the planet as a whole.” Does yoga create a stronger moral obligation to the wellbeing of humans, animals, and natural resources?

One participant displayed a shifting view of nature but did not show an enhanced concern toward environmental sustainability. Before yoga, Wayne’s descriptions of “nature” included:

Wayne: *Things without concrete on them. Things that, even though they are attempted to be managed and controlled, will never be – and can never be. Those things that are innately wild and organic.*

After yoga, Wayne’s description included everything. He expressed his disapproval of concrete but realizes that it too, is included in his definition of nature.

Wayne: *I feel like everything [that] is really naturally happening [is nature]. Even like – I don’t like it that someone said it’s okay to put concrete on my grass and put up a sign that says you can’t walk on it. But I guess concrete is just rocks, its nature, everything is really the same. There is only five shapes that make up everything that exists. So everything is really pretty natural. So I guess everything [is nature]. [There is] no separation.*

Wayne’s shifting perception of “nature” is more inclusive after yoga but he does not display a greater concern toward the wellbeing of the environment after yoga. His first interview displayed his eagerness to talk about sustainability and the actions he takes towards resource conservation. However, after yoga the excitement toward sustainable

actions turned into a modest description in which such actions were not the primary focus of the conversation. After yoga, he stated:

Wayne: *I wake up and feel the planet suffering and like, I know like, ideally it's going to be fine because everything is fine....I feel like everything will be alright because thanks to that younger generation they are just going to fix everything, hopefully. Then [they will] have more babies and then fix whatever they screwed up and then we will keep doing this human thing.*

Wayne did not experience a sensorial enhancement of his surroundings and his response toward sustainability became distant and more passive as he expressed his belief in the younger generation's ability to amend environmental devastation, rather than through his own actions. Wayne's responses highlights the paradoxical nature of this study – yoga and meditation may not create a mindset that fosters personal environmental activism for all, but rather, creates a feeling of oneness with nature which for Wayne, influences a mindset that surrenders to present conditions.

Similar to Wayne's environmental passiveness, Gina also displayed a shift away from environmental activism. Before yoga, Gina spoke about how she “definitely tries” to act sustainably by recycling and turning off lights. She even explained that she is worried about the environmental impact of recycling. However, after yoga her answers were less assertive, “Yes, I try to [make a contribution to sustainability] but I'm just one person.”

Although the focus of this research is to understand what perceptual changes occur from the practice of yoga and meditational relaxation, these techniques are actually designed to promote an acceptance of what *is* and to lead the practitioner to *Purusa*, or supreme consciousness (Mishra 1987). With the willingness to relinquish the ego through these physical, spiritual and breathing exercises, scientists have demonstrated the various

changes that can occur. Yoga and *pranayama* have been methods proven to reduce stress, anxiety and depression (Brown and Gerbarg 2005), stimulate brain function (Arankalle et. al 2008; Telles et. al 2011; Joshi and Telles 2009) and decrease blood pressure (Pramanik et. al 2009). These changes that occur within the body may contribute to a mindset that allows one to accept and surrender to present conditions as Wayne and Gina experienced.

Interestingly, no practitioners in the gentle yoga group showed an enhanced environmental concern toward sustainability. Two of the four individuals that experienced an enhanced sensory perception of their surroundings were identified as being environmentally active before the start of their yoga class. Lucy believes there are alternatives to consuming animals, so her choice to be a vegetarian has lasted 35 years. She drives a hybrid vehicle and believes she contributes to the planet's wellbeing by not having children. Similarly, Laura expressed her environmental activism through composting, recycling, gardening, and being outdoors as much as possible. These two women did not show an enhanced increase in environmental sustainability after yoga, mainly because their responses to questions about sustainability were already strongly aligned with environmental conservation from the start.

The narrative descriptions from the gentle yoga participants indicate that all showed a change in perception of themselves. One person changed their definition of nature and four out of the six displayed an enhanced sensory perception toward their surroundings. Two practitioners were identified as already having an environmentally active role and no participants exhibited an enhanced concern towards environmental sustainability after gentle yoga.

Summary

The results of the interviews reveal that the gentle yoga practitioners experienced an enhanced sensorial perception of their environment more frequently than the *vinyasa* yoga group. Longer meditational relaxation times occurred in the gentle yoga group and 66% experienced an enhanced sensory perception of their surroundings as compared to 42% in the *vinyasa* group. These findings show that extended meditational relaxation techniques occur in various forms during yoga and lead more practitioners to experience an enhanced sensorial awareness.

The degree to which sensory perception was enhanced in each individual can be viewed in Table 6. Two *vinyasa* yoga participants, Abby and Heather used generalized, overall statements to describe how the setting *seemed* and did not use any sensory descriptions before yoga. After yoga, both women gave detailed descriptions used their sense of sight to explain their surroundings. Each participant listed in Table 6 used at least one additional sense after yoga. However, the gentle yoga participants used more sensory descriptors after yoga indicating that their slower *asana* practice and longer meditational relaxation time may have contributed to the outcome.

Table 6. Sensory Enhancement Descriptors

Vinyasa Yoga Participants	Before	After
Abby	General	Visual
Heather	General	Visual
Janet	Auditory	Visual, Olfactory
Gentle Yoga Participants	Before	After
Patty	Visual	Visual, Auditory
Lucy	Visual	Visual, Taste
Debora	Auditory	Visual, Touch
Laura	Visual	Olfactory, Auditory

Out of the 13 total interview participants, three people changed their definition of nature to include humans and *everything* as part of the definition. Everyone expressed

feeling better about themselves either physically, emotionally or spiritually. Seven individuals, or 54% of all interviewees experienced an enhanced sensory perception of their surroundings after yoga. Of these seven participants, two showed a greater interest towards securing sustainability and were both a part of the *vinyasa* yoga group. Interestingly, no gentle yoga participants expressed an enhanced concern towards environmental activism and therefore, it cannot be concluded that extended meditational relaxation influences a greater perception of care towards the environment.

Yoga and meditational relaxation have a profound effect on shifting the perception of a practitioner. Enhanced sensorial awareness, shifting definitions of nature, greater concern toward the environment, and an overall increased feeling of wellbeing emerged as significant patterns in participants' experiences.

Chapter Five
Environmentalism: Situating Sustainability within
South Florida's Yogic Culture

This chapter examines the connection between the environment and yoga and addresses the common assumption that yoga practitioners have a greater affiliation toward environmental protection. Yoga is openly paired with “green” behavior through images and publications in the media that strive to emphasize yoga’s connection to nature. Certainly, legitimate connections exist, especially within yoga retreat settings. According to Jennifer Lea (2008), nature plays a very important part in the creation of a healthy body and is an active participant in creating therapeutic effects within a retreat setting. However, the majority of yoga is not practiced in a retreat setting, but rather in urban studios that aim to incorporate elements of the natural world. This chapter will examine survey results to show the sustainable practices of yoga practitioners versus non-yoga practitioners. The commitment that the SFYC demonstrates towards incorporating nature into their setting and mission is also expanded upon.

Measuring Environmentalism

Surveys were conducted to measure the sustainable actions taken by two groups: yoga practitioners and a control group comprised of non-yoga practitioners. Sustainable actions are common and effective ways to limit the impact of environmental degradation

by practicing activities that contributes to the wellbeing of the planet's natural resources. These sustainable actions include recycling, conserving energy, harvesting native plants, among others. Although there are many ways to perform sustainable actions, I will focus on the most common and available practices. An environmentalist is someone who frequently and systematically performs sustainable activities as a part of their lifestyle.

The survey was designed to understand how “environmental” each group is by asking how frequently the participant performs sustainable actions. Survey questions were grouped into four categories: recycling, energy usage, environmental education, and consumption and food practices. Any individual could participate in the survey regardless of their living situation or environmental views. Demographics were recorded to understand if environmental practices might be dictated by economic wealth within south Florida. Therefore, household income was recorded in the survey but it was concluded that no difference in environmental activism was present regardless of income level.

Interestingly, surveys and participant observation suggest that a paradox exists within the culture of yoga. The SFYC promotes ideas about environmental sustainability; however, survey results show the environmental actions of the yogis were no greater than the general public. The aesthetics of the SFYC has an appearance that is grounded in nature and promotes ideas about ecological wellbeing throughout the community. The acceptance that yoga produces environmental activism within the world was frequently voiced by many yoga participants. Some of the members at the SFYC believe that yoga has made them more environmental. One woman explained that she has become more environmental through yoga by eating less meat and she elaborated further by stating, “Yoga is about self-change, and then you want to change everything. We want to change

ourselves and everything around us.” Yoga has the ability to enhance one’s sensory perception, making the practitioner more environmentally aware. However, survey results conclude that yoga practitioners did not display any more environmental activism than the control group of non-yogis.

The culture of the SFYC was studied over the course of 12 weeks and observations were recorded of the cultural and environmental workings of the studio; particularly the spatially constructed indoor/outdoor yoga setting, interactions among the yogis, and organized activities that related to environmental activism. In the proceeding sections, I will elaborate on these elements, which are major contributing factors to the cultural construction of the SFYC, and the influence they have on the ethos of environmentalism.

New Age Yoga: Displaying Environmentalism

Throughout the past eight years, my personal practice of yoga has aided in my awareness of the specific aesthetics of New Age yoga centers. The interesting relationship between the studio setting and the deliberate incorporations of nature is a conscious effort put forth by yoga centers across the country. Why are yoga studios blending contemporary design to include elements that either represent or are part of the natural world?

Yoga has made a transnational journey, crossing into the United States from India, and traveling back and forth, exchanging techniques and customs. Rishikesh, India, is famously known as a travel destination for those seeking yoga. Strauss and Mendelbaum (1998) note that the New Age movement of the 1990s sought the blending

of yoga, environmentalism and wellbeing and to accommodate this, Rishikesh, India, began offering nature activities that included trekking, rafting, and various other outdoor sports to travelers. This desire for the outdoors was adopted by tourist agents in Rishikesh, India, interested in attracting western yoga tourists and was then reintroduced to studios in the United States as an idea that nature and yoga are incontrovertibly connected.

The elements of the natural environment that are displayed in many yoga centers today consist of, but are not limited to, gardens surrounding the studio, plants within the building, landscape paintings, natural lighting, water fountains, animals, and music that incorporates the sounds of nature. There are even studios that paint the ceilings with nearly perfect images of the night sky, where yoga can be practiced in a dark room and black lights illuminate the constellations – creating a perfectly controlled temperature setting while practicing under the stars.

The understanding that the culture of yoga is accompanied by a consciousness of the natural world is reinforced through the media as popular magazines and various advertisements include this assumption through pictures and artwork of yoga being practiced on mountaintops, in the forest, and on the beach. Various *asanas*, such as *vriksasana* which translates as “tree pose” is etymologically and physically linked to nature. Similarly, the popularity of the Green Yoga Association, which resulted from dissertation research by Laura Jean Cornell (2006), uses a drawing of *vriksasana* and a pine tree as their logo. Many other postures are named for nature including various animals such as: *garudasana* (eagle pose), *kapotasana* (pigeon pose), *matsyasana* (fish pose), *ustrasana* (camel pose), and *sasangasana* (rabbit pose). Yoga studios today

incorporate various elements that represent the natural world and demonstrate a conscious effort is being made to link the modern practice to environmental mindfulness.

The South Florida Yoga Center: Integrating Nature into the Setting

Yoga is linked to nature in a variety of ways, but the relationship that yogis themselves have with it remains ambiguous. The SFYC like many other yoga studios, has an appearance of appreciation of the natural world that when left unquestioned, affirms a “green” perspective of yoga. The studio has many defining characteristics that seems to promote a culture of care toward the planet. Perhaps the most obvious is the garden surrounding the entrance, where one has to walk through a path formed by various palm plants, greenery, and flowers to enter the SFYC. Chairs are available in the garden area where yogis are often found interacting with one another. This garden area is continually growing, quite literally, as yogis are able to donate plants and their time weeding and improving the landscape. The studio’s Garden Club meets once each month to enhance the aesthetics and health of the garden and to expand the perimeter.

The creation of the garden area outside the studio adds an inviting aspect to the design of the center, however the modifications made to nature in this setting are not associated with improving the environment using sound environmental facts. In fact, the garden is not so much a focal point and example of sustainability as it is an eclectic mix of donated plants, wind chimes, even a few gemstones and crystals for good luck. The garden area serves as a creative environment and a comfortable place to relax. One woman who frequents the studio explained to me that the garden setting is a nice place to spend time. She stated, “The garden is very peaceful, it’s very spiritual around here. The

sculptures makes it a bit more spiritual. And you know, it's just kind of nice. There's chimes going off. It's quite peaceful.”

In addition to the Garden Club, a variety of other activities are promoted through the SFYC that represent environmental consciousness. Outdoor yoga classes are advertised as a way to become “one with nature” and rediscover the true self. Yoga is regularly held on the beach by the SFYC, despite the studio location being several miles from the ocean. This additional yoga service displays a willingness to accommodate those who wish to try, or desire to practice within nature's elements, rather than in a controlled, studio setting.

Environmental consciousness is displayed through the setting, the activities, and the information available on the SFYC website. The website delivers information about ways to get connected with nature through activities like beach yoga, garden club and their non-profit affiliate. The non-profit organization gathers yogi volunteers to perform community outreach by planting trees and cleaning up beaches (although some yogis informed me that the organization has been inactive for quite some time). While information presented online is only a portrayal of how the community expresses itself, the reality is slightly different and will be presented in the next section. The SFYC website does, however, offer a way for inquiring yogis to gather information about the goals of the yoga center, their ethics, and what it is they choose to emphasize within the paradigm of New Age yoga.

The SFYC takes a spiritual look at nature and uses ancient yogic texts as justification for implementing nature into their mission. Outdoor activities like beach yoga are advertised as a way to “connect to oneself and become fully alive.” Practicing

yoga in nature can assist one in working toward the *niyamas* of contentment, purity, and asceticism, which is outlined in *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. Practicing in the sometimes uncomfortable conditions of nature demonstrates a commitment to the practice of yoga. When interview participants were asked where their ideal place is to practice, almost everyone stated that the best place to practice is “wherever you are” and that the conditions don’t matter.

These interactions that the yogi experiences with nature occur on a different level, where changing nature is not the goal, but accepting nature is. Although these yogis may not work to change nature in every setting, they do modify it to better serve their goals. For example, in the garden area outside of studio, a bamboo “wall” is being cultivated to close off the grassy area for meditation from the parking lot. This modification to nature is an example of how the SFYC uses nature (the bamboo) to create a more controlled environment that will assist in the goals of creating a conscious community inspired by traditional yogic texts.

The SFYC is portrayed through the community’s activities, setting and website and each mode of expression serves as a representation of a group of individuals working toward physical and spiritual wellbeing. But more than the practice of yoga, a conscious effort toward environmental awareness is fused into the creation of this community. Gardening, outdoor yoga, planting trees and cleaning beaches are all part of the center’s idea to extend yogic principles into the world around them.

The Paradox of Environmental Activism: Believing vs. Doing

The connection between yoga and environmental activism is represented in a variety of ways at the SFYC, however the reality of sustainable actions taken by yogis

revealed a contradictory relationship. While the intention and desire to assist in securing sustainability may be present within the character of many yogis, yoga as practiced in the United States exhibits a paradoxical nature that a break exists between believing and doing.

The ambiance created by the SFYC intentionally includes aspects of nature which go beyond the usual indoor, synthetic setting, and strives to incorporate outdoor elements. The garden area that surrounds the entrance to the studio is lush with tropical vegetation and represents a way to connect to nature and be in nature. In the article, “Domesticated nature: Motivations for gardening and perceptions of environmental impact,” Clayton (2007) states that gardening is a popular pastime for Americans, and many individuals use the yard to appreciate nature. However, she also argues there are legitimate concerns that many gardening practices are contributing to environmental devastation through the use of pesticides, excessive water, and planting invasive species. Clayton (2007) suggests that given the tremendous interest in gardening, alternatives need to be implemented that make gardening a more sustainable practice in the United States. This would include using native plant species, reducing pesticide use, and creating ecologically diverse landscapes that provide food and shelter for wildlife.

The garden at the SFYC is symbolic. Its beauty is an image of environmental wellbeing and the spatially constructed area serves as an extension of the studio by functioning as a place for yogis to gather. Once each month, the manager of the studio leads an activity for the Garden Club (comprised of volunteer yogis) to come together to weed and prune the garden. This activity gains volunteers by word-of-mouth and through social media. However, participation is minimal and my observations recorded only three

to five people attended this event during the months I conducted fieldwork. Despite the beauty of tropical plants, the garden does not connote any true undertaking of environmental activism; the garden harbors plants of all types that have been donated by the community and does not serve as a resting place or food source for wildlife. However, given the urban location, a degree of difficulty exists in trying to create the sustainable garden that Clayton (2007) suggests. The aesthetics of the garden create a welcoming atmosphere, enhance the studio's social areas and serve as a place to connect with nature. The construction and management of the garden stands as an emblem of a nature-oriented business that believes in the integration of nature's elements.

Many yogis associate the beauty of the garden at the SFYC as an indicator of health, environmentalism, and activism. This garden extends approximately 100 feet from the entrance of the studio and around one side of the parking lot and 20 feet wide. On any given day, yogis can be seen sitting in the garden area. I often joined many of the dreadlocked, young, twenty-something's who passed their time in the garden area. Many of them explained the garden is a way that yogis at the SFYC are caring for the environment and that is partially what makes their community so unique. While it is true that most yoga centers in south Florida don't have gardens where people volunteer their time, there is an erroneous perception among the yogis that the SFYC garden contributes to sustainability. Steven Yearley states, "Some environmentalists have been attracted to versions of the green argument which are principally founded on non-scientific forms of authority" (1993: 60). The garden at the SFYC does not represent a scientific collaboration to create a sustainable garden. In fact, only one food plant was observed in the garden which was a pineapple plant. The garden at the SFYC delivers a message of

environmental commitment but instead of using science to create a sustainable garden, aesthetics are the primary focus.

The SFYC demonstrates the willingness of New Age establishments to design ways to “get back to nature.” In addition to the garden, the studio’s yoga classes offer ways to be in nature’s elements. Yoga is held on the beach, outside on the deck behind the studio, and even inside with the doors open – bringing nature to the practitioner. The website’s marketing of beach yoga is suggested to make one fully aware of nature’s gifts through the immersion of the body, the “pebbled sand,” and the “ocean breeze.” While beach yoga may be a therapeutic experience for some, it was explained to me by one yogi as a less than pleasing situation. Her justification of why she only practiced inside at the SFYC was because she had went to the beach once and stated, “It was way too hot and sandy.”

Practicing yoga in nature’s wild, uncontrolled locations may seem like an exotic experience, but is not idyllic for many. Jennifer Lea’s (2008) study on therapeutic retreat yoga centers indicates that the uneven stone floors where they practiced outside was the cause of intense frustration and irritation for a number of individuals in the group. Although the desire to practice *asanas* in nature’s unrestrained conditions has the allure that one might become closer to mother earth, there is a degree of discomfort that supersedes the willingness for many to attend and enjoy outdoor yoga.

The majority of classes at the SFYC were held in one of the two indoor, air-conditioned studio rooms. In the larger studio room there is a door, similar to a garage door that opens to the outside. Although it was often closed, many days it was open and the air-conditioning poured out, while the heat permeated into the studio. This door was a

topic of conflict on several accounts – some yogis complained that it was too hot to open it, while others wanted it open to better detoxify the body through sweating. One yoga instructor referenced the situation with humor as she adjusted the air-conditioning setting cooler, opened the door to the 90 something degree Fahrenheit air and admitted to the class, “Shhh, I know this is really bad, but don’t tell anyone.” The instructor’s choice to create an optimal yoga setting surpassed the willingness to make a decision that would benefit the environment. This decision to leave the air conditioning on with the doors open was not objected to by any practitioners in the room.

The SFYC makes a deliberate attempt to incorporate elements of nature into the physical setting of its spatially arranged studio. The center extends beyond the walls of the building into the garden area and also to the beaches of south Florida. The desire to experience nature is a recognizable trait within this community of yogis and the SFYC makes that available to the practitioners. Although an ethos of environmentalism exists among many, the sustainable actions taken by individuals within the community remain questionable. One of the yoga instructors explained that he was an environmentalist because he plants trees wherever he desires even though he stated, “I don’t care that it is illegal.” Another instructor stated that he knows he shouldn’t use plastic water bottles but he still does. Within this desire to experience and even “help” nature, the practices of sustainability were not the focal point for the center. Although many people expressed their concern for the planet, there is a disconnection between the belief that the natural environment ought to be looked after through environmentally responsible choices and the reality that sustainability is cultivated through *doing* and making informed choices.

Measuring Environmental Actions: Survey Results

To accurately address the interactive relationship that yogis have with their environment, quantitative data was gathered in the form of surveys. There is reluctance in relying solely on self-described interpretations of how someone cares about the planet, because believing in sound environmental practices does not necessarily translate into personal activism that works toward sustainability.

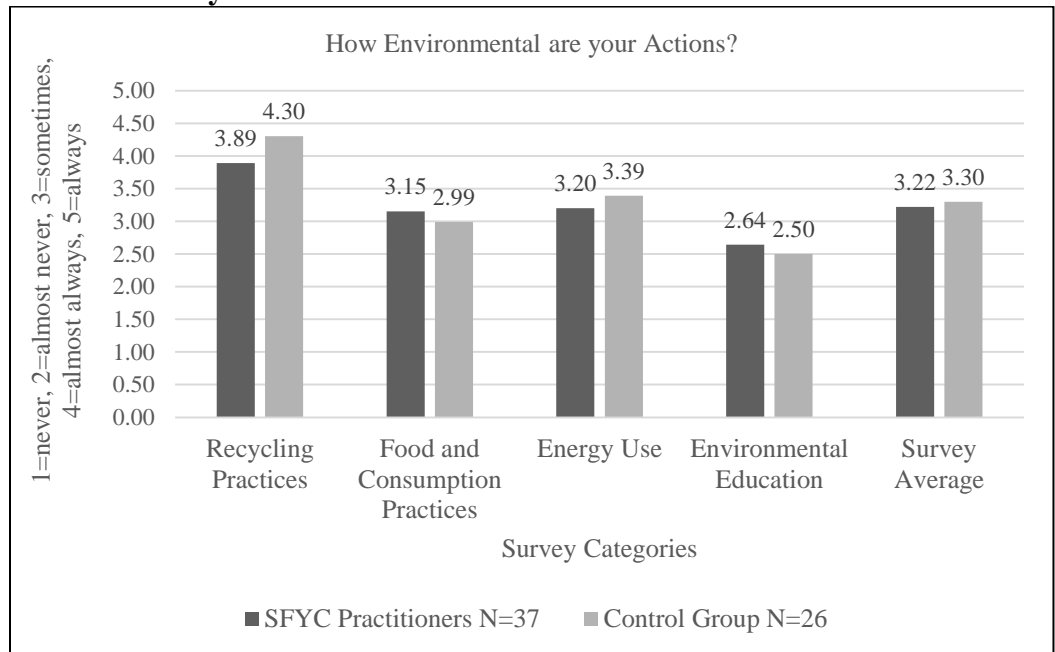
Surveys were administered between a control group of non-yoga practitioners and a group of yogis from the SFYC. The control group consisted of members from Florida Atlantic University's Lifelong Learning Society, FAU students, and other individuals from the general public. This survey was designed to collect details of how an individual implemented sustainable choices into their daily life. This information was analyzed and the two groups were compared. Despite the yoga community's attempt to connect with nature, the results of the survey indicated that the commitment to making environmentally sound actions in everyday life was no more frequent in the yoga practitioners than among the non-yoga practitioners.

Paper surveys for yoga practitioners were handed out at the SFYC on an evening where many people were socializing in between classes. The data from these surveys were later manually typed into Survey Monkey so they could be analyzed along with the surveys that were completed online by the non-yoga practitioners. Interestingly, remarks at the yoga center were candidly heard as the paper surveys were collected. "Thanks for making me feel terrible" and "Wow, I really failed that" were among the reactions I overheard. The survey was designed to ask for particular levels of activism in various areas of environmental concern. The embarrassed reactions of many of the survey

participants at the SFYC signifies that many practitioners associate themselves with yoga and environmentalism and perhaps, feel an obligation to make a commitment to improving the planet’s natural resources through their own individual actions but seemed to know they had fallen short. For some respondents, including the control group, this survey undoubtedly drew their attention to the lack of effort that is made regarding everyday environmental routines that could be practiced, but are not.

Questions were either short answer or in the form of a Likert scale, where the higher the respondent ranked an answer, the greater the level of environmental activism (see Appendix C). One corresponds to “never” performing a particular activity, two is “almost never,” all the way to five, meaning “always.” Likert scale questions were placed into four categories: recycling practices, food and consumption practices, energy use, and environmental education. Each category contained between four and seven questions that were averaged to provide the quantitative results shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Survey Results



When results were compared between the two groups, yoga practitioners did not display an overall higher level of activism despite their efforts in creating and participating in a conscious community that incorporates nature into the business model. In fact, results show that recycling practices and energy use of the yogis were less environmentally conscientious than the non-practitioners. However, the yoga practitioners did score higher in the categories of environmental education and food and consumption practices.

The SFYC is an umbrella for holistic and New Age treatments that are dedicated to enhancing spiritual and physical wellbeing. Nutritional services are offered through the center and many practitioners bring and share an assortment of health foods. The food and consumption survey category asked respondents about whether they practiced vegetarianism and whether they purchased locally grown food, both of which are frequent topics of conversation at the SFYC. A great number of vegetarians among the yogis is no surprise, and further confirms the New Age movement's dedication to healthy living. Wayne, a SFYC practitioner stated there is significance in "knowing where your food comes from, trying to grow food, [and] working your land not matter how small it is." Similarly, Heather, a yoga instructor at the SFYC incorporated food when she spoke about the environmental issues she is concerned about:

The fact that a lot of people aren't connected with where their food comes from [and] where their products come from [bothers me]. [Including] how much we use [and] how much we don't. Like, how much we waste without thinking about it. (September 11, 2014 SFYC)

The yoga survey group also scored higher in the category titled "Environmental Education." This series of questions asked participants about their willingness to participate in, and learn about environmental causes. The yoga survey group scored

higher in the overall category which is attributed to one single question. The only question that they ranked higher in than the control group asked, “Do you seek employment (or hold a job) that benefits the environment?” Several yoga instructors completed the survey which may contribute to results that show an increase among yogis that believe they have a job that benefits the environment. This definition of what job is beneficial to the environment is subjective to the participant. Therefore, this question may only show that yoga practitioners are more likely to define their job (or the job they are seeking) as environmental, even if it is not. A considerable effort is put forth by many yoga practitioners and instructors at the SFYC to improve the health and wellbeing of themselves and others through their employment. Yoga teacher training is offered at the SFYC twice each year and many see this as an opportunity where they will be able to gain positive employment upon completion of the course. Some described their experience in teacher training as “phenomenal” and “life-changing.”

The yoga practitioners scored lower than the control group on the other questions in the Environmental Education category. One of these questions asked, “Are you actively learning about environmental issues?” The control group scored 3.58 and the SFYC group scored 3.47. Participant observation and interviews support that some yogis hold passive attitudes toward taking environmentally concerned actions. Choosing to accept the environment as it is was a frequent comment made by interview participants. One yogi stated, “As one person, I can only do my one person part [for the environment].” The lack of environmentally sustainable activities shown in the survey results is partially justified through the mission of the SFYC. To create a conscious community is to recondition the human mind to accept what *is*. The mission of the SFYC

is to help people evolve on their path to conscious through a process of surrender, which can be achieved through yoga and meditational relaxation techniques offered in the studio.

The differences in the two survey groups are minimal but show that the control group, which consisted of the non-yogic practitioners, contributes to marginally greater environmental activism than the group of SFYC practitioners. Four categories were established to highlight the areas of environmental interest. When the results from each question were placed into categories, the yoga practitioners contributed to more sustainable food and consumption practices due to a greater number of vegetarians. Similarly, the environmental education category scored higher among the group of yogis because of one question regarding employment that benefits the environment. The control group displayed a greater commitment to recycling practices and energy efficiency. Overall, the survey results listed in Table 7 display how certain responses varied to reveal the areas where yogis contribute slightly more than the non-practitioners to securing environmental sustainability and also areas where they contribute less.

Summary

New Age yoga in the United States in general and south Florida in particular has descended from environmental movements of past 1970s counterculture where ideas about yoga, nature, and their interconnection still permeate modern yoga centers today, but are further infused with contemporary global environmentalism and its newly defined environmental crisis. The popular perception of yoga today presents the yoga practitioner as having an environmental mindset, being a conscious consumer, and holding

environmental values that foster sustainable actions. While some yogis do hold environmental views about the planet, the assumption that New Age yogic culture promotes more active fostering of environmental sustainability is not demonstrated by this study.

Enhancing the health of one's physical and spiritual dimensions are paramount goals of the yogi, and nature is often included in this mission. Susan Clayton (2007) addresses motivations behind gardening as ways to socialize, enhance status, and signify personality, creativity and values. The garden at the SFYC serves multiple purposes, which include consciously utilizing nature as a place for meditation, social gatherings, and extending the center to the outdoors. The garden also enhances the aesthetics and functions as a place that yogis can volunteer their time caring for the planet's natural resources. But this cannot be taken as an indicator of the environmental activism of the yogis who go there.

This chapter addressed, through the use of participant observation and quantitative surveys, why yoga in the United States is so often paired with environmental sustainability. Survey results analyzed levels of environmental activism to indicate that a paradox exists between believing in sustainability and *doing* sustainable actions. The SFYC harbors an ethos of environmentalism through various activities like outdoor yoga and garden club. Many people expressed to me their concerns for the planet and were quick to uphold a disposition that sustains they support environmental adjustments that improve the conditions on earth for all living beings. However, when surveys were analyzed the contradiction between believing in sustainability and practicing sustainable actions became apparent. Yoga practitioners not only work towards developing their

corporeal and spiritual self, but through meditation and the process of surrender, they become more accepting of what *is*. Changing the environment in many ways would be contradictory to the idea of surrendering and although yogis may appear to be more environmentally active than the general public, what they work toward is not necessarily sustainable activism, but rather, conscious awareness of the environment.

Chapter Six

Sustainability: Addressing the Paradox between Believing and Doing

The paradox between believing and *doing* shows that the yoga practitioner has a desire for environmental wellbeing but does not make a greater contribution toward sustainability than non-yoga practitioners. For some, yoga produces the ability to surrender to current environmental conditions which demonstrates a disconnection between wanting environmental wellbeing and taking sustainable actions. Interviews after yoga indicate that three interview participants vocalized a more environmentally passive perception toward caring for the planet. One participant, who experienced equanimity created from yoga pointed to her heart and stated, “At least if the world burns down tomorrow, I’m okay in here.”

The willingness for some yogis to surrender to the current condition is characteristic of yogic texts. Yoga is a practice that incorporates a multitude of techniques beyond the physical practice of *asana*. The eight limbs of yoga also express *asana* as just one of the ways to reach *samadhi*, or the ultimate concentration that only becomes possible after a person has achieved perfection in meditation (Satchidananda 1978). The eight limbs of yoga expressed in the ancient text, *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* guide the student toward a path of ultimate liberation and freedom from the mind, defining yoga as, “[an] unruffled state of mind under all conditions” (Satchidananda 1978: 235). Consistent with this message, this research illustrates that the

practice of *asana* and meditational relaxation techniques leads some participants to a more accepting position of current environmental conditions.

An individual's ability to view themselves as part of their environment after yoga suggests that a conscious transformation is produced in some yogis. This enhanced awareness promotes personal health with the potential to extend into environmental health. The yoga practitioner places a strong emphasis on personal wellbeing and connection to oneself and beyond. The heightened state of awareness that yoga produces for many encourages a healthy lifestyle but falls short when it comes to performing environmentally sustainable actions.

When yogis at the SFYC were asked about why they practice yoga and what it has done for them, comments varied, but overall similar remarks were voiced. SFYC practitioner, Heather stated, "My intention during yoga is union and connection with what *is*, what I am, what is more than I am. When I first started it was just physical and [now] it's gotten to be so much more" (September 11, 2014 SFYC). Heather and many other SFYC practitioners believe that their yoga practice has made them more mindful of the foods they consume, causing a shift to vegetarianism. Yoga creates a desire for personal wellness that leads the practitioner to consciously change their habits in order to achieve optimal health. However, the decision to be a vegetarian is not made to support environmental activism but rather to foster a healthy lifestyle.

The creative environment at the SFYC is thoughtfully arranged and aesthetically similar to an ashram. The studio provides a controlled environment for the practitioner to detach and re-focus their attention inward during yoga classes by concentrating on physical alignment and the breath. This temporary disengagement with one's outward

surroundings allows practitioners to connect to a deeper dimension of themselves – physically and sometimes, spiritually. In a series of interviews, 54% of the participants said they experienced a heightened sensory perception after yoga. Descriptions of the environment shifted from general statements about how the setting *seemed*, to precise explanations of how the participant experienced their environment through their senses. The conscious re-emergence of the body back into the same environment after a yoga class allows one to experience their environment through their senses. The vibrancy of their surroundings becomes more apparent and they experience their environment by becoming a part of it, rather than being a passive observer.

The sharpening of the senses that many practitioners experience after yoga promotes a deeper connection to oneself and a desire for personal wellness. However, in order to achieve an optimal state of wellbeing one needs a healthy environment. The ability for a practitioner to view themselves as a part of the environment and perform sustainable actions is essential to amending the paradox between believing and *doing*.

Suggestions for Future Research

Researching environmental consciousness deserves more attention within academia precisely because the future of humanity depends upon the willingness to live a sustainable lifestyle. Understanding what creates a shifting perception toward environmental concern is only part of the research, and yoga for many creates an immersive way to live through the senses, experiencing the environment rather than living in contrast to it. Perhaps the most obvious area where future research can continue is by further examining those yoga practitioners that experience a heightened sensory

awareness and also show a greater concern toward the planet. Can we bridge the gap between changing consciousness through yoga and implementing sustainable actions toward the planet? Assessing the particulars of each yoga class can help understand what factors further contribute to the consciousness that some people feel after they emerge from yoga. Additionally, quantifying the environmental actions of these yogis might take considerable effort, but would provide more conclusive evidence as to their exact level of activism, not merely their perception of their own environmental activism.

Measuring perceptions is a difficult task and survey results depended upon the respondents ranking their environmental actions through their own perception. Ultimately, the results depend upon how each individual perceives the Likert scale. When the respondent chooses the answer “sometimes” to the question, “Do you recycle batteries?” their view of “sometimes” may differ from other participants. Measuring environmental activism might be more accurately researched by asking the participant to count throughout a specific time frame, the number of times they perform a certain activity such as recycling plastic bottles. Therefore, the focal point of the research emphasizes measuring actual environmental activism rather than depending upon one’s perception.

Due to time constraints and travel limitations, this study was confined to a yoga center within south Florida. If done on a larger scale, results may show more conclusive evidence that leads to understanding how yoga could be used as a tool to foster sustainability. Although yogis did not display overall greater environmental activism than the general public, surveys revealed that 51% of SFYC practitioners responded they believe yoga has motivated them to make more sustainable actions. The emerging consciousness and strong desire toward resource protection that some people feel as a

result of yoga may connect with greater activism, but future research is needed to provide the answer as to how we can unite the desire for activism and the willingness to live sustainably.

Moving Towards a more Sustainable Planet

Researching human-environment relations confirms an exciting expansion of the social and behavioral sciences, but demands an interdisciplinary endeavor (Craik 1972). This thesis has drawn from anthropology of the senses, environmental discourses and various yogic texts to advance research within the social sciences to understand how a shift in consciousness can motivate sustainable actions.

Moving towards a sustainable planet requires the merging of interdisciplinary research that supports the endeavors of creating sustainability. Hopefully, this thesis will encourage other research that examines not only yoga, but other groups of people that possess environmental consciousness and work toward an ecologically balanced world. A greater empathy regarding all forms of life on earth can contribute to a worldview that would benefit sustainability by allowing humans to see themselves as part of the natural world, not dominating it. The practice of yoga does offer a recognizable advantage in creating change because it provides an opportunity for the practitioner to re-emerge into the world as part of the environment, not separate from it.

Through sensory enhancement and a shifting perception of the environment, can modern yoga help restore the health of the planet? Kay Milton states, “Identification with nature and natural things is the process through which this inclination towards benevolent action is thought to develop. Identification with something elicits empathy” (2002:74). If

yoga guides a person into *feeling* their environment through their senses while initiating a more profound appreciation for nature, identifying and implementing a connection that transforms this empathy into environmental activism may help humanity move towards a more sustainable planet.

Appendices

Appendix A: Sample Interview Questions with Yoga Practitioners

Before Yoga: (Interview part a)

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your ethnicity?
4. What is your highest level of education?
5. What are the things you do within your community? Involvement/activities?
6. When did you start practicing yoga?
7. Have you been practicing ever since you started?
8. How often do you practice yoga?
9. Is there anything different about you or your lifestyle that has changed since you began practicing yoga (regularly)?
10. Why do you practice yoga?
11. What led you to begin practicing yoga?
12. During your practice, what do you think about?
13. What intention(s) if any, do you set for your practice?
14. Can you describe the setting to me?
15. Does the setting of the yoga studio make a difference in your practice? If so, how?
16. Describe your perfect place to practice yoga?
17. How do you feel right now?
18. Describe your surroundings (your environment) at the moment.
19. How do you feel about your surroundings at this moment?
20. Do you feel content in your environment right now? Why or why not?
21. Do you find anything pleasurable about your surroundings right now?
22. Do you find anything unpleasant about your surroundings right now?
23. How do you define nature?
24. How do you interact with nature? What role do you play within nature?
25. What is important in your life right now?
26. If there was something you could change about your environment right now, what would it be?
27. Do you think you make a contribution to securing a sustainable planet? If so, in what way(s)?
28. Has nature always been an important part of your life?
29. Are there any problems occurring within nature that concern you? If so, what are they?

After yoga: (Interview part b)

30. How do you feel right now?
31. Describe your surroundings (your environment) at the moment.
32. How do you feel about your surroundings at this moment?
33. Do you feel content in your environment right now? Why or why not?
34. Do you find anything pleasurable about your surroundings right now?
35. Do you find anything unpleasant about your surroundings right now?
36. How do you define nature?
37. How do you interact with nature? What role do you play within nature?

38. What is important in your life right now?
39. If there was something you could change about your environment right now, what would it be?
40. Do you think you make a contribution to securing a sustainable planet? If so, in what way(s)?
41. Has nature always been an important part of your life?
42. Are there any problems occurring within nature that concern you? If so, what are they?

**Appendix B: Sample Interview Questions with the Owner of the
South Florida Yoga Center**

1. What is your age?
2. What is your ethnicity?
3. What is your highest level of education?
4. Is there anything different about your lifestyle that has changed since you began practicing yoga?
5. What was/is your vision for the SFYC?
6. Can you describe the community of the SFYC?
7. How would you describe your perfect setting to practice yoga?
8. Describe your environment at the moment? Are you content?
9. Do some practitioners at the SFYC resist the spiritual, or what seems to be spiritual nature of yoga?
10. When you teach, what do you want to elucidate in your classes?
11. What style do you teach? Why did you choose this style above the many others ways to practice yoga? What does it personally mean to you?
12. What are the two most contrasting classes that the SFYC offers?
13. What is the most popular class at the SFYC?
14. Can you give me your definition of 'environmentalism'?
15. How does this play a part in your life?
16. Does environmentalism have a place at the SFYC? How?
17. What about the nonprofit affiliate?
18. What do you think nature is? Where do humans fall within this definition?
19. How active do you see yourself in caring for the environment?
20. What do you believe the purpose of yoga and meditation truly are? Why?
21. Do you think that yoga stimulates/activates human senses or helps you to withdraw from them?
22. Have you ever observed any yoga student of yours become more attuned to nature/environmentalism? In what way?
23. Why do you think most people come to the SFYC? Do more come for meditation or for the physical aspect of yoga?

Appendix C: “How Environmental are your Actions?” Survey

- What is your age?
- What is your gender?
- What is your ethnicity?
- What is your highest level of education?
- How many children do you have?
- Do you have solar panels on your home?
- Do you drive a hybrid vehicle?
- Is your annual household income
 - a.) 0-25,000
 - b.) 25,000-50,000
 - c.) 50,000-75,000
 - d.) 75,000+

Rate the following questions 1-5

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Almost never	Sometimes	Almost always	Always

1. Do you recycle glass? Plastic? Paper? Batteries? Electronics?
2. Do you hold on to recyclable items until you can dispose of them in a recycle bin?
3. Do you donate your used clothes and furniture?
4. Do you eat a vegetarian diet?
5. Do you use reusable grocery bags?
6. Do you refrain from purchasing plastic water bottles?
7. Do you refrain from purchasing takeout food in Styrofoam containers?
8. Do you purchase locally grown food?
9. Do you use compact fluorescent bulbs?
10. Do you ride a bicycle or walk instead of using a car?
11. Do you turn the water off while brushing your teeth?
12. Do you turn off lights when you leave a room?
13. Do you make an effort to own energy saver appliances?
14. Do you refrain from using pesticides on your lawn?
15. Do you have leaky toilets and faucets repaired immediately?
16. Do you collect rain water to use for watering plants?
17. Do you volunteer your time with an environmental organization?
18. Do you regularly donate money or other resources to environmental causes?
19. Do you seek employment (or hold a job) that benefits the environment?
20. Are you actively learning about environmental issues?
21. If you have marked 3 or above to any of these questions, do you think yoga has motivated you to take these actions?

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