“FEMINISM LIVES IN THE BODY”:
THE HEALING EXPERIENCES OF FEMINISM AND YOGA FOR WOMEN SURVIVORS OF SEXUALIZED VIOLENCE

by

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Dedication

On January 1st of 2001, while in my first year of post-secondary education, I was stunned with my first of many memories of sexualized violence. Throughout my entire post-secondary education – Bachelor of Psychology, Bachelor of Social Work, and now this Master's of Social Work – I have simultaneously been moving through my personal journey of healing from sexualized violence. These two experiences – post-secondary education and healing journey – concurrently living in my life, have been extremely triggering and extremely healing. During this time I have been privileged to receive nurturance from so many – friends, family, university professors, yoga teachers, and counselors. The completion of this thesis was perhaps the most challenging of all – academically and as a survivor. It was not until one late night in October 2016 that I actually felt like the completion of this project could be a reality. This research is a pivotal moment in both my education and healing journey, as I have been blessed with the opportunity to meaningfully explore my passion for the intersection of feminism and yoga with women survivors of sexualized violence. With that, this thesis is dedicated to all of those who have provided nurturance along the way, supporting me to this apex in my healing and educational journeys. It is through this ever-present support that I have been encouraged to follow my intuition, challenge self-doubt and insecurity, and achieve meaningful contribution to feminist scholarship.

With that, I dedicate this thesis to all of you.

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Abstract

Research exploring the intersection of feminism and yoga with women survivors of sexualized violence is extremely scant. It has been shown that sexualized violence survivors have experienced significant healing through feminist practices of linking the personal to the political, as well as through yoga practices of reestablishing a positive relationship with the physical body. This research sought to explore the intersection of feminism and yoga with women survivors of sexualized violence.

Through a feminist foundation, interested participants were invited to take part in individual interviews, a focus group, and artistic creations to share and illustrate their experience of the intersection of feminism and yoga. Participants overwhelmingly asserted that both feminism and yoga were instrumental in their healing process, and that neither feminism nor yoga were all-encompassing healing experiences. The findings demonstrate that an intersectional approach of feminism and yoga would provide comprehensive healing through an exemplary experience of embodying the linkage of the personal is political.

List of Abbreviations Used

APA	American Psychiatric Association
BSW	Bachelor of Social Work
CBT	Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy
DSM	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders
MSW	Master's of Social Work
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
REB	Research Ethics Board
SSRI	Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The What, Why, and How of the Question

This thesis explores the question: How might a yoga practice and feminist experience intersect to support the healing process of women survivors of sexualized violence? Like much research, the passion for this project is rooted in personal experience. As a survivor of sexualized violence, the cognitive and affective feminist helping practices I experienced helped me comprehend the trauma of sexualized violence and work through overwhelming emotions. In addition to traditional 'therapy,' I found great healing through my feminist education as I explored women's history, dominant patriarchal systems, and critical perspectives to deconstruct oppression. A myriad of dialogues and consciousness-raising groups were both healing and liberating, as they provided an opportunity for me to unlearn the many assumed patriarchal truths that I had been living.

While these practices were invaluable, I have questioned whether the feminist healing was able to address the embodied physical manifestations of the trauma I experienced. However, during my yoga practice I found myself physically healing in a way I struggled to articulate. My personal healing journey as a survivor, especially coping with a flood of repressed memories, led me to explore yoga as an alternative and additional healing experience. This practice soon became one of the pillars that would see me through some of the most traumatic, disorientating, and disembodied moments of my life. I find great healing through the practice of yoga: it supports me as I reconnect to my body, release physically stored trauma, and experience stillness (instead of chaos) within my mind.

I have benefited greatly from the intersection of my feminist experiences and my yoga practice. These two forms of healing work well together as the feminist experience enables me to unlearn patriarchal constructs and cognitively comprehend my trauma, while the yoga concurrently allows me to release the stored trauma that is left lingering – and often resurfaces through talk therapy – within my physical body.

The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) of Canada (2015) estimated that 460,000 women experience sexualized violence every year in Canada. Sexualized violence is a broad term, which encompasses: incest; molestation; verbal, coercive, and physical sexualized assault; and all forms of rape (date rape, gang rape, stranger rape, acquaintance rape, familial rape, and rape under the influence) (Young & Maquire, 2003). In addressing this alarming statistic, feminist practitioners utilize various empowering practices that address the cognitive and affective wellbeing of women survivors of sexualized violence. As a budding feminist practitioner who intends to work with women survivors of sexualized violence, statistics such as these led me to wonder if others could also benefit from the intersection of feminist experiences and a yoga practice. Furthermore, if other survivors could benefit, perhaps feminist practitioners and yoga teachers could learn from each to enrich the services they offer. It is my hope that this research will demonstrate the value of integrating yoga with feminism, specifically when working with women survivors of sexualized violence.

In this first chapter, I explore the central concepts embedded within the research question and offer an overview of subsequent chapters.

1.2 Central Concepts

1.2.1 Sexualized Violence. Feminist scholars assert that violence against women is a social problem rooted in patriarchy, which is understood as the continuation of male dominance over women (Crittenden & Wright, 2012; Hunnicutt, 2009). Such violence can include, but is not limited to: stalking, child abuse, domestic/intimate partner violence, and sexualized violence including rape and sexual harassment (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

The term 'sexualized violence' is a relatively new term that differentiates between the related, though not synonymous, term 'sexual violence.' 'Sexual' is often thought of as a positive or pleasant term, defined as "relating to the instincts, physiological processes, and activities connected with physical attraction or intimate physical contact between individuals" (Oxford Dictionary, 2016, para. 1). '**Sexualized**,' on the other hand, is a term used to describe something that has been made sexual, even if it is not necessarily so. As per the Oxford Dictionary (2016), sexualized is to "make sexual; attribute sex or sex role to" (para. 1). Essentially, this places the emphasis on the violence, while simultaneously highlighting that it is *not* sexual, but has been sexualized. A gendered lens understands the term '**sexualized violence'** as a form of oppression, stemming from a patriarchal system that harms women psychologically and physically, privately and publicly, individually and socially (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2014; Hird, 2002).

1.2.2 Healing Process. Sexualized violence has the power to affect everything from the sense of self, physical body, intimate relationships, parenting, and beyond (Bass & Davis, 2008). Like any form of violence, sexualized violence

often results in trauma, calling "into question basic human relationships... the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community... [and shatters] the construction of the self" (Herman, 1997, p. 51). Unfortunately, "the trauma does not end when the abuse stops" (Bass & Davis, 2008, p. xxiv), thus a healing process is necessary. Feminist healing processes attend to trauma through cognitive and affective tools such as: consciousness-raising, empowerment, gender-role analysis, and gender-role intervention (Doucet & Mauthner, 2006; hooks, 2015a; Lather, 1991).

However, research indicates that trauma from sexualized violence does not rest solely within cognitive or affective realms, but is also 'embodied,' i.e. stored within the body: "trauma profoundly affects the body and many symptoms of traumatized individuals are somatically based" (Ogden & Minten, 2000, para. 1). Many professionals refer to this embodied trauma as somatic, meaning that embodied trauma is concerned with "the body, especially as distinct from the mind" (Oxford Dictionary, 2016). 'Embodiment' suggests that trauma remains physically stored within the survivors' bodies at a cellular level, which cannot be addressed by attending to cognitive and affective based interventions alone (Emerson, 2015; Emerson & Hopper, 2011). Therefore, effective healing processes must address multiple levels and, for the purposes of this research, **healing processes** are defined as experiences that help women cope with the cognitive, affective, and embodied manifestations of trauma.

1.2.3 Yoga. In the western world, yoga is known as a physical practice that combines the breath with stretching and strengthening postures to increase one's

physical health while simultaneously cultivating restoration from daily stress. Traditionally, however, yoga is an ancient eight-fold path dating more than two thousand years, designed to unite body, mind, and soul through the process of connection to a universal consciousness. As stated by Cope (2006):

> The most comprehensive exposition of the ancient wisdom tradition of yoga comes in the form of a two-thousand-year-old treatise called the *Yoga-Sūtra.* Although its origins will probably always remain obscure, it is most likely that the *Yoga-Sūtra* was written by a sage named Patanjali, in about the second century CE. The views and practices described by Patanjali in his *Yoga-Sūtra* embody the genius of many centuries of yoga practice and investigation. (p. xv)

It is typically through yoga mentorship or teacher training programs that Patanjali's Yoga Sutras are studied, limiting the general public's knowledge of yoga mostly to a physical exercise.

However, Patanjali is "[p]ossibly the most famous yoga philosopher" (Budig, 2012, p. 3). As mentioned, this sage penned the Yoga Sutras, which "are 195 statements on how to conduct oneself in life in order to achieve enlightenment" (Budig, 2012, p. 3). Within these sutras, we find the eight-limbed or eight-fold yogic path. Included within this ancient exposition or eight-fold yogic path are: (1) external disciplines, restraints, and ethical practice; (2) internal disciplines; (3) postures for meditation; (4) breath regulation; (5) withdrawal of the senses; (6) concentration; (7) meditative absorption; and (8) oneness (Budig, 2012; Cope, 2006; Devi, 2007; González & Eckstrom, 2016; Iyengar, 2015; Perlmutter, 2005).

These pathways are interconnected to one another and not meant to be 'accomplished,' but rather offered as "infinite possibilities and combinations to enhance our way of being" (Devi, 2007, p. 166). Each of these pathways has a corresponding Sanskrit title, often used by North American yoga teachers and studios. A full exploration of these eight pathways is beyond the scope of this project, however, an exploration of the third pathway, the physical posture practice, is necessary as it is the most common practice of yoga and, consequently, the most common explanation of yoga.

Asana. The third pathway, asana in Sanskrit, can be translated into posture, physical postures, postures of meditation, or seat (Budig, 2012; Cope, 2006; Devi, 2007; González & Eckstrom, 2016; Iyengar, 2015; Perlmutter, 2005). Western yoga is largely perceived as only this third path (González & Eckstrom, 2016). However, Budig (2012) highlights the irony here, as Patanjali believed yogis must begin by exploring the first two pathways, restraints and disciplines, prior to experiencing the physical practice of postures. Still, it is my experience as a yoga teacher and practitioner that many find yoga first with asana.

Another common misinterpretation of yoga is the egoist goal of asana to perfect a beautiful acrobatic shape with our bodies, when in fact it is actually to experience balance of effortless and ease within the postures (Devi, 2007; Iyengar, 2015). The challenge is not to push, pull, or contort the body; instead it is to listen to the body and move in a way that is effortless and easeful. Yogis believe that asana is a way to respect, nurture, and exercise the body as a divine vessel or temple that carries our true self (Iyengar, 2015).

The practice of asana requires a different kind of strength than may initially be assumed; asana requires a mental fortitude that urges the mind to be still, so awareness can remain in the body in connection with the breath (Budig, 2012). "This practice of asana encourages the body, mind, and breath to function together" (Devi, 2007, p. 226). Through this fortitude, yogis appreciate the body and mind not as two separate pieces of one being, but as interrelated (Iyengar, 2015). Thus, caring for one is simultaneously caring for the other. Within asana, yogis are gifted with more than physical exercise. "Asana practice challenges the body and focuses the mind, while its philosophical principles encourage spiritual growth" (Kaivalya & van der Kooij, 2010, p. 12). For many, asana is a reintroduction to the body, but once comfortable with the physical practice, moving inward to stillness is easier (Cope, 2006; Devi, 2007). The ability of asana to move into the mind and effect philosophical and spiritual growth separates this particular 'exercise' (a term used by non-yoga practitioners) from other forms of physical movement (Kaivalya & van der Kooij, 2010). Yogis believe that within the asanas, students can uncover pieces of the true self, unlocking unbounded potential (Kaivalya & van der Kooij, 2010).

The term **yoga**, for the purposes of this project, refers to mainly this third pathway, a practice of postures that are meant to cultivate physical training, but also an internal training of learning to simply *be* within one's self (Cope, 2006). In this way, we can understand that during the asana pathway, other practices of yoga – such as breath control, concentration, and philosophical teachings of restraints and disciplines – are also present and help in moving beyond the physical training to the deeper internal training.

Having said this, it is important to acknowledge that, while yoga (or asana) can be a healing practice, traditional North American yoga instruction does not generally offer what is know as 'trauma informed yoga' or 'yoga therapy.' While there are varied approaches of specific healing yoga (i.e.; yoga therapy or trauma informed yoga), they all share a common thread of utilizing the physical practice of asana as a therapeutic support (Emerson, 2015; Emerson & Hopper, 2011; Kraftsow, 2014). Yoga therapy is either individual or small group sessions with a certified yoga therapist, trained in choosing specific yoga techniques to benefit the client(s) (Kraftsow, 2014). Trauma informed yoga, on the other hand, is a lens that can be applied to traditional yoga instruction with appropriate certification (Emerson, 2015; Emerson & Hopper, 2011). Given that yoga therapy or trauma informed yoga are neither popular nor accessible, most people engage in yoga that is not specifically designated as therapeutic. Nonetheless, the literature explored in Chapter 2 demonstrates that yoga – be it traditional instruction, trauma informed, or yoga therapy – does contribute to healing.

1.2.4 Feminism and Feminist Experiences. Philips and Cree (2014) assert that there "is no straightforward definition of feminism today" (p. 930). Like other philosophical positions, "Feminism is not any more inclined… to be strictly defined or categorized" (Brisolara & Seigart, 2012, p. 292). One element the myriad of perspectives of feminism have in common is that they are about moving beyond confining boxes, as they reshape and redefine the social and political contours of women's history (Brisolara & Seigart, 2012; Dean & Aune, 2015).

Throughout the reshaping and redefining of feminism, from the first wave to the current fourth, there has been as much dispute as clarity when it comes to understanding feminism (Brisolara & Seigart, 2012; Chamberlain, 2016; Cullen & Fischer, 2014; Dean & Aune, 2015; Evans & Chamberlain, 2015; Hewitt, 2010; Garrison, 2010; Munro, 2013; Philips & Cree, 2014). Just a few of the understandings of feminism that have been experienced throughout the waves include:

- Liberal feminists, who strive for political and social equality between men and women (Brisolara & Seigart, 2012; Humm, 1992; Sangster, 2006).
- Radical feminists, who birthed consciousness-raising and the corresponding slogan "The Personal is Political" (Hanisch, 2006; Thompson, 2010),
- Social feminists, who understand patriarchy as both influencing and being influenced by men *and* women (Brisolara & Seigart, 2012).
- Postmodern feminists, who view realities and identities as socially constructed and in need of deconstructing and critical questioning to comprehend such social construction (Bohan, 2002; Enns, 2010).

Like any longstanding social cause, feminism has been, and continues to be, filled with growth, change, and debate. Perhaps one of the greatest lessons feminist history offers is that feminism itself is a resilient theory and practice (Brisolara and Seigart, 2012; Philips & Cree, 2014). As gendered oppression transforms throughout social history, feminism is there to explain the situation, including the persistence of patriarchy (Philips & Cree, 2014). Despite the many differences, these various feminisms are united nonetheless. Brisolara and Seigart (2012) state the following:

The fact that there are multiple feminisms, however, does not preclude a

> definition of some of the elements that unite these various forms… feminism is a practical and ideological position arising from social and intellectual movements, a stance that deeply values and acts in keeping with women's perspectives and experiences with the greater aim of fostering greater social justice and equality. Most feminist positions acknowledge that the majority of contemporary cultures are organized around patriarchal values and institutions. (p. 292)

Additionally, hooks (2015a) simply states: "feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (p. 1). In essence, the thread of the multitude of feminisms remains consistent in valuing women, their experiences, and perspectives as a means of social activism to end sexism and gendered oppression.

For the purposes of this research, **feminism** is defined as an ideology that asserts we live in a patriarchal system privileging men over women, wherein gender is socially constructed through discourses, power, principles, and practices of patriarchy and gender oppression (including sexualized violence).

The thesis question examines the intersection of yoga and feminism to ask: How might a yoga practice and *feminist experience* intersect to support the healing process of women survivors of sexualized violence? As seen from various appendices (recruitment flyer, email to potential participants and connections, prescreening interview questions, consent form, signature page for the creative piece, and individual interview question guide), this research began by using the phrase 'feminist helping experiences,' not 'feminist experience.' 'Feminist helping experiences,' a deliberately broad term, was chosen to acknowledge that, while

some women may experience traditional feminist counseling or therapy, feminist helping or healing does not always have to be formalized. This broad definition of feminist helping experiences was influenced by my own helping experiences that included a combination of formalized feminist therapy, feminist education, and consciousness-raising groups.

The breadth of the term 'feminist helping experiences' initially proved to be beneficial, as most participants experienced feminist healing outside of formalized therapy. However, after interacting with the participants, I came to realize that they did not define their experiences as 'helping' and thus, struggled to connect with the phrase 'feminist *helping* experiences.' Despite my better efforts, the phrase 'feminist helping experiences' was often seen as synonymous with 'feminist counseling' or 'feminist therapy.' For this reason the phrase 'feminist experience' replaced the phrase 'feminist helping experiences' within the research question.

Feminist Experiences. For the purposes of this project, feminist experience is defined as an experience that promotes healing through the process of linking one's personal experience to political and gendered structures (hooks, 2015a; Payne, 2006; Whalen, 1996), thereby comprehending the ways in which patriarchal discourses have resulted in one's experience of sexualized violence. As mentioned, most participants did not experience formalized feminist helping, however, they did note that their experiences within feminism were significantly healing, even if they would not have initially identified them as *helping* experiences.

1.2.5 Women. As a feminist researcher who identifies with postmodern feminism and social constructionism, I understand that knowledge has been, and

continues to be, socially constructed within the "cultural, historical and local contexts through the language used to interpret social experiences" (Payne, 2006, p. 58). When this lens is applied to gender, postmodern feminism questions the construction of gender, acknowledging that gender, like knowledge itself, is socially constructed within patriarchal paradigms (Enns, 2010). Thus, **women**, for this project, included anyone who self-identified as a woman. Essentially, this meant that any person who identified as a woman was welcomed to take part within the research, to be inclusive of all women. This definition acknowledges that one's gender may not match their sex – as gender is a self-identification, not physical genitalia – thereby challenging the dominant discourses of male and female social norms.

1.2.6 Survivor. According to Dictionary.com (2016) the term **survivor** means, "a person who continues to function or prosper in spite of opposition, hardship, or setbacks." For the purposes of this research the opposition, hardship, or setbacks refers to the trauma of sexualized violence. Women who have experienced sexualized violence often refer to themselves as survivors of the trauma that they have endured as it brings forth a sense of empowerment, rather than passively accepting the violence (Yassen & Glass, 1984).

1.3 Thesis Overview

This chapter has established the rationale for the research and defined the central concepts within the question. Chapter 2 considers the current knowledge relevant to the research question, through an examination of the literature related to: (1) the patriarchal nature of sexualized violence, (2) the traumatic nature of

sexualized violence for women survivors, (3) how feminism addresses sexualized violence trauma, (4) how yoga addresses trauma, and (5) how yoga addresses sexualized violence trauma. The chapter concludes by pointing out that there is a dearth of literature related to the intersection of feminism and yoga with the sexualized violent trauma experienced by women survivors. This sets the stage for Chapter 3, which describes the methodology used to answer the question: How might a yoga practice and feminist experience intersect to support the healing process of women survivors of sexual violence?

Chapter 3 presents the fundamental assumptions, theoretical perspective, methodology, data collection methods, process of data analysis, sampling criteria, and recruitment process. Chapter 4 then presents the findings, beginning with a general introduction to the participants and individual vignettes. Subsequently, Chapter 4 briefly presents what participants shared about how yoga alone supported their healing and about how feminism alone supported their healing. The final section of Chapter 4 presents five common themes that arose from the data and describe how the intersection of feminism and yoga supports the healing process of women survivors of sexualized violence. Chapter 5 first reflects on the epistemological stance of this project and recognizes the knowledge created among participants. Next, this chapter presents an analysis of the 'Gordian Knot' as a representation of the intersection of feminism and yoga and moves on to explain the healing processes at the intersection of feminism and yoga. Chapter 6 begins by offering several considerations for a comprehensive healing approach with women survivors of sexualized violence through the integration of feminism and yoga. This

chapter then presents a number of limitations to the research and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review begins by establishing the patriarchal nature of sexualized violence. This is followed by an exploration of the traumatic nature of sexualized violence for women survivors and a review of how current feminist helping practices address the various components of sexualized trauma. The next sections describe how yoga therapy addresses the various components of trauma, be that general trauma or trauma specific to women survivors of sexualized violence. This extensive review exposes an absence of literature exploring the intersection of yoga and feminism for women survivors of sexualized violence, thereby establishing the importance of this research.

2.1 Patriarchal Nature of Sexualized Violence

Much of the data that is currently available suggests that the prevalence of sexualized violence among women is highly disproportionate to that of men (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2013; Hunnicutt, 2009; McMillan, 2013). As stated earlier, the YWCA (2015) has estimated that 460,000 women experience sexualized violence every year in Canada. Moreover, research indicates that sexualized violence among our Canadian population has not decreased over the past twenty years, but has increased (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2013; Senn et al., 2014). Many researchers remain reluctant to give statistics of the number of women and girls who have experienced sexualized violence, as we now know that it is extremely under-reported (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2013; McMillan, 2013). Reasons for the gross under-reporting include: shame, self-blame, fear of not being believed, and fear of being blamed (Bachman, 1998; Hlavka, 2014; Regan &

Kelly, 2003; McMillan, 2013). Moreover, McKenzie-Mohr and Lafrance (2011) point out that there are many "unacknowledged rape victims" (p. 54), as many women do not label their experience as such, even if it fits the legal definition (Gavey, 2005; McMullin & White, 2006).

The reasons for the significance in under-reporting – shame, self-blame, fear of not being believed, and fear of being blamed – highlight that sexualized violence is rooted within a patriarchal system that exposes women to gendered oppression (Davis, 2005; Whalen, 1996). Oppression, in this case, "means the *absence of choices*" (hooks, 2015b, p. 5) or, more precisely, sexualized discrimination and restriction of women's behaviour and freedom (hooks, 2015b). Patriarchy is a political structure that exploits and discriminates against women through sexism, restricting and controlling women's behaviour in certain realms of society (hooks, 2015b). It is a sex or gendered system, in which social arrangements privilege men and masculinity (Hunnicutt, 2009), meaning that men and masculinity are more valued than women and what is considered feminine (Chesney-Lind, 2006). Patriarchy is the culture we are born into that affects us individually, within our families, culturally, and systemically (Crittenden & Wright, 2012; Hunnicutt, 2009). From a young age, people are socialized into this culture that not only normalizes, but also encourages, male domination and female subservience (Hlavka, 2014; Tolman, Spencer, Rosen-Reynoso, & Porche, 2003).

The patriarchal system that structurally and ideologically privileges males over females, both in the macro and micro – or the individual and social – levels (Hunnicutt, 2009; Ogle & Batton, 2009; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000), explains why

women are significantly more vulnerable than their male counterparts to experience sexualized violence (Hunnicutt, 2009; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Not only are women more vulnerable to sexualized violence because of patriarchy, but also when a sexualized violent act occurs the dominant (patriarchal) ideology is that women are deserving of or responsible for the violent oppression (Hlavka, 2014; Mackinnon, 2008; Redfern & Aune, 2010). Sexualized violence, and other forms of gendered oppression, are maintained as even the survivors are left with only the patriarchal discourses to understand the experience and, therefore, assume that "authority figures of all types will blame them" (Hlavka, 2014, p. 353). Hlavka (2014) states that, as sexualized violence has become normalized, young women understand sex "as something done to them" (p. 348).

"Women come to be justifiable objects of sexual exploitation" (Hlavka, 2014, p. 339). Redfern and Aune (2010) state: "Well-meaning campaigns focus on warning women to protect themselves but neglect targeting potential perpetrators, as if rape was an inevitable consequence of being female" (p. 81). It is through oppressive acts such as sexualized violence that patriarchy is maintained, as it continues to reinforce the power inequity between men and women (Crittenden and Wright, 2012; Hunnicutt, 2009). As articulated by Ogle and Batton (2009), both the micro and macro feed off each other, continuing the cycle of patriarchy, as it is the social system that influences our individual actions and it is our individual actions that maintain and perpetuate the social system.

With the understanding of patriarchy as a root cause of sexualized violence, we now consider the traumatic impact of sexualized violence on women survivors.

2.2 Traumatic Impact of Sexualized Violence on Women Survivors

As mentioned earlier, the trauma of sexualized violence "does not end when the abuse stops" (Bass & Davis, 2008, p. xxiv). Not only do the cognitive and affective consequences linger, but the political nature of sexualized violence further traumatizes women survivors, as they are often left feeling shamed and as though it was somehow their fault (McMillan, 2013). "Sexual… violence rooted in power and control results in a limitation of victims making choices, and a loss of control and agency over their lives and bodies" (Crews, Stolz-Newton, & Grant, 2016). Individual feelings of shame resulting from the systemic oppression may lead to misplaced blame and feelings of isolation. Sexualized violence has the power to permeate everything around a survivor from their sense of self, intimate relationships, sexuality, parenting, life, and sanity (Bass & Davis, 2008). The unfortunate necessity of coping may result in further trauma as the coping skills used (e.g., drugs and alcohol, gambling, eating disorders, high risk sexualized behaviour) often further contribute to the survivor's low self-esteem (Bass & Davis, 2008). In addition, many survivors experience an array of mental health concerns. An abundance of literature speaks to the prevalence of depression and anxiety (Emerson & Hopper, 2011; Hébert & Bergeron, 2008; Levine, 1997) as well as self-harm and even suicide (Bass & Davis, 2008) among survivors of trauma.

Like other forms of trauma, sexualized trauma survivors are often given a mental health diagnosis of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or they experience a range of symptoms associated with PTSD, even if they are not formally diagnosed. The range of associated symptoms of PTSD include, but are not limited

to: reliving of traumatic event(s) in the form of flashbacks, nightmares, or intrusive memories; emotional numbing of general responsiveness; avoidance of events or stimuli that are reminiscent of the trauma; negative changes in cognitions and mood; and persistent symptoms of autonomic and elevated arousal in the form of a heightened startle response, sleep disturbances or poor concentration (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Briere, Elliott, Harris, & Cotman, 1995; Cukor, Spitalnick, Difede, Rizzo, & Rothbaum, 2009; Emerson, 2015; Emerson & Hopper, 2011; Emerson, Sharma, Chaudhry, Turner, 2009; Foa, Keane, Friedman, & Cohen, 2009; Jindani & Khalsa, 2015; Matsakis, 1996; Shebib, 2006).

Since PTSD is currently the most dominant diagnosis of any form of psychological trauma (Emerson, 2015) it is important that it be briefly mentioned in this literature review. PTSD is a diagnosis within the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders (DSM-5) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Members of the American Psychiatric Association (APA) write all editions of the DSM (Cosgrove, Krimsky, Vijayaraghavan, & Schneider, 2006). The APA receives substantial funding from the pharmaceutical industry and the majority of the APA members are personally tied to the pharmaceutical industry (Cosgrove et al., 2006). Consequently, the mental health diagnoses within the DSM, PTSD included, are firmly rooted in medical discourses (Caplan & Cosgrove, 2004; Cosgrove & Bursztajn, 2006; Cosgrove et al., 2006). Further, it is worth noting that the construction of PTSD stems largely from data collected from men of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW), despite "the many different types of trauma," and is "applied extensively to women" (Linder, 2004, p. 31). Consequently, as

highlighted by Lafrance and McKenzie-Mohr (2013), PTSD is a contested diagnosis within the feminist community. For example, Burstow (2005) asserts that the medical diagnosis of PTSD is insensitive and "pathologizes purposeful and valuable coping strategies commonly used by people who are traumatized" (p. 429). Despite the historical encouragement of feminist practitioners to broaden the understanding of PTSD to include social explanations of mental health diagnoses (Caplan & Cosgrove, 2004) PTSD is a construct firmly rooted within a medical discourse and feminist "[t]herapists working within the mental health system have developed alternatives to the medical model" (Caplan & Cosgrove, 2004, p. xxii).

While the problem with a singular, medical model diagnosis for multiple forms of trauma is recognized, it is also important to acknowledge "the diagnosis has been widely and enthusiastically embraced as it firmly situates people's experiences as 'real'" (Lafrance & McKenzie-Mohr, 2013, p. 128). Since exploring this further is beyond the scope of this thesis the catchall diagnosis of PTSD will be used.

The popular mental health diagnosis of PTSD (Emerson & Hopper, 2011; van der Kolk & Fisler, 1995) has the potential to lead to some combination of medication and talk therapy (van der Kolk, 2006). Medication for PTSD is most typically some sort of selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI), which is focused on affecting the brain (Patki et al., 2014; Stein, Ipser, & Seedat, 2009), not the body. Talk therapy – be it psychotherapy or feminist based – is most typically focused on cognitive and affective healing (Emerson, 2015; Emerson & Hopper, 2011; van der Kolk, 2006), but again not the body.

The previously mentioned symptoms of PTSD illustrate the profound embodied nature of trauma (Ogden & Minten, 2000). "In trauma we know that the mind becomes profoundly altered" (Levine, 1997, p. 5). Just as the mind is profoundly affected because of trauma so too is the body, as it "tenses in readiness, braces in fear, and freezes and collapses in helpless terror" (Levine, 1997, p. 6). After a traumatic experience, the nervous system is changed and the survivor becomes focused on suppressing chaos within the body, yet these "attempts to maintain control over unbearable physiological reactions can result in a whole range of physical symptoms" (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 53) including fibromyalgia, headaches, neck and back problems, digestive troubles, chronic fatigue, and asthma (Levine, 1997; van der Kolk, 2014). These physical symptoms have the potential to be labeled as somatic and subsequently disregarded (Levine, 1997). However, "high rates of somatic complaints among traumatized individuals indicate that trauma is 'remembered' in the body" (West, Liang, & Spinazzola, 2016, p. 2). Levine (1997) states that:

> Trauma can make a person blind, mute, or deaf; it can cause paralysis in legs, arms, or both; it can bring about chronic neck and back pain, chronic fatigue syndrome, bronchitis, asthma, gastrointestinal problems, severe PMS, migraines, and a whole host of so-called psychosomatic conditions. Any physical system capable of binding the undischarged arousal caused by the trauma is fair game. The trapped energy will use any aspect of our physiology available to it. (p. 165)

Emerson and Hopper (2011) state that for many survivors a traumatic experience "is a process of very literally losing control of their body" (p. 4) as bodies are designed to take over in the event of a traumatic attack. "Some clinicians speculate that PTSD occurs when all of these natural, physiological processes are rendered ineffectual" (Emerson & Hopper, 2011, pg. 5). It is thought that this inability of the body to effectively protect the survivor leaves them feeling a sense of betrayal or resentment towards their very own body (Emerson & Hopper, 2011). Some survivors of sexualized violence experience what has been called body memories of the abuse, in which the body presents the memory physically rather than through images in one's brain, leaving the survivor to feel confused and out of control (Bass & Davis, 2008). Many survivors of sexualized violence blame their bodies for the trauma because of the body's physical appearance, for being vulnerable, and for feeling any pleasurable sensation that is no more than a biological reaction (Bass & Davis, 2008).

The literature confirms that, while the trauma experienced by women survivors of sexualized violence impacts their cognitive and affective health, this trauma is also embodied. With an understanding that sexualized trauma affects the survivor's cognitive, affective, and embodied health, the literature now turns to explore the ways in which feminism addresses trauma in women survivors of sexualized violence.

2.3 How Feminism Addresses Trauma from Sexualized Violence

There are several feminist based interventions or helping tools that practitioners have been able to draw upon in therapeutic interactions with women

survivors of sexualized violence. As mentioned, sexualized violence is a form of oppression stemming from patriarchal roots (Hlavka, 2014; hooks, 2015a; Hunnicutt, 2009; Mackinnon, 2008; Redfern & Aune, 2010; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000; Whalen, 1996); therefore, it makes sense that feminist practices, more politically based forms of intervention, would successfully meet the cognitive and affective needs of survivors of sexualized violence. Feminism is seen as an alternative approach to traditional psychology and psychiatric therapies as they reinforced oppression of women by not acknowledging the social context of women within their theories, practices, and research (Whalen, 1996). Feminist helping practices, on the other hand, attend to both the psychological trauma as well as the social context, which shapes the lives of women (Corey, 2013; Enns, 2010; Sharf, 2012). Enns (2010) states that:

> Feminist practice is built on the assumption that psychological growth and distress are best understood within a biopsychosocial, ecological framework that places emphasis on how the personal becomes political, or how personal lives are shaped by social context and culture. From its inception, gender or sex role analysis was identified as a central component of ecological assessment in feminist therapy, and has consisted of a variety of activities that involve exploring and raising consciousness about ways in which individuals feel compelled to subscribe to traditional or confining gender roles. (p. 333)

All such practices are "profoundly social and political as well as personal and individual," and acknowledge the "deep interconnectedness of our 'internal'

psychological worlds with the 'external' social and material worlds" (Chaplin, 1999, p. 5).

Feminist helping practices work with the principle that the personal is political, acknowledging the ways in which women have been oppressed by socialization (hooks, 2015a; Payne, 2006; Whalen, 1996), with sexualized violence being one way in which this oppression presents itself. Feminist therapists promote an understanding that a woman's personal problems are situated within the social system of patriarchy. A feminist therapist, practicing in accordance with the principle that the personal is political, counsels in a way that understands gender as an everyday factor in women's lives that "needs to be consciously addressed" (Ungar, 2011, p. 33). Acknowledging that the personal is political enables women to re-conceptualize the trauma they have experienced to include their "everyday experiences of interpersonal violence and the emergence of survivor" discourses (Muzak, 2009, p. 24). Through the process of building one's awareness that sexualized violence is a systemic problem, the feminist therapist can assist in the healing of the survivor's cognition or understanding of the experience of trauma.

The principle of the personal is political is often brought forth within the feminist intervention known as consciousness-raising (Ruck, 2015). The practice of consciousness-raising is about exploring the unexplored (Ardovini, 2015). It involves growing our awareness of patriarchy as a system of domination and control, how this system is entrenched within our Western culture, and how it is still perpetuated and maintained (hooks, 2015a). Consciousness-raising assists in uncovering an oppressive reality rather than simply recounting the constructed

reality (Ardovini, 2015). Therefore, it is a cognitive form of therapy as it aids in the "understanding of dehumanizing structures" (Payne, 2006, p. 240) and an affective form of therapy as it aids in overcoming the dehumanizing effects (Payne, 2006). Often times consciousness-raising is used in a group setting, in which women gain strength and empowerment through experiencing non-judgmental dialogue with others who can offer meaningful compassion and empathy while they delve into broader exploration (hooks, 2015a; Payne, 2006). In addition, consciousness-raising allows women to experience a sense of empowerment due to their increased awareness that the oppression they have experienced is not theirs alone, thereby helping to release self-blame (Payne, 2006). This process of increasing awareness is often followed with a sense of inspiration to be a part of the change in challenging the patriarchal structures that continue to oppress women (Payne, 2006).

Having said this, it is important to acknowledge that there is a strong critique of the consciousness-raising practice. Stanley and Wise (1993) state that consciousness-raising is an elitist conception and a patronizing assessment of another's consciousness. They explain that the practice of consciousness-raising claims a hierarchy of consciousness with feminist consciousness as the superior. They go on to say that not all women are going to share in their experience simply because they have engaged in consciousness-raising, yet we cannot assume that their consciousness is not raised enough or that they remain falsely conscious (Stanley & Wise, 1993). For the purposes of this thesis, I will acknowledge the critique yet maintain that consciousness-raising is not about raising everyone's consciousness to one feminist consciousness, but instead hold that it is "a tool for

granting voice" (Ardovini, 2015, p. 51). Through a process of considering that there are many possible "truths" instead of just one "Truth," consciousness-raising explores the previously unexplored (Ardovini, 2015, p. 53).

The literature demonstrates the forms of cognitive and affective feminist helping experiences. However, as mentioned earlier embodied trauma is also significant when working with women survivors of sexualized violence. While a few writers speak to the influence of the dominant patriarchal discourses on the social construction of women's bodies and the damaging effects of this construction (Powell, 2010; Shilling, 2001; Zucker & Landry, 2007), "a very small body of research concerns the relation between sexism and women's health, and has focused largely on women's psychological distress" (Zucker & Landry, 2007, p. 194). Researchers such as Goldenhar, Swanson, Hurrell, Ruder, and Deddens (1998); Krieger (1990); Landrine and Klonoff (1997); and Pavalko, Mossakowski, and Hamilton (2003) have extended "the small body of research" identified by Zucker and Landry through an exploration of the effects of sexism on health outcomes other than psychological distress, such as: nausea and headaches, hypertension, premenstrual symptoms, and physical disabilities.

This emerging literature indicates curiosity about the embodied nature of patriarchy and sexualized violence, but this curiosity has yet to include an exploration of embodied healing for physically stored trauma of sexualized violence. For this reason, the literature review now turns to yoga research to see what it can teach about the treatment or intervention for such embodied trauma.

2.4 How Yoga Addresses Trauma

While trauma treatment is still largely rooted within popular talk therapy fields, such as the cognitively based psychodynamic model, somatic or embodied trauma treatment is emerging (Emerson, 2015). Although Mensinga (2011) asserts that general comprehension of our somatic body is largely ignored or misunderstood, the literature demonstrating that PTSD symptoms are physical or embodied manifestations of the trauma left lingering within the survivor's body is increasing (Davis, 2005; Emerson, 2015; Emerson & Hopper, 2011; Jindani & Khalsa, 2015; Levine, 1997; Ogden, Pain, & Fisher, 2006; Stade, Skammeritz, Hjortkjaer, & Carlsson, 2015). There is also a mounting body of literature highlighting yoga as a means to therapeutically release these embodied symptoms (Crews et al., 2016; Davis, 2005; Emerson, 2015; Emerson & Hopper, 2011; Emerson et al., 2009; Jindani & Khalsa, 2015; Kane, 2008; Nolan, 2016; Streeter et al., 2010; van der Kolk, 2006; van der Kolk, 2014). Although Cukor et al. (2009) highlighted that emerging treatments for PTSD have shown yoga as a useful tool in reducing some symptoms associated with PTSD (e.g. depression and hyperarousal), they also stated that actual published data on yoga's efficacy is minimal.

This developing understanding of embodied trauma is evident within yoga, where the physical practice of asana is emerging as a means of trauma sensitive therapy (Emerson, 2015; Emerson & Hopper, 2011). Yoga has been shown to increase the desire of a trauma survivor to care for their bodies (Emerson & Hopper, 2011; van der Kolk, 2014), bring about a renewed sense of control and ownership over one's body (Emerson & Hopper, 2011; Rhodes, 2015), teach survivors self-care

skills (Jindani & Khalsa, 2015), and help trauma survivors to see themselves clearly "despite living in chaos" as they were able to strip down "sociocultural norms that have been inscribed on their bodies" (Kauer, 2016, p. 102). Research has found that sensory experiences – a constricted throat, clenched jaw, or tensed limbs – are reflective of the emotional state, which then becomes presented within the body (van der Kolk, 2014). The practice of yoga asks practitioners to draw their attention toward these sensations, thereby strengthening their connection and awareness between their emotions and their body (van der Kolk, 2014). Pagis (2009) suggests that embodied Eastern practices produce a self-reflexivity that moves beyond traditional talk therapy and becomes embodied self-reflexivity. Pagis (2009) states that:

> There is no Cartesian hierarchy of mind over body; in fact, the body is considered the main channel for influencing the mind. In contrast to the talking cure…, which requires a search for the causes of an emotion and attempts to raise embodied sensations into the verbal realm, the attempt here is to remain in the nondiscursive realm of sensations. (p. 272)

A review of the literature has shown that embodied symptoms of trauma, including PTSD, can be improved or released through the practice of yoga (Cukor et al., 2009; Davis, 2005; Emerson & Hopper, 2011; Emerson et al., 2009; Kane, 2008; Kimbrough, Magyari, Langenberg, Chesney, & Berman, 2010; Streeter et al., 2010; van der Kolk, 2006; van der Kolk, 2014). This research, however, speaks of trauma broadly, not identifying the type of trauma or person who experienced the trauma.

Thus, the literature review now considers the use of trauma informed yoga as an intervention specifically with women survivors of sexualized violence.

2.5 How Yoga Addresses Trauma from Sexualized Violence

While not speaking directly about yoga and women survivors of sexualized violence, recent literature is beginning to recognize that the pervasive power of patriarchy infiltrates the Western experience of the Eastern practice of yoga (Berila, 2016), of which 85% of practicing yogis in America are women (Kauer, 2016). In Canada, we have reason to believe that our current statistics are similar, as in 2005 there were 1.4 million people practicing yoga, with 72.3% being women (Namasta, 2016). When considering the Western yoga industry, Berila (2016) asserts that while yoga holds potential for incredible transformation, it is also riddled with contemporary Western culture power dynamics and body politics. We need only look at the yoga media consisting of mostly white, heterosexual, heteronormative, cisgendered, able-bodied, middle-upper class, thin, lithe women to become aware of the imposition of patriarchy within yoga (Berila, 2016). Additionally, Western yoga is filled with patriarchal body shaming language that compares women's bodies to men's and promises yogis will achieve a lighter body (Berila, 2016; Musial, 2016). Instead of resisting sexism, yoga is advertised as a means to achieve "the bodily perfection necessary to meet with male approval and access to men's resources" (Blaine, 2016, p. 129-130). This is one example, particularly relevant to this research, illustrating how patriarchy has completely permeated the individual and social systems within Western culture.

There is a limited body of research about trauma informed yoga as an intervention for sexualized violence survivors. As spoken to earlier, sexualized violence survivors experience a host of embodied or sensory symptoms that increase anxiety and leave them feeling in disarray (Bass & Davis, 2008; Emerson & Hopper, 2011; Hébert & Bergeron, 2008; Levine, 1997; van der Kolk, 2014). When used specifically with survivors of sexualized violence, the research shows that yoga helps to create a deeper awareness of self, a sense of compassion and desire to care for one's body, the power to make choices, and a renewed sense of control over one's body (Crews et al., 2016; Emerson & Hopper, 2011; van der Kolk, 2014; West et al., 2016). Research exploring mindfulness, yoga included, as a form of intervention with child sexualized abuse survivors has shown to decrease PTSD symptoms (Kimbrough et al., 2010; West et al., 2016). Such mindfulness practice has been described as an "awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment" (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 145). Likewise, the research of van der Kolk (2014) shows that the use of mindfulness and calming breath practices – both of which are incorporated throughout a yoga practice – enable his clients to experience memories of sexualized violence without feeling as though they have been hijacked by their emotions.

West et al. (2016), whose participants included survivors of physical and/or sexualized violence, shared that trauma informed or trauma sensitive yoga left the participants feeling gratitude and compassion, related or connected to their inner self, accepted, centered, and empowered. Rhodes (2015), who researched survivors

of complex trauma of which 74% experienced sexualized violence, stated, "that the core meaning of participants' experience of healing through yoga is claiming peaceful embodiment" (p. 247). van der Kolk (2014) believes that further exploration regarding the effects of a yoga practice is required, as his preliminary research has seen women survivors of trauma open up to the sensations within their bodies, become more comfortable expressing their emotions, see more choices within their life, and perceive their body as a safe place.

2.6 Yoga *and* Feminism with Women Survivors of Sexualized Violence

Research shows that the integration of theoretical perspectives enables practitioners to better understand clients' concerns and utilize a wider range of strategies, thereby providing the most comprehensive healing experience (Robbins, Chatterjee, & Canda, 2006; Sharf, 2012). Section 2.2 of the literature review confirms that sexualized violence may traumatically affect a woman's cognitive, affective, and embodied health. As depicted above, feminist based practices are helpful in supporting women cognitively and affectively (Bowland, Edmond, & Fallot, 2012; Corey, 2013; Muzak, 2009; Riddle, 2008; Ungar, 2011; Whalen, 1996). Berila (2016) asserts that "Much feminist theory remains highly cerebral when talking about the body rather than leaning toward more corporeal experiences" (p. 4). Yoga, however, is helpful in supporting women through affective and embodied layers of the trauma (Emerson & Hopper, 2011; Kimbrough et al., 2010; van der Kolk, 2014).

A few writers are speaking to an integration of feminism and yoga. Musial (2011) speaks to the commonalities between feminist teaching and yoga teaching, identifying what they can learn from one another. Doran and Hornibrook (2013)

speak to the benefits of yoga combined with a feminist framework for pre- and postnatal women. Dylan (2014) speaks to the potential benefits of yoga within a group of women experiencing substance use challenges. Mehta (2016) asserts that a feminist yoga approach can challenge the persistence of patriarchal discourses into the yoga industry. She states that "we need a feminist yoga space of our own," (Mehta, 2016, p. 230) that is inclusive, safe, and supportive (Mehta, 2016). Research is beginning to present yoga as a promising adjunctive therapy for treatment of PTSD and associated cognitive, affective, and physiological or embodied symptoms (Emerson et al., 2009; Nolan, 2016). Moreover, Kimbrough et al. (2010) found that when combined with psychotherapy or cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), yoga helped survivors of sexualized violence become more present throughout their therapy sessions. As represented in the white center of Figure 2.1, the healing potential of feminism *and* yoga for women survivors of sexualized violence has yet to be explored.

Figure 2.1

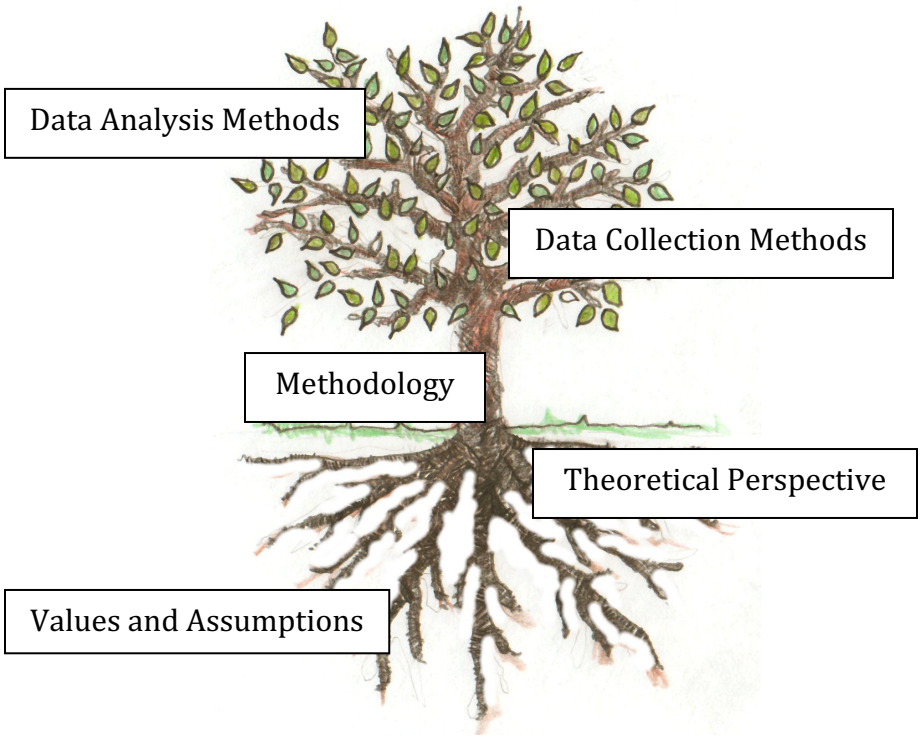
Figure 2.1 illustrates the connection of feminism with women survivors of sexualized violence, yoga with women survivors of sexualized violence, as well as yoga and feminism together. Through exposing the connections it gives reason to explore a possible interconnection of all three, as indicated in the white triangle.

Chapter 3: The Research Process

To explore the question: How might a yoga practice and feminist experience intersect to support the healing process of women survivors of sexualized violence? I interviewed ten women survivors of sexualized violence who have had a range of feminist experiences and have practiced yoga. Via individual interviews, group discussion, and artistic creations we explored the potential for feminism and yoga to contribute to their healing processes.

Chapter 3 begins by situating the research process through the use of a tree metaphor (Campbell & Baikie, 2015; Roosevelt, 1991) that served as a metaphorical guide to the research, permitting a structured review of the overall process. Beginning with the soil and moving through to the tree's leaves, the tree metaphor structures a sequential review of the fundamental assumptions, theoretical perspective, methodology, data collection methods, and data analysis methods of the research process. Chapter 3 concludes by briefly reviewing the ethical issues that were more comprehensively addressed in the project description as approved by the Dalhousie Research Ethics Board (REB).

Figure 3.1:



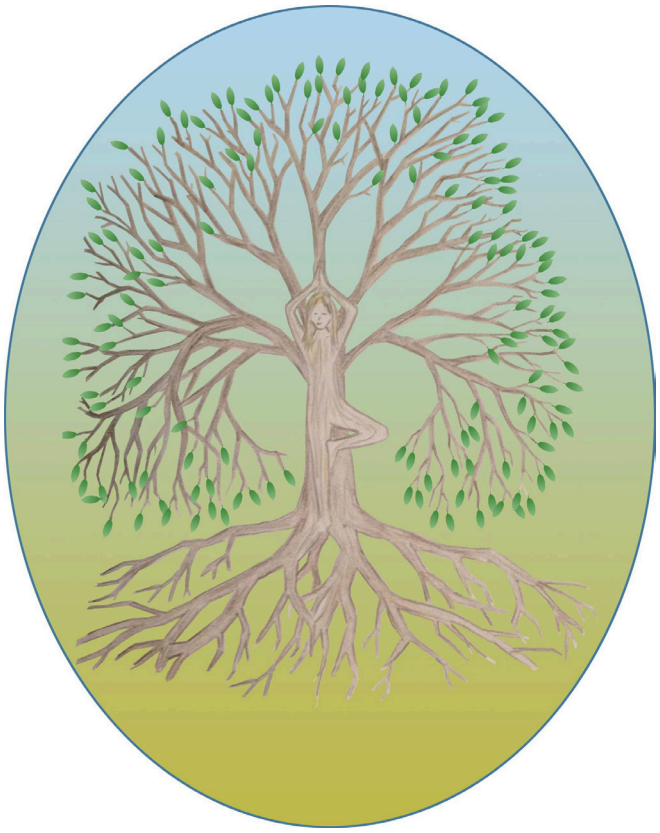
(Campbell & Baikie, 2015)

As a new researcher, the tree metaphor (see figure 3.1) provided a conceptual outline to assist me in ensuring congruence among all components of the research process. The tree metaphor envisions the research process as follows: the soil represents one's personal values and assumptions; the roots one's theoretical perspective; the trunk the chosen methodology; the branches the data collection methods; and the leaves the data analysis methods.

The image of a tree is also appealing because of its use within the physical (asana) yoga practice. The yoga posture known as 'tree pose' offers an opportunity to consider the inherent qualities belonging to a tree (Kaivalya & van der Kooij, 2010). In this yoga pose (see figure 3.2), "the legs represent the roots of the tree, buried underground, and the trunk of the tree begins at the trunk of the body,

growing all the way up through the spine and the arms, which are the branches" (Kaivalya & van der Kooij, 2010, p. 166). In the stability of this posture we can contemplate the qualities within the nourishing soil and strong roots, as they are channeled through the trunk and then mirrored in the branches and leaves that nourish the surroundings through shade, shelter, oxygen, and food (Kaivalya & van der Kooij, 2010). As illustrated in figure 3.1 and 3.2, the metaphor of a tree offers a visual of how the research process builds from the soil to the leaves, with the quality of soil reflected in the leaves. This illustrated interconnection helped to ensure the research process was congruent from beginning through to completion.

Figure 3.2:



The following section outlines the fundamental assumptions that became the foundation – or the soil – of the research process. It is important that the

fundamental assumptions are respectful of the qualitative research process, which aims to honor participants' voices. Accordingly, axiological, epistemological, and political assumptions are addressed.

3.1 Soil: Fundamental Assumptions

The soil within the tree metaphor challenged me to consider my fundamental assumptions and transparently display them (Creswell, 2013; Doucet & Mauthner, 2002). Being transparent and reflecting on fundamental assumptions in this way is what Doucet and Mauthner (2002) refer to as a "robust concept of reflexivity" (see more on reflexivity in section 3.3), as it ensures the researcher's accountability to the assumptions informing and influencing knowledge production (p. 13). Although there are many categories of assumptions, the categories of assumptions that were most relevant to this research are axiological, epistemological, and political.

3.1.1 Axiological. While values are typically intangible, they stem from "what a person, group, or culture considers important" and thus, "give a sense of what is esteemed, cherished and considered to be worth preserving and acting upon" (Campbell & Baikie, 2012, p. 73). The esteemed and cherished values that I strove to actualize through the research process included: equality and safety for women, connection to others through shared experiences, the power of knowledge creation through shared experiences, and simultaneous respect for one's individual experience as well as their connection to the collective.

3.1.2 Epistemological. The epistemological assumption that informed this research is social constructionism, which asserts "that knowledge and understanding about the world come from social interactions among people.

Knowledge is therefore constructed within cultural, historical and local contexts through the language used to interpret social experiences" (Payne, 2006, p. 58). This lens supports the explanation of sexualized violence as a form of gender oppression that shapes and perpetuates the patriarchal discourses. This social constructionist approach had me questioning: (1) "What is happening with our *lives*?" and (2) "What is happening with our *bodies*?" (Miller & Crabtree, 2000, p. 614), as they are both affected by cultural, historical, and local contexts.

3.1.3 Political. Politically the research is rooted in gendered perspectives. Gendered perspectives question the patriarchal social construction of gender and how this shapes our lives (Lather, 1991). A gendered analysis asks, "Who has what *power*?" (Miller & Crabtree, 2000, p. 614), and explores relationships of power and powerlessness (hooks, 2015a). I concur with Roof (2012) who asserts that our patriarchal systems have produced and defined the oppression women experience, including sexualized violence. Furthermore, patriarchal oppression has dominated social science inquiry and, consequently, much social science exploration has resulted in women's realities being misrepresented (Burgess-Proctor, 2015). Feminist researchers, however, view "research as a form of social activism… done for praxis and not for the sake of research" (Ardovini, 2015, p. 52). Essentially, feminist research aims to create knowledge that challenges the oppressive discourses. Through research rooted in my fundamental assumptions I hoped to respectfully represent the realities of the women who participated in my research, thereby engaging in social activism.

These rooted axiological, epistemological, and political assumptions guided the research process and provided the foundation for the theoretical perspective of the research.

3.2 Roots: Theoretical Perspective

Referring back to the tree metaphor (Campbell & Baikie, 2012), the roots of the tree prompted me to identify a theoretical perspective to guide the research. While certainly not the only theory that would be consistent with the values and assumptions described, feminist theory was chosen. Feminist theory brings to light that women's experiences are distorted when described according to patriarchal discourses, as these discourses do not consider the context of women's realities (Burgess-Proctor, 2015). In contrast, feminism grounds women's experiences in their everyday lives (Doucet & Mauthner, 2006). In so doing, feminist theory challenges the notion of power and the dominant groups who have the power to define knowledge (Doucet & Mauthner, 2006), whilst simultaneously constructing new knowledge (Fonow & Cook, 2005). In this way, feminist research respects the experiences of women as worthy and valuable in the construction of knowledge and discourse.

This dissatisfaction with male dominated research moves feminist researchers to challenge the patriarchal paradigms (Ardovini, 2015; Burgess-Proctor, 2015), through reducing power imbalances between the researcher and participant by way of reflexivity and collaboration (Burgess-Proctor, 2015). This collaboration and sharing among women has the potential for empowering transformation – both individually and collectively – as it challenges patriarchal

discourses (Roof, 2012). In this way, feminist research becomes social activism (Ardovini, 2015). The link between the root system and the corresponding trunk is clear, as feminist theory emerges from the axiological, epistemology, and political assumptions.

3.3 Trunk: Methodology

Following the roots into the trunk, I was invited to consider a methodology; "a theory and analysis of how research should proceed" (Harding, 1987, p. 2). Obviously consistent with feminist theory, is feminist methodology. Sprague (2005) points out that:

> Reflecting on methodology – on how we do what we do – opens up possibilities and exposes choices. It allows us to ask such questions as: Is the way we gather and interpret data consistent with what we believe about how knowledge is and should be created? What kind of assumptions about knowledge underlie our standards for evaluating claims about how things are or what really happened?" (p. 5)

Sprague's (2005) reflection on methodology encourages one to be critically reflexive of the fundamental assumptions and theoretical perspective of the research.

Among many guiding principles of feminist methodology, one is challenging the idea of objectivity, which assumes that the subject and object of research "can be separated from each other and that personal and/or grounded experiences are unscientific" (Fonow & Cook, 2005, p. 2213). Feminist methodology is consistent with both the social constructionist epistemology and gendered perspectives supporting this research. Such methodology views personal experience as valid in

formal research. In addition to recognizing the researcher-participant relationship as significant in knowledge production, feminist methodology makes use of reflexivity as a methodological tool for researchers to assess their position within the research process (Few, Stephens, Rouse-Arnett, 2003; Foster, 2007; Gringeri, Wahab, & Anderson-Nathe, 2010). Hesse-Biber and Piatelli (2012) state that, "feminist methodology can enhance the development of new methods tools that, in turn, can offer new angles of vision, reshaping both our research questions and the way we build knowledge" (p. 176).

This methodological tool, reflexivity, offered new angles of vision, reshaped the research process, and helped create meaning through the process of data collection and data analysis.

3.3.1 Reflexivity. Reflexivity has been defined "as the tendency of feminists to reflect on, examine critically, and explore analytically the nature of the research process" (Fonow & Cook, 2005, p. 2218). Through the feminist practice of critically examining and analyzing the research process, the credibility of the findings is enhanced, as the researcher's values, beliefs, knowledge, and biases are accounted for (Cutcliffe, 2003). It is important from the start to understand the position of the researcher within the research (Creswell, 2013; Cutcliffe, 2003). As a survivor of sexualized violence, yoga teacher and practitioner, and Master's of Social Work student, I am filled with my own assumptions and beliefs about the intersection of yoga and feminist experiences for women survivors of sexualized violence. While it is exactly this combination that inspired me to explore this unstudied area of social and embodied healing, it was imperative that I remained conscious of my values,

assumptions, beliefs, and attitudes throughout the research process. Thus, I adopted a reflexive stance, which Doucet and Mauthner (2006) believe to be critical within feminist research.

Since I am intrinsically connected to this project, the reflexive stance ensured I remained aware of the lenses I used and how these lenses helped and hindered what I saw (Russell & Kelly, 2002). According to Berger (2013), reflexivity:

> [M]eans turning of the researcher lens back onto oneself to recognize and take responsibility for one's own situatedness within the research and the effect that it may have on the setting and people being studied, questions being asked, data being collected and its interpretation. (p. 2)

As I turned the researcher lens onto myself I recognized that, for better or worse, I, as the researcher, was a part of the research.

A reflexive awareness of the 'researcher' position challenges the dominant stance of knowledge as objective and "as independent of the research producing it" (Berger, 2013, p. 2). Reflexivity invites the researcher to recognize, "that knowing and knowledge is tentative and tenuous" (herising, 2005, p. 136). Through reflexivity the researcher remains accountable to the knowledge produced by becoming transparent about the process of knowledge construction (Berger, 2013; Doucet & Mauthner, 2002; Doucet & Mauthner, 2006). In this way, reflexivity enables the researcher to not only acknowledge *that* they influence the data, but also *how* they influence the data. The reflexive stance demands moving beyond simple awareness of social, political, or institutional locations to also offer, "transparency and accountability about the theoretical, epistemological, and

ontological assumptions that inform and influence our knowledge construction" (Doucet & Mauthner, 2002, p. 13). Therefore, it was important to remain cognizant of the fundamental assumptions that I brought to the study, so I made them explicit throughout Section 3.1 (Creswell, 2013).

Further, according to Archer (2003), the action of reflexivity moves us from observation to internal conversation. Moving from simple observation to internal conversation brings the researcher's experiences, assumptions, and biases about the research process to the forefront of their consciousness. Messerschmidt (2012) agrees with Archer (2003), stating that, "*Reflexivity* refers to the capacity to engage in internal conversations with oneself about particular social experiences and then decide how to respond appropriately" (p. 32). So, in addition to the overt articulation of my assumptions, I kept a reflective journal. The journal served as a means to learn, reflect on, and gain insight into my understandings and experiences throughout the research process (Coghlan & Shani, 2008).

According to Coghlan and Shani (2008), journaling should not be kept private as "it may simply reinforce unexamined prejudices" (p. 648). For this reason, pieces of my journal have been distilled into 'thought boxes' throughout the thesis from here through to conclusion. "An introspective record of a researcher's work potentially helps them to take stock of biases, feelings, and thoughts, so they can understand how these may be influencing the research" (Watt, 2007, p.84). In this way, reflexivity is evident as an "ongoing process of self-observation throughout the research project" (Gringeri, Barusch, & Cambron, 2013, p. 56). Thought boxes served as a reflexive tool that made me more conscious of my thoughts and research

design decisions (Messerschmidt, 2012; Watt, 2007), and allowed me to share them with readers.

In addition to the thought boxes, the act of reflexively journaling brought forth the ways in which I influenced and was influenced by the research (Finlay, 2002). According to Seidman (2013), it is often a struggle for researchers to turn off the researching mind, constantly pondering the interviews. This constant mulling could unintentionally and unconsciously influence the evolution of knowledge production. Also, having personal, educational, and professional experience in both feminist healing and yoga, I have a certain level of knowledge about the subjects – both in isolation and integration – that certainly affected the process of data collection and data analysis (Berger, 2013). Therefore, through the act of reflexively journaling I became cognizant of the ways in which I may have unintentionally and unconsciously influenced the evolution of the knowledge production, thereby rendering it no longer unintentional and unconscious. The first thought box, figure 3.3, is an example that discusses positionality.

Figure 3.3

Thought Box 1: To Self-Disclose or Not?

February 3rd, 2016

As I consider reflexivity I find myself pondering self-disclosure. Wondering when, if, or how much would be appropriate. Feminist principles would conclude that self-disclosure would be beneficial. But how am I to be sure that the act of self-disclosure will help the participant(s)? My assumption is self-reflexivity would reduce the potential power differential between the participant(s) and myself; thereby creating an environment that would foster a comfortable, natural conversation. However, I anticipate that my decision to engage in self-disclosure will evolve throughout the entirety of the data collection process.

3.4 Branches: Data Collection Methods

This section begins by outlining the four branches of data collection: the recruitment/screening process, individual interviews, a focus group, and creative pieces.

3.4.1 Recruitment/Screening Process. Snowball sampling was used to connect with the most information rich cases (Creswell, 2013). I employed three avenues for recruitment.

For the first, I posted participant recruitment flyers (see Appendix A) at two local agencies that engage in long-term feminist helping practice with women (the Avalon Centre and Adsum Centre). For the second recruitment avenue, I posted the same recruitment flyers at three local yoga studios owned by Shanti Hot Yoga.

The third recruitment avenue stemmed from my professional yoga communications. I emailed (see Appendix B) women whom I know personally as well as my professional yoga email list, inviting them to either participate or help spread the word to women who might be interested. I also connected with members of Yoga Atlantic, a community I belong to as a certified yoga teacher, again asking them to either participate or help spread the word.

Interested participants were invited to contact me via phone or email, as per the recruitment flyer. I received thirteen inquires, each of which took part in a five to fifteen minute prescreening telephone interview (see Appendix C). The prescreening interview was designed to ensure all prospective participants met the following five selection criteria that were predetermined with the sensitive nature of the proposed research in mind.

Woman. The first criterion that was addressed is that of *woman*. As mentioned in section 1.2, the parameters of this project gave space for women to self-identify, meaning that their genitalia was irrelevant to their eligibility for participation; rather it was their chosen gender that determined suitability. If a person identified as a woman, they were welcomed to participate.

Survivor of Sexualized Violence. The second criterion was *survivor of sexualized violence*. It was imperative that all participants experienced sexualized violence at some point in their lifetime. For the purposes of this research, sexualized violence was defined as being inappropriately touched in a sexualized way against one's will. The nature, duration, or type of memory (be it a visual or other sensory recollection) of the sexualized violence was not in question and did not affect suitability.

Feminist Experience. The third criterion was *feminist experience*. For the purposes of this project, feminist experience was defined as practices that arose from an acknowledgment of the gendered oppression women face at the hands of patriarchy, and that link personal traumas and experiences to political patriarchal discourses. As mentioned in section 1.2, these experiences could have come from traditional therapy, educational settings, dialogic conversations with other feminists, etc.

Yoga Practice. The fourth criterion was that of a *yoga practice.* As described in section 1.2, for the purposes of this project, yoga referred mainly to the third pathway, a practice of postures that, are not "meant primarily to cultivate some kind of supernormal state of physical training" (Cope, 2006, p. 193), but also an internal

training of learning to simply *be* within one's self (Cope, 2006). The physical level or specific type of yoga was unimportant. However, to engage in this research, participants were required to have been practicing yoga for a minimum of three months so that effective healing would have begun. This is in accordance with research exposing that the healing benefits of yoga emerge after eight to twelve weeks (Cook-Cottone, Beck, & Kane, 2008; Dylan, 2014; Kimbrough et al., 2009; Streeter et al., 2010).

Readiness. Finally, the fifth criterion was the emotional *readiness* of the participants. This research was designed to explore whether the integration of yoga and feminist experiences was useful to women and, therefore, participants were not asked to discuss their specific experiences of sexualized violence. However, even the questions about their healing journey, as it relates to yoga and feminism, could have caused distress. Therefore, it was necessary to confirm that participants would remain safe throughout the duration of the research study.

Based on my two student placement experiences engaging in a myriad of feminist helping techniques, the completion of the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) program and all Master's of Social Work (MSW) courses, the research I completed for this project, and my personal experience as a survivor, I was confident in my ability to judge if an interested woman would be ready for participation. However, it was established that, if I found myself unsure of their readiness, I would consult with members of my supervisory committee, who were both well qualified to support me in making the best decision for prospective participants. Such consultation was necessary on one occasion.

I completed thirteen prescreening interviews that resulted in ten participants who met the selection criteria and were able to participate in the research.

As Roosevelt (1991) states: "Nothing can take place in the branches and be sustained naturally unless it is congruent with the roots" (p. 13). The data collection methods (or leaves of the tree) were chosen to be congruent with the other research components. "Like most researchers, those who engage in feminist research select from a diverse array of investigative methods and, therefore, can allow their questions, rather than one specific method, to guide their work" (Miner, Jayaratne, Pesonen, & Zurbrügg, 2012, p. 237). Rather than considering specific methods as feminist, instead the methodological lens (in this case feminism) influences the way in which the methods are used (Pillow & Mayo, 2012, p. 189). Basically, a feminist methodological lens assesses potential methods to ensure they are congruent with the feminist methodology.

Three methods, or "techniques for gathering evidence" (Harding, 1987, p. 2), were used in data collection: individual interviews, a focus group, and creative pieces. "Feminist research requires a critical stance towards existing methods and methodology and this must include a critique of the methods used by feminists themselves" (Letherby, 2003, p. 87). To ensure I remained critical of the methods as well as my position within the methods, I took time after each data collection experience to reflexively journal.

3.4.2 Individual Interviews. Interviewing is appealing to feminist research, as many feminist scholars engage in research that aims to accurately represent

vulnerable voices, creating new meaning relevant to social change (Miner et al., 2012). "The interview has been used frequently by feminist research as a way for researchers and participants to work together to illuminate experience" (Hesse-Biber, 2012, p. 20). Feminist interview research takes on the challenge of producing knowledge that is actually applicable to women and the world they find themselves in (DeVault & Gross, 2012). The congruence with the axiological, epistemological, and political assumptions is evident, as interviews provide space for participants' voices to be represented, knowledge production, and critical reflection.

To begin each interview I engaged in a reflexive, feminist interviewing practice known as "strategic disclosure" (DeVault & Gross, 2012, p. 215), where I shared my personal experience of healing through yoga and feminism. Quite simply, I shared that this research process was inspired by my personal experience of healing from feminist counseling and yoga, which left me wondering if anyone else could relate. I completed ten interviews, which lasted between forty-five and eighty minutes, and were loosely guided by a series of previously determined questions (see Appendix D). The questions were "open-ended," so to establish "the territory to be explored while allowing the participant to take any direction" (Seidman, 2013, p. 87), offering an opportunity for participants "to reconstruct their experience according to their own sense of what was important, unguided by the interviewer" (Seidman, 2013, p. 88). The interviews were "in-depth," meaning that the interest was "in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (Seidman, 2013, p. 9).

The interviews were all completed in a place of the participant's choosing. A few invited me into their homes, while most preferred to meet at a local coffee shop. As the public setting of a local coffee shop may present difficulties if participants became distressed, I was careful to reassure participants that, should they wish, we could prematurely end the interview at any time. Over coffee, tea, and lattes we would settle in to the interview process. A few of the participants expressed slight anxiety when sharing their experiences, which became evident at times with nervous laughter. However, all participants eagerly shared. Reminiscing about their greatest healings experienced through feminism and yoga was filled with enthusiasm and honest reflection.

3.4.3 Focus Group*.* Feminist focus groups have been shown to be an empowering experience for research participants and an invaluable tool for researchers as the participants dialogue about gender and sexuality issues (Montell, 1999). Collaborative or participatory research approaches, meaning a group exploring the research topic together, "hold promise for enriching both data gathering and interpretation" (Sprague, 2005, p. 161). The unstructured conversations of focus groups within feminist research "reduces the researcher's control over the interview process" as well as "the distance between the researcher and the researched" (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 641). Focus groups are congruent with the fundamental assumptions and theoretical perspective of this research as the participants' voices and the collective meaning creation is respected, whilst acknowledging the researcher's position.

Following the individual interviews, six women were available to come together for a focus group. The second data collection method was a focus group, which assumed a conversational manner to further elaborate on a select few common themes that emerged during the individual interviews. This list of common themes that initially surfaced was vast, so I selected just a few to remain respectful of the time gifted from each of the participants (see subsection '*Choosing Initial Common Themes*' in Section 3.5.2 for how these themes were chosen).

We gathered together in a large Dalhousie social work classroom, on a mid-week summer evening, for just over two hours. With the building empty, save for security folks, we were privileged with complete privacy. As participants arrived we enjoyed snacks and tea, then carried on to some introductions and icebreakers. As with any social interaction, some participants were more comfortable to speak than others, yet as the evening progressed those less comfortable did speak up more. All participants openly offered their experiences and perspectives, thus adding to the rich knowledge created. Upon closing the focus group, participants were asked to share a word that represented their experience of the evening. These words included: "connected," "open," "welcome," "supported," "together," and "held" (see Appendix E for the focus group agenda).

3.4.4 Creative Pieces. According to Sprague (2005), feminist researchers believe more creativity is needed within feminist research. As outlined by Hesse-Biber and Piatelli (2012), feminist methodology creates space for new and creative methods that "can offer new angles of vision, reshaping… the way we build knowledge" (p. 176). Ardovini (2015) highlights that feminist research opens doors

for less restrictive and more creative research to occur. Offering alternative, nontraditional methods has the potential to move beyond the sometimes restricting and confusing nature of language, to elicit a new way of meaning making.

Therefore, the third data collection method, a creative piece, was designed. Participants were invited to submit a creative piece – be it a yoga pose or practice, drawing or painting, poem or story, etc. – that they felt described the intersection of feminism and yoga throughout their healing. This piece could have been something that the participants created in their past or they could have created something brand new. They were given full creative freedom for this method of data collection. Participants were given the option to share the meaning of their creative piece in a privately written or spoken excerpt or allow me to interpret the piece. Of the ten participants, eight chose to complete a creative piece. Of those eight participants, four offered a brief written interpretation, three offered a brief verbal interpretation, and one submitted the creative piece without any interpretation. Of the eight creative pieces, one was the pseudonym a participant created for herself (see Vignette 4.2.4), one was a poetic narrative, one was a collage, two were newly created paintings, and three were previously created paintings. The experience illustrated through creative expression was captivating and rich with meaning. Participants creatively spoke to the confines of gendered oppression through sexualized violence and the empowering freedom provided through feminist and yoga healing.

3.5 Leaves: Data Analysis

Chapter 3 now turns to the process of data analysis. In an effort to remain congruent with feminist methodology and the corresponding awareness of the researcher-participant relationship within knowledge production, the data analysis drew primarily upon the work of Seidman (2013) and Braun and Clark (2006). This section will first discuss what it means to be a feminist researcher engaged in thematic data analysis. It will then outline the steps used for data analysis: journaling, transcription, developing ten individual "passages of interest" documents (Seidman, 2013, p. 123), "vignettes" (Seidman, 2013, p. 122), developing a collective "passages of interest" document (Seidman, 2013, p. 123), and identification of five themes emerging from the data.

3.5.1 Feminist Thematic Data Analysis. "Feminist researchers have made enormous contributions to understandings of the ways in which the research process is not innocent, but is riven with power relations" (Phoenix, 2010, p. 161). As an example, upon completion of the data collection (i.e.; interviews, focus group, and creative pieces) and moving into the data analysis, I as the researcher had "ultimate control over the material and authoritative resources" (Letherby, 2003). According to Seidman (2013), as the researcher, my consciousness played a role in the data interpretation. As this research aimed to create shared knowledge, it was important to use a system of analysis that supported me in recognizing my position as the researcher whilst respecting the voices of the participants, which is why thematic analysis was chosen (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Seidman, 2013).

Figure 3.4

Thought Box 2: Is There Even a Connection?

July 25th, 2016

I have spent the entire day prepping for the upcoming focus group and I am so excited to get together with all the women for this experience. I really want to make it just perfect. I feel that with the information the women have given me this focus group has the potential to be so empowering, enlightening, and insightful – for the women and my research. During my prep this afternoon I suddenly realized that I am confidently assuming that when I bring the common themes to the focus group the women will automatically experience a connection to one another. My sense (or my assumption?) is that when they elaborate on these common themes they will feel connected as women, survivors, and as yogis. And now I find myself really struggling with the themes I have chosen to bring forward. I mean, how do I know that these are the most "salient" or, more importantly, what the women would deem most salient? Are these themes enough to connect the women? Do they connect the women at all? How will I know if they experience a sense of connection to one another? I'm assuming that there is something within the interviews that would connect the women, but maybe not? I started this morning so confident in the connection I was sure the women would experience, and now I'm so filled with self-doubt that there is any connection at all.

Braun and Clarke (2006) encourage thematic analysis researchers to become aware of their theoretical and epistemological underpinnings early in the research process, as they shape the themes that emerge through the analysis; hence the overt articulation throughout section 3.3. Thematic analysis assumes the researcher's analytic thoughts will emerge during data collection (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This did happen and I exposed such thoughts through journaling (see figure 3.4). According to Seidman (2013), "the researcher's consciousness will play a major role in the interpretation of interview data, [thus] that consciousness must interact with the words of the participant recorded as fully and as accurately as possible" (p. 117). The idea was

not to extract myself from the research, rather to remain cognizant of how I was present within it.

Thematic analysis "can be applied *across* a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches... and is compatible with both essentialist and constructionist paradigms" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). As the epistemological stance that guided this project asserts knowledge is constructed by individuals based on their social location, I sought meaning from the participants themselves based on their own experiences (Potts & Brown, 2005). The flexibility of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) ensured this research reflected one of the many principles of feminist methodology: to value the voice of the participants within the research as "active agents of information and change whose experiences can – and must – illuminate our understanding" (Burgess-Proctor, 2015, p. 130). This form of analysis is congruent with both feminist methodology and social constructionist epistemology, two fundamental assumptions that guided this research (see section 3.3).

3.5.2 Process of Data Analysis. The thesis now explains the steps of thematic analysis, which I have broken into two phases. The first (informal phase) had three steps: journaling, transcription, and choosing initial common themes. The second (formal phase) had four steps: crafting vignettes, individual passages of interest, collective passages of interest, and identification of common themes.

Informal Data Analysis. The following three steps – journaling, transcription, and choosing initial common themes – are not always perceived as data analysis. While they may not be analysis per se, they each influenced the formal

steps of data analysis, as initial thoughts began to emerge during each of these three steps (Bird, 2005; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Seidman, 2013).

Journaling. According to Seidman (2013), "the pure separation of generating from analyzing data is impossible" (p. 116). While it may be unconscious, this means that during the data collection process the researcher is pondering and, therefore analyzing, the emerging data. To remain transparent about this process, I made use of my reflective journal, openly exploring how my lens, stemming from feminist methodology and social constructionist epistemology, might be present within the data. Thus, data analysis first began during the process of becoming cognizant of the subtle analysis occurring, even during data collection.

While journaling began randomly, during earlier phases of the research, it became routine upon beginning data collection. After each interview, creative piece submission, the focus group, and sporadically between, I would freely journal my thoughts, experiences, understandings, and feelings about the data collection or research experience in general. Following each interview and creative piece, I noted common themes, considering that some might be brought to the focus group. See a journal entry in figure 3.5 reflecting on identifying salient points and choosing common themes.

I, as the researcher, positioned myself as the learner, attempting not to theorize participants' experiences, but rather to learn from the personal construction of their experiences and reality (Lather, 1991; Moosa-Mitha, 2005). Journaling became an opportunity to identify gaps in what I knew, thought I knew, and what I was learning (Coghlan & Shani, 2008). It also helped me acknowledge

Figure 3.5

Thought Box 3: Who Am I to Make These Decisions?

May 7th, 2016

I've just finished my third interview. Already I'm seeing so many common themes between these women. I'm feeling so inspired… like I'm on to something… like I'm living my dharma! But – and I hate to say "but" because I don't want to negate what I've just said… yet I need to be honest with myself here – when I feel so inspired I find myself wondering why. Is this inspiration because what I'm hearing these women say reaffirms my own experience? And, if so, am I missing something they are sharing with me because my mind is attuned to connect their words personally? I realize there are many words and phrases that each woman has spoken. And, of course, I'm marking them down in my common themes log. But what about the interesting points that I'm not noticing? Who am I to decide what is interesting or not?

what I had yet to learn and what I may have been taking for granted (Coghlan & Shani, 2008). Through learning what I had taken for granted hitherto, I was prompted to shift the way some questions would be delivered in subsequent interviews. It was through this subtle and informal analysis of the interviews that the questioning process became more refined. It was a process of mentally reviewing previous interview(s) in preparation for the next (Seidman, 2013). See figure 3.6 for a reflection of this process.

Transcription. The next level of data analysis was transcription. I chose to transcribe each interview myself, thereby ensuring my knowledge of the data sets (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Seidman, 2013). I went through each transcript, taking time to ensure all pauses, laughs, interruptions, and so on were accounted for (Seidman, 2013). Additionally, I was careful to include all "ums," "ahs," "likes," "you knows," etc. within the interview transcripts to aid in later analyzing the transcripts (Seidman, 2013).

Figure 3.6

Thought Box 4: Feminist Helping Experiences VS Feminist Experiences

May 9th, 2016

I've just finished my fourth interview and I'm becoming a bit concerned about the language I've chosen to describe feminist healing. It seems as though every time I say "feminist helping experiences" the women either get confused or think I'm talking specifically about therapy. I have to do a lot of explaining to outline that feminist healing is broader than that. There must be better language for this. I don't think "feminist healing" is the right term… I'm considering "feminist experiences" as an alternative. That term seemed to provide the most clarity for two women I recently interviewed. I wonder if this would remove the assumption that the healing had to be in formal therapy?

Transcription itself is considered a key phase in the process of thematic analysis, as initial thoughts begin to percolate throughout this familiarization (Bird, 2005; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Similar to the journaling phase, I was engaged in an informal process of identifying common themes (Seidman, 2013). However, following Seidman's (2013) advice on interviewing, I set the intention to avoid analyzing the interview data *in-depth* until all data collection was complete. It was through continued journaling that I remained aware of the inability to separate myself from the data (Seidman, 2013) and the ways in which I was already subtly analyzing. See figure 3.7 for a reflection of transcription.

Choosing Initial Common Themes. Upon completion of all ten transcriptions I began preparing for the focus group, which required that I make decisions about what common themes to bring forward. As mentioned, the intention was to avoid any in-depth study of the interviews, so I only gathered common themes from the journaling and transcribing phases. The list of common themes was already vast. I

Figure 3.7

Thought Box 5: What Does My Inspiration Tell Me About How I'm Transcribing?

May 31st, 2016

Wow! That was an inspiring conversation! As soon as we parted ways I was so excited to get into transcribing and reliving the interview. I've definitely experienced many emotions during these interviews. At the end of some I'm left wondering if I've done enough preparation for this project and at the end of others I am so inspired by the information I'm receiving. I assume that is somewhat normal. I mean everyone has something different to say based on their very different experiences, and we're all at different places along our healing journey. I can't help but wonder if this means I'm more attached to some interviews than others… And I know the answer is yes. So what does this mean during transcribing and (what will soon be) analyzing? If I'm more focused on the transcripts that I am inspired by, what am I missing in the other transcripts? And how will this look when I begin analyzing the data? I'm sure each woman has valuable information… how do I make sure I don't miss it?

narrowed it significantly, recognizing that at this phase of analysis I, as the researcher, had total control over what was chosen for the focus group.

Due to time constraints and to ensure time to hear the voices of the participants, I could only bring a small bit of what I would have liked to discuss into the focus group. The first piece I chose was four themes that I noticed within all, or almost all, of the individual interviews, which included: empowered, reclaimed power, accomplished, and vulnerability. In addition, I brought forth two emerging themes that I wanted the participants feedback on, as these emerging themes were significantly shifting the original vision of the research project. These themes were: feminism as embodied healing and yoga as cognitive healing. Please refer to figure 3.8 for an internal reflection on one of these learnings.

Figure 3.8

Thought Box 6: A-Ha!

July 20th, 2016

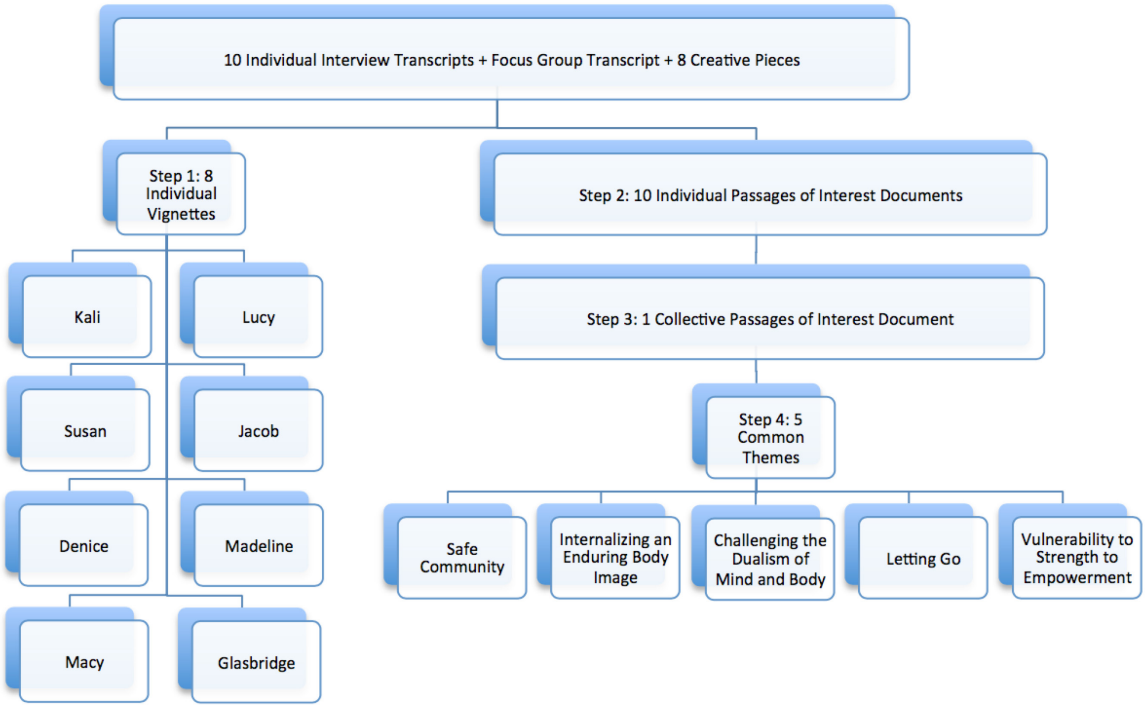
I've just finished the individual interview phase of data collection and have had the biggest 'A-ha' moment throughout the interview process. Everything has shifted and I wish I could go back to the first interview. When this woman I was just interviewing said that "feminism lives in the body" I was suddenly reminded of things other women previously shared, alluding to this idea of feminism as embodied. If only I could go back and ask more questions! When she first shared those words with me I must admit, I was feeling a bit discouraged… like, what the heck is the point of this research if feminism is also embodied? But by the time we finished I realized that this is a part of the interconnection… the congruence. Maybe I am onto something after all.

Formal Data Analysis. Upon completion of all data collection – individual interviews, focus group, and creative pieces – I more deeply immersed myself in the data sets, beginning the phase of formal data analysis. This 'formal' phase had four steps: crafting eight vignettes, preparing ten individual passages of interest documents, preparing a collective passages of interest document, and identifying common themes. Please see figure 3.9 for a visual representation of formal data analysis phase.

Step 1: Vignettes. The first step of the formal analysis phase was to craft individual vignettes (see Vignettes in section 4.2) for the eight participants who were able to submit creative pieces (Seidman, 2013). According to Seidman (2013), vignettes cover a "limited aspect of a participant's experience" and are an opportunity "to reflect the person's consciousness" (p. 122) within the research. They provided a creative way for the voices of the participants to become present within the data and articulate what knowledge has been gained from the women

(Seidman, 2013). Accordingly, the vignettes present the creative pieces and the meaning these pieces hold. Including women's voices and experiences in this way is congruent with feminist methodology. With their own creative expression, I was able to display what I learned from most of the participants (Seidman, 2013).

Figure 3.9



Step 2: 10 Individual Passages of Interest Documents. The second step of the formal analysis phase was to reduce the individual interviews into individual passages of interest documents. I began by reading through all the individual interview transcripts, the focus group transcript, and any creative piece descriptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I reminded myself that as the interviewer and researcher, I am not coming to the data with a blank slate, so I must remain open to explore what

emerges, allowing each piece of data to speak for itself (Seidman, 2013). Following Seidman's (2013) suggestions, I then reread the transcripts, marking passages of interest, and placed those passages into separate documents labeled with the participant's pseudonym and the title 'Passages of Interest.' As I was able to identify each of the participants' voices within the focus group, data collected from that transcript was also included into the individual passages of interest documents. Lastly, interpretations of the creative pieces were also included with the individual passages of interest document. As mentioned, upon receiving the eight creative pieces, seven of the eight participants offered a brief written or verbal interpretation of their creative piece. It was the information received in those brief interpretations that was placed into the individual passages of interest documents.

The purpose of these documents was largely organizational, as they began the process of removing data that was irrelevant to the research question in preparation for thematic analysis. With a "more demanding eye" (Seidman, 2013, p. 123), they were reviewed one final time, prior to being combined into the collective passages of interest document (see Step 3 below).

Step 3: Collective Passages of Interest Document. Upon completing the individual passages of interest documents, I combined all the information into one document titled 'Collective Passages of Interest.' This document became "an initial list of ideas about what is in the data and what is interesting about them" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 88).

Step 4: Identification of Common Themes. With the collective passages of interest complete, it was time to begin the fourth and final step in the formal

analysis. This fourth step was again organizational, as I identified, at a much deeper level than had been done prior to the focus group, the emerging themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once all the information was arranged according to specific themes, I read over the document again, this time merging themes, breaking themes down, and deleting themes I realized were not salient.

Here I determined the "thematic connections" (Seidman, 2013, p. 121), thereby, creating five themes unique to this research (see section 4.4 Something More: The Intersection of Feminism and Yoga). Once satisfied with the identification of themes, I went back to the original individual interview transcriptions, creative piece descriptions, and the focus group transcription for one final read through, ensuring that I had not overlooked any information (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I did uncover some data within the individual interviews that had been originally missed during the creation of the passages of interest. Finally, I completed one final review of the identified themes to ensure saliency and comprehensiveness. Once again, it was necessary here to reflect and acknowledge that I am using my judgment as the researcher (Seidman, 2013) to determine the themes as well as what is 'enough' data. A small amount of data was determined to be not salient to the research question and disregarded from the data analysis.

Once satisfied with the thematic groupings, I completed a detailed written description of the findings (see Chapter 4) and explored the essence within the intersection of feminism and yoga, and what the intersection means for the healing process of women survivors of sexualized violence (see Chapter 5).

Before moving to a consideration of the findings, it is important to briefly speak to some ethical components of the research methodology.

3.6 Ethical Concerns

This project has been previously approved by the Dalhousie REB (please see Appendix F for the REB approval letter); hence a detailed description of the ethical concerns is unnecessary. Therefore, this section of Chapter 3 briefly reviews the process of informed consent and the main ethical issues, of confidentiality and conflict of interest.

3.6.1 Informed Consent. As this research study involved three methods of data collection I created one informed consent for all three data collection methods (Appendix G). I asked for informed consent for the individual interviews and creative pieces simultaneously, as many participants chose to submit their creative piece electronically. Consent for the focus group was separately requested. As this research project asked participants to discuss a personal and emotional experience there were risks involved, so I had an agreement in place with the Avalon Sexual Assault Centre. If a participant contacted the Avalon Centre and mentioned their participation in this research study the Avalon Centre would provide an initial appointment as soon as possible. In addition, I created a pamphlet outlining various community resources (see Appendix H) that participants received at the individual interviews and the focus group. After explaining and reviewing the consent form, I provided time for questions prior to signing the consent forms (Appendices I, J, & K). Both the individual interview and creative piece signature forms were signed simultaneously, while the focus group signature form was signed separately.

3.6.2 Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest. Since the yoga community within Halifax is relatively small, some of the women were known to one another. Consequently, this small community presented a confidentiality risk of unintentionally "outing" oneself to peers. Additionally, as I have been active within this community for over nine years, I was personally known to some of the women. Consequently, women I know could have felt pressured to participate in the research project because they know me as a friend or teacher. Whether they knew me personally or not, there was also the risk that participants may have wanted to please me simply because I was the researcher and said or did things that may not have been true to them. These risks were minimized as much as possible through complete transparency and open discussion. In addition, at the beginning of the focus group participants were given instructions to share only what they were comfortable sharing and they all signed a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix L), which encouraged everyone to respect privacy and confidentiality.

3.7 Stability of the Tree

Returning to the tree metaphor (figure 3.1), the preceding visual and verbal description of the research process illustrates the attention given to congruency within the research process. This metaphor outlines how fundamental values and assumptions, followed by appropriate theoretical and methodological approaches, can produce methods and analysis tools to help one make meaning of the world around them in way that supports the core of their being. Ensuring the research process remains congruent supports the validity of the findings presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Findings

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the research, beginning with a collective introduction to the participants and then moving to personal vignettes. After briefly reviewing how the findings support the value of both feminism and yoga as distinct supports to healing, the remainder of the chapter describes the findings related to the intersection of yoga and feminism, prior to the analysis presented in Chapter 5. As per the discussion in Chapter 3 on reflexivity, it was important that I kept myself out of the descriptive phase; however, analytical questions could not help but arise. These questions were captured in the multiple thought boxes entitled 'Digging Deeper,' which serve as prompts for the subsequent analysis provided in Chapter 5.

4.1 Who Were My Participants?

All of the women who participated in this research had experienced sexualized violence. While they were asked no questions pertaining to the sexualized violence itself, many participants openly shared aspects of the violence perpetrated against them. From what the women shared, the nature of the sexualized violence ranged from molestation, physical sexualized assault, date rape, acquaintance rape, intimate partner rape, and rape under the influence.

Participants who came to this research had a wide range of yoga experience: anywhere from six months to over twenty years, with some practicing "on and off" at times. Overwhelmingly, participants shared that their practice of yoga was "different" than other forms of exercise or even other hobbies, such as art or music, in which they engage. Of the ten participants, one received formal yoga therapy – which consists of individual sessions designed to support specific physical and/or

Figure 4.1

Thought Box 7: Cold and Callous Therapist. Is That Not an Oxymoron?

May 17th, 2001

So I have spent the last while living in hell. It has been a while since I have even considered journaling because everything sucks so bad. I finally did it, or at least tried to do it [die by suicide]. Ending up in that hospital, seeing that so-called therapist was probably the worst part of all this. He was just so cold and callous. Why is he even a therapist? Is a cold and callous therapist not an oxymoron? I felt like me overdosing was an inconvenience to his schedule. But one thing I can say for him is that he treated me exactly how I feel… like damaged goods. He really made me appreciate the support I have been getting from M [my feminist counselor]. I guess I did not fully realize how impactful she has been to me

mental health concerns with breath control, postures, and concentration – but did not tell the therapist her reasons for seeking treatment.

Just as varied as their yoga experience, so too was their feminist experience. Participants shared that their feminist experiences ranged from personal dialogue with fellow feminists, their childhood providing "feminist sensibility," educational workshops from many inspirational feminists like Margaret Mead, various university gendered courses and programs, self-study, and traditional therapy. Out of the ten participants, six received therapeutic support, one of which received support from a feminist social worker, and one from a feminist psychotherapist. Participants mentioned that feminist therapy is "hard to find and identify" (Kali) and that a therapist with a non-gendered lens was "wanting to follow her own agenda" (Susan). Of the six participants who received traditional therapy, five had experience with a traditional, non-gendered therapist. Four of these five participants asserted that they felt "a real disconnect"

Figure 4.2

Thought Box 8: Personal Poem

November 14th, 2001

Running toward the fire,
My body split in half.
What a strange desire,
Used to love to laugh.

Sleeping beneath your lies,
Lost in your delusion.
As you slowly closed my eyes,
I believed in your illusions.

Left in your darkness,
Only silent cries protect me.
I rest emotionless,
And your mistakes cost *me* a fee.

Invisible hands rip me apart,
A pretty smile rests on the outside.
Bleeding from inside my heart,
My shadow dims in sunrise.

Forced against the wall,
The lies begin to unfold.
I've forgotten tears,
And lost all control.

A puppet of a puppet,
Completely beaten and bruised.
No one can ever see it,
So it quickly steals my soul.

You cut inside my mind,
Inspired by my aches.
The way to act in kind,
Was to weaken under the weight.

One day I wake,
I'm poison and bound in shame.
I don't know how much I can fake,
I was chained, but completely blamed.

A numbing pain consumes me,
As I realize a life of decay.
I thought he was there for me.
How much can one betray?

Now in my dreams,
The pain is numb.
Yet still no one can hear my screams.
Laughter is no more than a quiet hum.

with the therapist with a non-gendered lens. See figure 4.1 for a former journal entry of my own experience with non-gendered therapist.

4.2 Vignettes

The following vignettes draw upon the creative pieces submitted by most of the participants to offer the reader a glimpse of the uniqueness, strength, and vulnerability of the participants. The creative pieces reminded me of a poem I wrote when I began to confront the confines of patriarchy that surfaced during my yoga practice and feminist counseling (see figure 4.2). While only eight of the participants were able to submit creative pieces, the remaining two were active in the

interview and focus group portions of the research.

4.2.1 Lucy

Watercolor Painting

Lucy shared that in tree pose she feels grounded and protected by Mother Earth, in all of her feminine strength. She loves the balance of power and calm that she experiences in this posture.
"Tree, for me is one of the most powerful, grounding poses because I'm using every muscle in my body… Chest is proud… And then my face shows none of everything that is going on. So it feels really strong and powerful, complete calm on the outside."

4.2.2 Macy

Poetic Narrative

I am not entitled

"If the police ask you about dad don't tell them anything."

The little girl agrees- obediently- to her own undoing with a smile on her face as her mother passes her a cake for her grade 6 class party.

It's not that she is a willing participant in protecting him but she is more than willing to be an agreeable little girl for her mother. She returns to the classroom, cake in hand, with the knowledge that she is a good, well behaved little girl. The vision of her loving mother intact.

What she doesn't know at the age of 12 is that this moment is a seed for a lifelong narrative that tells her she is not worth protecting. She is not entitled. Even if she dares to speak, no one will care or do anything about it. She just isn't worth that much.

She spends many of her days strangling those pieces of her life that remind her she's broken. It's exhausting to push back the memories and unhappiness that continually surface and threaten to expose her. Threatening to lay her brokenness out on display, a spectacle for the world where she has no voice.

How could she-share that is. When the whole of who she is, how she understands her brokenness-is tied to the act of one man. Bound to a crime. One that defines her as victim -or if she chooses- survivor. She is bound and gagged, gagged by his protection, gagged by her own 12 year old compliance in his protection, gagged by others' inaction, and gagged by a discourse that doesn't allow this to be a single piece of the whole that she is…

-Macy

4.2.3 Susan

Watercolor Painting

Susan saw this image online and it resonated deeply, so she kept it close. When pondering her creative piece this image came to mind, so she recreated it with watercolors. Susan explained that this image illustrates how her yoga and feminist experiences have "broken me open" and "lifted me up."

4.2.4 Glasbridge

Pseudonym Creation

The reasons Glasbridge created her name are twofold. First, she envisioned the arch of a bridge as herself backbending, opening her chest. Second, the glas represents a glass breaking through the process of bending and opening her heart.

4.2.5 Kali

Painting

Kali began this painting during an art course, but was never happy with it. She was unsettled because during creation she was chatting with the person who was to become the perpetrator.
“Knowing that person was there when I first started this tainted the work, so I painted over everything but the alien head (I was happy with this part and the person was not there at that point). Re-doing this art work was healing, it felt like a form of closure.”
Kali has since thrown out the painting and said leaving it was “a fresh start.”

4.2.6 Jacob

Collage

Jacob described her creative piece as a symbolic journey of her life. As a "Young One," she blossomed and grew into a lush, beautiful tree. "The Fire Storms" illustrated the sexualized violence she experienced and "The Dead Zone" illustrated how she felt after. Jacob explained that rising "Out of the Ashes" was characterized by yoga, her feminist community, and self care activities, which brought forth "A New Life."

4.2.7 Denice

Painting

Denice's creative piece was completed right as the abusive relationship ended.
"It was a bit of a release, unstructured in my mind at the time. Happy, free??? I didn't prime the canvas and I didn't care if it looked perfect. It was cathartic. You will see that a little figure is folded inside of bright ribbons of color. Is this me? Am I saved? Am I safe? Am I still hidden from the brightness and potential of the world around me? Is it odd that I look like a baby in a womb?"

4.2.8 Madeline

Watercolor Painting

Madeline shared that she struggles to connect with her root chakra, which in yoga philosophy is responsible for your sense of safety and security. This painting was a means to connect to her root chakra.

Following these individual introductions, the chapter now turns to a description of the collective findings. Some of the findings reinforce the literature's assertion that yoga and feminist experiences are independently valuable healing modalities. These findings are briefly considered in section 4.3. The more significant findings, which address the healing that can be gained from the intersection of yoga and feminism, are presented in greater depth in section 4.4.

4.3 Reinforcing the Literature

Research has clearly indicated that sexualized violence may traumatically affect a woman's cognitive, affective, and embodied health (Bass & Davis, 2008;

Crews et al., 2016; Emerson & Hopper, 2011; Hébert & Bergeron, 2008; Levine, 1997; van der Kolk, 2006). The findings of this research reaffirm feminism as a form of cognitive and affective healing (Ardovini, 2015; Bowland et al., 2012; Corey, 2013; hooks, 2015a; Muzak, 2009; Payne, 2006; Riddle, 2008; Ungar, 2011; Whalen, 1996) and yoga as a form of embodied healing (Crews et al., 2016; Emerson & Hopper, 2011; Kimbrough et al., 2010; Rhodes, 2015; van der Kolk, 2014; West et al., 2016) for women survivors of sexualized violence.

4.3.1 Just Feminism. Participants expressed an array of cognitive and affective healing benefits stemming specifically from their feminist experiences. Carmen shared that feminism offered a "space to examine [my experience of sexualized violence] on a personal and a political level, and making that connection, was huge" and Lucy shared that it "helped me understand that I wasn't to blame." Julie Rose, when referring to negative inner dialogue and questioning, shared that "information that comes from a feminist experience changes that dialogue… and it takes some of the personal hurt out of it." Time and again the participants would assert that their feminist foundation or "feminist sensibility" was significant in their healing journey as a survivor of sexualized violence. Madeline shared that her feminist understanding really helped "because it's coming back to my roots and knowing that the patriarchal society is what it is."

Simply comprehending that sexualized violence is a social issue was a significant piece to healing. The understanding of the "patriarchal society" through the feminist lens was discussed as being "the greatest part," "comforting," "remarkably healing," and more. Essentially, all participants asserted that

comprehending sexualized violence as a form of political and gendered oppression, and not a personal attack, was named as one of the greatest healings from their feminist experiences. Jacob stated, "it is a huge accomplishment to be able to recognize that you weren't the catalyst or the cause or the magnet of those kinds of things." Participants agreed that it is important and helpful to comprehend the "bigger picture" through a feminist perspective. Macy shared that it is "important for the therapist to have this larger understanding of what sociologically is at play or what's impacting women's bodies" and, "when feminism is added to" therapy, she feels "there is a stronger sense for what might be happening for women." This comprehension of the "patriarchal society" is therapeutically healing and supports the research indicating feminist therapy as an appropriate support for women survivors of sexualized violence (Corey, 2013; Muzak, 2009; Sharf, 2012; Ungar, 2011; Whalen, 1996).

Glasbridge frankly shared that "when it comes to a feminist point of view, it's more empowering." Macy pointed out that when we use feminist theory we are "pushing back against the limits." Denice reinforced this idea of "pushing back" when she said: "feminism gives us a vocabulary and framework to talk about that [patriarchy and the confining boxes or labels placed upon us] in a constructive and interesting way and recognize the discursivity that's around us and problematize that." Jacob agreed with this and shared that through feminism "you can be true to your gender, yourself, your body" and that you can find "your voice as a woman." The articulation of empowerment stemming from feminist practices reinforces previous research (hooks, 2015a; Payne, 2006).

Additionally, participants shared that advocating against sexualized violence is also empowering. Kali shared that whilst feminist theory itself is empowering, being around feminist women who are "involved in the feminist activist community" is "empowering" and "affirmative." Julie Rose shared that being engaged in social change "in efforts to really preventing the root of what happened to me" is healing and empowering. This inspiration to be a part of social change reinforces Payne's (2006) assertion that feminist healing motivates women survivors of sexualized violence to challenge the patriarchal structures that continue to oppress women.

4.3.2 Just Yoga. Similar to their feminist experiences, participants felt strongly that yoga provided an array of healing benefits. Overwhelmingly, participants shared that yoga left them feeling accomplished and empowered. Carmen shared that no matter how her day went, when she leaves a yoga class she's left with "a big sense of accomplishment." Kali said that at yoga you "accomplish something that feels good" and that it is "empowering doing these things you don't normally do physically with your body." Many participants asserted that the challenges presented within the practice of yoga surprise you, as they expose a strength you would not have previously associated with yourself. As an example, Denice shared that yoga "represents this amazing thing where your body is always doing something new... It just makes me feel good." Carmen stated that upon trying postures she would have deemed "too advanced," she felt encouraged to "just try it," and was left with feelings of "strength and empowerment and confidence."

Several participants agreed that the empowerment experienced through yoga left them viewing their body in a positive light, which was not the norm. Susan

shared that in yoga "you have to pay attention in your postures about how you're treating yourself," which showed her that "I have to pay good attention and I'm worthy of that, and even the days when I'm feeling bad about myself, I can still treat myself well." Kali spoke to how yoga has "shown me all the cool things my body can do." She went on to say that typically, "we only notice our bodies when they're in pain or when something goes wrong, and yoga makes you notice the good things too." Denice shared that, "in the real world we're constantly reminded of our bodies… there's this negative attachment. When you're in a yoga class it's always from a positive place." Denice likened this experience to the "reclaiming of power."

There was a multitude of comments that spoke to how the empowering relationships with one's body resulted in stronger sense of self. Lucy went so far as to say: "100%, I credit yoga to the person that I am today" as it taught her "self-worth and self-respect." Madeline said: "I separate the important from the unimportant and I'm more at one with what I want versus… society, what we're supposed to want… I'd say my practice of yoga brought me… to my true self versus the fake self that you portray." Many researchers have also exposed this overwhelming sense of empowerment and confidence produced through yoga (Crews et al., 2016; Emerson & Hopper, 2011; van der Kolk, 2014; West et al., 2016).

Participants asserted that the experience of empowerment often followed the experience of vulnerability in a way that sparked meaningful healing. Glasbridge shared: "I felt completely naked when I got reintroduced to my body [during yoga]. I didn't know who I was. It was scary. So then I started to put myself back together through yoga." Lucy stated that yoga "shows you exactly who you are as a person,

what you can and can't handle on and off the mat. It breaks down the negative in the body." This concept was elaborated on when Madeline asserted that yoga "gets you more into your body. You trust your body and then it makes you more confident and trusting in yourself." Carmen shared that "once I started yoga I started repairing that connection [to my body] that had been lost or never really existed." This newfound confidence, trust, and overall positive relationship with one's body reinforces previous research stating that yoga has been shown to increase a survivor's relationship with their body in a positive way (Crews et al., 2016; Emerson & Hopper, 2011; van der Kolk, 2014; West et al., 2016).

Additionally, many participants shared that their yoga practice instilled a renewed trust in themselves and their bodies, enabled the physical release of anxiety and trauma, and inspired the desire to care for themselves and their bodies. This newfound confidence, trust, and overall positive relationship with one's body reinforces previous research stating that yoga has been shown to increase a survivor's relationship with their body in a positive way (Crews et al., 2016; Emerson & Hopper, 2011; van der Kolk, 2014; West et al., 2016). As an example, Susan shared that yoga brings up the inner dialogue and then, "helps you to confront some of those difficult feelings, some of those demons you might be wrestling with." All the participants asserted that yoga enabled them to better cope with stress as well as release anxieties and emotions. Jacob shared that "the quietness that it brings to my body and my mind I don't find in many other places in the world." She went on to say that "when you're stressed, uptight, tense, troubled, or in pain, it [yoga] was a method of release. It allowed me to slow my breathing and relax my

muscles." This supports van der Kolk's (2014) assertion that yoga enables survivors to move through their trauma without feeling as though their emotions are taking over.

4.4 Something More: The Intersection of Feminism and Yoga.

There is beginning research to indicate that yoga can be a promising adjunct to traditional talk therapy (Emerson et al., 2009; Kimbrough et al., 2010; Nolan, 2016). In addition, there is some evidence demonstrating that merging yoga and feminism in educational contexts, in substance abuse treatment, and with pre- and post-natal women is beneficial (Doran and Hornibrook, 2013; Dylan, 2014; Musial, 2011). Very recent literature suggests that this merging of yoga and feminism provides a therapeutic experience that is respectful of corporeal and embodied empowerment (Berila, 2016). The findings of this research support the above contention, but further suggest that 'something more' emerges at the intersection of yoga and feminism for women survivors of sexualized violence. Participants identified five central themes within this 'something more' space, and it is these themes that are particularly unique to this research (see figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3

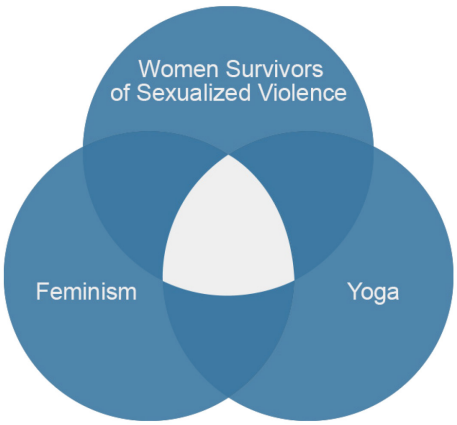


Figure 4.3 is a re-illustration of Figure 2.1. Both figures illustrate the connection of feminism with women survivors of sexualized violence, yoga with women survivors of sexualized violence, as well as yoga and feminism together. Figure 2.1 demonstrated that there was reason to explore a possible intersection of all three, as indicated in the white triangle. Figure 4.3 illustrates that the intersection of all three is more significant than originally thought, as highlighted by the larger white triangle.

4.4.1 Gordian Knot. The proverbial 'Gordian Knot' is a term used to illustrate an intricate problem, only solvable with unique or bold actions (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2016) and is an apt metaphor for this 'something more.' Overwhelmingly, participants struggled to articulate how yoga and feminist experiences worked together in their healing journey. Carmen, for example, shared that it is difficult to separate yoga and feminism because "they're both inextricably or fundamentally linked." She went on to say that it is "hard to put into words… because we only can use what we have, and what we have is a language to describe what is so much more." While everyone struggled with their articulation, they also shared the belief that there is a congruency or integration between yoga and feminism. Denice shared that she could not imagine being attracted to yoga "if it wasn't congruent" with feminism. She said, "…if they weren't complimentary, they wouldn't be coexisting. By process of logic it seems to me that they make sense together."

Despite their difficulty articulating the interconnection between yoga and feminist experiences, most participants confidently asserted that neither yoga nor feminism individually offered them all that they required – and still do require – along their healing journey. As an example, Madeline shared that "you can work through this [sexualized violence trauma] in your body but you need to also be able to understand in your head." Kali wondered if feminist experiences and yoga were not connected if you would be unable "to express your verbal thoughts, which I also think is an important part of healing," that surface during a yoga practice. Macy stated:

> I think that it [feminist counseling] wasn't enough on its own and I don't believe that it's enough for anyone on its own. I think that you need something else… I think that yoga is a really great place to start because my belief is that when we have any life experiences, including trauma, that we literally embody them, they become part of our physiology.

Glasbridge spoke to being supported with feminist helping, but also needing the yoga to stir "things up in your body that you pushed down."

As participants acknowledged that both yoga and feminist experiences were significant in their healing journeys, they began to formulate their thoughts around the integration, uniquely and boldly attempting to solve the 'Gordian Knot' (see figure 4.4). Their articulation of the intersection between yoga and feminist experiences is presented below.

Figure 4.4

Thought Box 9: Digging Deeper

Perhaps the challenge is not to solve the knot, but instead to work within the complexity?

4.4.2 Safe Community. Many participants spoke to the synchronicity between yoga and feminist communities, as they both simultaneously believe in strength through unity and empowered individuals. Julie Rose spoke to these two communities as a "perfect complement" as the community values of feminism are "really in keeping with ideas that yoga teaches too." Denice also viewed this similarity and shared that "feminisms talk about the benefit of being strong together while simultaneously being individuals… [and] you have a yoga community that's strong together, but also it's about the individual experience." Macy shared that there is "empowerment in the safety of spaces that's created" within yoga and feminism.

Applying a feminist lens to yoga, thereby creating a safe, feminist yoga community, was a strong theme that almost every participant mentioned. Kali spoke to the potential within a combined feminist yoga community, stating that if it "was focused on body politics" you could build "your connection to yoga." In other words, understanding the way in which a woman's body is constructed according to political (patriarchal) discourses fosters a deeper connection to the physical practice of yoga and her body within the practice. Kali went on to say that understanding "body politics" outside of yoga and bringing that awareness into the "very physical space, but also a lot of focus on emotional and spirituality" would "help you embrace it [your body]." Carmen asserted that "there's a lens or a language or a perspective that feminist helping can bring to yoga." Denice believes that "there's something about the connection with people who practice yoga and female experience, without really saying anything we can have an experience or a

connection." Many participants shared that a true feminist yoga experience is an "environment that is safe to practice" yoga (see figure 4.5).

Figure 4.5

Thought Box 10: Digging Deeper

What intentional action would a yoga teacher or feminist practitioner need to take to foster such an environment?

4.4.3 Internalizing an Enduring Body Image

Image. Many participants spoke about their relationship with their body as "negative," particularly when considered within "the real world" as distinct from their yoga or feminist worlds. For participants, this "real world" referred to any piece of their life that did *not* include feminism and/or yoga. Participants emphasized that both feminism and yoga encourage a positive relationship with their bodies. Feminism gives language that helps them "divorce" the patriarchal constructs affecting their bodies (i.e.; the popular clothing choices available, the media's dominant representation of women, dominant dialogue about what women can/cannot do, etc.). Yoga offers the physical experience of respecting one's body and pride in unusual physical accomplishments. Furthermore, yoga is seen as an opportunity to make a choice for oneself and one's body without the pressure of conforming to constructed roles, such as: women are meant to be the 'damsel in distress,' supposed to be physically attractive, not as strong as men, and so on. Through making these safe, empowering, and respectful decisions, yoga creates a more trusting relationship with one's body.

Kali shared that she believes yoga and feminist experiences are connected and empowering "because it's something I'm choosing to do myself and it's just for me… it's not to make anyone else happy or live up to some role." Kali shared that this empowerment was experienced through making decisions for her body. For her

making choices about her body was empowering because making such choices challenged the patriarchal constructed idea that women are never in charge of themselves or surrounding situations. Carmen shared in this experience and said that when feminism was experienced physically in her yoga practice, it "manifested itself into recognizing the other positive things that I was able to do in terms of my relationship with my body and elsewhere in life." Julie Rose believes that the integration of feminist experiences and yoga creates "body positive images that," challenge negative body images that, if not addressed, "might create roadblocks" in healing.

Figure 4.6

Thought Box 11: Digging Deeper

How do yoga and feminism create an enduring body image? What is unique about this enduring body image?

Denice shared that yoga and feminist experiences encourage "acceptance of yourself and of your body and of who you are, that I think we as women struggle with, if not every minute of every day then, close to every minute of every day." See figure 4.6 critically questioning this concept of enduring body image.

4.4.4 Challenging the Dualism of Mind and Body. Overwhelmingly, participants shared that they struggle with the many "hats," "pieces," "labels," and "boxes" that daily life demands of them and that they are left feeling "disconnected" from themselves or "compartmentalized." The disconnect and compartmentalization were sources of frustration for many of the participants. The women agreed that this compartmentalization results from a culturally encouraged disconnect between our minds and our bodies (see figure 4.7). Kali shared that "in our culture, we have this disconnect between our brain and our body" and we "feel

Figure 4.7

Thought Box 12: Digging Deeper

Why is this assumption so prevalent?

that" when we "talk about things that happen 'in my body' separately from 'myself,' but… you're just one person." She went on to say that this disconnect creates a "system where we deal with our thoughts and our feelings and our bodies so separately, and they're not separate," which makes you wonder "what's the most valid part of your experience and how do you deal with your emotions." Most of the women shared ways in which both feminist experiences and yoga supported them in reconnection.

As stated by Denice and Macy, the "vocabulary and framework," as well as the "pushing back against the limits," offered by feminism were ways the participants felt they could challenge the compartmentalization (see figure 4.8). Kali shared that she learned through feminism that "you don't have to be one dimensional," that you can be "a quiet person and a strong person," and that "you can have different sides to yourself." Susan added that through owning her feminism she found that she can be feminine and "still be strong and in charge," that she can be "soft and gentle" at times and not at other times. The experience of finding confidence in one's multidimensional self through feminism reinforces the feminist practice of acknowledging the woman within her social context (Corey, 2013; Sharf, 2012).

Figure 4.8

Thought Box 13: Digging Deeper

I wonder if this "vocabulary and framework" can also be used to challenge personal political dualism?

Berila (2016) asserts that, "Much feminist theory remains highly cerebral when talking about the body rather than leaning toward more corporeal

experiences" (p. 4), and much of the literature within Chapter 2 supports this assertion. However, it was noted that some researchers are becoming curious about the embodied nature of patriarchy and sexualized violence (Goldenhar et al., 1998; Krieger, 1990; Landrine & Klonoff, 1997; Pavalko et al., 2003; Powell, 2010; Shilling, 2001; Zucker & Landry, 2007), yet this curiosity does not include an exploration of feminism as embodied healing for physically stored trauma of sexualized violence.

Interestingly, the knowledge created by the participants challenged both my assumption and the literature's assertion that feminist theory is "highly cerebral when talking about the body" (Berila, 2016, p. 4). Denice shared that "feminism lives in the body," which later inspired a dialogue exploring feminism as an embodied healing experience. Macy shared that "the words we use, we embody them," and "feminism has created space where our bodies and our minds" can be shaped according to the feminist language "that is pushing back against" patriarchal language. Participants asserted that because feminism is associated with challenging sex and gender constructs through language "it changes how we physically experience" sexualized violence. So, for the participants, feminism was not only cerebral, but was also embodied (see figure 4.9).

Figure 4.9

Thought Box 14: Digging Deeper

If feminist language is embodied, how does this intersect with yoga? What is the language of feminist yoga? What purpose does it serve?

In addition to feminism being experienced as embodied, the reverse was also experienced. Participants felt that the embodied practice of yoga was also a cognitive and affective experience. Carmen asserted that yoga is a cognitive and

emotional form of healing because it shapes "the way you *think* about your body." Susan shared that through paying attention to yourself in yoga postures you notice, "how you're treating yourself" in and out of the yoga studio. Intriguingly, there appeared to be a deeper impact of positive and affirming language when actually practicing yoga. Participants agreed that yoga encourages you to pay attention to yourself in a positive light. Furthermore, as they began to notice how they were treating themselves, with the encouragement to offer positive attention, they began to realize that they are "worthy" of good attention. Participants shared that there was a physical strength experienced in yoga that manifested into an emotional strength outside of yoga, which influenced how they allowed themselves to be treated by others.

Denice, when speaking about the imposing values of the "real world," shared that through the positive reinforcement within yoga you have "permission to divorce the associated external." She went on to say that:

> Yoga has made me feel like a more complete human being. Yoga has made me feel like I don't have to live a compartmentalized life… That there is room in a CEO's life for meditation, that there is room in a mother's life to be a PhD student… Yoga tells you these things happen simultaneously. They're not separate, they're part of you, and you're a part of it, and who you are is perfect.

These experiences shared reinforce research completed by Kauer (2016) exposing yoga as means to strip away sociocultural norms when Denice said that, "Yoga has made me feel like I don't have to live a compartmentalized life."

Through exposing the ways that feminism and yoga each challenge the dualism of mind and body, participants began to speculate on how the two helping practices might work together. Macy shared that a feminist lens "might be able to offer ways of expressing or understanding what people are feeling physiologically." Macy believes that by giving "people a chance to pull things apart up here [in their head]… the two forms of therapy can really support each other." She shared that when you're experiencing feminist talk therapy "that obviously has trickle down effects into the physical… [and] yoga provides the space… to do the shifting of the embodied stuff… and has this trickle up [effect]… so it can impact the emotional and the psychological." Glasbridge spoke to the value in having a feminist lens to work through everything that has been stirred up during yoga:

> There's someone to validate you for feeling that way and let you know that it's okay, that they understand. Because you can't just go and have all these yoga experiences without the support of someone who knows what they're talking about… and I think when it comes to a feminist point of view it's more empowering for the individual.

Lucy shared that if she were to bring the "rawness" she experiences on her yoga mat "into treatment… it would open up so many doors" for further dialogue. Macy spoke to the benefits of using the feminist lens within her own yoga practice, saying that "the feminist helping really pulled things apart linguistically or intellectually."

4.4.5 Letting Go. Another way that participants experienced yoga as a cognitive healing process was through the intellectual and emotional "break." Overwhelmingly, participants shared that yoga gave their "brain a break" (Denice,

Kali). Through the quietness within yoga, participants experienced space to "let go of the stories" (Macy) of their every day. Consequently, through letting go of all "the junk and busyness" (Jacob), this cerebral break provided "space" (Jacob, Macy) to absorb the feminist healing in a more meaningful and impactful way. In this way yoga was said to "impact the emotional and the psychological" (Macy).

Susan shared that after conversations of releasing shame, when she later goes to yoga, she would "commit to letting it go." She went on to say that, in the experience of physically releasing tension, "there are times when I'm in poses where I just release all of the tensions and I don't think about any of those things that cause me stress or anxiety and I just release from it all." Macy acknowledged that "if I hit the mat and I'm sitting with it [stress, anxiety, etc.], and it's there throughout the practice, at some point I will feel a release. A letting go that isn't always possible up here in my head" (see figure 4.10). Glasbridge said that one of the greatest healings from the yoga practice is in "letting go of trying to stop those sensations, just allowing them to move through you." Kali agreed when she shared the following:

Figure 4.10

Thought Box 15: Digging Deeper

What is happening within this physiological "letting go" that participants are speaking of?

> When I talk about really emotional things, I feel like I have a lot of anxiety and excess energy. So then when I go to yoga, it's a really healthy way to express that… It can be really helpful to take time away from that and have a counter balance of a lot of mental work.

Jacob's assertion was similar as she said, "it [yoga] really does give my body and my mind a rest to be better able to cope with what I'm dealing with." Denice shared that

she can “come out the other side” of a yoga practice with more “perspective” and that she “can respond now with a little bit more clarity.” Macy, resting her hands over her heart, insists that her yoga practice is a practice of “listening to this [her heart] and listening to this is enough.”

4.4.6 Vulnerability to Strength to Empowerment

Figure 4.11

When asked about yoga postures, seven of the ten women named backbends such as the camel, the wheel, and wild thing (see figure 4.11) as contributing to their healing process. Participants said that through backbending they “experienced the most physical responses” (Macy). They shared that it takes a lot of emotional strength “to hold those poses and put your heart above your head” (Lucy) that “exposing the entire front of your body” made them sick to their stomach (Lucy), and “when we expand and open that area we’re vulnerable again to ourselves and everybody else” (Glasbridge). Glasbridge named backbends as the most troubling or challenging for her because “there’s still stuff in there that needs to come out, so I avoid it.” See figure 4.12 for a journal reflecting on backbending.

Integrating a feminist lens with one's yoga practice helped reframe vulnerability as strength. Denice explained how "you're humbled" in both yoga and feminism:

> It humbles you in terms of your place in this world and what you can do and what you can't do, but that can coexist with opportunity and that can coexist with being empowered… that's the coexisting of being both vulnerable and strong at the same time. It's a weird, interesting relationship and I think feminism and yoga offers both of those things. They coexist at one time.

Macy shared that this combination, of yoga and feminism, supports you in "allowing yourself to be vulnerable, but you're physically or emotionally holding the space, which takes strength in itself… literally holding space for yourself to mourn or to be vulnerable, which is hard." Susan explained that the lessons of yoga and feminism have taught her to "be accepting for feeling that pain. You don't need to squash it down… You can be vulnerable. There is strength in vulnerability." Kali spoke to engaging in vulnerability within yoga, feminism, and the

Figure 4.12

Thought Box 16: What is in a Backbend?

May 17th, 2016

Several women have shared that backbends were some of the most significant postures in the healing journey. I get chills every time someone shares that. Personally I have such a strong love-hate relationship with backbends that I find it absolutely fascinating when so many other women are sharing this sentiment. It is so clear that someone's flexibility has nothing to do with this relationship, which I find even more fascinating. Why is it that a pose I can technically do quite well can cause so much distress? What is it in a backbend?

"real world" as "a political and feminist act" because it is challenging the idea that feminine emotions are negative.

For many participants this movement from vulnerability to strength continued into a qualitatively unique experience of empowerment as they took their learning and growth "off the mat". Many participants agreed that the combination of vulnerability and strength left them feeling empowered in "the real world." Kali shared that many women "tend to focus on other people's needs first," but yoga encourages you to "take time out for yourself and care for yourself." Susan shared that one of the benefits she attributes directly to yoga is: "I'll advocate for myself in a way that I never would have before."

Denice explained that the experiences of empowerment are present within the intersection of feminism and yoga because they are multidimensional constructs: "Yoga brings a physical practice, an emotional practice, a spiritual practice… Feminism has also contributed to my life in those different ways. I see similarities in that respect, in terms of how it empowers us as women." Carmen shared that, "fundamentally empowerment is a huge theme that comes from both of them in my life… And feeling like I have control over my life and that I have power and that I have a voice." Susan shared that both yoga and feminist supports gave her "a sense of self and a sense of strength… to a point where you become a little more self-reliant." Macy asserted that this newfound confidence originates from the space provided in feminism and yoga that opens "you to connect with the truth… of who you are… Connecting with that deeper part of who you are, which gives you strength and empowers you." Macy added to this when she said that "feminism gives you a

new framework" or language to name our experiences. Kali shared that when she started practicing yoga while "influenced by feminism," she experienced a connection to the empowering choices she could make about her body, stating that: "I can do all of these things with my body and it's just my decision." She went on to say that "yoga is very empowering because it's something that I'm choosing to do myself and it's just for me… it's not to make anyone else happy or live up to some role."

Many participants artistically expressed this experience of empowerment through their creative pieces. The instructions for the creative piece were simply to present a creation that expressed their experience of a survivor of sexualized violence who has engaged in both yoga and feminist experiences. Jacob shared in her creative piece that "rising from the ashes" and creating "a new life" was possible through the combination of her feminist supports, yoga, and self-care. Denice shared that her creative piece was completed "right as the relationship ended" and served as a "release." Kali's creative piece was almost completely redone and she shared that "re-doing this art work was healing, it was a form of closure." She later threw out the painting, which felt like "a fresh start." Susan shared that her creative piece illustrates how yoga and feminist experiences have "broken me open" and "lifted me up."

Many participants shared that during the practice of yoga they made empowering and respectful choices for themselves. Furthermore, while the emotional and physical stress experienced within yoga was overwhelming at times, it was often followed by a physical experience of "letting go" of the stress and

anxiety. Many participants felt strong that the feminist lens provided an opportunity to work through the experiences that surface in a yoga class, leaving them even more empowered. Participants felt that their combined experience of feminism and yoga was cyclical (see figure 4.13). Lucy spoke to how the integration is representative of "an infinity symbol" because healing can "continually move." It was said that sharing the experiences within their yoga practice and further elaborating on their personal trauma inspired the women to "commit to letting it go" when they return to yoga, furthering their experience of healing and empowerment (see figure 4.14).

Figure 4.13

In summary, participants suggested that there is indeed 'something more' offered within the intersection of feminism and yoga. This 'something more' includes a safe community, internalization of an enduring body image, challenging the dualism of mind and body,

Figure 4.14

Thought Box 17: Digging Deeper

So what is the actual healing process? Why is it unique? What happens within feminist yoga healing?

letting go, and moving from vulnerability to strength to empowerment. Chapter 5 presents an analysis of these descriptive findings.

Chapter 5: Meaning Making

Chapter 5 revisits the findings presented in Chapter 4, this time exploring the essence of the data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To honor the collective knowledge that emerged within the focus group, the chapter begins with an explanation of how the thesis question itself was challenged. Chapter 5 then reveals the intricacy within the intersection of feminism and yoga through an analysis of the 'Gordian knot' metaphor. The essence of this chapter is the consideration of the three healing processes embedded within the space that is the intersection of yoga and feminism: the easing of physiological symptoms, the provision of a language that promotes integration, and the engendering of a safe space. The chapter closes with a graphic representation of the feminist yoga healing process.

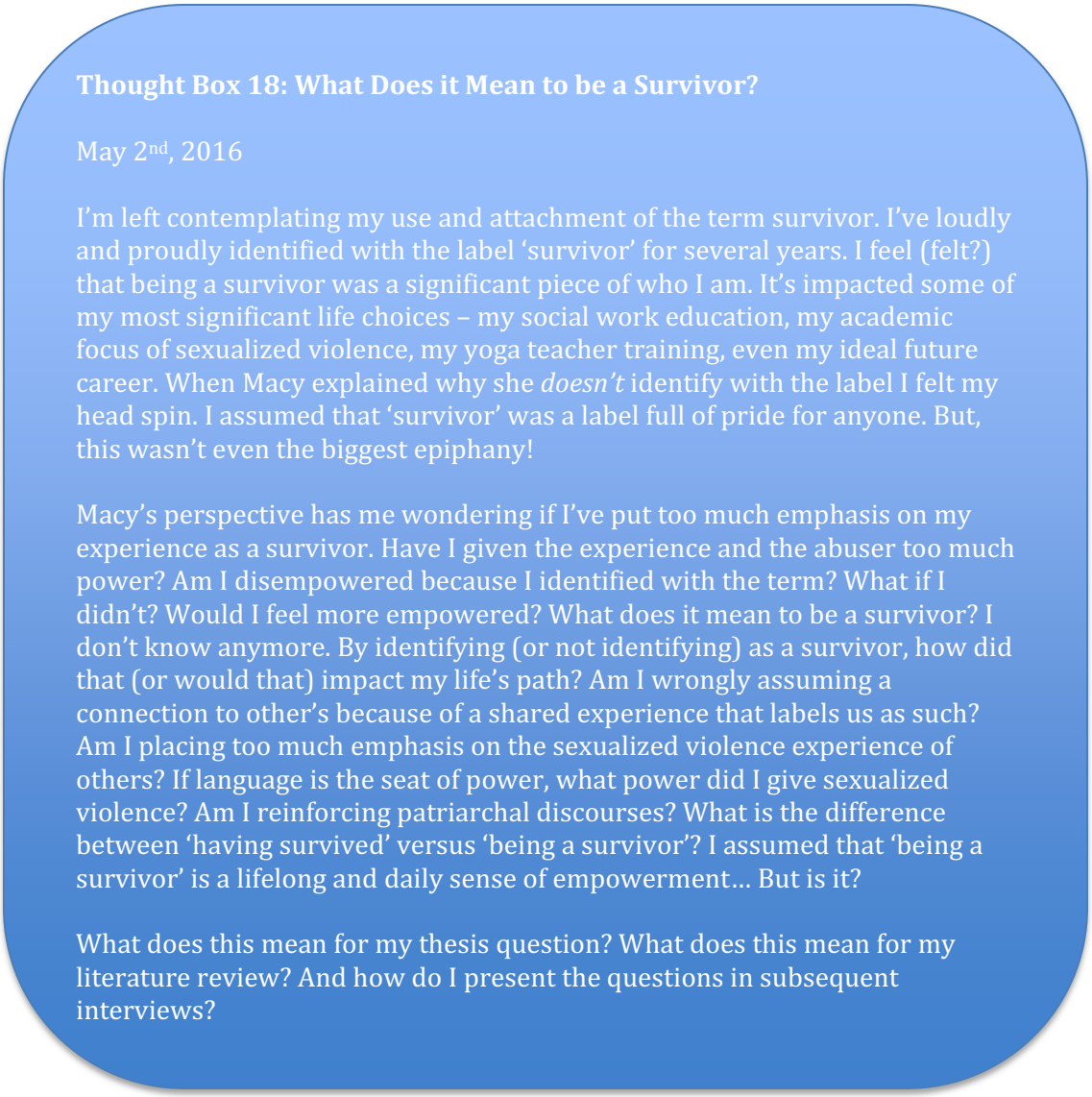
5.1 Questioning the Question

While the guiding thesis question (How might a yoga practice and feminist experience intersect to support the healing process of women survivors of sexualized violence?) resulted in an abundance of rich data, the question itself was challenged during my very first interview with Macy. Macy shared that the term "survivor" is a powerful label that she struggles with, saying that:

> I am a person who has experienced this [sexualized violence] much like everyone who you'll be interviewing, but it is not definitive of me. It is a tiny piece of what makes me up… It [the label survivor] feels narrowing… It's also a word that ties me to the act of one person.

See figure 5.1 for my internal reflection about this piece of our interview.

Figure 5.1



Interestingly, this struggle with the label of survivor surfaced again during the focus group, with several women becoming excited by Macy's words. She shared our original conversation and added:

> We fought forward… and that takes a lot of strength and courage, but for me… the term survivor really ties me to the act of one other person. And my life is bigger than that and it's… only a tiny piece of the whole of who I am."

The women expressed that moving from victim to survivor "was very empowering," but this shift from survivor to 'one who has survived/experienced sexualized violence' appeared to be even more liberating. As an example, Denice, who was previously struggling with the survivor label for reasons unbeknownst to her, was grateful for Macy's perspective and was in agreement that the word "gives it [sexualized violence] too much emphasis." Additionally, Susan shared that she would not define herself as a survivor either, rather: "I would define myself as a lot of other things… one piece of me is the fact that I have survived a handful of terrible situations that I didn't deserve." Interestingly, this collective knowledge creation shifted the experience of sexualized violence from one of present tense (I am a survivor) to one of past tense (I have survived), thereby leaving the sexualized violence in the past.

There is considerable discussion about moving from victim to survivor, and some discussion about moving beyond survivor. For instance, Nissim-Sabat (2009) challenges both terms – victim and survivor – asserting that they support individualistic victimization, instead of focusing on the social and psychosocial factors, enabling the dualist nature of victim/survivor and abuser/oppressor to exist. Further, the term 'survivor,' like 'victim,' is still a noun and, as such, "describes a person according to their experiences of (and resistance to) violence, and nothing more: it is one-dimensional" (Ephemeradical, 2012, para. 19). This focus group conversation also prompts the question: Is it time to shift our language from 'survivor' to 'have survived' or something else altogether? See figure 5.2 for a journal reflection on this challenge to the language embedded in the thesis question.

As can be seen within the thesis question (How might a yoga practice and feminist experience intersect to support the healing process of women survivors of sexualized violence?), this initial enlightenment offered by Macy did not change my thesis question. In retrospect, I am satisfied with the decision to move forward with the term survivor because had I chosen otherwise it may not have spurred the liberating knowledge creation within the focus group. Additionally, this new understanding of the label 'survivor,' experienced within the focus group, highlights the need for further dialogue to collectively create a new and empowering language that challenges the confines of the label.

Figure 5.2

Thought Box 19: Leave it in the Past.

August 3rd, 2016

I had the biggest epiphany! I was wondering what the different is between 'having survived' and 'being a survivor.' After leaving Macy's interview I was overwhelmed and spent days pondering what it means to be a survivor and my attachment to the label. I was nervous about going into other interviews, wondering if I was inappropriately assuming a shared perception of the label. But as I listened to the women speak, it became clear: 'having survived' leaves the experience in the past. Changing the language to 'having survived' means sexualized violence is not a part of the every day, nor is it a part of the whole self. Sexualized violence is nothing more than something awful that happened… in the past! So what does this mean for women who I connect with in the future? What does this mean for the path that I've traveled? Will this shift the path I'm on? Will this language shift the experiences of the women in the focus group? And how? And why? Will they see it as an opportunity to leave the sexualized violence in the past? Or am I again inappropriately assuming a shared knowledge?

5.2 Embracing the 'Gordian Knot'

Chapter 4 presented the difficulty that participants experienced when attempting to articulate what exists within the intersection of feminism and yoga,

despite their firm assertion that these two experiences provide an undeniable depth to their healing process. They also expressed confusion about the various ways in which they experienced the trauma of sexualized violence (in their thoughts, emotions, and bodies). My initial intention for this data analysis Chapter was to boldly untie all these strands and thereby 'solve' this unique Gordian knot. However, this intention shifted as I worked my way through the analysis.

In reviewing the basic assumptions of European epistemology Lander (2009) states:

> one particular kind of knowledge-Western scientific knowledge-is understood to be true, universal, and objective-the form by which all other ways of knowing are simultaneously defined as ignorance or superstition. In Western knowledge, the *separation of reason and body lies at the base of a 'disembodied,' desubjectified knowledge* [emphasis added]; these divisions sustain its pretensions to objectivity and detachment from time and space as a universal knowledge. (p. 41)

Given the prevalent devaluing of affective and embodied ways of knowing and the resultant privileging of cognitive ways of knowing, it makes sense that participants in my research internalized confusions about the value of the different ways they 'knew' about their experience of sexualized violence. This confusion was evident when they expressed frustration with the cultural disconnect between their emotions, minds, and bodies. But such a devaluing of multiple ways of knowing discounts what is known about the impact of trauma.

Levine (1997) states that after a trauma the "mind becomes profoundly altered" (p. 5). Crews et al. (2016), highlight the feelings of shame, blame, and isolation that arise after an experience of sexualized trauma. Finally, van der Kolk (2014) speaks to the "unbearable physiological reactions" (p. 53) that result from trauma. The work of these researchers, and the multiple others reviewed in Chapter 2, clearly demonstrates that sexualized violence is a simultaneous attack on a woman's cognitive, affective, and embodied health. This means that the trauma from sexualized violence is known and experienced in multiple ways and has multiple manifestations. Therefore, any suggestions for addressing this trauma must reject the separation of reason and body that Lander discusses, and encompass multiple ways of knowing.

The social constructionist epistemology that I used throughout the research was one way to reject such a separation. Furthermore, my firm rooting in feminist thought leads me to automatically honor intuitive and emotional experiences as valid ways of knowing. Finally, the study and practice of yoga is situated within a worldview that has a fundamentally different epistemological stance than that of the Euro-Western worldview discussed by Lander. According to Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, "*truth bearing knowledge and wisdom is distinct from and beyond the knowledge gleaned from books, testimony, or inference.* Truth bearing knowledge is first-hand, intuitive knowledge" (Iyengar, 2002, p.101). As a result of these three influences, I did not succumb to the differential valuing of multiple ways of knowing.

However, upon reflecting on both my own work and the literature, I can see that I envisioned these three ways of knowing as separate and distinct. As an

example, I stated that: “I have questioned whether the feminist healing was able to address the embodied physical manifestations of the trauma I experienced. However, during my yoga practice I found myself physically healing in a way I struggled to articulate” (p. 1). I consistently conceived of feminism as supporting cognitive and affective healing and yoga as supporting embodied healing. Berila (2016) supported my musings when she articulated the distinction between the cerebral and corporeal experiences within feminist theory. Therefore, I thought that, in my analysis, I needed to disentangle each way of knowing from the other and understand them in isolation.

However, one of the most significant learnings for me from this research was that I must understand the healing process of survivors in a more holistic and comprehensive fashion. All participants shared that healing is experienced through a comprehensive and intersectional approach that addresses the three ways of knowing and experiencing trauma. Therefore, ‘solving’ the Gordian knot is a misguided goal. Instead, by leaving the Gordian knot knotted, I can be assured that embodied, affective, and cognitive forms of experiencing, knowing, and healing are equally valued. In addition, I can be assured that the depth and complexity of the healing process will be respected, thereby offering a holistic and comprehensive approach to supporting women who have experienced sexualized violence. At the same time, articulating the inter-connected healing processes embedded in the ‘knot’ is an essential culmination to this research.

5. 3. The Healing Processes at the Intersection of Feminism and Yoga

5.3.1 Easing Physiological Symptoms. Participants asserted that, after the "mental work" of talking about their experience of sexualized violence, they needed to give their "brain a break." This cerebral break, experienced during yoga, provided the opportunity to "let go" of stress and anxiety. The literature in Chapter 2 explains that women survivors of sexualized violence typically experience an array of anxiety symptoms – flashbacks, intrusive memories, nightmares, heightened startled response, and so on – that are often associated with PTSD. Further, such PTSD symptoms are an indication that the body's automatic survival system has taken over and, therefore, the person is in a state of "fight, flight, freeze, or submit" (Emerson & Hopper, 2011, p. 18).

Levine (1997) explains the three main parts of the brain: the reptilian brain responsible for instinctual action, the limbic brain responsible for emotional thought, and the neo-cortex responsible for rational thought. Memories, traumatic memories included, are stored within the limbic or emotional brain (Samuelson, 2011), while the reptilian brain is responsible for traumatic stress symptoms (Emerson & Hopper, 2011). The limbic brain receives information from the reptilian brain and then reacts accordingly (Levine, 1997). In the face of trauma, the reptilian and limbic brains are "massively activated," which results in terror and "intense physiological arousal" (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 95). It is at this point when the body's survival or instinctual (limbic brain) system takes over, leaving the survivor in a state of "fight, flight, freeze, or submit" (Emerson & Hopper, 2011, p. 18).

Several researchers have asserted that trauma does not end when the traumatic experience ends (Bass & Davis, 2008; Damasio, 1999; van der Kolk, 2014). Simply recalling the events is enough to trigger the same visceral sensations that were experienced during the traumatic event (Damasio, 1999). As these visceral sensations stem from the reptilian brain, they are automatic (van der Kolk, 2014). Several participants of this research shared that simply speaking about the sexualized violence they had experienced would leave them feeling incredibly anxious and full of "excess energy." Research completed by van der Kolk (2014) affirms that anything that can trigger a memory – such as a smell, physical touch, sound, and so on – can result in anxiety or heightened arousal. Reliving the sexualized violence in this way triggers the reptilian brain, causing the body to become physiologically anxious (Damasio, 1999) or trapped in the experience of fight, flight, freeze, or submit. Essentially, the mind *and* the body remain in a constant state of hyper-arousal, as if the threat of sexualized violence is present (van der Kolk, 2014).

Levine (1997) states that the "key to healing traumatic symptoms [PTSD] in humans is in our physiology" (p. 17) because these traumatic and physiological symptoms stem from a hyper-aroused reptilian brain, which then sends corresponding messages to the limbic (emotional brain). This, therefore, explains why participants would say that yoga became a space to "release tension" and give their "brain," "body… and mind a rest," as the physical practice of yoga was attending to the physiological (reptilian) part of the brain, which reassured the limbic (emotion brain). Further, this explains van der Kolk's (2014) assertion that

yoga enables women survivors of sexualized violence to experience traumatic and intrusive memories without feeling as though they are being taken over, because the reptilian brain calms and the physiological symptoms are able to settle. This helps us make meaning of both Glasbridge's assertion that yoga encouraged her to let "go of trying to stop those sensations" and allow "them to move through" the body and Macy's acknowledgment that "if I hit the mat and I'm sitting with it [stress, anxiety, etc.], and it's there throughout the practice, at some point I will feel a release. A letting go that isn't always possible up here in my head." This essential non-verbal calming of the limbic brain is one of the essential healing processes of yoga.

However, simply calming the reptilian and limbic brains, is not enough to heal from trauma. As highlighted by Levine (1997), as human beings, we must also attend to our "highly evolved neo-cortex (rational brain)" (p. 100), which is also affected during trauma. Madeline affirmed this need when she said: "you can work through… [sexualized trauma] in your body but you need to also be able to understand in your head."

But, in the midst of the myriad physiological symptoms previously described, and the control exerted by the reptilian brain, the part of the neo-cortex responsible for rational analysis shuts down (Arnsten, Mathew, Ubriani, Taylor, & Li, 1999; van der Kolk, 2014). How then can a survivor of sexualized violence feel as though they have regained control over their mind and body when the rational brain (neo-cortex) has shut down and the instinctual reptilian and emotional limbic brains have taken over? van der Kolk (2014) tells us that helping survivors of trauma articulate their experience through language is an essential and profoundly meaningful

component of healing. However, as the neo-cortex and, consequently, linguistic articulation, is rendered ineffectual during trauma, as well as in reliving trauma, survivors need assistance in finding a language that is supportive of their healing.

5.3.2 Providing a Language that Promotes Healing and Integration.

Sable and Francis (2012) tell us that "Every language has its purpose, which serves particular needs" and "all languages shape and cut up reality differently" (p. 30). Language has the power to shape our reality and offers purpose and meaning to our experiences.

Unfortunately, much of the current patriarchal language we use to talk about sexualized violence serves to support and perpetuate gendered oppression, which leaves survivors experiencing self blame and shame (Davis, 2005; Whalen, 1996). As articulated by the participants, language becomes embodied and shapes the way they think about their bodies. McMillan (2013) asserts that the patriarchal society itself is re-traumatizing, as a result of oppressive language that blames and shames women. Thus, if language is embodied, as per the participants' assertion, and patriarchal language is traumatizing, then patriarchal language furthers the *embodied* trauma, in addition to the cognitive and affective experiences of trauma. This linkage assists in making meaning of the participants' assertions that patriarchal labels and discourses feel "slap[ped] on the body," and are carried in the chest and in the belly. It also may help us understand why *speaking* about their experience of sexualized violence results in "tightness" in one's "throat."

Recognizing the patriarchal and re-traumatizing reality of dominant language leaves one yearning for a language that would support a 'healing reality' for

survivors of sexualized violence. The findings of this research suggest that a language emerging from the intersection of feminism and yoga could potentially advance such a healing reality. Combining the wisdom of the participants with that from both feminist and yogic literature one can speculate that a feminist yoga language could:

- Attend to the neo-cortex, which would calm the limbic and reptilian brains, thereby addressing cognitive, affective, and embodied trauma and reducing the associated physiological symptoms.
- Attend to cerebral and corporeal healing.
- Equally validate cognitive, affective, and embodied forms of healing.
- Respect all ways of experiencing, knowing, and healing, including those yet to be discovered.
- Understand knowledge as fluid and created through collective conversation.
- Facilitate linkages between personal thoughts, emotions, and behaviours and political structures and constructs.
- Deconstruct the ideal "yoga body" by exploring the desire to reshape one's physical body.
- Be reflective and humble.
- Challenge patriarchal discourses through the consciously choosing empowering language, for example:
    - The term 'posture,' instead of 'pose,' would be encouraged, as the term 'pose' can have a sexualized connotation to it, while 'posture' refers to one's physical alignment with the asana.

- Sexualized posture nicknames (e.g.; 'sexy girl pose' or 'yogi stripper twist'), often framed as playful in many yoga studios, would be avoided altogether.
- The popular topic of superior health, rampant within Western yoga studios, would be reframed to challenge orthorexia (an obsession with eating only healthy food), by inviting a realistic and respectful balance of physical and emotional health into one's life.

This language also has the significant ability to make personal political connections, which has been shown to be an essential component of healing for survivors of sexualized violence. A myriad of participants spoke to how feminist language "is pushing back against" the confining nature of patriarchal constructs. As an example, the unique combination of the feminist yoga language inspired participants to pay attention to themselves and their bodies in a positive light, effectively reshaping the way that they thought about themselves and their bodies. Participants claimed that this politically empowering language enabled them to see and experience their bodies outside of the patriarchal discourses that tell them they are sexualized forms. For example, when speaking about daily 'catcalls' on her morning walk to work, Glasbridge intensely shared her frustration when she said, "I'm not an object! I'm a human being! I'm not just a body! I'm not just this form!"

This empowered political understanding of their bodies translated into realizations that they were not to blame for previous trauma. When speaking to this epiphany, Susan confidently said: "I'm done with trying to convince somebody of my value." All participants shared in this realization that their value was not to be

determined by misogynist paradigms. Many participants firmly asserted that this personal healing translated into confidence as women and knowing their worth as survivors and as people. For instance, Denice stated that because feminism is associated with challenging sex and gender constructs through language "it changes how we physically experience" sexualized violence. The feminist yoga language, thus, became an embodied and linguistic healing, through "the power of naming."

Several participants spoke to a feminist yoga language that enabled them to resist a "one dimensional" definition of the self and to be simultaneously gentle and strong, which left them feeling more interconnected and "whole." In addition, when feminist language was combined with their yoga practice, it resisted the separation of emotions, thoughts, and body, thereby enabling an integrated healing experience. In many respects, the participants' articulation of the integrated feminist yoga language reinforced my decision to consider the Gordian knot as whole. Several participants spoke to how the feminist language respected the emotional and physical sensations experienced within their yoga practice. For instance, when speaking about the benefits of a feminist lens within her yoga practice, Macy shared that her feminist experiences helped her "linguistically or intellectually" comprehend her yoga experiences. Glasbridge shared that the feminist language can "validate" the feelings that surface within a yoga practice. In this way, the feminist yoga language provides an integrated cognitive, affective, and embodied healing that left participants feeling as though their minds, emotions, and bodies were all considered equally. This is in contrast to the "separation" of mind, emotions, and bodies within Euro-Western culture (Lander, 2009), which leaves us to wonder

what is "the most valid part" of the experience of sexualized violence, as articulated by Kali. Thus, combining the feminist language with their yoga practice fostered an experience in which participants could experience themselves as an integrated whole.

5.3.3 Engendering a 'Safe Space.' Consistently, participants spoke to the need for safety as a component of healing from sexualized violence. When envisioning a true feminist yoga space, several participants asserted that it would be an "environment [where it] is *safe* to practice" yoga. In general, safety refers to being protected from potential harm or threat. As the literature exposes, patriarchal discourses, including triggering and traumatizing discourses about women survivors of sexualized violence, have even intruded upon our Western yoga studios, thereby rendering them unsafe, as shown with the disempowering language discussed in the above list (see section 5.3.2). Therefore, a safe feminist yoga space would need to embrace feminist discourses to minimize unnecessary re-traumatization. With that, the healing process of 'engendering a safe space' has three inter-related components, which include: moving through vulnerability, to strength, and then to empowerment; reconstructing body image; and experiencing community.

Translating Vulnerability to Strength to Empowerment. It is not at all uncommon for yoga practitioners to find themselves experiencing a host of emotions during or after a yoga practice. Yet, this overwhelming experience of vulnerability was largely a surprise to many participants. For instance, Glasbridge shared that, "Sometimes we think there's nothing wrong and then we go to yoga,

and you're like 'Oh my god! I haven't thought about that in years!' or 'Why am I crying?' But it's a release." As a result of this unexpected surge of emotion, participants have shared that they say nothing and quietly leave the yoga studio to cry in private. Susan shared: "I have had a lot of nights coming home from the yoga studio feeling like I was just going to, well I did, cry my eyes out on the drive home… Because you come up against so many feelings." In my sixteen years of experience, both as a practitioner and teacher of yoga, I have felt and been witness to this vulnerability on countless occasions. One moment that stands out is during my first year as a yoga teacher. A brand new yoga practitioner joined my class and finished in overwhelming tears. Thankfully, we had the opportunity to connect after class and speak about her experience, although she never did return to yoga (at least not that I know of), despite her promise to come back the following day.

All participants spoke to the overwhelming and unexpected experience of vulnerability during a yoga practice. As an example, Glasbridge shared that during yoga she "felt completely naked" and Lucy shared that yoga made her "raw." During the experience of vulnerability within yoga, participants reported that yoga left them exposed to themselves and the world around them.

As articulated in Chapter 4, this vulnerability, when supported with a feminist lens, enabled participants to experience strength in vulnerability. This in turn translated into a distinct sensation of empowerment as their physical practice moved "off the mat." The participants' explanation of how a feminist lens supported them through their yoga experience left me wondering if the woman who came to

my yoga class many years ago would have felt more supported, and perhaps returned to yoga, if the studio was a feminist space.

This transition from vulnerability through to empowerment was epitomized during the discussion of backbends, as many highlighted these postures as significant to their healing process. When speaking specifically to backbending postures, participants shared that they were often met with such intense emotion that it became physical, to the point of making them nauseous. MacGregor (2012) emphasizes that the emotional experience within backbend postures is paramount and should be respected. An analysis of the backbending postures is helpful in speculating how the intersection of feminism and yoga contributes to the movement from vulnerability through to empowerment. For a personal example, my first experience in the backbend called camel posture left me in unexpected and hysterical tears (see figure 5.3).

Figure 5.3

Thought Box 20: Will I Ever be Whole?

May 26th, 2003

I've been practicing yoga for a while now. You'd think it'd be getting easier, but it's just getting harder. Especially camel pose. Every time I lean back I feel like I'm drowning. I can smell and taste chlorine. It literally feels like I'm suffocating. My body has no trouble bending that way, so why do I feel like this? A part of me is terrified that this is another memory surfacing. I've had enough of all the memories. When will it end? Jackie thinks I should mention this to M; that I should work through in counseling. I'm just so tired of always having something to work through. I feel broken… and like there are pieces of me that are so lost I'll never be able to put myself back together, at least not into a whole person. I'll always be just bits and pieces taped together.

Reflecting back to section 5.3.1 (easing physiological symptoms), we are reminded of how the reptilian brain takes hold in the face of a threat, perceived or real. van der Kolk

(2014) explains how the body's physiological symptoms are a direct result of the information delivered from the reptilian brain. A common response when threatened is to curl up, broadening our back and protecting our heart. Backbends, however, ask that we move in the opposite direction, exposing our heart. This helps us understand why participants felt incredible resistance when beginning their backbend yoga practice.

Backbending postures do require a substantial amount of physical strength and flexibility. However, more than the physical body requirements, there is a considerable amount of mental fortitude required in many backbending postures, as they elicit fear and anxiety when the practitioner moves in an unknown direction. The literature has asserted that with repeated yoga practice, and the subsequent calming of the reptilian and limbic brains, the survivor can regain a sense of control over one's body. Further, backbends are said to "help us build confidence to truly open up" (Budig, 2012, p.299). This is in line with the findings of this research, as participants explained that, while such postures take strength, they simultaneously build strength.

Through repeated practice and combined feminist experience, participants shared that they were able to further open their physical body as well as absorb the embodied and empowering language of feminism. For instance, Julie Rose spoke to the physical opening in camel posture, saying that "it helps to stretch that area out and then it lets me take in a deeper breath," that resulted in relaxation and greater comprehension of her anxiety. This is in line with van der Kolk's (2014) assertion

that once trauma survivors feel safe in their body they can begin to translate the previous overwhelming sensations and memories into comprehensible language.

MacGregor (2012) states that it is in this delicate phase – when it is difficult to remain calm, breathe, experience clear thoughts, and emotions that are overwhelming – that the yoga practitioner needs the support of a skilled teacher. MacGregor is not generalizing to survivors of sexualized violence specifically, yet still urges the support of an experienced guide. The trauma experienced by survivors of sexualized violence, and the inability to communicate through language during such triggering postures, highlights the importance of a feminist lens in offering the words and concepts the survivor cannot access and reinforces "the power of naming." Further, this is an opportunity for the feminist language to have a deeper impact, as when in asana participants shared that they are more receptive to empowering language. Perhaps, then, it is the pairing of emotion inducing postures and empowering feminist language that promotes a shift from strength to empowerment.

Reconstructing Body Image. Distressingly, the patriarchal discourses shaping women's bodies have found their way into the Western yoga experience, which has resulted in the overwhelming ideal of the "yoga body." This "yoga body," soaked in patriarchy, is used as a marketing ploy, promising women a long, lithe, supple body through a dedicated practice of sweating in crammed yoga studios with a temperature of 100°F (Berila, 2016). Furthermore, this "yoga body" falsely presents the misguided goal of yoga as achieving the ultimate balance of strength and flexibility, culminating in perfectly positioned and majestic postures. This is

contrary to the traditional goal of yoga, or more specifically asana, which is to achieve a balance of effort and ease within postures (Devi, 2007; Iyengar, 2015). The traditional understanding has become distorted, as Western yoga is often presented as a rigorous practice that controls, challenges, pushes, and contorts the body to achieve the ultimate experience of asana. The epitome of asana is often represented with the ideal "yoga body," pictured in a magnificent posture. Further, achieving said body and posture is believed to be the result of an intensely dedicated and rigorous practice. Thus, the "yoga body" represents the epitome of yoga and, consequently, becomes synonymous with how much control we have over our lives and our bodies. So, the *ideal body* is a representation of the *control we have* as women, yet the *ideal body* is defined according to *misogynistic constructs*.

The reason the construct of an ideal woman's body persists – and has penetrated yoga spaces – is because of the underlying patriarchal discourses that tell us these are the bodies worth having (Crawley, Foley, & Shehan, 2008; Lorber & Moore, 2011). Furthermore, Crawley et al. (2008) point out that women are actually "called to 'fix' or change parts of their bodies that do not meet the beauty standards of unnatural thinness, facial perfection, large breasts, and so on" (p. 92). It is these discourses that are contributing factors to the re-traumatization of women survivors of sexualized violence.

Despite the infiltration of patriarchy into the Western experience of yoga, the practice itself has been shown to be significantly healing for women who have survived sexualized violence. Several participants stated that their yoga practice began to shift their relationship with their body. This is in line with the literature

saying that yoga enables survivors of trauma to experience a new relationship with their body, a relationship that is gentle, healthy, kind, and forgiving (Emerson & Hopper, 2011).

Most often, participants spoke to a meaningful and empowering change in their relationship with their body *only* when considering the intersection of feminism and yoga. Participants shared that through feminist language they were able to "divorce" the patriarchal constructs of what it means to be a woman in a body defined according to misogynist values. Further, through yoga they were able to physically explore what it meant to not be physically defined according to patriarchy. For instance, Kali spoke of the ability to make a decision for herself that had nothing to do with confining patriarchal roles; rather it was simply for her and her alone. In addition, many participants discussed how the intersection of feminism and yoga provided an opportunity for them to experience pride and satisfaction in their physical body and its physical accomplishments. Interestingly, participants shared that outside of the feminist yoga world, they could not share this personal pride due to overwhelming judgment.

Reflecting back on the literature of Chapter 2, we are reminded that women survivors of sexualized violence are often left disconnected to and distrusting of their bodies, feeling as though their bodies are somehow to blame for the sexualized violence experienced. Much of the literature speaks to the reconnection of a survivor to her body through yoga, as the yoga practice re-invites the woman into her body, reassuring her that her body is indeed a safe place and not at fault for trauma endured (Emerson & Hopper, 2011; van der Kolk, 2014). In addition, van

der Kolk (2014) proclaims that yoga inspires survivors of trauma to listen to and care for their bodies. While the participants of this research reinforced the above assertions, they further elaborated upon their reconnection to their body, stating that they felt a meaningful sense of pride in their bodies. The *pairing* of feminism and yoga enabled the participants to experience pride, as well as safety, which is an uncommon combination for many women in our Euro-Western culture. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, this pairing enabled them to look at their bodies as something other than sexualized, which is again an incredibly challenging task. Despite this difficulty, most of the participants shared that the intersection of yoga and feminism was an opportunity to truly accept themselves and their bodies.

Experiencing Community. Consistently, participants spoke about the power of community that is experienced within both yoga and feminism separately and how this community would be further strengthened with a merger of feminism and yoga. Many spoke of how these communities complimented one another due to their similar values, acknowledging the empowered individual and the strong community simultaneously. This supports Levine's (1997) assertion that an invaluable healing for trauma survivors is experienced within the interconnection and support of one's community. While there were no questions pertaining to community within the interview, yet several participants named the healing within the intersection of a feminist yoga community as being empowering and safe.

Angelique and Mulvey (2012) point out the significance in critical reflection and consciousness-raising with feminist communities. The psychological experience

within a feminist community involves exploring gendered oppression and confining gender roles (Angelique & Mulvey, 2012; Enns, 2010). A myriad of participants spoke to the healing qualities of comprehending gendered oppression, challenging gender roles, and releasing the anxiety elicited during these conversations in safe communities. For instance, Susan shared that because her feminist yoga community is so "intertwined" she can take the discussions surrounding sexualized trauma and oppression into yoga, then "commit to letting it go." Furthermore, Susan shared that "the yoga and women… remind me that I can do more than I think I can do… on and off the mat." Denice spoke about community as one of the primary pieces of congruence within feminism and yoga as it promotes strength "together while simultaneously being individuals."

A Feminist Yoga Space. The intrusion of patriarchy into Western yoga spaces is overwhelming. Sadly, these spaces are susceptible to perpetuating oppression and subsequently re-traumatizing the woman. As yoga, by its very nature, is designed to get women in touch with their bodies and experience vulnerability, the patriarchal nature of many Western yoga spaces renders them unsafe for women survivors of sexualized violence. Thus, a feminist yoga space is needed.

What would a feminist yoga space look like? Practically, a feminist yoga space would include décor that is empowering and inclusive. As an example, postural imagery of women in sexualized yoga postures would not be present within a feminist yoga space. Images would be respectful of the reality that there is not one body type, rather there are many.

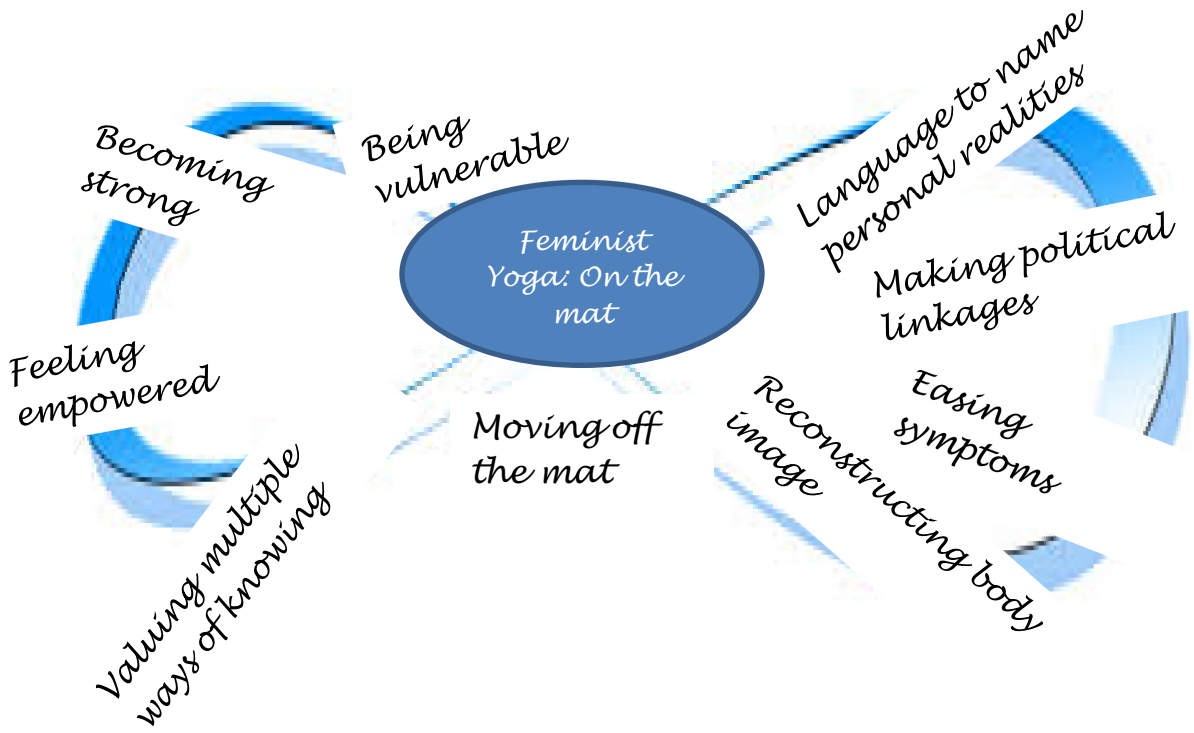
A feminist yoga space would resist the patriarchal hierarchy of student and teacher and, therefore, would position both as students, effectively learning from one another as well as each of their political or macro experiences. As such, a feminist yoga space created specifically for women survivors of sexualized violence would include dialogue, in addition to asana. Further, feminist yoga would believe that knowledge is fluid and created within collective experiences. Therefore, the dialogue that could emerge from the vulnerable sharing of feminist yoga practitioners would help to further the knowledge of feminist yoga and enrich the safety of the feminist yoga space. Throughout these conversations, a feminist yoga facilitator would be thoughtful to make use of empowering and healing language that respects the experience as collectively created within a feminist yoga space.

Facilitators within a feminist yoga space would understand, respect, and expect vulnerability to arise. As a facilitator within a feminist yoga space, it would be imperative to remain aware and prepared for the potential vulnerability and the many ways it could present (i.e.; frustration or anger could be a masking of vulnerability). The presentation of vulnerability would be framed as a courageous strength. Further, such vulnerability would be thought to enrich the knowledge creation of what it means to be a feminist yoga practitioner.

5.4 The Feminist Yoga Healing Process

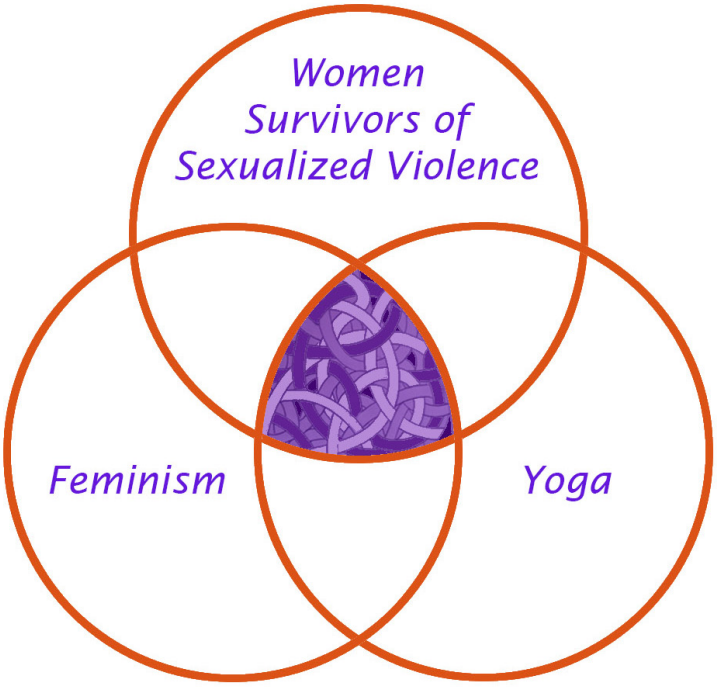
Lucy suggested that the healing process found within the intersection of feminism and yoga can be represented by the infinity symbol. ∞ This cyclical, holistic healing process can be graphically illustrated as seen in figure 5.4.

Figure 5.4



While the Gordian knot that is the intersection of feminism and yoga remains, the findings of this research explain that respecting the intricacy of the Gordian knot is the best way to understand the knot in its entirety (see figure 5.5). Further, accepting the knot as a whole enables one to simultaneously attend to cognitive, affective, and embodied experiences of trauma, thereby providing holistic and comprehensive healing. In moving to Chapter 6, the thesis considers this intersection in providing recommendations for the feminist community, yoga community, and for future research.

Figure 5.5



Chapter 6: Conclusion

Like much passionate research, the inspiration to explore the healing that exists within the intersection of feminism and yoga stemmed from my personal healing experience and my curiosity to see if other women survivors of sexualized violence shared such experiences. As demonstrated throughout the thesis, not only did the participants share my experience, but they also gifted me with a deeper understanding of the intersection as well as the healing potential that rests within feminism and yoga as an intersected approach. To bring closure to this research, Chapter 6 discusses the implications of this gift for feminism and for the yoga community. The chapter concludes by discussing the research limitations and recommendations for future research.

6.1 Considerations Arising From an Intersectional Approach

6.1.1 Considerations for Feminism. Participants overwhelmingly considered feminism to be extremely empowering and healing. The feminist practice of linking the personal to the political was often highlighted as one of the most profound pieces of the healing process. Despite this, participants felt strongly that feminism alone was not an "all-encompassing" healing practice. As discussed, yoga was said to provide additional healing not yet possible in feminism. With the healing benefits of yoga so profound, it would be unfortunate if women survivors of sexualized violence miss out on this therapeutic opportunity. It is my belief that yoga has value to feminism, specifically with regard to women survivors of sexualized violence. For this reason, it is my recommendation that the feminist community consider integrating yoga into their education and healing practices.

With trauma informed yoga training becoming more widely available, feminist counselors can enhance their therapeutic knowledge to include this embodied approach, thereby enriching the healing experience offered to their clients.

6.1.2 Considerations for the Yoga Community. Participants also emphatically referred to yoga as significant to their healing journey. Reestablishing a relationship with their body (or establishing one that never had an opportunity to form), providing the opportunity for respectful and empowering choices, enabling them to feel like a "complete human being," and releasing traumatic anxieties were just a few of the benefits noted by the participants of this research. However – and just like feminism – the women in this study remained firm that yoga was not an "all-encompassing" form of healing. Participants consistently agreed that the feminist lens is helpful to the yoga experience, particularly when considering trauma from sexualized violence.

As mentioned, patriarchal discourses have even infiltrated the yoga industry, which unfortunately includes yoga studios. Research tells us that such patriarchal discourses can be re-traumatizing to women survivors of sexualized violence (McMillan, 2013). This explains why participants of this research would avoid certain postures in a yoga studio and why they would feel more comfortable experiencing vulnerable postures in a feminist yoga space. As there is potential for incredible healing within yoga, it would be unfortunate if women survivors of sexualized violence become triggered in a space with such massive healing potential. With at least 460,000 women experiencing sexualized violence every year in Canada (YWCA, 2015) and at least 72.3% of Canadian yogis being women

(Namasta, 2016), it is reasonable to assume that a significant number of women practicing in yoga studios have experienced or will experience sexualized violence. Furthermore, the rate at which I exceeded my maximum participant numbers (recruitment was complete within just one month) also speaks to the number of women who practice yoga and have experienced sexualized violence.

The feminist lens has power to "push back against the limits" of the patriarchy, so it is my belief that yoga could benefit from integrating a feminist perspective. My recommendation for the yoga community is to create "a feminist yoga space" (Mehta, 2016, p. 230) that could simultaneously challenge the imposing patriarchal discourse and ensure women survivors of sexualized violence feel safe and supported instead of re-traumatized.

When considering yoga therapy specifically, I would repeat the above recommendation and add the suggestion of embracing a feminist lens when working with women survivors of sexualized violence. Several participants in this study felt disconnected from therapists who did not make use of a feminist perspective. As acknowledging the personal as political is a significant piece to healing (Ardovini, 2015; hooks, 2015a; Muzak, 2009; Payne, 2006; Whalen, 1996), it is my belief that adding the complementary feminist lens would improve the quality of healing provided to clients.

6.2 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

As with any research, this project had limitations, some of which emerged retrospectively. The discussion of these limitations leads into recommendations for future research.

As a beginning researcher I feel as though my research skills, in particular my interviewing skills, could use refinement. Moving through the transcripts, during the data analysis phase, I was continually left questioning myself, wondering why I did not dig deeper into some of the conversations. While I adhered to completing in-depth and open-ended interviews (Seidman, 2013), I was left to wonder if I could benefit from studying the art of interview questioning, in an effort to receive the richest information available. As I intend on completing research in the future, a recommendation I offer myself is to enhance my interview questioning skills.

While the demographics varied slightly among participants, the majority were white, middle class, able-bodied, cisgendered, heterosexual, and heteronormative. The lack of demographic variance could be due to self-selection bias, as interested participants were invited to initiate contact, instead of participants being strategically recruited by the researcher. Self-selection bias brings the characteristics of the sample population into question and heightens the potential similarity among those who choose to participate in research (Collier, Brady, & Seawright, 2010). Alternatively, while the selection criteria did allow for a more diverse population, there was a restriction in the number of women I could accept. After receiving ten participants I could accept no more, regardless of the potential diversity among the sample population. However, the identified recruitment sources may, in and of themselves, been a limitation. Perhaps, if I reached out to more diverse populations I may have increased the diversity of the participant sample. If I did have a more diverse participant sample, would the

findings be different? I am, therefore, recommending future research that purposefully recruits a more diverse group of participants.

However, the subtle demographic variance within the sample population could also be a reflection of the population of yoga practitioners. Berila (2016) states that yoga is exclusionary, consisting of mostly white, able-bodied, middle to upper class, heteronormative, and cisgendered women. Therefore, the participant sample may actually be representative of women within the yoga population. This exclusionary notion, mentioned by Berila (2016), brings yoga itself into question as a healing modality for women survivors of sexualized violence. Thus, I recommend future research exploring the demographics of yoga practitioners as well as those who have not practiced yoga. It would be useful to explore why the yoga population is so exclusive. Is it because of patriarchal discourses, as Berila (2016), Blaine (2016), and Musial (2016) posit? And if so, would the results be generalizable to women outside of the dominant labels mentioned who have yet to experience yoga? Would yoga still hold the space powerful healing benefits to those currently excluded from the practice?

A very obvious limitation of the research is that I knew fifty percent of the participants prior to the research. Some of the participants mentioned in our interviews that one of the reasons they chose to participate was that they kindly wanted to support me in my studies. Consequently, it is possible that participants provided information that they believed I wanted to hear in order to be successful in work they know I am passionate about. As this is research I intend to investigate

further, a recommendation for the future would be to purposefully exclude participants who I know.

Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that this thesis was completed in partial fulfillment of an MSW degree, but little attention was given to social work practice or practitioners. This exclusion is another limitation of the research. Feminist counselling or therapy is uncommon in our region, with feminist based social work even less so. Therefore, in order secure sufficient participants, I had to significantly broaden the criteria of feminist healing experiences beyond even a broad understanding of social work practice (see discussion in Section 1.2.4). Of the ten participants in this study, only one received counselling from a feminist based social worker, one received counselling from a feminist psychotherapist, the remaining eight received their feminist healing from their feminist and gendered education and feminist social circles. Whilst I do consider the results of this study of value to feminist practitioners within all fields, it would be useful to explore what these results specifically mean for feminist social work. With that, another recommendation for future research is to explore the integration of yoga and feminist based *social work* with women survivors of sexualized violence.

The final recommendation for future research was born from the focus group conversation that challenged the 'survivor' label, which highlighted that a new and empowering language for survivors is needed. Butler (1993) explains that a label, or a noun (i.e.; survivor), has the power to influence the way a person thinks of themselves as well as the way a person is projected to others. Interestingly, participants of this research appeared more inspired and empowered when the

label (noun) was reframed to a past experience (verb). Thus, the final recommendation for future research is the consideration of a new and empowering language that moves beyond confining labels and into descriptive experiences.

6.3 Reaffirming the Recommendations

6.3.1 Recommendations Arising From this Research. According to the literature in Chapter 2, there are two central pieces to healing from sexualized violence. One is linking the personal to the political (Ardovini, 2015; hooks, 2015a; Muzak, 2009; Payne, 2006; Whalen, 1996) and another is regaining control, respect, and ownership of one's body (Bass & Davis, 2008; Crews et al., 2016; Emerson & Hopper, 2011; Hébert & Bergeron, 2008; Levine, 1997; Rhodes, 2015; van der Kolk, 2014; West et al., 2016). As demonstrated in Chapter 5, the intersection of feminism and yoga has the potential to be an exemplary opportunity for women survivors of sexualized violence to truly know and embody "the personal is political" through the meaningful empowerment experienced. Thus, the intersection of feminism and yoga attends to both the aforementioned central pieces of healing simultaneously. In accordance with the findings of this research, the thesis presents the following two recommendations for feminism and yoga:

1. Recommend that the feminist community consider integrating yoga into their education and healing practices; and
2. Recommend that the yoga community create "a feminist yoga space" (Mehta, 2016, p. 230) to simultaneously challenge the imposing patriarchal discourse and ensure women survivors of sexualized violence feel safe and supported.

(See Appendix M for a potential outline of an eight-week feminist yoga healing program and a detailed example of week 7).

6.3.2 Recommendation for Future Research. While the deeper healing explained in Chapter 5 is exciting, it is important to remain humble so as to learn and grow from this research. As mentioned, this study is the first of its kind; therefore, future research is necessary. The abovementioned recommendations humbly illustrate the myriad of ways in which future research could strengthen and support the findings of this study. In summary, the recommendations include conducting research that:

1. Includes a more diverse participant sample;
2. Explores the exclusionary nature of the yoga community (Berila, 2016) as discussed above;
3. Considers the implications of this research for social work (see figure 6.1); and
4. Explores the potential for empowering language that moves beyond labels such as "victim" and "survivor."

Figure 6.1

Thought Box 21: Feminist Social Work or Feminist Helping?

February 2nd, 2016

I had to make a very difficult decision about whether to include social work in my recruitment criteria. My criteria are already very limiting – I am requesting that the participants are women, survivors of sexualized violence, practice yoga, and have experienced feminist helping. Feminist helping alone is not very common, feminist social work helping is even less so. I think that if I added social work in to the criteria I would never receive enough participants, and so I decided to exclude social work. However, I am a bit worried about what this means for the project at large. After all, I am completing this for my Masters of *Social Work* degree.

6.4 Conclusion

While the ultimate goal is certainly to eradicate sexualized violence against women, at this time we still live in a patriarchal system in which sexualized violence is one of many experiences of gendered oppression. With the staggering statistic of at least 460,000 women experiencing sexualized violence every year in Canada (YWCA, 2015), it is imperative that women survivors of sexualized violence receive the deep and meaningful healing they deserve. This research suggests that this deep and meaningful healing must acknowledge that the personal is political, utilize the empowering and embodying language of feminism, and support a reconnection to the physical body through yoga (asana) practice. Furthermore, the findings of this research demonstrate that this deep and meaningful healing is possible by concurrently attending to the cognitive, affective, and embodied experiences of trauma. As a feminist practitioner, I see it as my responsibility to provide such comprehensive support to women survivors of sexualized violence, while simultaneously advocating for a feminist discourse, one free of sexualized violence and respectful of all women. The merger of feminism with yoga not only encourages a turn toward the embodied and corporeal (Berila, 2016), but also toward honoring and trusting our intuitive selves. Intuitively, we know that feminism and yoga are an empowering and healing intersection for women survivors of sexualized violence. Listening to this intuition was the birth of this project. Continuing to respect this intuition will ensure the gift of knowledge received from the participants does not end with the words on this page, but continues forward with practice, education,

and research, moving toward a truly comprehensive healing experience, until the eradication of sexualized violence is a reality

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Appendix A

Participant Recruitment Flyer

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

LOOKING FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

I am looking for self-identified women who have experienced sexualized violence at any point in their life, who have practiced yoga for a minimum of 3 months, and who have engaged in feminist helping practices as a mode of healing.

You are invited to take part in a 3-part research study exploring the effects of yoga with feminist helping for women survivors of sexualized violence. Your participation in this study is completely confidential. I will explain how your privacy and anonymity will be protected prior to beginning the study. The first portion will include a 45-60 minute one-on-one interview. The second portion will include a 60-90 minute focus group interview with 6-8 women. The third portion will involve an optional creative piece. This study will take place in a quite, comfortable, and mutually agreed upon location.

For more information or to be considered for participation please contact me at:

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Dalhousie school of Social Work
Tel: 902-209-0688
Email: patricia.arnoldin@dal.ca

Please Note: (Adsum Centre/Avalon Centre/Shanti Hot Yoga) is not directly involved in this research study.

Patricia Arnoldin
patricia.arnoldin@dal.ca
902.209.0688

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Appendix B

Email to Potential Participants and/or Connections

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

Subject: An Invitation to Participate/A Request to Spread the Word
From: Patricia Arnoldin, patricia.arnoldin@dal.ca

Dear friend, colleague, or acquaintance:

I am writing to you in relation to my MSW Thesis, which is an exploratory study that considers the experiences of women survivors of sexualized violence to determine how a yoga practice can enhance the efficacy of feminist helping practices. The research is a collective case study including five to eight women survivors of sexualized violence who have received feminist helping and have connected with a yoga practice. I would be honored if you would either agree to be one of these women or if you would pass this email along to anyone with whom you believe may be interested in participating.

Anyone who is interested in the research will be asked to participate in a short pre-screening interview with the researcher to determine if they 1) identify as a woman; 2) identify as a survivor of sexualized violence; 3) have experienced feminist helping; 4) have connected with a physical (asana) yoga practice for a minimum of 3 months; (5) are not currently enrolled in any of my yoga classes; and (6) are ready to participate in such research.

In brief, I am asking research participants to: 1) join me in a one-on-one interview; 2) join myself and other participants in a focus group discussion; and 3) present a creative piece of art (either new or previously created) that outlines their relationship between their yoga practice as connected to their experience as a survivor of sexualized violence. Participants will not be asked to describe or discuss their experiences of sexualized violence; the research will focus on the integration of yoga and feminist helping as part of the healing process.

This email serves as an initial exploration of your ability and/or willingness to participate or spread the word to others. Should you agree, you may connect with me either by responding to this email or by telephone (number included in signature).

With gratitude for your consideration,
Patricia Arnoldin
E: patricia.arnoldin@dal.ca
T: 902.209.0688

Appendix C

Prescreening Interview Guide

DALHOUSIE
UNIVERSITY

1. Do you identify as a woman?
2. How long have you been practicing yoga?
3. Are you currently enrolled in any of my regular yoga classes?
4. For the purposes of this research sexualized violence is defined as being inappropriately touched in a sexualized way against your will.

   Have you experienced sexualized violence according to this definition?
5. Feminist helping practices are designed to help us understand that our experiences, while personal, are shared with many women. Feminist helping explains that our shared experiences of sexualized violence or abuse result from a society that values men over women.
   a. Have you had helping experiences that fall within this definition?
   b. Can you give me a brief description of what this helping was?
   c. How long ago did you receive this help?
   d. If feminist helping has ceased, for what reason?
6. Has it been one year or more since the sexualized violence you experience ended?
7. This research is designed to explore whether yoga and feminist helping practices used together are useful to survivors. Therefore, you will not be asked to specifically describe your experience of sexualized violence.

However, even the questions about your healing journey as it relates to yoga and feminist therapy could cause distress.

a. Would you expect these questions to be upsetting or distressing?
b. If so, how would you process this distress?
c. Do you have anyone in your life you could call on as a support person?
d. Would you feel comfortable to reach out for external or professional support to help you with your distress?
e. If so, who would you reach out to?

Appendix D

Individual Interview Question Guide

How long have you been practicing yoga?

What brought you to yoga in the first place?

If you still practice, why do you continue to practice yoga?

Describe the feminist helping practices that you experienced?

How long did you find yourself in feminist helping?

What brought you to feminist helping?

Why did you choose feminist helping?

Did feminist practices help you along your healing journey? If so, how did it help?

If anything, what was your greatest healing experienced from feminist helping?

If anything, what was lacking from your experience in feminist therapy?

Did yoga help you along your healing journey? And, if so, how did it help?

If anything, what was your greatest healing experienced from your yoga practice?

Where there any poses that contributed to your healing?

Can you name a posture that was the most:

- Grounding
- Empowering
- Troubling or challenging
- Calming or soothing

If anything, what was lacking from your experience in your yoga practice?

How, if at all, did you find the combination of feminist helping and yoga worked together for your healing?

Can you explain to me how feminist helping and your yoga practice connected or worked together?

How do you see feminist helping as being enhanced by yoga?

How do you see yoga as being enhanced by feminist helping?

What is your reason for participating in this journey with me?

What would you say is the most important thing that you have shared with me today?

Appendix E

Focus Group Agenda

5:30-5:45pm Gathering, welcome, bathrooms, snacks

5:45-6:00pm Consent & Confidentiality forms

6:00-6:15pm Who are we?

- 4 sociographs. Arranging from right to left according to the question provided.
    - 1. Who lives the furthest away?
    - 2. How long have you been practicing yoga?
    - 3. How essential is feminism to who you are?
    - 4. What is your level of comfort in being here today?

6:15-7:30pm Meaning Making

1. Sharing initial findings:

6:15-6:40 a. Flip chart paper with twelve words, four of which are ones that popped up repeatedly when speaking about the integration of feminism and yoga.

- Check the four that you think were the most common.
- Share the actual findings, speak about it with large group.
    - Empowered
    - Reclaimed Power
    - Accomplished
    - Vulnerable
- If any others were checked more than the original findings, speak about those with the large group.
- Are there any other words that you feel belong here?

6:40-7:30 b. Shift in exploration and the two new key realizations that this shift rose from.

- Original statement: To explore if women survivors of sexualized violence who have participated in feminist helping practices experience yoga as an enhancement to their healing process.
- New statement: An exploration of the integration of feminism and yoga as a contribution to the

healing process of women survivors of sexualized violence.

- Question 1: How is feminism an embodied healing process?
- Question 2: How is yoga a cognitive healing process?

7:30-7:45pm Summarizing

- Together create a body sculpture that to you depicts the integration of feminism and yoga. 7 minutes.
- Once sculpture is complete share one word/phrase/image/etc. that explains experience in the body sculpture.

7:45-8:00pm Closing ceremony

- Pass ball of yarn from one person to another sharing one word/sentence/image about how you feel about being apart of this group AND metaphorical gift (one word/phrase) that you would like to offer to the group to take forward on their journey.
- Bracelets

Appendix F

Dalhousie Research Ethics Board Letter of Approval

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY
Research Services

Health Sciences Research Ethics Board
Letter of Approval

April 12, 2016

Ms Patricia Arnoldin
Health Professions\Social Work

Dear Patricia,

REB #: 2016-3817
Project Title: Yoga as an addendum to feminist helping practice with women survivors of sexualized violence

Effective Date: April 12, 2016
Expiry Date: April 12, 2017

The Health Sciences Research Ethics Board has reviewed your application for research involving humans and found the proposed research to be in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement on *Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans.* This approval will be in effect for 12 months as indicated above. This approval is subject to the conditions listed below which constitute your on-going responsibilities with respect to the ethical conduct of this research.

Sincerely,

Dr. Brenda Beagan, Chair

Appendix G

Consent Form

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

Project title: Exploring Yoga as an Addendum to Feminist helping practices with Women Survivors of Sexualized Violence

Lead researcher: Patricia Arnoldin, Master's of Social Work Student
patricia.arnoldin@dal.ca, 902-209-0688

Supervisor: Dr. Carolyn Campbell, Associate Professor, School of Social Work, Dalhousie University
carolyn.campbell@dal.ca, 902-494-1188

Introduction

I invite you to take part in a research study being conducted by me, Patricia Arnoldin, a student at Dalhousie University as part of my Master's of Social Work degree. Taking part in this research is entirely your choice. There will be no impact on your studies, employment, involvement in the yoga community, or the services you receive if you decide not to participate in the research. The information below tells you what is involved in the research, what you will be asked to do, and about any benefit, risk, inconvenience, or discomfort that you might experience.

You should discuss any questions you have about this study with me, Patricia. Please ask as many questions as you like. If you have questions later, please contact me at any time.

Purpose and Outline of the Research Study

I am doing this research to see if practicing yoga can improve the usefulness of feminist helping practices for women who have experienced sexualized violence. I would like to speak with six to eight women who (1) are survivors of sexualized violence, (2) have engaged with feminist helping practices and, (3) practice yoga. **I will not ask you to describe or discuss your experiences of sexualized violence.**

Who Can Take Part in the Research Study?

You may participate in this study if you:

- identify as a woman
- have experienced sexualized violence more than 12 months ago

- have received some sort of feminist helping as a way to heal from the violence
- have practiced any type or level of yoga of at least three months

If you decide to participate I will conduct a brief telephone screening interview to see if you meet these criteria and are ready to participate in the research.

What You Will Be Asked to Do

There are three parts to this research study.

1. I will conduct an individual interview with you to explore your thoughts and feelings about the combination of yoga and feminist helping. I will come with a few predetermined questions to guide the interview will but there will be time for a natural conversation. If you agree I will audio-record the interview for later transcription. You will have an opportunity to review and approve the transcripts before they are used as research data. You will be provided with an individual password that will be required to open the emailed transcripts. The interview will take place in a confidential location of your choice and will be between 45 and 60 minutes.

2. If you have participated in the interview you will be invited to be part of an audio-recorded focus group in which the 6-8 women who have been previously interviewed will come together to discuss the common ideas that emerged from the individual interviews. I will come prepared with a list of themes to guide the group discussion but there will be time for a natural conversation among all participants. The group conversation provides an opportunity for mutual learning and support and makes the research findings even stronger. The focus group will take place in a confidential location on the Dalhousie campus and is anticipated to last between 60-90 minutes.

3. If you have participated in the interview you will be to submit a 'creative piece' that symbolizes your experience as a survivor of sexualized violence who has experienced yoga and feminist helping. This could be a poem, a piece of music, a painting, or any other expression that you created before or during the research process. This piece can be shared with me at a time and location of your choosing, between the completion of the interview and two weeks after the focus group. You can choose to provide me with an interpretation of your creative piece or leave the interpretation up to my discretion.

All participants are required to participate in the individual interview. After that you can choose to participate in the focus group and/or the submission of a creative piece. To word it another way, you cannot participate in the focus group or creative

piece without first participating in the interview. You will be asked to sign a separate consent form for each of the three parts of the research process.

Possible Benefits, Risks and Discomforts

Participation in the research may or may not benefit you directly, but we may learn things that will benefit others in the future. You may find that discussion with other women in the focus group to contribute to personal healing and growth. There is no financial remuneration for participating in the research.

As was mentioned before, at no point in the research will you be asked to describe or discuss your experiences of sexualized violence. While this will minimize the risk associated with participation I understand that there is still a potential for distress or anxiety. There are a number of safeguards built into the research to both minimize and address any emotional distress that may arise.

1. I have already explored your "readiness" for participation in the pre-screening interview.
2. I will be available for "off the record" non-therapeutic conversation and referral throughout the entirety of this three part study up to two weeks after the focus group.
3. Dr. Campbell, the supervisor for this research, is a professional social worker with relevant experience and has agreed to be available to speak with participants for short-term support and referral.
4. If you experience distress arrangements have been made so that you can contact the Avalon Sexual Assault Centre and identify that you are a participant in this research study. The Avalon Centre is aware of the research and will arrange for an initial appointment as soon as possible.
5. I will provide you with a list of appropriate supportive resources.

If you choose to participate in the focus group there is a risk of private information becoming known to others. In order to minimize this risk you are encouraged to share only as it is comfortable for you. In addition, I will ask all participants to sign a Confidentiality Agreement designed to protect the privacy of all participants. As I am a teacher within the Halifax yoga community I will also sign the Confidentiality Agreement to reassure all participants that any and all information you share with me will be kept strictly confidential.

There are no known risks to physical health, economic well being, or to relationships.

How your information will be protected:

- All telephone or email communication with participants will be private: emails will be individual, not group, and will not mention the research process in the subject line.

- All individual interviews will be held in a private location. I will be the only person who will know that you have participated in an interview. I will also be the only person who will have access to any identifying information (unless you seek other support as described in the previous section). At the beginning of the individual interview you will be invited to choose a non-identifying pseudonym (a made up name) that I will use throughout the research, including in the interview transcripts. Please be careful to choose a name that is not related to you in any way.
- If you participate in the focus group you will choose the name you wish to use (either your real name or your pseudonym) and the amount of identifying information you wish to share. As I cannot control the conduct of participants, confidentiality cannot be assured in this part of the research but, as mentioned above, all focus group participants will sign a Confidentiality Agreement.
- No identifying information will be included with the creative piece.
- Any identifying information shared with me during the research (including names, place of employment, practice studio, etc.) will also be changed to pseudonyms. My research supervisor, Dr. Carolyn Campbell, may see the transcripts (of the interviews and the focus group) and the creative piece after all identifying information has been changed to pseudonyms.
- **You will not be identified in any way in any transcripts; I will use the pseudonym that you choose (not your name) in all written and computer records so there will be no association between you and the information gathered.**
- If the research findings are shared in any way [thesis, presentations, public media, journal articles, etc.] only group results will be discussed so that no one will be identified. This means that **you will not be identified in any way in any reports.**
- All hard copy signed informed consent forms and transcripts will be securely stored in a locked cabinet. All electronic transcripts and audio files will be stored in a password-protected file on the researcher's password-protected computer, which will be stored in a locked cabinet. Within one month of receiving my MSW degree from Dalhousie University all electronic files will be deleted and any hard copies will be shredded.
- As a citizen and a professional, and as mandated by provincial law and professional ethics, I have a duty to report suspected child abuse or neglect, the abuse or neglect of an adult in need of protection, domestic abuse, or any intent to harm another person to the relevant authorities.

If You Decide to Stop Participating

You are free to leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating at any point in the study, you can also decide whether you want any of the information that you have contributed up to that point to be removed or if you will allow me to use that information.

- You can withdraw your consent for me to use data collected during the interview up to one week after you have reviewed and approved the interview transcripts. After that time, it will become impossible for me to remove the interview it because it will already be incorporated into common themes to be presented at the focus group.
- If you participate in the focus group you have two weeks after the focus group to inform me if you do not wish your information to be included in the results.
- If you submit a creative piece you have two weeks following submission to inform me if you do not wish your information to be included in the results.

After the above times it will impossible for me to remove your information because it will already be anonymized.

How to Obtain Results

After the thesis has been successfully defended, I will send a private email to each participant asking if you would like to receive an executive summary of the results via email or meet with me in person to go over the results.

Questions

I am happy to talk with you about any questions or concerns you may have about your participation in this research study. Please contact me, Patricia Arnoldin, at 902-209-0688, [patricia.arnoldin@dal.ca] or Carolyn Campbell at 902-494-1188, [carolyn.campbell@dal.ca] at any time with questions, comments, or concerns about the research study. I will also tell you if any new information comes up that could affect your decision to participate.

If you have any ethical concerns about your participation in this research, you may also contact Research Ethics, Dalhousie University at (902) 494-1462, or email: ethics@dal.ca (and reference REB file #2016-3817).

Appendix H

Community Resource Pamphlet

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

Lead Researcher

Patricia Arnoldin, MSW Student at Dalhousie University's School of Social Work

Email: Patricia.Arnoldin@dal.ca

Cell: 902-209-0688

"Just like the lotus we too have the ability to rise from the mud, bloom out of the darkness and radiate into the world"
-Author Unknown

Disclaimers:

(1) **Neither Dalhousie's School of Social Work nor Patricia Arnoldin are associated with the included list of Services and Supports.**
(2) **All information is taken directly from respective websites.**
(3) **This list is not exhaustive.**

Crisis Services

Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team (MHMCT)

The MHMCT provides intervention and short term crisis management for children, youth, and adults experiencing a mental health crisis. They offer telephone intervention across Nova Scotia and mobile response in most communities in Halifax Regional Municipality. Their support is confidential, non-judgmental, and respectful.

24/7 Resonse Line: 902-429-8167
Toll Free: 1-888-429-8167
Website: http://www.cdha.nshealth.ca/mental-health-and-addictions-central-zone-nsha-halifax-area-eastern-shore-and-west-hants/programs-and-services/mental-health-s-7

811 Telehealth

811 can provide advice on a broad range of health concerns in over 125 different languages.

4/7 Resonse Line: 811
Hearing Impaired 24/7 Respone Line: 711
Website: https://811.novascotia.ca/

Emergency Sexualized Assault Services

Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE)

The Avalon SANE program provides care while ensuring that the survivor's wants are respected. A SANE is a registered nurse who has advanced training and education in forensic examinations of sexualized assault victims. The Avalon SANE program provides medical examinations and forensic evidence collection in all of the emergency departments of Halifax Regional Municipality.

4/7 Resonse Line: 902-425-0122
Phone: 902-422-6503
Email: sanecoordinator@avaloncentre.ca
Website: http://avaloncentre.ca/services/sexual-assault-nurse-examiner/

Long Term Sexualized Assault Services

Avalon Sexual Assault Centre

Located in Halifax Regional, the Avalon Centre provides a continuum of specialized sexual assault services to those who have suffered sexualized assault. They offer individual counselling, supportive information and referral, legal and court support, and education. The primary emphasis is on immediate care/support, education, counselling and leadership/advocacy services for women.

Phone: 902-422-4240
Email: info@avaloncentre.ca
Website: http://avaloncentre.ca

Emergency Shelters

Adsum House

Located at 2421 Brunswick Street in Halifax, the Adsum House offers shelter to women, youth, and children.

24/7 Crisis Line: 902-423-4443
Phone: 902-423-5049
Email: adsum@adsumforwomen.org
Website: http://www.adsumforwomen.org/node/3

Bryony House

Located in a private location within Halifax Regional, Bryony House offers shelter to women and children escaping all forms of intimate partner violence and abuse.

24/7 Distress Line: 902-422-7650 (Collect calls accepted)
Phone: 902-429-9002
Email: info@bryonyhouse.ca
Website: http://www.bryonyhouse.ca/

Second Stage Housing

Adsum Centre

Located in Lakeside, the Adsum Centre is communal living and support to women and their children for 6-12 months.

Phone: 902-876-5011
Email: adsumcentre@adsumforwomen.org
Website: http://www.adsumforwomen.org/node/26

Alice Housing

Located in Halifax Regional, Alice Housing offers second stage housing and support to women and children escaping intimate partner violence and abuse.

Phone: 902-466-8459
Email: livesafe@alicehousing.ca
Website: http://alicehousing.ca/

Affordable Housing

Adsum Court

Located in Dartmouth, the Adsum Court is a long term supportive house for women.

Phone: 902-442-5059
Email: adsumcourt@adsumforwomen.org
Website: http://www.adsumforwomen.org/node/7

The Alders by Adsum

Located on Gottigen Street, The Alders by Adsum offers long term supportive housing for women, children, and trans folk.

Phone: 902-492-1120
Email: the.alders@adsumforwomen.org
Website: http://www.adsumforwomen.org/node/27

Victim Services

Department of Justice/Victim Services Head Office

Victim Services offer a range of services to help victims of crime in Nova Scotia, including information about Crisis Services and Emergency Protection Orders.

Phone: 902-424-3309
Toll Free: 1-888-470-0773
Website: http://gov.ns.ca/just/victim_Services/

Appendix I

Consent Signature Page for Interview

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

Project title: Exploring Yoga as an Addendum to Feminist helping practices with Women Survivors of Sexualized Violence

Lead researcher: Patricia Arnoldin, Master's of Social Work Student
patricia.arnoldin@dal.ca, 902-209-0688

Supervisor: Dr. Carolyn Campbell, PhD, Faculty of Social Work
carolyn.campbell@dal.ca, 902-494-1188

I have read the explanation about this study. I have been given the opportunity to discuss it and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that:

- I have been asked to take part in one interview that will occur at a location acceptable to me;
- with my consent, the interview will be recorded;
- direct quotes of things I say during the interview may be used without identifying me; and
- I will have an opportunity to review and approve the interview transcript

I agree to take part in this interview. My participation is voluntary and I understand that I can withdraw my consent for you to use the data collected during the interview up to one week after I have reviewed and approved the interview transcript.

_____	_____	_____
Name	Signature	Date

I agree that my individual interview may be audio-recorded.

☐Yes ☐No

_____	_____	_____
Name	Signature	Date

I agree that direct quotes from my interview may be used without identifying me.

☐Yes ☐No

_____	_____	_____
Name	Signature	Date

I agree that the researcher may contact me via email to provide me with the interview transcript for review and approval.

☐Yes ☐No

_____	_____	_____
Name	Signature	Date

Appendix J

Consent Signature Page for Submission of a Creative Piece

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

Project title: Exploring Yoga as an Addendum to Feminist helping practices with Women Survivors of Sexualized Violence

Lead researcher: Patricia Arnoldin, Master's of Social Work Student
patricia.arnoldin@dal.ca, 902-209-0688

Supervisor: Dr. Carolyn Campbell, PhD, Faculty of Social Work
carolyn.campbell@dal.ca, 902-494-1188

I have read the explanation about this study. I have been given the opportunity to discuss it and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I have been asked to submit a creative piece describing my experience as a survivor of sexualized violence who has experienced yoga and feminist helping. I agree to submit this creative piece. My participation is voluntary and I understand that:

- I can provide an interpretation of my creative piece to you either orally or written, or I can leave the interpretation my creative piece up to you;
- direct quotes of things I say during my explanation of my creative piece may be used without identifying me; and
- I can withdraw my consent for you to use the data collected as a result of submitting this creative piece for up to two weeks after submission of the piece.

_____	_____	_____
Name	Signature	Date

I agree that my explanation of my creative piece may be audio-recorded.

☐Yes ☐No

_____	_____	_____
Name	Signature	Date

Should I choose to describe my creative piece, I agree that direct quotes may be used without identifying me.

☐Yes ☐No

_____	_____	_____
Name	Signature	Date

I agree that my creative piece may be used in its entirety.

☐Yes ☐No

_____	_____	_____
Name	Signature	Date

I agree that the researcher may contact me via email to present options for the provision of results.

☐Yes ☐No

_____	_____	_____
Name	Signature	Date

I agree that the researcher may contact me via email to present options for the returning my creative piece.

☐Yes ☐No

_____	_____	_____
Name	Signature	Date

Appendix K

Consent Signature Page for Focus Group

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

Project title: Exploring Yoga as an Addendum to Feminist helping practices with Women Survivors of Sexualized Violence

Lead researcher: Patricia Arnoldin, Master's of Social Work Student
patricia.arnoldin@dal.ca, 902-209-0688

Supervisor: Dr. Carolyn Campbell, PhD, Faculty of Social Work
carolyn.campbell@dal.ca, 902-494-1188

I have read the explanation about this study. I have been given the opportunity to discuss it and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that:

- I have been asked to take part in a focus group, consisting of 6-8 women, that will occur at Dalhousie University, and that the focus group conversation will be recorded;
- the researcher cannot control the conduct of all focus group members so confidentiality cannot be assured;
- all focus group participants will sign a Confidentiality Agreement; and
- direct quotes of things I say during the focus group may be used without identifying me

I agree to take part in this focus group. My participation is voluntary and I understand that I can withdraw my consent for you to use the data collected about me during the focus group up to two weeks after the focus group is completed.

_____	_____	_____
Name	Signature	Date

I agree that direct quotes from the focus group may be used without identifying me.

☐Yes ☐No

_____	_____	_____
Name	Signature	Date

Appendix L

Focus Group Confidentiality Agreement

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

Due to the nature of the topics discussed and the possibility that we may be known to one another outside of this focus group you will be required to read, understand, and sign a confidentiality agreement prior to participation in the focus group portion of the study. This confidentiality agreement is designed to protect the privacy of you as well as everyone else who is choosing to participate in this study. It serves as a contract between me (the researcher) and each of you (as the participants) as well as between each of you to one another. It is expected that we will all abide by the confidentiality agreement and by signing this document you acknowledge that you agree to refrain from unauthorized use of disclosure of any proprietary information.

Should we choose to sign the agreement and participate in the focus group, the following is a list of the rules by which we will all adhere to:

- I understand that the names, identities, and all identifying information (including place of employment, practice studio, etc.) are strictly confidential and are not to be shared with anyone who is not a part of our group.

- I understand that I cannot reveal any information that is discussed within the focus group with anyone who was not a part of our group.

- Is there anything else that anyone would like to add?

_____	_____	_____
Name	Signature	Date

Appendix M

Eight-Week Feminist Yoga Healing Program with Detailed Week 7 Example

- Week 1: Welcoming & Why Feminist Yoga
- Week 2: Ways of Knowing, Experiencing, & Healing
- Week 3: Vulnerability
- Week 4: Physiological Symptoms
- Week 5: Strength
- Week 6: Letting Go
- Week 7: Empowerment

  Synchronized Breathing, Check-in, & Theme Discussion

  Asana (round 1)
  - Warm up and preparatory postures:
    - Marjaiasana Bitilasana
    - Virasana
    - Gomukhasana
    - Garudasana

  Check-in & Critical Reflection Dialogue

  Asana (round 2)
  - Backbending postures:
    - Anjaneyasana
    - Setu Bandha Sarvangasana
    - Ustrasana

  Check-in & Critical Reflection Dialogue

  Asana (round 3)
  - Closing postures:
    - Supta Jathara Parivartanasana
    - Supta Padangusthasana
    - Apanasana
    - Savasana

- Week 8: Closing