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## The exploration of *becoming* as a yoga practitioner and its impact on identity formation, health and well-being

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### ABSTRACT

This study ~~explores the occupational concept *becoming* through yoga practitioners' perspectives. *Becoming*, as a dimension of occupation, arguably requires further development compared to *doing*, *being* or *belonging*. The study~~ aimed to narrow the gap in understanding the health and well-being effects of *becoming* through occupation ~~by exploring the concept of *becoming* through yoga practitioners' perspectives~~. Four participants from the Southwest of England were recruited ~~to engage in through advertising at yoga studios, a health store and a University campus~~. The one-to-one semi-structured interviews concentrated on perspectives of transformation; that is, *becoming*, from their viewpoint as yoga practitioners. Qualitative interpretative phenomenological analysis brought about rich, in-depth accounts of the lived experiences of *becoming*, revealing the nature of *becoming* for a yogi, how yoga impacted their identity formation, and tensions between the Western definitions of *becoming* and yoga. The findings uncovered ~~the following~~ themes: mapping self through time and yoga practice, transformed health and well-being through doing yoga, and strengthened connections through being a yogi. The findings support the significance of yoga as an occupation that elicits *becoming* through personal transformations despite the potential for adverse effects, such as insecurity and Western conformity pressures. Yogis' depictions of *becoming* differed from the Western occupational paradigm of *becoming*, ~~as; this was~~ highlighted by participants'

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concentration on self-acceptance versus active self-promotion.

For yoga

practitioners, *becoming* involved receptivity and reinforced inner resilience. Further research is warranted on how the effects of *becoming* manifest across different meaningful occupations and diverse cultural backgrounds.

**Keywords:** Occupational science; mindfulness; personal growth; occupation; transformation

Occupational science elaborates on the complexity of occupation: its form, meaning, and physical impact on human beings (van Niekerk, 2014); thus, requires real-life examples of how engaging in occupations affects everyday life. Wilcock (1999) conceptualised occupation through *doing*, *being*, *becoming*, and *belonging* in her occupational perspective of health. [While theory about becoming exists in occupational science literature \(Hitch, 2017; Suarez-Balcazar & Hammel, 2015\)](#), in a comprehensive review, Hitch et al. (2014a) argued that *becoming* was less developed than *doing* and *being*. More recently, Bratun and Zurc (2020) have supported the need for more research on *becoming*. Christiansen (1999) stated that meaningful occupations are often maintained secondary to their importance or subjective worth. Therefore, research on *becoming* can be useful for occupational scientists in building perspective on identity formation and sustaining certain occupations which may contribute to individuals' health and well-being.

Wilcock and Hocking (2015) defined *becoming* as a motivational, inspiring force facilitating occupational engagement. Hitch and Pepin (2021) more recently theorised that social conditions influence *becoming*, acknowledging the interrelatedness of *becoming* and *belonging*.

In this paper, an individual who practises yoga is called a 'yoga practitioner' or 'yogi' (Newcombe, 2009). [Additionally,](#)

### **Yoga Practice**

Yoga refers to physical postures, meditation, and breathing exercises rooted in ancient Eastern philosophy that unites mind, body, and spirit, facilitating self-awareness (Pegis, 2009). There are many yoga variations, traditional or modernised; some more focused on

precision of posture, others on concentration, meditation and transformation of energy, which often complement each other (De Michelis, 2005).

Various yoga forms

focus on physical and psychological healing, purposed toward personal growth (Pagis, 2009). According to Iyengar (1966), this growth involves separating oneself from desire, not projecting body goals onto practice, such as “reduc[ing] body weight” (p. 85) or “size of abdomen” (p. 257), therein leaving commitments, plans, and preoccupations behind (De Michelis, 2005). Such a perspective diverges from current understandings of *becoming*, which derive from goal-focussed strategies directed towards attaining achievements (Hitch et al., 2014a), typically forged by widespread cultural expectations. These strategies are useful for structuring lives towards milestones; however, that leaves a gap where reflective, acceptance-oriented aspects of *becoming* can manifest. Yoga stereotypes have also emerged, contributing to practitioners practising in response to Western body image concerns (Miller, 2016). In modern Western contexts, yoga outcomes precipitate personal growth; however, projected body goals serve an alternative notion of *becoming*, matching popularised expectations as opposed to traditional yogic tenets. These result in detrimental changes, such as reduced self-esteem from insecurities regarding stereotypes about yoga bodies or anxieties that studios practice exclusivity based on skill level (Hinz et al., 2021).

Limited peer-reviewed academic yoga literature (in the English language and Western world) is linked to physical and identity-related transformation. Büssing et al. (2012) and Csala et al. (2021) identified that aspects of transformation need development given that yoga is considered a valuable occupation done individually and in group settings to improve personal health and well-being (Butterfield et al., 2016; Fishman & Small, 2007).

Linked to improved health outcomes.

yoga has been increasingly adopted as a suitable medium for therapeutic and recreational purposes (Cartwright et al., 2020; Sohl et al., 2011), demonstrating its relevance to current Western cultural context. For example, yoga provides mood-enhancing properties and reduces stress and anxiety per changes in physiological parameters such as blood pressure, heart rate, and cortisol levels (Pascoe & Bauer, 2015). A systematic review (Green et al., 2019) evidenced the yoga benefits for individuals at risk of falls with neuromuscular issues, such as improvements in individuals’ posture control and flexibility (Chugh-Gupta et al., 2013). While studies primarily centre on positive benefits, noted adverse effects of yoga, including injuries resulting from physically vigorous yoga modalities (Cramer et al., 2019), complexify the understanding of health-promoting occupations. Cramer et al.

(2019) focused primarily on physical health effects, missing a vital aspect of yoga's impact on individuals' mental health. We sought to study *becoming* in relation to doing yoga to explore the transformative potential for individuals and their everyday lives.

### **Becoming**

Researching *becoming* can expand understanding of how individuals make sense of themselves in the world, physically and introspectively, informing on identity formation (Hitch et al., 2014b). When people participate in meaningful occupations, they construct their identities (Kay & Taylor, 2015); this process is continuous and influenced by personal values (Yerxa et al., 1989). Christiansen (1999) posited that identities are influenced by the potential of whom a person might *become* through engaging in occupation. Self-competence in occupation influences individuals to maintain those occupations. *Becoming* ties into identity formation as one's perceived possible self is formulated by motivated behaviour. This behaviour is often influenced by positive or negative social or internal feedback (Maersk, 2021).

Consequently, we inquired as to how being a yogi can impact this unending construction that is *becoming*. This inquiry offers another way to build occupational science knowledge, entertaining a bottom-up approach of first experiencing mindfulness in the body and mind and then exploring how that experience impacts mental self-awareness over time, as yoga practice encourages (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). When the physical self regularly experiences mindfulness, increased self-awareness ensues (Kabat-Zinn, 2013), informing how individuals manage life challenges over time. Such understanding is essential to widen the platform for discussing transformative opportunities in occupation.

*Becoming* can manifest through mutual interactions with others; that is, *becoming* through connectedness (Hitch et al., 2014b). Evans and Rodgers (2008) highlighted that families could *become* through strengthening their communal ties and that family time strengthens bonds and builds a shared identity. Therefore, further research, such as the present study, may also enhance the understanding of *becoming* through connecting with others.

### Intersection of Yoga and Becoming

In Eastern contexts, yoga is a necessary measure towards enlightenment. Western yoga culture adopted and moulded Eastern yogic traditions of self-development to fit modern Western paradigms (Pegis, 2009). In connecting occupational science understandings of *becoming* to a Westernised yoga practice, we investigated how differing interpretations of *becoming* exist, constituting self-development.

Peer-reviewed yoga literature has primarily concentrated on empirical evidence of *becoming* healthier and less on yoga's holistic effect on *becoming* as self-development. Articles in academic journals and published books were reviewed for their inclusion of both yoga and *becoming* no studies were found explicitly pursuing this relationship. However, three studies were critically appraised for their contribution to *becoming* and yoga. A cross-sectional survey of over 500 yoga students and teachers in the United States, described why individuals adopt and sustain yoga practice (Park et al., 2016). Park et al. (2016) hypothesised that the more time spent practising yoga, the higher potential for spiritual transformation. However, the authors did not assess how people make sense of their physical and mental improvements or transformation. The mainly female, Caucasian, well-educated participant demographics meant the findings were concentrated on a particular sector and may not be generalisable.

Similarly, an ethnography of prison inmates explored the potential for yoga to foster well-being and self-transformation (Griera, 2017). The research rendered rich, in-depth accounts of self-transformation, where yoga became a vehicle for survival and dealing with uncertainty. The large sample size of 52 multicultural men and women provided ample diversity of experience. However, while Griera (2017) justified using interviews to complement observational findings, the use of and lack of justification for a survey raises questions about appropriate use of methods and reduces study reliability.

Garrett et al. (2011) studied benefits of attending a yoga programme and empirically investigated the impact of yoga on individuals' health. Changes in individuals' health indicated transformation, given its definition, which is noteworthy for the current study's aim. Procedurally, Garrett et al. (2011) used interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith et al., 2009) to investigate doing a 10-week yoga programme. However, the researchers' relationship to the study was not explicit, which may have affected the interpretation of participant interpretation, or double hermeneutic (Giddens, 1984). As such,

their methods were arguably not sufficiently congruent with their research design because the nature of IPA is to explicitly illustrate the double hermeneutic process. Exposing the researchers' critical examination of their role, bias, and influence on analysis in any study method improves credibility and validity (CASP, 2018).

## Methods

We took a constructivist epistemological stance, acknowledging that knowledge does not derive from facts; humans create knowledge through their thoughts and interpretations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Given this constructivist viewpoint, a qualitative research approach was chosen to explore how being a yogi can impact identity formation and *becoming*. The primary author utilised IPA (Smith et al., 2009) to capture yoga practitioners' lived experiences. The second [author](#) reviewed the data and findings. IPA recognises producing an account of individuals' experiences necessitates a process of interpretation (Smith & Osborn, 2015). Therefore, the researchers implemented the 'double hermeneutic' (Giddens, 1984), meaning they interpreted stories revealed by participants, who made sense of their own experiences as they spoke about their yoga occupation (Smith et al., 2009).

The primary author chose this method to recognise the role of yoga in her life. [It](#)

The primary author chose

this method to recognise the role of yoga in her life. [It](#) required her to acknowledge the data alongside subjective contexts, augmenting study rigour. [This sense-making of the phenomenon of becoming as a yogi occurred among both researchers \(Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2009\).](#)

[An](#) iterative sense-making process was required between researcher and participant

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required between researcher and participant experience of the phenomena (Peat et al., 2019). The primary author used a reflexivity journal to self-critique and acknowledge what personal responses and reactions arose during interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2013), analysing how her situated context affected her interpretations. Despite limited experience applying occupational science terms to real-life phenomena, the author had some understanding of the transformative aspects of yoga, as her practice positively impacted her wellness and inner growth. This interest may have influenced emphasising the connection between the occupational concept of *becoming* and yoga. The secondary author was not involved in yoga, which may mitigate against potential bias.

### *Sampling*

In alignment with IPA, a homogenous sample; that is, a particular set of individuals who may experience a similar phenomenon, was sought (Noon, 2018); and was purposefully idiographic to explore an abstract topic (Smith & Osborn, 2015), such as *becoming* as a yogi. Using purposive sampling to recruit health-focused yoga practitioners in a city in Southwest England, leaflets and flyers were distributed at yoga studios, a local health food store, and a university campus. Prospective participants contacted the primary researcher, and the first four individuals who offered to participate over 3 months were selected.

A smaller homogenous sample allowed for rich, in-depth exploration of the concept *becoming*. The researchers prioritised a deeper analysis which is essential to IPA (Wilde et al., 2019).

The study received ethical approval from the University of Plymouth's Faculty Ethics and Integrity Committee (19/20-524).

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, a necessary measure for producing research with integrity (Alderson & Morrow, 2011). Participants were given the right to withdraw and offered links to support services to address risk of harm, such as emotional distress from recalling personal histories. Participants did not use these measures.

The inclusion criteria required participants to be at least 18 years. There was no upper-age limit as lived experiences were welcomed across the lifespan. Adolescents were excluded for ethical and practical reasons, like safeguarding and access barriers (Hiriscou et al., 2014) and as their sense of identity and thought articulation might differ from those of adults (Erikson, 1994; Smith et al., 2009).

Participants needed at least 6-months yoga experience to ensure they were sufficiently knowledgeable about their relationship with yoga to produce the in-depth responses requisite for IPA (Noon, 2018). Just one yoga class is evidenced to alter one's emotional state and energy level (Park et al., 2020); thus, inquiring how these changes occur over a series of months arguably could elucidate a sense of *becoming*. Accordingly, there was no cap for duration of yoga involvement. The sample did not restrict yoga style because different facets of yoga are complementary, and practitioners often practise varying techniques (La Forge, 2005). The four participants were of similar race, female, mostly middle age, and with higher education (Table 1).



**Table 1**

*Demographic Participant Characteristics*

<u>Participant (pseudonym)</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Age (at interview)</u>	<u>Ethnicity</u>	<u>Educational Level</u>	<u>Years practising yoga</u>
<u>Joy</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>British White</u>	<u>Higher Education</u>	<u>14</u>
<u>Fena</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>58</u>	<u>British White</u>	<u>Higher Education</u>	<u>6</u>
<u>Harriet</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>52</u>	<u>Irish White</u>	<u>Higher Education</u>	<u>10</u>
<u>Laura</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>45</u>	<u>British White</u>	<u>Higher Education</u>	<u>26</u>

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*Data Collection*

<u>Participant (pseudonym)</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Age (at interview)</u>	<u>Ethnicity</u>	<u>Educational Level</u>	<u>Years practising yoga</u>
<u>Joy</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>British White</u>	<u>Higher Education</u>	<u>14</u>
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Data were collected via one-to-one semi-structured interviews (Reid et al., 2005) in English, with a loose interview schedule (see Appendix A1) to elicit in-depth anecdotes of the lived experience of *becoming* in yoga practice. Questions centred on how yoga affected different areas of participants' lives and identities, such as, "Can you describe how yoga has affected your sense of confidence or self-assuredness in everyday life?". Questions also focussed on evoking feelings experienced when participants reflected on their transformations as yogis. The primary author formulated ~~an~~ the interview schedule using her previous yoga experiences and literature on *becoming*. *Becoming* was pursued through open-ended questioning using terminology such as 'transformed', 'changed over time', and

'identity'. The interview schedule was fine-tuned following feedback from a certified yoga instructor on the impact, relevance, and coherence of questions for individuals regularly practising yoga.

Interviews lasted 50-70 minutes and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to gain a rich account of individual experience. The primary researcher took notes during interviews to record interpretations and necessary clarifications (King & Horrocks, 2010). Participants were given pseudonyms (Table 1) to ensure confidentiality.

As the research took place during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United Kingdom (GOV.UK, 2020), only two could be interviewed participants face to face. The latter two participated via video conferencing (Skype) to respect social distancing measures. The same methods for audio recording and transcription were maintained across interviews. Videoconference participants were advised to be in a private, quiet room to reduce distraction and facilitate immersion in the interview experience (Irani, 2019). This change in procedure was cleared with the ethics committee.

### **Data Analysis**

Theme-making was facilitated using the IPA visual text example provided by Smith et al. (2009). Transcripts were organised into three columns:

'emergent themes', 'transcript' and 'exploratory comments', to give a vetted structure to data analysis. The researchers prioritised an iterative and inductive approach so that exploratory comments generated broader themes (Patton, 2002).

Subsequently, emergent themes were assembled from each case seeking patterns within transcripts to build super-ordinate themes. Thematic guidance from previous transcripts can facilitate forging connections between multiple transcripts; nevertheless, bracketing occurred to highlight transcript individuality (Smith et al., 2009) and bolster analysis validity. The researchers asked participants not to attempt modifying data to say the *right* thing when offering member checking after data collection (McConnell-Henry et al., 2011); however, no participants chose to return feedback which facilitated an idiographic and unadulterated participant perspective.

### **Findings**

Three superordinate themes and seven sub-themes captured becoming through yogis' perspectives in interviews (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

Superordinate Themes and Sub-themes

Superordinate themes		
Mapping Self through Time and Yoga Practice	Transformed Health and Well-being through Doing Yoga	Strengthened Connections through Being a Yogi
Sub-themes		
Self-awareness through becoming	Embodying yogic values	Becoming in relation to belonging
Yogic values penetrating identity	Increased resilience	A supportive network reinforces becoming
Self-acceptance		

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### Mapping Self through Time and Yoga Practice

This theme describes how individuals tracked their own development, identity influences, and self-awareness with the help of yoga in their lives.

#### Self-awareness through becoming

Harriet, who lived with chronic fatigue syndrome for over 2 decades, commented: "Looking back now, I probably still saw myself as a sick person with an illness, whereas now... I think of myself as stronger than I've been for years". Similarly, Laura described: "As I got older, you know so, so to begin with more of a warrior... go out there, and then as I think more... it's more sort of reflexive...". Laura associated her past with higher energy compared to her present, more "reflexive" self she became after having children. For both, continued yoga practice throughout different life stages, such as being ill, healthy, young, older, or a mother impacted their identities. This finding suggests one's self-concept in yoga over time is mutable and continued practice manifests new identity aspects.

Concerning self-perceived transformation, participants acknowledged their *becoming* as unique and ungeneralisable. Fena grew up practising mindfulness in her Quaker community; Laura started yoga on a retreat to India in early adulthood, and Joy began yoga as an adolescent in reconnection with her mother. Harriet likened it to “*a natural progression*”, evoking an unstructured, fluid nature to her *becoming*, as opposed to purposefully steered growth. Laura suggested that *becoming* in yoga can be dynamic and variable: “*I don’t see it as a linear, transformation as a linear thing, you know, there can be moments... you can have like mini-Samādhis*” [Samādhi, a yogic term, refers to self-realisation or an altered state of consciousness (De Michelis, 2005)]. Joy noted how yoga affected her confidence,

I don’t know, it’s probably something that I don’t notice and is almost like ingrained in myself ...called it poise and I don’t know if that’s something I’ve just always had or if that something that has come from yoga, but I always think it’s from yoga.

Reflecting on how yoga impacted her cumulatively over time, Joy noted it was not measurable but present within her. However, a less optimistic side of *becoming* arose when Joy answered about yoga skill level: “*Part of me feels worried about pushing my body too far, but also I don’t understand it, and maybe I feel like I’d never get to expert, I don’t know*”. This statement reveals that an individual can also feel insecure in *becoming*, indicating adverse parts of *becoming*.

Further, participants actively noted *becoming* increasingly aware of taking care of their health. Fena noticed increased food consciousness: “*Just far more aware of my needs*”. Joy stated, “*When I’m doing more yoga, then, I am... feeling better and I’m more able to do other things that are a form of self-care*”. The routine inclusion of yoga fostered health consciousness in all participants. However, when practising for body image concerns, self-awareness became self-consciousness:

It was always really peaceful and um, quite slow...and since then I’ve sort of only ever found hour-long ones and, I think I do get swept up into the sort of um, the energetic side and thinking about your body and wanting to change your body. (Joy)

Joy addressed her class choices based on pressures to conform to yoga stereotypes. Aforesaid negative *becoming* diverges with the positive *becoming* as a yogi, illuminating potential societal impact on *becoming*.

#### *Yogic values penetrating identity*

In the face of Western societal norms and modern yoga stereotypes, all participants

wished to project an authentic self-image that emphasised physical health and broadened self-awareness. Fena claimed: “*Doing yoga and meditating together is actually quite a rebellious act against our society, which I’m sort of all for* [bursts into laughter]”, indicating communal yoga fuelled her nonconformist self-identity. Unanimously, convergent themes of prioritising authentic yoga based on philosophy arose, elucidating how that impacted identity. On evolving her style of yoga practice, Joy said:

Ugh, (laughs) I don’t like it, like hearing myself talk about it, I’m like oh that’s such a shame, getting drawn into like, I don’t know, like Western white ideals of bodies and, and how yoga can accomplish that and sculpting yourself through yoga... but it’s probably what I do get drawn into.

Joy highlighted fears related to Western thin body ideals. She was the sole participant to do so, suggesting her younger life phase may impact self-image.

#### *Self-acceptance*

Laura reflected that she accepted her current self and wished to avoid “*egotistical manifestations*” of a future desired self when asked about her wishes of *being* and *becoming*. In occupational terms, her sense of *being* is more self-accepting and her future projection of *being* is rejected. She noted: “*What I’ve said today is where I am today..., and it can’t be any other way, can it really?*”.

#### ***Transformed Health and Well-being through Doing Yoga***

This theme describes how individuals’ health and well-being were affected by regular yoga practice. It produced increased resilience and an embodied yogic presence that increased wellness and linked to deeper spirituality.

#### *Embodying yogic values*

Well, I think it’s quite a relief, and the realisation is that you can control yourself but not what’s going on outside [says listlessly], and that you can bring some calm with whatever storm you’re experiencing, um, but it is [assertive tone] the mindset that enables you to do that. (Harriet)

Fena contributed,

Every night I’ll have feet up the wall, favourite [yoga] pose, coz it is just, it just feels so good, um and I do, do meditation every day... but it has become much more

ingrained into my day. I start and end my day with a meditation.

Embodying values from an occupation like yoga can influence one's personal growth, or *becoming*, through seaming it into the fabric of their day. Joy noted, "*It was a part of my identity, and it was almost like a confidence in it*". The confidence from embodying yoga can permeate everyday occupations, influencing participants' *becoming*.

Participants suggested the physical environment could encourage and motivate deeper yoga embodiment and spirituality. Fena thoughtfully countered around embodying yoga: "*It is really lovely to set the scene and be in a lovely calm... but the reality is... [pause] you need to be able to reach that space wherever you're at*". Embodying yoga steered participants towards more profound spirituality but, as Fena remarked, yoga philosophy instructs individuals to find that space despite the external context. This converged with Harriet's statement on bringing 'calm' to any 'storm' she experienced.

Joy used the term "*go[ing] to*" when describing the outcome of breathing exercises. Similarly, Harriet used "*that world*", connoting a separation from the current world. A converged finding emerged where yoga became a means to go beyond the current world. Without anyone referencing personal religiosity, in between participants' texts a candid reverence of yoga's transcendent significance surfaced.

#### *Increased resilience*

Participants equipped themselves with strategies to overcome life obstacles through mindfulness. "*I always find myself going back to... (exhales with relaxation) breathing techniques that I've learned through practising yoga*" (Joy). All participants relayed new power gained through managing their thoughts with breathwork or meditation. Harriet noticed: "*I feel a lot more flexible... will that make me more adaptive, not just physically but mentally?*" Harriet embodied yoga philosophy by maintaining calm during challenging moments. She said she was "*becoming more resilient again*". Practising yoga potentially contributed to increased adaptiveness and resilience to everyday stresses. For example, Joy answered about regularity,

I'd be in a state of turmoil... and as soon as I went to a class, like I'd just be grounded again and yeah there was something that just pulled back into myself, I think almost like showed me the way, so it's something that I come back to, um, especially in times of stress.

Joy exemplifies how one's motivation to sustain yoga reinforces resilience. Resilience relates to *becoming* in yoga as all participants developed increased flexibility toward distress over time.

### ***Strengthened Connections through Being a Yogi***

This theme describes how individuals' *becoming* was influenced by practising with others; findings included deeper yoga experiences leading to greater self-efficacy and yoga offering a way to maintain relationships.

#### *Becoming in relation to belonging*

For Laura, yoga practice provided "a feeling of *community that there's a whole lot of us doing it together um... yeah through a process of transformation*". Fena articulated: "*You can bounce off of other people's energies and I think Śavāsana is often much deeper, as a group practice... There seems to be a collective... [inhales]... expression*" [Śavāsana, a yogic term, refers to surrendering the physical, emotional and spiritual body (De Michelis, 2005)]. Certain individuals sustained group yoga involvement, and that *belonging* reinforced self-efficacy and yoga's place in their identities. This suggests a link between *becoming* and *belonging* in a non-linear way, where either could enhance or incite the other. Joy described how she got into yoga:

My mum and dad got divorced when I was like 15, 16... one of the ways I started to rebuild a relationship with her was through yoga... She invited me to go with her, ...and I really, I just, I really loved it... yeah just a way to get back into touch with my mum again and... to build something with her.

Here, yoga held the potential for building a bond with her mother.

#### *A supportive network reinforces becoming*

All participants emphasised having the right teacher to facilitate the most meaningful yoga experiences, implying a supportive sphere reinforces *becoming* in yoga. Laura noted, in appreciation of her decades-long relationship with her teacher: "*She's the one that's really um, yeah taught me some of the most um profound experiences and the whole sangha experience*"; she added later: "*I feel very grateful...especially in when these difficult situations come up that I have this tool of yoga and this support, this um, network*".

Acknowledging others' role in improving participants' yoga experiences demonstrates that practising communally influenced participants' transformations and *becoming* over time.

## Discussion

Generalisations cannot be claimed from results; however, theoretical links can be made which may resonate (Mason, 2002) with yoga practitioners in Western contexts.

### *Mapping Self in Time and Yoga*

Findings highlight how participants experienced increased self-awareness through their *becoming* as yogis. To our knowledge, no other studies note how yoga practice elicits such self-awareness juxtaposed with *becoming*. Perceiving the occupations that evoke self-awareness is noteworthy for occupational scientists in exploring the dimension of occupation, *becoming*, which merits continued investigation.

Participants' self-awareness spilled into their relationship with self-care, food, mindfulness, or responding to their needs. Occupational scientists can arguably discern this as a domino effect of self-care, where yoga amplifies the significance of self-care, precipitated by an increased self-awareness of its holistic benefits. This aligns with yoga philosophy around self-awareness increasing with practice.

Self-acceptance suggests a new understanding of *becoming* in that part of a yogi's evolution results from letting identity develop in a fluid, not action-oriented way through sustained yoga practice. This challenges Hitch and Pepin's article (2021) on the link between *becoming* and goal setting when compared against occupational therapy models. Arguably, *becoming* can be a receptive, flowing phenomenon that does not require active structuring to transpire.

Kang (2003) defined *becoming* as "volitionally directed growth and development of the self through active *doing* and consequent experience of flow" (p. 97). We argue against the solely volition-directed and active aspects of *becoming*, expanding its definition to a more receptive, unguided phenomenon accepted over time, given current study findings. Whilst this definition shift from active to receptive is important, we do not underestimate the need for active yoga practice to drive a yogi's *becoming*. However, this *becoming* maintains its receptive nature. Present study findings extend this argument, where self-acceptance rejects a future projection of *being*, as noted by two participants. Thus, *becoming* targets present self rather than future hopes for self which posits that *becoming* in yoga requires some surrendering of desire.

Uncharacteristic of Western contexts, releasing desire involves relinquishing self-promoting objectives, which is anticipated in yogic tradition (Andrews et al., 2020);



consequently, curated *becoming* could be redundant for occupations such as yoga. Acknowledging cultural contexts behind occupations could deepen awareness of the varied ways *becoming*, be it carefully planned or embraced more passively, can be applied by occupational scientists for promoting health and well-being.

Research on yoga as an occupational therapy intervention highlighted that receptivity and self-acceptance encourage relevant progress, noting “that’s part of yoga...meeting them...and yourself...where you are that day” (Andrews et al., 2020, p. 6). Despite *becoming* having strong correlations to transformations in yoga, its occupational science definitions ostensibly convey Western idealisations. The *doing, being, becoming*, and *belonging* dimensions arguably function in a Western paradigm rooted in individual desire; applying the paradigm to non-Western contexts could be at odds with certain philosophies. For example, when examining the inner journey in yogic philosophy, a presupposition is that one dispenses with a desire to reveal their purest self (Godrej, 2017). This may suggest the way occupational dimensions work together cannot be applied across non-Western contexts.

Participants demonstrated anecdotal connections to yoga, which gradually integrated into their present identities. That yogis elected to embrace yogic spirituality and sustain yoga as an occupation suggests it shaped their identities, supporting claims by Polatajko et al. (2007) and Galvaan (2015) that continued engagement in occupation shapes identity. When confronted with Western conformist yoga ideals, embodying yogic philosophy can arguably focus one’s *becoming*, punctuated by sustained and repetitive engagement in supportive yoga environments, ultimately securing its position in individuals’ identities.

The endeavour for an ‘authentic’ yoga experience was shared among participants. This suggests it carries weight, encouraging confidence in participants’ yogic identity and cementing the role of authenticity in their journeys. Authenticity in yoga can be paralleled to meaning in occupation; namely, authenticity boosted morale in participants’ identities, comparable to how meaningful occupation promotes well-being. Beagan and Hattie (2015) pointed to authenticity as necessary for achieving fulfilment. Occupations that impact identity arguably require authenticity to boost meaning and pride to sustain it.

Regarding influences on identity, whilst yoga is known to reduce self-objectification (Head & Hammer, 2013), seeking popularised body ideals can counter this, exemplified by a participant who struggled to balance self-acceptance with Western appearance ideals. This tension illustrated maladaptive ideals contributing to identity dissonance, a concept not related to transformation and yoga before now. The participant still clung to authentic yogic philosophy and self-acceptance, but her identity shaping was not without distraction. Such

dissonance can be avoided by aligning individuals' physical selves/reactions and inner reflexive selves, for example, through self-reflexivity produced by yogic meditation. As Pagis (2009) claimed, yoga is a meaningful agent in overcoming the mind/body disconnect triggered by trauma; sustained practice consequently transitions an identity from unwell to improving.

Pagis (2009) denoted an individual's *becoming* in yoga as driven by the alignment of mind and body. Here, sustained yoga practice produced synchronicity, suggesting positive impact on identity. Scalzo et al. (2016) underscored identity as challenged by role interruptions and occupational deprivation secondary to past trauma. In the present study, two participants overcame illnesses and consequent trauma, which interrupted their roles and occupational performance.

### ***Transformed Health and Well-being***

Results from a previous study (Ivtzan & Jegatheeswaran, 2015) reveal that spirituality strengthens with yoga practice over time and functions by producing higher psychological well-being. Present study participants gained but did not anticipate increased spirituality and resilience from their practice, having only joined yoga for its physical intentions. This suggests yoga practice with philosophically-rooted aspects can positively surprise the yoga practitioner, boosting overall wellness.

This study demonstrated that individuals experienced improvements in energy levels and physical health, building resilience reinforced by yogic philosophy (Liu et al., 2022; [Tandon, 2012](#)); this resilience establishes that *becoming* as a yogi involves a progression of inner strength building. Salmon et al. (2009) supported that physiological and psychological changes can ensue from practising *both* mindfulness and physical yoga. These findings replicate results from several studies linking yoga to health and well-being benefits (Chugh-Gupta et al., 2013; Fishman & Small, 2007; Greendale et al., 2002; [Penman et al., 2012](#); Ross et al., 2013). [While](#) evidenced before, is relevant to reiterate in the context of its implications for an individual's journey of *becoming*.

According to Bandura et al. (1997), "the inability to influence events and social conditions that significantly affect one's life can give rise to feelings of futility and despondency" (p. 153). Participants responded to these feelings by embodying yogic practice, demonstrating resilience to life challenges through acceptance. Other studies have noted that mindfulness was instrumental in managing transformation and providing coping mechanisms

(Beddoe et al., 2009; Kuechler & Stedham, 2018; Urrila, 2021). The participants' abilities to react to feelings of unease with yoga practices illustrates that their continued involvement with yoga introduced *greater* adaptiveness to their lives. This is a relevant finding to capture how *becoming* can manifest, particularly for a yoga practitioner.

*Becoming* has been likened to occupational adaptation (Hitch & Pepin, 2021) and is reinforced in the present study which demonstrates that yoga functions as an adaptive tool in an individual's *becoming*. Current study participants experienced yoga as an anchor or protection against stress or chaos. Walder and Molineux (2017) theorised that occupational adaptation increases individuals' confidence and motivation. In extension, we posit that habituated yoga practice produced confidence in yoga practitioners. Dyer et al. (2019) theorised that yogis may have increased occupational adaptiveness based on the qualities yoga practice imbues on its practitioners. Bridging occupational adaptiveness and the occupational dimension of becoming can elucidate how *becoming* holds meaning across the *doing, being, becoming, and belonging* dimensions of occupation to build health and well-being over time. Mälstam et al. (2022) underscored this idea, stating that engaging occupations and literacy in healthful occupations facilitate healthy lifestyle habits.

### ***Strengthened Connections***

Integrating yogic ideals into everyday lives contributed to greater self-efficacy, and doing so in a communal sphere created shared support for building confidence. Present findings denote *belonging* and yoga reinforce self-efficacy and consequent motivation to continue practising communally, as supported in previous literature (Franzblau et al., 2006; Greysen et al., 2017; Kay & Taylor, 2015; Kwasky & Serowoky, 2018).

However, no other studies have identified a link to regular collective yoga practice, self-efficacy, enduring transformation, and its composite outcomes.

Communal spaces were sometimes alienating and one participant preferred non-group practice to counter insecurity. Collective yoga as alienating opposes claims (Kishida et al., 2018) that it consistently produces connectedness and brings up a noteworthy concept that communal yoga can raise negative emotions and insecurity throughout *becoming*. This could be attributed to the Western thin-lean expectations of yogis and their exclusivity, perpetuated by commercial agendas (Webb et al., 2017). Whilst group yoga spaces vouch for community, diversity and health ideals (Hinz et al., 2021), present study evidence suggests

this is not always true. This is discouraging for individuals who experience health issues or do not fit the thin yogi ideal and can impact a yogi's *becoming*. We must recognise a plurality of *belonging* and *becoming* despite group participation entailing greater meaning (Hocking, 2021). Acknowledging *belonging* and *becoming* as capable of positive and negative outcomes could expand how occupational scientists apply occupational dimensions beyond current norms.

Furthermore, young women are more subject to the thin yogi stereotype than other individuals across gender and lifespan (Miller, 2016), as noted in Joy's body image concerns. This validates other study findings (Middleton et al., 2017) and highlights a novel finding that lifespan or gender may impact how negative emotions coincide with a yogi's *becoming*. Scholars have described this relationship, highlighting the influence of social experiences on individuals' personal growth (Berger et al., 2022). When tensions around *belonging* intersect with *becoming*, it is notable that the well-being of yogis may be affected.

Inspiring yoga teachers solidified participants' trust in communal yoga spaces, intensifying their participative spirit and desire to sustain practice. Grier (2017) found that yogis created joint meaning-making of their narrative with their teacher. Csala et al. (2021) and Park et al. (2020) noted that in Western culture, teacher friendliness and warmth elicited deeper personal transformations. In the present study participants communicated how they sustained an enduring relationship with particular teachers, appreciating the reassurance and yoga networks that nourished and proliferated their *becoming*. Understandings of such growth align with Eastern conceptualisations of yogic transformation, which state the teacher-student relationship guides yogis' journeys (Newcombe, 2014).

### **Limitations**

It would have been thought-provoking to explore the dark side (Twinley, 2020) of *becoming* for yoga practitioners. Exploring compulsive exercise addiction, competitiveness, and racial exclusivity (Miller, 2016) or self-indulgent escapism (Krueger, 2018) could have integrated a more holistic perspective of *becoming* for yogis. An in-depth exploration of how *becoming* manifests in yoga practitioners in a maladaptive way would welcome a more critical discourse of occupation. Further, the study explored yoga generally, not differentiating experiences in schools of yoga such as Kundalini, Iyengar or Hatha, which expect distinctive disciplinary habits (Feuerstein, 1998). Different conceptions of self-transformation may present among diverse schools of yoga.

Despite seeking idiographic data for a specific sample under the IPA method, only white, well-educated (with post-secondary education) female participants were recruited. The homogeneity of race and gender is a recruitment pattern noted in numerous academic yoga research. Different cultural, spiritual, and economic contexts may vary in interest, knowledge, and access to yoga practice and philosophy. Diversifying the sample could yield a richer, more balanced discussion of how context impacts *becoming* and how *becoming* impacts quality of life and identity, thus increasing the potential for generalised findings.

### Implications for Occupational Science

Study results suggest highlighting self-reflection and spirituality when exploring the impact of *becoming* as an occupational science concept: *doing so* could equip scientists with contemporary, culturally relevant interpretations of *doing so* could equip scientists with contemporary, culturally relevant interpretations of *becoming* to utilise in promoting health and well-being.

The occupations individuals engage in may influence how their identities transform over time (Galvaan, 2015), particularly when sustained. Through this inquiry, occupational scientists can glean potential relational influences on their health and well-being (Yerxa, 2002) and help inform how time practising a specific occupation impacts individuals' "coming to be" or *becoming*, thus informing their adaptivity in response to life challenges. Experiencing an occupation authentically also impacts individuals, producing positive morale in identity. Within occupational science, exploring how individuals react to occupations that feel authentic may be conducive to understanding different identity influences.

### Conclusion

This research explored the lived experience of *becoming* through yoga to inform occupational science theories of *becoming* and identity formation. *Becoming*, for yogis, increased self-awareness, resilience, adaptivity, and spirituality. These qualities, produced in tandem as a product of *becoming*, impacted participants' quality of life, values, and identity. As participants integrated yogic philosophy into their daily lives and identities, they *became* more self-accepting, confident, and invested in sustaining practice. Their growing resilience reinforced this integration. Simultaneously, negative aspects like emotional insecurity and internalisation of Western thin body ideals also constituted an

individual's *becoming*. Such tensions demonstrated how *becoming* conflicted with yogic philosophy in Western societal contexts and inform occupational science understandings of yogis experiencing personal growth across inform occupational science understandings of yogis experiencing personal growth across competing cultural circumstances.

The study provided insight into *becoming*, eliciting how it can manifest as a continuity of *being* versus active future development. *Becoming* mingled with identity, where sustained engagement in meaningful, authentic social occupation produced a confident self-image that united minds and bodies. Conversely, tensions around *belonging* and *becoming* displayed how social contexts may disrupt one's *becoming*. Having the right teacher and sustaining engagement in welcoming yoga spaces enables a gradual shift in how one relates to oneself and the surrounding world, which can include improved relationships with others and self-acceptance, informing the understanding of personal growth whilst *belonging* in yoga. We recommend developing dialogues around relational influences of occupations on individuals' *becoming* to expand awareness of how one's transformations alongside certain occupations contribute to managing life challenges.

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