

A Different Weight Loss Experience: A Qualitative Study Exploring the Behavioral, Physical,
and Psychosocial Changes Associated with Yoga That Promote Weight Loss

Critical Review of Qualitative Research Study

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Introduction:

A research team conducted a study about individual's experiences with weight loss from a yoga practice. The purpose of this paper is to critically review the qualitative research done in the article "A Different Weight Loss Experience: A Qualitative Study Exploring the Behavioral, Physical, and Psychosocial Changes Associated with Yoga That Promote Weight Loss" by A. Ross, A. Brooks, K. Touchton-Leonard, and G. Wallen. The author chose to review this study, because of the relation to their field of study as a yoga teacher and exercise science major. Their research question presents as, what are new ways to help people with yoga and reduce the psychological effects of weight loss/ gain? Ultimately, the negative impact weight issues have on a person effects their quality of life, and yoga is shown to change this into a positive impact.

Study Purpose:

The study clearly stated its purpose, which was to attain information and results on whether or not Iyengar yoga helps with weight loss. The primary research question is as follows: "what is the experience of individuals who have lost weight and believe that yoga practice contributed to this weight loss?" (1). The study is searching for ways in which yoga improves weight loss, the researchers are unclear of how it works.

Literature Review:

Relevant background literature was reviewed in this study. Which provided justification for this study that was clear and compelling. The researchers explained how stress correlates with weight gain, and provided examples of how this happens. The researchers also stated that there is not one excellent way to lose weight. Surgery and other traditional ways of weight loss have extensive complications, and often do not have long term effects (1). Many of the traditional weight loss modalities do not address the psychological and behavioral effects that lead to weight gain. However, this study provided evidence, and backed up their claims. This study applies to the authors practice as a yoga teacher. A yoga teacher is continuously striving to learn more information about the field. The author is also an exercise and movement science major researching different ways to combine yoga with health and wellness practices.

Study Design:

The design of this study is phenomenology. To better explain the rationale of the study design the definition of phenomenology is "The discipline of phenomenology may be defined initially as the study of structures of experience, or consciousness. Literally, phenomenology is the study of "phenomena": appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience. Phenomenology studies conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first person point of view" (2). The study looked at how the experiences and meanings from yoga contribute to weight loss. This gives rationale to the use of phenomenology as the study design of this study. A theoretical perspective was somewhat identified. Meaning that the researcher perceived the participants as truthful without any proof of honesty. However, Iyengar yoga strives to encourage people to live honestly. This is the type of yoga they used to find participants that lost weight with Iyengar yoga. The methods were congruent with the philosophical purpose of the study. They conducted telephone interviews of individuals who feel they have lost weight from a yoga practice. The

researchers contacted yoga studio owners to reach out to their clients and spread the word. They conducted an initial interview and a follow up interview based on whether or not they fit the eligibility criteria. The research team used the interviews to answer the research question.

Sampling:

The researcher found test subjects by reaching out to yoga studio owners, and having them relay the information to their clients. This was done to find anyone that believes they lost weight from a yoga practice. The researchers did not specify the location of the yoga studios they contacted. The process of purposeful selection was not described, however, the sampling method was appropriate for the study purpose. The researchers were able to find real people to share meaningful qualitative results. The researchers addressed informed consent, which was done before interviewing the volunteers over the telephone. They did not address whether sampling was done until redundancy in data was reached. This is where the study lacks organization and detail. The description of the participants was done in detail, however, each participant was not explained individually. The sample is adequate to the authors practice, because their teacher training taught Iyengar yoga. Which is the style of yoga practiced in this study. It is worth continuing to expand knowledge of the practice, and the bonus is the topic is pertaining to exercise science.

Data Collection:

The study did not contain a clear and complete description of the participants or the site of the experiment. The study also did not contain much information and results. However, for the amount of information given the context was sufficient for understanding the "whole" picture. To further describe descriptive clarity, it was noted that identifications of assumptions and biases of researchers were made. However, the role and relationships of the researchers/ observers with participants was not identified. What is missing from the understanding of the research is it does not specifically say that only phone interviews were done, and that there was no form of participant observation involved. This influenced the understanding of the research by showing that there was room for assumptions and biases of the researcher. Procedural rigor was not strongly addressed, however, the study provided information on how they added rigor to the interview results. For example, "Having participants confirm a synopsis of the transcript and allowing subjects to add or retract comments in the follow-up interview allowed the researchers to better describe the experience and added rigor to the study" (1). There was flexibility within the answers of the participants. To reduce bias, they could have given the participants a collection of answers. However, that would decrease the qualitative nature of the test.

Data Analysis:

When looking at analytical rigor, the study showed that data analyses were inductive. Also that the findings were consistent and reflective of the data. The methods were appropriate and reflective of the findings. They included audio files that were transcribed and a research team member did an internal reliability check by listening to the files. Then "Two investigators independently read and reread the transcripts to obtain a feel for the participants' experiences. They then extracted statements that described the phenomenon and illuminated the experience" (1). They turned these themes into codes to summarize the subjects experience. Another coder had no connections to yoga. This process was developed in the decision trail, along with the

rational for the development of themes. To do this "They formulated meanings from these statements and assigned those meanings codes, words, or phrases that describe and summarize the meaning of the subject's experience. These codes were placed into themes, represented by categories of experiences that were universal to the participants that then were unified into a comprehensive description of the phenomenon" (1). The themes were reflective of the research question and purpose of the study. However, the researchers did not adequately describe the process of analyzing data. The study redeemed itself with a meaningful picture of the phenomenon under the study. The research team "extracted statements that described the phenomenon and illuminated the experience. They formulated meanings from these statements and assigned those meanings codes, words, or phrases that describe and summarize the meaning of the subject's experience" (1). These codes were turned into themes that are a meaningful picture of the phenomenon. The 5 themes were: theme one- shift toward healthy eating, theme two- impact of yoga community/ culture, theme three- physical changes, theme four- psychological changes, theme five- a different weight loss experience.

Overall Rigor:

The overall components of trustworthiness included in this research paper were: credibility, transferability, and confirmability. These components were portrayed in a unique way. The researcher did not include transferability in the data analysis, however, they did include fittingness of data which is similar to transferability. "To address fittingness, 80% of participants were interviewed at two time points, providing a wealth of data from which to draw inferences and describe the experience" (1). They also included credibility "Credibility was established by having two team members analyze the data independently and then having a third study team member with expertise in qualitative methodology validate the themes and coding" (1). Another component of trustworthiness they provided information for was auditability, which is similar to confirmability. "For auditability, examples of data are presented alongside each theme and subtheme to illustrate how data led to each theme being identified" (1). This is what the researcher used to ensure trustworthiness of data. The relevance of this study is connected to the authors practice by combining the two entities of their expertise. Which is yoga, health & fitness. This information is useful to teach students and offer individual sessions to promote weight loss with yoga.

Conclusions & Implications:

The conclusion of the study was appropriate relative to the findings, and concluded that "The findings of this study imply that yoga may offer diverse psychological, physical, and social effects that may make it a useful tool for healthy, sustained weight loss" (1). The study did not include implications for occupational therapy practice. However, it did offer implications for further research; yoga therapy is also becoming increasingly more popular and used in occupational therapy. The main limitations of the study were with purposive sampling, the risk of selection bias, risk of personal bias with data analysis, and small sample size. The quality of this study was sufficient for the topic of research. As to the rigor of the study, the data analysts subjectively turned the information into qualitative data. This provides a foundational base for future researchers to add data and results of yoga practitioners who have successfully lost weight from yoga.

References

1. Ross, A., Brooks, A., Touchton-Leonard, K., & Wallen, G. (2016). A different weight loss experience: A qualitative study exploring the behavioral, physical, and psychosocial changes associated with yoga that promote weight loss. *Evidence - Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1155/2016/2914745>
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