Trauma-Informed Yoga: Conceptualization and Application

Syllabus

Lauren Justice, PhD, ERYT500 and Heather Freeman, PsyD, ERYT500

Dates TBA; 30 hours across a two weekends

Target Audience and Instructional Level

This is an intermediate-level course geared to students in the YogaX YTT300 and the following audiences:

- Psychologists, psychiatrists, and other mental healthcare providers interested in bringing pranayama principles and strategies into their clinical practice.
- Psychology, psychiatry, and other mental health-program students in graduate or medical programs interested in bringing pranayama principles and strategies into their supervised clinical practice.
- Yoga teachers interested in offering advanced pranayama practices, especially to students in healthcare settings.
- Yoga therapists providing offering advanced pranayama practices, especially in healthcare settings.

Training Pragmatics

- Cost: $800 tuition for this 30-hour workshop or YogaX YTT300 prepaid enrollment
- This training is delivered via online synchronous instruction and with fulltime contact with the lead teacher, Chris Brems
- (see Training Format below for specific details of training delivery)
- Yoga Alliance Continuing Education credits (30 hours) are included in the tuition cost; a CE certificate is issued upon request
- Participation (by entering the zoom link and/or making payment) implies that you have read and agreed to the Stanford Assumptions of Risk, Release of Claims, and Hold Harmless Agreement at https://www.yogaxteam.com/healthandsafetyinformation
- YogaX Refund and Payment Policy is available at https://3de0fc17-ea21-4854-87c7-777a583c02cf.filesusr.com/ugd/37469f_73d3c9e8ebb14214a60e11d8b08babaa1.pdf
- YogaX has no commercial support for this event and there are no disclosable conflicts of interest.
- The zoom link for this event is: https://stanford.zoom.us_TBA

Instructor

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Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the Stanford School of Medicine
More information at https://www.yogaxteam.com/founding-members
This 30-hour YogaX Trauma-Informed Yoga (TIY) training focusing on yoga as a complex, multifaceted practice that fosters resilience and equanimity. The TIY training helps yoga teachers and health professionals make yoga practices accessible to students with trauma-related symptoms. Trauma-informed yoga (TIY) is a form of yoga adapted to meet the unique needs of individuals working to overcome trauma. Although yoga is often considered a healing practice, yoga that is not designed to meet the needs of students with histories of trauma may inadvertently increase reactivity and activate symptoms.

We offer trauma-informed yoga principles for teachers working to create accessible and inclusive classes, while also providing tools to help teachers navigate difficult situations when they arise in class. We explore through practice and contemplation how yoga may offer students a way to navigate the uncertainties of life with mindfulness and equanimity.

Participants will learn TIY principles that ground the yoga practice into a multi-modal, integrated and holistic theory of understanding the body-mind connection. We will demonstrate how that connection is explored in the practice of yoga to alleviate suffering related to differing forms of trauma across a variety of populations. We integrate the teachings of Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras with the panchamaya kosha model as a way to understand the complexity of the human experience, methods for self-regulation, befriending the nervous system, and aspiring to equanimity regardless of circumstances. We embed this ancient wisdom in modern science, especially the science of polyvagal theory and other nervous system research.

The training includes multiple integrated and holistic practices to provide participants opportunities to experience the depth of yogic teachings and be able to relay them to their students in a variety of healthcare settings. To do so a variety of teaching techniques are applied – all modeling TIY principles. These strategies include didactics, experiential learning, discussion, application, and personal exploration. In all teachings, language, context, and environments that are conducive to the experience of psychological and physical safety are integrated and role-modeled.

Participants explore yogic principles, skills, and applications related to a range of facets of trauma-informed yoga and modern psychology, including (but not limited to):

- Foundational considerations, including definitions of trauma and review of the koshas along with their developmental relevance to trauma
- Discussion and implications of yoga’s risks, benefits, and possible contraindications for work with trauma
- Review and enhanced understanding of the nervous system with focus on polyvagal theory
- Theory and practice of creating opportunities for a sense of psychological safety through exploration of structural, language, relational, power, and interpersonal dynamics
- Theory and practice of creating opportunities for a sense of physical safety through exploration of contextual and environment features
- Theory and practice of TIY class structure
- Applications of interoception, neuroception, and mindfulness in the TIY context
- Special considerations in a range of healthcare settings
- Special considerations for TIY teacher resilience, burnout prevention, and risk management
Learning Objectives

Learning Objective #1:

1. Learn foundational considerations and contraindications for TIY
   a. Enhance understanding of trauma, trauma-related symptoms, and trauma-informed approaches to patient-care and practice
   b. Explore how western psychological perspectives of trauma overlap with yoga philosophy (gunas, koshas)
   c. Understand how to emphasize parasympathetic engagement (pranayama practices and asana)
   d. Understand how to carefully utilize sympathetic engagement and when to limit it

Evaluation Method for Learning Objective #1

- Define and provide examples of trauma-related symptoms and yoga interventions for those symptoms
- Define TIY framework and basic themes
- Define contraindications for TIY classes that may be common practices in commercial yoga classes

Learning Objective #2:

2. Gain basic understanding of how to structure a TIY class while staying flexible in that structure
   a. Develop mindfulness cues and pranayama practices to create themes in practice rather than sequencing toward a “peak pose”
   b. Learn how to adapt sequence based on present-moment needs of students in the class
   c. Effectively balance pranayama, pratyahara, and asana to emphasize engagement of parasympathetic nervous system
   d. Understand how to use props as a tool of support rather than deepening

Evaluation Method for Learning Objective #2

- Define and explain the difference between TIY sequence themes and commercial yoga sequencing techniques
- Develop a sample TIY sequence and be able to address potential needs for adaptation and modification
- Implement TIY mindfulness cues with intention and purpose

Learning Objective #3:

3. Learn in-depth understanding and application of interoception and mindfulness from a TIY framework
   a. Define and explore dissociation
   b. Review polyvagal theory and how hyper- and hypoarousal may inhibit mindfulness and interoception
   c. Become proficient in how and when to utilize specific mindfulness practices to facilitate interoception

Evaluation Method for Learning Objective #3

- Define and provide examples of specific mindfulness cues and how they facilitate interoception
- Define interoception and importance in treatment of trauma-related symptoms
- Develop a sample TIY sequence emphasizing the development of interoceptive awareness and pratyahara
Learning Objective #4:

4. Learn how to apply TIY framework in different environments (hospital settings, in-patient, clinical, etc)
   a. Explore ways of working with staff within a given type of institution to ensure TIY considerations (safety, consistency)
   b. Identify outreach opportunities while also considering diversity and inclusion to emphasize accessibility for target populations (veterans, the incarcerated, sexual assault survivors, first responders)
   c. Outline specific cultural and clinical considerations for differing environments

Evaluation Method for Learning Objective #4

- Define and provide examples of significant cultural considerations for specific TIY populations
- Define spiritual bypassing and race-based trauma
- Define and explain how one might provide outreach and coordination with staff in different settings for TIY
- Define barriers to accessibility and special considerations for different TIY populations
- Develop sample outreach plan for specific population instructor would like to work with or currently works with

“TIY instructors prioritize safety considerations over offering a predetermined sequence or achieving a peak posture. Although specific interventions may vary, TIY instructors may add to their skillset by having multiple strategies for cultivating an external sense of safety (in the practice space, in their own presence, in the tone they set for their classes) in addition to cultivating an internal sense of safety in their students (through interoception and mindfulness). TIY instructors may therefore advocate for keeping classes small, being thoughtful about touch, using modifications, and emphasizing invitational over command language to highlight a sense of safety and choice in their students. Instructors in larger-class contexts are not as able to attend to the individual needs of students, leaving students to model after what they see as opposed to what they feel. This type of context may leave students with trauma experiences vulnerable.”

Quoted from
## Schedule and YA Continuing Education Categories

### Weekend One – Days 1 and 2 of the Training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>TTP</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 1</td>
<td>9a – 11a</td>
<td>Introductions; TIY experiential sessions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>11a – 12p</td>
<td>Review of the koshas and discussion of their relevance to TIY</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1p – 2:30p</td>
<td>Risks, benefits, and contraindications</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2p – 5:30p</td>
<td>Trauma and the nervous system; PVT</td>
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### Weekend Two – Days 3 and 4 of the Training

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 3</td>
<td>9a – 11a</td>
<td>Structuring a TIY class – overview</td>
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<td></td>
<td>11a – 12p</td>
<td>Developing a TIY class sequence</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1p – 2:30p</td>
<td>Creating opportunity for physical safety</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2:30p – 4p</td>
<td>Creating opportunity for psychological safety</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4p – 5:30p</td>
<td>Practical applications of safety consideration with special populations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Day 4</td>
<td>9a – 12p</td>
<td>TIY-informed mindfulness practice and theoretical debrief</td>
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<td></td>
<td>11a – 12p</td>
<td>Mindfulness applied to TIY principles</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1p – 3p</td>
<td>Interoception and neuroception</td>
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<td>3p – 5p</td>
<td>Practicing -ceptive and mindfulness cues</td>
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<td>5p – 5:30p</td>
<td>Debriefing the experiential work</td>
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30 hours of YA CE or YTT 300 in the following categories:

- 1
- 15
- 5
- 1
- 8
- 30

### Notes:
- YA=Yoga Alliance; CE=Continuing Education
- TTP=Techniques, Training, and Practice; TM=Teaching Methodology; AP=Anatomy and Physiology; YH=Yoga Humanities; Prac=Practicum; Spc=area of program specialization
Handouts Provided

Several handouts and the slide set for the workshop will be provided to registered and paid enrollees on the day of the workshop. These materials are provided with the understanding that students will not duplicate, distribute, or otherwise publicly use these materials without express permission and proper attribution and referencing.

Handouts to be provided include:

- Integrated Holistic Yoga – Koshas, Limbs, Biopsychosociocultural Context
- Eight Limbs of Yoga
- Pathways of Sensory Processing Engaged in Integrated Holistic Yoga
- Principles of Trauma-Informed Yoga
- Gunas –Fundamental Expressions of Nature
- Slide Set for the Training
- Content Manual for the Training

Suggested Readings and Practices

It is recommended that in preparation for the workshop you read all YogaX blogs, especially the following:

https://www.yogaxteam.com/blog/polyvagaltheory
https://www.yogaxteam.com/blog/blogbreath
https://www.yogaxteam.com/blog/physicallimbs
https://www.yogaxteam.com/blog/innerlimbs
https://www.yogaxteam.com/blog/lifestylelimbs
https://www.yogaxteam.com/blog/koshas

It will be helpful to have independently taught at least 10 hours of yoga prior to attendance, but it is not required. If you want to read a nice beginner’s asana book, check out Bondy (2020; see citation below).

Also, peruse YogaX webpage resources and try out some of the offered free practices (asana, pranayama, meditation, and more) at yogaXteam.com and on the YogaX Team YouTube channel.

The following readings will be helpful as you deepen your journey once you have completed the workshop.

**Training Format**

The workshop uses mixed pedagogical methods, ranging from didactics/lectures to discussion to experiential work, including small group activities. Lecture/didactic time invites discussion throughout and is accented by experiential exercises and activities. The experiential work is yoga-based and includes asana, pranayama, meditation, and guided imagery. To make sure that everyone can enjoy the yoga-based activities safely and with maximum comfort, please note the following (more personal) thoughts and requests.

- Stanford University requires that you sign the release form (link above) to be able to participate in the activities that are part of this workshop. It assumed that you have agreed to this document when you pay or use the provided zoom link for the workshop.

- Required training activities start promptly. To make sure that we can start on time and that you have ample opportunity to get settled or ask questions, it would be lovely if you could arrive as much as 10 minutes early.

- Participants provide their own props for the virtual training sessions. Minimum prop equipment includes 2 yoga blocks, 1 yoga strap (10 feet is preferrable), 1 yoga bolster, 1-2 blankets, and a yoga mat. Access to a clear wall space is extremely helpful (a closed door works). Prop substitutes are fine (e.g., a stack of books instead of blocks; a scarf instead of a strap, sofa cushions instead of a bolster, etc.). Please have all props at the ready for each training session.

- Yoga is best practiced on a relatively empty stomach but not starving. A sustaining but light meal prior to class will help you maintain your energy without having a full belly that makes bending and twisting difficult.

- Please ask questions – before class, after class, and during class. If you are wondering about something – whether it’s the reason for a particular shape or movement, an alignment question, or a more healthful way of doing something – someone else is likely to ponder the same thing.

- Always honor your own intuition and body wisdom – if something feels wrong, do NOT do it. We are all anatomically unique and we all express the same yoga shape, breath, or practice in different ways. What works for us, your teachers, or the person next to you, may not be optimal for you. Allow yourself the joy of using props and variations based on the feedback from your own body, breath, and mind. We offer both freely and demonstrate their use throughout.

- Yoga practiced in a group is inspirational. It is never competitive. Work within your own body limits and preferences; give yourself permission not to strive to do what others are doing. Delight in the pleasure of expressing each pose or breath in uniquely your way. If something comes easily, celebrate this state of pure joy; if something is a struggle, embrace the moment of learning.

- Thank you in advance for making me aware of any medical conditions that may affect your yoga practice. It is helpful for me to know if you are modifying practices for a particular reason or if you would like to have help in working with a particular concern.

- Thank for turning off all cell phones, beepers, or other noise-making or distracting devices before you settle in for any given training session.

- Thank you for keeping your cameras on during virtual sessions to the degree possible and appropriate.
Pranayama: Polyvagal Theory

The Physiology of Safety
(gratitude to Stephen Porges)

- **Perception of danger**: prepared for danger, live in a
  near-constant state of sympathetic arousal, isolation,
  and physiological overload or break-down; mobilized
  sympathetic NS state of fight or flight - **MOBILIZATION**

- **Perception of safety**: live in a socially engaged
  parasympathetic nervous system; relaxed, engaging,
  and restorative (myelinated) ventral vagal space -
  **SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT**

- **Perception of life threat**: develop a habitual pattern of
  shrinking back from life, withdrawing - even dissociating
  - from human experiences; parasympathetic NS is at an
  extreme state of withdrawal, of surrender and
  hopelessness - **IMMOBILIZATION**

Pranayama: Polyvagal Theory

Hybrid states
(gratitude to Stephen Porges)

- Perception of the need for **safe action or mobilization** in the service of personal or collective growth, health, and PLAY - **PREPAREDNESS, PLAY** (VVC + SNS)

- Perception of the need for **safe immobilization** in the service of prosocial activities (e.g., child birth, nursing, sadness, collapse in laughter) - **INTIMACY, SHARED STILLNESS** (VVC + DVC)

- Perception of the need to cease mobilization in service of survival in face of being overcome - **FREEZE, SUBMIT** (SNS + DVC)