

POWER DYNAMICS IN YOGA





POWER DYNAMICS AND ABUSE IN YOGA

Firstly we acknowledge and recognise the abuse that took place in the yoga community over decades and the experiences of the individuals who have shared their stories and spoken out to expose this.





POWER DYNAMICS AND ABUSE IN YOGA

- It's not just Ashtanga, and it's not just Yoga
- There is always a power dynamic between the yoga teacher and student and we can (intentionally or unintentionally) either reinforce that or reduce it
- Which type of power do we want to engage with when we teach? Power over, power with, power to or power within? Which is coercive and which is empowering?



POWER DYNAMICS AND ABUSE IN YOGA

"The role of the yoga teacher has so often become telling people how to move, when to move, when to breathe, what to feel and what the results of the practice will be and then we expect autonomy...self-awareness to arise"

-Wildcroft 2019



YOGA COMMUNITY AS A HIGH DEMAND GROUP

A high-demand group, or cult, instills complete trust in its members and demands an inordinate amount of time, energy, and money, using a totalist and inflexible ideology that permeates most or all aspects of the members' lives. Such groups are known for isolating members either physically or culturally, suppressing serious questions and flexibility in thought, leaving little room for doubts or dissent, and never allowing criticism of leadership. The goal is for ideological purity and unanimity among all members.



BREAKOUT

in groups take 10 minutes to discuss your experience of language that is coercive, that reinforces power dynamics or that could be potentially disempowering.

Write as many of them down as you can



SOME SELF REFLECTION

Your Yoga teachers tells you are a 'bad lady' for practicing on a Saturday

A well known yoga teacher asks a student to sell DoTERRA oils as part of an MLM programme

Youre told by your teacher that you questioning them is a trauma response or that you are not ready to do the work

A fellow students says to you that you shouldn't be worried about an adjustment there is no harm in it and its releasing



TRUSTING OURSELVES FIRST

Language like pushing through pain creates a culture where it becomes difficult to question or where it becomes difficult to listen to our intuition or truth



No intervention that takes power away from the survivor can possibly foster her recovery, no matter how much it appears to be in her immediate best interest.”

Trauma and Recovery, Herman (1994)

SOME SELF REFLECTION

How does it feel when a student says that you have 'given them' an amazing experience?

How does it feel when a student says they don't want you to give them an adjustment?

Have you ever felt upset or left out when a teacher didn't offer you an adjustment or picked out someone else in the class. Why?

In a culture of celebrity yoga teachers are we attracted by charisma or quality of teaching?



We should never forget to
ask questions-

"The strange case of the
Yoga Korunta"

-Remski 2019

MOVING FORWARD-

- Think about why and how we offer adjustments
- Use language that is non coercive
- Notice when you are centering yourself in the practice is it 'all about you' or all about your students?
- Actively discourage the elevating of one individual to 'guru' or celebrity status
- Always ask questions and encourage questions
- There is no 'One Way'
- Be suspicious when people claim to have all the answers or that 'they' can 'heal' you



MOVING FORWARD- POST LINEAGE YOGA

- Grassroots Movements of Yoga Communities
- Not anti lineage but post lineage
- How do we find balance in this between commodification of yoga and acknowledging the historical and cultural roots of practice?

- Noticing and calling out power abuse/unhealthy cultures



-Wildcroft (From Guru to #metoo)



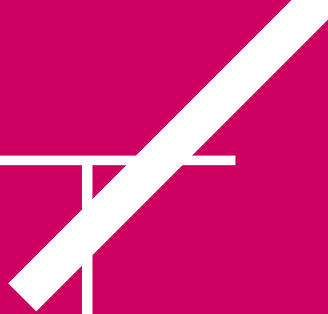
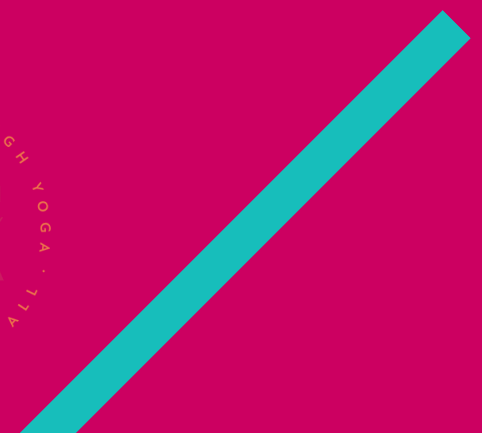
How do we make sure
trauma informed yoga
doesn't become the next
form of dogma?





POWER DYNAMICS

ATTACHMENT

THEORY





Cult dynamics or high demand
groups can exploit the human tendency to form bonds through
trauma and disorganised
attachment styles

✕
Alexandra Stein -Terror, Love and Brainwashing



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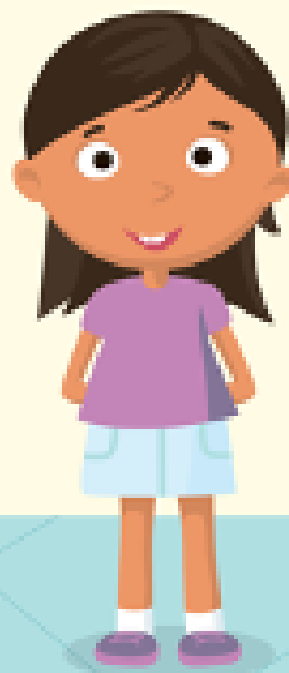
CHILDHOOD ATTACHMENT STYLES

CONTENT
ENGAGED
ON TASK



SECURE

WITHDRAWN
QUIET
ANXIOUS



AVOIDANT

ANXIOUS
NOT FOCUSED
INSECURE
ASKING A LOT OF
QUESTIONS



AMBIVALENT

ANGRY
DEPRESSED
NOT FOLLOWING
DIRECTIONS
SHORT FUSE
DIFFICULTY
MAKING FRIENDS



DISORGANIZED



TRAUMA IS RELATIONAL

Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships, they breach the attachments of family friendship love and community and destroy the fundamental sense of safety in the world.

People who experience complex trauma may never feel safe in relation to other people, and therefore in relation to themselves

-Judith Herman 1997





AND THEREFORE SO IS RECOVERY

Behaviour in adulthood is directly related to the experience of childhood however it is now recognised that in the context of later life, building healthy relationships that are based on mutuality (ie entered into freely without coercion) can support the development of agency and choice.



AS YOGA TEACHERS WE CAN SUPPORT THIS BY

- Recognising the power dynamic and always seeking to share power with and encourage power within rather than have power over
- Noticing when coercive language creeps in and changing it
- Using language that is non-coercive, non attached, non assuming and that encourages invitation and choice at centre of frame
- By not trying to fix someone or use yoga to fix them
- Meeting students with non judgment and unconditional positive regard
- Being consistent, predictable and treating everyone in a similar way e.g no favourites
- Keeping professional boundaries and scope of practice in mind
- Noticing when trauma bonding or unhelathy attachment is showing up





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