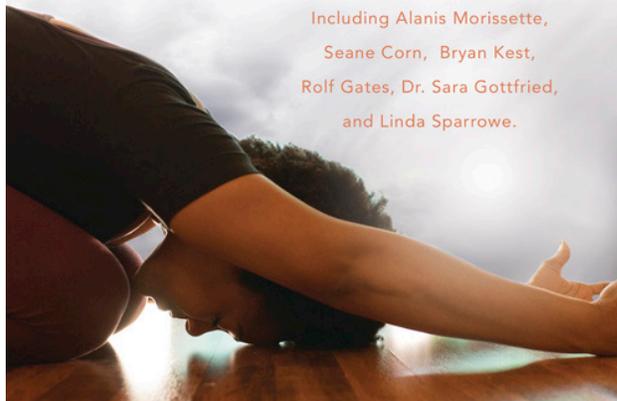


# GUIDE TO FACILITATING BOOK DISCUSSION GROUPS

MELANIE KLEIN & ANNA GUEST-JELLEY

Including Alanis Morissette,  
Seane Corn, Bryan Kest,  
Rolf Gates, Dr. Sara Gottfried,  
and Linda Sparrowe.



YOGA  
AND BODY IMAGE

25 Personal Stories  
About Beauty, Bravery  
& Loving Your Body

# INTRODUCTION

In the book, *“Yoga and Body Image: 25 Personal Stories about Beauty, Bravery, and Loving Your Body,”* Melanie Klein and Anna Guest-Jelley bring together a diverse group of writers to share their voices and experiences related to the complexity of issues around yoga and body image.

This important and powerful book has become the basis for the Yoga & Body Image Coalition’s mission and activism around the world. We are proud to provide this guide as a starting point for your group’s insightful and informed discussions around the book’s essays and main themes.

On the following pages, you’ll find information on how to create and facilitate an effective discussion group, questions relevant to each individual essay, and thematic conversation points for higher-level discussions.

Thank you for joining the conversation about yoga and body image and the myriad of related issues. We hope you’ll share your experiences with us at @YBICoalition on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#). In addition, we are available for questions and conversation at the email addresses provided below.

In gratitude,

Yoga & Body Image Coalition members

Dr. Beth Berila  
St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud, MN  
[bethberila@hotmail.com](mailto:bethberila@hotmail.com)  
[bethberila.com](http://bethberila.com)

Elen Bahr  
Yoga For Every Body, Minneapolis, MN  
[elen@everyyogi.com](mailto:elen@everyyogi.com)  
[everyyogi.com](http://everyyogi.com)

# CREATING AN EFFECTIVE GROUP

## Accessibility

- Please ensure your discussion group is accessible in every way - from the location to the physical space to the meditation and movement. If you'd like to talk about how to create a more accessible group in your area, contact either Beth Berila (bethberila@hotmail.com) or Elen Bahr (elen@everyyogi.com) and we'll be happy to talk through ideas with you.

## Creating Community

- Begin the group with introductions, asking participants to say their name and preferred gender pronoun.
- Some of these discussion questions may be more effective if participants journal about them first, then discuss. Some of the questions will result in more productive discussions if there is a level of openness and trust in the room. Journaling or starting the session with participants talking in pairs can help develop that dynamic.

## Physical Space

- We like to host the discussion groups in local yoga studios, but they can be hosted anywhere, including people's homes. Please do be mindful of accessibility for people of various abilities.
- Arrange the discussion area in a circle to foster a more welcoming dialogue.
- Have chairs available. For more authentic inclusion, try not to have just one person in a chair or on the floor.

## Opening & Closing

- Guide an opening grounding meditation and make introductions and/or a brief ice breaker so participants can get to know each other. At the end, guide a closing meditation with or without movement or lead a full yoga practice.
- If you choose to include guided movements or a full practice at the end of the discussion, be sure the types of movement and breath are accessible to everyone.
- If you choose to have a full yoga practice after the discussion, advertise that clearly, including the class level. Please ensure the class is accessible to everyone.

## Inclusive Discussion

- Consider setting ground rules and intentions. Help participants create the environment they want. Suggestions such as "no talking over one another" and "using I statements rather than generalizations" can be useful.
- It is helpful to have a facilitator to keep the discussion on track and to be mindful of time. This person should have questions prepared, but create spaces for participants to ask their own questions. Let them shape the discussion as much as possible.
- Conversations flow more smoothly with some structure. Structure can come in a variety of ways. You may want to discuss one essay in-depth and then move on to the next one. Or, discuss multiple essays based on themes. Choose what you think will work best for your group.

# CREATING AN EFFECTIVE GROUP

## Price

- We typically do charge for the discussion series to cover the cost of the space, the discussion manual, and a small honorarium for the facilitators, with 10% of the proceeds going back to the Yoga and Body Image Coalition. We highly suggest making work-for-trade and scholarship opportunities available.

## Shared Conversation

If you find that the same couple of people are talking or dominating the conversation, while some people remain silent, try to create spaces for others to talk. There are several ways to do so:

- If the group is large - maybe 10 or more people - divide into smaller groups or pairs.
- Invite participants to journal first, then give them the option to share what they journaled.
- Set ground rules together before the discussion starts, one of which can be mindfulness about taking up space in the discussion. Once that ground rule has been established, the facilitator can refer back to it as needed.
- Use phrases like, “Is there anyone who hasn’t spoken yet who would like to say something about this essay?”
- The facilitator can start a “low-risk” go-around, in which each person says one idea or point that interested him/her/zir about the essay. These ideas can provide the basis for a rich discussion.

## Vulnerability

- Some of the topics can hit very close to home for people. Depending on how real and authentic they become, people may become very raw and emotional. That’s OK. It’s part of the process.
- It is vital to create as safe a space as possible to hold these emotions with respect and honor. If a moment becomes emotional, the facilitator can help shape the openness with which people respond. The facilitator does NOT need to jump in and try to “fix” anything, but a simple breathing exercise or expression of compassion can go a long way. The facilitator might also want to check in with anyone who has expressed deep vulnerability or become emotional during the discussion and just make sure they are OK.
- Depending on the topic of various essays, you may want to have contact information available for local eating disorder treatment centers, LGBTQIA Centers, and other community resources on hand. Place them near the door so participants can help themselves.

# PART ONE

## Making Choices and Creating Change

### “Coming Home to the Body: Can Yoga Help or Hinder” / Linda Sparrowe

- In the opening paragraph, Sparrowe describes a woman who felt that she needed to lose weight before she could go to a yoga class. This woman said, “Yeah, right. I’m going to put clothes like yours over thighs like mine and walk into a room full of beautiful bodies. Why? So I can feel worse about myself? No thanks.” Have you ever had a similar reaction to yoga teachers or advertisements? A similar hesitation to going to a yoga class? What were your hesitations? What did it take to overcome them (or what would it take)?
- Our bodies change as we age. How has that affected your relationship to your body in your own life? How can yoga help us develop a kind and empowering relationship to our bodies as they are today?
- Sparrowe urges us to treat our bodies with the same care and compassion we would treat a beloved friend. Do you do this? If not, why not? What stops us from “honoring what [our] body need[s]” to heal?
- What tips does Sparrowe offer for relating to our bodies and our practice with more kindness? Have you tried any of these techniques? How did they work for you?
- What are some common negative self-talk phrases that come up for you? What are some loving phrases you can say to yourself instead, when that inner critic arises?

### “Yoga Is More Than Just a Workout” / Dr. Sara Gottfried

- Gottfried writes, “*Wabi sabi* is an antidote to the false ideal of the perfect female form” (24). How so?
- How does this quest for perfection harm us physically, mentally, and emotionally? Does it affect your quality of life? How? Where do you see it show up for you?
- What tools does yoga offer us to more fully accept and honor ourselves? How does it do so?
- Gottfried writes, “It’s easier to focus on my distorted by image than on the true work that needs to be done on my inner self” (26). Do you agree? What kind of work or attention (if any) does your inner self need?

### “How Shame Found Me on the Yoga Mat” / Marianne Elliott

- How does shame show up for you in your life? In your yoga practice / class? What about yoga helps you work through that shame?
- What have yoga teachers done to (or what can they do) make you feel willing and able to be vulnerable? What have they done to shame students or make them feel less safe?
- Elliott writes, “but shame can be insidious, and as I began to shed some of my shameful feelings about my body, I accumulated new ones” (39). Have you experienced something similar? Does yoga practice / yoga culture / the “yoga body” image lend itself to new sets of perfectionist standards?
- Elliott writes that “yoga is the path through, rather than around, our shadows” (40). How does this insight work for you?

# PART ONE

## Making Choices and Creating Change

### Elliott, continued

- As both yoga teachers and students, what can we learn from the following quote? “It takes careful judgment to know when the student has the support and tools to process a stored emotion as strong as shame without creating new shame...before we can skillfully engage with external teachers, we need to recover our core relationship with our inner teacher, the part of us that knows what is best for our body. This relationship is healed through love and trust....” (41).

### “Too Much Is Not Enough” / Dr. Melody Moore

- What limiting beliefs do we have about ourselves? Where did we learn them? How can we reframe them?
- Moore writes, “As my yoga practice became a prayer, my body became a temple” (47, emphasis in original). Do you find this sentiment empowering? Do you treat your body as a temple? What would it look like to do so?
- What do you hear in yoga classes that either supports or undermines an honoring of your body? What do you want to hear in your yoga classes? What would help you cultivate a self-honoring and self-accepting relationship with your body?
- How can yoga be a practice of imperfection, rather than perfection? What would that look like? Feel like?
- How can yoga be a path toward healing from distorted body image or eating disorders?
- How do we move our yoga practice from a sense of exercise to “improve” our body to a way to understand and befriend our body?

### “Maybe the Problem Isn’t My Body” / Anna Guest-Jelley

- Guest-Jelley tells her own personal struggle with weight loss and body image throughout childhood. Has anyone here had a similar struggle?
- How does Guest-Jelley’s essay reveal the prevalence of body shaming throughout U.S. culture, especially for women? Her essay is titled, “Maybe the Problem Isn’t My Body.” So let’s finish the sentence...what is the problem? Where should we locate it instead?
- How can our yoga practice contribute to a healthy and positive body image?
- Guest-Jelley writes that yoga “is what gave me the confidence and know-how to turn away from the myriad messages coming at me everyday to be different and look different than I do. And to do so with as much grace as I can muster—feeling good in my skin despite the odds” (59). Has yoga done something similar for you? What would it feel like to feel “good in your skin”?

## PART TWO

### On The Margins

#### “Work in Progress” / Vytas Baskauskas

1. He writes, “I’ve always wanted to be comfortable in my own skin but didn’t know how to get there. My deep seated fears and insecurities always seemed to win out” (64). Have you had any similar experiences with insecurities? How has yoga practice helped transform the writer’s relationship to those internalized fears and your own?
2. More and more recovery programs are incorporating yoga into their treatment and aftercare programs. Why do you think the two are so well-suited to each other?
3. What does yoga offer to the process of healing from any kind of addiction?
4. What was the relationship Baskauskas described between addiction and body image? What does he mean when he says that healing the addiction to heroin was only the first step?
5. What does he mean when he says there “is no finish line” in yoga? How does that help you think about your yoga practice?

#### “Confessions of a Black Yoga Teacher” /Dianne Bondy

1. Why did Bondy feel so alienated from most yoga spaces? Have you ever felt something similar? What would have had to change for you to feel welcome in those spaces?
2. What links does Bondy draw between her racial identity, her body image, and her path to yoga?
3. She asks, “how do we shake up the yoga stereotypes and allow people to see yoga as it really is” (79). What suggestions do you have for doing so?
4. What is Bondy’s critique of the inaccessibility of many yoga classes? Have you experienced anything similar? If you are a yoga teacher, what can you do to ensure that your classes are accessible to all who attend?
5. At the end of her essay, Bondy issues a call to action for each of us to “be a trailblazer. Share your uniqueness, your challenges, and your practice.” What would that look like for you? What unique gifts do you bring to your community? How can you best share them?

#### “I’m a Warrior, Hear Me Roar” / Carrie Barrepski

1. Barrepski defines her disabilities as characteristics, rather than a definition of who she is. How does that encourage us to rethink cultural constructs of disability?
2. The author talks about several support networks and learning moments in her journey through life. Did any of them in particular offer insight into any of your life challenges?
3. Barrepski writes that she “came to trust and listen to her body’s cues on what it can and cannot do” (86). Has your body offered similar cues for you? When do you (and don’t you) listen to them?
4. She quotes a Kripalu yoga teacher as saying that “Our yoga mat is our science lab because we are experimenting with our body movements” (86). Would it reframe your practice to view your yoga mat as this kind of space? What kind of wisdom might you gain?

## PART TWO

### On The Margins

#### Barrepski (cont'd)

5. How does Barrepski describe her body image as linked to both her disability and to her yoga practice?
6. She writes that yoga is a “valuable tool for dealing with negative self-talk” (89). Has that been true for you as well? How has it helped?

#### “Yoga from the Margins” / Teo Drake

1. Drake describes that his beginner’s yoga class in an industrial district made it far more appealing to him than the boutique yoga studios. Why would this be? Have you had a similar reaction to different yoga spaces?
2. Drake writes that his yoga teacher “modeled an embodied practice without having to leave a part of myself at the door or pathologize a part of who I was” (93). Why was this so important to him? What met him on his mat?
3. Drake describes his body as “a war zone.” Why would that make yoga practice complex, and how did he learn to work with that through his practice?
4. What does Drake’s essay tell us about gender normativity and gender-policing and its damaging effects on individuals? How did Drake combine social justice with yoga practice to both heal and work toward transformation (both individually and collectively)?
5. Drake writes that “every one of us has a relationship with our that is negotiated; we just aren’t all equally aware of it” (96). How was that true for Drake? How might it be true for you?
6. What are Drake’s critiques of mainstream Western yoga culture? What are some ways that teachers or spaces were exclusionary for him?

#### “From Body Confident to Body Insecure and Back” / Joni Yung

1. Yoga is supposed to be about wellness. So why did Yung’s self-esteem plummet during her yoga practice?
2. What does Yung’s story tell us about different ways to approach yoga?
3. Yung writes that “yoga isn’t about looking your yoga, it’s about living your yoga” (106). Does that message resonate with you? What does it mean to “live your yoga” off your mat?
4. Is yoga different from others forms of exercise? How?
5. Yung describes a process of coming to terms with her own body image. What was your path in that process like?

# PART THREE

## Culture and Media

### “F\*\*\* Yer Beauty Standards” / Melanie Klein

1. Klein describes being regularly shamed about her body when she was young. How are girls and women body-shamed in culture? Are boys also body-shamed? How are genderqueer individuals body-shamed?
2. She says women get the message that you have to “suffer to be beautiful” (114). How is suffering built into beauty rituals?
3. Klein says that feminism gave her the tools to analyze what that body-shaming was all about. She writes that through feminism, “my paradigm shifted from one that viewed my body image as seemingly personal troubles to understanding them as public issues that were (and are) systematic in nature” (117). Why is it important to shift our perspective in this way?
4. Klein writes that, “feminism freed my mind. Yoga freed my body. It’s one thing to intellectualize self-love and another to embody it” (117). What does yoga bring to feminism and why do we need both parts, according to Klein?
5. Klein says that “Settling onto my mat has been a far more liberating and rebellious act than anything” she did when in the punk scene. What is so transgressive about “settling onto our mats” (118). How might this way of looking at it empower you in your own life?

### “What Has Always Been” / Rolf Gates

1. Gates describes a significant shift in yoga culture in the U.S. How has this shift affected yoga communities and even an individual’s practice?
2. He writes, “The Buddha taught that we suffer because we believe the impermanent is permanent, the unreliable is reliable, and that things that are not the self are. Nowhere in my experience has that been truer than in the quest to use my body to wrest some measure of respect from a world that would prefer I not exist” (121). How is his identity as a man of color and his history with addiction connected to this insight?
3. He describes how, in his twelve-step and his yoga communities, there was a clear recognition that many people are survivors of trauma (123). That recognition informed how teachers taught and how students related to one another. Has this been true of your experience with yoga communities?
4. He says that with the rise of popularity of yoga in the U.S., the emphasis on physical asana means that “the healing context and the intentional community held together by mutually agreed-upon principles” have become much less central to yoga spaces. Is that true of your experience? How does that shape our experience of yoga? What would it take to restore those elements to our yoga communities?
5. Gates writes that, “society’s dis-ease concerning the body, and the many ways this dis-ease is exploited, has had unfettered access to the yoga space” (126). Has this been true in your experience? What do you think it means to speak of a “dis-ease” about the body?

## PART THREE

### Culture and Media

#### “Beauty, Value, and the Feminine Roots of Yoga” / Nita Rubio

1. Rubio writes, “Being objectified and self-objectifying had created a deep rift between my mind and my body” (130). Has this been true of your experience or that of the women you know?
2. “It turned out in order to access this magic in my body, I would need to confront (and still do) everything in my mind that worked against walking into the world liberated from all my own self-deceit and self-hatred. I would need to stand in my own inner power in a world that did not want me to be liberated from these things” (131). What are your thoughts about this insight?
3. How is beauty defined from the Tantric perspective? How might women—or anyone—relate differently to beauty if this were our understanding of beauty?
4. How is “witnessing” different from “watching” (134)? Why might that difference be important for nourishing a community?
5. What does Rubio mean when she says she “betrayed herself?” Have you ever betrayed yourself in similar ways? How did she develop a more honoring relationship to her inner “wild nature?”
6. How does Rubio define the tradition of Tantric dance as different from what we typically understand as asana?

#### “Power, Privilege, and the Beauty Myth” / Seane Corn

1. How does Corn describe her responsibility as a prominent leader in the yoga world? What do you expect of your leaders and role models?
2. How does Corn acknowledge her privilege throughout the essay? (Privilege is unearned benefits granted to members of dominant groups and denied to members of marginalized groups. Those who receive privilege are taught not to see it.) Where might you hold privilege in your life?
3. How can yoga be helpful in establishing an authentic sense of self and healthy body image separate from external opinions of us?
4. How can we be both “celebratory” and “unapologetic” about aging? What has to change in our own lives and in the broader culture for that to be achieved?
5. Corn has committed to striving to “not to buy into a collective projection of what beauty is as manufactured by a team of marketers who are invested in keeping us insecure” (145-146). What are some specific ways we can also resist that influence?

#### “Too Much and Not Enough” / Chelsea Jackson

1. Jackson describes learning body shaming so well she didn’t need people outside to do it anymore. Have you had a similar experience? She says that she “allowed others to define the borders surrounding my body” (150). What did that look like for her? For you?
2. How did it affect Jackson’s experience of yoga that she was so often the only person of color in the yoga space? Why are so many yoga spaces in the U.S. predominantly white and what can we do to change that?

## PART THREE

### Culture and Media

#### Jackson (cont'd)

3. Jackson says that she found it really difficult to “look at herself.” Why was this? Have you experienced anything similar?
4. She writes that her yoga class “was the place that finally began to pull the curtain back on what had been the root of my pain for so many years: my invisibility in some spaces, contributing to an identity that was always trying to be accepted” (154). How did this work for Jackson? Have you experienced anything similar?
5. Jackson writes that she sometimes had trouble “softening” when her yoga teacher invited her to because of the difficult emotions that arose for her. Have you had a similar experience? What can we learn about those difficult emotions? What can yoga teach us about how to meet them?
6. How can yoga be a tool for resistance, according to Jackson?

#### “Finding and Loving the Essential Self” / Alanis Morissette

1. Morissette describes certain “advantages” to being “like a boy,” and the negative impact to her self-esteem when she began developing as a girl. Why does society place those negative beliefs on girls and women? Do other genders have similar experiences?
2. She writes that “androgyny has always saved my life” (165). Why was that for her? Why would disrupting gender norms be so important for many people?
3. Morissette describes several times of hunger that arose for her. What were they? Have you felt anything similar?
4. Klein notes that yoga provided Morissette “a safe space of inquiry free from scrutiny” (167). Has this been your experience of yoga? Or has it been another way to “beat yourself up” (166-167)?
5. Morissette writes that “Yoga is an approach to life for me...There’s a sense of wholeness and a lack of apology for the essential self” (168-169). What would/does it mean for yoga to be an approach to life for you? How would/does that shape your life off the mat?

## PART FOUR

### Parenting and Children

#### “Mother vs. Media” / Kate McIntyre Clere

1. What were the very different messages that Clare learned about girls, bodies, and beauty in her youth compared to those her daughter is learning? Do you see that difference at work in the young people in your life?
2. If you are a parent, how can you model empowerment for your children, particularly around issues like beauty and the “yoga body?”
3. Do you think parents are measured against standards of achievable perfection? How do you come to terms with that?
4. What are ways we can create a new media paradigm, particularly in this day and age when so much media-making is accessible to people who are not “professionals” in the field?

#### “Tuning out the ‘Baby Bump’ Media Madness: How Prenatal Yoga Helped Me Find Real Body Image Balance” / Claire Mysko

1. What are the cultural messages women get about pregnancy? How do these messages vary by race, class, ability, and sexual identity?
2. How might these messages about pregnancy further complicate the broader messages women get about beauty and body image?
3. What did Mysko learn from her body during pregnancy when she was able to turn inward, away from those loud cultural messages?
4. What would a “body-positive pregnancy” look like? How did her prenatal yoga classes help with that?
5. Why was it important for Mysko to be a “media literate” mother?

#### “Rx: Yoga” / Dr. Dawn M. Dalili

1. Dalili writes of continually being “new” to yoga, being a constant “beginner,” even after practicing for years. What does she mean by this?
2. How did her pregnancy change her experience of her body? What did she learn from it?
3. What was her experience returning to yoga after giving birth? Have you ever had a similar experience?
4. She writes that, “yoga has opened a dialogue with my body” (198). Since a dialogue is a two-way process (or multi-directional process) in which all parties are transformed, what does it mean to be in dialogue with our bodies? Has your yoga practice ever made that possible for you?

## PART FOUR

### Parenting and Children

#### “I’m Ugly! I’m So Ugly!” / Shana Meyerson

1. Meyerson writes that “one of the ultimate goals of yoga is to learn how to see beyond maya, illusion” (202). What illusions has your yoga practice allowed you to dismantle? Which ones are you still working on?
2. She says that when she discovered yoga at 30, she learned that “it is okay to fall” (203). What would it mean in your life to accept that it is okay to fall?
3. She writes, “When we learn to accept that we are perfect in and of ourselves, by default, we also learn that everyone else is as well....We are taught from an early age to be both critical and humble—two sides, in a way, of the same coin and ourselves” (204). How, then, can lessons of self-acceptance not only help us meet ourselves with more compassion but also relate to others more kindly?
4. How does Meyerson take these insights from yoga into her body positivity work with kids?
5. Why do negative body images and bullying that kids experience in their youth have such lasting powerful effects on their being? What can we, as a community, do about that?

## PART FIVE

### Gender and Sexuality

#### “Meeting my Own Body” / Rosie Molinary

1. How was her body perceived by people around her, and how was that perception shaped by both racialized and gendered stereotypes? How did those reactions affect her relationship to her own body?
2. Molinary describes an exchange in which she thought her friend was complimenting her, only to realize that he was “slut-shaming” her. What lesson does she internalize in that moment? What cultural lessons had he learned that motivated him to respond to her that way?
3. She writes that “really inhabiting the body is a shared personal reality; it is both expression and sensation” (216). What does she mean by that? How did all the cultural messages she had internalized about her body shape her relations with others?
4. Given this experience, why was yoga so transformative for her? Has it had a similar effect for you?
5. Why was she always longing to practice pigeon? Do you have a pose that you long to do? Why?

#### “The Athletic Yogi: Sexuality and Identity Through the Body” / Dr. Kerrie Kauer

1. What messages about gender and the body had Kauer received growing up? How did they complicate her expression of both her gender identity and her sexual identity?
2. What contradictions does she point out about the “athletic aesthetic” and the marketing of health and beauty?
3. Are lesbian communities susceptible to the same internalized body-judging and shaming that target heterosexual women in mainstream media?
4. What did yoga bring to Kauer’s understanding of herself and her relationship to her body?
5. How has her yoga practice changed over the years? How has yours?

#### “Like Father, Like Son” / Bryan Kest

1. What messages about masculinity did Kest learn? Where did he learn them? Have the cisgender men in your life learned similar messages about masculinity? (Cisgender is a term used to describe people who, for the most part, identify as the gender they were assigned at birth)
2. How have these cultural messages about masculinity affected any of the boys in your life (cisgender boys or self-identified boys)? Are there multiple messages about masculinity out there—masculinities? How do people choose between multiple masculinities?
3. Kest describes a fraught relationship with his father, but he also says that the American dream hadn’t delivered for his father. What does he mean by that, and how did that “betrayal” perhaps contribute to his father’s behavior?
4. Kest says that yoga revealed flaws in the “tough guy” persona. How did it do that? What possibilities did it offer for him?
5. How has aging also changed his relationship to masculinity? To yoga?

## PART FIVE

### Gender and Sexuality

#### “Doing More By Doing Less” / Ryan McGraw

1. Why was he so reluctant to try yoga in high school? What does that say about pressures on young men in our society and the stereotypes about yoga?
2. How did McGraw’s experience of living with a disability shape his experience of yoga?
3. What did McGraw learn about modifying poses for his body in the classes with Karina and Gabriel? Have you ever had a time when a teacher gave you an option for a pose that opened up the pose entirely for you?
4. Why was McGraw initially reluctant to enroll in a yoga teacher training program? How did he come to terms with that to become the teacher that he is?
5. He writes that, “Alignment of the body enhances the quality of the breath, which in turn enhances the quality of the mind. The connection of all three is vital to yoga” (245). Talk about how you connect all three in your own practice. Have you had any insights from when you did not connect all three?

#### “Virabhadrasana in the Academy: Coming Out with an Open Heart” / Dr. Audrey Bilger

1. Bilger talks about the discrimination she faced as an out lesbian on her campus. How did she carry the effects of this oppression in her body? Her heart? Have you had similar experiences?
2. Trace how she uses the Warrior pose sequence as a metaphor for her own transformation throughout the essay. What did strength mean to her early in the essay? By the end? What does strength mean to you?
3. Have you ever operated in a climate that bred competition and combativeness (“the smaller the tank, the bigger the sharks”)? How has that affected your well-being? What has or could yoga offer you?
4. What were the lessons from her yoga practice and the warrior poses that Bilger applied to her life off the mat? Have you had similar insights on your mat that have informed your choices in your daily life?
5. She writes, “Warrior pose...is about allowing yourself to be vulnerable, fiercely offering your heart to the world, and braving the possibility—the near certainty, even—of rejection, judgment, hostility” (256). Talk about your responses to this insight.
6. She writes that when she started teaching yoga classes on campus, she helped “humanize” the culture. Why did it have this effect and why is that important?

## FOR ONE-TIME GROUPS

If you want to have a one-time book discussion group and discuss each section rather than individual essays, you might find the following questions useful. The questions address some of the main themes in each section.

### Part One: Making Choices and Creating Change

“Yoga has the possibility of becoming a way into a deeper, more positive relationship with one’s body—and it also has the possibility of reinscribing limiting beauty and body norms” (11). Talk about how does each, providing specific examples and discussing what you would like to see more of in yoga spaces.

### Part Two: On the Margins

What are some instances in which people have felt “othered” or marked as the outsider in this section? Have you ever felt something similar? How did the writers’ yoga practices help them heal from these experiences? “While the roots of their feelings of marginalization and isolation are varied, what they share...is the key role the practice of yoga played...in bringing them into a space of wholeness” (61). Has your own practice had a similar impact in your life?

### Part Three: Culture and Media

How does the mainstream media, including yoga media, portray the practice and who participates in it? How do you feel / what do you think, when you look at yoga in the media? What would you like to see instead? How can our yoga practice diminish the “cultural noise” and instead encourage us to create an alternative, more empowering culture? What would that look like for you?

### Part Four: Parenting and Children

How can yoga inform the particular challenges parents face as they try to raise children? How are prenatal classes different than non-prenatal classes and why might that be important for expecting mothers, particularly given the ways women’s bodies and pregnancy is constructed for different groups of women in society? What benefits can yoga offer for children and youth?

### Part Five: Gender and Sexuality

How can constructions of masculinity and femininity affect people’s experiences of their own bodies, other people’s perceptions of their bodies, and their experience of yoga classes? How can disability affect that relationship? What about LGBTQIA identities? Each writer describes learning deep wisdom from their own yoga practices that informed their lives off the mat. Which insights resonated the most with you and why?

## ACTIVITIES TO GENERATE DISCUSSION

1. Think of a moment when your self-critic appeared recently. Write a short journal entry from the perspective of that self-critic—in that voice. Then take a look at it. What is the tone your critic uses? The language? What does the critic urge you to do, or not do? Now, imagine your best friend was talking to herself/himself/hirself that way. Write another journal entry to your best friend. What would you say to your friend. How would you guide them? When you are finished, take a look at that journal entry. What is its tone? Its language? How does it differ from the first journal entry?
2. Write up some of the powerful quotes on nice sheets of paper and distribute randomly. Invite group participants to either discuss in pairs or journal about how particular quotes do or do not speak to them. Then share with the group.
3. Have small sheets of paper and sharpies or pens available. Have participants write affirmations for themselves that they can place on their mirrors or in places around their house. The affirmations can be self-honoring statements to replace their inner-critic judgments or they can be intentions for themselves.
4. Look at a couple pictures of *wabi sabi*. Talk about what makes them beautiful. Notice how easy it is to see beauty in *wabi sabi*. How can we translate that to our own imperfections? Take an aspect of ourselves that we usually consider “not good enough” and reinterpret it through a *wabi sabi* lens.
5. Have several copies of various yoga magazines available. Flip through them and discuss the kinds of portrayals we see and don’t see in them. What messages about bodies, yoga, and beauty do the magazines consistently send? What would we prefer to see instead?
6. Have some of the work body positivity yogis available (such as Dana Smith’s book *Yes! Yoga Has Curves*, or the websites of Anna Guest-Jelley, Dianne Bondy, Amber Karnes, and others). Talk about what is empowering about their work and how it counters what we tend to see in mainstream yoga.
7. What is one thing each participant can do to be more body positive, more inclusive in the next week? Commit to one another to do that one thing, then report back at the next book discussion.

## SUPPORTIVE RESOURCES

We love the work of these individuals and organizations for support around navigating yoga, body image and all of the intersecting issues.

### Adios Barbie

Broadening the concepts of body image to include people of all ages, cultures, genders, abilities, sexual orientations, races, and sizes.

[adiosbarbie.com](http://adiosbarbie.com)

### The Art of Yoga Project

Focuses on early intervention to help at-risk and sexually exploited girls prepare for a positive future.

[theartofyogaproject.org](http://theartofyogaproject.org)

### National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF)

Bridging the many issues that confront AAPI women and their communities.

[napawf.org](http://napawf.org)

### National Center for Transgender Equality

The United States' leading social justice advocacy organization winning life-saving change for transgender people.

[transequality.org](http://transequality.org)

### National Eating Disorders Association

Supports individuals and families affected by eating disorders, and serves as a catalyst for prevention, cures and access to quality care.

[nationaleatingdisorders.org](http://nationaleatingdisorders.org)

### Off the Mat Into the World

Uses the tools of yoga to inspire conscious activism and ignite grassroots and global change.

[offthematintotheworld.org](http://offthematintotheworld.org)

### PFLAG

The United States' largest LGBTQIA family and ally organization.

[community.pflag.org](http://community.pflag.org)

### Proud2BMe

Online community for teens and young adults living with eating disorders.

[proud2bme.org](http://proud2bme.org)

## SUPPORTIVE RESOURCES

We love the work of these individuals and organizations for support around navigating yoga, body image and all of the intersecting issues.

### Southern Poverty Law Center

Nonprofit legal advocacy organization specializing in civil rights and public interest litigation.  
[splcenter.org](http://splcenter.org)

### The Trevor Project

Crisis intervention and suicide prevention services for LBGTQ youth.  
[thetrevorproject.org](http://thetrevorproject.org)

### And, of course, our book contributors' websites:

Anna Guest-Jelley  
[curvyvyyoga.com](http://curvyvyyoga.com)

Rolf Gates  
[rolfgates.com](http://rolfgates.com)

Claire Mysko  
[clairemysko.com](http://clairemysko.com)

Melanie Klein  
[feministfatale.com](http://feministfatale.com)

Dr. Sara Gottfried  
[saragottfriedmd.com](http://saragottfriedmd.com)

Nita Rubio  
[embodyshakti.com](http://embodyshakti.com)

Carrie Barrepeski  
[carriewrites.net](http://carriewrites.net)

Chelsea Jackson  
[chelsealovesyoga.com](http://chelsealovesyoga.com)

Linda Sparrowe  
[lindasparrowe.com](http://lindasparrowe.com)

Vytas Baskauskas  
[vytasyoga.com](http://vytasyoga.com)

Dr. Kerrie Kauer  
[kerriekayer.com](http://kerriekayer.com)

Joni Yung  
[blog.accidentalyogist.com](http://blog.accidentalyogist.com)

Dr. Audrey Bilger  
[claremontmckenna.edu](http://claremontmckenna.edu)

Bryan Kest  
[poweryoga.com](http://poweryoga.com)

Dianne Bondy  
[diannebondyyoga.com](http://diannebondyyoga.com)

Kate McIntyre Clere  
[yogawoman.tv](http://yogawoman.tv)

Seane Corn  
[seanecorn.com](http://seanecorn.com)

Shana Meyerson  
[yogathletica.com](http://yogathletica.com)

Dr. Dawn M. Dalili  
[dawndalili.com](http://dawndalili.com)

Rosie Molinary  
[rosiemolinary.com](http://rosiemolinary.com)

Teo Drake  
[imfromdriftwood.com](http://imfromdriftwood.com)

Dr. Melody Moore  
[embodylovemovement.org](http://embodylovemovement.org)

Marianne Elliott  
[marianne-elliott.com](http://marianne-elliott.com)

Alanis Morissette  
[alanis.com](http://alanis.com)