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# *Tantric Peaces*

**Tantra Workshops -  
A Fresh Take on Ancient Paths to Inner Peace**

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## Abstract

Workshops featuring or promising elements of Tantra have been on the rise in Europe and North America since the 1970s. This study attempts to define the elusive and eclectic term Tantra and explores the effects that Tantra workshops have on the *peaceability*, resilience and serenity of its attendees. Due to the accessibility of data, the Austria-based Institut Namasté was used as an example.

The survey evaluations seem to show slim, albeit consistent positive changes in the subjective perception of increased *peaceability* among participants of the Institut Namasté's Tantra Workshops; statistical relevance could not be determined. The in-depth interview analysis, on the other hand, showed clear evidence of growth and improvement in the five categories *Interactions and Relationships; Confidence, Insight; Inner peace, Equanimity, Joy; Body Awareness, Sexuality; Mindfulness, Spirituality*.

This study demonstrates that there is a causal link between the Institut Namasté's Tantra Workshops and the attendees' development of resilience, frustration tolerance, nonviolent communication, self-esteem, compassion and inner peace, summarized as *peaceability*. The impact of this improvement benefits not only the alumni but, according to their reports, also their inner and outer circles of family, friends, colleagues and even strangers, thus contributing to *peaceability* on a societal level.

*To my many teachers, in all of their disguises.*

*If you could kick the person in the pants  
responsible for most of your trouble,  
you wouldn't sit for a month.*

*(attributed to Theodore Roosevelt)*

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## Abbreviations

- BVM *Breath, voice and motion* – formula aimed at aiding attendees automatize stress-relieving and awareness-enhancing physical responses by applying breathing techniques, emotion-connected sounds and physical release of tension.
- IN Institut Namasté: a non-profit organization in Vienna, Austria, run by Amrit R. Fuchs and me since 1997. Its main purpose is to offer workshops and trainings on personal development and Tantra to the public.
- {NA} Indicates "notes of the author" as the source for a direct or paraphrased quote.
- RW *Ritualweg*, [*German*:“Path of the Ritual”]; commercial title of the advanced program for alumni of the Year-Training.
- {ta} Translation by author
- TW Tantra Workshop – refers to the workshops offered by Institut Namasté
- YT Year-Training: the series of workshops which this dissertation’s case study is mainly based on.

## Definitions of Terms

**Inner Observer:** One portion of the individual’s awareness, tasked with delivering non-judgmental, matter-of-fact data about that individual’s emotional, mental and physical state. Examples: “Now he [the Inner Observer’s “owner”] is getting jealous.” “That back pain is increasing.”

The Inner Observer does *not* deliver dismissive nor qualifying remarks, such as “See? I knew you would never make it” or “Oh, this back pain is terrible.”

Attendees are encouraged to “install” their neutral Inner Observer early on in the program and to keep developing it until it becomes second nature.

peaceability;  
peaceable

terms used for the purpose of this study to describe a person’s ability to generate and to maintain serenity, compassion and inner and outer peace, as well as the ability to respond to disturbing stimuli in a gentle, peaceful way, i.e. their *peace-ability*, which is the main focus of the present study. I suggest that *peaceable* includes an element of agency and activity in both seeking and contributing to peace in one’s own life and the world and embraces qualities such as resilience, frustration tolerance, nonviolent communication, self-esteem, compassion and, of course, inner peace.

I chose to use these terms, because none of the terms available seemed to express with sufficient precision the quality I am referring to – a problem well-known to Wolfgang Dietrich, who resorted to re-defining *peace* by suggesting five peace families (Dietrich & Sülzl, 1997) in order to present a more precise description of his understanding of peace.

Likewise, widely used terms such as *peaceful*, *at peace*, *calm* or *peace-seeking* fail to describe my understanding of this particular state of mind which the TWs aim for: *peaceful* does not include the ability to proactively generate and maintain one’s inner peace; also, a person can sit peacefully on their porch while despising their family. *Being at peace* is not versatile enough linguistically; *calm* has too many different meanings; *peace-seeking* does not include the result of the quest.

A possible phrase that might be used is *peaceful awareness* which gets closer to the state that I am trying to describe. *Aware* suggests mindfulness as well as a socially conscious person and avoids the connotation that peacefulness is a withdrawal from daily experience. However, the linguistic versatility of this phrase is limited.

Therefore, and also because they are not in common English usage (and thus has few pre-conceived meanings attached to them), I opted for the use of *peaceability* and *peaceable* to describe the state of mind aimed for by the TWs, throughout this study, whenever *inner peace* or *peace of mind* did not seem a perfect fit.

Shiva [Sansk. Śiva, “the auspicious one”] male Hindu deity, associated with the powers of reproduction and dissolution (Oxford English Dictionary Online, n.d.); in Western Tantra schools frequently used term for “man”.

Shakti [Sansk. Śakti, “energy”, “life force”] in Western Tantra schools commonly used term for “woman”. Example: “Shaktis, please line up to the right, Shivas to the left.”

In both traditional and Western Tantra, these two terms represent the two aspects of duality: male/female, unmanifest/manifest, formless/formed, consciousness/energy. "One is the principle of changelessness and the other, the principle of change – Shakti is change within changelessness while Shiva is changelessness as the root of change. The experience of perfect unity of the changeless and the changeable, the dissolution of duality, is the aim of Tantra [...]". (Saraswati, 1991)

Tantra workshop A workshop on Tantra in general, offered by any given school, as opposed to Tantra Workshop (TW), which refers to workshops facilitated by the IN.

## 1. Resumen en Español

### 1.1. Introducción

Al tener una maestría en Estudios de la Paz y muchos años de experiencia como instructora de Tantra Occidental, siento un interés muy marcado por el impacto que los talleres de Tantra Occidental pueden tener sobre la pacificidad de los/las participantes. Llevo veinte años enseñando el Tantra Occidental en el “Institut Namasté” de Viena (Austria) y es ahí donde he tenido muchas oportunidades de observar a grupos e individuos y de recolectar datos sobre sus experiencias subjetivas, sobre todo en cuanto a los talleres del ciclo anual. Este ciclo es una serie de siete talleres Tantra que se llevan a cabo a lo largo de nueve meses. Decidí combinar mi interés académico con mi interés profesional estudiando a fondo los efectos de los talleres de Tantra, específicamente relacionado con el aumento de la paz interior. Así surgió mi pregunta de investigación: “¿Los talleres de Tantra son susceptibles de fomentar significativamente las respuestas serenas y pacíficas de los/las participantes a situaciones exigentes?”

Los términos *Tantra* y *talleres de Tantra* serán explicados en más detalle en una de las siguientes secciones. Sin embargo, una breve introducción propuesta al principio facilitará la comprensión de mi argumento. Para los propósitos de este estudio, Tantra se refiere a un amplio conjunto de instrucciones arraigadas en antiguas enseñanzas hindúes y budistas que se proponen liberar a las personas de todo sufrimiento. Se parte del supuesto de que cuando se reduce el sufrimiento (p.ej. estrés, ansiedad, impaciencia), es más probable que emerja y perdure la felicidad. Como mostraré en este estudio, la felicidad está conectada con la paz interior y con la *pacificidad* (del inglés *peaceability*, o sea, la habilidad de una persona de generar y mantener serenidad, compasión así como paz interior y exterior. Para información sobre el uso específico de este término, véase la

sección de definiciones de este estudio). Por consiguiente, planteo que las enseñanzas del Tantra pueden facilitar las experiencias de paz a nivel intrapersonal e interpersonal. El *Tantra Occidental* es una adaptación modernizada de estas enseñanzas y abarca métodos provenientes de varias perspectivas, como por ejemplo distintas ramas de la psicología, el trabajo corporal y la técnica terapéutica del juego de rol. Los talleres de Tantra consisten en trabajo de grupo estructurado de un día o más donde los/las participantes tienen la oportunidad de explorar y practicar dichos métodos e integrarlos a sus vidas cotidianas para así gradualmente automanejar su estado de conciencia al preferir la paz interior a las emociones aflitivas.

Mientras que mi intención inicial fue incluir varias escuelas de Tantra y comparar sus resultados, pronto comprendí que sería una labor de demasiado alcance. Por consiguiente, decidí enfocarme en el material al que tengo más fácil acceso y usar como ejemplo los talleres impartidos en el Institut Namasté ubicado en Austria que he presidido junto con mi socio Amrit R. Ruchs desde 1997.

## **1.2. Revisión bibliográfica**

Hasta la fecha, se han realizados escasos estudios sobre el tema de talleres de Tantra Occidental. Ninguno de los que tengo disponibles se ha enfocado en el impacto que los talleres de Tantra pueden tener sobre la *pacificidad* de los/las participantes. Los tres estudios sobre talleres de Tantra que he consultado en parte exploran preguntas o situaciones similares a las que se estudian en la presente tesis: el estudio de Rita Lugmayr (2003) se enfoca en sexo e iluminación a través de talleres de Tantra. Para su realización, encuestó a uno de los grupos del ciclo anual del “Institut Namasté”. Las personas entrevistadas por Marianna Kropf no eran participantes de los talleres de Tantra sino sus instructores/instructoras. Sin embargo, su estudio (1999) y el mío tienen el

mismo enfoque de análisis narrativo. Desafortunadamente, solo existe un resumen del estudio SkyDancing (Kattenbeck, Emrich, & Gröninger, 1992) basado en entrevistas con participantes del ciclo anual, cosa que lo asemeja al presente estudio de caso. Dada la gran variedad de los enfoques utilizados, la revisión de la literatura existente sobre los talleres de Tantra no fue de gran utilidad para los propósitos de este estudio. Sin embargo, algunas reflexiones y algunos resultados han sido incluidos como puntos de referencia.

En los estudios revisados, todo indica que los talleres de Tantra efectivamente tienen un impacto considerable en los/las participantes. Este impacto se manifiesta sobre todo en un autoestima más alta, mejores habilidades comunicativas, experiencias sexuales y espirituales más profundas y generalmente más alegría de vivir. Según los estudios consultados, parece que las mujeres obtienen más beneficios o beneficios más intensos de los talleres que los hombres.

Los grupos analizados en los mencionados estudios son heterogéneos e incluyen personas de esferas sociales muy distintas y de una amplia gama de edades. Los que son meramente “turistas sexuales” son un fenómeno marginal. Los instructores y las instructoras parecen concordar en muchos temas clave, elementos y métodos de enseñanza, con un enfoque en trabajo corporal y trabajo energético. Mientras que la sexualidad es un tema principal en los talleres de Tantra, la literatura revisada indica que la espiritualidad también juega un papel primordial. Estos resultados son, en gran parte, consistentes con las conclusiones del presente estudio.

### **1.3. Metodología del estudio**

Para mi propio estudio, elegí un método distinto al de los tres estudios arriba mencionados, a saber, la observación participante. Este método reflejó y aprovechó el rol

específico que tuve a la hora de observar los grupos. Mientras coleccionaba mis datos, no solo estuve observando los grupos como investigadora, sino que también como su instructora y como tal fui parte de los grupos y estuve íntimamente involucrada en su dinámica y sus procesos. Inevitablemente, un involucramiento tan cercano crea parcialidad, lo que podría poner en peligro el proyecto de investigación. Habiendo aceptado esto, seguí adelante con una concientización más aguda y procedí con sumo cuidado a la hora de la investigación y del análisis. Por otro lado, esta cercanía inusual y el conocimiento íntimo de mi muestra también me permitieron obtener conclusiones muy profundas y valiosos resultados.

Los datos para este estudio fueron obtenidos en encuestas y entrevistas en profundidad así como con observaciones y conversaciones en entornos formales e informales. La experiencia acumulada a lo largo de dos décadas de observación fue crucial no solo para las entrevistas en profundidad sino también para la examinación y el análisis de los datos. Las encuestas fueron el primer paso en el viaje que supuso este estudio. No obstante, también fueron de gran importancia para desarrollar las preguntas que iban a ser usadas en los cuestionarios y después integradas al análisis.

En el año 2004, elaboré el cuestionario que se iba a usar para las encuestas. Durante once años consecutivos (2005-2015), participantes del ciclo anual respondieron a las 82 preguntas del cuestionario antes de comenzar los talleres y otra vez al terminar el ciclo de los mismos. Las áreas cubiertas por la encuesta fueron extensas. Por consiguiente, para los propósitos de este estudio, reduje el alcance a aquellas áreas de crecimiento personal que más relación tenían con los temas de *pacificidad*. Para este fin, primero definí cinco categorías de preguntas (*Interacción y relaciones, confianza, introspección, paz interior, ecuanimidad, alegría, consciencia corporal, sexualidad, conciencia plena, espiritualidad*) y luego seleccioné 25 de las 82 preguntas que más

adecuadas me parecieron para cada categoría y teniendo en cuenta mi pregunta de investigación.

En el momento de elegir las 25 preguntas para mi estudio, descarté aquellas preguntas con las que se exploran áreas de interés diferentes a las que corresponden a las cinco categorías arriba mencionadas, como por ejemplo preguntas referentes a la práctica regular entre talleres o incomodidad física durante largos períodos de permanecer sentado/a. Además, de varias preguntas con un enfoque similar, escogí las más representativas de ellas. En casos de formulaciones positivas y negativas de una pregunta con enfoque similar, opté por la positiva.

Pronto se hizo evidente que el diseño del cuestionario no iba a permitir una validación estadística rigurosa ni el enfoque cuantitativo que inicialmente había querido usar me iba a proporcionar una respuesta a mi pregunta de investigación. Por consiguiente, el resultado de las respuestas de la muestra (N=222) fue usado para identificar posibles tendencias y sobre todo para identificar preguntas que parecieron ser de tal relevancia para las personas encuestadas que me pareció sumamente prometedor abordarlas en profundidad durante entrevistas cualitativas.

Estas entrevistas cualitativas se llevaron a cabo con seis personas, tres hombres y tres mujeres, seleccionadas para representar una amplia gama de características respecto a su experiencia del Tantra, su dedicación, cohorte de edad e historia personal. No obstante la diversidad deseada, todas las personas entrevistadas tienen en común el hecho de que al igual que todas las personas encuestadas, todas han asistido como mínimo a un ciclo anual.



#### **1.4. Marco general: paz, sexualidad y Tantra**

Antes de examinar los datos, me cercioré de que los términos relevantes para este estudio y aquellos a los que se hace referencia con cierta frecuencia fueran adecuadamente detallados y definidos: *paz*, *sexualidad* y *Tantra*. Primero, revisé diferentes interpretaciones del término *paz*, en particular con relación a las cinco familias de paces definidas por Dietrich (Dietrich, 2008): *energética*, *moral*, *moderna*, *posmoderna* y *transracional*. Establecí que la paz a la que me refiero en el presente estudio tiene la mayor similitud con la paz transracional definida por Dietrich, ya que intenta reconciliar lo que aparentemente es irreconciliable, por ejemplo racionalidad no idealizada con espiritualidad no sentimental y práctica, mientras que al mismo tiempo fomenta el respeto o tal vez hasta la fascinación por la otredad de los demás. Además, la paz transracional no teme el desacuerdo sino que entiende el conflicto como una fuente potencial de energía que se usará para transformar situaciones problemáticas. Se trata de un enfoque cuya semejanza con las antiguas enseñanzas del Tantra salta a la vista.

Como parte de mi acercamiento al término de paz, también estudié los enlaces entre paz y felicidad. Para ello, evalué conceptos como la gratificación aplazada, cuestioné la credibilidad del dicho “la gente feliz no pelea”, exploré el impacto del *flow* y los efectos de llevar una vida significativa y las opciones para alcanzar una *eudaimonia* duradera. En el siguiente paso, exploré los términos *tacto*, *sexo* y *paz*, mostrando así cómo los estímulos táctiles, vinculación emocional, intimidad y actividad sexual reconfortante están relacionados con la paz interior de toda persona. Dicho de manera general, una descripción adecuada para la paz en el contexto del presente estudio podría ser “un estado de conciencia único y poderoso que empieza con cada individuo” (Asociación pro Naciones Unidas del Canadá, 2012).

El siguiente término a explorar fue *sexualidad*, su significado en sociedades occidentales, la incomodidad que aún lo acompaña tras medio siglo de “progresismo sexual” y la falta de palabras que aún predomina en todas las cohortes de edad cuando se trata de hablar de sus propias esperanzas, miedos y experiencias en estas áreas. La habilidad de superar frustraciones sexuales que tienen su origen en la educación, la crianza y la historia personal nos permite llevar relaciones sexuales felices y enriquecedoras, lo que se puede entender como un factor importante para la paz interior del individuo.

Durante los talleres de Tantra, conceptos tan profundamente arraigados como inútiles como por ejemplo el asociar todo tipo de contacto de la piel con connotaciones sexuales así como creencias sobre las motivaciones masculinas y femeninas son cuidadosamente desmanteladas y se muestran perspectivas alternativas. Eso permite descubrir narrativas y experiencias nuevas que crean más respeto entre los individuos y los hace estar abiertos a lo inesperado.

Además, analizo la importancia del poder transformador de la energía sexual para metas tántricas elevadas – en nuestro contexto, el de la *pacificidad*. Muestro que es más fácil generar, manejar y aplicar dicha energía después de que el individuo haya desarrollado un enfoque relajado, positivo y amoroso hacia su cuerpo y sus funciones corporales. Según lo que comentaron los/las participantes de los talleres de Tantra, generalmente acaban por entender que las relaciones humanas, la naturaleza de la sexualidad y hasta sus propias personalidades son más complejas y multifacéticas de lo que suponían, pero que también son más maleables con relación a la paz de lo que acostumbraban creer.

En el capítulo sobre el Tantra, presento una gran gama de enfoques e interpretaciones de este término así como de su sentido. Para empezar, la labor de definir

el término *Tantra* no es fácil. Los expertos no solo tienen dificultades a la hora de encontrar una sola definición, sino que hasta hay desacuerdo sobre su primera mención histórica. Esto se debe al hecho de que el concepto es extremadamente amplio. El término mismo frecuentemente es ofuscado por el uso popular y comercial, lo que muchas veces incluye contenido sexual explícito, como por ejemplo salones de masajes, grupos practicando sexo libre o poliamor o centros que ofrecen cursos sobre orgasmos múltiples. Mientras que las antiguas tradiciones tántricas efectivamente incluyen elementos sexuales, sería un error creer que la sexualidad es la meta del Tantra o siquiera su enfoque principal. El presente estudio rechaza la interpretación del Tantra como una manera de meramente alcanzar una mejor vida sexual. Un tal enfoque no reconoce debidamente lo que ofrece esta antigua puerta a la unidad a través de la autorrealización profunda.

Los elementos sexuales que según la literatura parecen formar parte de los rituales tradicionales de Tantra no están destinados al placer prosaico, sino que tienen el fin de trascenderlo para así alcanzar introspección y paz interior. El Tantra se puede comprender como el antiguo arte de aplicar la energía sexual para alcanzar estados mentales superiores/alterados. Muchos estudios, incluyendo este mismo, hacen referencia a estos estados mentales superiores. Estos tradicionalmente se buscan para obtener introspección y con ello, liberarse del sufrimiento, lo que a su vez se puede interpretar como paz interior duradera. Esta meta se encuentra tanto en el Tantra original hindú como en el Tantra budista que surgió más tarde.

Basándose en estas fuentes antiguas, que el Institut Namasté no considera religiones sino más bien instrucciones probadas para el desarrollo personal, los talleres analizados para este estudio definen el Tantra como “difundir el conocimiento que salva” (Urban, 2003, 31). Esta definición se basa en la traducción literal de *tan = difundir* y *tra*

= *aquello que salva* y cobra vida a la hora de enseñar métodos y habilidades individuales y de grupo que los ayudan a liberarse/salvarse de emociones aflitivas como la ansiedad, el miedo o la rabia. Al practicar estos métodos y al desarrollar una perspectiva de la realidad radicalmente distinta, los y las participantes tienden a profundizar y a estabilizar la tranquilidad de espíritu, independientemente de las circunstancias externas.

La transformación de los/las practicantes de Tantra a nivel personal profundo es la esencia del Tantra. En el caso ideal, lleva del trabajo del individuo que deja de enredarse en temas egocéntricos a una conexión dichosa con una Fuente (ya sea percibida como una deidad, el universo o su propio corazón). En el caso ideal, el/la practicante desarrolla una comprensión profundamente compasiva sobre la dinámica de la vida humana y a partir de ahí, al entender que todo está conectado, surge una paz interior inquebrantable. Es ahí donde convergen la Paz y el Tantra.

Quienes desean alcanzar estas metas tendrán más oportunidad de conseguirlo si lo intentan en un entorno seguro donde prueban y practican nuevas perspectivas y enfoques, patrones de preguntas, rutinas y creencias y donde tiene apoyo y personas experimentadas a su lado. Para proporcionar un entorno así, el Institut Namasté, como muchos facilitadores en el mundo, ofrece talleres de Tantra donde se abordan exactamente estos temas. Con el fin de ofrecer información detallada sobre los métodos y el entorno de uno de estos talleres, describí detalladamente las metas y los métodos y también proporcioné ejemplos de ejercicios típicos.

### **1.5. El estudio**

El estudio incluye una amplia lista de factores, habilidades y aptitudes que he visto manifestarse durante el periodo de observación de veinte años, y forman parte de la trayectoria personal de desarrollo a la que aspiran los talleres de Tantra del Institut

Namasté. Esta lista incluye temas que estimulan y profundizan directa o indirectamente la experiencia de paz interior del individuo, como por ejemplo

- la habilidad de escoger y cambiar la propia perspectiva sobre el mundo,
- mayor resistencia y tolerancia a la frustración,
- goce de la vida y gratitud,
- amabilidad y compasión,
- poder distinguir lo auténtico de lo falso,
- asumir responsabilidad por su propio bienestar,
- desarrollar conciencia plena, practicar comunicación no violenta – hasta en diálogos internos,
- valor ante desafíos y dificultades
- autorespeto y respeto por otros, en especial por su otredad,
- una relación amorosa/de bienvenida pero sin ataduras con su propio cuerpo y todo lo material.

Para que los instructores y las instructoras de los talleres puedan apoyar a los/las participantes lo mejor posible, es crucial que los/las participantes sientan confianza. Si los instructores y las instructoras no saben o no saben por qué una persona está teniendo dificultades, si esta persona no confía en al menos uno de los miembros del equipo para abrirse a esa otra persona, no se podrá ofrecer exitosamente reafirmación ni orientación y no se podrán aclarar posibles malentendidos. Dado que una confianza que acabe siendo más fuerte que el miedo o el bochorno tiene que ser probada y creada con el tiempo, la importancia de un enfoque ético y de confianza es un aspecto primordial y es un elemento crítico del código de conducta del Institut (“Assi-Regeln”, 2001).

El estudio incluye una descripción detallada del entorno de los talleres de Tantra, el horario y el enfoque para así ayudar a entender las metas y métodos en un contexto

pragmático. La descripción del ciclo anual, sus componentes y sus metas específicas proporcionan información de fondo para el posterior análisis de los datos recolectados. Además, el material demográfico en el que se describen las cohortes de los ciclos anuales con período de observación entre 2005 y 2015 proporciona cifras sobre la distribución de las cohortes de edad, profesión y la proporción hombres/mujeres.

### **1.6. Análisis de la encuesta**

Tras una revisión inicial de los datos de la encuesta, estuve sorprendida ante los primeros resultados: contrario a lo que había observado a lo largo de años de trabajo con participantes en los talleres de Tantra, las respuestas a la encuesta mostraron solo cambios menores entre el momento de comenzar el ciclo anual y el momento de finalizarlo. Esto fue inesperado ya que basado en mis observaciones, había anticipado que los resultados mostrarán mejoras significativas y consistentes.

Los datos de la encuesta fueron analizados desde varias perspectivas: *tendencias*, *categorías* y *cambios intraindividuales*. Las tendencias encontradas en los capítulos *tendencias* y *categorías* no comprueban de manera convincente la eficacia del ciclo anual para la pacificidad. Sin embargo, en el capítulo donde se examinan historias personales, sí proporciona más información, ya que la personalidad, el estado de conciencia y el enfoque único de cada persona encuestada hacia su propio desarrollo se hace más evidente. Estas informaciones con su “calidad de huella digital” ofrecen una perspectiva íntima del viaje de los/las participantes a través del ciclo anual. Algunas personas empiezan con valoraciones tan altas que apenas sí pueden ser mejoradas en la segunda encuesta, mientras que otros aparentemente pasan por un proceso de “reducción natural”, muestran señales de confusión y desamparo o, por el contrario, indican mejoras que probablemente nunca hubieran esperado.

Al examinar las 25 preguntas seleccionadas para este estudio, los datos recolectados en el periodo 2005 a 2015 de una muestra de N=222 muestran un ligero incremento en las valoraciones de las personas encuestadas:

Respuesta promedio S1 7.08  
Respuesta promedio S2 7.63

En el mejor de los casos, estas dos cifras indican una tendencia. Esta tendencia no es muy notable ni concluyente, ya que un enfoque cuantitativo basado en las herramientas usadas no permite obtener resultados estadísticamente relevantes. Esto se debe en parte al diseño del estudio y al entorno mismo, y estudios futuros seguramente podrían beneficiar de más y mejores herramientas como una encuesta de seguimiento o un grupo de control.

Dado que el diseño del cuestionario para el presente estudio no permitió obtener resultados estadísticamente relevantes, los datos de la encuesta fueron usados para una orientación básica hacia el análisis cualitativo. Por consiguiente, el contenido de *tendencias, categorías y cambios intraindividuales* da una idea básica de las tendencias que se esperaban del análisis de los datos cualitativos. Mientras que estas tres maneras de analizar datos de la encuesta solo pueden apuntar en una dirección, sí preparan el terreno para el siguiente paso del estudio: el análisis cualitativo de las entrevistas en profundidad.

### **1.7. Entrevistas**

Las entrevistas en profundidad proporcionaron amplio material para el análisis. Basándome en las cinco categorías determinadas para el análisis de la encuesta (*interacción y relaciones, confianza, introspección, paz interior, ecuanimidad, felicidad, consciencia corporal, sexualidad, conciencia plena, espiritualidad*), sometí las seis

entrevistas a un análisis narrativo. Después, presenté cada entrevista dividida en cinco categorías y analicé cada categoría por separado. Esto facilita la comparación entre las declaraciones por categoría de cada una de las personas entrevistadas.

Este enfoque cualitativo con su análisis narrativo discursivo confirma mi expectativa de que este método permitiría mostrar clara y diferenciadamente el crecimiento y la transformación hacia la paz interior experimentados por los/las participantes de los talleres de Tantra. Con esta herramienta me fue posible poner las tendencias, puntos fuertes y débiles personales en perspectiva y valorarlos de manera equilibrada, siempre tomando en cuenta las circunstancias personales de cada persona encuestada. Todo parece indicar que ni las “altas notas” ni un fracaso aparente en ciertas áreas revelado por las valoraciones de las encuestas inequívocamente apunta a un verdadero progreso o a una auténtica falta de éxito. Los métodos cualitativos, por el contrario, proporcionan una herramienta adecuada para evaluar el impacto de la influencia examinada a nivel individual.

Además, cualidades como la pacificidad y la ecuanimidad son más fácilmente detectables con otros métodos que no son una sencilla valoración numérica: las entrevistas de persona a persona ofrecen una gran cantidad de fuentes de información e indicaciones sobre el enfoque de cada persona, su actitud y estado de conciencia. Es más, hasta sus valores se hacen patentes a través de la interacción con la entrevistadora, su ritmo, tono de voz, las pausas que hacen para pensar, las palabras que eligen. Todos estos elementos complementan la impresión general de lo que las personas entrevistadas comunican de manera verbal.

Ahora bien, ¿qué fue lo que revelaron los/las participantes en las entrevistas en profundidad? Las entrevistas mostraron que, cuando se les pregunta a las personas que han hecho el ciclo anual sobre el impacto que estos talleres han tenido en sus vidas, en



sus perspectivas y sobre todo en su paz dentro de su entorno y en él, estas personas confirman el concepto desde el que partió este estudio.

**1.7.1. Interacción y relaciones.** Un denominador común fue que el entorno social de las personas entrevistadas notó una mayor apertura, más tendencia a compartir opiniones, preferencias y emociones, lo que a su vez fortalece los lazos con amigos/amigas y familiares. Las personas entrevistadas concuerdan en que este acto de compartir se siente menos “arriesgado” para ellas y que abordan temas delicados con claridad y valor. Todas ellas resaltan que sus habilidades comunicativas han mejorado. Han aprendido a tomar rechazos de manera relajada, detectar y expresar sus emociones, adoptar una postura y se han convertido en personas de confianza codiciadas para escuchar a otras personas en situaciones de angustia.

La mayoría hace constar que hubo cambios considerables en sus relaciones: algunas amistades acaban cuando un/una participante desarrolla un nuevo enfoque hacia la vida, como por ejemplo sacar menos satisfacción de quejarse y de acusar a otros. Hay participantes que deliberadamente se distancian de otros miembros de su círculo íntimo, mientras que integran a nuevas amistades a sus vidas. Se trata de personas quienes les dan apoyo, comprensión y una sensación de reto.

Especialmente en el caso de las mujeres, los “muros de protección” contra compañeros potenciales y existentes pasan a ser obsoletos, ya que con una nueva perspectiva del otro sexo se crean relaciones basadas en confianza. A partir de ahí, las mujeres expresan sus necesidades, imponen límites y los defienden, de ser necesario.

Todas las personas entrevistadas indicaron que mejoraron sus relaciones familiares, ya sea gracias a una reconciliación (especialmente con los padres de los individuos, hasta en casos de grave disfuncionalidad), tras haberse liberado de la

búsqueda compulsiva de la aprobación de la familia o habiéndose permitido a sí mismos y a su familia ser como son sin tratar de cambiar su manera de ser. Las personas encuestadas acostumbraron decir que “finalmente se hicieron adultos”. Para más de la mitad de ellas, este cambio abarca no solo una reconciliación sino también compasión y gratitud hacia los miembros de su familia. La paz dentro de su propia familia es, para muchas personas encuestadas, un atractivo particularmente valioso con un impacto positivo en la paz interior de la persona en cuestión.

Para la mayoría de las personas encuestadas, la relación con su propio yo también se hizo más profunda: trabajan especialmente bien con el modelo del niño interior y su diálogo interno se vuelve más tierno y más comprensivo, lo que a su vez permite tener más pacificidad. La mayoría de las personas entrevistadas indicaron que ya no se culpan por fracasos o conflictos interiores; desarrollaron más autoaprecio y se volvieron más comprensivas consigo mismas, pero también más rigurosas a la hora de perseguir sus metas de crecimiento interior, dando menos espacio a su yo débil.

Existe una necesidad muy marcada en todas las personas entrevistadas de “devolver lo recibido al mundo/a la comunidad”. Sin sentirse responsables por todo el universo, sienten el impulso de compartir lo que han aprendido, de apoyar a otros y de contribuir a un mundo lleno de comprensión, de búsqueda de soluciones y de paz, aunque sea solo gracias al hecho de estar en paz con su propia mente.

**1.7.2. Introspección y confianza.** Todas las personas entrevistadas sistemáticamente indicaron que tienen mayor confianza y atribuyen este hecho a su habilidad recién encontrada de poder decir “sí” o “no”, o sea a aceptar o rechazar propuestas/sugerencias con amabilidad, claridad y determinación. Después de haber cursado el ciclo anual, dicen lo que piensan cuando no se sienten satisfechas con alguna situación en vez de acabar

frustradas; desarrollaron valor y se enfrentan a situaciones de estrés con un espíritu cada vez más deportivo.

La desconfianza, el desprecio y/o el sentido de inferioridad hacia otros disminuyen mientras que su confianza aumenta. Esta transformación predominantemente se basa en la introspección recién adquirida, o sea, su habilidad de detectar y entender sus propios patrones mentales y de equilibrar y ajustar su comportamiento como corresponde. Por lo general, es más fácil entender los patrones de otras personas y relacionarse con ellas en un espíritu de pacificidad cuando se han comprendido y perdonado los propios patrones. Los talleres de Tantra ofrecen un sinnúmero de posibilidades para alcanzar esta comprensión acerca de las batallas y dificultades de otras personas. Tras haber combinado la compasión con la introspección, todas las personas encuestadas indicaron que sienten más indulgencia con sus propios defectos y los de los demás, lo que abre nuevos espacios para la pacificidad.

Gracias a una mayor confianza, los desafíos y traumas de toda la vida aparecen menos aterradores. La mitad de las personas encuestadas indicó no solo tener más alegría de vivir, sino que también divertirse y gozar del desafío de enfrentar y superar obstáculos. Algunos ejemplos típicos son abordar conflictos latentes o decir su opinión o defender a alguien más con desenvoltura y pacificidad. Todas las personas encuestadas aplican técnicas y conocimientos aprendidos en el ciclo anual para lidiar con situaciones abrumadoras, resistir dramas inútiles o cuidarse bien a ellos mismos y a su niño interior. Casi todos indicaron que les gusta aplicar estos métodos que aprendieron en el ciclo anual a sus vidas cotidianas.

La introspección se extiende a la autoconciencia de las personas encuestadas y su habilidad gradualmente creciente de darse cuenta de lo que están haciendo, percibiendo y sintiendo (el observador interno). Por consiguiente, todas las personas encuestadas

indican que les es más fácil controlar sus emociones y cada vez más permanecen con la conciencia aguda en una situación dada, sin la necesidad de reaccionar inmediatamente. Esto les da tiempo para elegir enfoques más serenos y más pacíficos en vez de optar por enfoques precipitados y desconsiderados. Asimismo, todas las personas entrevistadas generalmente toman el tiempo de reflexionar sobre las razones de las reacciones internas espontáneas que observan, lo que facilita descubrir procesos y motivaciones subyacentes y desenredarlos después.

Igualmente, las personas entrevistadas indicaron que hicieron las paces con personas de su propio sexo: las mujeres dejan de mirar a otras mujeres con desprecio y de percibir las como competencia y abiertamente peligrosas. Los hombres empiezan a percibir a otros hombres como potenciales aliados más que como rivales. Todas estas transformaciones fomentan la paz interior y exterior.

**1.7.3. Paz, ecuanimidad, alegría.** Estas habilidades nuevas o mejoradas alimentan la ecuanimidad y la alegría de las personas entrevistadas y contribuyen a una experiencia de paz interior cada vez más profunda: todas ellas indicaron sentirse considerablemente más cercanas a sí mismas, más centradas, más serenas y más tranquilas, aun cuando hay caos y desafíos. La tolerancia hacia la ambigüedad aumentó en toda la muestra, disminuyendo la necesidad de ver las cosas en blanco o negro sino aceptando y haciendo suyos los matices de gris. Ante eventos deprimentes o frustrantes, todas las personas encuestadas indicaron sentir más resistencia y un enfoque más ecuánime, y con ello la posibilidad de reacciones pacíficas.

Todos los participantes desarrollaron, en distinta medida, tolerancia con sus propias imperfecciones, cosa que, junto con una introspección avanzada, les ayuda a ser más comprensivos con las imperfecciones de otras personas en vez de reaccionar a ellas

con irritación y acusaciones. Todos ellos usan su observador interno para estar conectados con sus emociones sin tener que actuar conforme a ellas, lo que aumenta su convicción de estar al mando de sus propias vidas y haciéndolos menos propensos a acusar a otros.

Tanto hombres como mujeres indicaron haber alcanzado mejor acceso a sus propias emociones y notan que su paisaje emocional se está volviendo más colorido: se abren a más alegría en sus vidas y al mismo tiempo no apartan su vista del dolor, sino que reconocen ambas cosas. Celebran la alegría y sacan conclusiones de experiencias desagradables o inquietantes. De esta manera, gradualmente se abren a todo lo que se les presenta en el camino con una mente pacífica, ya que entienden que, sea lo que sea, puede ser tanto una fuente de placer como una oportunidad para la introspección y en el mejor de los casos, ambas cosas.

Todas las personas encuestadas explícitamente abrazan virtudes como la gratitud, o sea, la conciencia de los elementos buenos y alegres en sus vidas, así como la conciencia plena, lo que les permite permanecer serenas y amables aun en situaciones estresantes y fastidiosas. Indican enfrentarse a sus propios rincones oscuros con más y más valor en vez de evitarlos. Esto las lleva a una mayor y más profunda confianza y más paz interior al desprenderse del miedo, el antagonista de la paz.

Las cualidades más frecuentemente indicadas que las personas encuestadas dicen alcanzar tras el ciclo anual son mayor amabilidad, paciencia y compasión, además de métodos y pistas que les ayudan a seguir por su camino. Más de la mitad de estas personas indica que se divierte más, que ríe más que antes y que ataca y se defiende menos que antes, gracias a un enfoque más paciente y tolerante hacia los caprichos de la vida. En el caso de dos de las personas encuestadas, su habilidad de enfrentar los eventos de la vida con ecuanimidad hasta les ayudó a enfrentar su propia muerte, probablemente

inminente. Se mostraron serenas, en paz consigo mismas y además tranquilizaron a su entorno.

El hecho de permanecer en sus rincones tranquilos abre oportunidades para una comunicación mejor y más profunda. En general, las personas entrevistadas describieron sus interacciones como fluidas, agradables, eficientes y de gran cercanía – aun en situaciones laborales y especialmente en éstas. Con relación al trabajo, algunas personas encuestadas se dieron cuenta que los aspectos materiales son cada vez menos importantes para ellas. Prefieren trabajos donde ganan menos pero que dan más satisfacción y sentido a sus vidas y aspiran a hacer una diferencia en el mundo.

**1.7.4. Conciencia corporal y sexualidad.** Todas las personas encuestadas concuerdan en haber alcanzado una mejor conciencia corporal así como un enfoque más relajado hacia sus propios cuerpos y sus funciones corporales, hacia la sexualidad en general y hacia sus propios encuentros sexuales en particular. Tanto hombres como mujeres sienten considerablemente menos presión interna de desempeño lo que conlleva una sexualidad más relajada y gratificadora. Además, ambos sexos, independientemente de su cohorte de edad, indican tener una mejor imagen corporal lo que también estimula su autoestima y confianza.

Los encuestados masculinos dijeron que su dependencia emocional de funciones eréctiles impecables ha disminuido considerablemente, lo que crea espacio para el goce cada vez menos estresante o para todo lo que una situación erótica dada permita. El no tener que “demostrar” nada, además de poder dejar ir sentimientos de culpa sobre sus deseos, es algo que los hombres viven como un gran alivio que aumenta su fe en sí mismos y el mundo y fortalece su tranquilidad de espíritu.

Las mujeres entrevistadas resaltan la importancia de reconciliarse con su propia feminidad, sus cuerpos y su sexualidad antes de pasar a disfrutar los aspectos felices de la sexualidad y explorarlos más sin recaer en estrés y ansiedad. Dependiendo de la historia personal de cada mujer, esto normalmente exige varios pasos de concientización, aceptación y sanación, cosa que las entrevistadas alcanzaron a hacer durante su ciclo anual. Cada una de las tres mujeres entrevistadas contó de manera conmovedora de su nuevo despertar de la felicidad sexual que había creído desaparecida para siempre.

Los/las participantes desarrollan un nuevo enfoque hacia su yo corporal: se encaminan hacia la aceptación de quienes son físicamente. Paso a paso, aprenden a amar sus cuerpos, “con todo y verrugas”. Este tipo de autoaceptación desplaza sentimientos de inferioridad profundamente arraigados y fomenta una sensación pacífica de “estar a salvo y a gusto consigo mismo/misma”.

Tanto hombres como mujeres mencionaron que al generar un flujo elevado de energía se sienten vivos y a gusto con sus cuerpos. Para algunos, el experimentar con su flujo de energía es más fascinante y gratificante que el aspecto meramente físico de su sexualidad. Es ahí donde el ciclo anual conecta con el Tantra tradicional y prepara el terreno para un nuevo estado de conciencia, lo que a grandes rasgos se asocia con una profunda paz interior.

Según lo que resaltaron todas las personas encuestadas, este vínculo estrecho con su cuerpo fortalece la conexión con las emociones presentes en un momento dado, ya que las reconocen a través de su expresión física: respiración, voz y movimiento se han convertido en actos instintivos y proporcionan un camino conocido para volver a su espacio tranquilo interior. Ninguna de las personas entrevistadas se resiste a acompañar

sus emociones con un sonido (suspiros, risas, jadeos) y cuando están bajo presión, se permiten movimiento físico como estiramientos en vez de quedarse paralizados.

El enfoque hacia la sexualidad cambió considerablemente para cada participante. Pasó de ser un asunto de miedo, delicado, embarazoso, deseos no satisfechos o confusión hacia una sexualidad como una manera humana de expresar cercanía, crear energía, vivir alegría y unidad o hasta de encontrar estados mentales alterados y espiritualidad. Con este enfoque hacia la sexualidad fundamentalmente transformado, los/las participantes encontraron caminos nuevos para conectar con su paz interior.

**1.7.5. Conciencia plena, espiritualidad.** La conciencia plena está presente en las vidas de las personas encuestadas no solo como su bien establecido observador interno “encargado” de detectar patrones de pensamientos y reacciones inútiles. Según las declaraciones de las personas encuestadas, la conciencia plena también se manifiesta en su tendencia más marcada de encontrar gratitud en lo que han recibido en la vida y en las oportunidades para crecer que han aprovechado. Otros elementos de la conciencia plena son consideración hacia las inquietudes, miedos y sueños de otros así como ternura, cosa que no solo se manifiesta en la manera de hablar de las personas entrevistadas, sino que también cada vez más en su manera de pensar y hasta de actuar, como cerrar una puerta o poner una taza de té en la mesa.

Todas las personas encuestadas indicaron sentir mayor empatía consigo mismas así como con tu entorno social: les es más fácil entender la motivación de otra persona de pedir algo o de actuar de una manera dada y, teniendo autoconciencia y autorespeto, cada vez más logran reaccionar de una manera positiva y con pacificidad.

Otro indicador de que existe una conciencia plena creciente es, según las personas entrevistadas, su habilidad de conceder que su propio punto de vista, por más



preciado que sea para ellas, puede ser solo uno de muchos. Esta desvinculación de su manera preferida de pensar está conectada con la habilidad de cada persona de elegir virtualmente los pensamientos que quiere pensar y rechazar los que son conocidos como perjudiciales, como pensamientos que reflejan rabia, acusación o venganza. Dos de las tres personas encuestadas indicaron haber alcanzado esta habilidad avanzada.

Sin ignorar o minimizar la importancia de dificultades que tengan consigo mismas, su entorno y el mundo que las rodea, la mayoría de las personas encuestadas aprendieron a apreciar lo que tienen, valorar lo positivo en sus vidas y celebrar no solo las grandes victorias y los grandes logros, sino que cada pequeño paso exitoso en el camino que recorren. Alimentan la confianza fundamental en sí mismos y en otros y, para algunos, este proceso lleva a una satisfacción profunda y estable con la vida tal y como es, lo que es un ingrediente básico para una paz interior duradera.

Todas las personas entrevistadas indicaron haber vivido momentos de extraordinaria introspección, estados mentales mejorados o experiencias espirituales durante su ciclo anual que las tocaron profundamente y abrieron una puerta a niveles previamente desconocidos de comprensión y ser. Todas ellas tuvieron dificultades al expresar estas experiencias con palabras y se mostraron más bien reticentes a compartirlas, dada la naturaleza tan íntima de estas experiencias.

Todas las personas encuestadas observaron que al tener conciencia plena, o sea, al ser muy conscientes de su estado de conciencia, les es más fácil relajarse aun cuando la carga emocional es demasiado pesada para ellas. Dado que han dedicado el suficiente tiempo a la observación de su propia mente para conocer la mutabilidad de las emociones, saben que independientemente de la conmoción que sientan en un momento dado, pronto se convertirá en otra cosa. Esto les ayuda a mantenerse serenos y pacíficos aunque se vean incapaces de resolver una situación difícil.

Asimismo, la mayoría de las personas entrevistadas indica sentir una mayor inclinación de aceptar las cosas como son, sin por ello caer en una letargia. La mayoría reconoce la naturaleza finita de las cosas, lamenta menos sus pérdidas y está más dispuesta a implementar cambios. Esto está acompañado por una tendencia de encontrar lo positivo en cada situación, lo que a su vez contribuye no solo a la tranquilidad de espíritu de la persona entrevistada: como rechazan difundir pánico y ansiedad en su alrededor y más bien deciden inspirar seguridad y confianza, su entorno sale ganando también.

Dicho de manera general, las personas encuestadas observaron que se acercaron a una actitud altruista y se alejaron de una actitud egocéntrica; creen que la razón de este desarrollo es el hecho de que saben de su interconexión con otros o hasta con todo lo que las rodea. Sin excepción alguna, todas estas personas están dispuestas a y listas para ofrecer su tiempo, sabiduría y energía para el beneficio de otros.

Según lo que indicaron las personas encuestadas, algunos de los ejercicios que hicieron durante su ciclo anual abrieron puertas a momentos inolvidables de unidad, alegría desbordante, introspección y paz. Similar a las experiencias cercanas a la muerte, estos momentos hacen desaparecer el miedo, fomentan la confianza fundamental y crean saber existencial. En varios casos, este tipo de experiencia tuvo un impacto específico en la manera de la persona entrevistada de ver el mundo, su fe y su compromiso con la amabilidad y la pacificidad.

## **1.8. Conclusión**

Como era de esperarse, las entrevistas en profundidad resultaron ser una herramienta mucho más adecuada para explorar el proceso de crecimiento hacia la paz interior y exterior de los/las participantes de los ciclos anuales. El conectar con estas personas de

manera individual, hacer preguntas de apoyo con delicadeza y sacar a luz memorias muy personales fue de gran utilidad para entender mejor su propia transformación y ver su éxito bajo una nueva luz. Eso lo indicaron cuatro de seis espontáneamente varios días después de la entrevista.

La evaluación cualitativa corroboró una serie de temas que ya se habían perfilado tras los resultados de las encuestas. Lo más evidente fue la mejora de relaciones personales, especialmente con los padres, pero también a nivel intrapersonal: todas las personas encuestadas indicaron importantes mejoras en categorías como la capacidad de perdonar, tolerancia, comprensión, amabilidad y paciencia – todos ellos ingredientes para un sentido profundizado de paz interior, pero también para relaciones más pacíficas. Un tema muy destacado entre los/las participantes fue su intensa búsqueda por el sentido. Quieren estar al servicio de los demás, no tanto para dejar huellas sino que para hacer una diferencia: lo que buscan no es reconocimiento, sino que aspiran a contribuir a un mundo más pacífico y feliz.

Basado en el análisis narrativo de seis entrevistas en profundidad y en mis observaciones como participante y observadora así como en los temas que aparecieron a través del material recolectado para las encuestas, surgió una respuesta afirmativa a la pregunta de investigación. Efectivamente, los talleres de Tantra – en este caso en el Institut Namasté – y en especial los ciclos anuales son susceptibles de fomentar significativamente las respuestas serenas y pacíficas de los/las participantes a situaciones exigentes.

Este estudio contribuye a una mejor comprensión de cómo el crecimiento personal puede impulsar el crecimiento para así contribuir a prácticas y perspectivas que fomentan la paz. Se suma a la bibliografía de estudios que indican el valor del

crecimiento personal en la comunidad siguiendo un camino trazado arraigado en prácticas espirituales tradicionales.

La falta general de investigación en este campo es motivo de preocupación, ya que hay muchos aspectos de los enfoques tradicionales que pueden ser rescatados para ayudar a fortalecer la capacidad y la voluntad de las personas de dedicarse a actividades relacionadas con la paz. Esta área de investigación en el campo de las paces transracionales merece ser estudiada más a fondo, especialmente desde la perspectiva de la psicología positiva. Así, esta tesis prepara el terreno para una línea de investigación más rigurosa que examinaría también los efectos de los componentes de los talleres de Tantra usando una medida de resultados bien definidos. Un ejemplo podría ser la aplicación del modelo de los Grandes Cinco y usar el análisis de factores de componentes principales.

Este estudio ha alcanzado su objetivo: contribuir al campo creciente de Estudios de la Paz al añadir conocimientos sobre maneras y métodos de alcanzar la paz interior y exterior. Ha mostrado que el enfoque tántrico tradicional, adaptado a un público contemporáneo, puede abrir oportunidades hacia una gran gama de metas, desde desarrollar confianza fundamental y conciencia plena, fortaleciendo así la paz individual y social, experiencias espirituales y unidad cósmica y paz integral. En este sentido, los talleres de Tantra han mostrado que verdaderamente cumplen con la definición de Hugh Urban y la traducción literal del término Tantra, a saber, *difundir el conocimiento que salva*, al guiar a los individuos hacia una apertura y la aceptación de la otredad acorde con el concepto de la paz transracional.

## **2. Introduction**

In this chapter, I address the reasons why, and the process of how, I came up with the topic for the present study. I also expand on my own becoming and expertise as a Tantra teacher, particularly on my personal background and my bias as a researcher. Lastly, I share some of the most influential sources of knowledge which have shaped my worldview and approach.

### **2.1. Why this Topic?**

I remember meeting Edi Götschel, the webmaster of a then unique Swiss Tantra portal,<sup>1</sup> in one of the famous Viennese coffee places back in the late 1990s. At that time, I had been giving Tantra workshops alongside my partner for about three years, and I was flattered that somebody who, I felt, was so experienced in this field and knew so many famous people connected to Tantra, had agreed to meet over coffee with me.

He asked me about the contents of our workshops and I briefly described the goals, the methods and the structures. After listening attentively, he exclaimed: “So you are doing therapy!” I was flabbergasted. Therapy? Really? Meaning, we were doing something people from the outside would not only take seriously, but consider useful and having healing potential? Even though, to date, Tantra workshops are not listed nor acknowledged as therapy, the encouragement and sense of contribution I drew from this conversation inspired me for the years to come in my career as Tantra facilitator.

Today, about 17 years later, I am reading the email from one of our participants’ concerned mother. Her daughter – a mother of three in her early forties – has “evidently fallen into the trap of your esoteric cult”, “has changed, completely – we don’t recognize

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<sup>1</sup> [www.tantra.ch](http://www.tantra.ch); live until 2016.

her, anymore”, “her unheard of calmness in any situation and unwavering friendliness with the kids is but evidence of a washed brain”, “she is spending all her money on your workshops and will end up broke”, “a person in her right mind doesn’t need workshops to have satisfying sex or to find spirituality and a purpose in life”.<sup>2</sup>

So, what is it, after all, that we are doing? Is it therapy, personal growth, ways of self-experience, sexual education, bonding with something bigger than our beloved Self – or is it brain washing, esoteric wannabe spirituality, moneymaking and abusive group dynamics? But maybe even more intriguing: does, whatever Tantra workshops offer, indeed work for people? Does it take them where they want to go?

I am writing this at a time when the Austrian Federal Health Ministry has issued new guidelines aiming at distancing psychotherapists from alternative, esoteric or religious therapeutic approaches (Bundesministerium für Gesundheit, 2014) by deleting these approaches from the list of acknowledged methods, thus canceling their funding within the Austrian health care system. While this step towards a more strictly interpreted understanding of what may or may not benefit the population has no impact onto Tantric Schools, for they have never been acknowledged within the framework of therapies, it does include well-established and long-standing approaches like Shamanic Counseling or Hypnotherapy.

On one hand, such a measure is understandable: the avalanche of “new”, “channeled”, “re-discovered ancient” methods, aimed at helping individuals to deal with their life issues which is washing over Europe since the 1990s is more than any Health Care Authority concerned about its reputation could possibly handle. On the other hand, rather than expanding and becoming more varied, responding to new findings and new

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<sup>2</sup> The attendee’s mother was not right, after all: her daughter proactively found a job, successfully worked on saving her failing relationship, interrupted her advanced training Ritualweg (RW) in order to be a good parent to an issue-burdened child and currently enjoys a family life without big drama.

requirements in an increasingly complex society, this way, the choices are bound to be cut back to traditionally acknowledged ways, say, drug-based treatments or surgery. These approaches tend to leave aside the non-tangible and “non-rational”, while at the same time defining the client/patient as an individual in need of protection and unable to choose wisely for themselves.

Attending Tantra workshops is far from being socially acknowledged as anything more than an exotic hobby, an eyebrow-raising pastime not much different from visits to swinger clubs, possibly sex-education, relationship enhancement at best, or perhaps esoteric lightweight spirituality. Since this kind of understanding is very different from what I experience on a day-to-day basis, my goal is to show whether or not Tantra workshops can lead to a significant change in the participants’ quality of life in general and in their peaceful dealing with everyday situations, in particular.

## **2.2. Tangible Results vs. Audience’s Reluctance**

During all these years since 1997, I was haunted by one question: how come many participants in Tantric workshops describe their positive results as so real, down-to-earth and tangible as well as easily detectable by the participants’ environment, while the wider audience – without a reference frame of their own – keeps rejecting, ridiculing or thoroughly misunderstanding anything Tantric (“This is about orgies, right?” “After all I’ve heard, this is an abusive sex cult, anyway...” “Oh, I do Tantra, myself. I can do 15+ Kamasutra positions!”) or hoping for quick reward and simple pleasures (“Why isn’t there a woman for every man, in this group?!”, “You do happy endings, don’t you?”).

However, even those who can refer to their own experience of Tantric workshops have not necessarily turned into unanimous supporters: some leave mid-seminar, some look for alternative facilitators, some find that this kind of setting is not for them, and

a few feel driven to warn others about the methods, contents or facilitators. These are, really, good signs, demonstrating the lack of foundation for the popular accusation of brainwashing people and turning them into addicted followers (cf. sec. 6.4.5.1, *Is Tantra a Cult?*, p.204). One of the declared goals of IN's workshops is to create a safe space where people can learn to become more independent, discriminating and to rely on their own judgment; hence, turning the back on their former teachers or simply moving on can be interpreted as an increase in self-determination.

It is a common reaction to the unknown to ignore, ridicule, fear or simply avoid it (Adolphs, 2013), a range of responses familiar to those who work in the Tantric field. Therefore, I suggest that the public lacks information about the contents, goals and perceivable results of Tantric workshops – a condition this paper is aimed to change.

### **2.3. Expertise**

I made first contact with the term “Tantra” when I was about seventeen and, at a book sale, ran into Kamala Devi’s “*Tantric Sex*” (Devi, 1978). It fascinated me, even though I did not understand very much; I tried several of the suggested exercises (“...touch your lips with your index fingers and repeat the sacred mantra”) but gave up quickly because I was unable to get anything out of them: it was simply boring and I shook my teenaged head over the silly things adults would find thrilling.

From my twenties onward, I explored different ways of alternative spirituality and energy work, on my own as well as in groups, in informal settings as well as thorough training: Wicca, Shamanism, Reiki, Psychological Astrology, Biodanza,<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> “Biodanza is a process of global human development; it is an invitation to get into movement, to express and develop oneself among a group of people. Biodanza is done with the support of a precise combination of exercises, dances and music. It offers the possibility to progressively rehabilitate one’s life force, one’s « joie de vivre », and promote a general sensation of well-being.”  
[www.biodanza.ca/en/biodanza-canada/who-is-biodanza-for/](http://www.biodanza.ca/en/biodanza-canada/who-is-biodanza-for/), Feb 19, 2016



Systemic Constellations and others. While I gave up many of them because they felt too shallow, shamanic methods (Harner, 1980) and Systemic Constellations (Ruppert, 2007; Ulsamer, 2001) were tools I kept using and developing for the years to come.

The next Tantric step followed years later: I was in my early thirties, a successful freelance translator and about to spice up a failing relationship with something a friend had recommended: a Tantra workshop. My then boyfriend and I signed up and I was excited, remembering my early attempts – hopefully, this time, I would get “the hang of it”! However, the relationship ended abruptly three days before the workshop date and the facilitators would not allow me to attend as a single. Hurting because of the breakup and upset because of the rejection, I looked for an alternative, determined to get my Tantric experience no matter what.

This was 1996, and self-exploration workshops in Europe were still everything but common. Surprisingly enough, I found a facilitator who offered a workshop that very week end, plus he needed a female participant to balance the group. The group was small – about ten people –, taught by a couple in their forties with exotic names: Amrit and Fulwari. Later I learned that those were taken-on Sannyasin<sup>4</sup> names: they had been students in Bhagavan Shree Rajneesh (Osho’s)<sup>5</sup> ashram – a meditation resort of mixed reputation – in Pune, India.

That week end was exactly what I needed at that moment: it gave me time to focus on myself and my mindset, gentle exercises made me feel deeply connected and soothed my grief, upbeat music and vigorous dancing helped me get back in touch with my body awareness; there were people who would genuinely listen to my story and share

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<sup>4</sup> “Sannyasin” – the wanderer; in reference to the vows former itinerant monks used to take.

<sup>5</sup> Born Chandra Mohan Jain (1931-1990), Bhagavan Shree Rajneesh – later simply Osho – was an Indian philosophy professor and public speaker turned controversial New Age guru. Most Western Tantra schools trace their origins back to the adaptations of what was his understanding of Hindu and Buddhist Tantra.

their own; I discovered methods to experience and increase my own energy, and I took my first steps in the field of meditation, peeking into states of mind of peace and bliss I had had no idea even existed. I was delighted: this was what I had been looking for, all these years – everything “under one roof”! I signed up for the follow-up workshop two months later.

That second workshop confirmed my determination to explore this path further. I also fell in love with Amrit, the facilitator. Since the feelings were mutual, the following months were turbulent and challenging; however, in the following summer of 1997, I was already leading a workshop alongside Amrit, leaning on his gentle guidance and drawing from my own extensive group experience. Amrit and I remained in a common-law relationship for 12 years, founding the Institut Namasté (IN), designing, developing and leading Tantric workshops for a wide range of experience levels, goals and requirements.

Since we soon realized how much responsibility our participants’ often unconditional trust really put onto our shoulders, we made sure we enhanced our own education, training and experience by studying to become life counselors and licensed sexual educators as well as by attending Tantric workshops with a number of renowned facilitators. We both graduated from a Family Constellations training and implemented Systemic Constellations into our Standard Year-Training. A few years later, we started offering intense one-on-one trainings for future Tantra teachers and Constellations facilitators.

In 2008, Amrit and I gently separated our private lives, carefully avoiding any impact on the IN. We remain best friends and an extraordinary team, finding reward in working for our participants’ best results.

## **2.4. Personal Background and Bias**

The question, “Who am I as an Author and what is my bias?” cannot be answered without understanding who I am as a person. Just the same as the outer world and its phenomena are clearly interconnected – there is a cause to everything – so are a person’s inner processes and the resulting reactions, worldviews, values, fears, beliefs and physical symptoms.

I was born 1963 in the then Czechoslovakian Socialist Republic into a middle-class family. My parents fled the communist regime in 1969 and I, their only child, was raised and educated in Vienna, Austria. After graduating from University, I worked as translator and lived for prolonged periods of time in Spain and Russia. Currently I am living both in Austria and Canada.

I hold two master’s degrees<sup>6</sup> and look back on 30 years of mostly freelance-career: first, as a translator, later as facilitator of workshops on Systemic Constellations (Krivan, 2012, 43) and Tantra, adding professional trainings on individual coaching and counseling to my education profile, such as life coach training, sound- and provocative therapy training or manipulative bodywork.

I grew up in a moderately Christian environment but seceded from the Roman Catholic Church at age 18 and became a Buddhist at 40. My vivid interest in the relationships between things, individuals and groups as well as in the elements that make these relationships thrive or wither is what makes me passionate about systemic constellations and connective communication techniques.

Admittedly, it is hard to think of anybody more biased than myself to write the present doctoral dissertation: As a workshop facilitator and head of the IN I am

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<sup>6</sup> MA in Translation and Interpreting from the University of Vienna, 1985; MA in Peace Studies (Program for Peace, Development, Security and International Conflict Transformation) at the University of Innsbruck, 2012.

inseparable from what I examine, which makes it particularly hard to achieve any kind of objectivity. Additionally, I am an interested part, as well: It would require some effort to accept facts if the data showed that, really, the workshops I have been pouring my energy into for 20 years render only negligible effects.

This said, there are a number of factors that support my endeavor:

- My second Master Thesis (Krivan, 2012), for which I have already applied the participant-observer approach, has provided the groundwork of interest as well as the methodological expertise for the present study; also, it trained me in being aware of my bias.
- I possess thorough and long-term experience in the field;
- Over a period of 11 years, the Institut Namasté has systematically collected data which are available for this research project;
- These data were initially meant to be used by an external researcher; however, I could not find anyone who would conduct this study;
- I have the privilege to work with a comparatively large sample;
- The author of the master thesis “Enlightenment through Sex?” who surveyed participants of the Institut’s Year-Training recommends in her conclusion that a study like that should be conducted by somebody who is well-trained in the Tantric field (Lugmayr, 2003, 102).
- If, indeed, the analysis shows that the TWs have little to no effect or function as a mere placebo, I do want to know in order to reconsider the entire concept and, consequently, offer alternatives that provide enhanced efficacy and better serve the needs of Tantric workshops’ attendees in general;

## **2.5. Sources of Knowledge and Wisdom**

The following sources are meant to give a very concise overview of what shaped my particular way of seeing the world around me. Since a personal bias is inevitable even for

researchers most zealous for objectivity, I will give a number of sources that might help understand my cultural, philosophical and professional background.

My approach to Western Tantra and the art of unifying sexuality with spirituality is fittingly reflected in Elmar and Michaela Zadra's *Tantra: Bewusstseinsentwicklung und sexuelle Ekstase* (Zadra & Zadra, 2000) in which the authors bridge the gap between Western Tantra and ancient Buddhist teachings.

To give an idea whose advice I follow spiritually, I would like to name Garchen Triptrül Rinpoche, whose life and teaching is summed up in *The Lama of Many Lifetimes* (Dan, 2013). This elderly Tibetan Lama,<sup>7</sup> revered far beyond the circle of his own students, is a living example of what applied compassion and genuine kind-heartedness look like. On what everyday Buddhism might mean, Pema Chödrön, an American nun in the tradition of Tibetan Buddhism is a prolific author and teacher and well-respected authority. Her "Practicing Peace in Times of War" (Chödrön, 2006) – to name only one of her works – has been my good-night read for many years.

Systemic thinking has, over the years, become part of my character. It is the main subject of *Lehrbuch der systemischen Therapie und Beratung*, (Schweitzer & Von Schlippe, 2014) while *Rituals in Families and Family Therapy* (Imber-Black, 2002) offers a combination of therapeutic approaches, communication skills and structured interventions. Another author and constellation trainer I am privileged enough to list among my teachers is Franz Ruppert, Professor of Psychology at the University of Applied Sciences in Munich, who takes a scientific approach to the phenomenological art of constellation work (Ruppert, 2007) .

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<sup>7</sup> *Lama* means "teacher" in Tibetan; the term refers to spiritual teachers, exclusively.

My understanding is that tensions, misunderstandings and resistance which we experience in all kinds of relationships are rooted in failing communication, and that successful communication is a cornerstone of any teaching/learning situation. Therefore, I would like to list a few works on communication which I consider pivotal for the development of my own communication skills as a workshop leader and counselor.

One of my first favorite authors on communication was Paul Watzlawick. (Watzlawick, 2010). The next step was to discover Friedemann Schulz von Thun, (Von Thun, 1980) a German communications theorist who has been publishing since 1981 and whose *Communication Square* and *Four-Ears Model* (Schulz von Thun, 2017) are broadly quoted in the related literature. Not only does he break down the parts of a message into easy-to-grasp elements and thus opens a completely new door for its improvement; he is, furthermore, an author with a marvelous sense of humor, which makes his work an entertaining while horizon-expanding read.

My MA in Peace Studies introduced me to Marshall Rosenberg's method of *Nonviolent Communication* (Rosenberg, 2002). I immediately realized that his method represents the next logical step after studying Schulz von Thun: where Schulz von Thun left me with a couple of questions, Rosenberg provided the answers, while his approach – patience, believing in a person's good intentions, trying to understand their goals – resonates with the Buddhist teachings I am familiar with.

Positive Psychology (Maslow, 1943; M. E. P. Seligman & Royzman, 2003), a very young branch on the ramified tree of psychological approaches (its first summit took place in 1999), is another cornerstone of the Institut's work and describes an important part of its approach. The term was coined by A. Maslow in his *Motivation and Personality* (1954) and has been popularized and expanded through the work of Nancy Etcoff, Daniel Gilbert, Mihály Csíkszentmihályi and Martin Seligman (Lambert, 2009).

The Institut deals with individuals who consider themselves physically and mentally healthy; they do not seek healing in a medical sense. However, many of them find around age 40 that they do have difficulties coping with the challenges life is presenting them with. A high percentage is also haunted by the thought that there must be more to life than what they perceive as a frustrating job, draining relationships and little hope of improvement. This is where institutions such as the IN can offer methods aimed at supporting participants in their striving for change.

Positive Psychology aims at supporting and enhancing traits, skills and views that help the individual on their way to a more fulfilling life. While this goal falls short of encompassing all of a TW's objectives, it is still one of its pillars:

Psychology should be just as concerned with human strength as it is with weakness. It should be just as concerned with building strength as with repairing damage. It should be interested in the best things in life. And it should be just as concerned with making the lives of normal people fulfilling, and with genius, with nurturing high talent (M. E. P. Seligman, 2003).

With all this in mind, fascinated by human nature and the manifold methods individuals apply to stand in their own way, but also by their ability and eagerness to overcome their fears and hesitation, I am committed to sending out a simple message: "Change is possible!" I am passionate about the Tantric path, in particular, and while it certainly is not for everyone, still – according to hundreds of written testimonies gathered over 20 years – people of all walks of life seem to find many of its elements useful. I want Tantra workshops out of the esoteric New-Age slot, out of the disreputable or slightly grubby sex corner, to be seen for what they, apparently, are able to provide when facilitated with due diligence: a joyful trail of self-exploration and personal development, instilling

loving kindness, compassion and a deep, wordless knowing about inner peace. Eventual enlightenment is optional.



### **3. The Initial Question**

This chapter revolves around the innermost core of this study: its concept (in the sense of grounded theory approach (p. 60, unterhalb) and the steps that had led me to it. I will discuss the underlying assumptions – for instance, how an individual’s quest for happiness relates to their inner peace – as well as on my personal research interest. Observations in the field backing this hypothesis will be discussed alongside a number of antitheses.

#### **3.1. My Thesis**

Based on my long-term observation of hundreds of Tantra Workshop (TW) groups and their individual attendees as well as on an equally large number of formal and informal counseling sessions, conversations, written testimonies and sharing circles with individuals who all have attended the Institut Namasté’s TWs, I came to hypothesize that the changes reported by these individuals had, to a considerable extent, to do with the TWs they had been attending.

The improvements reported and observed after being instilled and repeatedly put to the test during the intense, nine-months long Year-Training (YT) affect levels of self-esteem, resilience, frustration tolerance, kindness and compassion, awareness, nonviolent communication, a positive body image and a general *peaceability* – “peace-ability”, or the ability to proactively generate and maintain one’s inner and outer peace (cf. Definitions of Terms).

The thesis I formulate is, therefore, “Tantra Workshops at the Institut Namasté, and particularly the Year-Training, tend to significantly enhance the attendees’ serene and peaceful responses to challenging situations.”

### **3.1.1 Capability of Change**

It is self-evident that human beings change over the course of their lives: toddlers learn how to speak and walk, education and life events shape the individual's responses to stimuli. Many of these stimuli come from external sources, such as parents, adversaries, or the environment. The question is: are individuals capable of self-induced change, defying subliminal and overt messages which often have been internalized ("In our family, we are too clumsy to be dancers")? Since for this study, the assumption of an inherent capability of deliberate change is pivotal, we will explore this field of interest first.

Although some authors suggest that human traits are fixed and do not vary significantly over extended periods of time (Cobb-Clark & Schurer, 2011), or are unable to find significant changes even in a 45-year longitudinal study (Soldz, 1998), others such as Dan Gilbert suggest that not only we can change, but we do so inevitably and throughout our lives (Gilbert, 2007, 2014).

Individuals change, indeed, continuously on all possible levels, so slowly and at the same time so quickly that they do not even notice: body's cells renew latest after seven years in use; we all learn new skills, meet new people who instill unknown habits, ideas, pet phrases in our life; there are viruses that attack human bodies and accidents that alter them; people discover new flavors, countries, songs; they forget about old sweethearts, pains, tragedies and victories. What was assumed to be hard-wired – values, friendships, favorite dishes – change considerably within surprisingly short time frames (Gilbert, 2014). Change is so ubiquitous that even changes themselves are subject to change: those laboriously lost pounds re-appear, we quit the language course we signed up for, relationship-damaging habits set back in.

There are different types of change: for instance, change by force and change by choice (McLeod, 2000, p. 50). The individual experiences change by force, Buddhist teacher and author Ken McLeod suggests, whenever they fail to pay attention/are not present in their lives: “We dismiss signs that something is wrong and push forward until established structures break down” (McLeod, 2000). That way, somebody who, for instance, invests his time mostly into a career and keeps ignoring the growing tension in his body and in his family, will possibly change by getting sick and/or have loved ones leave him, while the stress takes its toll on his career. This is a common reason individuals name when they sign up for personal development trainings such as Tantra workshops: “The boat is sinking, and sharks [habitual patterns] are circling around you. You realize that you have to build a new boat out of the old, leaky boat, and you have to do it without sinking” (McLeod, 2000, p.49).

Change by choice, on the other hand, can be described as *transformation*, albeit not exclusively pleasant:

Internal transformative work is primarily destructive. Those parts of our lives that result from and depend on habituated patterns will fall apart. In other words, to do this work, we must be willing to die to the life we have known. The essence of the dismantling process is the ability to maintain attention in the face of habituated reactions and not be consumed by them (McLeod, 2000, p. 51).

I have observed over a period of twenty years of leading workshops that people are not just able and willing to, but they, indeed, do change their ways, approaches, interpretations of and response to life events; they even change their default levels of anxiety or gentleness. This is what I observed in the field; it also is what keeps me motivated, since without tangible results, giving workshops on personal development would be rather pointless and frustrating.

However, some studies claim that changes of character traits are particularly frequent in young adults – during the period when there are significant physical and societal changes that signal maturity (Bleidorn et al., 2013; R. Lehmann, Allemand, Zimprich, & Martin, 2010) – and, surprisingly, again in elderly individuals beyond age 70. In contrast, middle-aged individuals seem to be relatively stable regarding their personality (R. Lehmann et al., 2010; Specht, Luhmann, & Geiser, 2014). According to this pattern, any changes in middle-aged participants’ personalities would need to be evaluated as the result of a more important impact than changes in younger and older attendees, where they, apparently, are to be expected.

It is noteworthy that it is precisely these middle-aged individuals with highly stable personality traits who, according to the present study’s demographics, represent the largest group among IN attendees. Moreover, they also tend to experience the most pronounced improvements in their overall scores (cf. Section 7.3, p. 223).

Regarding age cohorts, it is conspicuous that attendees under age 30 are rare among the IN’s audience. This begs the question: how come Tantra Workshops are so much less attractive to younger people? If participants are attracted by cliché and hearsay, should not the sexual rumors, alleged adventures or even the exotic of Asian spirituality be of more interest to individuals under age 30 than to settled moms and dads or grandparents?

My educated guess based on countless conversations with attendees and observation through decades is that middle-aged individuals are much more inclined to explore their own personality, sexuality and spirituality, since the “immortal” momentum of youth has worn off; the individual cannot uphold the myth of their own invincibility – sexual and otherwise – anymore, and feels the urge to discover who they really are;

several romantic relationships may have fallen apart; now they start wondering whether it might, after all, have something to do with themselves.

They have faced loss, defeat and death and start asking questions about values, meaning and purpose. Middle-aged individuals often discover that they are driven by strong emotions (e.g. anger, inferiority complex, jealousy); they have noticed that they follow destructive patterns and seek a constructive way to deal with them. Some came to realize that life is not what they expected it to be, and they wonder whether “that’s all there is to it”, or whether maybe there are depths for them yet to discover. These phenomena coincide with well-researched personality development, as well (Kegan, 1997).

Long-term observation during the IN’s workshops showed that at this stage of life – some around age 35, others much later – individuals understand that they need expert support in their endeavor to “find themselves”, be it therapy, coaching or a personality development group; unlike younger audience, they feel less ashamed about it and tend to seek and accept support more readily.

Change is a natural phenomenon – impermanence (*Pali: Anicca*) has been named by Buddha Shakyamuni as the first of three basic facts of all existence (Thich Nhat, 1999, 131). Coming into existence only to dissolve into nothingness some time later is a phenomenon affecting any object, person or state of mind. To steer the inevitable change towards selected goals is, however, not a given but the result of mindfulness, self-awareness and insight. There are many ways how individuals can induce change in the development of their personality and *peaceability*; one of these ways are Tantra workshops.

### **3.2. My Research Interest: The Impact of Tantra Workshops**

I am conducting this study, because I found that TWs, as a method for developing personal traits and finding stable inner peace, may enrich the landscape of more traditional approaches such as meditation, breath work, coaching or psychotherapy. Leaving aside Buddhist Tantric literature which predominantly presents a mind-focused (as opposed to body-centered) approach, currently, there are either purely academic studies on Tantra, or publications by Tantra practitioners and facilitators.

Scholarly works approach Tantra mostly from a historical and/or religious point of view, without much reference to its application in everyday life (Feuerstein, 1998; Samuel, 2008; Urban, 2003). Practitioners (Carrellas, 2007; Garrison, 1964; Hellyer, 2009; Zadra & Zadra, 2000), on the other hand, tend to highlight its pragmatic elements at the expense of philosophical and academically sound underpinning. This is where the present study aspires to close a gap: based on long-term, hands-on experience in the field, it applies academic methods in order to deepen the publicly accessible knowledge about an object of study – the impact of TWs – which has not been studied in this way, before.

Since the effects of TWs and their impact on an individual's life can be manifold – leaving old relationships/establishing new relationships; gaining confidence/becoming more humble; standing up for oneself/knowing when to step back – it was critical to choose a scope that would allow to study a particular effect of the TWs in-depth. The individual increase of *peaceability* was chosen as a “looking glass”, because the stability of inner peace seemed to be a highly significant common denominator for a number of desirable changes in personal traits and habits, such as resilience, frustration tolerance, compassion and patience.

The questions this paper attempts to answer is a) do the TWs have a peace-enhancing influence on the sample?, and b) are there indications this influence has been caused or at least triggered by TWs rather than by something else?

### **3.3. Thesis: This works!**

There are a number of indicators suggesting the possible effectiveness of the Institut Namasté's TWs, when it comes to generating factors that may be relevant for the development of an individual's *peaceability*. Based on these indicators, observed during TWs, I formulated my thesis, suggesting that TWs have a positive effect on its attendees' ability to generate and maintain inner peace. Let us look into the most prominent indicators which led to my thesis that "this works", based on observation, reports and conversations with attendees:

#### **Body Awareness**

While not everybody is able to perceive their own heartbeat without feeling their pulse, even untrained individuals can mostly tell sensations of warmth or coolness on their skin or whether their position is comfortable or uncomfortable, and all without exception can feel their breath. This is the starting point for my observations.

Over time during their TWs, observation suggests that the attendees' body awareness slowly expands to more subtle levels of perception, including the detection of previously imperceptible physical reactions to feelings and emotions such as pleasure, fear, embarrassment or confidence. Rather than feeling embarrassed of their bodies and their needs, reactions and preferences, which is a common approach when individuals start attending TWs, attendees seem to "team up" with their bodies: they report that they listen for their bodies' signals – for instance, when they have eaten enough, or when they

feel their boundaries are being trespassed – and act accordingly. This seems to start a positive spiral: understanding and following their body’s signals apparently increases the individual’s confidence, since they express that now they can “take good care” of themselves.

It seems that increasing body awareness includes the awareness of the individual attendee’s sexuality, their needs in the field of intimacy and of their sexual response, according to testimonies: “Now I know what I sexually want, and what I don’t – and finally I have the means to communicate either” is attendees’ typical comment about halfway into their Year-Training (“YT”, cf. Definitions, above).

### **Emotion Awareness/emotional Literacy and Intelligence**

To body awareness, attendees add getting and staying in touch with their emotions. Typically, they first show signs that they developed skills of discerning emotions (for instance, feelings of anger from feelings of hurt) and to name them: “I had no idea there were this many feelings inside of me!” is a comment, typical for beginners’ groups.

Once the individual realizes that there is not just a blurry sensation of “something is wrong” or “it feels sort of good”, but they can discern and name feelings such as loneliness, sadness or anticipation, they can frequently be observed taking their development a step further and looking for the source of these feelings. In these instances, attendees typically comment that a certain feeling set in when they were, for instance, cut off during a conversation. It seems that this is when many attendees get to re-claim their active role, by refusing being a helpless victim of a hostile environment, but calmly addressing the issue with those involved.



YT alumni – i.e. attendees who have graduated from the Year-Training – often seem to show signs of secure attachment (Leyh, Heinisch, Kungl, & Spangler, 2016): they appear to have gained access to their own helpful emotions as well as to the unhelpful ones,<sup>8</sup> are apparently aware of their emotional state as well as able to express it while self-regulating and evaluating in the process. .

### **Communication Skills**

While during beginners' TWs, occasional verbal clashes between attendees can be observed, possibly due to their different personalities, worldviews and ways of handling conflicting situations, such clashes are absent in advanced groups: attendees' reports during sharing rounds suggest that either, they apply one of the communication techniques learned to deal with the conflict in a peaceful way, and/or they turn inwards to explore their own role in it by examining their emotional response and re-establishing their inner peace.

YT alumni typically seem to show a substantially clearer communication style compared to the one they used in the beginning of their training: according to the team's observations, they engage less in games (Berne, 2010), they express with increased clarity what they want and what they do not want, they tend to address issues rather than ignoring or suppressing them. Also, attendees seem to make themselves more vulnerable, but also more accessible, by taking off their protective masks and showing their tender spots.

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<sup>8</sup> In the Tantric context, the terms *negative* and *positive* are often avoided since they are tied to qualifiers such as *good* and *bad*, while Tantric philosophy typically advocates for abstaining from judgements.

**Empathy**

Forgoing boldly confronting somebody about “what they have done” and rather choosing self-reflection requires not only the ability to put one’s own agenda second, but also to put oneself in another’s shoes. Empathy is, therefore, one of the main markers for TW attendees’ progress that I looked for in my observations. The way attendees, according to their reports, react to peers, friends, family and situations in general when their patience is challenged seemed to be a good measure of their empathic skills. Likewise, the apparently increasing tendency towards understanding an opponent’s reasons rather than blaming the outside world for the attendees’ own “misery” can be observed.

Attendees in general and YT alumni in particular seem to tune in better with their counterpart; they appear to give more space to their exercise partners, to guard their shared *sacred space* and increasingly seem to engage in being at the service of the partner they support in a given exercise, without overwhelming or overprotecting them.

**Self-esteem**

The attendees’ self-esteem is one of the TWs’ main focus points, since high self-esteem individuals are deemed emotionally stable, extraverted and conscientious as well as somewhat agreeable and open to experience (Robins, Tracy, Trzesniewski, Potter, & Gosling, 2001). During their YT, attendees frequently comment on emancipatory steps from authority figures (parents, spouses, teachers, superiors) which they often had not been able to take for a number of years. Some of the situations seem to require courage, when confronted with the other party’s firm resistance, as in the case of several attendees, leaving abusive relationships. Others, on the other hand, report having been surprised by the friendly reception of their new-gained confidence; for instance, asking

for a raise and receiving it, or making new friends, without the awkwardness they used to experience.

In the long run, situationally-adequate confidence also seems to enable TW alumni to develop civic courage and stand up for those who cannot do so for themselves, be it abused children, minority members or mistreated animals.

### **Mindfulness and Impulse Regulation**

Mindfulness empowers the individual to become increasingly aware of their thoughts, emotions, sensations and impulses. While it is common for an untrained individual to experience a delay between, for instance, the moment when anger arises and the moment when they become aware of this anger (Compton, 2003) (often only after unhelpful reactions such as abusive speech or violent outbursts have already taken place), the mindful individual notices the signs accompanying certain emotions and can regulate the impulse by taking adjusting counter-measures, such as taking a few deep breaths before reacting.

Observations by the IN team through the years show that TW attendees in general and YT alumni in particular seem to tend to stop to get in touch with their inner self when facing unexpected, upsetting or otherwise challenging situations; they report that in their everyday life, they apply almost instinctively techniques such as *Breath, voice and motion* (BVM) in order to channel and process overwhelming sensations or feelings, rather than let them build up pressure in their system (for instance, when undergoing painful medical treatment or receiving devastating news).

### **Stress and Frustration Tolerance**

Another important marker of a TW attendee's development is increased stress and frustration tolerance. Beginners can be observed complaining about having to give up habits such as keeping their spot in the sharing circle or, on the contrary, to get used to certain settings and rules, such as early-morning starts or being assigned their exercise partner mostly by random choice. Advanced students, on the contrary, seem to discover and increasingly enjoy the fascination of stepping out of their comfort zones and proving themselves in the face of adversities such as unexpected and unfamiliar situations, dealing with their own or others' strong emotional response or bravely facing their individual fears.

An example: to a few attendees, the three daily free-dance sessions pose a substantial challenge: some complain about the music, some complain that they should move when asked, some resort to complaining about the facilitators. However, all of those who kept trying despite their stress rather than giving up, could be observed developing into relaxed and talented dancers, over time.

Mastering individually difficult situations seems to gradually turn from a stress factor into something rather playful; overcoming obstacles appears to become more of a game which can be played gracefully and with sporting spirit, rather than anxiously hoping for it to be over, soon. Also, practicing delayed gratification seems to be more accessible to TW attendees, with all the benefits involved (Mischel, Ebbesen, & Zeiss, 1972).

## **Resilience**

Resilience can be defined as “the ability of people, communities, and systems to maintain their core purpose and integrity amid unforeseen shocks and surprises” (Zolli & Healy, 2013). Shocks and surprises can be hard to agree to, and resilience is not a given: and individuals are not resilient by default, as explained by Frank Infurna and Sunyia Luthar (Infurna & Luthar, 2015). In YT attendees, features resembling increased resilience can be observed: the more challenges they overcome, as discussed under “Stress and frustration tolerance”, the more confidence in their own resilience they seem to gain, and the more relaxed they, according to their reports, can face “shocks and surprises” in their everyday lives.

Attendees appear to show less tendency to outsource the responsibility for their lives and well-being to loved ones (family, spouses) or authorities (government, employers) but rather seem to develop independence (as opposed to co-dependency) and self-government. At some point during their training, most of them report applying self-therapy by giving themselves pieces of advice or taking appropriate care of their needs.

## **Spirituality**

Spirituality is highly individual and subjective; spiritual experiences are hard to describe or to communicate to others. One possible definition of spirituality might be “non-separateness, the deeply personal linked seamlessly to the universal, the one engaged with the whole” (Culliford, 2010, 31).

Experiences of oneness and universal love are a crucial part both of traditional and Western Tantra. They can be overwhelmingly powerful, instill deep inner peace, restore faith in Existence, or even change an individual’s life (cf. Koppensteiner, 2009,

196). This kind of experience is, indeed, frequently part of TW attendees' written and oral testimonies.

### **Ethics**

The Tantric path is a path out of the “illusion of being an isolated self” (Feuerstein, 1998, 270). Therefore, genuinely advanced practitioners – no matter which school they have attended – are not known for bragging about superior skills, exotic experiences or spiritual achievements. Rather than showing off their skills, they seem to stand out for their gentleness, simplicity, courage and mindfulness. Developing these qualities is important, since the skills acquired during Tantric training can – just like any effective know-how – be used to impress, mislead or even abuse others by creating a nimbus of superiority.

Embracing everyday ethics seems to aid alumni make choices that feel “right” not only for them personally but which, as they comment, additionally benefit the Whole which they feel they are part of: for instance, when they share having declined a well-paid job in an arms factory; being proactively and long-term committed to the integration of Syrian refugees; swallowing their pride and reconciling with an estranged sibling or leaving a crush alone because he is already taken.

### **Approach to Sexuality**

Observation suggests that YT attendees display a more relaxed approach to sexuality than individuals who have not gone through this training. They appear to be more at peace with their bodies and their bodily functions, such as menstruation, flatulence, phlegm or sweat; for some attendees, the latter poses a problem so grand in the beginning of their TW journey, that they feel the need to address it. They seem to use

their words more often to express sexual preferences and to clarify misunderstandings “in bed”; they appear to be more familiar with the detailed morphology of either sex’ genitalia as well as their functions, as well as better able to name the different parts, including the internal ones.

They appear more relaxed when it comes to touching, better able to create rapport and a safe space, to take the lead in an encounter as well as to abandon themselves to another’s lead. Attendees’ testimonies suggest they approve of their own sexuality and of the sexuality of others, be it similar or different from their own. They appear to know what they are doing and seem to be able to offer a wide range of pleasant options to a partner, while appearing mindful of the expressed or subtle preferences of their counterpart.

### **Many Truths**

One of the landmarks of Prague, in the Czech Republic, is an imposing monument to the philosopher and church reformer Jan Hus on the Old Town Square. Its pedestal displays one of my favourite quotes. It reads, “Love one another, do grant [their] truth to everyone”.<sup>9</sup> It does not say, “*tolerate* others’ truth”, nor does it say, “give up yours”. It says “grant, to everyone”, which implies kindness as well as generosity on eye-level.<sup>10</sup> This ability, namely to stand by one’s own truth yet still grant others that their truth might be just as true, is one of the profoundest and most peace-building achievements

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<sup>9</sup> „Milujte se – pravdy každému přejte.“ {ta}

<sup>10</sup> This is the contemporary interpretation of this quote among educated Praguenses; however, as church historian Neil Parker remarks, back in Europe of the 14th century, there was no individual truth to be granted; the quote – taken from a letter which Jan (John) Hus wrote while imprisoned – most likely refers to „granting everybody access to *the* truth, which is only one, and it was to be found in the Gospels“. (Private conversation, December 2016)

TWs can offer: “It is precisely the insight that there cannot be the one truth which allows for a democratic plurality of truths.” (Dietrich & Sülzl, 1997, 4).

Truth – a term just as elusive as peace or Tantra (p. 137, unterhalb) – is, according to the IN’s approach, highly subjective; the individual can interpret reality only according to their current abilities which change as the individual matures; therefore, it is virtually not possible to be in “possession of truth”, and one’s own snapshot of reality is not to be forced on anyone else. While this rule may sound simple, embracing it to its full extent affects what and how a person thinks, speaks, acts and interacts. Not forcing personal views onto others while acknowledging the counterpart’s truth’s validity even though it might escape one’s understanding would be a mindset very much along the lines of Marshall Rosenberg’s Nonviolent communication (Rosenberg, 2002) as well as John Paul Lederach's Elicitive Conflict Transformation (Lederach, 1996) and certainly a contribution to interpersonal peace.

### **Flow and Happiness**

Due to the transformations discussed, which can be observed in TW participants in general and in YT alumni in particular, anxiety, fears, judgments and worries take a back seat and give increasingly way to a more openhearted and open-minded awareness of the present moment. This pristine awareness is, according to Mihály Csíkszenmihályi (1990) closely linked to the experience of flow – a free-floating presence in the here and now, described as extraordinarily rewarding and invigorating.

Gaining reproducible access to this gate to genuine happiness and inner peace, to delightfully “losing oneself” in the present moment, is simultaneously one of the goals as well as the path on the Tantric journey: the more often a person has found the entrance,



the easier it becomes to find it again. Some of the main stepping stones towards this gate are to be found in the elements described in this chapter.

### **3.4. Research Question: Does it, indeed, work?**

As we could see in the previous chapter, there are significant indicators observed in the field which seem to suggest that TWs, indeed, have a beneficial effect on their attendees' inner balance and *peaceability*. However, there is also a number of doubts that need to be addressed and taken into account. First of all, there is the experimenter bias which narrows the experimenter's view so they tend to hear and see what they expect or wish to hear and see, in their experiment (Slovic, 1999). As Emily Pronin puts it, "Human judgment and decision making is distorted by an array of cognitive, perceptual and motivational biases, and people tend not to recognise their own bias, though they tend to easily recognise (and even overestimate) the operation of bias in human judgment by others." (Pronin, 2007) Applied to the present case, it would mean that I, as the observer, might be at risk of developing the tendency to see proof for enhancement and positive effects, where there are few or even none.

It is certainly true that just like any other teachers, the trainers at the IN want to see their students progress, and I as the conductor of this study am doubtlessly an interested part. However, it also seems that the experimenter bias as well as the experimenter effect (inadvertent influence on the results of their research) is not as inevitable as suggested by Paul Slovic, and can be prevented by due diligence and avoidance of misjudging, misrecording or misreporting the results, verbally reinforcing "expected" responses or "intentionally or unintentionally [transmitting the experimenters'] expectancies and desires by paralinguistic or kinesic cues." (Barber & Silver, 1968).

Another source of potentially misleading influence concerns the self-selection bias. Certainly, individuals who choose to participate in TWs may differ from those who never tried, thus potentially rendering results insufficiently representing the general population. Among those who have signed up for the YT, some may have a stronger bias towards positive effects of their YT because of their beliefs rooted in previous experiences with other groups or facilitators, or because of special attention they have received from the IN team – for instance, because they were on a waiting list or had difficulties handling the sign-up process and therefore, had more direct contact with the IN than other participants (Goyal et al., 2014).

However, some self-selection for the YT – from which the data for the present study are drawn – is not only a fact, but even intended: while literally anyone can sign up for beginner TWs, with limits set only by the individual’s physical ability to make it to the venue and their mental capacity to be part of an active group process, the bars for attending the YT are set noticeably higher: certain experience, physical mobility and mental agility are required. In practice, and according to the IN’s comprehensive statistics, only about 10% of those who ever attend a TW sign up for and finish the Year-Training. Those who do sign up often comment that they do so because they believe it will take them further along on a path they describe with terms such as “exciting”, “reassuring”, “increases my awareness”. Due to this individual self-selection, the IN virtually never has to turn down anybody who aspires to attend the YT: the potential candidates have already gone through a thorough preparation period, which, again, increases their chances to obtain good results. So, yes: those who get there, are more likely to benefit, since those who were just curious or preferred not to commit have dropped out before even signing up for the YT.

Aside from the different biases that may alter the answer to my research question, there is another potentially influential aspect that needs to be mentioned: the power of misunderstanding. Despite the IN's best efforts to provide everything necessary – from venue to thorough teachers' training – to offer the attendees an ideal environment for understanding and experimenting with the ethical and philosophical foundation upon which the IN's workshops are built, the very structures and formats within these workshops present ample opportunities for misinterpretation. For instance, a number of exercises aim at increasing the individual's self-esteem. While the effect of a more solid self-esteem improves the quality of life of many attendees – they report that now, they can stand up to their intimidating boss, or finally asked out that girl they have secretly liked for years – observation shows that in a few cases within each YT, the “more is better” pattern sets in and the individual starts overshooting the mark by developing a self-righteous, arrogant attitude or becoming overly self-centered, claiming “I was taught to take good care of myself.”

A compelling example for a frequent misunderstanding is found in Lugmayr's study on the IN's Year-Training in 2003 (Lugmayr, 2003), where she states that “the separation of sexuality and relationship, taught and practiced in Tantra, remained an alien concept” to her (Lugmayr, 2003, 106). What is taught and practiced – by the IN, anyway – is, however, not the separation of sexuality and relationship. Rather, it is the art of discernment between relationship and attachment; a concept which, admittedly, takes time and effort to understand and put into practice.

Another example for a common misinterpretation of the guidance offered by the IN team is cognitive dissonance. During TWs, creating cognitive dissonance is used deliberately as a method, in order to help attendees practice its constructive handling. This is done by giving them the necessary tools and then putting the individual into

a situation they would “normally” not seek out. During a beginners’ workshop, i.e. in a group of strangers, the group may for instance be asked to impersonate hippos among fellow hippos. The goal is, in this case, to “loosen up”, to let go of masks and personae, to share a laugh. For most attendees, exercises like this are a challenge, but they “get it”. Some, however, may feel exceedingly overwhelmed, for instance, by being asked to do “ridiculous” things. In these cases, observation shows the individual’s tendency to handle their cognitive dissonance in ways they are familiar with: frequently, they will dismiss the method, the IN, the facilitator; they will retreat to the “sidelines”, to a different room or leave, altogether; at times, when attendees find themselves unable to refuse an exercise-related suggestion (despite being encouraged to do so), they occasionally blame the IN for “peer pressure” or “forced compliance”.

These examples show that even the best intentions cannot guarantee an expected outcome. As listed in the previous chapter, there are many elements that indicate a positive impact of TWs on attendees, and yet, there will always be instances where a TW leads to increased confusion, self-doubt or, on the contrary, to more egotism – particularly if the individual quits attending, which makes it difficult or impossible to straighten out any misunderstanding.

On the other hand, the fact that the effect of a TW on an individual is mostly unpredictable supports my suggestion that the effect of the experimenter bias is rather negligible: again and again, attendees surprise me by suddenly quitting despite doing, in my opinion, great or, on the contrary, by taking impressive development leaps I would not have expected from them.

Another argument questioning my concept (“This works!”) is that possibly, many of the “successful” attendees were on the very edge of their next development leap, anyway, and they would have made it with or without the YT. This may certainly be

true: aging alone changes a person's outlook on things, new relationships or parenthood do, as well; when we lose somebody, or something we love – be it the job or our health – we also change. However, while change is inevitable, the reaction to change is subject to the individual's choosing: aging can be fought by funding the beauty industry – or it can be embraced with grace; losing a loved one can be the end of the world – or it can be transformed into a new beginning. The latter corresponds to the approach promoted in IN's workshops.

Here, as in so many other areas, Hippocrates' "rule of thirds" may be applied: it "states that one third of patients get better on their own; one third don't respond to treatment; and just one third really benefit from it." (Frances, 2013) Transferred to our area of interest, it can be postulated that one third of attendees would have achieved their results with or without the YT; one third would not experience great changes, while one third would, indeed, benefit from what the YT has to offer. In the light of this rule, any positive impact detected beyond these thirds would indicate a genuine improvement.

However, even genuine improvement is subject to the effects of habituation: after a while, even the most exuberant happiness becomes less perceivable and fades out into "normality". This is, interestingly enough, true not only for pleasant situations, but even for circumstances that by no means qualify as pleasant: "[...] the fact is that a year after losing the use of their legs, and a year after winning the lotto, lottery winners and paraplegics are equally happy with their lives." (Gilbert, 2014) Applied to the present study, this would mean that after some time, attendees become accustomed to their new level of inner peace/resilience/self-esteem to such extent that they do not perceive it as noteworthy, anymore. This fact could certainly have influenced the data this study is based upon, particularly the results of Questionnaire 2 handed out in the end of the YT, in which YT attendees were asked the same questions as in the beginning of their YT.

To summarize this and the previous chapter: as a Tantra teacher, I have certainly a hunch about the effects the YT has on its attendees. As a researcher, I know that it might be even a very accurate one, yet it is still but a hunch. In order to move from a mere hunch to a fact-based interpretation, it is required to ask the attendees in question and to analyze what they themselves think, feel and experience. The question to be answered by this study is, therefore: “Do Tantra Workshops at the Institut Namasté, particularly the Year-Training, tend to significantly enhance the attendees’ serene and peaceful responses to challenging situations?”

#### **4. Methodology: the How's and the Why's**

According to Creswell (2009, 2014), methodology is not just about a method. It is about a worldview, about a specific perception of reality and about how I as an author see myself and others (Creswell, 2009). Since no two people share the same history, journey, values, losses, inspirations and aspirations, their methodological “fingerprint” will be necessarily different, even if they were to examine the exactly same subject. The aspects of my life journey that made me into the person I am also inevitably influence the methods I choose and the way I use them: thus, a researcher who is uncomfortable conducting interviews is unlikely to use them as a source for research, while others will gladly apply them. Methodology is therefore, on one hand, about the best possible way to find answers to my research question, taking into account my very personal vantage point and approach to this world.

On the other hand, aside from personal preferences, a methodology is chosen in order to understand and analyze the data available as best as possible. In the case of the present study, the sources of data are not numbers or physical events but breathing human beings; therefore, I chose a qualitative approach and a participant-observer methodology. There are two primary advantages to such an approach:

- A qualitative approach is most suitable for a post-modern world which has moved us beyond the “great narrative” and its intent to describe human experience generically. Increasingly, there is value in studying local knowledge and practices, as deeply as possible (Geertz, 1983).
- A qualitative approach is grounded in individuals’ experiences, and seeks to develop theories from the concrete and the particular. This direction, from data to theory, is a useful counter-approach to the tendency, discussed in the section on Tantra, to apply esoteric theories without properly examining how individuals are affected or benefited. Starting with the data, rather than the

theory, is a significant contribution from the grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1976) which has informed some of this research.

My approach as a participant-observer: I have a privileged opportunity to engage with individuals in many different encounters as well as viewing them holistically, both as they present themselves and as they can be observed. Unlike quantitative methods, with which I initially began my study, the participant observer approach explicitly values the role of the observer, and the awareness that how an individual appears to the observer is a relevant consideration. Both the subjectivity of the researcher, and that of the participants, form part of the research and of the interpretation (Flick, 2006).

As explained oben (p. 43), the present study has been propelled by curiosity and a concept, which emerged as a result from years of observation: I watched attendees sign up for TWs, apply the methods and change their views on themselves, their lives and the world in a way that, according to their testimonies, made them feel happier and more at peace. My concept was that these changes were largely caused by the contents and settings of the TWs, and I wanted to see whether there was a way to confirm my guess.

Based on this assumption, I started gathering data via surveys, to be used by some future researcher. After eleven years of data collection I realized that said researcher with interest in this particular field might never materialize. Encouraged by the results of my participant-observer approach for my MA in Peace Studies, I decided to do the necessary research, to analyze the collected data, to conduct in-depth interviews and to write the study, myself.

The method and approach is that of mixed methods according to Creswell (2014). Data were originally compiled with a survey administered before the commencement of YT and following. 82 questions were asked, using a ten-point Likert scale to indicate the level of agreement with statements covering a variety of personal growth measurements.



These data, however, were purely exploratory; they were not based on a previously selected theoretical perspective but simply sought to elicit a wide range of responses.

Based on the subjective character of the survey, it was clear that the present study would not deliver quantifiable results: the goal was not to compare how many times respondent A has completed exercise X, but to explore if, how, in which areas and to what extent the respondents' self-assessed transformation had taken place. The experience of a YT is highly personal and different for every individual; it is therefore not possible to prove a theory, as it would be the case in a quantitative evaluation. The in-depth interview approach has provided the richest data (cf. chapter 8), and while the survey data did not provide such rich material, they nevertheless do indicate that some of the individual, concrete results can be to some extent generalized. These data will be presented in summary form in chapter 6.

In this chapter, I will discuss the methods I applied in order to gather, examine and present the information required for answering my research question; also, I will point out why I decided to use certain settings and chose one procedure over another.

#### **4.1. Philosophical Underpinnings**

How do we humans connect, how do we make sense of what we watch others do and say? According to Edmund Husserl, (Husserl & Carr, 1936) we understand others through intersubjectivity. We reach another's lifeworld through our own, which we can apprehend because we are both living and empathic beings. This form of empathy is so deeply enrooted in our *Sein* (*German: being*) that it applies even across species: the fear of a trapped mouse or the despair of a mother cow whose calf has been taken away resonates in our own body. Central to this understanding is the understanding that we are embodied: we do not exist solely as physical bodies (*Körper*) but also as animate or, to

use a basic Buddhist term, sentient beings (*Leib*). Husserl postulates that we are “body-subjects” and have a unique relationship with the material body such that “I am my body, my body is me.” While I agree that we are body-subjects, in our context it is critical to keep in mind that in Tantra, although the body is considered significant, even sacred, still the identification of the Self with the body is seen as an essential delusion which leads to suffering – the opposite of peace – and therefore needs to be disentangled.

The task of lifeworld research is, thus, not to ‘interpret’ another person’s experience, but to investigate this bond between the visible and the invisible, to explore the invisible by using the visible as a point of departure (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2004).

“Exploring the invisible by using the visible as a point of departure” expresses quite precisely my approach to the research for this study; this understanding helps us bridge the gap between description and interpretation. Describing another person’s actions, viewpoints, and understandings is always an exercise in interpretation, but this does not need to result in a dualistic subject/object orientation. Our own experience of embodied reality allows us to enter into the lived experience of the other – we reach another’s lifeworld through our own (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2015). Thus the divide between researcher and researched (subject/object) is seen to be artificial, as we approach one another intersubjectively. This approach of intersubjectivity undergirds my work as a participant-observer in a phenomenological approach.

According to Danuta Wojnar und Kristen Swanson, there are two types of phenomenological approach: descriptive and interpretative (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Descriptive phenomenological approach is key when conducting constellation work where the client and the facilitator, in most cases, have not met before. This approach helps the facilitator achieve an almost meditative state of disinterestedly opening up to

the client's unknown lifeworld, free of interpretation to the best possible extent (Wall, Glenn, Mitchinson, & Poole, 2004)

. However, for the in-depth interviews in this study, descriptive approach was not applicable because of the grade of intimate knowledge I already have of the lives, experiences and psyches of the interviewees. Given this previous knowledge as well as the research objective, interpretive (hermeneutic) phenomenology (J. A. Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) seemed much more appropriate as a valid approach to the qualitative evaluation.

According to the Encyclopedia of Phenomenology (Embree, Behnke, Carr, Evans, & Huertas-Jourda, 1997) “interpretive phenomenology is concerned with interpretation of the structures of experience and with how things are understood by people who live through these experiences and by those who study them”. Therefore, “when the primary goal [is] to appreciate the holistic context of participants' experiences and finding meanings in what participants said and received”, (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007) interpretive phenomenology is the method of choice.

When applying interpretative phenomenology, having personal experience with the phenomenon studied is – unlike in the case of descriptive phenomenology – an asset, because it facilitates and deepens the communication and trust between interviewee and researcher (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007), thus allowing for understanding people's experiences and the meaning they attribute to those experiences. In this process, a two-stage hermeneutic unfolds, as the interviewee tries to make sense of their experience, while the interviewer tries to make sense of what the interviewee is sharing (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2015). Related to the question of intersubjectivity, my own experience as a practitioner of Tantra makes the research itself an exercise in relationship-building and empathy: the attendees interviewed in-depth are not just reporting life events and

changes. Rather, they are reflecting on them with someone who has similar experiences and had been present, while those changes to their lives were taking place: changes in their personal ways of understanding themselves, of interacting with others and with their situation in the world and how all of this has influenced their inner peace.

In addition to the interpretative phenomenological analysis within the framework of participant-observer research, for the evaluation of survey data I adopted some elements used in grounded theory approach. Grounded theory originated with the sociologists Glaser & Strauss (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and is widely used among qualitative researchers, because unlike *a priori* hypotheses, it generates a theory based on real life data and, given its many variants, accommodates researchers' different core beliefs, working styles and worldviews.

The elements I used were Charmaz' constructivist version of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) regarding storytelling and the analysis of an individual's interpretation of their experience: the result of any research depends largely on where the researcher starts from, on the way they think and see the world, who they meet on their journey and how they interpret what they see – a researcher, as an involved party, ultimately constructs the result of their research out of the many puzzle pieces they carefully gather and put together.

Following a grounded theory approach, I looked into the obtained survey data and developed categories to be compared and analyzed (Section 7, Statistics and Surveys, p. 216). The same categories were later applied for coding the in-depth interviews, as well. Since the initial focus of the questionnaire had not been aimed at inner peace exclusively but involved a wider range of questions – touching on topics such as decision-making, bisexuality, or whether the interviewee considered sexuality and spirituality be antagonisms – a set of question were selected that fit the present

study's focus on *peaceability* best (Section 4.3.3, p. 72). The results of these 25 selected questions were examined, applying consistent comparison: each question was examined separately in order to determine possible trends, and responses were analyzed by gender and age cohort.

#### **4.2. My Involvement as Participant Observer**

As stated earlier, my research is inevitably biased by the fact that I am not an outsider to the groups I observe, survey and interview – on the contrary, I am most definitely a participant observer. According to James P. Spradley, who differentiates five types of involvement in participant observation, ranging between Non-participatory (“no contact with population or field of study”) and Complete Participation (“Researcher is completely integrated in population of study beforehand”), I would locate myself at the “Complete Participation” end of Spradley’s continuum (Spradley, 1980).

While “Complete Participation”, for Spradley, means that an outsider observing a tribe or subculture gradually becomes part of the group studied in order to obtain data,<sup>11</sup> I was no stranger to the groups and individuals engaging in TWs, long before I started my research. Due to my role as teacher, facilitator and leader, and by guiding group members through challenges, resistance, feelings of defeat, victory, depression and surprise, I get to know a high percentage of the TW attendees to a degree that can only be described as “intimate”.

This intimacy is generated by the specific structures and settings of a TW, which help the individual question socially imprinted behavior patterns, experiment with getting in touch with their vulnerability and building the courage to acknowledge and

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<sup>11</sup> For instance, Dian Fossey living among mountain gorillas in the Congo;  
<http://www.biography.com/people/dian-fossey-9299545#death-and-legacy>

eventually show their soft spots. During all of these structures and exercises, the leading team watches over the group and never “abandons” it: even during the simplest exercises (such as coloring in a picture or sharing in small groups), there will be a member of the leading team present, in order to maintain a focus point for the group, as well as the feeling of safety and “being cared for”. This is a setting that allows for trust to grow, and it is this trust that enables the attendees to “hatch” from their egg shell of constraining beliefs.

On the other hand, over the course of time, attendees get to know their facilitators quite thoroughly, as well: they, also, observe the team, its habits, quirks, mishaps, communication styles and occasional tensions; they have preferences, develop opinions and give the team members a personal feedback, whenever they feel like it.

Even though, occasionally, an attendee may complain about “feeling observed all the time”, most of them embrace the protection offered – protection from incidents such as exterior disturbances or emotional outbursts within the group, which are calmly taken care of by the team – and experiment with their own responses to a given situation without getting distracted.

Since I oftentimes get to work with an individual for a number of years and make sure I am present at almost all of their YT workshops, the group members consider me a natural part of their system. The YT’s structures require high levels of integrity on behalf of the team as well as equally high levels of trust on behalf of the attendees; therefore, when they are handed the first survey sheet, virtually all of the participants have attended several IN’s workshops and the necessary rapport, particularly critical for qualitative research (P. Ryan & Dundon, 2008), is already well-established.

### 4.3. Epistemology and Ways of Data-Collection

For this study, both primary and secondary sources have been applied. The secondary research used sources such as magazine and journal articles, web pages, lecture transcripts and online videos. For the primary research, I collected data accessible through the IN.

This chapter presents the five ways I used for collecting primary data: my own long-time observations, quantitative surveys, in-depth interviews and personal conversations as well as oral and written testimonies. However, the question to be answered before we expand on the methods of data collection is about the epistemology applied in this study: how do I as a researcher know what knowledge is, and in this case, specifically knowledge about how people develop and grow, and how do we *know* that growth and development are taking place? In other words, what do I consider a trustworthy source, and why; and what criteria do I use to define a knowledgeable person, i.e. an expert?

To some extent, all qualitative research is a philosophical exercise, as we approach everything we do, guided by principles founded in our understanding of the way in which the world works (Bateson, 1972, p. 320). Tantric principles, understanding of peace(s), and my own assumptions about human beings and their ability to grow and develop, make up some of these epistemological beliefs which shape the way I see the world, and how I act in it. (Guba, 1990a, p. 18; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 14– 15; and Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011).

For the purpose of this study, I define knowledge or expertise as utterly subjective: the individual is, in perfect line with client-centered counseling tradition (Rogers, 2003), assumed to know best about themselves, and therefore, to be the expert on their own emotions, experiences, growth observation and evaluation of changes – in

short, on their lives. Clients in general and attendees of Tantra Workshops, in particular, are considered able to define, express and rate their development, improvements or the lack thereof, as well as to reflect on their position in the group, within their wider environment and in the world. As Carl Rogers put it: “As no one else can know how we perceive, we are the best experts on ourselves.” (Gross, 1992, p. 905)

Since the focus of this study is the impact of IN’s Tantra Workshops on the individual, the subjects selected for this study had to meet one criterion which would define their knowledgeability: to have completed the Year-Training. The experiences they went through during that year, along with their peers, and the tools they learned to use in order to ensure their own well-being and progress (Section 6.4, p.168) make them a sufficiently trustworthy source of knowledge for the present study.

However, if I consider graduation from the IN’s Year-Training the main criterion for becoming a trustworthy source, the question might arise, whether I therefore claim that all participants of the training benefit equally? Certainly not. The grade of adoption of new techniques introduced and suggested to the groups, be it mindfulness training, reframing or communication skills, varies considerably. Some adopt them easily and naturally, others struggle to succeed, some spend long periods of time in resistance. A few attendees even cruise along, participating in the structures, sharing with their peers for an entire year, but they “emerge out of the lake” without one wet hair: for whatever reasons, they did not use the training for questioning their patterns or dealing with their issues.

Regardless, even these participants are considered fully capable of being the experts on their own lives; therefore, individuals who completed the training and are able and willing to share their experience, are considered valid sources of knowledge for the purpose of this study, no matter how intensely they allowed the contents to sink in.



### **4.3.1 Long-time observation**

My own long-time observation was the initial spark to this study. Based on what I was able to watch during the workshops, practice evenings (*Jours Fixes*), counseling sessions and during many years – in a number of cases, well over a decade – of working with the same individuals, I concluded that it would be worthwhile to study the effects of this kind of workshops which I was witnessing in the field. I expand on the various observed changes and impacts in Section 3.3 (Thesis: This works!, p. 44).

In the context of IN's workshops, the term *observation* can be interpreted quite literally: during the TWs, the team spends a relatively small amount of the time available – perhaps 40% – on being actively involved – to teach, lead, demonstrate, interact, intervene, co-ordinate assistants<sup>12</sup> or handle teaching aids such as flip charts or handouts. The rest of the time is spent with close observation of the group and the unfolding dynamics, gently guiding whenever necessary and trusting the process whenever possible.

This way, 20 years of focused participating observation have, indeed, yielded a considerable amount of data which shall be presented, discussed and analyzed for the present study.

### **4.3.2 Oral and written testimonies**

Within the structures provided by the IN, there is ample opportunity for giving and gathering testimonies: for one, there are sharing rounds in the morning of every workshop where – depending on the size of the group – most or even all of the participants get to share the state of their mind as well as describe their current emotional

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<sup>12</sup> Assistants are YT alumni who support the leading team during a TW. They fulfill tasks such as lighting candles, opening and closing windows, tend to props and being available for demonstrations. They do not interact with attendees, unless tasked to do so.

landscape, their experiences, difficulties and victories. These feedbacks are not individually recorded; however, the TW leaders usually take notes in order to give a comment or supportive input at the end of the sharing. These notes are written down in a casual, non-academic format; some TW leaders choose to archive them, later.

Additionally, there are monthly online gatherings for the Year-Training's participants aimed at facilitating the group bonding as well as giving the IN team the chance to follow the individuals' development. The group members meet on the web platform Second Life and share whatever is currently on their mind or happens in their life, exactly the way it is done during live workshops. The Second Life setting offers an attractive graphic design – the participants' avatars sit in a meditation circle in a park next to the beach, with candles and chimes in the centre – and allows for a visual as well as auditory experience by “seeing” and hearing everybody. After the sharing (and after the instructors have left), small groups oftentimes stay and keep chatting or engage in discussion. I have taken notes of approximately 40% of these sharing rounds; similarly to those taken during TWs, while these notes are occasionally used as a reference for the present study, the aim is to detect and confirm tendencies, only.

In the end of each workshop, independently on its experience level, participants are invited to give a written feedback which is then collected and archived. This procedure has been followed at every workshop since 1999; however, the testimonies before 2005 have been disposed of for lack of storage space. Some of the testimonies are used on the Institut's webpage to illustrate the participants' experience during a concrete workshop.

A number of participants choose to give spontaneous feedbacks per email, when there is an important event in their life, when they are going through a crisis or simply ask for advice. These often enlightening emails are being kept and archived, as well.

Lastly, encouraged by the positive outcomes of experiments introduced in recent years, YT participants are now requested to mail a monthly report on their general situation, changes and emotions they observe, problems they encounter, issues they tackle, questions they have and progress they make.

This way, there is a large amount of written or otherwise recorded testimonies available. Particularly some of the written testimonies, but also a few conversations, have been used to underpin some of this study's theses.

### **4.3.3 The Questionnaire**

In 2004, I carefully phrased 82 questions that covered all the areas of change and transformation I could differentiate at that time. Compared to the comprehensive *SkyDancing* survey which comprised 139 items, 82 questions did not seem too many, and my somewhat naïve hope was that the more questions I asked, the more precise the obtained results would be. While this assumption is questionable, there are certainly downsides to large questionnaires: the respondents may get tired or bored, so that the last questions might get less attentive answers.

I chose partly negative and partly positive wordings for similar questions, e.g. "The other group members have a high opinion of me" vs. "I often wonder whether others perceive me as a nuisance". The goal was, for one, to keep the respondents on their toes; for the other, I wanted to be able to apply cross-examination to similar but differently phrased questions when analyzing them.

In order to give the respondents as precise a tool as possible to express their experience, I opted for a Likert scale of 1-10 (Allen & Seeman, 2007), where "1" describes the response "not at all" and "10" corresponds to "yes, absolutely".

The wording of the questions was deliberately chosen to be colloquial and, to use an English equivalent for the German *duzen* (*tutear*, in Spanish), on “first-name terms”. The assumption was that the test persons would feel more comfortable and relaxed if they were guided by a familiar register, including the use of specific Tantric terms, and therefore would give more spontaneous/authentic responses,

Despite the temptation to improve the questionnaire in later years, after I had learned about more efficient questionnaires, I kept its original wording and design. I was aware that by doing that, I was possibly trading more conclusive data for a larger sample, but back then, a large sample was my priority. However, that meant that I had to cope with some of the questions phrased in a way that encouraged ambiguous responses (e.g. asking whether something was now “better than before”, without properly defining “before”) or received 0-answers where I had failed being explicit enough (e.g. asking about the relationship with the respondent’s father, without indicating that they should rate the relationship even if the parent was already deceased (cf. Example 7, p. 263).

I had initially designed the questionnaire with rather vague categories in mind, such as “body image”, “sexuality” or “spiritual growth”, none of them aiming explicitly at the attendees’ *peaceability*. Therefore, I had to break the questions up into analysable categories for the particular purpose of this study. Using grounded theory approach, the survey questions naturally formed themselves around five categories which could be linked to the development of the attendees’ inner peace:

- relationships – it is easier for an individual to be at peace when they are on their own; inner peace is put to the test during interactions with other individuals;
- confidence – faith, basic trust and self-esteem are important components of confidence, while confidence builds serenity and courage which counteracts anxiety – the opposite of inner peace;

- *peaceability* – the ability to respond to upsetting stimuli in a gentle, peaceful way
- *sexuality* – on the importance of sexuality for happiness and inner peace, cf. Section 6.2, p. 126, unterhalb)
- *spirituality*, which could be defined as the pathway to inner peace.

A comparison between these five “emerged” categories, the personal transformations observed in the field (cf. Section 4.2, p.66) and the prerequisites for personal and interpersonal peace (cf. Section 6.1, p. 101) showed that the selected categories would cover the field of interest even better if they were slightly broadened. After applying these adaptations, the list of five categories read as follows:

- Interactions and relationships
- Confidence, insight
- Inner peace, equanimity, joy
- Body awareness, sexuality
- Mindfulness, spirituality.

After having determined the five categories to describe the main focus of the questions, I assigned each of the 82 questions a fitting category and color-coded each question according to that category, for better overview (for instance, purple for Confidence, Insight; yellow for Interactions and Relationships). This color coding was followed throughout this study, providing consistent guidance to the readers.

Some of the categories assigned to some of the questions are certainly arguable: for instance, “My jealousy poses a problem for me” is listed in the *Interactions and Relationships* category, but might fit into the category *Confidence, Insight*, as well. This is a good example of how a qualitative study is shaped by the researcher’s worldview and subsequent choices: in my role as participant observer, I have seen jealousy damage the peace within individuals’ relationships in a far larger scope than it generally affected

the peace they would draw from their confidence or insight; hence the attribution of jealousy to the category *Interactions and Relationships*.

Since it became clear early on that only part of the complete set of questions was relevant for the topic of this thesis, I selected those 25 out of 82 which focused best on the field of peace, to be examined for this study. Questions were selected from each of the five identified categories, while the category referring to inner peace was given the highest priority. These 25 most relevant questions were selected according to the following criteria:

- They had most to do with the object of this thesis, i.e. describing changes in perceived inner peace, equanimity, resilience, joy of life.
- They provided *prima facie* validity.
- Some questions may seem overly specific, such as the two exploring the respondents' relationships with their parents; however, these were used as relevant markers for different kinds of relationships, which, again, can be indicators of an individual's stress levels.
- They seemed the most representative out of several questions with a similar focus; in cases of positive and negative wordings, the positive was selected.

Examples for this last selection criterion:

- #71 (The things I learned in the workshops I put into practice in my everyday life) was chosen over #78 (I just can't get myself to practice on regular basis);
- #3 (I am increasingly figuring out my mental patterns) over #58 (I am probably never going to overcome my flaws);
- #13 (Sexuality comes completely natural to me) over #50 (Sexuality is rather a problem than a source of energy).

The following chart gives an overview over the categories, the color-coding, the original number of questions in each category and the number of questions out of each category which have been selected for the present study.

# of questions total	# of questions selected	Category
18	5	Interactions and relationships
15	5	Confidence, insight
20	10	Inner peace, equanimity, joy
20	3	Body awareness, sexuality
9	2	Mindfulness, Spirituality
82	25	

*Figure 1 – Selected questions and corresponding categories*

I deliberately refrained from selecting the questions according to greatest variation or most interesting responses, but focused on those which seemed to promise to answer my research question best.

I had designed and phrased all the questions myself, exclusively for this particular questionnaire. These are the 25 questions selected; in order to allow for a deeper understanding, their German original is given, as well:

#	The 25 selected questions: English translation	German original
3	I am increasingly figuring out my own mental patterns.	Ich komme meinen Mustern immer mehr auf die Schliche.
6	As a woman, I get on well with women/as a man, I get on well with men.	Ich komme als Frau gut mit Frauen/als Mann gut mit Männern zurecht.
10	I am able to forgive myself my imperfections.	Ich kann mir meine Unvollkommenheiten verzeihen.
11	I am proud of my body.	Ich bin stolz auf meinen Körper.
13	Sexuality comes completely natural to me.	Sexualität ist für mich ganz natürlich.
16	When I want things to be different, I speak up.	Wenn ich etwas anders haben will, sage ich es.
19	<i>Breath, voice and motion</i> kick in without even thinking of it.	“Atem, Stimme und Bewegung” funktionieren, ohne nachzudenken.

23	I can understand myself better now, than two months ago	Ich verstehe mich selbst jetzt besser als noch vor zwei Monaten.
28	I am able to say No when I mean No.	Ich kann NEIN sagen, wenn ich NEIN meine
29	It is easy for me to reach out to people – not only here but in my everyday life, as well.	Es fällt mir auch in meinem Alltag leicht, auf Menschen zuzugehen.
36	I can deal better with closeness now, than before.	Ich vertrage jetzt mehr Nähe als früher.
37	Within these workshops there are things I should address but I don't find the courage to do so.	Es gibt im Rahmen der Seminare Dinge, die ich ansprechen sollte, aber ich habe nicht den Mut dazu.
47	I am better at receiving than at giving.	Ich kann besser nehmen als geben.
51	I can detect emotions and states of energy in others.	Ich kann Emotionen und Energiezustände bei anderen wahrnehmen.
53	My dark places are just as threatening as two months ago.	Meine schwarzen Löcher sind noch genauso bedrohlich wie vor zwei Monaten.
57	Basically, all is good the way it is.	Im Grunde ist alles gut, so wie es ist.
60	To talk with my partner about emotions is (1) completely impossible... (10) an absolute given.	Mit meinem Partner/meiner Partnerin über meine Gefühle zu sprechen ist... (1) ganz unmöglich – (10) völlig selbstverständlich.
62	Even when feeling lousy, overall I am still feeling pretty good.	Selbst wenn es mir schlecht geht, geht's mir eigentlich noch immer ziemlich gut.
63	I am able to observe closely everything I do.	Ich kann mir genau zuschauen bei allem, was ich tue.
66	I get along with my father.	Ich komme gut mit meinem Vater zurecht.
67	I stay relaxed, despite nuisances and stress.	Ich bleibe gelassen, selbst bei Ärger und Stress.
70	I am the director of my own life script.	Ich bin der Regisseur meines Lebens.
71	The things I learned in the workshops I put into practice in my everyday life.	Was ich in den Seminaren gelernt habe, setze ich in meinem Alltag um.
72	My view of the world and of people has grown milder, somehow.	Mein Blick auf die Welt und die Menschen ist irgendwie milder.



74	I get along with my mother.	Ich komme mit meiner Mutter zurecht.
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*Figure 2 – Selected Questions in English and German*

In addition to the questions/statements to be rated, the questionnaires also offered the option to add feedback and observations in the respondent's own words. However, only a fraction of the surveyed attendees used this option; therefore, I did not evaluate this part of the questionnaire (cf. Annex A).

The very first questionnaire was handed out to participants in 2004. However, since I had it only ready for the third part, rather than the second part of the YT, as in all following years, I could not use the responses of this first survey. From 2005 onwards, the survey has been administered twice during the Year-Training at the exactly same stage of the Training, every year until 2015.

Throughout the entire test period, i.e. between 2005 and 2016, there were only negligible changes to the curriculum, its schedule or contents; most of the leading team has remained unchanged, as well.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the participants' surveys refer to a highly consistent input. Likewise, the collection of data consistently followed the exact same procedure every year: before or during the introductory session of the second workshop (*Pleasure & Healing*), the participants were handed the questionnaire and asked to fill it out swiftly, without witnesses or distractions, and to return it that very evening, i.e. three or four hours later. Section 7.4, p. 228, unterhalb explains some of the underlying reasons for this procedure.

The generating of the interviewees' individual code was described on the first page of their questionnaire: first and last letter of their first and last names, followed by the cipher of the day they were born. My own code (Helena Krivan, born June 10)

<sup>13</sup> Such a change might refer to a change in music or adapting a structure to a different venue; however, even the venue was generally the same used throughout the test period.

would, therefore, read HAKN10. Despite the fact that the person's initials were part of this code, the four letters that formed it were distracting enough to ensure the anonymity of the individual: even for a trainer who was very familiar with the attendees, this combination of letters would hardly give the person away.

Those group members, who have attended all of the workshops through the year, were handed an identical questionnaire when checking in for the last seminar of the training in December and received the same instructions.

The obtained results of both surveys – from the beginning and the end of the YT – were, in 2015, transferred to a spreadsheet. For each question, the responses were grouped according to age cohorts and gender and transformed into charts, where different colors represented Questionnaire 1 and Questionnaire 2. This made the variations between S1 and S2 visible in one chart per question and allowed for examination. The detailed discussion of the surveys is laid out in chapter 6.

#### **4.3.4 In-depth interviews**

From the first draft of this study onward, conducting semi-open qualitative interviews was part of this thesis' methodology, mainly in order to complete the data from the quantitative surveys for reasons of triangulation: “Qualitative research adds to the breadth of your knowledge base while quantitative research deepens the substance of what you already know” (J. C. Woods, 2016).

Therefore, and in order to explore further on questions the survey had not been able to answer to my satisfaction, I conducted six qualitative interviews. Given that this research is attempting to measure personal growth, feelings and subjective worldviews – items which do not easily surrender to being measured with quantitative methods –,

qualitative interviews applying semi-open questions seemed to be a particularly good match for the research objective in question. As one of my consultants put it: “When you want to understand a person, you don’t take their measurements – you talk to them.”<sup>14</sup>

The pre-selected candidates were asked, whether they would be willing to participate in the research by giving an interview by video-conferencing technology; all agreed. (This less personal setting was chosen due to the distant locations of my interviewees.) Next, one week before the interviews, they were sent an email with the necessary factual information (for instance, my skype address), and a means to schedule the interview appointments (doodle.com). The interviewees were not informed and had no way to learn about the other five individuals. This was meant to ensure that they would not share their thoughts and impressions before the interviews, thus possibly blending experiences.

Further, in order to be clear about my participant-observer role, I explained in that very email that this setting was somewhat unusual for an academic study, given the relationship that, over the years, had grown between them as students and me as their instructor and counselor. The individuals were requested to bluntly speak their minds during the upcoming interview, without considering what they possibly thought I might or might not want to hear.

This was necessary, since failing to address their bias – which they assumedly would not be able to completely “switch off” only because they were asked to do so – might have led to twisted results. Therefore, one of the three questions posed in this email referred to evidence they might contribute about concrete changes that could be credited to the YT, alone.

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<sup>14</sup> N.I. Parker, private conversation on the present study, February 2016

Lastly, the questions were disclosed to the interviewees, in order to give them a week's time to recall details and to ponder, particularly on question #2 (regarding changes in their relationships). The first question on the list was sent to the participants a few days later, which is why it is not numbered. This is because I realized that the questions I had already sent would possibly not address the interviewees' initial motivation to participate in TWs clearly enough.

This first question aims at an introductory overview about the individual's expectations when enrolling with Tantra, while the last one explores the evidence the probands have found to credit their transformation to the TW. The most interesting responses for the purpose of this study, however, were expected to come from question #2, which was subdivided into questions a, b, c and d.

All of these four sub questions focused on changes the interviewee may or may not have experienced in their personal relationships: with oneself, with close relationships, with a wider circle of people and "the world" as a whole (leaving the interpretation of "world" up to the probands). The focus on relationships was chosen because it seemed a useful means to approach a hard-to-measure quality like "peacefulness": it is in our relationships where we apply new insights and newly acquired techniques; it is also our relationships who give us feedback about changes in our behavior, explicitly or implicitly. Therefore, exploring the transformations within these four layers of relationships seemed to be a promising way to cover a wide range of personal transformation, while being easy to observe, and to report on, for an individual trained in attentiveness.

These are the questions the interviewees received in advance:

"As far as you remember, what was your initial incentive that drove you to engage in attending Tantra Workshops?"

1. To what extent have your expectations/hopes/fears come true?
2. In what ways have your relationships changed (in your opinion, due to the workshops):
  - a. your relationship with yourself
  - b. with your loved ones
  - c. with friends and acquaintances and
  - d. the world?
3. Particularly, in what ways were you able to observe changes regarding placidity, inner peace, kind equanimity and joy in your life?

Please give 4-6 concrete examples to illustrate your conclusions.

4. How can you know that these changes have been induced by the impact of the workshop contents during your Year-Training (or by IN workshops before that), rather than by personal development which comes naturally with age, exterior influences (important life events, epiphanies, friends, books, other workshops) or other means?"

All six interviews were conducted within one week and transcribed during that same week, using the online tool *Transcribe*. Despite having planned for 30-40 minutes per interview, each of them ended up lasting just a few minutes shy of a full hour. This did not pose a problem to the interviewees – all of them displayed interest and engagement until the very closing of their session.

As explained in the chapter on methodology, interpretive phenomenological approach has been chosen for conducting and analyzing the in-depth interviews. According to Patricia Benner, interpretive analysis consists of three steps: (a) isolating paradigm cases, (b) identifying repetitious themes for within and between cases, and (c) selecting exemplary quotes to illustrate themes (Benner, 1994). I strictly followed this procedure in the analysis of the in-depth interviews in chapter 8, "Analysis of Interview Data", p. 269.

In order to analyze the obtained narratives, I had to decide whether to go with chapters addressing one of the topics (e.g. the interviewee's relationship with themselves), and discussing the responses of all six interviewees in that chapter, or, on the contrary, to tell each interviewee's story separately. I chose the latter approach – narrative analysis –, since it provides a consistent story line and facilitates the understanding of each individual's journey. In addition, possible reasons for perceived changes – or the lack thereof – become more evident.

I color-coded the text passages in each interview according to the coding applied to the surveys' categories (Figure 1, p. 76), thus highlighting the text passages referring to *Interactions and relationships; Confidence, insight; Inner peace, equanimity, joy; Body awareness, sexuality; Mindfulness, Spirituality*. Each interview analysis chapter was then structured around these five subchapters and presented, mostly paraphrasing and partly quoting the contents of the interview. I started each chapter with a brief introduction of the interviewee's background.

Subsequently, each interviewee was sent their interview as it would appear in this thesis. They also received a brief explanation about their code names and were asked to confirm whether they found everything accurate. All six confirmed their satisfaction with the accuracy, the majority of them being pleased by having been heard and understood to the letter.

#### **4.3.5 Conversations**

The spoken word is typically the main tool for instructors, teachers and counselors, and most of the interaction in the YT and TWs is done orally. Therefore, my own observations are often based on and fed by casual conversations, formal and informal

(spontaneous) counseling sessions or simply comments dropped at a venue's buffet, during a recess or when answering an attendee's workshop-related question.

Formal counseling sessions are appointments with a pre-defined time frame, location and fee and are frequently booked between workshops. Informal ones are much shorter and usually take place during a workshop: all attendees are being encouraged to claim support and help, whenever they find themselves in a tight spot, such as experiencing difficulties with their own mental patterns, with other participants, or following the rules. Since attendees are explicitly asked not to hesitate to "bother" the team at any time of day or night in case they feel troubled – for many, an exercise in self-esteem, in itself – a considerable portion of these informal counselling take place around 3 am (cf. Section 6.4.2, "Personal Development", p. 175).

Just like during conferences, recess time during a workshop is often the most intense and important part of the event. So much so, that one of the TW leaders would often jokingly point out that the sessions only serve to distract the attendees' attention from the "real thing", which happens during recess. Indeed, this is when what had been presented and practiced during a structure is put to the everyday test; this is when new skills and relationship formats are being tried, and this is when those who might feel embarrassed to officially "seek help" can approach an instructor and address whatever concerns them, while "just chatting".

The pieces of information from these conversations are to great extent documented in my notes, taken by default during formal counseling sessions, and/or my own detailed journal which keeps record of situations and conversations of particular interest since 2007. These records allow for paraphrasing situations or even for direct quotes.

#### **4.4. Sources and Evaluation of primary Data**

This subchapter presents the quantitative and qualitative samples which have been examined for this study along with statistic data describing the samples. Additionally, the chapter specifies the methods applied in order to obtain and process those data.

For qualitative data obtained from individuals, it is critical to determine whether the samples are representative, i.e. whether the observed results are only to be expected e.g. in black females under age 30 or whether the sample is broad enough to allow for extrapolation of the results for typical audiences: similar numbers of males and females, different age cohorts, varied professional backgrounds and cultural influences.

Even before drawing the samples – both quantitative and qualitative – it was clear that they would represent a rather specific cohort compared to a global population: males and females are proportionally represented and their professional background is relatively varied; however, age cohorts are limited to adults, the common language is unsurprisingly German, the cultural background predominantly central-European, their financial situation such as to be able to afford tuition and accommodation.

Also, given the specific requirements of this study, only individuals with pronounced interest in Tantra Workshops and everything they comprise – personal development, awareness training, relationships, sexuality etc. – are part of this sample, which certainly diminishes its global representativity. Nonetheless, we will see that the samples still cover a substantial part of Austrian and German societal range. More research would be required to evaluate whether the findings of this study are applicable to different social and cultural backgrounds (e.g. in the US or Australia).

We will explore the samples drawn for quantitative and qualitative evaluation in more detail, including the presentation of statistical material, in chapter 6.



#### **4.5. Language**

German is the first language of all my live sources, including myself: the interviews, the surveys, the testimonies – everything has been collected and recorded in German. Therefore, it might seem like an obvious choice to write this thesis in German. However, the wish to reach a broader audience led me to opt for an English version of this study. This decision immediately posed the problem of translation, since in this case, everything, starting with the questionnaire and including every single word uttered by an interviewee, needed to be translated from German into English. Fortunately, having graduated from the Institute for Translation and Interpretation at the University of Vienna (1985) and having worked as a freelance translator for a decade, I am very familiar with the trade. The summary of this study, which precedes it and was required to be submitted in Spanish, was entrusted to a fellow expert.

I decided that, whenever a German text had to be quoted, I would include it into the text body in its translated English version, while making the original quote available in the footnote. This ensures a fluent reading experience, while still offering the original version for those who want to compare or inquire further. Whenever an original version is given in a footnote, I have added {ta} – translation by author – to indicate that the text had been translated by myself.

Due to the nature of transcripts of live interviews, this method could not be reasonably applied to the qualitative interviews. Since they not only had to be transcribed, but also translated and then condensed – leaving out redundant or meaningless parts, which are typical for spoken language but would make an unedited transcript unreadable – I opted for presenting the English version, only, while keeping the original recordings as well as the transcripts available for further reference.

## **5. State of the Art: Research on Tantra Workshops**

To date, there has been very little research on the effect of Tantra Workshops. Few facilitators or attendees seem to have engaged in reporting the results and impact of Tantra Workshops beyond testimonies in the format of short magazine articles or Facebook postings. These testimonies have not been taken into account for this study, since they serve mostly advertising purposes and do not provide solid data. Nonetheless, I was able to acquire a master thesis by Rita Lugmayr (2003), a scholarly paper by Marianne Kropf (1999) who interviewed workshop facilitators, and fragments of the commissioned *SkyDancing* study by Monika Kattenbeck-Remscheid (1992), which, lamentably, is only partly available and thus hardly meets scientific requirements. Both Kropf and Kattenbeck-Remscheid are extensively quoted by Lugmayr.

From a strictly scholarly point of view, a master thesis is not the best reference for a doctoral thesis; however, in this particular situation, where virtually no academic research on the effects on TW has been done to date, I opted to review the few existing sources despite them being less than ideal.

### **5.1. Lugmayr's "Enlightenment through Sex?"**

Lugmayr's master thesis (Lugmayr, 2003) at the Department of Psychology of the Faculty of Natural Sciences at the Paris Lodron University of Salzburg is an ambitious project; Lugmayr's inaugural work deserves credit for tackling such a new and little ploughed field. The paper is of interest for this doctoral thesis, since its research focuses on the Institut Namasté's participants and their individual experiences. Lugmayr was part of the YT cohort of 2002 which she surveyed, even though she herself failed to complete all of the portions of the training.

Lugmayr subdivides her paper into six chapters: A description of Tantra; History of Tantra; Hypothesis; Methodology; Results and Discussion. The first chapter takes up over a third of the entire paper; the author touches on topics such as “The Body in Tantra” and “Women in Tantra” and elaborates extensively on very specific subjects such as *Chakrapuja*<sup>15</sup> and ritualized deflorations, which seem to be rather unrelated to her hypotheses. A particular concern is that she attempts to conflate very different traditions, and does not always distinguish between Hindu and Buddhist approaches to Tantra.

The definition and description of what Tantra is and is not is largely based on Nayak’s “The inner World of Tantra” (Nayak, 2001), which in turn is a blend of traditional Hindu and modern Western Tantra. It extensively caters to the audience’s sensationalist curiosity, e.g. describing in detail an “in the eyes of simple-minded people shocking ritual – the Chakrapuja” (Nayak, 2001, 109). Generally, the sexual aspects of Tantra are being highlighted out of proportion throughout Lugmayr’s thesis, despite the interspersed references to its spiritual goals.

A number of Lugmayr’s claims would hardly find broad support by experts in the field, e.g. “mature genital sexuality is an important goal in Tantra” (Lugmayr, 2003, 35) or the suggestion that it is to be expected that practicing Tantra would improve an individual’s sexual satisfaction (Lugmayr, 2003, 67) since from a classical point of view, they are not considered goals but prerequisites, at best.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, she is correct in her assessment of Western Tantra, improving the individuals’ communication skills and

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<sup>15</sup> A ritual celebrated in a circle, during which strictly ritualized sexual union with different partners may take place.

<sup>16</sup> While improved sexual satisfaction is not excluded, it is certainly a byproduct, at best – never a goal for traditional Tantra. However, part of the problem here might consist in Lugmayr’s translation of Socher’s “women’s sexual realization issues” as “female sexual satisfaction” (“weibliche sexuelle Befriedigung”, p. 51).

therefore, as a secondary benefit, also having a beneficial effect on a person's ability to communicate their sexual wishes and preferences (Socher, 1999).

When referring to historical data or elaborating on tantric rituals, Lugmayr repeatedly relies on sources such as Daniel Odier, Margot. Anand or Ashley Thirleby. Odier, originally a crime novel author, who claims having been trained by an authentic Tantric priestess in the forests of Kashmir and shares his adventure in his novel *Tantra* (Odier, 1997), unfortunately leaves out the most important parts of his initiation experience. Anand, the godmother of Western Tantra (Margo Anand, 1990) and commissioner of the SkyDancing study (cf. Section 5.2.195), calls herself "Tantric High Priestess" and can certainly be a role model for those lacking self-esteem: "There is not a single other female Tantra teacher and pioneer who is better known than me, or who has had such a wild, global, epic life as I have." (Margot Anand, 2016a). Thirleby suggests imaginative sex-encounters in his *Tantra the Key to sexual Power and Pleasure* and offers detailed instructions on how to achieve orgasm; however, neither sexual power, pleasure nor orgasms are listed as essential goals in mainstream classic literature (Thirleby, 1978). All three authors are well-known for their inspiring writings but less so for their scholarly rigor.

### **5.1.1 Lugmayr's Methodology**

Lugmayr examined a sample (n=13) of participants in order to explore the following hypotheses:

Tantra would

1. have a positive impact on the individual's sexual response (longer, more intense, more frequent orgasms; more and longer encounters of higher quality; increased

abandon and deepened couple commitment) and therefore could be successfully implemented into sexual and couples' therapy (Lugmayr, 2003, 68).

2. enhance the individual's satisfaction with their own body, generate more enjoyment when exercising (e.g. dancing) and fuel the body with more energy and strength (an attempt to confirm the results of the SkyDancing Study).
3. increase the individual's experience of "bliss, ecstasy, peace, meaningfulness and cosmic unity" (Lugmayr, 2003, 70).

Lugmayr used a questionnaire of 23 items, plus three open questions. Her items were partly drawn from the Body-Image-Questionnaire BIQ (German: FKB-20). The BIQ by Clemens & Löwe is generally being used for body image disturbances, such as anorexia, transsexualism or hypochondriac syndrome; its use outside of pathological body image situations has not been validated.

### **5.1.2 Lugmayr's Results**

According to Lugmayr, the results of her variance analysis rendered a "highly significant, positive effect of Tantra, comparing the two questionnaires". She found, however, that it only affected two of the three measured scales, namely the scales "Sexuality" and "Spirituality", while the scale "Body image/experience" showed no changes or even a slight decline.

Interpreting her data, Lugmayr concludes that due to participating in the Tantra training, the second questionnaire shows a significantly higher ability to trust another person, as well as improved communication and relationship skills. She explains the lack of increased Body image/experience with the individual's focus on the remarkably enhanced "Sexuality" and "Spirituality"; however, the author also notes that her own observations and inquiries with participants showed that they, indeed, knew their bodies better after having participated in the training; also, they knew how to take care of them

and their needs. Nonetheless, she concludes that Tantra is not an indicated therapeutic tool to be used in cases of *bulimia*, *anorexia nervosa* or other disorders connected with a distorted body image. She argues that neither the studies conducted by Socher (1999), Sovatsky (1985) and Kropf (1999) nor her own found indicators suggesting an improvement of physical self-perception (Lugmayr, 2003, 97) – a finding clearly contradicted by the results of the present study.

While it may be true that TWs are not top of the list for dealing with anorexia or bulimia and pathological body image disorders may not be best addressed by Tantric exercises, my own observations in the field show that, particularly in women-only groups, the subjective body dissatisfaction can be dramatically changed through corresponding structures and group dynamics, resulting in an overall increment of self-esteem, courage, supportiveness towards others and non-competitive bonding among female participants.

Lugmayr states that her third hypothesis, about deep spiritual experiences, has been fully confirmed by her study. This is of interest for the present thesis, since Lugmayr's survey questions aimed not only at feelings of cosmic union but also at states of inner peace. Thus, Lugmayr's study seems to point towards an increase of peaceful sensations in the individual due to the participation in Tantra Workshops.

Another interesting finding is that, according to the results of Lugmayr's study, females seem to benefit more from Tantra Workshops than males: sexual realization among females as well as their spiritual experiences improved noticeably while their male counterparts showed much less impact. (This finding is supported by the SkyDancing Study, cf. p 95). Lugmayr suggests that this result comes from the much higher status women have in Tantra – a questionable conclusion, due to the ambivalent image of women throughout the history of Tantra: there is a number of authors who

suggest that the role of women in Hindu and Buddhist Tantra was, at best, that of a springboard used by males to achieve their own spiritual heights: “[...] historians have held that Tantric Buddhism was an oppressive movement in which women were at best marginal and subordinate and at worst degraded and exploited. The prevalent view is that the human counterparts of the exuberant yoginis of Tantric iconography were downtrodden prostitutes and low-caste women exploited for ritual purposes” (Shaw, 1994, 3).

In addition, there are no teachings on the supreme role of the female in Tantric practice during the IN Year-Training, except for the explanation that *Shakti* means *energy* which pervades all things, and nothing could exist without her – but neither could anything exist without *Shiva*, who is equaled to *consciousness*.

Regarding age cohorts – <33, 33-40 and >40 –, according to Lugmayr, the group that seems to benefit least from Tantra Workshops is the one that feels most attracted by them, namely individuals age 33-40: “The age cohort between 33 and 40 seems to benefit least from the Tantra-Year-Training.” (Lugmayr, 2003, 99).<sup>17</sup> As I will show, my own research strongly contradicts this conclusion (p. 248).

In view of the small sample, the results of Lugmayr’s study need to be reviewed and extrapolated with caution. She herself admits that, in order to obtain a broader picture of the impact of Tantra Workshops on an individual’s experience, qualitative interviews would have been a more adequate tool than quantitative surveys (Lugmayr, 2003, 101) – a tool which has been applied for the present thesis. Even so, Lugmayr’s study showed a clear tendency towards improvement in two out of three areas of focus (cf. Section 5.1.2, p.90).

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<sup>17</sup> „Die Gruppe 33 bis 40 Jahre profitiert anscheinend am wenigsten vom Tantra-Jahrestraining.“ {ta}

Lugmayr recognizes that her own experience in the Tantric field at the time when she started her study was not enough to come up with questions that might have helped shed more light onto the subject. For instance, she acknowledges that her take on Tantric sexuality at the time of writing her study was too narrow, resulting in questions which focused mostly on sexual satisfaction or performance and less so on transcendent experiences (Lugmayr, 2003, 102): “My own understanding of sexuality has been broadened thanks to the Year-Training and now, after the Year-Training, I would phrase some questions very differently”.<sup>18</sup>

## **5.2. SkyDancing Study**

*SkyDancing* is the name of several of Margo Anand’s international franchise Tantra Schools; it alludes to enlightened beings in the Hindu-Tantra and Tibetan-Buddhist mythology who were referred to as “sky dancers” or “sky walkers”. After graduating from the psychology department at the Université de Sorbonne, Anand met Osho Sri Rajneesh and became one of his closest disciples, leading Neotantra Workshops at his ashram in Poona and later introducing them to Europe, particularly Germany, and the US (Margot Anand, 2016b).

The research paper *Forschungsprojekt Training in Ekstase und Liebe (T.E.L.)*, known as *SkyDancing Studie*, was carried out by psychologist Monika Kattenbeck-Remscheid in 1992 at the Ludwig-Maximilian Universität in Munich, with the academic consultation of Hinderk Emrich (M.D.) and teaching analyst Siegfried Gröninger (Kattenbeck et al., 1992). It was aimed at demonstrating the beneficial impact of Tantra Workshops on their participants. As a series of workshops to be examined, the training of 1991/92, taught by Margo Anand and Peter Schröter, was selected.

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<sup>18</sup> “Mein eigenes Verständnis von Sexualität hat sich durch das Jahrestraining geweitet und ich würde jetzt, nach dem Tantra-Jahrestraining, einige Fragen ganz anders formulieren.” {ta}



The study itself, however, seems to be as elusive as the scent of an incense stick: it turned out to be utterly difficult to catch a glimpse and even less so to get physically hold of the paper. Lugmayr (2003) refers to this study but quotes only secondary literature,<sup>19</sup> explaining that for now and with the consent of the university, this study's results are not to be published.

In April 2013, the Swiss *SkyDancing* teachers Peter A. Schröter and Doris Christinger posted on their Facebook page: "It does make sense to book a Tantra Workshop with us! The positive results of the study done 1992 have been confirmed in 2008."<sup>20</sup> I contacted them, asking for the results of the study which they were celebrating, 22 and five years after, respectively, in order to help spread the word about the efficiency of Tantra workshops. They declined my request, stating that they have "invested too much time, money and commitment" to give the outcome away, just like that. Eventually, Schröter and Christinger sent me the four-page-long extract of the study which, back then, was accessible on their webpage, and added that the full study was "too much content and most people wouldn't understand it, anyway". Unfortunately, the extract provided little scholarly value.

To date, the extract has been taken down from the (meanwhile re-designed and re-named) Swiss *SkyDancing* webpage.<sup>21</sup> An even shorter reference could also be found on the German *SkyDancing* group's site where potential participants were promised a copy of the study along with their sign-up forms for the year-training; however, the German *SkyDancing* branch has abandoned its activity in spring of 2016 (SkyDancing Tantra Institute, 2016) and the web content ceased to exist.

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<sup>19</sup> An article by Robert Fischer in *Sexualmedizin* (1994), gives a detailed description of the study; however, said article is not available anymore, not even to the publisher, Medical Tribune.

<sup>20</sup> "Und es lohnt sich doch! Ein Tantra-Seminar bei uns. [...] Eine Nachuntersuchung (2008) belegt die Ergebnisse der ersten Auswertung." {ta}

<sup>21</sup> [www.tantra.ch](http://www.tantra.ch), retrieved March 1, 2017

Not ready to give up, I contacted the author of the study, Monika Kattenbeck-Remscheid, making a request of her to share her knowledge and data, in order to be properly included and quoted in the present study. I was asked to send in my detailed thesis proposal in order to, “after deliberation, possibly” being mailed the four-page-extract which was already in my possession. Kattenbeck-Remscheid declined to share the data or results of the full study, since she “had received payment only for the extract, while the payment for the full study has not been effected yet”; she added that, once she retired as a psychotherapist, she planned on writing a doctoral thesis based on her data, herself.

In view of the information available to me, it seems that the *SkyDancing Study* was a commissioned research, paid for by a customer – in this case, a Tantra school. Nevertheless, non-academic studies may well add enlightening data and insight, provided they are conducted in an academically compatible manner; therefore, I will give a compact overview of the SkyDancing study of 1991 and its results, insofar as I was able to access them.

### **5.2.1 Methodology and Results of the SkyDancing Study**

The exploratory study in question was based on the year-training *Ekstase und Liebe* (T.E.L), taught by the psychologists Margot Anand and Peter Schröter between May 1991 and May 1992. The sample was comprised of 48 individuals of different professions between the ages 28 and 67 (Kattenbeck et al., 1992), which after the last evaluation was reduced to n=31, made up of 12 men and 19 women (Fischer, 1995). The training was comprised of three parts; two of them lasted 10 days, the third one eight days. Data were collected before and after each part as well as 17 weeks after the training was completed, resulting in a total of 7 surveys.

The questionnaire and its items were partly designed by Kattenbeck and Emrich; partly based on psychometric instruments from other sources, such as scales from the Gießen test, a widely used and extensively validated self-assessment test (Beckmann, 1990), the von-Zerssen-Test which explores the individual's psycho-social conditions, (Von Zerssen, 1976) as well as from the *Tübinger Skalen zur Sexual-Therapie* (TSST) (Zimmer, 1994) which focus on collecting data about the individual's sexual experience (Lehmann, 2007, 92-98).

Due to the condensed format of the study's extract, the results and conclusions are, for the most part, merely listed, rather than presented, interpreted and discussed, which makes it difficult to follow the scholarly reasoning. According to this abstract, the study rendered noteworthy results: improvements in all categories are reported, from enhanced orgasmic response, more enjoyable sexual encounters, less disgust caused by bodily fluids, better communication skills and body-awareness to self-esteem, deeper bonding, social skills, joy, "warm pulsing energy waves" and "feelings of peace, unity and ecstasy", along with "enhanced concentration, vitality, creativity and more initiative in all spheres of life, as well as a healthier and more conscious approach to all forms of life"(Kattenbeck et al., 1992; no longer available).

It is unfortunate that the full study has been unavailable for over 20 years now, even for academic research, since it might contribute to properly evaluating the impact of Tantra Workshops on their attendees. This, in turn, might help well-trained, resourceful and reputable trainers get out of the New-Age corner where the public opinion has been situating them for decades, thus making Tantra as a valuable tool visible to a wider audience.

### **5.3. Marianna Kropf: “Tantra in the West”**

This religio-sociological study (Kropf, 1999) was conducted by Kropf during her time as university assistant at the Department of Theology at the University of Bern (Switzerland). It has little common ground with the research for the present thesis: Kropf does not focus on training but rather on general impressions about Tantra Workshops; she does not inquire about the impact on participants but rather focuses on the correlation between the religious and the sexual; finally, she does not interview attendees but their trainers – a sample selected from facilitators in Switzerland, alone (N=8).

Nonetheless, Kropf’s results are, for the most part, consistent with the observations made at the IN between 1997 and 2017, this being the main reason why her study has been included into this literature review.

#### **5.3.1 Kropf’s Methodology and Results**

Kropf conducted qualitative interviews with five Tantra schools in Switzerland who shared their own development as Tantra teachers and their approach to Tantra; she explores contents and methods used and the ways in which these are offered to the participants; also, she inquires about the attendees’ motivations and profiles.

Since all Tantra trainers have been Tantra students, at some point, Kropf’s results can certainly be applied to participants, as well. Thus, some of her findings might be useful as reference points for the present thesis, even though her research focuses on individuals on the teaching side of the training circle.

Kropf finds that most of her interviewees point to Osho and Margo Anand as their main source of inspiration, while individually naming other teachers and spiritual influences, as well. This is relevant insofar as it corresponds to the Institut Namasté’s

line of working philosophy, as confirmed by the elements, listed as common to all of the interviewees' work, which are firm cornerstones of the Institut's syllabus, as well:

1. Focus on bodywork
2. Focus on the subject and their individual state
3. Sexuality as well as spirituality as an explicit part of the syllabus
4. Providing a ritualized space beyond the everyday experience
5. No rules set in stone/casual atmosphere
6. Absence of any kind of performance pressure
7. Autonomous handling of the contents imparted
8. Meditation and energy work (Kropf, 1999, 104)

Despite a rather varied list of reasons why the future Tantra trainers were initially drawn to Tantra, Kropf observes one common point regarding the general impact that Tantra had on them: all of the interviewees track fundamental changes in their way of acting and thinking back to their encounter with Tantra; they experienced a “modification of existing patterns of interpretation and attitude, which radiated into all spheres of their lives and lastingly influenced their professional as well as private lives.” (Kropf, 1999, 102). According to my observation, this kind of essential changes in life approach, values and goals, affects (future) trainers and attendees likewise; indeed, some of the IN's participants are so inspired by the changes they go through during the Institut's YT, that they decide to become Tantra facilitators, themselves.

All interviewees describe a striving for the spiritual, even though they seem to have different understandings of it: be it a transformative process, a holistic view on life, living in the *here & now*, finding one's own essence, finding religion in Nature or unifying with the Nameless. Within the groups, alternative answers to questions that used to be the domain of established religions are offered, while never insisted upon or demanded: the individual is encouraged to find their own spiritual path according to their preferences, grade and direction of commitment.

The participants are described quite uniformly as people of all walks of life with a tendency to be involved with care giving professions. The represented age cohorts range between 20 and 75. The motivations for signing up for a Tantra workshop are diverse but tend to be triggered by circumstances perceived as difficult: childhood trauma, failing relationships, sexual frustration and a whole array of stress factors rooted in modern society, such as alienation, loneliness, lack of communication, beauty ideals, over-achieving or depression (Kropf, 1999, 106).

Kropf's interviewees agree that the number of participants who sign up out of simple curiosity, the hope for something titillating, sex addicts or the like is marginal. Kropf remarks that this is interesting since it clearly contradicts the widespread narrative of what Tantra groups are all about; she suggests an extensive analysis including all institutions connected to Tantra, as well as their clientele,<sup>22</sup> while admitting that this would be a challenging task due to data protection.

#### **5.4. Summary of Literature on Tantra Workshops**

Of the very few existing academic studies on Western-Tantra Workshops, the three presented here do not offer much common ground with this thesis: either the sample is not comparable (N=13, 8 and 24?, respectively, vs. N=222; one-time surveys vs. longitudinal) or the focus is different (trainers rather than attendees; sexual response rather than inner peace). Nevertheless, some of their insights and results can still be used as reference point.

There seems to be a clear tendency indicating that indeed, Tantra Workshops have a substantial impact on attendees. This observed impact points towards increased

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<sup>22</sup> To include all institutions who claim to be "doing Tantra", such as massage parlors, "Tantra-Goddesses" etc., would only confirm the public's widespread belief that Tantra is mainly about sex and orgies.

self-esteem, enhanced communication skills, deepened sexual and spiritual experiences and generally more joy of life. According to the examined studies, females seem to be able to draw more or more intense benefits from the workshops than males.

The groups themselves are heterogeneous, comprised by individuals from all walks of life and an impressively wide range of age cohorts. Mere “sex tourists” are a marginal phenomenon; some participants stay for just one or two workshops and move on, while others commit to a more intense and time-consuming syllabus.

Trainers seem to agree on a large number of main topics, elements and methods of teaching, emphasizing bodywork and energy work. While sexuality is a main subject of TW, spirituality plays a major role, as well.

## **6. Definitions**

This study refers to a number of terms readers are familiar with, such as peace or sexuality, as well as to terms that are not necessarily part of a broad audience's vocabulary, such as Tantra or Tantra Workshops. In order to understand the subject and focus of this study, it is critical to understand what peace and sexuality mean in the present context. Even more important is the way I as the researcher define Tantra and understand the Tantra Workshops this study is rooted in. Therefore, this chapter is dedicated to thorough examination and comprehensive explanation of each of these four terms: peace, sexuality, Tantra and Tantra Workshops.

I will start by discussing Wolfgang Dietrich's *Many Peaces* (Dietrich & Sülzl, 1997), explore how peace is linked to happiness and sexuality and determine what kind of peace is relevant for the present study. Then I will discuss the term "sexuality" and how it connects to Tantra; from there, we will look into Tantra itself, its history, goals and methods and my own perspective on it. Lastly, I will elaborate on the many facets that I believe are essential for setting up a Tantra Workshop which generates a space where attendees can discover, explore and stabilize their inner peace.

### **6.1. Peace**

Peace is one of the two main focal points of this study. However, since Dietrich coined the term *Many Peaces* and introduced it to the social sciences' discourse (Dietrich & Sülzl, 1997), the concept of peace and to which of its varieties a particular study refers to, requires some further explanation.



### **6.1.1 Many Peaces**

Initially, Dietrich hypothesized two types of peace (Dietrich & Sülzl, 1997): energetic and moral. Energetic peace, which he suggests being the original one, refers to a concept which embraces harmony and well-being not only between individuals or between societal systems, but between these and even larger systems such as nature or universe. Typical for societies with this kind of peace concept are powerful Mother Goddesses, responsible for fertility and peace.

Moral peace, on the other hand, developed later among the three large institutionalized monotheistic religions Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It was not based on naturally flowing harmony, nurture and care between the individual and the whole, anymore. Peace, in this sense, was rather something granted by a supra-human entity to those who followed the rules of an unquestionable truth (Dietrich, 2006). These rules had allegedly been set by that very entity, yet they were irrefutably interpreted by its worldly representatives (Dietrich, n.d.). The result was a variety of peace which is still sought after in European and North American societies: inner peace as a result of clear conscience in reference to a divine entity.

In addition to the energetic and moral peaces, Dietrich (2008) suggests three further understandings of peace, thus forming five peace families: energetic, moral, modern, post-modern and transrational. In the modern world view, peace is just like a car: if it breaks down, it can be fixed; the sole prerequisite is to know how it works. There are templates how to fix cars, human bodies and warring nations; the assumption is that they only need to be applied correctly, while the conflictive parties are expected to accept the peace-bringing party's unfailing recipe. If a group, tribe or society did not know the recipe, its members needed to be educated according to the One Truth; this process was called "civilizing". Over time, this concept of categorizing everything and

arguably possessing a solution for any problem, raised doubts. Emerging from these doubts, the second half of the 20th century saw the propagation of postmodernism.

In postmodern thinking, previously firm pillars of the world perceived, “given” axioms such as truth, justice, equality, security or nation-state are questioned and deconstructed. Similar to a child who – driven by curiosity or boredom – takes apart a toy, disillusionment, loss of orientation and meaning accompany postmodernism. However, thanks to these now disconnected, non-functional and scattered parts of what used to be an unshakeable truth, new and unimagined things started being assembled: literature and journalism escaped their tight modernist corsets by re-defining objectivity and playfully opening up to new narratives; unexpectedly, the option to acknowledge more than one possible truth arose – and suddenly, there was more than one way to see, live and establish peace (Dietrich, n.d.)

For optimistic natures, this carefree “anything goes” mindset allows for new levels of creativity. I myself am a child of postmodernity: I deliberately rejected training in a well-defined field of psychotherapy such as systemic therapy, since the different schools’ clinging to the *one true method* – theirs – would have narrowed down my selection when choosing how to approach my clients’ issues. Rather, I opted for the (much less prestigious) life counselor training, because it guaranteed me free choice and unrestricted mixing of methods – be it counseling according to Carl Rogers, constellation work, shamanic counseling or provocative therapy according to Frank Farrelly (Farrelly & Brandsma, 1985).

On the other hand, such dissolutions of previously well-guarded boundaries do invite arbitrariness. According to the Tantra facilitators interviewed by Marianna Kropf (1999), this new constructivist freedom can lead to individually designed “religions”, allowing spiritual seekers such as Tantra workshops’ attendees to craft their own

religious system by picking-and-choosing: whatever is perceived as pleasant and meaningful is included, across cultural and theological boundaries; whatever feels unpleasant or hard to understand, may be left out. The value of this kind of cherry-picking through religious and/or spiritual concepts for the individual's personal development is questionable.

Regarding peace, its postmodern variety demands completely new skills from its followers (Dietrich, 2008): there is nothing to rely firmly on, anymore; the illusion of the One, Perpetual Peace is shattered and is being replaced by small, transient, imperfect day-to-day peaces which require being conquered again and again. There are no instructions carved in stone, no fool-proof method. Similarly to Marshall Rosenberg who calls for listening for the other party's needs, here and now (Rosenberg, 2002), he who yearns for peace in a postmodern world is challenged to keep inventing new moves for the timeless dance of co-operation and conflict. However, those who do not lose themselves in mourning the lost illusion of sacred truth and security, arguably provided by fixed rules and standards, may enjoy the liberty of coloring their lives – and peaces – the way which works best for them, in every given situation. Keeping the balance while walking the fine line between “flexible adaptation” and “cherry-picking” is a challenging art, in itself.

The fifth, transrational family of peaces is rooted in transpersonal psychology (Grof, n.d.), which is itself based on humanistic psychology (Maslow, 1969) and emerges out of the dissatisfaction with the two current psychological approaches in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: psychoanalysis and behaviorism. Transpersonal psychology suggests that every human being is capable of the lowest and the highest deeds; also, that there is a vital need in the human psyche for connecting with something beyond the Self, in order to preserve health, hope and *peaceability* and not give way to unhelpful

impulses. By embedding the individual and their personal thoughts, emotions and impulses into this greater *something* which aims at the evolution of small (individual) and larger (societal and even universal) systems, this approach clearly transcended the personal scope – hence “transpersonal”.

In this new, transpersonal light, rationality gradually loses its high esteem and idol-like role which it had played in modernity and even postmodernity; it is now considered just another practical tool. This tool, however, can be used to transcend the rational interpretation of reality, in order to achieve transrationality, which strives for a reality-grounded spirituality without recurring into magic or mystic patterns.

For the context of peace studies, *transrational* means to embrace the fact that just like a person is more than an external beholder can see or even imagine – their personal history, but also the history of their family and culture of origin; the individual dreams, hopes and tragedies that shaped them – humanity is also embedded in a wider framework of ancient wisdom, still resonating from pre-modern and pre-rational societies (cf. C.G. Jung’s collective unconscious [1981]). This inherited reference system is not a burden to be shaken off; it can be understood as a treasure to be kept: “The more we suppress [the ancient knowledge] in the name of rationality and persona, the higher is the risk that it returns in an uncontrolled, violent and destructive manner, because we all are the carriers of the complete memory and everyone has the potential to trigger disaster.” (Dietrich, 2006, 17)

At this point, let us properly define the terms *peaceable* and *peaceability*. These terms are used for the purpose of this study to describe a person’s ability to generate and to maintain serenity, compassion and inner and outer peace, as well as the ability to respond to disturbing stimuli in a gentle, peaceful way, i.e. their *peace-ability*, which is

the main focus of the present study. I suggest that *peaceable* includes an element of agency and activity in both seeking and contributing to peace in one's own life and the world. In addition to a peacemaking/peacebuilding quality (Lederach, 1996) it embraces qualities such as resilience, frustration tolerance, nonviolent communication, self-esteem, compassion and, of course, inner peace.

I chose to use these terms, because none of the terms available seemed to express with sufficient precision the quality I am referring to – a problem well-known to Wolfgang Dietrich, who resorted to re-defining *peace* by suggesting the five peace families described above (Dietrich & Sülzl, 1997) in order to present a more precise description of his understanding of peace.

Likewise, widely used terms such as *peaceful*, *at peace*, *calm* or *peace-seeking* fail to describe my understanding of this particular state of mind which the TWs aim for: *peaceful* does not include the ability to proactively generate and maintain one's inner peace; also, a person can sit peacefully on their porch while despising their family. *Being at peace* is not versatile enough linguistically; *calm* has too many different meanings; *peace-seeking* does not include the result of the quest.

A possible phrase that might be used is *peaceful awareness* which gets closer to the state that I am trying to describe. *Aware* suggests mindfulness as well as a socially conscious person and avoids the connotation that peacefulness is a withdrawal from daily experience. However, the linguistic versatility of this phrase is limited. Therefore, and also because they are not in common English usage (and thus has few pre-conceived meanings attached to them), I opted for the use of *peaceability* and *peaceable* to describe the state of mind aimed for by the TWs, whenever *inner peace* or *peace of mind* did not seem a perfect fit.

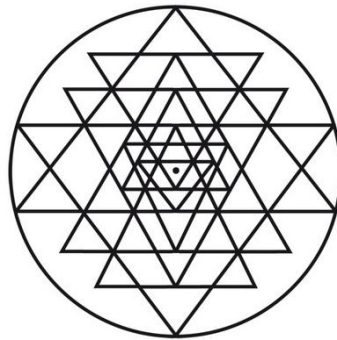
Returning to the practical application of *peaceability*: peace that reaches beyond very small groups of individuals will hardly ever be more than a lovely delusion if there are no real people trying to make it real in their everyday lives and day-by-day interactions and situations; situations as distressing and as trivial as getting cheated by a friend, being late and hopelessly stuck in traffic or dealing with a needy colleague. Generally, having a peaceful response as a genuine option is a valuable resource whenever the individual feels overwhelmed by a strong emotion or basic mind-programs set in, e.g. the survival instinct, as in “it’s me or you” or “us against them” – even if it is merely about yielding one’s spot in a waiting line.

What this implies and requires is a crucial notion as pointed out by Dietrich: (transrational) peace means respect for otherness (Dietrich & Sülzl, 1997). In this sense, peaceful relations do not presuppose understanding the opponent. What they do presuppose is a radical – and in moral or modern peace contexts unheard-of – respect for the others’ right to look, speak, dress, parent, believe differently from ourselves. As we will see, implanting this kind of deep respect for otherness is one of the goals the IN is pursuing in its workshops.

While methods such as mindfulness and meditation praxis have been proven to decrease bias against otherness (Lueke & Gibson, 2015), it still holds true that the cognitive dissonance, generated by others’ otherness, can lead to inner (intrapersonal) or even outer (interpersonal) conflict. However, conflict does not need to be rejected *a priori*. According to Johan Galtung, conflict is not a contemptible antonym to peace but rather a sign of life and vibrant energy, “which can, through non-violent means, be extracted in order to transform problem situations.” (Dietrich, n.d.) This approach strikingly resembles one of the most elementary Tantric axioms: take energy – no matter

where from, be it anger or pleasure – transform it, and then use it for attaining the highest levels of human potential! (Cf. Section 6.3.1, “What is Tantra?”, p. 137).

The link between transrational peaces and the Tantric tradition is visually confirmed by the logo used for publishing within the UNESCO Chair for Peace Studies at the University of Innsbruck: the Sri Yantra, an ancient graphic meditation aid which, in this special case, comprises “interpenetrating male and female principles, contemplated to envision the totality of existence and one’s unity with the cosmos” (Sillitoe, 2002, 128).



*Figure 3 – Sri Yantra*

If ancient, pre-rational wisdom is ours to keep, as suggested earlier, we can hardly refuse to acknowledge that spirituality, which is one of its essential elements, is a human *conditio sine qua non*. Equipped with rationality which is not something to worship, anymore, but something to skilfully apply, it is now possible to value achievements of modernity such as democracy or political correctness, while weaving in postmodern insights. For example, that there may be instances where they need to be adapted to a different cultural reality than the one which has conceived them, and simultaneously trusting the underlying and all-pervading spiritual reference, whatever its individually chosen name.

A remarkable example of how to bridge the apparent gap between rationality and spirituality was set by the Indian mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan (Kanigel, 2016). In the beginning of the last century, he was an acknowledged mathematic genius, being compared to Leonhard Euler, on one hand; on the other hand, he also stood firmly by his spirituality, candidly declaring that he would receive inspiration from his devotion to goddess Namagiri. She, being a variety of well-known Hindu goddess Lakshmi, would not only inspire him but literally reveal new theorems during his prayers, or even in dreams (which reminds of *dream yoga* taught at advanced levels of Tantric Buddhism (Norbu, 2002). Ramanujan would often say, "An equation for me has no meaning unless it represents a thought of God." (Chaitin, 2007) This marriage between lucid rationality and spirituality, where neither dominates the other but both are at one another's service, describes best what I understand by *transrational*.

Qualities and skills which enable the individual to reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable, to find and maintain inner peace are, however, mostly not innate. On the contrary, considerable amounts of time and energy are required in order to, first, understand the value and necessity of these skills and second, to achieve and firmly incorporate them into one's behavioral structure. Therefore, if the long-term goal is to achieve peace between groups, communities and societies, its development needs to start at a very personal level, as the UN Association in Canada (2012) notes: peace is "much more than simply the lack of conflict and hostility. It is a unique and powerful state of mind that starts with the individual". In addition to highlighting the individual's contribution and responsibility, this understanding of peace as being more than just the absence of war and violence is also in concert with Johan Galtung (Galtung, 1990; Singh, 2003).



The development of qualities that pave the way for peace as a *powerful state of mind*, requires several prerequisites, such as

- opportunities to learn about it – what is, after all, *peaceability*?
- To understand and
- to practice/train mindful behavior, which facilitates peace on a personal as well as interpersonal level.

### **6.1.2 Peace and Happiness**

Is it peace, then, that human nature yearns for, above all else? Rather than peace, it seems that happiness is the starting point when individuals set out to improve their conditions: “All sentient beings wish to be happy” is one of the axioms of Buddhism, or, using the words of the Dalai Lama, “Every one of us wants to avoid suffering and gain happiness” (His Holiness the Dalai Lama, 2012, 11). Aristotle, in Western philosophy, came to a similar conclusion 200 years later: “More than anything else, men and women seek happiness.” (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990, 13) The United States of America declare in its founding document, the Declaration of Independence, the pursuit of happiness as one of the inalienable rights given to all human beings, while the responsibility of governments is to protect it. In Britain, the government now applies methods to measuring happiness, the OECD promotes the standard international measurement of happiness and the UN holds an important conference on happiness (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Development, 2013), while the Buddhist country of Bhutan made happiness one of its government’s main goals as early as 1971, enshrining the Gross National Happiness (GNH) in its legal code of 2008: “...if the Government cannot create happiness [...] for its people, there is no purpose for the Government to exist” (“The story of GNH,” n.d.): happiness matters.

Individuals pursue happiness in different ways: some seek to become influential or economically successful, since that is their definition of happiness; others practice growing an Abundance Mindset (M. Hyatt, 2016), still others sit down with friends and design a Manifesto aimed at guiding towards a happy life (Holstee.com, 2016), or create a blog on happy life that draws the attention of an impressive audience, such as “Marc and Angel Hack Life” (Chernoff & Chernoff, 2016).

Thus, happiness matters. So much so, that at times it seems that happiness, particularly instant-gratification-happiness (P. Roberts, 2014), is all that matters. If asking random individuals whether they would rather be happy or unhappy, it is highly unlikely anybody would choose the latter. Leaving aside definitions of happiness beyond the ample “free from suffering/stress/frustration”, it is safe to claim that virtually everybody fills the hours of their lives with moves and strategies that take them closer to whatever they call joy and help them evade whatever they define as pain: “Almost all actions [...] are based on our predictions of the emotional consequences of these events.” (Gertner, 2003)

So, here we are, struggling and striving, doing our best to get our slice off the happiness cake – or, at least, off what we *think* will make us happy, in a future. However – do we succeed? Often, we do not, or at least we think what we have achieved is not good enough or has lost its shine, as Dan Gilbert compellingly describes (Gilbert, 2007). When whatever there is, does not seem to be enough, disappointment is likely to emerge. Disappointed individuals tend to look for a different point of focus; they look for change – new ways that lead to more happiness in their lives.

For this purpose, individuals in their younger years typically initiate changes in their environment, thus hoping to achieve more happiness: *If only I had a better job... a different partner...more money... lived in a different neighbourhood..., things would be*

*so much better and I would be so much happier!* As they mature into more experienced adulthood, some individuals come to understand that it is hard to change one's environment and even harder, if not impossible, to change others; however, there is always the option to change one's own ways. This is when personality development shows up on the individual's radar. Perhaps, so the reasoning frequently voiced in the IN's group sharings, if I (rather than you) become more X or more Y, my life will change for the better.

According to my observation of TW groups, it takes attendees months – often years – to correlate happiness to inner peace and *peaceability* and to understand that peacefulness and happiness are intertwined: on the one hand, a peaceful mind leads, at least indirectly through nourishing relationships, to a happy mind. On the other hand, a happy mind also seems to impede violent outbursts, since, as the saying goes, *happy people don't fight*. This popular wisdom is backed up by neuroscience:

Pleasure and violence have a reciprocal relationship, that is, the presence of one inhibits the other. [...] When the brain's pleasure circuits are 'on,' the violence circuits are 'off,' and vice versa. Among human beings, a pleasure-prone personality rarely displays violence or aggressive behaviors, and a violent personality has little ability to tolerate, experience, or enjoy sensuously pleasing activities. As either violence or pleasure goes up, the other goes down (Prescott, 1975).

Happiness is a subject which has been widely addressed by positive psychology, a branch of psychological research that emerged in the 1990s . Positive psychology is aimed at finding ways to help people "see the glass as half full": it suggests shifting the individual's attention from the problematic and hopeless to the purposeful, fulfilling and encouraging (Peterson, 2006; M. E. Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). When speaking about happiness, particularly in the context of peace, we therefore do not have

in mind mere frolicking or, as one of the pioneers of positive psychology, Martin Seligman calls it, “Hollywood view of happiness”, which consists in achieving the biggest possible amount of pleasure at any given moment (Matousek, 2005). Seligman suggests a second tier beyond this Pleasant Life, namely the Good/Engaged Life, where the individual draws happiness from unfolding and applying their particular strengths. Finally, he postulates a third tier, the Meaningful Life (M. E. P. Seligman & Royzman, 2003). Here, rather than serving predominantly one’s own wants, the individual’s strengths are put at the service of a goal that reaches beyond egotism. *Authentic Happiness*, according to Seligman (M. E. P. Seligman & Royzman, 2003), reconciles and embraces all three tiers, acknowledging not the importance of the Meaningful Life alone but both hedonic pleasure and realization of individual talents, as well.

Seligman himself adjusted his *Authentic Happiness Theory* later and re-named it *Well-Being Theory*, based on the fact that individuals often do things which do not add to their immediate happiness but still increase their overall well-being,<sup>23</sup> such as building a house or participating in an emotionally challenging workshop. This is consistent with research on delayed gratification (Mischel et al., 1972; P. Roberts, 2014), as well as my own observations, where attendees leave their comfort zones and face challenging situations in order to gain something that is worth the cost: stable inner peace.

If, based on this discussion, we assume that a) *all beings want to be happy*, b) individual happiness is a solid base for inner and interpersonal peace which, c) in turn is the foundation for peace (and increased levels of happiness) within a given community, we will be interested in ways of developing *Authentic Happiness* or genuine well-being on an individual level, for as many individuals as possible:

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. [www.learning-theories.com/positive-psychology-perma-theory-seligman.html](http://www.learning-theories.com/positive-psychology-perma-theory-seligman.html), Feb 12, 2016

Happy people have an underlying predominant sense of well-being and contentment. They remember the past with serenity, anticipate the future with confidence and experience the present with joy and exuberance. This attitude is sourced from a life integrated by meaningful purpose and sound principles and enhanced by healthy relationships and pleasure (D. Smith, 2011).

In fact, we might consider switching from the rather narrow term happiness to Aristotle's *eudaimonia* which describes the phenomenon, for which the English language lacks a proper translation, more accurately: "The contended state of being happy and healthy and prosperous"<sup>24</sup> or "the state of having a good indwelling spirit, a good genius" or even, not taking happiness for the result of an action, but rather for the action itself: *eudaimonia* is "that which is 'activity in accordance with virtue'; or that which is 'contemplation'."<sup>25</sup> It is interesting that even for Aristotle, contemplation, i.e. meditation, apparently was a cornerstone if not the equivalent for *eudaimonia*. Again, we note the close link between happiness and peace: a person in contemplation or generally leading a contemplative lifestyle may be less prone to violent actions (cf. Brantmeier, 2007; Nagler, 2014).

What to Aristotle was activity which is contemplation, to Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, the co-founder of Positive Psychology, is his concept of flow (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990): while this particular state of mind, described as effortless performing and thought-free "floating" within a given activity, can happen spontaneously and anytime, it is much more probable to occur during structured activities with rules, skills and/or a time frame involved – e.g. skating, mountain climbing, doing research, or participating in a Tantric exercise. Indeed, attendees keep

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<sup>24</sup> [www.dictionary.reference.com/browse/eudaimonia](http://www.dictionary.reference.com/browse/eudaimonia), Feb 9, 2016

<sup>25</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica online: [www.britannica.com/topic/eudaemonism#ref273308](http://www.britannica.com/topic/eudaemonism#ref273308), Feb 10, 2016

reporting the experience of surprisingly liberating state, where they did not feel restrained but rather supported by rules; where they completely forgot about time; where they never would catch themselves thinking about what and how they were doing but would simply do it, knowing that everything was just right; a state when they felt one with themselves, their partner/s in the exercise and the task they performed, as if the doer, the deed and the one at the receiving end of the doing were undistinguishable.

According to Csíkszentmihályi, this state of mind, *flow*, can be practiced and achieved deliberately, which enhances a person's overall happiness and therefore, as suggested by Prescott, their reluctance to violent action:

What I “discovered” was that happiness is not something that happens. [...] It does not depend on outside events, but, rather, on how we interpret them. Happiness, in fact, is a condition that must be prepared for, cultivated, and defended privately by each person. People who learn to control inner experience will be able to determine the quality of their lives, which is as close as any of us can come to being happy (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990, 14).

The key to a life the quality of which we determine ourselves seems therefore to be the ability to control inner experience – a perfect definition of meditation, which takes us back to Aristotle and to Tantra. Since Csíkszentmihályi's *flow* seems to encompass merely transitory happiness, even though it apparently also helps build more stable states of *eudaimonia*, we still need to look into the art and methods of achieving deep-rooted individual well-being which would serve as a stable base for peacefulness.

What are, then, possible ingredients for the kind of happiness as described, which allows for peace of mind to emerge and to deepen? Certainly, first the basic requirements are to be covered before a person can even start thinking about more than transient happiness, grounded in elements such as getting their physiological needs met, as

presented e.g. in Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943). However, as soon as the most basic needs are taken care of, a higher level of needs floats to the surface of awareness, and then the next. On these higher levels of requirements for human fulfillment (using a broader brush, we could use any of these terms: flow, happiness, *eudaimonia*, well-being, inner peace), we find notions such as meaning, presence, purpose, growth; qualities such as mindfulness, patience, gratitude, kindness, altruism; we find courage – the ability to face difficulties such as overwhelming emotions, change, and conflict; we find resilience, frustration tolerance and faith in a “benevolent universe” (D. Smith, 2011) in the view of loss, grief and adversities.

Another important contributing factor to peace of mind is acceptance. Acceptance comes in many shapes and colors: acceptance of one's own shortcomings, of chances missed, mistakes made, wrongs done. Acceptance of others' struggles, failings, imperfections. This kind of acceptance is, however, very different from becoming resigned, shrugging problems off or giving up on resolving them. It is rather a proactive relaxation into the flawed nature of reality and the inevitability of impermanence: it means to welcome imperfection and to willingly tread the never-ending cyclic path of creation, flourishing and fading (Berzin, 1998; Dietrich, 2008).

Neither does *acceptance* mean to dully tolerate misfortune; rather, the individual is called to master *bootstrapping*, that is, to learn how to “synthesize happiness” (Gilbert, 2014). Happiness is created, “synthesized”, by reframing events in such a way that unfavorable circumstances and results are perceived as genuinely gratifying. Gilbert, another scholar in the field Positive Psychology and the Science of Happiness, shows conclusively that whenever we are unable to achieve a goal – go to our first-choice university, get the car we really wanted – once we settled for the second-best (or even less attractive) option, we start liking it better than our former favorite. The fascinating

thing about this process is that we do *not* engage in “sour grapes.” We most genuinely and literally change our mind, liking now that which we have gotten, better than what we preferred earlier (Gilbert, 2014). The happiness we *synthesized* this way is, according to Gilbert’s research, equally valuable as the “natural” happiness that comes with getting what we initially wanted.

This ability to draw well-being even from apparent defeat is one of the main pillars of a peaceful mind, and it takes us straight to another essential ingredient for *eudaimonia*: resilience (Section 0, p. 50). Resilience has in recent years attracted the attention of psychologists, therapists and – as a desirable feature in employees – companies. It can be defined as the “process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress — such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems or workplace and financial stressors. It means “bouncing back” from difficult experiences (Rutter, 1987). Resilience is not a given; it is even less common than thought (Infurna & Luthar, 2015). According to studies conducted by biochemist Christina Berndt, there are a few genes that make part of the population more resilient right from the start (Berndt, 2013). However, resilience can be developed and improved on even later in life, independently on the presence of the bounce-back genes. Berndt recommends a number of stress-reducing, resilience-enhancing ways of acting: acceptance when facing a crisis, cultivating an optimistic mindset, gratitude for everything good so far – which in itself benefits both mental health and relationships (G. R. Fox, Kaplan, Damasio, & Damasio, 2015) –, close bonding in thus reliable, stable relationships (Berndt, 2015) – and awareness training.

As for recommendations to improve resilience, the American Psychological Association (APA) suggests a to-do list of their own (Berndt, 2015) which closely resembles not just Berndt’s but also largely coincides with the requirements for human



fulfillment/*eudaimonia*, listed earlier in this chapter: stable connections, accepting help, choosing a helpful response to stressful events, accepting change, taking opportunities for self-discovery and growth, keeping up an optimistic attitude and developing confidence, to name a few. Remarkably enough, APA likewise highlights the benefits of meditation and spiritual practices for fostering resilience.

A remarkable example for meditation and awareness training that manages to build hope, resilience and peace within an environment void of much perspective is *The Dhamma Brothers Project* (Phillips & Coles, 2010). In 2002,

...an overcrowded, violent maximum-security prison, the end of the line in Alabama's prison system, is dramatically changed by the influence of an ancient meditation program. [...] For some of [its inmates], a spark is ignited when it becomes the first maximum-security prison in North America to hold an extended Vipassana retreat, an emotionally and physically demanding program of silent meditation lasting ten days and requiring 100 hours of meditation (The Dhamma Brothers, 2016).

The inmates' testimonies are compelling evidence of the power of awareness, of confronting and accepting oneself, of discovering their inner landscape, their kindness and compassion, equanimity and peace. One of the inmates in the project, Edward Johnson, put it this way: "On the third day of meditation, I began to feel calm. And then and there, for the first time in my life, I was really ready to deal with me" (The Dhamma Brothers, 2016). His experience is confirmed by research, suggesting that practicing mindfulness meditation, indeed, helps foster mindfulness; mindfulness, in turn, reduces psychic symptoms and enhances well-being (Carmody & Baer, 2008). The project is, according to the webpage, being academically studied; so far, the findings confirm "increase in mindfulness & emotional intelligence; improved physiological &

psychological well-being; decrease in anger and distress; a 20% reduction in institutional infractions and segregation time” (The Dhamma Brothers, 2016).

### **6.1.3 Touch, Sex and Peace**

However essential awareness training may be for the development of a peaceful mindset, it does not cover the full scope of basic human needs. As we have seen, gratifying relationships seem to be at the very core of resilience and inner peace, while the happiness ensued enables individuals to be kind: “Being happy may give us a greater capacity to be helpful to people in pain” (Berzin, 1998). Of course, relationships do not unfold on an intellectual level, alone. In order for them to thrive, all senses need to be involved – humans yearn to experience their counterpart on all levels, the surprisingly most essential being the sense of touch (Turp, 2000). Experiments with different mammals have shown that the skin-to-skin contact between a mother and her newborn is not only critical for the offspring’s further development: if separated and deprived of the very first contact which in most species, even in apes, includes vigorous licking on behalf of the mother, the baby suffers a loss that cannot be caught up on later, while in some cases she even dies (Montagu, 1971).

What is true for apes might not be applicable to humans. However, German Emperor Frederick II (1194-1250) conducted an experiment with infants who were raised without a word spoken to them and deprived of any tactile stimulation except for nursing. The aim was to determine the “primordial language” of humanity. The Emperor’s attempt failed since, according to chronicler Salimbene, all infants died.

In the 1970s, developmental psychologist James W. Prescott claimed that societies in which infants and children were consistently touched, soothed, carried around and petted *and* later given freedom to explore their adolescent sexuality, tended

to be free from violence (Prescott, 1996).<sup>26</sup> We might not want to follow him quite as far; nonetheless, the thought of linking generous amounts of human touch to downscaled affinity to violence was taken up and developed further by other scholars: so, for instance, it has been demonstrated that in humans, “the tactually failed child grows into an individual who is not only physically awkward in his relations with others, but who is also psychologically, behaviorally, awkward with them” (Montagu, 1971, 228). Such awkwardness which can be traced back to a lack or predominant absence of tactile stimulation as well as to unreliable family bonds during childhood (Polan & Ward, 1994), has been shown to turn into aggressive behavior in adolescence in a significant number of cases (Field, 2002).

According to these authors, deprivation of skin contact is disastrous in children; however, it can be equally painful in later life. Humans are social animals who suffer when bereft of other human beings and their physical presence; this becomes very obvious in nursing homes (Heidt, 1981) when there is barely any touching on behalf of the nursing staff except for the most necessary caretaking. Also, the existential suffering caused by the absence of human contact is the main reason why solitary confinement is among the most dreaded punishments (Grassian, 1983; Methner & Fellner, 2010). The lack of tactile stimuli in children, adults or the elderly is particularly unfortunate given its well-known healing and soothing effects, helping to reduce pain, anxiety, depression and aggressive behavior (Field, 2002).

Closeness, intimacy, skin-to-skin contact are elements of a nurturing relationship not only between parent and child; they are also main ingredients of healthy sexual relationships between adults. The importance of reassuring sexual relationships and the

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<sup>26</sup> In fact, Prescott claimed that such communities were 100% free from violence (e.g. theft, pain in infants, cruelty against enemies). However, critics argue that societies like the Amish or orthodox Jews are also known for their strictly non-violent approach, while not encouraging premarital sexual experiences, at all.

beneficial effects of “positive sexuality” (i.e. an approach to sexuality which focuses not exclusively on the harm that sexual contacts potentially cause – STIs, pregnancy, violence – but rather on those aspects that enhance well-being) have been intensely studied in the last decades. “The results indicate that sexual health, physical health, mental health, and overall well-being are all positively associated with sexual satisfaction, sexual self-esteem, and sexual pleasure” (Anderson, 2013).

Moreover, it has been shown that particularly in females, the need for physical contact and tactile stimulation can become so desperate that it translates into sexual activity as a price to be paid for the underlying desire to be cuddled and held (Montagu, 1971; Northrup, 2010). It seems as if even though sexuality as part of a fulfilled, happy human life has been widely accepted (after centuries of denial and demonization), we are still far from developing a natural, neurosis-free approach to it. According to Montagu, “it is highly probable that sexual activity, indeed the frenetic preoccupation with sex that characterizes Western culture, is in many cases not the expression of a sexual interest at all, but rather a search for the satisfaction of the need for contact” (Montagu, 1971, 166).

The link between free-flowing sexual activity and communal peace has been tentatively made by Prescott as early as in the 1970s. Focusing not on humans but on our closest relatives in the animal kingdom, we find an even closer link between sexuality and peace: the deliberate use of sexual activity as a means to pacify tensions between members of a group. This phenomenon has been extensively studied by primatologist Frans de Waal in the 1980s. He observed chimpanzee and bonobo communities and found that while chimpanzees get sex by applying violence, bonobos – with whom we share 98.5% of DNA – avoid violence by offering sexual activity. “The species”, he writes, “is best characterized as female-centered and egalitarian and as one that substitutes sex for aggression” (de Waal, 1995).

Research shows that bonobos manage to build and maintain a “peaceful society in which females are in charge, war is nonexistent, and sex is as common and friendly as a handshake” (V. Woods, 2010) – and all of this while enjoying deep bonding and intimacy, e.g. by gazing into each other’s eyes while copulating. Psychologist Christopher Ryan advises his fellow human males to act in their own interests:

Societies in which women have lots of autonomy and authority tend to be decidedly male-friendly, relaxed, tolerant, and plenty sexy. [...] If you’re unhappy at the amount of sexual opportunity in your life, don’t blame the women. Instead, make sure they have equal access to power, wealth, and status. Then watch what happens (C. Ryan & Jethá, 2012).

While this advice sounds somewhat tongue-in-cheek and it may be a long way from our “oversexed and underloved” Western society to an even remotely as natural and gentle approach to equality and sexuality as displayed by the bonobos, it has been frequently observed that sexuality, sexual orientation and gender seem to be inexhaustible sources of social conflict: hate crimes against members of the LBGT community, stoning as punishment for premarital sex, domestic violence, “honor killings” and gang rapes without prosecution are daily news.

If we ever want to see any improvements on the situation of gender equality and world peace,<sup>27</sup> we need to keep asking painful, embarrassing and unsettling questions about sex and peace, such as “How come most politics aimed at slowing population growth apply reproductive control over women, rather than giving them reproductive freedom?”, or “How are we going to stop AIDS from affecting the future of states

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<sup>27</sup> In the sense of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s message for the International Day of Peace 2016: “Let us all work together to help all human beings achieve dignity and equality; to build a greener planet; and to make sure no one is left behind.”  
<http://www.un.org/en/events/peaceday/sgmessage.shtml?nid=9015>, retrieved Dec 23, 2016

without first solving the underlying causes, such as sexual exploitation and trafficking of women?” (Hudson, Ballif Spanville, Caprioli, & Emmett, 2012).

#### **6.1.4 What Kind of Peace is relevant for this Study?**

In the context of this study, I want to examine the effect produced by a particular form of Tantra workshops on the *peaceability* of their attendees. In order to be able to evaluate the effect, we need to define what precisely it is we are observing, i.e. what kind of peace we will consider relevant for this study (cf. 6.1.1, Many Peaces).

As explained earlier, my focus is on generating personal, inner peace; a peace somewhat different from the image of the smooth-as-glass mountain lake used by Dietrich in his *Variations on the Many Peaces* (Dietrich, 2008) to illustrate *energetic peaces*. A tranquil mountain lake is doubtlessly compelling; however, it does not reflect the chaotic, confusing, challenging situations individuals face in their everyday lives – situations in which the individual may yearn for inner peace but rarely finds it on the surface. Therefore, when thinking of inner peace, which attendees are invited to explore and discover, rather than the mountain lake, an ocean comes to mind: with breaking waves and menacing clouds, starry nights and colorful sunrises, buzzing with life and conflict and creation on, above and underneath the surface – and yet, at the bottom of all these superficial agitations, amidst turmoil and howling storms, a place of imperturbable, comforting, unchanging quiet, strength and peace is to be found.

While workshop participants are encouraged to explore this quiet space within themselves in brief guided meditations on regular basis, typically several times a day, the term *peace* is barely ever mentioned by the leading team: in German-speaking countries, the target audience of those interested in Tantra would be most likely dissuaded by the term. Even though the team never brings up *peace* proactively, attendees still end up

resorting to the term when attempting to describe some of their TW-related experiences: “The quiet within me makes me feel at peace... no longer driven by my urges.”<sup>28</sup>

In order to discover, recognize and cultivate this inner space in the first place, awareness training is needed: most attendees are not acquainted with concepts like “body awareness” or “observing emotions without acting them out”, but rather tend to react to all kinds of triggers according to their ego-states and life scripts (Berne, 2010). This is why unsophisticated meditation methods (e.g. “counting breaths”) and awareness techniques (the *Inner Observer*) are introduced from the simplest beginners’ level onward; thus, the attendees’ awareness of physical, mental and emotional states and processes is being deepened and constantly encouraged.

Hardly any attendee would agree to the claim that what they signed up for was inner peace: the term is, at least in German, not considered “cool” or describing something a potential attendee typically aspires for. However, making the acquaintance of their “quiet inner place” is the prerequisite for success at advanced training levels. Combining awareness meditation and visualization methods, attendees practice on regular basis to find that place within, which is, as they learn, invariably undisturbed and stable. This routine is part of most beginning phases of any given exercise and helps attendees let go of anything distracting or stirring, be it within or out.

Approaching the quiet place is often induced by words such as, “No matter how harshly your boat gets buffeted by the waves on the surface – the anchor of your awareness is securely cast in your inner point of stillness.” By practicing this over and over, the individual learns how to access their very own peaceful place. The experience of being in charge of their inner peace helps attendees to master increasingly demanding

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situations as they advance through the workshop levels. Simultaneously, it helps them to handle the challenges of their everyday lives.

Once this anchor is reliably set and the peaceful place becomes so familiar that they can return to it whenever they choose to, exercises with a focus on interaction start achieving better results, while also becoming more rewarding. Attendees frequently report that being increasingly at peace, themselves – and also increasingly aware of their emotions and biases – allows them to gradually let go of judgmental tendencies, become more forgiving, patient and forbearing with themselves and others – overall, to weather emotional storms better by remembering how to get back to their *point of peace* and thus, to experience less extreme emotional spikes in either direction.

In order to practice building gratifying interpersonal relationships, altruism in its manifold shapes is being introduced and fostered from the most basic workshops on. Supporting others is not only good for your health (Inagaki et al., 2016): being helpful and supportive towards others or stepping aside at times in favor of a peer, thus building trust and interpersonal peace, is not only a virtue promoted by most religious groups (Scarboro Mission, 2015). It is also a character trait that enhances personal happiness and helps the individual age well, as noted by George Vaillant (Vaillant, 2002), the current director of the famous 75-year longitudinal Harvard study on human happiness, *Triumphs of Experience* (Vaillant, 2012). Individuals who cultivate the ability to be grateful and forgiving seem to enjoy more nourishing relationships. Thus peace – this *powerful state of mind* – is closely linked to happiness, while happiness is linked to love (Waldinger & Schulz, 2010).

In other words, a peaceful mind nourishes loving relationships, while loving relationships are what humans genuinely need to be happy: “The seventy-five years and twenty million dollars expended on the Grant Study points, at least to me, to



a straightforward five-word conclusion: ‘Happiness is love. Full stop.’” (Vaillant, 2012, p. 52)

## **6.2. Sexuality**

In this chapter, I will explore the possible definitions of sexuality, its current meaning in and for society, and in particular, how it is being viewed and developed within the context of this particular take on Tantric Workshops.

### **6.2.1 What is Sexuality?**

It seems silly to ask such a question: after all, we all know what sexuality is. However, do we really? And do we always refer to the same thing, when we talk about it? I remember a Tantric workshop I attended in the late 1990s, where all participants were required to sleep on side-by-side mattresses on the floor of one sole dormitory. After the first evening session, we were sent off to bed and charged not to engage in sexual activities. We were all middle-aged adults, but in that moment, we turned into excited high-school students on a field trip, everybody pondering the definition of *sexual activity* in their head. However, our instructor did not leave anything to doubt and provided us with a very precise definition: “No body parts in body cavities,” he said, paused for a few seconds to give us time to process the message and to try find a loophole, and then added, “...cupped hands count as cavities.”

Sexuality is something virtually every adult person is engaged in – either pursuing, enjoying or avoiding it. Its presence in Western media has been blatant for such a long time that its perception bypasses our awareness; a number of consumers think it is “normal” to see sexually unambiguous pictures when what is being advertised is beer, cars or healthy lifestyle. Sexual content seems to be ubiquitous; so much so that

Foucault and his 1990 diatribe about the burden of our “Victorian legacy” (Foucault, 1990) may seem outdated: do we not live in the most enlightened age, ever – sex-wise, anyway? Are there not discourse, research, discussion and information about sexuality, wherever we look – in the West, anyway?

Nonetheless, when taking a closer look, it becomes clear that Foucault is not exaggerating when he claims that not much has changed since Victorian times. In the Victorian era, anything sexual without a direct link to procreation “not only did [...] not exist, it had no right to exist and would be made to disappear upon its least manifestation...” (Foucault, 1990, 4) Despite omnipresent sources of information in their everyday lives, today’s workshop attendees of all age groups commonly display perplexing levels of inhibition when it comes to condom use (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Scott, Sharpe, & Thomson, 1993) as well as ignorance about basic sex-education facts, anatomy and familiarity with their own bodies: an exemplary and not uncommon remark comes from female participants who admit never having seen their own vulva in a mirror.

Moreover, attendees rarely possess skills that would enable them to communicate about sexuality – the topic is still shrouded in awkward silence. Almost 60 years after the 1960s sexual revolution, words for sexually charged content do not come easy, either: they mostly fall into two categories – slang or scientific – while for most attendees, neither is comfortable to be used in an intimate conversation about preferences and boundaries.<sup>29</sup> Participants report having difficulties talking about sexual topics with their partners, when educating their children and even with health care professionals. Sexual dysfunctions are being rather concealed and denied; STIs are mostly perceived as

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<sup>29</sup> This is why, in the context of Western Tantra, genitals are referred to with Sanskrit terms which are both respectful and free from mostly negative connotations: *yoni* for the vulva (meaning *source, origin*) and *lingam* for the penis (meaning *sign, evidence* – in this case, for male sex).

shameful, and the knowledge about them is scarce. Overall, the Victorian “don’t do this; but if you really can’t keep yourself from doing it, at least don’t ever mention it” seems still to be in full bloom.

This is a devastating picture to observe, since humans are dyed-in-the-wool sexual beings, even more so than any other mammal (except, perhaps, bonobos): humans can engage in sexual activity whenever they choose to, thanks to a uniquely short ovulation cycle. Additionally, they also can have simple, straightforward sex like any other animal – but beyond that, they can also *make love*, i.e. take their activity to a new level and add an ego-transcendent element to the encounter. Humans are irresistibly driven by sex hormones just like any other animal; however, *unlike* any other animal, they are able to transcend their urge and use the energy of arousal for other purposes than procreation or, at the most, orgasm.

The WHO’s definition supports this broad view, when it speaks of sexuality as an essential part of being human, independently on age and other criteria:

[Sexuality] encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships. While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors (World Health Organization, 2006).

Since, as per this definition, everything humans do and represent is in some ways connected to sexuality, concern about safety, sexual health and healthy sexuality is in order. Sexual health, according to the WHO, “requires a positive and respectful approach

to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences” (World Health Organization, 2006).

In order to make pleasurable and safe sexual experiences happen, every individual should therefore be entitled to define themselves as whatever they choose to: hetero or homosexual, bisexual, transsexual, asexual, pansexual or even sapiosexual;<sup>30</sup> kinky and into BDSM or plain *vanilla*, without being bullied, threatened or harmed in any way. Moreover, provided their partners’ explicit consent and with all necessary safety measures in place, every human being should be free to act according to their sexual preferences, thus drawing pleasure, well-being, satisfaction, bonding and inner peace from them (“Declaration of sexual rights,” 1999).

### **6.2.2 (Western) Tantra's Approach to Sexuality**

In classical Tantric texts (the tantras), sexuality is never a main topic – just like pots and pans are, at best, only secondary in any book about cooking. However, just like cooking is certainly not about pots but still not possible without them, Tantra is not about sexuality, and yet sexuality is an essential element of Tantra. Similar to the approach in pre-Victorian European era, traditional Hindu or Buddhist Tantra assumes that sexuality simply *is*, and that its nature is to be natural; it does not need to be extensively taught or studied first, in order to eventually become a useful tool on the path to liberation or enlightenment.

The situation in the West – and generally in modern societies– is very different. As we have already briefly discussed, a natural approach towards sexuality is not something Westerners generally grew up with. This is certainly true for the baby boomer generation now in their fifties and sixties which I also belong to, but surprisingly not any

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<sup>30</sup> Sapiosexual: those who get, beyond the average, aroused by intelligence and wits.

less so for their children, i.e. the younger age cohorts among participants in Tantric workshops. Sexuality for the modern Westerner is, according to my observations, still something that needs to be discovered, proactively owned, liberated from awkwardness, guilt and shame and – often against almost unmanageable inner and outer resistance – given a new, respected and enjoyable place in the individual’s life.

In view of this reality and in order to help attendees get to a mindset where sexuality is something as natural as eating or breathing, Western Tantra facilitators need to go to great lengths acquainting students first with content and skills which have nothing to do with ancient Tantric teachings. Most of the Western Tantric schools I am familiar with or whose curricula I have examined online provide content aimed at improving the students’ self-esteem, building a positive image of sexuality, deepening/discovering sensitivity and sensuality, and highlighting the teaching of techniques to enhance sexual response and pleasure.

While all these measures are critical for the social context all these facilitators operate in, they do not form part of traditional Tantric training, in any way. Unfortunately, while some facilitators may be familiar with this fact, very few ever mention it. The majority of those known to me keep their focus on the sexual content, often beefed up with New-Age fillers (cf. Section 6.3.1, “What is Tantra?”, p. 137), without inviting their attendees to walk the much more challenging and taxing path of self-transformation. The focus on explicit sexual content is in some cases also due to attendees’ expectations: not everybody aspires after more than “mere” sexual satisfaction, achieving which is, to many, already a quantum leap in their life quality.

Thus, a thorough look at – and, if necessary, professional therapy of – sexual history, traumata, dysfunctions and related issues such as emotional instability are absolutely necessary for somebody who is seriously interested in studying Tantra. It is

necessary because a relaxed, loving approach towards all bodily functions is an indispensable prerequisite for an individual's all-inclusive emotional and mental growth. This stage of instruction is where many Tantric workshops add some basic sexuality-education and also share common ground with recently established methods, for instance Biodanza<sup>31</sup> or Cuddle Parties:<sup>32</sup> using elements such as light touch, gentle eye-gazing or group-cuddling helps the attendee's often frightened, saddened or aggressive Inner Child (Bradshaw, 1990; Capacchione, 1991) find new hope and trust. However, leaving it there would sell Tantra short, since healing a person's sexuality can be but the first step on the Tantric journey towards inner peace.

Individuals who discover the beauty and joy of their newly freed sexual expression tend, according to my experience, to grow deeply fascinated by it. This is not surprising: after 20, 40 years of frustration, they finally feel attractive to themselves and to the opposite sex, they hold a few keys to make an encounter work, while having improved their overall sensitivity; so much so that a number of them conclude, "This freedom is what Tantra is all about; now I got it and I am done here".

Some of these attendees take their new freedom home with them and act on it without paying close attention to the much less attractive fact that freedom comes with responsibilities such as responsibility for one's own and the partner's safety – for instance, practicing safe sex; for keeping their own boundaries and respecting their partner's; for communicating intents and goals, such as not letting somebody believe they are interested in a stable relationship when what is being sought is exploring the field of sexual possibilities; being honest about their current relationship status; not

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. footnote 3, p. 29.

<sup>32</sup> "Cuddle Party is a playful social event designed for adults to explore communication, boundaries and affection. You can come to a Cuddle Party [...] to touch, to be touched, to have fun, to practice asking for what you want, to practice saying "no" to what you don't want — all in a setting structured to be a safe place for exploration and enjoyment." [www.cuddleparty.com/about/](http://www.cuddleparty.com/about/), Feb 19, 2016

trying to impress others by boasting about their own Tantric experience; not overwhelming a partner with expectations or exercises they had no chance to get properly introduced to.

Therefore, while introducing attendees to a relaxed yet respectful perspective on sexuality, and while they are still developing their new skills, ideally they also are taught how to gradually disentangle often deeply imprinted views and misconceptions. Typical views include “any kind of touch counts as foreplay”, “foreplay leads invariably to intercourse”, “kindness equals interest in sex and/or committed relationship”, “committed relationship equals monogamy”, “jealousy is a sign of love”, “Tantra means getting laid as much as possible”, “orgasm is the main reason for having sex”, “freedom means that now I can do whatever I want” and the like.

To facilitate this sorely needed disentangling, Tantra workshops committed to comprehensive personality development typically offer a wide variety of exercises. Through these exercises, participants not only discover and enhance their sensitivity to touch and awareness of their own and others’ body language; they learn and practice to say “yes” and “no” when they mean it; they learn how to create affection, closeness and even intimacy with people they met a few hours ago, and to trust they can do so without acquiring the obligation for a sexual encounter:

It is significant that almost universally there is a close identification between touch and sex. In the special case of [...] most Americans (unable to feel comfortable about touch as a friendly or affectionate statement) they see physical contact between adults almost exclusively as a prelude to sex, and hence, subject to the usual range of sexual taboos (Montagu, 1971, 166).

In this sense, attendees are introduced to a desexualized perception of touch and practice to view it as a friendly statement with no strings attached – an approach some still remember from their childhood; they discover that love, relationship and sexuality are good when they go together, but also that they do not necessarily have to go together in order to be important, helpful and enjoyable. According to my observation, Tantra workshop attendees seem to lean towards exploring alternative relationship models, such as open relationships, triads or polyamory. Typically, attendees of Tantra workshops come to understand that human relationships, the nature of sexuality and even their own personalities are more complex and multifaceted, but also more malleable than they used to think.

Expansion of the attendees' view and personal experience of themselves, their relationships and sexuality in general could be called the second step on the Tantric ladder. Despite the fact that the teachings on this level are still in the realm of personal development and far from genuine Tantra, expansion is, after all, one of the basic meanings of the term *Tantra* (Figure 4 – List of Translation Options for the term “Tantra”, p. 145). The next step, which would lead the individual into a realm that can finally be called Tantric with good reason but which only few facilitators take, may at first glance look completely backwards: after helping attendees access the field of sexuality and make it feel natural and familiar, their attention is now being gently turned away from this field – towards something they will, ideally, find even more rewarding.

This *rewarding something* is to learn about and to handle their own energy. The corresponding skills are, in most of the Tantra workshops known to me, slowly introduced to them, starting at the most basic workshop level. A high percentage of attendees have already heard of life energy and the possibility of experiencing and playing with their own; some are familiar and at ease with it, others are skeptical or



scornful. However, in general it is not hard for them to understand that *energy* is what they sense when there is tension between them and their partner; that feeling overjoyed is an expression of their own energy as well as getting upset or aroused. This understanding, along with practices such as simple yet efficient breathing exercises, can lead to a stage where attendees not only become able to generate fresh energy from within, but also can use the techniques to calm down when upset or frustrated.

On a further level of experience, which even fewer Tantra workshop facilitators seem to aim for, this knowledge about energy, combined with the participants' by then relatively stable mindfulness and solid meditation skills, can lead to even more gratifying discoveries: the energetic outcome of exercises, particularly those which incorporate sexual elements, increases; often to a point where the individual is, without difficulty, able to refrain from reaching an orgasm, i.e. is no longer held captive by the involuntary response to their autonomic nervous system.

While the literature on extended sexual pleasure has spread in the last decade, most of it "naturally" guides the reader and practitioner to an enhanced orgasmic response (Brauer, 1983). However, a few Tantric facilitators use these very methods to increase the individual's energy and facilitate higher states of consciousness *without* giving the energy away in an orgasmic discharge. Attendees trained according to these methods often report that they prefer not peaking, thus enjoying prolonged and extraordinarily pleasant plateau experiences of heightened energy, insight and peace of mind. This approach and outcome is in line with classical Tantra scriptures.

Based on all these personal experiences, the advanced participant's notion of sexuality and its goals can shift considerably: from a rather narrow definition of something clearly defined as for purpose, motivation, technique, course and outcome, to

something much more wide, and difficult to define; less of an incentive by itself and more of a vehicle able to take a person on their spiritual journey from A to B.

Ultimately, on some training levels (advanced, at the IN), even the idea of a union on a physical level – *maithuna* – is stripped of its narrow mold. While the common understanding of *coition/maithuna* is that of intercourse between a male and a female, here attendees come to understand that intimate forms of union occur incessantly and simultaneously on multiple levels: we breathe and become one with the air (Koppensteiner, 2009, p. 175); we eat and our food becomes part of us; we listen and what we hear turns into one of the memories that make us up as an individual; we gaze at something and its impact becomes part of who we are. Feeling at one with everything there is, neither rejecting nor clinging to anything in particular, is one of the possible definitions of Tantra. Certainly, it describes a mindset of deep inner peace.

### **6.3. Tantra**

In this chapter, I will shed some light onto the multifaceted term *Tantra*. I will explore its history, the range of definitions as well as its goals and methods, as they were understood throughout centuries and from different vantage points.

“Almost every study of Tantrism begins by apologizing”, writes Robert L. Brown in his introduction to *Roots of Tantra*: “Scholars say it is little understood, that it cannot be easily or precisely defined and that it lacks a coherent structure” (Harper & Brown, 2012). It is understandable that scholars feel somewhat uncomfortable around a phenomenon that clearly exists, but can neither be pinned down nor described with ultimate validity, as opposed to a mathematical equation. However, and similarly to what can be observed in the field of peace studies, this very elusiveness and the challenges with the term’s proper definition add to the topic’s fascination.

While Brown's description of Tantra is, as we will see, quite accurate, I prefer introducing this chapter with an illustrative story, rather than an apology, and put things into perspective right from the start. Perspective and the spirited change thereof is, indeed, required when attempting to understand the phenomenon of Tantra, as shown in this anecdote from the 1950s. In this real event, re-told by Pandit Rajmani Tigunait, a missionary in West Africa shows two tribal chieftains the region's largest city (Tigunait, 1999). They are impressed yet not overwhelmed by their first experiences with skyscrapers, traffic and unfamiliar noise. Then they arrive at the hotel, attentively scanning their surroundings,

... and while the missionary was checking the party in, his guests noticed a door opening in the opposite wall to reveal a metal grate in front of a tiny room. The man seated inside folded the grate back to admit four men, who then turned and faced the front. Next the seated man pulled the metal grate over the opening, and the door closed. A few minutes passed while the tribesmen continued to take in the sights of the lobby. Then the door to the tiny room opened again. The man seated inside again pulled back the metal grate and out stepped – not the four men who had entered, but two women and two little girls! What black art was this that had reduced healthy men to women and girls?

Sickened and terrified, the two tribesmen made for the street, bent on reaching home and safety as quickly as possible. The missionary raced after them, and once he understood what the problem was, he tried to explain what they had seen. But both men had witnessed the same awful metamorphosis and were not to be persuaded that they had seen something else.

The multiple misunderstandings linked with the term *Tantra* stem, as Rajmani Tigunait explains, from a problem of *seeing*: “Like the tribesmen watching the elevator, we cannot comprehend what we are seeing when we look at Tantra until we enlarge our

view of reality because the tantric vision is radically different from ours.” (Tigunait, 1999).

### **6.3.1 What is Tantra?**

Whoever tries to educate themselves on Tantra and browses for the term online will find an overwhelming glut of definitions, suggestions, claims, stories and advice as well as related, loosely related and completely unrelated content. *Tantra* can be a wine label, a speaker system, the name of restaurants and hair salons, an artificial lake surrounded by a newly-built condominium; you may buy solar products from Tantra International or flip through the Rocky Horror Tantra book – but mostly you will encounter massage parlors promising a tantric experience which in almost all cases will turn out to be an euphemistic name for sex work.<sup>33</sup>

If the interested seeker has not given up on finding anything substantial by now, they will also find web pages, flyers and literature featuring all kinds of gurus, teachers and facilitators affiliated to groups and organizations with traditional or made-up names and goals, encompassing blatant and/or well-meaning ignorance, blunt touting, religious ritual, personal development, scholarly treatises and ancient spiritual exercise – genuine and fake – while all of them claiming being experts on Tantra. Since the majority of these websites are oriented towards Western audiences, Feuerstein might be right when stating that Tantra has, undoubtedly, “captured the fascination of a good many Westerners, but few of them actually know what it stands for, including some of those who profess to practice, teach, or write about it” (Feuerstein, 1998, p. ix).

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<sup>33</sup> One of the few exceptions seems to be a university research project on the effect of tantra massages: <https://uniexperiment.wordpress.com/2014/03/10/studien-und-versuchsreihe-tantramassage/>

The array of approaches manifests in countless definitions of the term, merrily introducing inventive varieties; some of the definitions are clearly personal, others strive for a more objective understanding: “Tantra is the science of transforming two ordinary lovers into soul mates” (Claramunt, 2013)<sup>34</sup> and similar definitions, which are popular among workshop facilitators, while “Troubadour Tantra – this form of tantra is native to Europe” (Vallely, 2008) is a claim that would hardly stand any historian’s test.

Imagination and flowery style is common among workshop hosts: “The word ‘Tantra’ comes like a warm wind from the East, carrying the scent of sandalwood and possibility” (Schrader, 2010). Some opt for graphic depictions of the alleged effects of Tantric training:

Tantra is the hot blood of spiritual practice. It smashes the taboo against unreasonable happiness; a thunderbolt path, swift, joyful, and fierce. There are many different types of paths. Some touch you like a gentle spring rain, but Tantra is the wild summer thunder storm churning with creation, destruction, bliss and emptiness. Tantra is a wild mother tiger – if you approach her with right motivation, right intention, and integrity, she’ll suckle you at her breast; but if you come to her in a sloppy way, she’ll rip apart your body-mind, eat you for dinner, and shit out what’s left (Pranama & Abrams, 1994).

Very occasionally, we find facilitators who assume their audience will be attracted by even blunter wordings, as in, “Tantra is lechery!” (Andro, 2005).<sup>35</sup>

A number of sources attempt to make Tantra understood from a practical and partly metaphysical point of view: “[Tantra] encompasses astrology, yoga, sorcery, alchemy, devotional worship, medicine, and the search for enlightenment. It is not a

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<sup>34</sup> “El Tantra es la ciencia de transformar los amantes ordinarios en almas gemelas”. {ta} Claramunt, C. (2013). *Formación de Profesores de Tantra Yoga*. Barcelona.

<sup>35</sup> “Tantra ist Geilheit!” {ta} Andro. (2005). Taoasis.

religion, though it does have religious elements, nor is it a way of thought; Tantra is a way of action” (C. S. Hyatt, 2008). Frequently, the scope of Tantra is being described even wider, claiming essential Oneness and even ecological concerns: “Philosophically, Tantra is thoroughly ecological. It recognizes the ultimate unity, even identity, of all beings and things. Otherness is a mental artifact” (Feuerstein, 1998). There is also the element of developing self-awareness by means of another person, when defining “Tantra as the art of knowing oneself through knowing the other” (DeRose, 1996).

A number of authors agree that Tantra is rather science than religion or philosophy: “Tantra is a science where all the practices given are designed to help us go deeper into ourselves, thus releasing our spiritual potential” (J. Avadhuta, 1982). Numerous sources also attempt to compare the different strands of spiritual training in Asia – mostly Hindu, Buddhist, Tao and Jainist traditions – thus finding common ground: “Tantra is a spiritual science from ancient India and in its basic essence is very similar to Taoism from China. Both involve balancing the male and female energies to create harmony and both have an ultimate goal of spiritual unity with the universe or the source or God” (Riley & Riley, 2008). More often than not, authors highlight the necessity of thorough internal change, required to practice and truly understand this scientific field:

Tantra is science, tantra is not philosophy. To understand philosophy is easy because only your intellect is required. If you can understand language, if you can understand concept, you can understand philosophy. You need not change; you require no transformation. As you are, you can understand philosophy – but not tantra (Osho, 1972).

In addition to the challenge of defining what Tantra is and what it is not, we have to deal with not just one, but at least two branches of Tantra: Hindu Tantra and Buddhist

Tantra<sup>36</sup> – however, some experts in the field are in disagreement over the question whether they are, indeed, very different: “[...] in actual spiritual practice, there isn’t that much of a distinction between Vajrayana or Tantric Buddhism and Hindu Tantra” (Feuerstein, 2013). Some temples in Bali, indeed, still present a blend of Buddhist and Hindu traditions (Magee, 2008), pointing at their common history; however, shared methods do not necessarily indicate shared basics: “Hindu Tantra by contrast [to Tantric Buddhism] has different philosophical basis and motivation, even though it shares some of the same practical methodology” (Trizin, n.d.). In view of this we can assume that there are, indeed, differences between Hindu and Buddhist Tantra; however, they are apparently rooted rather in their philosophical approach (e.g. in questions of whether there is an individual soul, the way reincarnation works or what the ultimate goal of liberation is) than in their practical exercises, methods and rituals, which share a considerable amount of common ground.

Buddhist Tantra, i.e. Tibetan Buddhism, is oftentimes defined very differently than the general term *Tantra* in the West is, thus causing confusion among participants of Tantra workshops:

In Tibetan tradition the word Tantra [...] normally refers to a special class of the Buddha’s teachings [...], and more specifically to the scriptures that embody it, such as the Hevajatantra, the Kalacakratantra, and the Guhyasamajatantra. But contrary to its English usage, the word does not usually refer to the whole system of Tantric practice and theory. For the doctrinal system of Tantra, the terms Mantrayana (“Mantra Vehicle”) and Vajrayana (“Vajra” or “Adamantine Vehicle”) are used instead (Trizin, n.d.).

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<sup>36</sup> There are several synonymous terms, describing Buddhist Tantra. The most common are Tantric Buddhism, Vajrayana and (Secret) Mantrayana. The term Tantra Yoga, on the other hand, is more frequently associated with Hindu Tantra.

To make attempts of defining the term even more complicated, there is also the ongoing debate on whether sexuality is or is not part of “genuine Tantra”. Most workshop facilitators worldwide seem to reduce Tantra to a collection of methods to enhance an individual’s or a couple’s sex life or, at best, the ability to enjoy sensual pleasures. These are often announced in a style reminiscent of TV commercials: “Welcome to the world of Tantric Sexuality. Everyone deserves a happy sex life...”<sup>37</sup>; or, “Advaita-Tantra helps you to heal yourself sexually, [...] to boost sexual attractiveness and activity”<sup>38</sup>.

Non-facilitators present a more differentiated image, while some question the involvement of sexuality, altogether:

[Tantra] is also a technique that is very misunderstood by western society (and indeed by eastern society). Most of the teachings in print today regarding ‘tantra’ are not about Tantra at all, rather they are about sex practices. Tantra in and of itself has nothing to do with sex-magic or sex-meditation. One can be a tantrika<sup>39</sup> and never involve sex in your methods at all (Nisarg, 2009).

Numerous sources acknowledge the existence of sexual elements in Tantra, lamenting the contemporary tendencies towards a superficial understanding of these elements:

With the passage of time, the real meaning of Tantra was misunderstood. From a highly evolved spiritual science Tantra was demeaned as a tool for magical or occult power or an enhancer of sensual enjoyment.

Tantra is none of these. It is an ancient discipline that provides a vast learning, a deep understanding of life, and a methodology to attain Self-realization (Prajnanananda, 2006).

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<sup>37</sup> [www.tantraworkshops.com](http://www.tantraworkshops.com), retrieved Jan 17, 2016

<sup>38</sup> “Advaita-Tantra trägt dazu bei, sich sexuell zu heilen [...], die sexuelle Attraktivität und Aktivität in Schwung zu bringen.” {ta} [www.advaita-tantra.de](http://www.advaita-tantra.de), retrieved Jan 17, 2016

<sup>39</sup> Practitioner of Tantra.



Other authors surrender to the vastness of the Tantric field, “defying description” (Yogani, 2006), and show sympathy for those overwhelmed by some particular Tantric practices:

Not only does [Tantra] include all of the practices contained in the traditional systems of Yoga; it also contains practices that, at times, have challenged the established codes and standards of society. The sexual practices of tantra fall under this controversial category (Yogani, 2006).

According to Yogani, Tantra seems to be a broader term than the mentioned traditional systems of Yoga. While Yoga tends to invalidate the material world, sexuality and the feminine, Tantra suggests reconciling the material and the spiritual: “Tantra shares classical Yoga’s aim of spiritual Self-realization, but in Tantra, embodiedness and sacredness remain compatible. (Fields, 2001, 138f.) Yogani’s “controversial category”, i.e. exercises which include sexual elements, seems to be a means that needs to be understood not on a mundane, but clearly on a spiritual level: “The reason why the word tantra in the west [sic] is surrounded by so much sexual connotation is that there is within it the sexual component of union. There is an effort to unite, to realize the Oneness of reality” (P. Avadhuta, 2011).

In order to achieve this new understanding of a strive for union on a higher plane, erroneous assumptions and prejudices need to be overcome: “We have to be able to separate the popular view of tantra as an amalgam of black magic and sexual practices from the ancient and elegant philosophy of tantra that skillfully demonstrates how to use the objects of the world as a means for spiritual unfoldment” (Tigunait, 1999).

Omar Garrison, a journalist who studied Tantra in India in the 1960s, addresses the necessity of dealing with sexuality within the realm of spiritual development, stating, “Tantra Yoga is the only Yoga which comes to grips with human sexuality” (Garrison,

1964). He explains further: “One of the major criticisms of [other kinds of] Yoga by Western scholars has been the emphasis on celibacy and the seeming disregard of the world in which we live, which to the Western mind and culture represents a rejection of our present existence” (Garrison, 1964).

Tantra is, in that sense, at least apparently closer to generally hedonistic Western societies, since it acknowledges and even celebrates life and joy: “The overwhelming characteristics of Tantra are its profoundly positive view of the universe and its sweeping embrace of the phenomenal world as an expression of infinite and essential Consciousness” (J. Avadhuta, 1982, 3). Or, more poignantly, as Jelfs tries to define the unruly phenomenon Tantra, “‘Embodied spirituality’ is as good a two word definition as you can get” (Jelfs, 2011).

In view of all these conflicting definitions and contradictive interpretations, we might want to take refuge and hold onto the purely lexical meaning of the term Tantra. Alas, we will be disappointed, again: it is unlikely to find consistent and sharp-edged definitions. Those workshop facilitators whose work I am familiar with or whose websites I have researched generally choose the road most traveled, cutting-and-pasting from one another and claiming that Tantra has something to do with *weaving* and *expanding*. However, since leaders of Tantra workshops are not typically experts of Sanskrit, as well, they find it challenging to bridge the gap between those rather odd notions and the contents of their workshops. As a result of this struggle, the tendency to resorting to all kinds of wordsmithing can be observed, ranging between imaginative and simply incorrect: “The word ‘tantra’ means technique, the method, the path” (Osho, 1972, 2), “Tantra, meaning ‘that which extends’ or stretches knowledge” (Feit, 2010, 22), “In the word ‘Tantra’, ‘Tra’ is a Sanskrit suffix which signifies repetition” (P.

Avadhuta, 2011) or even “Tantra means literally ‘that which liberates from darkness’” (Sarkar, 2002, 4).<sup>40</sup>

Sources rooted in genuine tradition often offer deeper insight: “The word tantra in Sanskrit is derived from the root tanu that means ‘to spread’, and derivatively ‘origination’ and ‘knowledge’. Thus ‘tantra’ means ‘the scripture by which knowledge is spread’” (Samarpanananda, 2010, 269). Not everybody would agree, though, including Sakya Trizin, the head of one of the five schools of Tibetan Buddhism: “In its technical sense the word Tantra means “continuum” (Trizin, n.d.). Indeed, as Hugh Urban states,

...the Sanskrit word tantra has appeared since Vedic times, with an enormous diversity of meanings; it has been used to denote everything from a warp or a loom to “the chief potion or essence of a thing” [...]. Probably derived from the root tan, “to weave or stretch”, tantra is most often used to refer to a particular kind of text which is “woven” of the extended threads of many words (Urban, 2003, 4).

Van Lysebeth goes into even more detail, thus demonstrating the hard-to-tame nature of the term:

Depending on the context, Tantra means a shuttle (in weaving), the warp (of a fabric), continuity, succession, descendance, a continuous process, the carrying out of a ceremony, a system, a theory, doctrine, a scientific opus, or a section of a book. Tantra is also a mystical and magical doctrine or any piece of work based on such a doctrine (van Lysebeth, 2001, 3).

If we truly want to savor the vast semantic field covered by the term *Tantra*, we might choose to consult the Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary (Apte, 1965), which lists no less than 32 options to translate the term:

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<sup>40</sup> “Tantra, literalmente significa ‘aquello que libera de la oscuridad.’ {ta}

1. a loom
2. a thread
3. the warp or threads extended length wise in a loom
4. posterity
5. an uninterrupted series
6. the regular order of ceremonies and rites, system, framework, ritual,
7. main point
8. Principal doctrine, rule, theory, science
9. Subservience, dependence
10. a scientific work
11. a chapter, section, of a work
12. a religious treatise teaching magical and mystical formularies for the worship of the deities or the attainment of superhuman power
13. the cause of more than one effect
14. a spell
15. a chief remedy or charm
16. a drug, medicament
17. an oath, ordeal
18. raiment
19. the right way of doing any thing
20. royal retinue, train, court
21. a realm, country, authority
22. government, ruling, administration
23. arrangement or machinery of government
24. an army
25. a heap, multitude
26. a house
27. decoration
28. wealth
29. happiness
30. model
31. supporting a family
32. providing for the security and prosperity of a kingdom.

*Figure 4 – List of Translation Options for the term “Tantra”  
Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary (Apte, 1965)*

As if that were not enough, each of the syllables composing the noun, namely *tan* and *tra*, are terms in their own right with another range of new meanings like *to expand* and *to rescue*. The many possible combinations are widely used to explain the term Tantra, thus adding to the difficulty of agreeing on one commonly valid definition.

Perhaps it is our all-too-human habit of wishing for reality to be something that can be pinned down, measured, analyzed and defined, while reality is, according to Buddhism, rather a dance of intertwined thoughts, particles and strings, whirling through time.<sup>41</sup> Correspondingly, while we can hardly obtain the one ironclad definition of Tantra, we might be able to catch a look at countless snapshots of what it was, or is, or might become:

Tantrism is not a coherent system; it is an accumulation of practices and ideas from various sources distributed unevenly in different times, places, and sects and among individuals. While the pieces of Tantrism (doctrines and practices) can be listed, none is exclusively Tantric, and all are components of other religious systems. Rather, one might see them as cumulative, with some systems having more components being weighted toward the Tantric. Thus there are levels or degrees of Tantrism (Harper & Brown, 2002, 1).

### **6.3.2 The historical Emerging of Tantra**

So far, we have gathered a fair amount of tentative definitions; however, they seem to be rather contradictory, thus not allowing for a clear view of what Tantra, indeed, is. Since these conflicting definitions possibly originate in the early stages of the development of Tantra, we will look into its history and how it unfolded over time.

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. the Buddhist term *skandhas* or aggregates (Trungpa, 2013)

Unfortunately, we soon discover that the history of Tantra presents conflicting data, as well. Most workshop facilitators – at least those among them, who bother defining Tantra – are content with stating that Tantra is “thousands of years old” (“Was ist ‘Tantra,’” 2011) has developed “thousands of years before religions as we know them today emerged” (Verein Lichtung, n.d.) or “...tantra’s origins are in ancient universal experiences predating all forms of organised religion” (Tantra.uk.com, n.d.).

To be fair, we need to bear in mind that the scholarly interest in Tantra is so recent and reliable data are so scarce that it is very hard to say anything non-disputable. Indeed, in 1989 and 1995, two conferences were held in the greater Los Angeles Area, exclusively in order to flesh out “the meager evidence on early Tantrism” (Harper & Brown, 2002, ix). Due to this lack of dependable data when it comes to stipulating the beginnings of Tantra, we find wild guesses about “perhaps even as long as 30,000 years ago” (Schrader, 2010, 6) as well as more conservative reasoning, presenting as evidence “symbols in the vast natural caverns of Palaeolithic Europe (c. 20,000 BCE) which can be accurately matched with symbols still used today by Tantrikas” (Rawson, 1973, 6).

However, depending on whether we focus on the sexual content which might trigger associations with, indeed, very ancient fertility cults (Hammar, 2005) or rather on meditative practice, we obtain different results: “Meditation is a spiritual practice which has evolved over thousands of years, its earliest known roots being the practices of Tantra, first introduced in India some 7000 years ago” (J. Avadhuta, 1982, 13). Rather than 5000 BCE, others see the beginnings of Tantra just 1500 years back: “Tantra emerged out of South Asian elite and popular mainstream sometime in the middle of the first millennium CE” (White, 2000, 20).

If we focus on Tantric Buddhism, which traces its beginnings back to the first written *tantras* (i.e. Tantric texts), we get yet another figure: “Tantric or Vajrayana

Buddhism [...] can be dated to approximately the 5th or 6th century AD. This dating is controversial as it is quite difficult to fix a date for the earliest tantric texts” (Hammar, 2005, 5).

More concrete information can be found in Geoffrey Samuel’s *History of Yoga and Tantra* (Samuel, 2008). Here, the author explores in-depth the existing scholarly material on the history of these intertwined systems of spiritual training, yoga and Tantra. He rejects, for lack of evidence, the widespread assumptions about early yogic and tantric practices in the Indus Valley (modern Pakistan and North-West India), which most experts believe to be the starting point for the history of Indic religions, while some claim it to be the cradle of Shivaism – about 2600 to 1900 BCE (Samuel, 2008).

Sticking exclusively to firm evidence, Samuel concludes that – despite a number of reasonable assumptions by his scholarly colleagues – “[...] we do not have conclusive evidence for yogic or ‘Tantric’ practices in the Indus Valley cultural tradition” (Samuel, 2008, 304): Evident yogic practice, meaning a sophisticated system of methods for transforming body and mind, thus marking a possible beginning of Tantra, developed “probably in around the sixth and fifth centuries BCE” (Samuel, 2008, 312).

The use of physical and mental methods, including sexuality and aimed at the development of some kind of higher powers or consciousness was, however, never limited to any geographical area in particular: it thrived all over the globe, including Europe (Urban, 2006). Even some modern representatives of the Judaic tradition claim Tantric roots and goals for themselves, pointing to unexpectedly erotic text passages of the Kabbalah (Wisnefsky, 2016).

Perhaps it is simply not possible to pin down a term as multifaceted as Tantra. Whoever tastes its flavor will know that, yes, there is *something* – a fascinating,

breathtaking something, but this something is squirmy and hard to define. To me, trying to define Tantra is like trying to keep my balance on a slippery, wobbly ice floe: there is doubtlessly firm ground underneath my feet, and yet, at the same time, it is everything but solid and seems to change with my every move.

Nevertheless, there is one definition of Tantra that I personally cherish and consider valid: while extremely short, it still implies all of the elements I believe are relevant. It was in the summer of 2006 in Kathmandu. I was attending an intense language course on spoken Tibetan at the Rangjung Yeshe Institute within the impressive complex of one of Kathmandu's largest Buddhist monasteries. The abbot of the Ka-Nying Shedrub Ling Monastery, Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche, was present for the summer teachings on Buddhist philosophy; so our tiny study group of six was not too surprised to have one of his sons – a Buddhist teacher like his father, dressed in maroon monk's robes – drop in on us one afternoon.

He stuck his head between door panel and frame and started chatting in fluent English about soccer (that summer, the FIFA World Cup was on, and most Tibetan males are hopelessly soccer-crazy). I frowned inwardly: this was not what I wanted my class to be interrupted for. The other students, young women in their twenties, were not very passionate about the topic, either. But he was a revered teacher, a Rinpoche, and it was an honor to have him call, after all, and so we listened politely. After a few minutes, he suddenly stopped his musings, looked at us and, casually leaning against the door frame, fired, "Do you know what Tantra is?" The girls looked at him blankly, but my head flew around and I held my breath. He paused. I did not dare to breathe. Then, he uttered four words I will never forget: "No hope, no fear." He grinned... and was gone.



### 6.3.3 The Goals of Tantra

In the view of all these takes on Tantra, what is it then, that a Tantric novice may hope to gain? Why might somebody want to learn about this scientific/philosophic set of methods, travel to India or Tibet and/or attend Tantric workshops in the West?

In my experience, many an attendee has very modest aspirations, which may be better dealt with by a qualified sexual counselor; these aspirations are nevertheless readily addressed by some workshop facilitators: “After the year-training [...] you will be perfectly prepped to experience sufficient amounts of good sex, anytime.” (BeFree Tantra, n.d.)<sup>42</sup> Indeed, “many people [...] want a quick-fix-spiritual experience. Tantric sex workshops for the adventurous person can seem like an easy way to meet women or men for free sexual experiences” (Vallely, 2008). Some worries and expectations demonstrate a level of ignorance not uncommon among potential students who declare their fascination for Tantra but believed it was “achievable only by those who had memorized the names of a few hundred East Indian gods and goddesses, and the patience to practice a long series of complicated rituals. It was the end result that I sought, to give my woman a six hour orgasm” (Shade, 2000, 31).

So widespread is the narrow interpretation of the goals of Tantra, leaving out its higher aims and methods, that even Osho – known for his liberal views – would state not without bitterness:

Tantra is right that sexual energy is the basic energy, so this energy should be transformed into higher forms. It is a truth. But what happened is that [the students] never went very deep into meditation; meditation remained just secondary. And man’s sexuality shows itself so powerfully that in the

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<sup>42</sup> “Sie werden nach dem Jahrestraining [...] bestens vorbereitet sein, um jederzeit genug guten Sex erleben zu können.” {ta} [www.befree-tantra.de/tantra-seminare/tantra-jahrestraining-befree.html](http://www.befree-tantra.de/tantra-seminare/tantra-jahrestraining-befree.html), retrieved Jan 17, 2017

name of tantra it became simply sexual orgy. Without meditation that was going to happen (Osho, 1986, chap 38).

Even those who concede that Tantra might not be about intercourse alone seem to struggle to find their way out of the sex trap: “What is sex? In Tantra, it doesn’t necessarily mean sexual union. It is all about sexual pleasure” (Becher, 2013).<sup>43</sup> Some authors, moved by the suspicion that there might be more to Tantra than just sex and pleasure, introduce the notion of energy: “[P]ractice is a bliss-filled erotic and sexual one. The bliss comes with the gentle, compassionate, beautiful, erotic spreading of energy of sex throughout the physical and subtle bodies in what you might call prolonged foreplay” (Vallely, 2008), which others however mock as being no more than just “slow sex with deep breathing, candles and joss sticks” (Jelfs, 2011).

However, there seems to be more to Tantra, to be discovered by those who do not settle for instant gratification: “Tantra says ‘If you do these things which Tantrikas have discovered, you will find yourself in a position to experience what the truth is about yourself and your world, as directly as you can experience the street’” (Rawson, 1973, 8). Students of Tantra are, apparently, promised nothing less but deep insight about their own nature and the nature of the world – which requires a perception freed from the veils of neuroticism or, to use Buddhist terminology, from the three poisons: aversion, attachment and ignorance (Gyaltshen, 2010, 451).

This is why energy, and sexual energy in particular, is such an essential element in Tantra – everything depends on whether we are able to steer this energy, and if so, what we aim it at: “One of the basic teachings of Tantra states that through an understanding of how to change our energy, we have the capacity to change our experience of the world” (Mirsky, 2015).

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<sup>43</sup> “Was ist Sex? Beim Tantra bedeutet das nicht zwangsweise Vereinigung. Es geht um Lust.” {ta}

According to this approach, the world does not simply “happen” to us; on the contrary, we seem to have quite some control over it. Not the way most individuals might prefer, though – say, by having the power to change unpleasant circumstances or other people’s annoying habits. This promised control comes in a rather unexpected shape: we can *develop* “the capacity to change our experience of the world”. Since the first Buddhist axiom about the nature of mind – “All beings want to be happy” – includes humans, as soon as a person is able to choose the way they perceive their world, they will most likely tend to choose a worldview that helps them feel relaxed, confident, connected, loved, safe and joyful. In other words, by teaching students how to handle their energy, i.e. how to deal with emotions, Tantra seems to hold nothing less but the key to human happiness.

However, this key and the abilities it encompasses come with a price tag. “Tantra demands disintegration of the often comfortable prison of conceptual habit and illusion as an absolute necessity before its processes and images can even begin to work” (Rawson, 1973, 38). This disintegration of personal comfort zones is not an easy task to tackle nor a simple goal to achieve. Therefore, countless methods, exercises, techniques and trainings have been developed in the course of many centuries, “...disciplined and systematic techniques for the training and control of the human mind-body complex, which are also understood as techniques for the reshaping of human consciousness towards some kind of higher goal” (Samuel, 2008, pos. 197).

The reason why so many individuals and groups in the West, fascinated by the world of Tantra, fail to reap the benefits it can provide, may lie in this very requirement – to bravely look beyond the truths we grew fond of, to question them and to question ourselves: “[T]o get into the position from which you can experience the truth, involves a total change of personality. This takes every kind of effort – physical, sexual, mental,

moral; and most are just the kinds of effort that nothing in Western education or tradition prepares one for” (Rawson, 1973, 8).

This is why Tantric workshops, adapted to the abilities of Western students and led with awareness of the responsibility involved, are an absolute necessity if we do not want the wisdom and the insights from ancient Tantric sources to go extinct. However, it poses the often underestimated challenge to any facilitator to find the fine line between *carefully adapting* and *watering down* or even completely ignoring or misinterpreting the sources.

As is becoming evident, Tantric practices – and their sexual components in particular – are never an end unto themselves. They serve a higher purpose, since “according to Tantra, evolution of mind and the corresponding expansion of consciousness are the essential purpose of existence” (J. Avadhuta, 1982, 29). Despite this ambitious goal, Tantra stays always well-rooted in the tangible, embracing the best of both worlds: “Whilst to some, whatever is spiritual may seem to exclude that which is earthly, both are harmoniously reconciled in Tantra. Spiritual enlightenment and the individual’s fulfilment of a meaningful existence are both seen as complementary needs” (J. Avadhuta, 1982, 1).

This is a remarkable contrast to most spiritual paths, including Hinduism and early Buddhism as the roots of Tantra, which often demand adepts give up their ties to loved ones, home and tradition. Tantra not just tolerates but even expects prosperous development both on the worldly and the spiritual planes:

[B]oth enlightenment and worldly success are expected. These goals are frequently separated in religions, including Indian religions, with two different sets of activities expected to achieve them. Enlightenment, often seen as a difficult process of endless rebirths achievable only by advanced

religious specialists, can be reached in Tantrism during one lifetime while the practitioner is still alive (Harper & Brown, 2002, 3).

This unique bridging of the mundane and the spiritual is embraced by all schools of Tantrism. It is based on the assumption that there is no dividing line between creation and the divine, as monotheistic approaches often suggest. Since everything that can be experienced is part of creation and creation is considered divine, all perceivable phenomena without exception are considered divine, as well – including sexual desire. For a Tantrika, sexual union is consequentially a religious act (Offene Kirche St. Gallen, 2008).

This passionate affirmation of life and the forces that drive it, while aspiring to unite with the Oneness beyond, is unique to Tantra. It is what makes it so appealing – and so difficult to put into genuine practice: “In saying ‘Yes’ to life, Tantra embraces all and rejects nothing. We lean into, feel deeply and accept what life brings, even when it feels ‘wrong, hard or bad.’ We learn to have radical trust in ‘loving what is,’ feeling emotions fully without fixating on them” (Schrader, 2010).

Radical trust into the divine nature of virtually everything we meet on our path is, however – provided we are courageous enough to defy our own shadows like fear, anger, arrogance or pettiness – something that needs to be developed only gradually. This is why earnest Tantric training will not be completed on a week end nor even after a year-training. Traditionally, it would take years, and often a lifetime:

Tantra, which molds the power of creation and ego into skillful means cutting through delusion, requires careful preparation. We don't expect someone who just wants to play around now and then on a keyboard to become a concert pianist. We don't expect someone to be able to get up off the couch one day and run a four minute mile. Great tasks require great effort (Pranama & Abrams, 1994).

Among the first steps on this journey is to develop an *open heart*, which means to gradually acknowledge our own vulnerability and learn how and when to lift our defenses. This has far-reaching effects: “If the heart is open, even a little, there is no tendency to hurt oneself or others. Love wishes everyone well” (M. Woods, 1981), which brings the much more ancient biblical verse from 1 Corinthians 13:7 to mind: “[Love] always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.” It is precisely this kindness that reaches far beyond one’s own person and interests that links Tantra in general and Buddhist Tantra in particular with peace. While Hindu Tantra and the early Buddhist tradition (Theravada) focus mainly on liberation on a merely personal level, it is the Buddhist Great Vehicle or Mahayana which quite naturally turns the happiness of all sentient beings into its highest goal:

Early Buddhist teachings maintained (like most yoga methods) an austere focus on the primary goal of ending individual suffering, but as the tradition developed, the emphasis broadened to include cultivating the transformative intention for the well-being of all (Feit, 2010, 22).

As discussed so far, the ultimate objective of Tantra seems to be higher realization/liberation: “The Tantric teachings are geared toward the attainment of enlightenment as well as spiritual power” (Feuerstein, 1998). Since there are numerous theories about how to achieve such goals, we may wonder: which path enables us best to reach this objective – is it renunciation or rather enjoyment of sense-objects? While the Vedas, the sacred texts of the Brahmins, mostly chose the path of asceticism, Tantra embraces life-as-is, aspiring to overcome entanglement into desires, aversions and emotions by deeply delving into them, learning about their transitory and ultimately illusory nature and practicing to let go of them.

#### **6.3.4 The Methods of Tantra**

Tantra and its methods are a phenomenon of which its homeland India is to this day “usually embarrassed” because of its connection with sexuality (Ishvara, 2002). While a few Western scholars struggle to dissolve the “historical pattern of scholarly neglect [which] reflected the emotional prejudices of western scholars and their Indian Informants”, (Brooks, 1990, ix) members of Western societies tend to find anything connected with Tantra intriguingly scandalizing:

Try announcing to any group of friends, acquaintances or colleagues that you are into Tantra, and enjoy the reaction, which may range from raised eyebrows, to shock, horror, disgust or extreme curiosity. And why is this? The main reason is because as a general rule, people believe Tantra is all about sex, particularly group sex, or at the very least, promiscuous sex (Sarita, 2010).

This kind of popular belief about Tantra is fueled by the lack of reliable and sober information, for one; for the other, by the popularity of countless books on Tantra published in the last two decades. A number of them spread a message that misleads the reader into an understanding that has little to do with genuine Tantra: Chapters like “Tantric Fucking” or “How to throw a great ritual/sex party”, the inclusion of BDSM “play” which – by its very nature – contradicts the Tantric equality principle, or reminding the reader of “taking off the glove only after one is completely done with the lingam massage” (Carrellas, 2007), thus suggesting that there is something unclean about it, are elements that do not help the audience to understand the nature of Tantra.

In addition, despite Tantric methods being by now “acknowledged as a valuable set of tools in modern sex therapy” (Lorius, 2008), this seems to be just another label which does not do justice to the real intent of Tantric methods. It is this misleading which religious scholar David G. White addresses when he criticizes “Western

dilettantes, [...] self-proclaimed Tantric entrepreneurs, who have hitched their elephant-wagons to the New Age star to peddle a dubious product called Tantric Sex, which they (and their clientele) assume to be all there ever was to Tantra” (White, 2000, 4).

Sexuality in general and its exploration in particular may be embraced not only by Tantra, but even by as conservative institutions as the Church of England (its traditional marriage ceremony contains the phrase “With my body I thee worship” (Archbishops’ Council, 2017), thus endorsing sexual activity without the necessity of procreation); however, for the broad audience it is “easy to confuse a sex-positive culture with tantra” (Jelfs, 2011). Lama Yeshe, a renowned Tibetan Buddhist teacher in the West, points out: “There are vast differences between tantric embrace and ordinary sexual contact. [...] While [for instance,] in ordinary sex it is the man who enters the woman’s body, in true tantric embrace it is the woman’s energy that penetrates the man!” (Yeshe, 1987, 136).

Indian creation narratives report such a magical sexual encounter between Shiva and Parvati who later would become the main Tantric deities. According to this ancient story, their encounter took place after both entered an enlightened state by using one of the 108 (according to some sources, 112) methods of “kindling inherent energies” (Jain & Daljeet, 2008). This set of secret meditation techniques had been entrusted to Parvati by her consort Shiva (cf. Definition of Terms). The result marks the very beginning of the universe as we know it and demonstrates the power of creative energy linked with deep insight: “[Shiva] revealed that the ‘One’ in him desired to ‘be many’. They united in bliss and the Void exploded with energies, radiant and colorful. The friction of ‘Yoni’



and ‘Lingam’<sup>44</sup> – female and male organs, produced ‘Nada’ – the supersonic sound, first loud and then low, and the Void echoed with it” (Jain & Daljeet, 2008).

It is noteworthy that, for one, Parvati would ask Shiva about the nature of things, despite herself being an all-knowing goddess: some interpretations suggest that, despite possessing all this knowledge, herself, she does so in order to have her husband utter it, thus benefiting all beings. For the other, and for our subject even more remarkable, is that Shiva would not give her a straight answer but rather a “tool kit”:

Devi [the goddess] asks, ‘What is your reality, my lord?’ He is not going to answer it. On the contrary, he will give a technique. And if Devi goes through this technique, she will know. So the answer is round-about; it is not direct. He is not going to answer ‘Who am I.’ He will give a technique – do it and you will know” (Osho, 1972, 4).

“Do this and you will know” is, apparently, a Tantric meta-method: not answering questions directly but rather providing tools for the student so they can find the answer, by themselves – an approach largely followed by the IN, as well. These didactics reveals a deep understanding of human nature and psyche; it brings to mind contemporary motivational teaching approaches and seems to be related to systemic thinking, where a counselor instills into their client the confidence that they are the sole person competent to find their own solutions. This is not too surprising, given that “[...] Tantra has millennia of observation and analysis of human psyche behind it” (Rawson, 1973, 36).

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<sup>44</sup> *Lingam* [*Sansk.*, “scepter”] – term used for male genital organs. *Yoni* [*Sansk.*, often translated as “flower of lotus”] – a term used for female genital organs. Both terms are free from medical or offensive connotations and are widely used within the Western Tantra community.

Historically, Tantric methods were famous for their provocative style and rebellious spirit, which was initially what this new movement within the restrictive caste system of Indian society was mostly about:

[T]he original Tantric movement occurred outside and in reaction against hierarchical ‘high’ forms of clerical Hinduism and Buddhism. This integration of magical cult practice and metaphysical religion appears to have occurred as a reaction against social caste discriminations and politicized ceremonial priesthood (Emery, 2005).

Thus, “Tantra provided a home for all those who longed for direct spiritual experience but found orthodox Hinduism [...] far too restrictive and exclusivist” (Feuerstein, 1998, pos 4381). Tantric groups would welcome all members of society, regardless their caste, “and at least for the duration of the rituals brahmins [*sic*] and untouchables drank from the same cup, ate from the same plate, and freely mingled their bodily juices, for during the *cakra-pūjā*<sup>45</sup> all were transformed into sacred beings – gods and goddesses – free from all cultural stereotyping and societal constraints” (Feuerstein, 1998, pos 4383).

Again, it is not hedonistic gratification that Tantrikas set out to achieve, despite their enjoyment of life’s pleasures. Pleasure in and by itself is never the goal but merely a means that aids creating the energy necessary for higher aims:

In complete contrast to the strenuous “No!” that official Brahmin tradition said to the world, Tantra says an emphatic, if qualified, “Yes!” It asserts that, instead of suppressing pleasure, vision and ecstasy, they should be cultivated and used. [...] Because sensation and emotion are the most powerful human motive forces, they should not be crushed out, but harnessed to the ultimate goal (Rawson, 1978, 9).

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. footnote 15, p. 88.

Rooted in its history of changing socially set-in-stone rules, numerous Tantric exercises deliberately generate cognitive dissonance by confronting students with uncomfortable, stressful or even shocking situations, thus providing for them the chance both to react and to think outside the box. For instance, requiring a Hindu student to eat meat and to turn their set of rules about clean/unclean upside down would have been such an intervention; nowadays, Western students might struggle with tasks such as looking a stranger in the eye for an extended period of time. “Tantra involves breaking down one’s personal barriers. It is a rebellious method, it involves opening yourself to all the dimensions, being totally open to experience” (Nisarg, 2009, 147). Ideally, this experience enhances the student’s virtuous qualities, since “many facets of Tantric psychology and practice are relevant to all who seek to cultivate self-understanding and are sincerely engaged in the noble task of spiritual self-transformation” (Feuerstein, 1998, ix).

One of the desired results of this kind of self-transformation is staying calm and kind in view of inner and outer adversities: “[I]n Tantra the practical problem is to attain composure and Bliss in the face of continual mental turbulence created by action and Samskaras [mental tendencies, e.g. emotions]” (J. Avadhuta, 1982, 74). This is not a simple endeavour, at all, as even the Dalai Lama points out: “When anger or [destructive] sexual desire arises, the negative emotion is accompanied by an energy. Tantric technique neutralizes the negative anger and sexual desire but uses the energy for practice. This is very difficult to practice” (His Holiness the Dalai Lama, 1989).

Since mastering one’s everyday emotional rollercoaster is not achieved by determination alone, self-reflection and meditation are indispensable pillar stones for any progress on the Tantric path. According to recent neurological studies, awareness meditation and particularly meditation on compassion is able not only to “increase the

brain's capacity for happiness" (Gregoire, 2013) but can even change deep-rooted cognitive patterns and lead to significant relief in anxiety patients (Blech, 2013). The engaged student's aspirations, however, go even farther: "In tantric meditation, inner bliss can be obtained by arousing energy latent in humankind [...]. Tantra uplifts consciousness in order to embrace the cosmic spirit" (Prajnanananda, 2006).

Now, how should a student even start approaching such an impalpable notion as *the cosmic spirit*? Whenever coming across an attempt of expressing something everyday-language has no words for, readers, listeners and especially students are called upon to thoroughly and wisely sift chaff from the wheat and generously apply common sense. "Without the ability to distinguish genuine from fake, a tantric practitioner from a tantric pretender, there is no way to begin to find our way from the realm of duality through the mist of misunderstanding that veils the true tantric vision from our eyes" (Tigunait, 1999). Since Tantric methods can involve intense mental and emotional experiences, students are well advised to know their own boundaries and limits just as well as they should know in advance who the teachers and peers are they entrust themselves to. The encouragement of independent thinking, reasonable scepticism and a well-calibrated detector for "pseudo-profound bullshit" (Pennycook et al., 2015) should occupy a prominent place among the methods taught and applied by any Tantric teacher.

Deep insight, gained through meditation, well balanced with pragmatic sagacity is a *conditio sine qua non* for any Tantrika. This is critical, because Tantra is renowned to be one of the swiftest paths to the highest humanly possible accomplishment, but also as the one harbouring most risks of developing the precise opposite of the aspired qualities:

Swift, yes. But the Tantric Vajrayana path is complex and can be dangerous. It requires a strong, well integrated sense of self prepared

through careful preliminary practice. Otherwise it is possible for the practitioner to make gross errors in judgment. On the Tantric path, it is perhaps easier to become the ultimate form of egohood and delusion than it is to become free (Pranama & Abrams, 1994).

This potential danger of becoming ultimately entangled in one's neuroticisms is rooted in the very essence of the Tantric perspective and its 'secret' nature, neither of which opens up easily to intellectual understanding:

From the viewpoint of the secret Mantrayana [i.e. Buddhist Tantra], all phenomena are pure and of equal value. If examining existing phenomena in-depth, they turn out to be void of essence. According to the teachings of Sutra [taught verbatim by the historical Buddha], the natural expression of this emptiness may be pure or impure. However, according to the Mantra vehicle [revealed later], this expression is always considered pure. This natural purity and indifference in value is very hard to realize and is, therefore, described as 'secret'. In sum, since the Mantrayana perspective is extremely profound, it is secret by its very nature, without being concealed (Dolpo, 2011).<sup>46</sup>

This intrinsic purity of everything that *is* represents a basic Tantric axiom. It describes the *fundamental goodness* of things as they are, which, properly understood, is a powerful source of peace of mind. However, since it is not possible – nor didactically wise – to overwhelm students with too high expectations of their ability to understand such approach to reality, small and easily digestible steps are taken in the beginning; steps that ring familiar from other fields, e.g. Positive Thinking:

We can look at the water in a glass, for instance, with a pure or impure perception. If we think, 'Oh, the glass is not really full', we feel

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<sup>46</sup> "In der Sicht des geheimen Mantrayana sind alle Phänomene rein und gleichwertig. Denn untersucht man die Phänomene genauer, so sind sie letztendlich in ihrer Essenz leer. Der natürliche Ausdruck dieser Leerheit kann, den Sutra-Lehren zufolge, rein oder unrein sein. Im Mantra-Vehikel hingegen wird er immer als rein betrachtet. Diese natürliche Reinheit und Gleichwertigkeit aller Phänomene ist sehr schwer zu erkennen und wird deshalb als ‚geheim‘ bezeichnet. Kurz gesagt, da die Sichtweise des Mantrayana extrem tiefgründig ist, ist sie ihrer Natur nach geheim, ohne dass sie dazu gemacht wird." {ta}.

frustration. If, on the contrary, we think, ‘Wow, the glass is half-full’, we will feel as if we gained something and will be rather happy. So, it is not mandatory to meditate on a deity for us to develop pure perception.<sup>47</sup> (Dolpo, 2011)

Nonetheless, Tantra is a way of action, rather than a way of thought: “[W]hat these texts consist of are prescriptions for action, including mental action, which are the whole purpose of the texts. If you don’t do what your Tantra describes, then you will never get the point” (Rawson, 1973, 8). Learning from books is certainly beneficial, although not advisable as a sole means: since traditional texts never give away complete instructions, it is necessary for the committed seeker to find a trustworthy teacher in order to receive the detailed instructions that will lead to success. This is true not only for traditional Tantric schools but also for modern workshop facilitators. More than once, students new to the IN’s seminars would report that they had tried to practice Tantric exercises at home “by the book” (for instance, using Anand (Naslednikov), 1989; Brauer & Brauer, 2001; Richardson, 1999) but ended up clueless and disappointed, while they were easily able to follow the same exercise explained and practiced during the workshop, and achieved the desired effect.

### **6.3.5 My Perspective on Tantra**

For the purpose of facilitating workshops to a Western audience, only part of the vast number of goals and methods, known to Tantra, can be applied. For instance, for Buddhist Tantra, the ultimate goal is achieving enlightenment for the benefit of all beings; however, for the average Western student, enlightenment is not only hard to

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<sup>47</sup> “Das Wasser in einem Glas zum Beispiel können wir mit einer reinen oder einer unreinen Wahrnehmung betrachten: Denken wir ‚ach, das Glas ist nicht ganz voll‘, dann haben wir ein Gefühl der Unzufriedenheit. Denken wir hingegen ‚oh, das Glas ist ja halbvoll‘, dann haben wir das Gefühl, etwas gewonnen zu haben und sind eher zufrieden. Man muss also nicht unbedingt über eine Gottheit meditieren, um eine reine Wahrnehmung zu entwickeln.” {ta}

define but only in very rare cases even of interest. Similarly, Hindu Tantra encourages meditation on impermanence and death directly on cremation sites, to make the experience more poignant. For efficient an exercise as it may be, there would be very few attendees signing up, not to mention the inevitable conflict with authorities and the fact that there are no freely accessible cremation sites, in the West.

Due to the wide range of definitions of Tantra and the resulting confusion and uncertainty among contemporary facilitators, providers/hosts/trainers mostly end up concocting their own blend of views, approaches, settings and methods that suit them best while promising to call the attention of the clientele they want to target – Gay Tantra, BDSM Tantra, Sex Magic, Tantra massage etc.

For the purpose of this paper and to clarify what kind of perspective we are talking about, I will present the ideas and influences that helped shape the IN's approach as well as list the main elements which comprise the take on Tantra that the IN offers it to its attendees.

When Amrit R. Fuchs started teaching workshops in 1994, he relied mainly on the settings, structures and contents he had studied with Margo Anand and others at SkyDancing Tantra in Germany. Margo Anand (Mitsou Naslednikov), a French psychologist and one of the co-founders of Western Tantra, had herself been a student of Bhagvan Shree Rajneesh (Osho) in his ashram in Pune, India.

Osho coined the term “neo-tantra” during a series of talks on Zen: “That’s my whole effort here: to introduce a neo-Tantra to the world, a new vision of love and the possibilities of love, and an insight into the reality of orgasm – because orgasm is your greatest source of finding God, harmony, truth, the universal unity of all life. If you can

be one with one woman, one man, you have the secret key in your hands. You can be one with the whole universe...” (Osho, 1981)

After I joined Amrit Fuchs in 1996 as facilitator and we founded what is now known as the Institut Namasté, more elements were gradually added to the curriculum and new workshops were designed according to the requirements of the audience. Thus, during the course of 20 years and according to experience acquired in further trainings, contents, knowledge and experience were improved and broadened. The goal was to be able to offer a well-grounded, logically structured and academically sound curriculum in order to maximize the attendees’ benefit.

Here are the cornerstones of this case study’s focus, the IN’s, understanding of Tantra, as well as its approach towards the teaching of Tantra:

- IN defines the term *Tantra* tentatively as “liberation through expansion” (*tan* – to expand, *tra* – to rescue, to liberate): we liberate our bodies and minds of patterns and habits that narrow down our view on reality, and we achieve this by expanding our understanding, kindness and benevolence toward ourselves and others. Another, slightly different take on the definition is Hugh Urban’s “spreading the knowledge that saves” (*tan* – to spread, *tra* – that which saves) (Urban, 2003, 31), which fittingly describes both traditional and contemporary understandings of Tantra.
- The main goal is to help the individual, little by little, to develop pure perception, that is, learning how to gradually abstain from judgment. Continual awareness, deep-rooted gratitude and joy of life, appropriate confidence and a peaceful, welcoming attitude towards any situation attendees might encounter in “real life” are stepping stones towards this goal.
- Further, the individual is invited to take on complete responsibility for their own well-being, happiness and life in general, while considering the impact the fulfillment of their wishes might have on others. In accordance with John Paul Lederach’s approach to peace building (1996), the attendees’



helpful/constructive responses are not prescribed but, wherever possible, elicited.

- Meditation and the development of mindfulness is a clue for these goals: meditation techniques are an important part of the syllabus.
- Body and mind/spirit are linked; it is possible to address the spirit through the body (e.g. with bodywork or breathing techniques) and vice versa (e.g. by relieving bodily symptoms with a counseling session). The workshops contain a considerable amount of physical activity – dancing, body work, active meditation, group work etc.
- Communication is essential, since without emphatic, nonviolent communication, rewarding and peaceful relationships are hard to maintain – including the relationship with oneself.
- Joy, humour and fun during the workshops is being encouraged, since joyful learning is believed to have longer-lasting effects (cf. Lehtonen, Hyvönen, & Ruokamo, 2005, 152-163; Rantala & Määttä, 2012).
- Sexuality is welcomed, its basics such as anatomy, STI and their prevention as well as a few techniques are taught. However, it is made unmistakably clear that pleasure is not the ultimate goal in Tantra but rather the means by which the individual can gain the energy necessary for the challenging process of their inner transformation.
- High ethical standards are being strived for, such as strict rules for the team about personal contact with attendees; attendees are encouraged and supported to find ethical answers to their problems (“Shall I hit on the partner of this other attendee? But what if I really love him?”).
- Support in form of different methods of intervention/therapy (such as counseling or body- or energy work) is available at any time (day and night) during and after a workshop.
- The attendees are welcome to project their issues and inner struggles onto the leading team. They are, however, strongly advised to ask for support in order to deal with their issues in a constructive way. Also, attendees are expected and encouraged to emancipate from their workshop leaders in due time and apply

the methods they have mastered and consider useful in their own ways, thus fostering further growth.

- Attending other facilitators' workshops is being encouraged, thus promoting the attendees' broader views and deeper understanding, while simultaneously fostering disentanglement of possible attachment both at the attendees' and at the IN's end.

### **6.3.6 Summary: Tantra**

As we have seen, Tantra is – due to its long history, geographical diversity and the many cultures that have adopted it, an elusive term which even seasoned scholars find difficult to properly define. While it is possible to list its philosophy and its practices, bits and pieces of these can be found in other systems, such as Yoga, psychology or religion, as well. Tantra requires its followers to develop a radically different view of reality. Currently, there are very different takes on Tantra to be found, including massage parlors, groups practicing free sex or polyamory, facilitators promising improved sexual performance, schools offering personal and/or spiritual development courses, and Buddhist practitioners.

While Tantra clearly includes elements of sexuality, it would be a mistake to believe that sexuality is Tantra's goal or even its main focus. Sexuality is, according to ancient texts, used as a means; never in a hedonistic sense but in order to achieve higher goals. It is understood as a vehicle, as a source of energy which fuels the necessary personal transformation of the Tantric practitioner.

This transformation is what Tantra is all about. Ideally, it leads from the individual's work on letting go of their neurotic entanglements to a blissful connection with a Source (be it perceived as a deity, the universe or one's own heart). The practitioner develops a deeply compassionate insight about the dynamics of human life,

and from there, understanding that everything is connected, a sense of unshakeable inner peace. This is where Peace and Tantra meet.

#### **6.4. Tantra Workshops**

Most of those who crave achieving this kind of deep inner peace need a signposted path they can walk towards it. In this chapter, I will examine settings, goals, methods, contents and ethics of Tantric Workshops as offered by the IN, which provide one such path. All details refer to IN workshops, unless stated otherwise.

This might raise the question why this study is examining the results of the Institut Namasté's Tantra Workshops, only: would the inclusion and comparison of other facilitators and schools, drawing at least from the German-speaking community, not provide a more profound overview and insight? While this is a valid objection, there are several reasons why I eventually chose not to follow the – initially planned for – course of action of including other facilitators' findings and results.

The results of several schools would be harder to compare, due to the variety of approaches, different lengths of workshop units, goals and, first and foremost, opposing interpretations of what Tantra is and is not (cf. Section 6.3.1, "What is Tantra?", p. 137). Also, it is doubtful that potentially existing data could be successfully retrieved from any other facilitator, given the experience I had with SkyDancing (cf. Section 5.2).<sup>48</sup> Most importantly, since my main research method is participant observation, the inclusion of data collected by other researchers would not help the purpose of this study. Therefore, the intention of including other schools into the present study had to be abandoned in

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<sup>48</sup> My guess is that the networking between schools is not much better in North America: when I attempted to sign up for a beginners' workshop near Toronto, Canada, the facilitator repeatedly questioned my motives, being a facilitator, myself, and eventually denied my participation. [www.tantraworkshops.com](http://www.tantraworkshops.com), retrieved July 14, 2016

favor of a narrower, yet clearer analysis of one particular case study, whose data were easily accessible for my research.

#### **6.4.1 The main Goals of IN's Tantra Workshops**

A workshop can, generally, be defined as a hands-on setting of varying length and number of participants, where under the guidance of facilitators, caretakers or teachers, specific mental and/or physical skills are focused on, developed and improved. The term covers areas of activity which span from learning how to meditate, how to build one's own kayak or to do efficient fundraising to workshops on fine arts, self-defense or gardening. A Tantra Workshop in the IN's understanding is one that keeps Tantric goals and methods as main guidelines in mind, while gently adapting them to the given circumstances such as the attendees' experience level, local customs, individual needs and limitations etc., wherever possible and necessary, such as sitting positions (not everybody is able to sit on the floor, cross legged, for hours).

The main goal of Tantric workshops as the IN understands them is to help attendees develop a stable mindfulness, present in any situation. With a stable mindfulness in place, the individual notices quickly whenever an emotion such as anger or jealousy arises. When the rising energy of, for instance, anger is perceived and the person is trained enough to stay mindful, they will most likely not be overrun by their emotion but rather take the time to ponder their options: fight, flee, freeze, which is the basic set of responses our limbic system, or to free themselves from the grip of the *amygdala hijack*<sup>49</sup> (Goleman, 1995), take a breath and face the situation in a poised, peaceful way.

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<sup>49</sup> The "amygdala hijack" is a term coined by Daniel Goleman (Goleman, 1995). The amygdala is the part of the brain which regulates an individual's emotional reactions. When the individual feels overwhelmed or threatened, this part of the brain can set off an irrational response, due to the stress

As attractive as this outcome might sound, it certainly also begs the question: if mindfulness is the goal – why not engage in well-established mindfulness meditation alone, right away? Why the huge overhead of complex structures and meticulously crafted exercises if the goal could be reached by simply sitting quietly on a cushion as numerous outstanding masters of the mind have, for thousands of years? Or, in a more contemporary context: why not go for a nice jog or fly-fishing, which even science lists as “meditative”? (Edwards, n.d.)

One main reason is, because humans are made of both body and mind: training the mind alone might take its toll on the practitioner's physical and material functionality. Likewise, some of those who focus mainly on the development of the body's strength, health and fitness and claim they “do meditation” during jogging, may recall occasional experiences of openhearted happiness and even universal oneness during their workout; however, I have not found reports on athletes, having developed qualities such as kindness, patience, lasting peace of mind and altruism during weightlifting. Neither favoring solely the training of mind nor the main focus on physical improvement seem to naturally generate a holistic transformation of the human body-mind continuum. As Georg Feuerstein puts it, “body and mind are only conceptually separate and in actuality form aspects of the same world process” (Feuerstein, 1998, 60), which is why both require being mindfully cultivated.

Therefore, and in order to obtain stable mindfulness within a reasonable time frame, it is necessary to approach the goal from several directions, at once, i.e. to focus not just on the mind but on the body and its abilities to support spiritual development, as

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hormones flooding the body before the prefrontal lobes (regulating executive function) can mediate this reaction.

well. To quote a frequent saying used during the IN's TWs: "There is no need to 'spiritualize' the spirit – it is the body that needs to be made spiritual." This does not refer to the body alone but to everything material that forms a person's world: their work, their chores, the way they eat, pay their taxes and make friends.

However, often it is precisely the body that seems to get in the way of spiritual development: the physical body with all its needs, cravings, blatant reactions and its extreme vulnerability, making it difficult to concentrate on meditation, or to decide against the third piece of cake, or to speak to a stranger without stammering. At the same time, however, no development – mental, intellectual, emotional or spiritual – is possible without this very body: how could we ever see inspiring sights if not through the eyes of this body? Who would hear and understand teachings if not the brain of this body, through its ears? How, if not first through breath and touch and intimacy, would anyone's mind taste supreme bliss?

The Tantric movement understood this connection between body and mind very clearly and put the body in the limelight of its efforts toward enlightenment: liberation is not reached by scorning the body, its expressions of liveliness and its functions, but by treating it as a temple where mind and spirit or even the Divine abide (Feuerstein, 1998, 53). Without needlessly spoiling the body neither subjecting it to debilitating austerity – a balanced approach, reminiscent of Buddha Shakyamuni's Middle Way<sup>50</sup> – but by paying it the necessary respect and attention, the body becomes a vessel holding loyally the essence of a human's highest potential.

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<sup>50</sup> "Buddhist teaching is neither a path of denial nor of affirmation. It shows us the paradox of the universe, within and beyond the opposites. It teaches us to be *in* the world but not *of* the world. This realization is called the middle way." <https://jackkornfield.com/finding-the-middle-way/>, accessed Sept 28, 2016

This highest potential lies in the wise use of a person's energy. Since *energy* is a term widely used and abused by the New Age community,<sup>51</sup> it is helpful to remember that the concept of an underlying life force has been established for millennia, albeit using different names: *chi* or *Qi* in Chinese medicine (used in Qi Gong practice and acupuncture), *prana* in Hindu systems, *lung* in Tibetan Buddhism (Newman, 2004) to name but a few. Tibetan Buddhism even speaks of the “inseparability of mind and energy” (Newman, 2004, 175), thus highlighting the inseparability between the flow of an individual's energy and that which goes on in their mind. For instance, strong emotions affect the individual's energy flow: a person afflicted by disappointment or fear may feel a lump in their throat, rendering them unable to speak. They may feel “their heart freeze” or suddenly feel weak and shaky. A person facing the strong desire to help somebody in need may, on the contrary, feel internal heat rising, flooding them with strength and the resolution to act.

If we accept the existence of such a life force or energy, the next question is, can it be influenced or tapped into deliberately, and if so, what can it be used for in the context of Tantric goals? The answer to the first question is a firm “yes”: the deliberate use of the energy which flows through an individual's body has been a subject of research and practice throughout human history and found its application in fields such as medicine (acupuncture, yogic asanas, sweat lodges), mental dysfunctions (breath control, autogenous training) or meditation (visualization exercises, for instance *tummo* practice (L. T. Yeshe, 1999; Kozhevnikov et al., 2013)<sup>52</sup>). I want to highlight that within

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<sup>51</sup> As one of countless examples: “Miracle Soul Healer Dr. and Master Sha”, founder of the “Love Peace Harmony Movement”; claims that he has divine powers and is able to “download” new organs for ailing patients.  
[https://web.archive.org/web/20080514174540/http://www.wired.com/culture/lifestyle/news/2007/04/dr\\_sha\\_0405](https://web.archive.org/web/20080514174540/http://www.wired.com/culture/lifestyle/news/2007/04/dr_sha_0405), accessed March 7, 2017

<sup>52</sup> The practice of *tummo*, the Inner Fire, enables the advanced practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism to generate a bodily heat which, as an exterior sign of accomplishment, is able to dry wet sheets on their naked body at temperatures below zero.

the context of the IN's workshops, the use of this energy flow is never manipulative: each attendee experiments with their own energy on and for themselves.

How about its use for Tantric goals? Similarly to a physically unfit person who wishes to run a marathon and will have to invest time, effort and discipline – that is, energy –, in order to transform their untrained body into a body capable of taking on such a challenge, likewise a person aiming at gaining stable peace of mind will have to invest time, effort and discipline, in order to transform their mind. The untrained mind is, to use a common Buddhist metaphor, not peaceful like a mountain lake, but afflicted like a stormy sea. Engaging in calming the storm of ever-conflicting thoughts, emotions, cravings and anxieties consumes exceptional amounts of energy: for instance, staying composed while being unjustly attacked, dealing with jealousy during a social event or trying to quit smoking can be a draining endeavor.

Calming this kind of inner storms requires much more energy than an untrained individual usually has available: if the average person had enough energy to fuel their resolve and resist temptation, it would pose no problem for the individual to handle their anxieties and frustrations with grace and poise, obtaining peaceful results, and all new-year resolutions would be kept. This is where the body comes in: the body is, in some spiritual systems such as Tao, Tantra or Tibetan Buddhism, believed to be a source of energy and a gateway to the spiritual, rather than an obstacle. Indeed, the basic physical activities of breathing, eating and resting generate life force; when losing access to any of these elementary activities, living beings run out of life force very quickly. However, maintaining an amount of life force based solely on these three ensures little more than keeping the individual barely functional.

In order to enable the individual to be more than a simple living organism – to become a thinking, feeling, contemplating, reasoning, passionate and compassionate



being, more energy is needed than the amount which can be drawn from food and sleep. This extra energy can be obtained by fulfilling some of the individual's higher needs (Maslow, 1943). By doing so, not just these needs, such as belonging, meaning and purpose – including psychology professor Brian Little's "happiness of pursuit" (Little, 2014) – get fulfilled. Their fulfillment also boosts the individual's energy by broadening their options to see, interpret and understand their reality: the *law of the instrument*<sup>53</sup> gets overruled and the individual's range of optional responses to their perceived reality increases. Where there used to be only one viable response to a given stimulus, there is a choice now: for instance, a person who used to react violently when they felt attacked, might now calmly address the issue, or withdraw, or, indeed, react with violence if they feel it fit – but they are not tied to the one and only way of responding, anymore.

In addition to these increased levels of energy which, due to the now available choices, make life not just barely manageable but often enjoyable and worthwhile, there are even higher levels of energy an individual can reach. They are well-known and familiar to most individuals: every time a person falls in love, experiences success or satisfaction, indulges in beauty or overcomes an obstacle, energy is being generated (for instance, their pulse rate increases) and released (they gasp in awe, or laugh with gladness).<sup>54</sup> The individual is, in general, aware of this change in their energy level and may describe the accompanying sensation as "happiness" or "peace", or even "bliss". However, this kind of energy boost seems to simply "happen"; it has not been deliberately generated and it decreases by itself; the individual has usually no means to maintain it stable at a high level.

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<sup>53</sup> "Give a small boy a hammer, and he will find that everything he encounters needs pounding." (Kaplan, 2009, 28)

<sup>54</sup> The same applies for unpleasant situations such as fear or embarrassment; however, I will focus on the pleasant aspects.

This would not pose a problem, if the thorough transformation of the afflicted mind into a peaceful mind did not require consistently high levels of energy. Without these elevated levels of energy, which can feel like being lovestruck or “happy, at peace, and motivated without obvious reason”,<sup>55</sup> the transformative effort would be doomed, similar to endeavoring a trip through the Sahara, but running out of gas midway. Aware of this problem, countless methods aimed at generating elevated levels of energy have been explored and developed in the course of human history. A vast variety of meditation forms, physical exercises such as the many different yoga systems, drugs to use, rituals to perform, visualizations to practice – all these and similar methods are means to gaining reliable, unhindered access to an internal source of energy which then can be re-directed towards the goal of spiritual transformation.<sup>56</sup> The methods applied in classical and Western Tantra – provided the latter draws its wisdom and its goals from the former – are ways to generate such surplus energy, by educating and training both body and mind.

#### **6.4.2 Personal Development**

With this surplus of energy, there is a good chance for attendees to succeed in personal development: they are better equipped to follow the call for transformation which is at the very core of Tantra. This process of growth unfolds roughly as follows, even though most stages overlap:

First and foremost, rapport and a solid basis of trust have to be established between the IN as the organizing body in general and the workshop leading team

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<sup>55</sup> {NA}

<sup>56</sup> Since energy as such is neither positive nor negative, it is up to the individual to decide what they do with the now available surplus of energy. This is why ethics are an important element of any responsible Tantric curriculum. Cf. Section 3.3, “Thesis: This works!”, p. 44.

member as the contact person in particular on the one hand, and the attendees on the other hand. If the attendee feels that they are being taken good care of, treated equally, paying a just fee, that the TW leader is competent, kind yet firm, ethically correct and an acceptable authority, they will most likely develop the trust which is necessary to allow themselves being led into situations they would try to avoid in their “normal” lives – situations where they leave comfort zones behind and face their anxieties. This approach shares elements with exposure therapy (J. S. Kaplan & Tolin, 2011) and stress inoculation training (Meichenbaum, 1988).

Next, the individual’s self-respect and self-esteem are approximated to a realistic level: gently adjusted where necessary by, for instance, not allowing the overly perky to seize more attention, time or other resources than other group members, while the shy and more self-doubting individuals receive support and acknowledgement in their attempts to increase their visibility and presence within the group.

This happens while the attendees are encouraged to explore their body awareness through a wide range of suitable exercises (cf. 6.3.4, *The Methods of Tantra*, oben). Increased body awareness provides data about the physical Self: from noting health issues such as stiff joints or headaches (which not every person is initially aware of) to “feeling at home” in one’s body, being able to trust the body’s own wisdom when it comes to relaxation or moving to music; ultimately, to sensing subtle changes in the muscle tone in different zones of the individual’s body, changes in their breathing pattern or the intonation of their voice. By linking these observations to events, thoughts or emotions which emerged just before said change, attendees learn to understand the “language” of their bodies, thus becoming familiar with their range of reactions. As a useful side effect, this new understanding enables them to give themselves efficient biofeedback.

Increased body awareness, along with improving mindfulness, helps the attendee secure and define the image of their Self. Testimonies such as “Finally I can sense myself!”, “Now I understand what my body is trying to tell me”, “This is who I am!” indicate that this step has been accomplished, at least partially. Now it is time to start helping the attendees deconstruct their individually perceived reality and slowly let go of their just yet emerged sense of self-importance. While some schools start working on undermining self-importance (“ego”) right from the start, the IN’s approach is that a person can only let go of something they truly possess, not of something they have never had. For this reason, first, the individual’s self-esteem and self-respect are being balanced. Only after reaching that stage, it is expedient to start introducing them to the concept of selflessness – first in the altruistic sense of putting others before oneself, later in the philosophical sense of Mahayana Buddhism teachings (“there is no real Self”).

This is done applying several methods, for instance, by introducing them to the idea that while there are truths most of us can agree upon (“the Earth is a globe”), there are also personal truths which one may firmly believe (“nobody is really interested in me”), but their holder is entitled to question and challenge them and, if these personal truths/beliefs turn out being unhelpful, to reframe or change them. By letting go of destructive beliefs about themselves and others, particularly those which induce insecurity, contempt or egotism, the attendees discover a key to personal and interpersonal peace.

One of the methods applied during this transformative process involves elevated mindfulness and emotion awareness and elements from the Buddhist Vipassana meditation.<sup>57</sup> Attendees are encouraged to keep their Inner Observer “turned on”, in

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<sup>57</sup> “Vipassana (insight meditation) is the ultimate expression of Socrates' dictum, "know thyself." The Buddha discovered that the cause of suffering can actually be erased when we see our true nature. This

order to note any kind of rising emotion, particularly the unhelpful kind. Other instructions refer to the handling of emotions: whenever they detect an emotion, their task is not to act out on that emotion but rather to breathe, to acknowledge the emotion independently on its character and then to look beyond that emotion, to see whether there is, possibly, another emotion hidden underneath.

For instance, when an attendee notices a feeling of sadness, her task is to not withdraw and indulge in feelings of loneliness or hopelessness, but to stay put and mindful, trying to unveil the underlying emotion. She may find, for example, that there is anger. She may even find the cause for this anger, but again, she is encouraged by the IN team not to get lost and act on the emotion but to look further, where she might detect yet another emotion, perhaps fear. This way, attendees learn how to deconstruct their belief in the “unquestionable reality” of emotions; by not acting on them, they also learn how to deal with them in a peaceful way. Practicing patiently and systematically this way, advanced alumni gradually master the skill of peacefully defanging afflicting emotions, including very challenging ones, such as jealousy and feelings of hurt.

This ambitious goal cannot be achieved without mindfulness and self-awareness; however, in order to complete this task, special awareness skills are required, particularly mental discipline. Again, the Inner Observer reports in its nonjudgmental way, this time about the interpreting and commenting mind and its destructive thoughts, such as “I knew I couldn’t do this... I blew it, again. Why do I even try?” With mental discipline, this kind of self-destructive thought formations can be stopped before it spirals out of control and into the depths of depression or violence. YT attendees are taught

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is a radical insight. It means that our happiness does not depend on manipulating the external world. We only have to see ourselves clearly” (Thatcher, 2008).

contemporary and ancient meditation and breath-work techniques to ensure their peace of mind by choosing which thoughts they deliberately want to be thinking and which they declared unhelpful and therefore will not engage in thinking them.

As the attendees advance on the path of personal development and transformation towards a more stable inner peace, they tend to become less afflicted by mood swings, frustrated expectations, cognitive dissonance and other stress factors. At this stage of their training, methods for transcending the ego's wants and not-wants are offered, for instance by encouraging attendees to find the good in any given situation. This is done by means of often simple, unspectacular measures, such as the rule that every sharing in the big circle – no matter how disappointed, angry, misunderstood or hopeless the speaker may feel at the moment – has to be concluded with a positive statement. Measures such as this are being readily embraced and supported by the group (after all, it is more pleasant for the circle when a sharing ends on a bright note), to the extent that they, themselves, demand its application, often even in private conversations among themselves. Not permitting oneself – or a mate – to wallow in self-pity but to look for the sparks of goodness and hope is yet another tool to ensure one's (and the group's) peace.

Endowed with the skill to find the good in everything, attendees are ready to be guided towards the practice of non-judgment, empathy and compassion. Since there are different understandings of the latter terms, I will give a brief explanation: when I refer to empathy, I define it along the lines of Merriam-Webster: the ability to relate to others' feelings, thoughts and experience (*Merriam-Webster's Dictionary*, 2003). Compassion, on the other hand, I find best described as “sentimental compassion” which can be exhausting since it prone to generate attachment and distress, and therefore should be avoided, or “great compassion” – less personally involved, but all-inclusive and

sustainable indefinitely (Goodman, 2009). As the Dalai Lama expresses it, “love and compassion are the moral fabric of world peace” (2012, 10).

When contemplated from a perspective of what Buddhists call *loving kindness*, the individual’s world offers more elements of belonging, beauty and peace. Understanding oneself and treating others increasingly with genuine and selfless kindness seems to lead to a lessened entanglement in preferences and rejections, which reduces neurotic and narcissistic responses and allows for more stable, well-bonded relationships and, whenever necessary, for peaceful, “civilized” separations where both parties remain friends after ending their relationship as a couple.

This profound development and personal transformation do not unfold smoothly in every case: attendees face their inner resistances and anxieties when, for instance, their core beliefs are challenged and they struggle with cognitive dissonance (“This is not how things should be done!”). Since these are sensitive moments and an individual in this situation is often particularly vulnerable, there is a “lifeline” offered in the beginning of each TW, where attendees are strongly encouraged to seek support and counseling in case they ever feel confused, hurt, upset or overwhelmed in any way. This kind of “first-aid counseling” offered by the leading team has a time limit to it – usually between five and twenty minutes; however, the attendees are expressly invited to claim it, in case of necessity, at any time of the day or night. This on-call service is one more reason why the IN’s groups are generally led by no less than two team members: whenever an urgent intervention is needed, one of them keeps the current group structure going, while the other ministers to the afflicted participant.

This “pick-up service” is not being used very often during beginners’ TWs; a probable reason is that most attendees are new to the entire concept of Tantra and still building their trust in the TW team. This intervention’s peak is recorded during the YT,

where the trust between group members and leading team is already well-established; at this stage, seeking support stopped being seen as something “for sissies” but the group rather understands it as a grown-up move, recommending it to one another when they notice a troubled peer. “First-aid counseling” during the YT would typically be claimed up to 5 times a day plus 1-3 times a night, depending on the size of the group and its dynamics. During advanced TWs, such as the RW, as the attendees’ become more skilled, resourceful and stable in their inner peace and develop the ambition of finding good solutions by themselves, the need for interventions is typically less pronounced and, with some groups, fades out completely.

### **6.4.3 Setting**

Before the process of supporting an individual in their quest for developing and transforming one’s personality can be started, any facilitator has to ensure a functional framework for their attendees. In this subchapter, I will present the different elements that make up a IN workshop setting: the time frame, the venue and the structure that are present in every IN workshop. This shall provide a background for a broader understanding of the workshops’ goals and methods.

#### **6.4.3.1. Time Frame**

A workshop or seminar lasts currently between one and eight days. Shorter time frames are considered events rather than workshops – e.g. practice evenings, meditation mornings or info talks. Workshops of more than one day start on the first day in the afternoon, before dinner, and mostly end on the last day at noon, before lunch.

The shorter type of workshops is mostly aimed at beginners who are not yet sure they want to invest time and money into a longer-lasting seminar. This is how beginners’



workshops not only introduce attendees to the settings, methods and goals of IN's work, but they also double as a selection tool: those who find the shorter seminars appealing and are satisfied with the benefit they draw from them, typically assume that more and longer workshops will increase their benefit, and they tend to keep attending TWs. Those whose expectations were not met during a short TW will typically not book a longer one but, at the most, try again a short one after some processing time (between a few months and 10+ years). This way, the more advanced TWs fill quite naturally up with attendees who are increasingly convinced of and committed to what they are signing up for. Commitment is one of the elements that co-generate their individual success, and being part of a peer group who share their achievements on regular basis keeps the group motivation at a high level.

The weekly *Jours Fixes* and similar short events (time frame between three and five hours) are aimed at supporting attendees' intents to stay in touch with one another, thus helping build a supportive community. Also, they provide an opportunity for practicing skills learned during a TW, asking the present IN team member questions and "fueling up" for the challenges of their everyday lives by enjoying seminar atmosphere between workshops.

The schedule during TWs is strict and tight, with the first session of the day starting at 7:30, before breakfast, and the last session ending between 22:30 and midnight. Attendance at all sessions, while voluntary, is expected. There are ample breaks around meal times, plus additional coffee breaks in the morning and afternoon. During long workshops – 7+ days – one free afternoon or evening is scheduled. Total net session time during a typical workshop day is 10-12 hours.

Compared to about eight Tantra schools and facilitators which either myself or other members of the IN team attended, and according to attendees' testimonies in the

course of over 17 years, this is an unusually intense schedule. Every now and then, an attendee would complain that they “have not enough time to process all that is happening”. This lack of processing time is, however, intended and, if questioned, explained to the group: when baking a pie, a steady high temperature is critical for the outcome; taking the pie out of the oven before it is ready would compromise the result. The group process during the IN’s TWs is deliberately intense and meant to prevent attendees from slipping back into old patterns, by keeping their time to think over and question the process, while it lasts, as short as possible.

#### **6.4.3.2. Space and Venue**

Preferably, workshops take place at venues far from participants’ homes. Based on experience, this helps them to let go of thoughts and worries connected with their everyday life and to focus on the workshop’s exercises and instructions. A drive of 3-5 hours has proven to be the best distance, providing time to unwind while arriving and to gradually emerge out of *seminar-mode* when departing. However, many individuals are willing to take on far longer journeys, while others would only consider participating if the seminar took place in their hometown.

The venue itself is in almost all cases a seminar house – i.e. not a hotel neither a resort or spa – in the countryside, ideally without immediate neighbors and offering attractive outdoors. The upside of a seminar house is its smaller size as compared to a hotel, hosting groups between 15 and 60, and individualized service that readily responds to customized requests. Also, in many houses there is only one group at a time, which helps attendees avoid distractions from their inner journey.

The venues are carefully selected since they have to meet a rather long list of requirements: noise tolerant because of the rather loud dance music, yet overall quiet for

meditation and reflection time; spacious yet cozy; the seminar room itself has to provide heating even in summer and as much natural light as possible, without offering chances to peek in from the outside; delicious, well-balanced and abundant food, clean and comfortable yet still affordable rooms, etc. Also, there are different requirements to a venue, depending on the content of the workshop – beginners’ groups tend to “need” a bar to gather around after the evening session, or a gym, or flawless internet connection; advanced groups are generally increasingly less prone to demand this kind of services.

The YT workshops take preferably place in one seminar house only, throughout. This minimizes the attendees’ distraction of having to settle in to a new environment and provides the feeling of familiarity and safety. This way, the group members stand a better chance to focus on their own inner work, rather than spending time and energy on getting used to a new place.

As for the individual accommodation, most rooms are doubles, some sleep three or four and often the offer includes a dormitory. Single rooms are comparatively rare, which suits the workshops’ purpose: experience showed that participants benefit from roommates, be it for making new friends or for having somebody to practice patience with. Participants choose their accommodation freely on a first-come-first-serve basis.

The seminar room – between 70 and 140 sq meters – is “the group’s” and available to anybody, anytime, during breaks and after the evening session. Participants are generally happy to take advantage of it to practice what they have been studying, to meditate, to cuddle or to nap. Conversations and discussions are requested to be taken out of the seminar room, into the dining area or outdoors.

The sessions, including meditations, are held exclusively indoors, except for a few formats that include project work in small groups, or whenever physical contact with nature is part of said format. The reason is that the seminar room provides an enclosed space where the focus and the group's energy can be guided and maintained more easily, as opposed to the many visual and auditory distractions outdoors, in addition to the technical difficulties with (and poor outdoor performance of) microphones and music equipment.

#### **6.4.3.3. Frame and Structure**

Workshops can be taught in many different ways: strictly according to a program, simply following the *flow* and the dynamics or needs of the group, or anything in between. Similarly, workshops can have a set of adamant rules or barely any rules, at all. The choice depends on the desired outcome and the facilitator's set of values and personality, and/or their institution's mission statement.

Based on observation during other facilitators' workshops as well as our own, the IN team noticed that less structure tends to elicit less resistance on behalf of the group members, because there are fewer rules to oppose, such as no smoking, showing up to all sessions, no water bottles in the seminar room, thus providing the sense of unrestricted personal freedom. On the other hand, more structure tends to be perceived as a handrail to hold onto, something giving guidance and security ("If I follow the rules, I'll increase my chances to obtain the desired outcome"). In a nutshell, structure is useful whenever the facilitator wants to not just take participants on a pleasant walk but help them get from A to B; therefore, in workshops where there is a particular syllabus, structure will be required in order to accomplish the scheduled tasks.

Regarding IN's workshops, for each of them exists a detailed script which has grown and been improved on through a number of years. The script indicates the time frame for each session, its content, the detailed description of more complex instructions and sometimes useful wordings. The detailed script helps – along with experience – to lead the group in a way that is perceived as smooth, non-intrusive, gently guiding and easy to follow. Since most exercises build on the previous ones, they need to be followed in order, so the participants can follow along easily, without stress or confusion.

The script also recommends particular pieces of music to set the mood for and during an exercise. While research shows that certain mood-types of people prefer certain music (Greenberg et al., 2016), it is also true that certain music can elicit certain moods (Shatin, 1970). This effect is meticulously applied and amply used in most of the TW settings and structured exercises. The confirmation that the selection of a fitting background – unobtrusive yet still gearing the group towards the desired mood – had been successful is obtained when attendees, asked for feedback about the music, reply, “Music? What music?”

Each stage of the attendees' journey is broken down into baby steps, carefully prepared and crafted in a way that makes every exercise feel easy, familiar, appealing and logical. The series of clearly structured curricula allows for evaluating an individual's experience level depending on the workshops the attendee has successfully completed. This is essential when people sign up for a workshop which requires previous experience and where beginners would not only slow down the group's progress but, more importantly, might end up feeling overwhelmed and confused.<sup>58</sup> This way, each group member has previously accumulated a required minimum of experience, which

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<sup>58</sup> Currently, there are over 30 different events and workshops; each of them is assigned a level of experience between 0 and 14.

0 means that no previous experience whatsoever is required, while 14 refers to participants who have completed their Teachers' Training and are part of the IN's facilitating team.

ensures a similar point of departure for all; during any given seminar they work together, supporting, challenging and encouraging one another as a group of peers.

Despite the importance of structure and schedule, the most essential element of a workshop is the group. Therefore, whenever necessary, the schedule and content is adapted to the needs of the group. For instance, when an engaged discussion requires more time than scheduled, the facilitating team adapts the following session times accordingly. However, it is important to note that such adaptations are made only for group needs, never for an individual. Whenever somebody has a problem – emotional, health related or otherwise –, which requires them to interrupt their exercise, that person is taken out of the group and taken care of in any way necessary, while the other group members keep focused on their task. In order to be able to do parallel work – e.g. attending a participant having a problem and carrying on with the group’s exercise – any workshop is led by two facilitators who mostly have assistants at their disposal, as well.

The workshops are designed in a way that tends to keep teacher-centered instructions very brief and instead focuses on implementing elements of Situated Learning Theory. Situated Learning Theory is an instruction method developed by Brown, Collins, & Duguid (1989) after observing successful models of learning and finding their common denominators: “An analysis of common features found in all the successful models was a set of six critical factors: apprenticeship, collaboration, reflection, coaching, multiple practice and articulation.” (McLellan, 1991). Elements such as *coaching and scaffolding* are applied during TWs:

A situated learning environment provides for coaching at critical times, and scaffolding of support, where the teacher provides the skills, strategies and links that the students are unable to provide to complete the

task. Gradually, the support (the scaffolding) is removed until the student is able to stand alone (Herrington & Oliver, 1991).

In general, participants are given basic instructions about the upcoming exercise; after that, they are set to face an often unfamiliar situation which most of them would rather avoid in their everyday life, due to the cognitive dissonance it might generate (Festinger, 1957). In this situation/exercise, they face a personal challenge and are encouraged to practice their tools and skills to handle the situation. The exercise can be something as simple as gazing into a stranger's eyes (cf. Section 6.4.4, p. 189) or sharing thoughts and memories about a given topic. During the exercise, the group is being monitored and guided as well as coached whenever necessary; every individual is encouraged to ask for support whenever needed. The attendees' most important task during any given exercise is to be mindful and reflective of their own emotions, conflicting tendencies, inner dialogue, physical perceptions, evasive strategies, body language etc.

Sharing and reflection after an exercise and generally during a workshop has proven being of pivotal importance for the individual's success: attendees keep reporting about valuable lessons they draw from hearing their peers' different ways of experiencing an exercise they, themselves, found difficult, boring or unrewarding. Additionally, sharing feelings, fears, hopes and experience builds community; a strong community of fellow students is, as many report, what helps them overcome inner resistance along the way.

In order to foster this essential exchange, communication and trust building, exercises are often wrapped up by a sharing of experiences, thoughts and impressions among the exercise partners. Moreover, every workshop day offers an active listening

exercise,<sup>59</sup> performed with the same partner all through a given workshop. In this specific setting, neither understanding (acoustically or intellectually) nor clarifying what the speaker had said is the goal. The listener is fully attentive, responds spontaneously with body language, emotion or connected sounds, but does not interrupt or ask questions. This form of active listening puts the emphasis on the speaker and his/her ability to express whatever is currently on their mind, knowing that there is somebody unconditionally available without being judgmental.

After the active listening in pairs, there is a daily sharing in the *big circle* including all group members. Depending on the size of the group, usually not everybody gets to speak during each and every sharing round; however, by keeping a list, the facilitating team makes sure everybody gets their fair share of time to express and show themselves and to be seen and heard. Speakers take their turns either passively, by taking up the “talking sphere” (inspired by first nations’ *talking stick*) which had been rolled to them by another attendee, or – at a later stage of the sharing round – actively, by calling out their name. Limiting the speaking time to three minutes per person has proven to be an excellent measure in this context and has been strongly applauded by the attendees.

Prior to the beginning of each workshop, participants sign a waiver about responsibility, data protection, substance abuse and contagious illnesses. Aside from this formal acceptance of responsibility, there are a number of additional rules in place which participants gradually grow familiar with. While to beginners, the rules are explained, but an occasional failure to follow them will only lead to another explanation or at most, to a one-on-one counseling in order to understand what prevents the participant to follow

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<sup>59</sup> Active listening is “a communication technique developed by the American psychologist, Carl Rogers (1902-87). Although at first this may appear simple, this technique is difficult to master because it goes against basic human behaviour. It is, however, indispensable to establishing a trusting link with the others. Rogers’ approach (1942) is based upon the unconditional acceptance and valorization of the other, and on empathy and authenticity.” (Williamson, 2006, p. 94).



the rule (for instance, abstaining from bringing food or drink into the seminar room, being on time for the sessions or accepting different exercise partners rather than only the “favorite one”). As attendees advance in their training, develop their personality and supposedly deepen their understanding of Tantric goals, challenging or breaching rules becomes increasingly less acceptable but also increasingly less frequent.

#### **6.4.4 TW Tools, or: What is *really* happening during Tantra Workshops?**

This is the question potential attendees, journalists and interested individuals unfamiliar with TWs are most intrigued by, often assuming settings at the very edge of legality such as pressure towards sexual activity or swinging.<sup>60</sup> As we have seen in the chapter on the definition of Tantra, attempting to explain it in a nutshell is considered a demanding task even by experts in the field; the same goes for TWs. This said, I will present a number of sources which TWs typically draw from, and subsequently introduce a few exercises to illustrate the “real feel” in a workshop situation.

The collection of structures and formats used by Western Tantra confirms what has been said of classical Tantra: it draws from all kinds of sources, but combines them in a way and with a focus alien to those sources. True to this tradition, IN’s TWs are composed by a wide range of methods and approaches. The following table may give a brief overview of the sources used at the IN (in alphabetical order). The second column lists some of the elements from each source which are applied during TWs; the third describes the main focus of these elements.

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<sup>60</sup> {NA}

	<b>Sources</b>	<b>Examples of elements applied</b>	<b>Main focus</b>
1	Biodanza	structured interaction with mood-setting music	group bonding; self-awareness; insight; patience; body awareness; kindness; flow
2	Bioenergetic therapy (Lowen, 1977)	breathing exercises; physical exercises; stress postures	release of subconscious emotions through relaxation of muscular tension; grounding;
3	Body awareness (Dychtwald, 1977)	guided body-awareness meditations	sense of Self; body-mind connection; deceleration
4	Chakra theories (Johari, 2000)	exploring and enhancing energetic flow	link between body and energy; self-therapy (e.g. via understanding one's blocks)
5	Classical Tantra Texts (Snellgrove (Transl.), 2011) , Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra	philosophical background; inspiration for adapted exercises, meditations and rituals; inner energy systems	familiarization with traditional Tantra; spiritual growth; bliss and peace
6	Contemporary Tantra Manuals, such as (Anand (Naslednikov), 1989; Richardson, 1999; Zadra & Zadra, 2000)	inspiration for structures and exercises	energy knowledge and control; sensitivity training; building intimacy; deceleration;
7	Client-centered therapy (Rogers, 2003)	active listening; interventions (by facilitators)	empathy; patience; generosity; selflessness
8	Cuddle Parties	strictly non-sexual, gentle and quiet cuddling in pairs or groups	nurturing the Inner Child; building basic trust; flow
9	Exposure therapy (J. S. Kaplan & Tolin, 2011)	situational learning; applying cognitive dissonance	defanging anxieties; frustration tolerance; resilience; delayed gratification; poise; inner peace; courage
10		gentle touching exercises; re-discovering non-sexualized touch	familiarization with other persons' bodies; reading body language; giving and receiving; sensual sensibilization; meditation
11	Group therapy	sharing circles	expressing/addressing one's thoughts and emotions; speaking in front of an audience; listening; patience; empathy

12	Hatha Yoga	physical exercise, asanas	inner and outer flexibility, body awareness, meditation
13	Mantra	chanting of mantras from different cultures	stopping the commenting mind; connecting with a spiritual plane; inner peace; meta-cultural spirituality
14	Meditation (Osho, 1980) (also: Vereesh, Buddhist tradition, Hatha Yoga)	active meditations; calm abiding	Body awareness; mindfulness; insight; letting go of fear; deceleration; re-discovering meaning; inner peace
15	Mindfulness techniques (Buddhist teachings, i.a. Berzin, 1998)	Inner Observer	compassion, generosity, self-awareness, conscientiousness; insight; reduced bias (Lueke & Gibson, 2015); re-discovering meaning; ambiguity tolerance; inner peace
16	Nonviolent Communication (Rosenberg, 2002; Von Thun, 1980)	introduction to communication techniques	clear, connective, peaceful communication; respect and empathy; frustration tolerance
17	Positive psychology (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990)	facilitating experiences of flow; building strengths and cultivating values	joy of life; letting go of fear; optimism; pushing the hedonic set point (cf. p. 233)
18	Postural Integration (Painter, 1987)	deep-tissue bodywork	loosening of muscular and emotional blocks
19	Provocative therapy (Farrelly & Brandsma, 1985)	interventions (by facilitators)	self-exploration, reframing, embracing fears
20	Reflection	single; in small groups; oral and written	self-awareness; self-expression; insight; gratitude
21	Role play (Yardley-Matwiejczuk, 1997)	role play	self-exploration; self-awareness; reframing of distressing or traumatic experiences
22	Sexual education (Perner, 1997)	talks and teachings on STIs, anatomy, sexual functions and dysfunctions, safe sex	thorough knowledge about STI risks, safety measures and anatomy; pleasuring oneself and a partner; respect towards oneself and others
23	Shamanic methods (Harner, 1980)	shamanic journey; sweat lodge	re-connecting with outer and inner worlds; spirituality; mindfulness; self-empowerment

24	Stress inoculation training (Meichenbaum, 1988)	situational learning	frustration tolerance; resilience; delayed gratification; poise; inner peace
25	Systemic constellation work (Ruppert, 2007)	family- or theme constellations	reconciliation; insight; compassion; basic trust;
26	Systemic therapy (Schlippe & Schweitzer, 1996)	interventions (by facilitators); general approach in all interactions with the attendees	the client is the one who has the key to their solution: re-claiming and fostering their autonomy and self-respect
27	Traditional Chinese Medicine (Eckert, 1997)	Meridian exercise; acupressure	body awareness; meditation; release of muscular and emotional tension

*Figure 5 – Methods applied during IN’s Tantra Workshops*

The above list of methods applied during IN’s TWs gives an overview about the range of sources tapped; to my knowledge and according to my own experience, a number or even most of them are used by other Tantra facilitators, as well (fellow Tantra teachers at Advaita Tantra, Art of Being, Aruna, Diamond Lotus Tantra, SkyDancing and Verein Lichtung, to name a few). The critical point is, however, the goal any method is ultimately applied for (cf. far-right column): Tantra, understood as a path of inner transformation towards enlightenment/inner peace, aims for more than just happiness, good sex and a pleasant everyday life.

Hugh Urban points to precisely this pitfall when he highlights the importance of respecting the traditional training and warns of self-made Tantra gurus whose primary interest is everything but selflessness (Urban, 2012, 440). From the IN’s point of view, Tantra facilitators have, indeed, a responsibility towards these ancient and powerful teachings; we owe them our striving to aim higher, beyond hedonistic satisfaction – towards the liberation from anxieties and fears, from attachments in a Buddhist sense, towards a growth beyond self-importance into all-encompassing understanding,

kindness, generosity and compassion. While the seeds for these qualities are insight and wisdom, their fruit are stable poise and inner peace.

The structures, formats and exercises offered to the attendees in order to help them achieve these goals are, in the age of the internet, no secret; in fact, they can easily be found everywhere (except perhaps for the most advanced rituals, which draw from classical Tantra literature, as well as those originally designed by a particular Tantra school). Also, many of the formats do not sound spectacular, in any way: reading through the description of an exercise or a structure does not easily give away its impact on an individual within the safe, playful and encouraging space of a TW. I myself recall a number of instances in the beginning of my facilitator's career, when, reading through a structure, I would think, "...and this is supposed to have any effect on a person?!" However, it is the intention, the purpose and the mindset that make the difference, along with an environment which allows for slowing down, paying attention to detail and developing mindfulness.

In the following section, we will look into a few typical structures without going into too much detail. They should provide a taste of what each structure's character is, how they are set up, what the instructions aim at, how the attendees react and what results can be expected from each of them.

During a TW – after introducing the structure, often with a demonstration when precision is key, or whenever the exercise is unfamiliar – the IN facilitators limit their leading to the amount necessary to steer the group towards the pre-defined goal by gently encouraging, correcting or reminding of the focus. The facilitator's voice modulation, together with the carefully selected music, helps set the mood: it energizes, slows down, soothes or encourages the group as a body. This said, it always depends on each attendee's choice and/or ability to what extent they follow the suggestions.

### ***Breath, Voice and Motion***

What may sound like a secret code is, in fact, a simple formula that attendees have been thoroughly taught and which they have heard hundreds of times, with the aim to help them automatize stress-relieving and awareness-enhancing physical responses. While not being an exercise in its own right, *Breath, voice and motion* (BVM) is an ingredient added to any given structure or exercise. For one, it means that the individual is guided towards awareness of their breathing – ideally slow and deep – particularly when there are emotions rising. This way, they prevent the shallow breathing that typically sets in with stress and tends to disconnect the individual from their emotions (cf. Philippot, Chapelle, & Blairy, 2002).

For the other, when facing the rise of emotions, attendees are encouraged to express them with a connected sound, such as sighs of pleasure, gasps of surprise, snarls of disapproval, squeaks of joy. This counteracts the often life-long and deeply internalized rule of “children should be seen and not heard” which frequently leads to alienation from the individual’s most genuine and authentic emotions because they are consistently silenced. Rediscovering one’s spontaneous vocal reaction to external stimuli benefits not only the reconnection to one’s innermost feelings but also prevents the buildup of tension and unprocessed inner dynamics which are the basic ingredients of the “cycle of violence” – tension, buildup, abusive outburst (Tweed & Dutton, 1998).

The third element of BVM, movement, takes this intent even further: by allowing the body to move when tension builds – i.e. emotions set in or strong sensations arise – rather than to freeze, the individual liberates the energy, thus preventing getting overwhelmed by it; they are able to stay in close contact with themselves and well aware of the ongoing process. The movements applied can be subtle, such as slightly turning

the head (for instance, away from a source of unpleasant stimuli), or more pronounced, such as reaching out to someone who the individual feels compassion for.

Once internalized, BVM helps attendees to keep in touch with their emotions as well as their reactions to them and to steer that reaction in a helpful direction. For instance, to use clear, yet nonviolent verbals as well as nonverbals when they want an (exercise)partner to stop doing what they are doing; to overcome feelings of fear in tense situations, such as when speaking in public; to allow for being moved by and acting on kindness and compassion despite feeling awkward – for instance, crying for somebody else’s loss.

### ***Eye Gazing***

This apparently simple exercise is at the very core of Western Tantra’s teachings and therefore – as far as I can tell – part of virtually any Tantra school’s syllabus. It enables the practitioner to connect with another being at an unusual – and for many, unheard-of – level of intimacy. “I haven’t ever looked at anyone like this, before; not even at my spouse of thirty years” is a typical comment shared after a first eye-gazing experience.

However, it is not possible to genuinely and deeply connect with another individual, if one has not established a connection with oneself, first. This is why, in the IN’s version of this exercise, the initial stage comprises very slow walking through the room, each attendee on their own, becoming aware of every step, of the movement of every muscle and joint, of the way the body weight shifts from one foot to another, of the breath that accompanies the movement, of any tensions within one’s body as well as the thoughts that flash through one’s mind and the feelings that rise and fade.

Even though only a small percentage of attendees feel naturally comfortable at their first attempt of eye-gazing with people they are not acquainted with, still about 95% do finish the exercise. Those who get to repeat it at subsequent TWs report on regular basis that “this time, it was so much easier and deeper than last time”.

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Character	This is a simple, yet not easy beginner’s exercise. It is being widely used in beginners’ TWs, but also during the warm-up phase for more advanced groups.
Setting	The attendees move slowly through the seminar room. When they meet another person, they stop and gaze in one another’s eyes. After a few seconds, they step back, resume walking and find another partner.  This exercise’s length varies between 10 and 15 minutes.
Instructions	The instructions focus on slowing the group down to almost slow-motion, thus allowing for becoming fully aware of rising thoughts, emotions and sensations. Taking deep breaths and to “feel what you feel” is being encouraged; speaking, touching or hugging is explicitly not part of this exercise.  In case anybody feels tense or overwhelmed, they are welcome to “come back to themselves”, by stopping and closing their eyes for as long as they wish and only then, resume walking and meeting others.
Reactions	Attendees tend to tense up in the beginning, uncomfortable with the unfamiliarity of the situation (“This feels so intimate... but I don’t even know this person!”). By and by, most relax and allow themselves to go deeper in every encounter. Some start smiling, some tear up; generally, they tend (and are encouraged) to stay somewhat longer in each encounter.
Results	Relaxation of body and mind; body and self-awareness; bonding with the group; feeling been truly “seen”; gentleness, generosity and gratitude; connecting with the person rather the persona; experience the here and now; vulnerability and courage; empathy, peace and kindness.

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In 1997, Arthur Aron published a paper claiming that four minutes of eye-gazing would create intimacy between two strangers (Aron, Melinat, Aron, Vallone, & Bator, 1997).

Based on his theory, Amnesty International conducted an experiment with Polish citizens



and refugees and published a short video. This video, “Look Beyond Borders” (“Look refugees in the eye,” 2016) shows poignantly the effect of eye-gazing on interpersonal bonding.

Another remarkable example of the eye-gazing’s impact (or soul-gazing, as Margo Anand (1989) calls it) has been presented by the performance artist Marina Abramović at the Museum of Modern Art in 2010.<sup>61</sup> For 90 days, she sat across a small table of any visitor who would take the seat in front of her; they would engage in eye-gazing for as long as the visitor wished – six times a week, seven hours a day. One of her visitors recalls: “I’ve heard it said that couples married for decades can sit in silence and understand one another perfectly, but I’d never imagine that sort of intimacy could be possible between two total strangers. It is. [...] Thirty minutes of epic silence I’ll never forget.” (R. Taylor, 2010).

Abramović herself says about the eye-gazing performance: “This feeling of beauty and unconditional love, this feeling of there’s no kind of borders between your body and environment – you start having this incredible feeling of lightness and harmony with yourself. Something becomes, like, holy. I can’t explain.” (Akers & Dupre, 2012) This description is surprisingly close to what TW attendees report after eye-gazing and other exercises which take their awareness and self-perception to a new level, such as the following:

### ***Fire Breath***

This exercise combines breath work with visualization and pelvic rocking (Lowen, 1977) of varying intensity. While lying on a mat on the floor, the attendee gradually builds up

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<sup>61</sup> Portrait: <https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2010/marinaabramovic/>; videoclip: <https://vimeo.com/72711715>, retrieved Jan 5, 2017

his or her energy (life force, Qi) by following a certain breathing pattern while rolling their pelvis back and forth. They imagine vividly that they are steering their energy from the pelvis, where it is generated, through the energy centers of the body (*Sanskrit: chakra*, [Johari, 2000]) upwards, until it reaches the crown of the head.

This structure – not to be confused with holotropic breathwork regarding technique and goals (K. Taylor, 2008) – is taught in a number of Tantra schools, even though its details and elaboration may vary. Some know it under the name *Fire Breath Orgasm*, because the bodily sensation after the exercise is comparable to the “afterglow” that follows a sexual peak; however, even though that is true, it sounds quite sensational. Therefore, the IN favors the simpler title, *Fire Breath*. The fascinating element about the *Fire Breath* seems to be that during and/or after completing the exercise, attendees typically experience non-ordinary states of consciousness (Grof & Mead, n.d.), feelings of deep connection, gratitude, joy, calm and peace. They report having felt “connected to something greater than myself”, “an immeasurable love that flooded my entire being”, “safe, guided and loved”.<sup>62</sup>

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Character	This structure requires previous experience with breath- and body work as well as some confidence and basic trust; therefore, it is only taught in medium-advanced groups.
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Setting	Each attendee practices the Fire Breath by themselves; before the exercise, they receive a thorough introduction and demonstration. The carefully selected music reflects the quality of each particular chakra that the attendees are focusing on. As always, they are welcome to follow their own pace and take care of their needs; on request, they are supported by members of the IN team.
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This exercise’s total length varies between 120 and 180 minutes; the breathwork in itself takes only about 30 minutes, while the rest of the time is assigned for resting, exploring the non-ordinary state of consciousness

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<sup>62</sup> {NA}

(“floating”) and gently tracing sensations and feelings.

In order to help open the gates to each attendee’s individual spirituality, a mantra is played for a few minutes during the resting phase.

**Instructions** The attendees are gradually guided through the different phases of this exercise. They are encouraged to be mindful of emotions, thoughts and feelings that may arise while focusing on the different energy centers; they are instructed to express emotions – to cry when they feel sadness, to scream when they feel angry or frightened, to laugh when they are having fun – but to avoid analyzing them, which would take them away from the present moment’s experience.

**Reactions** Attendees react very individually to this exercise; the experience is different each time even for those who are already familiar with it. Some fall suddenly asleep, despite the loud music and their neighbors’ noises; some smile happily or giggle through the entire structure, while others face and express traumatic memories.

Afterwards, many experience an “unknown openness” that can feel like vulnerability, while others feel gratitude to life and deep peace beyond words.

**Results** Mental and emotional cleansing; first-hand knowledge about one’s own energy flow; re-linking of body, mind and spirit; experiencing deep peace and connectedness.

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Annie Sprinkle, “former Prostitute/Porn Star turned Sexologist/Artist”,<sup>63</sup> describes her first Fire Breath experience: “The group FBO was the best, most beautiful and satisfying sex experience I ever had, and there wasn’t even any “sex” in the conventional sense of the word. And yet it was total sex.”<sup>64</sup> This testimony, for obvious reasons more impressed by the sexual/energetic elements of the Fire Breath than its ability to reach altered states of mind, is consistent with typical testimonies of IN attendees.

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<sup>63</sup> <http://anniesprinkle.org/phd-dissertation-educating-sex-workers/>, retrieved Jan 5, 2017

<sup>64</sup> <http://www.externstein.de/religion/Deer/Seite12.htm>, retrieved Jan 5, 2017

## *Yes/No*

Being able to say clearly Yes or No to a given request or suggestion is one of the basic skills trained at the beginners' levels of TWs. A high percentage of attendees complain about being unable to deny requests, even at the cost of their health and/or relationships (dependent personality disorder). However, there is also a high number of those who experience difficulties when they are to seize an opportunity they had been waiting for, such as to do something unusual, or something their (even deceased) parents would not agree with, or to admit that they deeply enjoy an encounter.

Yes and No are about boundaries. Some people are timid about setting boundaries, fearing possible conflict, but "Sometimes 'no' is the most honorable and respectful thing you can say to someone."<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, as the IN team frequently explains to our attendees, just as hard currencies used to be backed by real gold, their 'yes' needs to be backed by the real option of a 'no', in order to be perceived as valuable: who cherishes a 'yes', when there simply is no option for that person to say 'no'? In order to master this skill, there are a number of yes/no exercises along the Tantric path, varying in settings but always with the same goal: to offer the real-life experience that saying an honest 'no' is not only safe, but even though possibly uncomfortable, still helpful and beneficial for everybody involved.

The version I want to present is aimed at an audience with some previous TW experience. It is done in pairs (usually male/female) and consists in gentle touching at the discretion of the active partner (A). The receiving partner's (B) task is to first figure out whether they do or do not like that particular touch, and accordingly, to utter "yes" or "no". A leaves their hand at the same spot without moving it and waits for the response

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<sup>65</sup> <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/caveman-logic/201403/why-so-many-people-just-cant-say-no>, retrieved Jan 5, 2017

from B. If B enjoys the touch at that spot and says, “yes”, A stays there for a few more moments. If there is a “no”, A immediately removes their hand and chooses another spot to touch.

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**Character** This is an exercise for attendees with some previous experience; it requires basic body- and self-awareness skills and develops them further.

**Setting** The exercise is done in pairs, preferably male/female. The partners are seated on a mat. The active partner (A) can get up and move around the receiving partner (B). B remains seated at all times. For advanced versions of this exercise, clothing is optional.  
The partners take turns; after completing one cycle, they switch partners, in order to broaden their range of experience. In total, this exercise’s length varies between 30 and 50 minutes.

**Instructions** The partners are encouraged to proceed very gently and slowly, while observing their most subtle physical and emotional reactions. Partner A gently poses their hand(s) on a random part of B’s body; B’s task is to listen in to the reactions of their body and mind and to bluntly and clearly say ‘yes’ or ‘no’, according to the result.

A ‘yes’ is followed by a few more moments of the pleasant touch; a ‘no’ leads to immediate, albeit gentle withdrawal of A’s hand. This procedure is repeated until the time is up. In order to help both partners explore the territory outside their conflict-avoiding comfort zones, partners A are required to “harvest” at least three ‘no’s’.

In case B is not sure whether they agree or not, they are encouraged to refuse the touch: “If it isn’t a ‘yes’, it is a ‘no’.” Conversation aside from B’s ‘yes’ or ‘no’ is not part of this exercise.

**Reactions** Attendees tend to begin this exercise with a blend of tension and curiosity: will their ‘yes’ and ‘no’, indeed, be respected? As they learn that, indeed, partner B is completely in charge of what is and is not going to happen, both relax and start enjoying the new freedom: A, because they now can rely on B’s verbal reaction without being afraid of overstepping boundaries; B, because they now can get what they really enjoy, rather than putting up with what they dislike, by simply uttering ‘yes’ or ‘no’.

Typically, a few minutes into the exercise, both partners start acting more playfully; giggles and laughter are frequent during this structure.

Results Attendees learn that ‘yes’ and ‘no’ are acceptable and respected signs of a grown-up behavior. They experience being in charge of what happens to them, as opposed to keeping up the self-image of a victim; also, that it is possible that a ‘no’ is not followed by punishment or withdrawal, but by acceptance and a more pleasant next step. They learn that giving and following clear signals is a way to relaxation, confidence and mutual enjoyment.

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These common and typical structures illustrate why – despite the widespread understanding that Tantra is all about sex and orgies – there are virtually no attendees in advanced TWs who primarily hope for sexual adventure (Kropf, 1999). The reason is quite simple. Participants with second thoughts realize very quickly that these groups are not primarily about wellness, and even less about orgies, but rather about quite challenging and partly little appealing work on one’s own transformation.

What really happens in Tantra Workshops – those that work in a similar spirit as the IN, anyway – is much less about improving one’s sex life but more about becoming a grown-up: responsible, frustration-resistant, generous, kind and at peace with oneself. In this sense, Tantra Workshops truly comply with Urban’s definition and literal translation of the term Tantra: “Spreading the knowledge that saves” (Urban, 2003, 31).

#### **6.4.5 Ethics**

In order for the attendees to accept this “knowledge that saves”, to endeavor the exploration of their emotional landscapes, non-ordinary states of mind and their inner peace, they need to feel absolutely safe in the environment provided for them. Therefore, in the first part of this subchapter, I will briefly discuss the question why there might be public uncertainty about TWs, whether Tantra is possibly a cult and how to differentiate a harming cult from a beneficial personal-development group. In its second part, I will

present the IN's take on ethics and some of the rules it follows, thus ensuring the emotional safety necessary for a process of growth which benefits each attendee on their individual journey.

#### **6.4.5.1. Is Tantra a Cult?**

As we have seen, some of the structures and exercises offered within the IN's TWs can be quite powerful and, according to the studies reviewed earlier (cf. Chapter 5, p. 87) as well as my observation, can indeed change a person's worldview or even their life. Concerns voiced by some attendees' family members are, therefore, to some extent understandable: they watch a person they thought they knew intimately, change before their eyes (going from shy to confident, from unable to say 'no' to setting boundaries, from angry to compassionate), and they are not always satisfied with the explanation offered for those changes. This feeling of powerlessness sometimes leads to the suspicion or even claim that Tantra is a dangerous, brainwashing cult. However, if changing one's worldview were the sole sign of a cult, AA or group therapy would be cults, as well.

The top websites that open up when searching for the item "Tantra" rarely provide reassuring information on Tantra facilitators of good standing. Facing confusing input, some attendees' relatives panic, fearing for their loved ones' physical, economical and mental integrity. The suspicion that their mom/dad, daughter/son are "getting brainwashed by a cult" can take on extreme forms: adult children forbidding their mother in her fifties to attend a TW she booked after her husband's death; parents who threaten

and blackmail their adult children for attending TWs and refusing to play the family's ritual games (Berne, 2010): “I am so fed up with you being peaceful, all the time!”<sup>66</sup>

One possible reason for feeling so deeply at a loss lies in the number of unknowns and second-hand knowledge about Tantra in general and TWs, in particular. Not much is published about the contents of TWs, there is hearsay about sexuality, and where there is sexuality involved in a teacher-student setting, additionally requiring the student to trust the teacher, potential abuse is always, and rightly, a concern.

Let us therefore briefly look into the signs that point to a group being a potentially unsafe place, where abuse is possible or even likely to occur, which would be the opposite of what most of the groups I personally experienced strive to achieve. Currently, there is abundant information online on such indicators (Muster, 2016; Ross, n.d.), providing detailed listings of signs to look out for and moves to avoid. Psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton helped define the term “brainwashing” in reference to thought reform employed by cults (Lifton, 1989) and later co-authored a paper about cult formation (Lifton & College, 1991). There, he defined a cult as showing the following three characteristics:

- A charismatic leader, who increasingly becomes an object of worship as the general principles that may have originally sustained the group lose power.
- A process [is in use] call[ed] coercive persuasion or thought reform.
- Economic, sexual, and other exploitation of group members by the leader and the ruling coterie.

Facilitating Tantra Workshops increases, in the eyes of many of our attendees, the facilitator’s authority. The simple fact alone that the group leaders are not part of the group already gives them a different, for some people “higher”, status. Transference

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<sup>66</sup> {NA}



(Lear, 2005, 117), meaning perceiving the group leaders as particularly attractive or as “better parents than those I had” is common and not alarming; on the contrary, it can be beneficial for the attendee’s emancipation process. Very occasionally, slight tendencies of excessive “worship” can be observed; they are gently refused and put into perspective, while making sure the attendee’s trust and confidence are not harmed. Only once in twenty years, there was a case of transference of alarming degree, which had to be dealt with by excluding the attendee from further TWs.

Thought reform or “brainwashing” is what some attendees and some relatives are most afraid of. While it is true that a high percentage of TW alumni, indeed, have transformed their way of thinking, the process which led to this transformation is far from having being forced upon them. On the contrary: since the goal is to educate autonomous thinkers, questions, differing opinions and challenges are welcome and given room. A safe way to help somebody transform their thinking is to offer alternatives which, after thorough examination, render better results in terms of happiness and *peaceability*.

Offering workshops for fixed fees or even for a donation makes the economic exploitation of attendees highly improbable: all fees are disclosed in advance; there are no hidden/additional costs to a TW. The risk of sexual exploitation cannot be completely excluded, whenever sexual topics, vulnerability, trust and asymmetrical relationships are involved. Acknowledging this, the IN follows a set of ethic rules aimed at preventing any misunderstandings as well as situations which might be uncomfortable or potentially harmful for attendees, but also for the leading team and ultimately for the IN.

#### **6.4.5.2. IN's Code of Conduct**

Long-time reliability and strict adherence to ethical rules are pivotal whenever a facilitator's goal is to provide an environment where people can feel safe and respected. Reliability and rules are even more important, if the participants are to develop the trust necessary for being guided outside their comfort zones. Reliability is built on responsibility: therefore, at the IN, complaints are taken seriously and dealt with immediately; whenever mistakes at the IN team's end were made, they are addressed and straightened out as quickly as possible.

A basic set of rules of conduct is handed and thoroughly explained to TW assistants (YT alumni who wish to support the IN team during TWs) before they start their first experience as assistants. Since these rules are not mere guidelines but are meant to be binding, breaking them has consequences – first, explaining the rules again, then, a warning and lastly, removing the assistant from the team. This last remedy, however, had to be applied only once in 20 years. The same strict set of rules, plus a few more, applies to the leading team. Since the entire IN team – aside from Amrit R. Fuchs and me – has been recruited from alumni who after their YT started a career as assistants and only then were trained to be trainers, they are all familiar with and respectful of the code of conduct.

The code of conduct (“assi rules”) is in place in order to protect the peaceful unfolding of the process the attendees go through. The protection of the safety and well-being of the group has top priority for the IN; it comes before the personal interests of the leading team as well as before the interests of individual attendees. In practice, it means that, for instance, in case one of the group leaders is going through a difficult time (say, illness in their family), it should not affect their work within the TW context. If the

problem is serious, such as the death of a loved one, the group will be informed, so they know and do not need to guess why their facilitator's energy is different, this time.

Attendees are not singled out by granting them privileges nor favors (unless they are sick or otherwise in a transient vulnerable state); it is important and adds to the attendees' peace of mind, knowing that they can rely on everybody being treated the same. This includes respectful, non-judgmental communication – after all, humans learn by mimicking (Meltzoff, 1999). Respectful communication is also ensured by gendered language during instructions and by calling attendees out on jokes at anybody else than the teller's expense, thus making cultural violence detectable (Galtung, 1990). Members of minorities, such as gay, transgender or slightly disabled individuals are welcome to attend.

One of the strictest and most important rules within the code of conduct refers to personal and sexual involvement (cf. "Code of conduct," 2016). Assistants are to keep their distance from attendees and not get involved personally and/or sexually in any way during the TW they assist. For the IN team, this rule applies without time limit. The rule expands to anything that could be taken advantage of or simply "taken" from an attendee, such as their time or energy, their focus, admiration or attention. It is paramount that the attendees' space be protected, so they can feel safe and focus on themselves and their own inner processes.

For the IN, being a teacher does not mean to be a guru, and leading does not mean to take the stage: the IN team's policy is to keep in the background, gently steering the group process from there, interfering as little as possible and avoiding any kind of personality cult. The goal is to help the attendees conquer their independence, rather than establishing new dependencies. The leading team ensures the group feels safe, at peace and well taken care of, in the process.

Questioning, doubting and even challenging the leading team is a natural part of the attendees' inner growth. Both leaders and attendees are encouraged to wonder, to be open to questions and unexpected solutions, to waive The One Ultimate Truth in favor of many possible individual truths (Dietrich & Sülzl, 1997) and in particular, to avoid any kind of spiritual elitism and feelings of superiority towards those who choose alternative ways of self-realization.

Attendees who are not happy with what the IN can offer are invited to try with somebody else and given recommendations on request. Those who are happy but feel as if there is so much more out there, are encouraged to attend other Tantra schools: it broadens their horizons and deepens their experience. Alumni who have left the IN, sometimes with a grudge, but choose to return years later, are welcomed back. Tantra facilitators from other schools are welcome, as well: the IN team knows and supports the necessity to keep practicing and exploring one's inner landscape, particularly when working in a care-giving profession. The IN does not resent them if they end up using some of the IN's structures in their own groups: we all have learned from somebody and do our best to "spread the knowledge that saves" – and after all, words can be copied, but not the handwriting.

All these rules and the code of conduct are meant to be a guide rail, protecting both the attendees and the IN team. They are particularly important when a group is going to be working together for a long period of time, while covering challenging, delicate and often unfamiliar topics, such as the Year-Training.

#### 6.4.6 The Year-Training

In order to explain the choice of TW for the collection of data, I will give a brief description of the Year-Training's structure. The YT is comprised of six workshops, starting in March of any given year and ending in December. There are 6-10 weeks between the individual blocks, plus a number of special *Jours Fixes* between block 3 and 4. The titles and the durations of the individual parts are as follows:

#	Title	Duration
1	Flying High ( <i>Höhenflug</i> )	7 days
2	Resolutions ( <i>Lösungen</i> , systemic constellation work)	2x3 days
3	Pleasure & Healing ( <i>Lust &amp; Heilung</i> )	7 days
4	Ecstasy ( <i>Ekstase</i> )	8 days
5	The Wave ( <i>Die Welle</i> )	5 days
6	Maithuna	5 days

Figure 6 – The Structure of Year-Training

The first workshop, *Flying High*, is intended for attendees with basic experience (5+ workshop days). The group usually comprises between 30 and 45 participants; at this time, not all of them are signed up for the entire YT – this workshop is also meant to be an opportunity for the attendees to test whether they want to follow through. This first part of the YT has the excitement of a new beginning and a new adventure to it; the group bonding process sets in, and since they have just met and do not share a common history yet, the attendees tend to be polite and mostly openhearted with one another.

The contents include body- and breathwork (Lowen, 1977), energy work such as raising energy and guiding it through one's system; playful rituals such as *Sensory Awakening* (playfulness in adults enhances subjective well-being [Proyer, 20139]). A variety of rituals runs, in fact, like a golden thread through the IN's TWs: small or – on

advanced levels of the YT – more complex structures which anchor the attendees' intention of *peaceability* in their reality by encouraging them to do something physical. For instance, an attendee who felt overwhelmed by his in-laws and unable to stand his ground, was advised to wear his late father's watch and touch it every time he felt aggression build up.

Attendees of *Flying High* also get to explore their 'yes' and 'no' in different settings as well as structures in separate male and female subgroups and an introduction to the *Wave* (Anand (Naslednikov), 1989). The composition of the exercises and formats allows, for many attendees, for a tasting of non-ordinary states of consciousness – hence the title of the seminar.

Before they are entitled to attend the third part, YT attendees are required to do their active family constellation (Krivan, 2012; Ruppert, 2007). This is done because, based on observation, it is very helpful to look into the individual's family-of-origin dynamics and disentangle some of them, if needed, before tackling the topics of the next workshop. This particular kind of group work enables the attendee to understand the history of their family, the tensions, dynamics, grudges and often tragedies that led family members to act the way they did. Reconciliation with the past is one of the results of this method; making one's peaces with difficult family members is another.

Watching and participating in other family systems, YT attendees learn that there are thin spots in the fabric of nearly every family, which brings them even closer together in compassion and understanding. They leave with a clue of what to do and what to avoid in order to achieve nurturing, joyful and peaceful relationships.

The third part of the YT, *Pleasure and Healing*, requires the experience gained at the first workshop; now, in May, the YT group is complete and will stay together in this

constellation until December. An exception is made for those who – for multiple reasons – are not able to complete the training, and for those who have already done it before, joining the group for one or more blocks in order to deepen or brush up their previous experience.

The contents focus, for one, on the physical body and on gently building and confirming a positive attitude towards intimacy and self-induced sensations of pleasure. For the healing part, the group is introduced to Postural Integration (PI; Painter, 1987), in particular to the chapter which addresses energetic tissue blocks in the pelvic region. This kind of blocks – physical scars from surgery, but often emotional scars from unpleasant or traumatic sexual encounters – can, according to PI, contribute to the individual's repressed sexual response or sexual dysfunctions.

Practicing these structures, attendees take responsibility for their bodies and well-being. They learn how to be in charge of their own “healing” sessions (the healing is never meant in a medical, but rather in an emotional sense) – they choose their own pace, rhythm and a partner they particularly trust.<sup>67</sup> During this part of the YT, the group bonds even closer, welded together by the experiences they share.

The fourth part of the YT, *Ecstasy*, focuses on the manifold ways humans have attempted to touch the untouchable, to leave matter behind and reach beyond. Ecstasy (from Ancient Greek ἐκ ek-, “out” and ,hístēmi “I stand” (ἵστημι ) is defined as “a state of overwhelming emotion; especially: rapturous delight” (*Merriam-Webster's Dictionary*, 2003). In order to catch a glimpse of this delight, which – stripped of all hedonistic greed – might resemble the “bliss” described in Tantric literature (cf. Section 6.3.3, “The Goals of Tantra”, p. 150, oben), the practitioner first needs to let go of

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<sup>67</sup> This is not a given, since for all other exercises during the YT, the partners are raffled (with occasional exceptions for couples).

wanting and not-wanting, of *hope and fear* (Cf. Section 6.3.2, p. 146). This deliberate letting-go does not come naturally to most of the attendees; therefore, it is being contemplated, analyzed and playfully practiced in a number of different structures.

One of the moments which most attendees can link to some level of abandon is the state of arousal or orgasm. Since Tantra uses sexual energy as a vehicle for transformation, in this workshop, we combine the art of giving oneself over with exploring elevated levels of arousal, albeit without reaching orgasm, but staying just below. The technique applied is called ESO – Expanded Sexual Orgasm (Brauer, 1983). While the authors aim for better and longer genital orgasms, for Tantric purposes, only the well-described and efficient method for raising exceptional levels of energy is applied. This leads, in many cases, to non-ordinary states of conscience and moments some attendees describe as “one with everything” or “floating in peace”.<sup>68</sup>

At this stage of the YT, the group typically starts to “fall apart”: the excitement of the first months is gone, the climbing uphill of part 3+4 is done. Many of them have grown into a state where they need and demand less closeness and more independency inside of the group as well as in their everyday lives; they say ‘yes’ and ‘no’, they set their boundaries. Within the group, they want to be less part of the whole but rather more of an individual, they are seeking their own path within, but also away from the safe haven of the group.

The fifth part, *The Wave*, is dedicated to the exploration of subtle energy flows. The familiar breathwork is augmented with advanced visualization techniques and taken to new levels. The structure of the *Wave* – an energetic exercise usually practiced in couples and requiring experience in breath-work and visualization techniques – briefly introduced to the group back in *Flying High*, is now being taught to its full extent.

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<sup>68</sup> {NA}



Having completed most of the YT, the attendees have now developed enough mindfulness, body awareness, understanding and *peaceability* to be able to properly benefit from this practice. Reports on non-ordinary states of consciousness and the increasing stability of inner peace abound during this 5<sup>th</sup> part of the YT.

Towards the end of the YT, the group typically re-consolidates – differently than in the beginning, though. While their bonding, in the beginning, was based on the new adventure they all were starting and the anxieties and hopes they shared, now it is built on knowing each other, having watched one another and over one another in the most unbelievable situations, on generosity, forgiving and knowing one's own worth. Seen from the outside, the group feels unattached, but well-connected.

The last workshop of the YT, *Maithuna*, (cf. Section 6.2.2, p. 129) is named after the classical Tantric ritual where male and female, Shiva and Shakti, come together in an ecstatic and timeless embrace. This is the beautiful theory – in practice, the group spends most of the time gradually learning and understanding the highly defined structure of this ancient ritual, based on classical Tantra scriptures (Farrow, 1992). Taking the now familiar *Wave* as a starting point, more and more elements from the ritual are gradually added, making sure they make sense to the attendees, and practicing some of them separately: for instance, the cleansing-by-fire ceremony, where participants get to “touch” live spirit fire in a metal bowl, while visualizing their individual issues being transformed by it.

While the *maithuna* ritual's framework is inflexible in order to provide the necessary supportive structure, the attendees are free to fill the time of the ritual's central part with whatever they feel like doing – be it eye-gazing or ritual coition. Those who manage to look past their anxiety to “do everything right” and to relax into this encounter

between Shiva and Shakti – two entities beyond the two personas on the mat – report of moments of timeless union, beauty and peace (cf. Chapters 8.2.5, 8.6.5).

This is the last part of the YT, and the group’s cohesion starts to give in. Some are “content, but glad that this challenging year is over now”, others mourn the close-knit family feeling they are about to lose, some make plans for their Tantric future. According to the IN’s statistics, about 50% of YT alumni stay in touch with the IN: of these, some proceed to more advanced levels right away; others pause for a number of years and/or collect more experience with other facilitators, before signing up again.

## **7. Statistics and Surveys**

In this chapter, I will introduce the composition of the YT cohorts by presenting some basic statistical facts about the YT cohorts. I will also give a brief overview about the results of the surveys conducted during the Institut Namasté's YTs between 2005 and 2015.

Initially, the analysis of the surveys was done in three tiers, applying an increasingly narrow scope: starting with an overview of longitudinal developments, next focusing on the five categories of questions and then, looking into selected individual charts for specific intrapersonal changes.

### **7.1. Introduction**

After collecting survey data for eleven years without looking into them more than superficially (because they were being collected and kept for an external researcher who I hoped would analyze them), I decided to write the present study myself, taking advantage of the ample material I had gathered. As explained in Chapter 4.3.3, *The Questionnaire* Seite 722, the respondents were handed their questionnaires in the beginning of the second workshop within the YT cycle. The question might rise, why the respondents were not surveyed at the first workshop but only at the second? It would seem more logical to collect their responses before the very start of the training, thus hopefully obtaining a more pronounced difference between the first and second surveys (S1 vs. S2). However, since the attendees' previous experience in the Tantric field is rather diverse before the YT starts – some have completed six seminar days, others twenty or more – it seemed preferable to balance the overall experience level of the group by having them share the same structured experiences, first.

Secondly, as mentioned earlier, none of the respondents was a Tantric neophyte. Therefore, not much of a potentially informative difference has been given up, since the individual's experience (and impact) level was most probably already higher than zero before the start of the Year-Training, anyway. The pre-existing experience has been taken into account by phrasing questions with reference to "two months ago", which would roughly be the time of their first workshop within the Year-Training.

Finally, a number of participants commit to their Year-Training only after its first part, *Flying High*; between the first and the second workshop, the numbers typically drop by about 30%, for different reasons: either the individual had signed up for this one part of the YT, only, or they realize that they are not willing/able to follow through with the entire training, or other reasons, such as health, work-related issues or pressure from family members come up. Therefore, handing out the questionnaires to everybody at the first workshop would necessarily result in a large number of surveys being discarded. Those who commit to the remaining five parts of the YT are likely to form a cohort of similarly motivated and experienced individuals, which is a good base for solid research.

## **7.2. General Statistics**

During eleven consecutive Year-Trainings, starting in May 2005 and ending in December 2015, participants were asked to fill out a survey (N= 222), thus contributing to a representative long-term study. Only participants who had completed all six parts of the YT were eligible for evaluation; the surveys of those who have not been able to attend all parts were eliminated.

In the course of those eleven YTs, a total of 273 males and females committed to one of them. Not all of them were able to complete it, for reasons similar to those given by the dropouts before the second part of the YT: problems in/pressure from the family;

health reasons; loss of interest; too much challenge; work related issues. The average drop-out rate *after* the second part of the YT was above 15%.

Of the remaining cohort, some (between 0 and 22.2%, depending on the year) failed to return a valid survey. Even so, the average overall rate of return was remarkably high (above 95%); the few “missing” surveys were due to attendees failing to submit one of the two surveys, getting the code wrong or leaving it out altogether, thus rendering it impossible to match their two surveys.

The following chart gives an overview of the numbers of participants during the observation period:

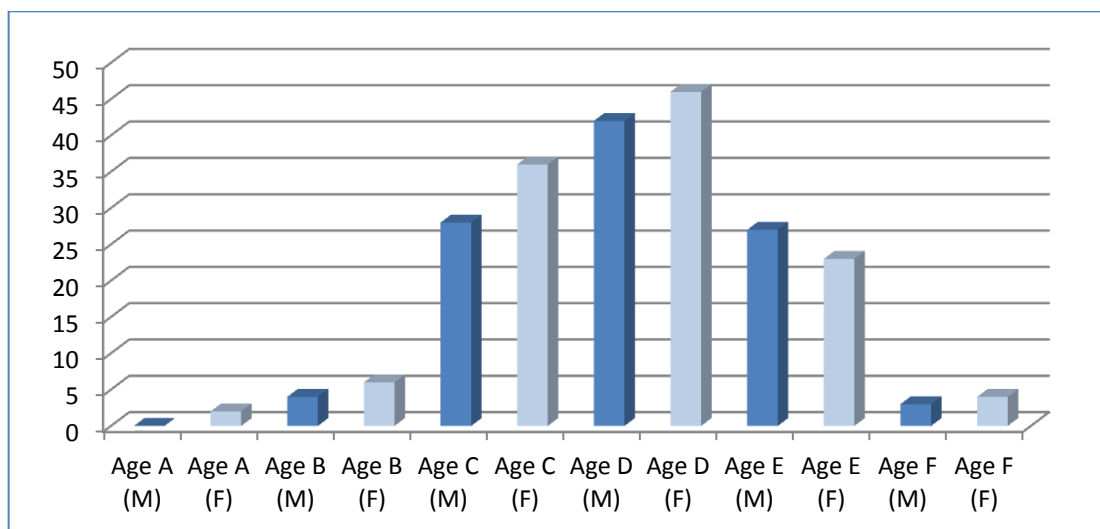
Year	Signed up	Drop-out after part II	Graduated	Female	Male	Survey participants	Female	Male
2005	40	15%	34	18	16	32	16	17
2006	32	12.50%	28	13	15	28	13	15
2007	21	14.28%	18	10	8	18	10	8
2008	20	10.00%	18	12	6	16	10	6
2009	24	25.00%	18	9	9	14	7	7
2010	24	16.67%	20	9	11	20	9	11
2011	23	17.39%	19	10	9	17	10	7
2012	25	20.00%	20	10	10	19	10	9
2013	11	27.27%	8	4	4	8	4	4
2014	27	14.81%	23	11	12	23	11	12
2015	26	0	27	17	10	27	17	10
	<b>273</b>	<b>avg.14.41%</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>106</b>

*Figure 7 – Numbers of Survey Participants during Observation Period*

Regarding age cohorts among the YT attendees, it was found that the vast majority ranges between ages 30-60 (91%); this means that most YT participants have already reached some maturity and gained some life experience. This age range corresponds largely with the three studies’ findings, described in Chapter 5. The data retrieved from the IN’s archive confirms what observation suggested from the very beginning of the IN’s activities: it is unusual for participants to become interested in

Tantra Workshop before they reach middle age; only 5.5% of them are under 31 (cohort B). The modal average of the age cohort was the age between 41 and 50, with over 40% of the participants falling within this age cohort (cohort D), while the younger (C) and older (E) age cohorts – 31-40 and 51-60, respectively – are still important regarding cohort size (29% and 22%).

The following chart gives an overview over the YT's gender distribution within age cohorts. As we can see, females clearly dominate all cohorts except E (ages 51-60). This dynamic can be, at least partly, attributed to the higher social acceptance for women who pay attention to their emotions (cf. Kring & Gordon, 1998), while males seem to claim a similar acceptance for themselves only when they reach middle age.

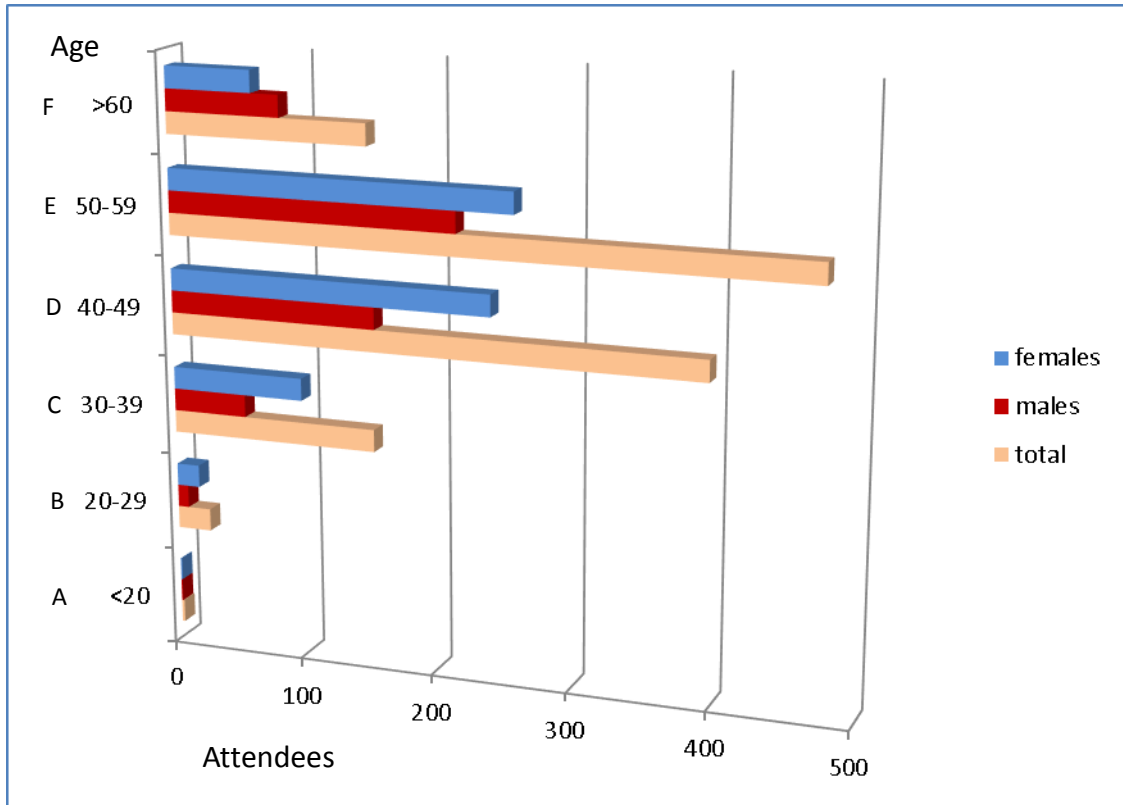


*Figure 8 – Cohorts and Gender*

For an even better overview, compare the age distribution of the IN's active participants<sup>69</sup> in the recent completed year, 2016 (N=1202). The chart (Figure 9 – Age Cohorts Active Attendees) shows that the overall age cohorts tend to lean strongly towards the more mature participants; this trend is less pronounced in the Year-Training

<sup>69</sup> "Active" refers to individuals who have attended TWs in the past and keep in touch with the IN by attending TWs and/or *Jours Fixes*.

itself. It seems, therefore, that while the idea to engage in one’s own development via TWs rarely comes up before age 35, it is still the “younger ones” among middle-aged adults, who are up to a longer commitment and/or more willing to invest time, money and effort into their personal development.



*Figure 9 – Age Cohorts Active Attendees*

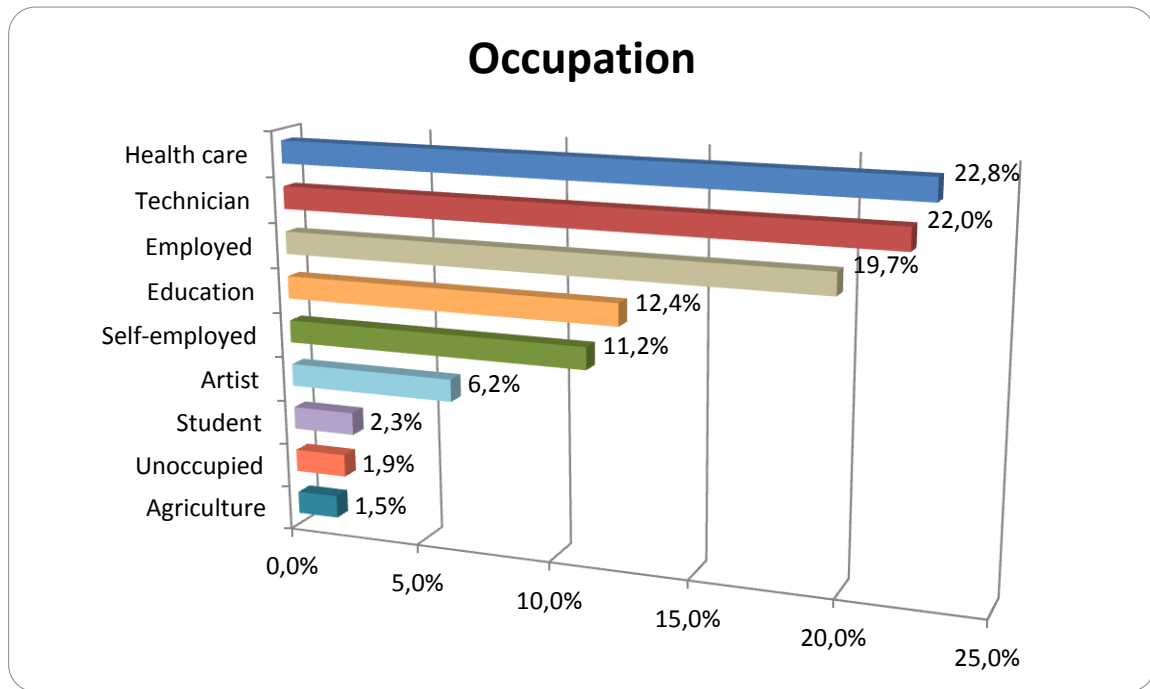
Those participants who do commit to the YT are required to have already gained some experience in the field; they are not at all Tantric neophytes. They have completed at least six days of TWs of 12-16 hours/day of structured group processes – some of them many more and/or with different schools and trainers. This requirement ensures a reasonably comparable experience level throughout the group and helps the individuals feel comfortable with themselves and their peers.

As it is true for all of the IN’s groups (except specific couples’ groups and groups aimed at women/men only), the YT welcomes singles as well as those who participate

together as a couple. To the couples, it is made clear that, in the IN's understanding of Tantra, a Tantra Workshop is not a means to improve a failing relationship or an opportunity to focus on bonding with one's significant other. (More details regarding the design and purpose of a TW are given in chapter 6.3).

The following chart (Figure 10) gives an approximate overview of the social and professional profile of the surveyed cohort. It can be only approximate, since the data – obtained back when they signed up for their very first workshop – had to be fitted into a limited number of categories and some professions would well have matched several of them (e.g. “carpenter” might be either *self-employed* or *technical*). Also, it is unclear what field those respondents work in who simply stated they were *employed* or *self-employed*. The category *health care* comprises not only medical personnel but also body workers, therapists, psychologists, pharmacists and self-proclaimed healers; *technician* includes among others carpenters, IT experts, contractors and architects.





*Figure 10 – Occupation*

It does not come as a surprise to see a high percentage of health care (and, to a lesser degree, educational) professionals signing up for a Tantra training, with its emphasis on awareness, self-care, compassion, reflection and personal growth. The high number of technicians, however, might strike one as unexpected: along with the health care professionals, they comprise almost half of the cohort. However, it is the technically trained individuals themselves who verbalize their incentive very clearly (particularly during the sharing rounds): precisely because their “brains are lopsided towards the rational and tangible” and they “feel more comfortable when things are provable and measurable”, some individuals in technical professions realize that they need something to balance it out, to find some kind of wholeness and to add body-awareness, social skills and emotional accessibility to their minds’ high performance.

The likely reason for the low numbers of university students is simple: students are usually too young; additionally, they mostly lack the financial means to afford a YT. The latter also explains the low numbers of individuals not in the workplace

("unoccupied", i.e. either unemployed, retired or stay-at-home).<sup>70</sup> Attendees from the agricultural sector are rare, perhaps due to a lack of interest, but – according to a few participating farmers' comments – also because of their commitment to animals, crops and workers and the unpredictable planning around seasons and weather.

### **7.3. The Questionnaire**

In this chapter, I will present the questionnaire, its individual questions and categories and briefly discuss the results of the responses it rendered, using charts for better visualization. For further information on the becoming of the questionnaire, cf. Section 4.3.3 (p. 72); for the original questionnaire, cf. Annex A – The Questionnaire.

The results of the two questions with negative phrasing (#37, "Within these workshops, there are things I should address, but I don't find the courage to do so" and #53, "My dark places are just as threatening as two months ago") were inverted (0=10, 1=9 etc.) in order to be able to keep a consistent visual in the charts, where S2 being higher than S1 indicates improvement.

#### **7.3.1 Questions and Categories**

These are the Categories designed for examining the survey data. The individual questions were gathered into similar themes, so that we have five general categories, as follows; the same Categories were also used for analyzing the qualitative interviews (cf. chapter 8).

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<sup>70</sup> While the IN's fees are deliberately kept at the lower end of the middle range in order to make workshops accessible to people of all walks of life (plus special offers for the economically less privileged), there are also the accommodation fees that add to the overall cost. All in all, and despite selecting reasonably priced venues, a workshop day's cost totals to about € 130-150 as of 2016; the complete year-training's fee is, therefore, between € 4,500 and 5,000.

	Interactions and Relationships
	Confidence, Insight
	Inner Peace, Equanimity, Joy
	Body Awareness, Sexuality
	Mindfulness, Spirituality

*Figure 11 – Question Categories*

Let us now examine each category and their corresponding questions in turn; the intent, aim and hypothesis of each question are explained in the column to the right. For the original German version, cf. Figure 2 – Selected Questions in English and German, p.76.

### 7.3.2 Interactions and Relationships

#	Wording of the question	Aim/focus of the question
37	Within these workshops, there are things I should address, but I don't find the courage to do so.	<i>The "things that require courage to address" within a workshop are also meant as a space holder for similar situations in an individual's life that put their courage to the test.</i>
47	I am better at receiving than I am at giving.	<i>This question aimed at tracking the changes in being predominantly at the giving or receiving end during an encounter.</i>
60	To talk with my partner about emotions is (1) completely impossible... (10) an absolute given.	<i>Being able to express emotions within close relationships is expected to improve these relationships and therefore, to improve the couple's well-being.</i>
66	I get along with my father.	<i>Tensions within the relationships with one's parents are known as a major source of conflict and stress.</i>
74	I get along with my mother.	

These two last questions (66+74) were used as markers for different kinds of relationships, which, again, can be indicators of an individual's stress levels. This is an important component of *Systemic Constellations* group work, which is part of the YT. According to literature on Systemic Constellations (cf. Ruppert, 2007) and my own

experience, individuals tend to struggle forming stable relationships as long as they have not emancipated from and reconciled with their parents.

Question #47 (“I am better at receiving than I am at giving”) represents a good example of a well-intended question gone awry. While at first glance, the question seems to have its place – after all, balancing giving and receiving in any kind of relationship can be a goal worth striving for – it is precisely this balancing that makes the question turn out unhelpful for the purpose of this study: while some respondents rightly reported their improved giving, others, just as rightly, reported an improved ability to receive. Since either is good (Grant, 2014), depending on what the individual in question needed to develop, the results could but turn out completely inconclusive. Due to these characteristics, which would add confusion rather than insight to the analysis, Q#47 has been, in some clearly labeled cases, disregarded.

### 7.3.3 Confidence, Insight

3	I am increasingly figuring out my own mental patterns.	<i>This question explores the respondent's ability to look behind habits and mental constructs, thus discovering the driving forces behind them, such as bias, fear, or loneliness.</i>
6	As a woman, I get on well with women/as a man, I get on well with men.	<i>Being on good terms with one's own gender cohort is expected to improve one's self-image and confidence.</i>
16	When I want things to be different, I speak up.	<i>Aimed at finding whether the respondent is able to stand up for their wishes and opinions.</i>
28	I am able to say No when I mean No.	<i>The ability to stand one's ground and to say "no" is the prerequisite to a meaningful "yes".</i>
71	The things I learned in the workshops I put into practice in my everyday life.	<i>Theoretical knowledge is good; theory plus hands-on practice is better: do participants implement their know-how in their lives?</i>

Even though these questions seem to refer to abilities and skills that have, at first glance, little to do with *peaceability*, they are, in fact, the building blocks which lay the basis for

feeling safe, oriented and composed – important ingredients for an individual’s inner peace.

### 7.3.4 Inner Peace, Equanimity, Joy

10	I am able to forgive myself my imperfections.	<i>Coming to terms with one’s own flaws helps being more indulgent with the flaws of others.</i>
23	I understand myself better now than two months ago.	<i>Self-knowledge is a prerequisite for forgiveness (cf. question #10) and change.</i>
29	It is easy for me to reach out to people – not only here but in my everyday life, as well.	<i>Knowing that one can reach out to people in everyday life prevents feelings of loneliness.</i>
36	I can deal better with closeness now, than before.	<i>Many participants report that – although there is nothing they desire more than experiencing closeness to another person – they often get anxious and engage in self-sabotaging when said closeness, indeed, comes within reach.</i>
53	My dark places are just as threatening as two months ago.	<i>One of the goals of the YT is the development of confidence and courage in face of what the individual considers most threatening.</i>
62	Even when feeling lousy, overall I am still feeling pretty good.	<i>This question aims at the respondent’s ability to keep their sight on the big picture and not let themselves be discouraged by singular events; also, it includes the category of gratitude (G. R. Fox et al., 2015).</i>
63	I am able to observe closely everything I do.	<i>Evaluates self-awareness and the Inner Observer.</i>
67	I stay relaxed, despite nuisances and stress.	<i>Responding to stressful situations with serenity indicates a peaceful mind.</i>
70	I am the director of my own life script.	<i>Taking mature responsibility for one’s actions, reactions and life settings.</i>
72	My view of the world and of people has grown milder, somehow.	<i>Judging and condemning others’ ways less prevents clashes and aggressive encounters.</i>

Regarding Q#70: “being the director of one’s own life script” does not imply delusions of grandeur. At some point in their life, often when their teddy bear falls out of their crib for the first time, an individual typically comes to understand that they can manage and influence only so much in their lives. Rather than fantasies of omnipotence, this question

addresses the capability to take responsibility for one’s life as best as possible, without blaming others for misfortunes or lost teddies.

**7.3.5 Body Awareness & Sexuality**

11	I am proud of my body.	<i>An affirmative approach to one’s body – independently on its age, shape and size – is believed to indicate a person’s level of self-respect.</i>
13	Sexuality feels completely natural to me.	<i>This question probes into the individual’s approach to sexual activity. The more it feels “natural”, the less neurotic entanglement, and therefore tensions, s are to be expected.</i>
19	<i>Breath, voice and motion</i> kick in without even thinking of it.	<i>Stress-reducing, non-violent, energy-building emotion release, applied by using a threefold grounding method extensively taught during TWs.</i>

Question 11 links positive body image explicitly to self-respect. For women, being satisfied with their looks is “the third strongest predictor of overall life satisfaction, behind only satisfaction with financial situation and satisfaction with romantic partner.” (Frederick, Sandhu, Morse, & Swami, 2016) For men, appearance satisfaction is even more important and ranks second, yielding only to their financial situation.

**7.3.6 Awareness & Spirituality**

51	I can detect emotions and states of energy in others.	<i>Points to empathy and the ability to “read” nonverbal messages from others.</i>
57	Basically, all is good the way it is.	<i>Indicates not only a high level of peaceful equanimity, but, associated with it, also high frustration tolerance.</i>

Question #57 does not advocate resigned indifference towards unsettling phenomena such as domestic violence or social injustice; rather, it seeks to set an unagitated starting point for peaceful yet determined action, wherever required.

#### **7.4. Survey Discussion**

This chapter will discuss the outcome of all 444 (= 2x 222) surveys. My initial intent was to first look into overall trends in order to explore the big picture and find answers to the question, “Are there clear trends across all of the surveys and years?” In the next section, the focus would become more specific and will shift to changes and tendencies within the five categories of experience, as presented above. In the last part of this subchapter, the focus would turn to the questionnaires of selected individuals. This, such was my assumption, would open a window to a very personal, even intimate level of understanding of the individual attendee’s world, similar to snapshots of their inner landscape taken in the beginning of their YT and after they have worked their way through the training.

However, in the course of these analyses, it became evident that I was trying to hammer a nail into a board with a toothbrush: the tools I had at hand – the questionnaire, the setting as well as the analyzing methods – were too imprecise to deliver statistically relevant results from the data available. Therefore, in order to answer my research question, I needed to rely on a proper hammer, in this case, the qualitative analysis of my in-depth interviews. Examining the survey data had not been in vain, though: as we will see, even without proper statistical analysis, it provided interesting insights and raised questions which later were addressed and explored more thoroughly in the interviews.

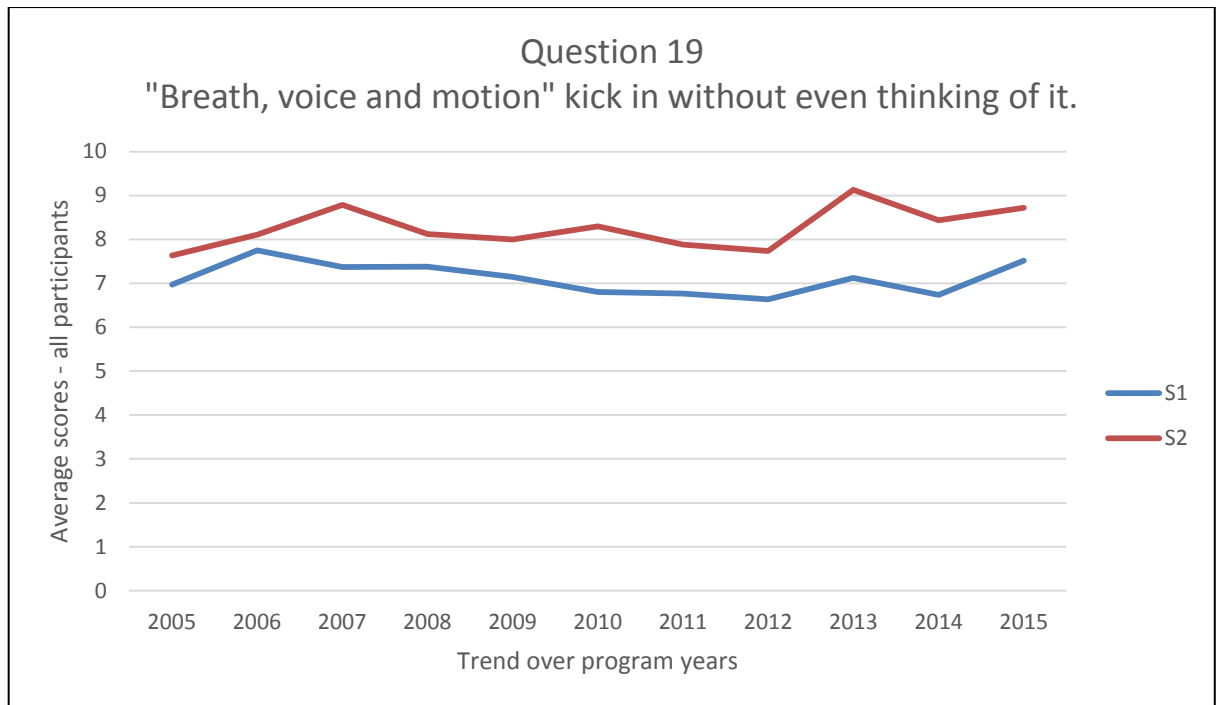
### **7.4.1 Trends over the full Timeframe of Observation**

The data in this section represent the averaged responses to each question over the observation period between 2005 and 2015. This allows for a rough overview over the big picture, exploring whether there are indicators of YT attendees' development.

We will start with Question #19 since it shows a rather consistent difference between S1 and S2: "*Breath, voice and motion* kick in without even thinking of it." (Section 6.4.4, p. 190). Even though the difference is very slight and therefore statistically irrelevant, the data do seem to indicate a trend: the results from the second survey S2 are higher than those obtained from the first survey (S1), throughout, independently of the year in which the YT took place.

The response level (around 7) is relatively high even at the time of the first survey: clearly, the attendees are already familiar with the concept of BVM and apply it with confidence. This is not surprising, since all of them have attended at least five full days of TW previous to the YT, where BVM has been extensively taught and practiced.





*Figure 12 – Question 19*

This is in contrast for the results of question #23, “I can figure myself out better now, than two months ago.” Here, we can observe the most fluctuating variation between S1 and S2 among the 25 questions: in four YTs within the observation period, the results of the second survey were slightly *lower* than in the first. This suggests that after the YT, respondents felt, on average, less certain about their ability to “figure themselves out”, than in the beginning; therefore, even though the results from S2 are still higher in 7 out of 11 YTs, these data give a somewhat inconclusive tendency in reference to question 23.

Now, how do we explain these outcomes? A cohort of YT attendees who just spent nine months investing time, money and effort into precisely that – “figuring themselves out”, meaning, practicing self-awareness, self-reflection and mindfulness – ends up assessing that they know less about themselves now, than they did in the beginning of their YT?

We have no means to determine the statistical significance levels of these fluctuations, and there is a real chance that the differences here are not relevant; therefore it would be inappropriate to speculate on the putative differences. Nonetheless, I will use this opportunity to reflect on possible reasons for apparent setbacks in the attendees' self-assessments, because it is a phenomenon that comes up in sharing circles as well as in conversations and reports.

One reason might be that as their self-awareness and insight increases, attendees realize that they only believed they knew themselves thoroughly. Having gone through the challenging and often revealing structures of the YT, some attendees might come to acknowledge that they had been deluding themselves and that their level of self-knowledge is, despite – or rather because of – their new self-awareness, in fact, lower than they used to think. This onset of humility illustrates the “self-pruning” of overly developed confidence (narcissistic personality traits) mentioned in Section 6.4.2 (p. 175). I would go as far as to suggest that the apparently poor performance in the “crossing” years ( $S1 > S2$ ), in fact, indicates a particularly high increase of self-reflection among that year's cohort, which is a crucial prerequisite for a realistic self-assessment.

Attendees are frequently confused about “where they stand” in relation to their individual goals as well as in comparison with their peers: after experiencing a few moments of inner peace in a meditation, some wonder whether they have possibly reached enlightenment; similarly, having dealt with their jealousy issues once without having a heated argument, some believe that this was it – now they are done with their personal development. This is why realistic self-assessment, grounded in self-awareness as well as in the group's feedback, is so pivotal: it provides the attendee with coordinates of “where he/she is” on their developmental journey. Based on this continuously updated

self-knowledge, solid motivation can be generated and the next meaningful steps can be planned.

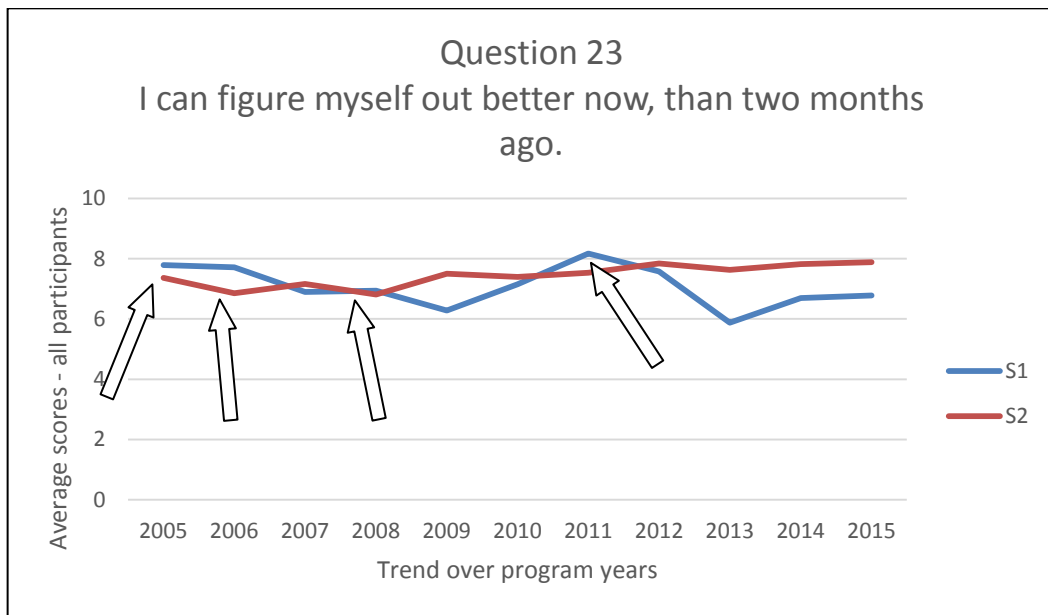
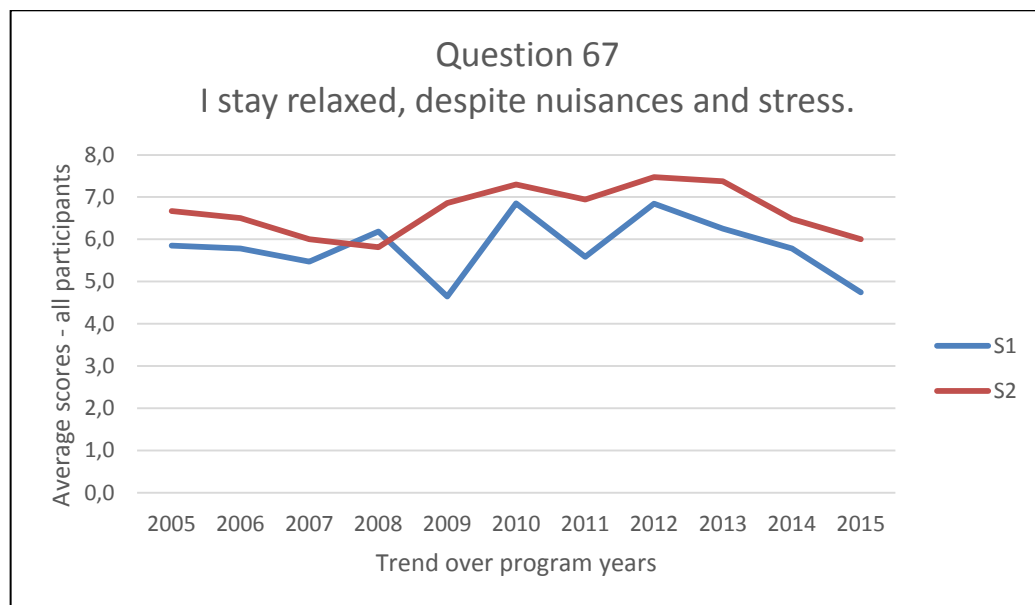


Figure 13 – Question 23

Next, we will discuss one more example which points towards a trend over the entire observation period. Question #67, “I stay relaxed, despite nuisances and stress” is a strong indicator for what we are looking for in this study. The ability to stay calm, even though there might be pressure and tension building up, can be interpreted as a sign of having reached poise and stable inner peace. This is no easy task, and the data do not seem to contradict this claim: in two years, the first survey’s average ratings were below 5, while in any other year, they would never increase enough to reach 7, thus suggesting a cautious self-assessment – the attendees seem to believe that there is still a lot of room for improvement. At the end of their YT, even the highest S2 ratings for this question never exceed 7.5, suggesting that even though slim growth has been recorded in each one of the years (except for 2008), the attendees are well aware that this goal of equanimity and *peaceability* is not quite achieved yet, even though they are about to graduate from their YT.

We will have opportunity to explore this question in-depth in chapter 8, when we turn to the qualitative analysis.



*Figure 14 – Question 67*

### **Summary: Trends**

Examining the data in a way that provides the big picture and allows for detecting trends is a first step in this survey examination: while it does not allow for reliable statistical analysis, it does suggest where there are tendencies pointing in one direction or whether the data are mostly contradictory.

The total of questions analyzed was 264 (11 years of observation, 24 questions per year, disregarding the misleading Q#47). In 26 cases, attendees rated a question, on average, lower in the second survey than in the first one; in 11 cases, the rating was identical in the beginning and in the end of the YT. Subtracting these 26 incidents where the result of S2 was lower than S1, as well as the 11 incidents where S2 was equal to S1, from the total of 264 questions, we are left with 227 questions: in these, the rating in S2 exceeded the one in S1. This means that 86% of all questions throughout the observation period have been rated higher in the second survey than in the first one, thus pointing

towards growth and improvement among the YT attendees. This unassertive trend, however, needs to be explored further with qualitative methods.

A possible reason for the quite frequent phenomenon of subjective setbacks among advanced attendees might be provided by the *hedonic set point* theory, also called *hedonic adaptation* (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005), which we will repeatedly refer to in the next chapters. According to this theory from which Positive Psychology had drawn some of its concepts (Seligman & Csíkszentmihályi, 2014), humans adapt to changed circumstances without too much change to the subjective perception of their own happiness: after a year, “[...] winners of lotteries do not report themselves as being much happier than other people, and those who were paralyzed in an accident do not report themselves as being much less happy.” (Brickman et al., 1978)

Applying this theory to the examined data, both quantitative and qualitative, the enthusiasm about or even just the awareness of the progress the YT attendees experience when said progress becomes apparent to them, fades away with time and becomes their new *hedonic set-point*, in other words, their *normality*. The hedonic set point theory, therefore, “might contribute to the finding that groups in different circumstances report more similar levels of happiness than one would expect.” (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007) In our setting, the individual improves in a given area, acclimatizes to the new level and loses the reference point to realities past – their improved *now* feels just as “normal” as their less-developed *before*.

#### **7.4.2 Examination of Cohorts by Categories**

In the previous section, we were examining all responses to one particular question throughout the observation period and comparing the large-scale results. In this subchapter, we will move closer by averaging the data for each of the five categories and

comparing S1 and S2 within each of them. This will allow for a deeper look into the dynamics of the attendees' development, while still keeping our eyes on the big picture.

The following five sets of data represent the five categories of questions (p. 224), broken up into male and female responses and the correspondent age cohorts. Here is an example of how the responses to all questions within each of the categories were averaged out: the female results of age cohort B for the category *Interactions & Relationships* (questions 37, 47, 60, 66 and 74) were summed up and then divided by N=number of respondents, thus obtaining the data. This procedure was repeated for males and females and all age cohorts except for A: since age cohort A represents only 2 female individuals, including their responses would have given them disproportional weight and distorted the results.

Again, none of the examined increments or trends is meant to deliver sound statistical results; they are presented exclusively for the charts purpose of an overview, while becoming familiar with the questions and categories which will be the base for the qualitative analysis in chapter 8.

**7.4.2.1. Categories: Interactions and Relationships**

37	Within these workshops, there are things I should address, but I don't find the courage to do so.
47	I am better at receiving than I am at giving.
60	To talk with my partner about emotions is (1) completely impossible... (10) an absolute given.
66	I get along with my father.
74	I get along with my mother.

The five questions used to obtain the data for this category address topics such as reconciliation, courage, speaking about emotions and ratio of receiving/giving.

We can observe moderately increased ratings, throughout, i.e.  $S2 > S1$  in almost all age cohorts. An exception from this apparent trend are the youngest males (ages 20-29) who rate their interactions and relationships slightly lower ( $S1 > S2$ ); on the other end of the scale, mature females in age cohort F report a comparably high increase (+2.4).

The relatively clear difference between male and female ratings in the first survey becomes almost negligible in S2 (cf. chart below): it seems that, even though both sexes start out with rather cautious ratings (females average 6.4, males 6.8 in S1), the females experience a more pronounced improvement and catch up with their male peers (S2: females average 7.0, males 7.1). This female improvement is particularly visible in age cohorts B and F, who seem to be the most susceptible for enhancing their relationship skills: the increments in the second youngest and most mature females are +0.9 and +2.4, respectively, while among the males, it is the cohorts D and E who appear to benefit most (+0.6 each).

Despite the increment of +2.4 in female group F being noticeably higher than the average, without a rigorous statistical analysis, it cannot be properly verified. However, it seems to accord with my observations over the years: I have witnessed that individuals from this cohort – females 60+ – indeed, frequently show remarkable results. One possible reason, typically voiced in sharing rounds, is that before they committed to TWs, these women had more or less resigned themselves to what they had: failing relationships or none at all; a lack of courage and tools to express their emotions and frequently, a grudge against their elderly or late parents.

The fact that they signed up for something as foreign to their own upbringing in the 1960s as a TWs shows that they have not quite given up on themselves but, as some of them express it, want to “give it one more go”. This cohort is, according to my observations, the one most eager to apply the lessons learned during their YT in their

everyday lives, once they have breathed the fresh air of joy, zest of life and a stable inner peace. I fondly remember a shy, unconfident lawyer who was my peer at the second TW I attended, back in 1996. A few days after the TW, she celebrated her 60<sup>th</sup> birthday with a circle of friends in a pub – and to everybody’s breathless surprise, merrily danced on a table.

The chart below shows the averaged ratings obtained for each cohort, sex and survey, as well as the overall average result for each sex and survey. For a better overview, two charts – one for the female results, the other for the males – translate these figures into a visual.



<b>Female</b>	<b>Age B</b>	<b>Age C</b>	<b>Age D</b>	<b>Age E</b>	<b>Age F</b>	<b>Average</b>
<b>S1</b>	6.3	7.0	6.4	6.1	4.8	<b>6.4</b>
<b>S2</b>	7.2	7.4	6.8	6.9	7.2	<b>7.0</b>
<b>Male</b>						
<b>S1</b>	6.8	6.5	7.1	6.5	7.2	<b>6.8</b>
<b>S2</b>	6.6	6.9	7.7	7.1	7.3	<b>7.1</b>

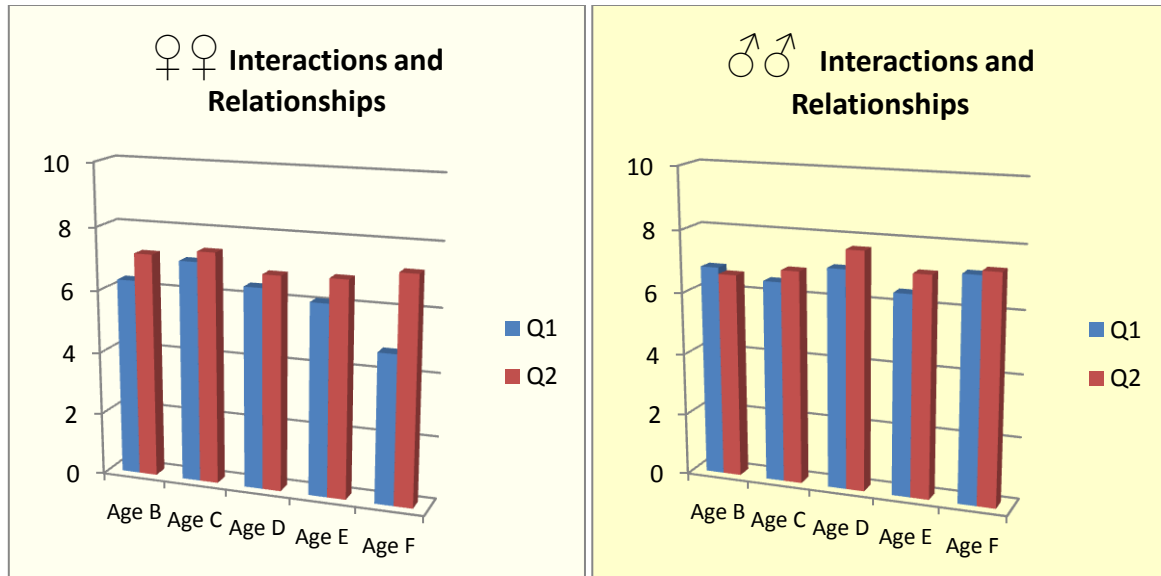


Figure 15 – Data for “Categories: Interactions and Relationships”

**7.4.2.2. Categories: Confidence, Insight**

3	I am increasingly figuring out my own mental patterns.
6	As a woman, I get on well with women/as a man, I get on well with men.
16	When I want things to be different, I speak up.
28	I am able to say No when I mean No.
71	The things I learned in the workshops I put into practice in my everyday life.

This category is made up by five questions; they explore the respondents’ development in fields such as confidence, clear communication, getting along with one’s own gender group and implementing new insights and methods into their daily lives.

Unlike in the previous set of data, both males and females give relatively high evaluations in the purple (Confidence and Insight) category, right from the start: the overall average  $\bar{X} = 7.0$  for the females,  $\bar{X} = 7.6$  for the males. Similar to Figure 15, oben,

we note a steady increase  $S1 < S2$  for all cohorts, except for a sudden drop in the male cohort F (60+), which decreases by 0.8. It is noteworthy that this is the one cohort who reported the highest S1 rate of all.

Given the life experience of the respondents in cohort F, their S2 results could be interpreted as having felt strongly confident and self-assured, already, when they started their YT. This confidence might have been put under high scrutiny or even thoroughly shaken by some of the structures, resulting in a more modest assessment of their own abilities, in the end of their YT. This is to be evaluated as a positive development, since one of the aims of the YT is to give its attendees the opportunity to learn and practice what they are not yet good at – confidence for some, modesty for others.

These responses seem to indicate that the cohorts who have benefited most in this category were the youngest females (+1.1), for one, and the largest male cohorts, aged between 40 and 59 (D, E +0.8 and +0.9). This confirms observations made in the field: for one, young women embrace encouragement towards clear communication, courage, and establishing healthy boundaries with particular eagerness (cf. Section 8.6, “Chloe: Touch and Gender”, p. 344).

For the other, the questions – or rather, statements – in this category reflect skills attributed to individuals with solid self-esteem. However, despite the subconscious image deeply rooted in attendees of the ideal “manly man” who has mastered all of those skills (Raether & Stelzer, 2014), these expectations are often set too high: considerable numbers of middle-aged males among the IN’s attendees visibly thrive and find their peace after meeting much less ambitious goals – for instance, learning how to say, “No” without immediately feeling guilty. Having a life-long burden such as this lifted off their shoulders may have been part of what resembles a leap in this cohort’s rating.

Female	Age B	Age C	Age D	Age E	Age F	Average
S1	6.6	7.4	7.2	7.6	7.8	7.3
S2	7.7	7.7	8.0	8.0	8.1	7.8
Male						
S1	7.2	7.3	7.1	6.5	8.4	7.0
S2	7.4	7.7	7.9	7.4	7.6	7.6

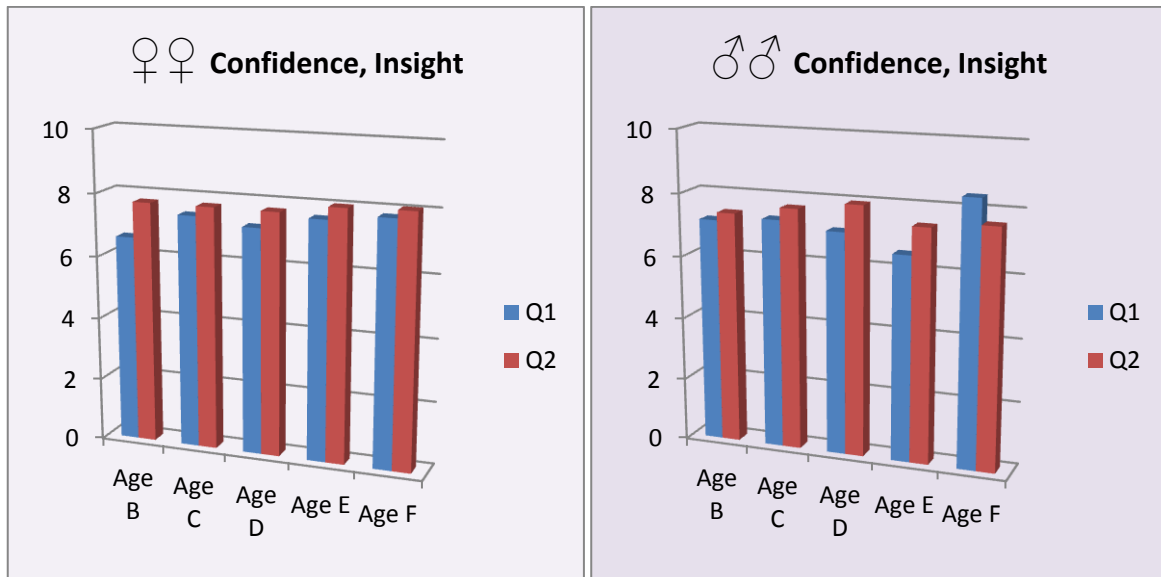


Figure 16– Data for “Categories: Confidence, Insight”

### 7.4.2.3. Categories: Inner Peace, Equanimity, Joy

10	I am able to forgive myself my imperfections.
23	I understand myself better now than two months ago.
29	It is easy for me to reach out to people – not only here but in my everyday life, as well.
36	I can deal better with closeness now, than before.
53	My dark places are just as threatening as two months ago.
62	Even when feeling lousy, overall I am still feeling pretty good.
63	I am able to observe closely everything I do.
67	I stay relaxed, despite nuisances and stress.
70	I am the director of my own life script.
72	My view of the world and of people has grown milder, somehow.

Since this category involves the questions most closely linked to the topic of *peaceability*, it comprises more questions than any other category. The ten questions in this category aim at the ability to forgive, develop understanding for oneself and others

as well as self-knowledge, responsibility, courage, gratitude, kindness despite stress and an overall indulging and non-judgmental attitude.

It is noteworthy that, consistently through male and female cohorts, the self-assessment in this category seems to increase with age, peaking at 60+, with a minor decline in females ages 41-50. In males, a similar decline starts in the same age cohort, but unfolds more fully a decade later (ages 51-60). A correlation between the drop in the individual's peace of mind and the onset of the natural aging process with its impact on self-perception within a demanding society can be hypothesized.

The responses seem to suggest that the 60+ (cohort F) find their personal peace quite naturally: their S1 rating surpasses 8.0 for males as well as females. However, we need to keep in mind that all YT attendees have previously already worked on their personal development, mindfulness and inner peace; therefore, part of this assessment might be credited to those experiences. This is, of course, true for all respondents, independently on their cohort. Despite their high S1 rating, cohort F succeeds to surpass their S1 results in S2: their peaceful response to internal and external stimuli has, apparently, grown even more stable by the end of their YT.

The overall increment between S1 and S2 is, similar to the previous sets of data. The cohort that seemed to have benefited most among women is cohort B, ages 20-29 (+1.6); among men, it is cohort D, ages 41-50 (+0.8). These modest increments in the one category, of all things, that deals explicitly with peace of mind, contradict the other sources of data collection for this study: observation, written testimonies, as well as in-depth interviews point towards a significantly more pronounced development of *peaceability* among the YT attendees than what the survey data are able to reflect (cf. Section 8, Analysis of Interview Data, below). A possible reason might lie in the questionnaire which had not been explicitly designed for evaluating *peaceability*, thus

rendering less clear results than the in-depth interviews. Future research might benefit from drawing from tools developed for measuring nonviolence, such as the recent 90-item Diamond Scale of Nonviolence (DSN) (Mayton, 2014).

<b>Female</b>	Age B	Age C	Age D	Age E	Age F	Average
<b>S1</b>	6.0	7.1	7.0	7.1	8.2	<b>7.0</b>
<b>S2</b>	7.6	7.4	7.6	7.8	8.4	<b>7.6</b>
<b>Male</b>						
<b>S1</b>	6.2	7.2	7.0	6.8	8.1	<b>7.0</b>
<b>S2</b>	6.7	7.4	7.8	7.5	8.4	<b>7.5</b>

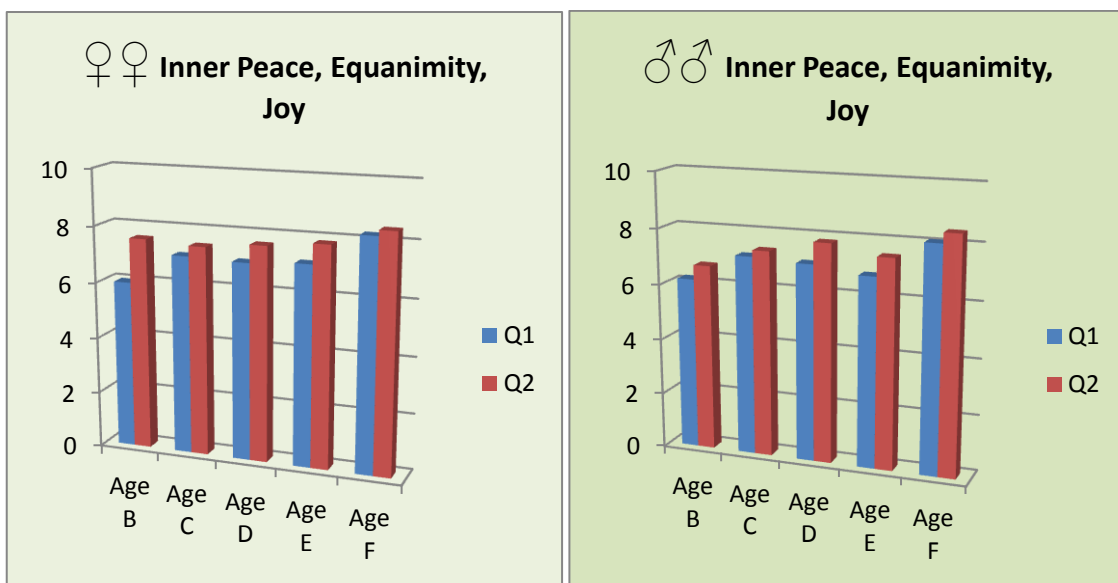


Figure 17– Data for “Categories: Inner Peace, Equanimity, Joy”

**7.4.2.4. Categories: Body Awareness & Sexuality**

11	I am proud of my body.
13	Sexuality feels completely natural to me.
19	<i>Breath, voice and motion</i> kick in without even thinking of it.

This category comprises three questions and explores the level of comfort the respondents experience with their body, with sexuality and the physical expression of their emotional landscape (Q#19, *Breath, voice and motion*, cf. Section 6.4.4).

This is the category that shows, within the limited informative value of the survey data, the most obvious increase across all cohorts:  $\bar{X}=+0.6$  for males and  $+0.8$  for females. Even though males reach single higher ratings, it is the females who seem to benefit most from the YT in the category *Body Awareness & Sexuality*: males and females start out with the same rating ( $\bar{X}=7.1$ ) in S1, but while male respondents reach  $\bar{X}=7.7$  in S2, the females take it up to 7.9.

This does not come as a surprise, since the repressive, albeit demanding sexual culture in which most of the attendees grew up, the lack of proper sex-education and the pressure towards beauty under all circumstances impacts women, in particular (Chapkins, 1986). The contents of the YT, such as re-defining beauty, taking out performance pressure, and making sexuality “feel natural”, are, according to what these data suggest, welcomed by both genders, but especially by women.

Once more, young women (B) seem most susceptible to changes and report an increment of  $+1.5$ , followed by cohort F with  $+1.0$ . Among the male sample, the changes are less salient, with  $+0.9$  in cohorts B and F and  $+0.8$  in D.

It is interesting to observe that it is the cohorts at both ends of the scale who seem to be impacted most in the category of body awareness and sexuality. In the younger ones, it could be interpreted as “a sigh of relief” in the face of an “authority” (in this case, the workshop leaders), entitling them to relax, to let go of the beauty-and-performance race and simply enjoy being who they are. This interpretation is apparently supported by the observation that the female cohort B presents the lowest initial rating of the entire sample:  $S1=5.9$ . While their  $S2=7.4$  is still the lowest result among females, suggesting the young women’s still ongoing insecurity about their bodies and their sexuality, it also might be reflecting this cohort’s eagerness to tackle their issues.

The males in cohort E (ages 50-60) rate lowest in their first survey; this might be attributed to the insecurities and self-doubts associated with middle age: the youthfulness and performance reliability are gone for good and the attendees need to re-define and re-discover themselves. However, this process does not seem to unfold easily, as the ratings of their S2 might be suggesting: despite having clearly made up ground, cohort E's results stay below all other male peers.

As for the male and female cohorts F, their increases of +0.9 and +1.0 might be pointing towards a similar relief reaction: at age 60+, it eases the mind and boosts self-confidence to learn (and even more so, to genuinely experience) that flawless performance and youthful looks are not necessarily the sole ingredients that make a person attractive to other people, while expressing yourself naturally, thus allowing for more authenticity, indeed boosts one's appeal. As a female attendee expressed it in her written testimony after a workshop: "[In this group,] the love-for-all is palpable - no matter whether man or woman, old or young, tall or short, fat or thin, all are equal and love can flow from heart to heart [...]".

The friendly attitude towards one's own material self is a traditional Tantric cornerstone. By making their peaces with their bodies and bodily functions, attendees not only follow the classic Tantric path: they also build a strong foundation for loving kindness towards themselves which, according to teachings both in Christian and Buddhist traditions, is the base for loving kindness towards others. Since loving kindness can be interpreted as the opposite of hostility, it is of unfathomable value to peaceful relations within small and larger societal systems.

<b>Female</b>	<b>Age B</b>	<b>Age C</b>	<b>Age D</b>	<b>Age E</b>	<b>Age F</b>	<b>Average</b>
<b>S1</b>	5.9	7.2	7.2	7.0	7.3	<b>7.1</b>
<b>S2</b>	7.4	7.9	8.2	8.0	8.3	<b>7.9</b>
<b>Male</b>						
<b>S1</b>	6.7	7.2	7.4	6.6	8.0	<b>7.1</b>
<b>S2</b>	7.6	7.7	8.2	7.1	8.9	<b>7.7</b>

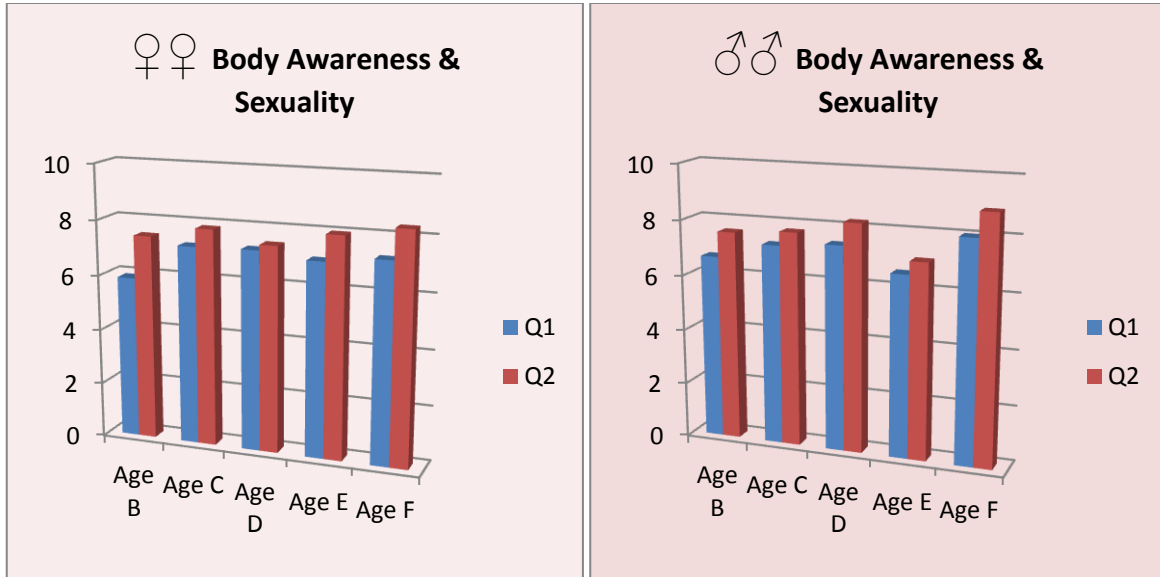


Figure 18– Data for “Categories: Body Awareness and Sexuality”

**7.4.2.5. Categories: Mindfulness & Spirituality**

51	I can detect emotions and states of energy in others.
57	Basically, all is good the way it is.

This category’s results are taken from two questions only, and explore the respondents’ empathic skills as well as their ability to happily accept things as they are (equanimity, thankfulness, serenity, inner peace).

The overall ratings are comparatively high both in S1 and S2, with exception of the young females who, again, give a low first assessment S1=6.7. Aside from that, female cohorts seem to feel, quite unsurprisingly (Hoffman, 1977), that their empathy and equanimity are well developed from the start (ratings around 8.0). Male attendees, on the contrary, appear more cautious in S1. In S2, the females report barely any



increase, except for cohort B who catches up with the others, rating S2=8.1 (increment of +1.4). Most men, on the other hand, make a leap forward, particularly the eldest cohort (increment of +0.7). Overall, both males and females grow by the same increment.

While the young females in cohort B seem to improve their confidence (as mentioned above, +1.4), their male counterparts start with a higher rating (S1=7.3 vs. S1=6.7) but fail to develop further, giving the impression as if they had ended up questioning their first rating, by giving a lower assessment in S2. The same dynamics can be observed in males and females C. Even though it may look like these cohorts missed the target – after all, more capability to perceive others' mental/emotional states, as well as increased thankfulness/equanimity would be considered an asset in the given setting – it might as well be another possible sign of a healthy re-calibrating of an overly confident first rating, after having gone through the YT's numerous self-exploring experiences.

<b>Female</b>	<b>Age B</b>	<b>Age C</b>	<b>Age D</b>	<b>Age E</b>	<b>Age F</b>	<b>Average</b>
<b>S1</b>	6.7	8.5	7.8	8.0	8.1	<b>8.0</b>
<b>S2</b>	8.1	8.4	8.5	8.3	8.1	<b>8.3</b>
<b>Male</b>						
<b>S1</b>	7.3	7.8	7.2	7.1	7.8	<b>7.3</b>
<b>S2</b>	7.1	7.6	7.9	7.7	8.5	<b>7.6</b>

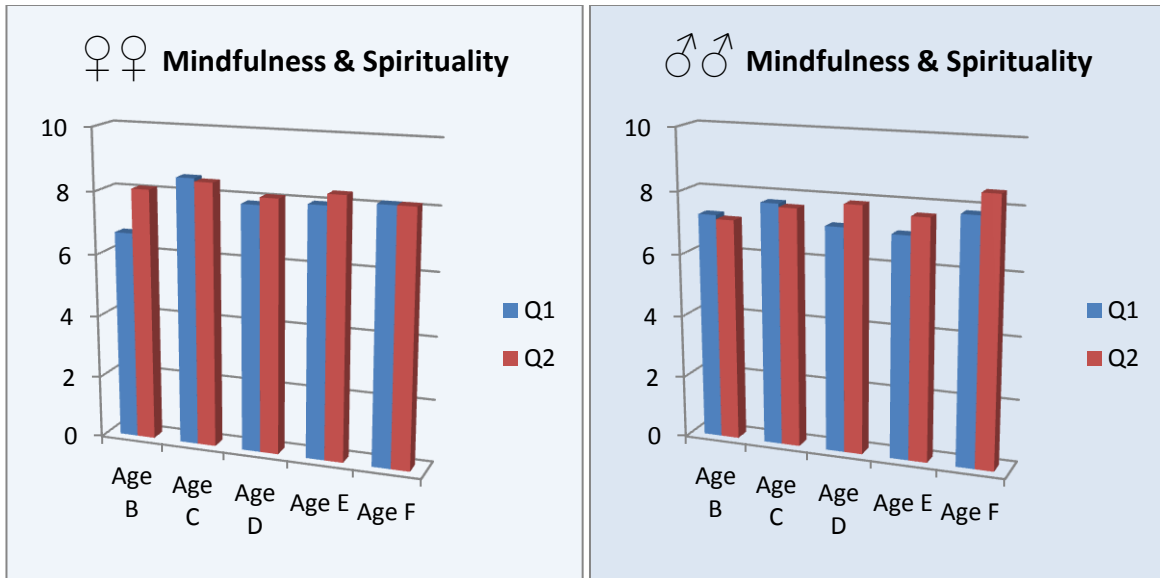


Figure 19 – Data for “Categories: Mindfulness & Spirituality”

**Summary: Cohorts by Categories**

All five categories seem to confirm the trend shown in Section 7.4.1, (p. 229), indicating statistically insignificant, yet consistent increments: *Interactions & Relationships*, *Confidence & Insight and Inner Peace*, *Equanimity*, *Joy* (yellow, purple, green) show similar increments over S1 (approximately +0.55), while *Mindfulness & Spirituality* shows an even less marked increment of +0.35. The experiences shared by the six interviewees points towards more pronounced results: they report on having gone through considerable personal development and describe distinct changes in all five categories (cf. chapter 8).

The increment that seemed to be the most salient has been reported in the red category *Body Awareness & Sexuality*. By this, the attendees apparently signal that one of the goals of the YT, namely helping individuals feel comfortable with their bodies and regard sexuality as something beautiful and natural, is, indeed, being achieved.



Figure 20 – Categories: Increments comparing S1 and S2

When examining the cohorts' ratings in the five categories, we need to consider that cohort A was so underrepresented that it needed to be disregarded in order to ensure meaningful results; cohort F has a somewhat limited representative power, since it comprises only 16% of the respondents. The steady improvement in the age cohorts B-E is therefore a more reliable indicator for the sample's improvements, thus contradicting Lugmayr's findings, which suggested that these cohorts do not benefit more than others. (Section 5.1.2, p. 90)

The category-based data presented in this subchapter confirms the results of the previous examination of general trends: there are a few cases where the results of the first survey S1 are higher than those of S2, and even fewer S1=S2 instances; nonetheless, it seems like there is an overall tendency towards a higher rating at S2. Again, it is

probable that many of these changes are not statistically relevant, but the qualitative analysis will allow for a better assessment of these results' value for my research question.

### **7.4.3 Examination of intraindividual Changes**

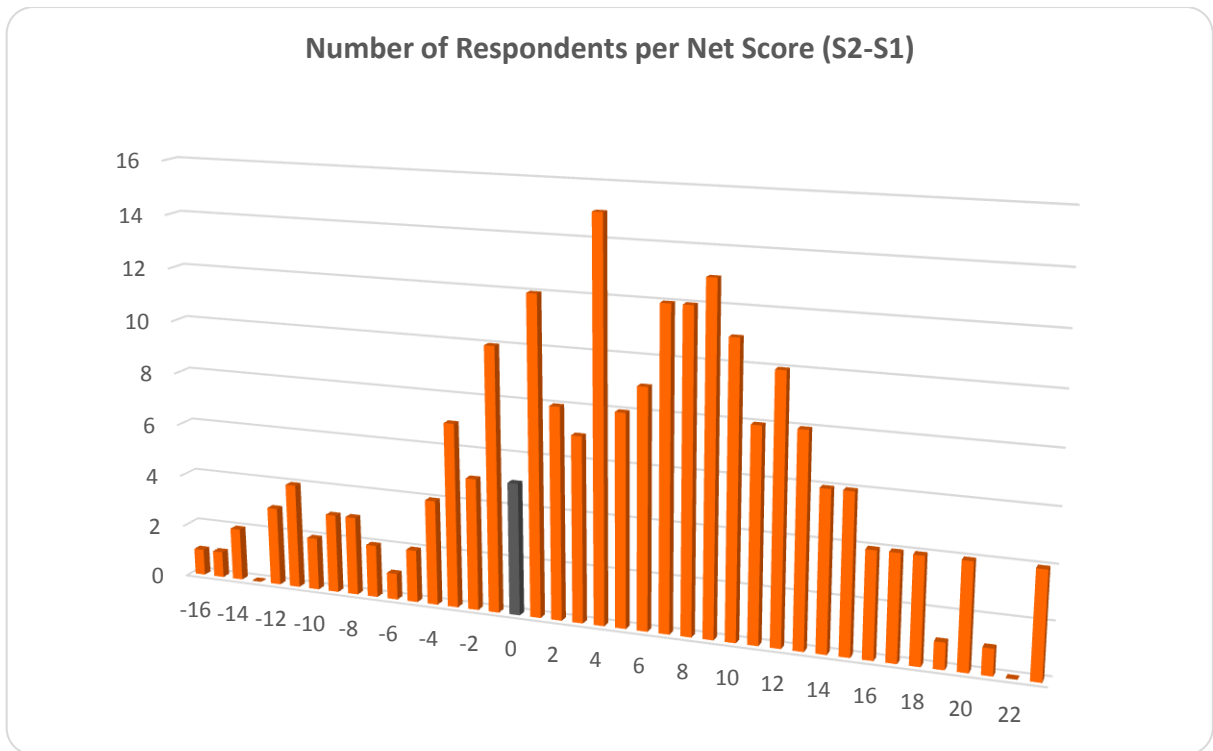
In this chapter, we will zoom into the survey picture and look into the ratings of individual respondents, focusing on representative individuals and their responses to the 25 questions selected from the initial total of 82. The selection of respondents analyzed in this chapter was based on a number of criteria, in order to ensure a representative sample. While disregarding the two highest and two lowest-scoring respondents, the sample comprises

- different age cohorts and both sexes
- a wide range of YTs attended by the respondents
- negative, positive and neutral *net scores*.

A *net score* describes the number of an individual's positive scores added to their negative scores. For instance, an individual who, in their S2, assessed 15 questions higher and 10 lower than in S1 (independently on the difference's value), would show a net score of +5. This facilitates a first rough classification of individual sets of data before examining them in detail.

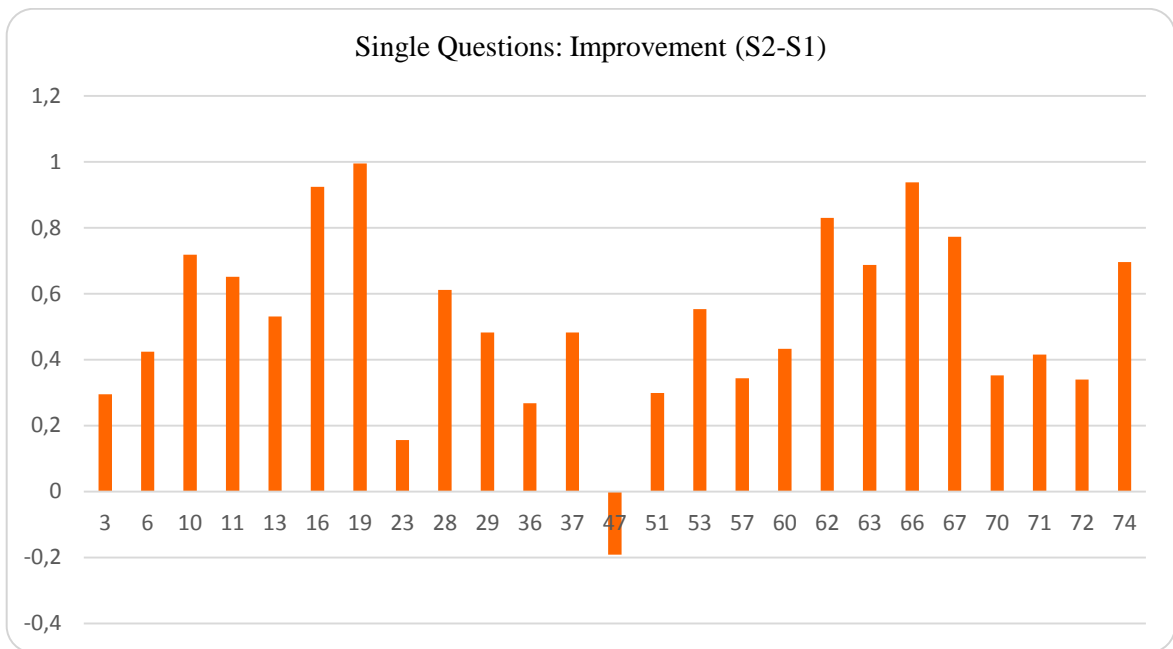
There seems to be is a tendency towards positive net scores, indicating that the improvements on individual level, however slight, outnumber the declines. This is particularly evident in the positive scores, going up to 23, while the negative ones only descend to -16. Generally, that is, we can say that people had a positive assessment of the YT.

It is not surprising to see fewer results at either far end of the field: this is to be anticipated with a classical bell-curve distribution. What does strike as unexpected is that the field does not spike around 0 (equal number of improvements and declines); rather, the ratings are particularly high at +1 and +4, again at +9 and even between +16 and +23. However, with a larger N, this result could be expected to even out into a typical bell-curve distribution. The chart below gives an overview over the apparent tendencies towards positive, neutral and negative net scores; instances of S1=S2 had no influence on this calculation.



*Figure 21 – Number of Respondents per net Score (S2-S1)*

Another way of making the consistency of positive ratings visible is to average out all respondents' individual ratings of each question, as shown in the chart below. It reflects the entire sample's (N=222) ratings: after summing up all increments and decreases for all 25 questions, the data shows positive growth in all instances but in Q#47 with its problematic wording (cf. Section 7.3.2, p. 224; in about 50% of the questions, the reported growth appears to be higher than 0.5).



*Figure 22 – Single Questions: Improvement S2-S1*

Here are the questions that seem to spike highest. They can, therefore, also be expected to be among the high-rating ones in the individual charts. Since attendees appear to give them particular weight, we can expect to find references to these particular questions in the in-depth interviews, as well:

19	<i>Breath, voice and motion</i> kick in without even thinking of it.
16	When I want things to be different, I speak up.
66	I get along with my father.
62	Even when feeling lousy, overall I am still feeling pretty good.
67	I stay relaxed, despite nuisances and stress.
10	I am able to forgive myself my imperfections.
74	I get along with my mother.

Before taking a closer look at individual charts, I will explain the charts' captions:

- For technical reasons, the questions are referred to by number. For their full wordings, refer to Figure 2 – Selected Questions in English and German, p. 78, oben.
- The charts are coded as follows:
  - #X refers to the number of that particular respondent in the original data chart
  - F/M indicates female/male
  - the following letters, B to F, refer to the age cohort
  - next, the year of this attendee's YT, and
  - lastly the figure indicating the net score reached (number of questions with increases, minus number of questions with decreases).

As an example, let us take a look at this code: #34 MB/2006/+6. This indicates the participant number (34) and demographic information (male, age cohort B, age 20-29). The year refers to the YT of 2006. The indicator +6 states the *net score*, i.e. the difference between the number of positive responses and the number of negative responses to all questions: thus +6 indicates that there were positive responses to 6 more questions than negative responses. This simple scoring allows for comparison between individual responses.

- The average of each of the graphs is, for better comparison, given by a dotted line of corresponding color.

- Question #47 is included but without interpretation, due to the reasons mentioned earlier.

Examining the individual charts is a fascinating experience, since each of them is as unique as a fingerprint, reflecting the attendee's inner conflicts, victories and doubts; they can help the researcher discern subtle dynamics and processes on a very personal level. To begin with, we will look at two examples from either far ends of the scale – i.e. very high and very low scores – and examine more moderate outcomes, after that.

*Example 1 – Female B, Score +23*

This female in her twenties presents the exceptionally high net score of +21. As we can see, she improved in all questions except #19 and #57, which remained unchanged (S1=S2). Her ratings stay mostly in the upper middle field between 5 and 9, which suggests that she is not somebody who embraces extremes easily (as opposed to examples 2, 4 and 6).

Such an unusually high score raises the question whether this attendee might have simply tried to impress somebody by high ratings – herself, or perhaps her instructors. However, there is a gap of 7 months between S1 and S2, and the respondents do not receive a copy of their surveys. It is, therefore, highly unlikely that she would remember her responses from S1. This is confirmed by viewing other charts, where some of the ratings S1 vs. S2 differ considerably, suggesting that the respondents do not build their S2 on the previous S1.

It is noteworthy that this respondent improved most in #3 and #23; both address a better self-assessment: “I am increasingly figuring out my own mental patterns” and “I can understand myself better now, than two months ago.” Overall, these data give the



impression of an individual who knew how to take optimal advantage of the contents the YT had to offer.

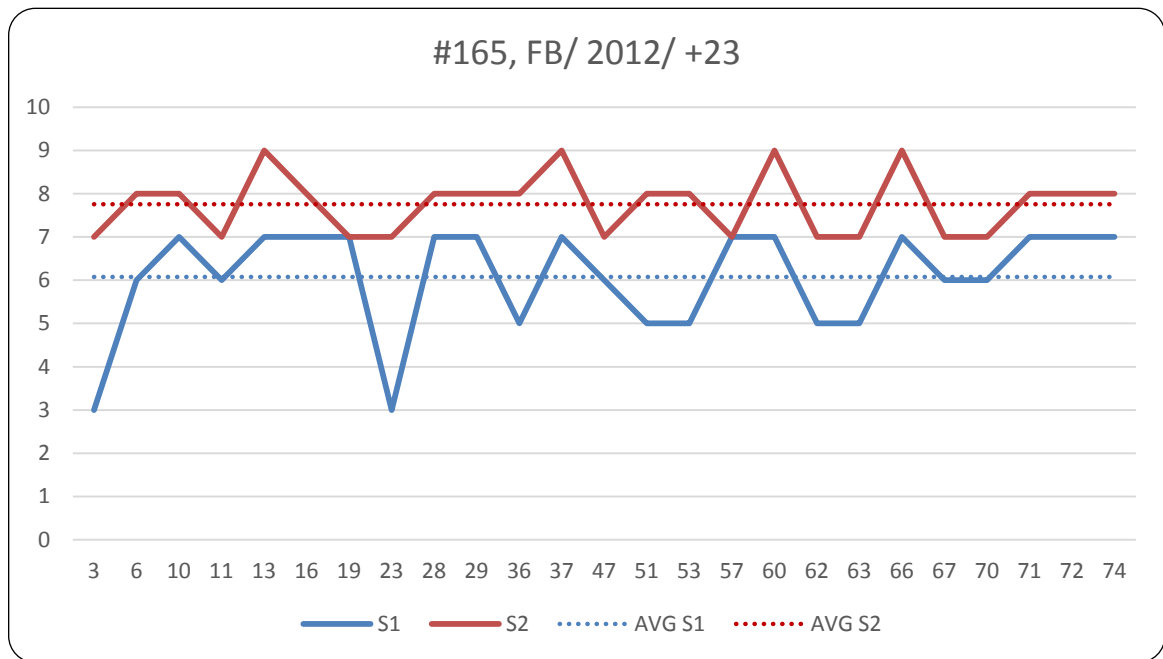


Figure 23 – Example 1 – Female B, Score +23

*Example 2 – Male E, Score -14*

This male age 50-59 is an example for a high negative net score as well as for leaning towards extreme ratings. He rates only two questions higher in S2 than in S1: #3, “I am increasingly figuring out my own mental patterns” and #23, “I can understand myself better now, than two months ago”, while 7 stayed unchanged and all others decreased.

Since the survey questions – except for #47 – leave little doubt about what would be considered an improvement, it is unlikely that what seems to be a change for the worse has been caused by misunderstanding the questions. When examining his ratings closer, there are indicators suggesting a possible imbalance in his social network: while the relationship with his mother stays unchanged at a high 8, the relationship with his father (given the respondent’s age cohort, probably long deceased) deteriorates from 9 to 6 – an effect we rarely observe after a YT which includes a number of structures aimed

at making peaces with one's parents. In addition, #60, which rates the quality of communication in the respondent's romantic relationship, decreases from 10 to 8, and his courage and capability to tackle his "dark places" (#53) even from 9 to 5. With these ratings, it does not come as a surprise that he does not feel like he is "the director of his own life script" (#70, drops from 10 to 5).

The underlying reason for what resembles a personal crisis might possibly be found in the only two questions he noted an improvement in: #3 and #23, which both address the respondent's ability to look behind their own masks. It might well be that he reached a development stage typical for TW attendees – and often particularly shocking for mature participants – in which the individual comes to realize that their self-image is not as storm-proof as they thought, when some of their beliefs about themselves and the world get roughly shaken up by the structures of the YT, by the feedback from their peers and/or by their own difficulties when integrating the new knowledge about themselves into their everyday lives. This interpretation is further supported by the fact that this male's initial body image rating drops from 10 to 5 (#11).

At this moment in time – and we need to keep in mind that any survey can but provide snapshots of a person's emotional, mental and physical state – he appears to be not willing or able to let indulgence with his own shortcomings prevail (#72 drops from 7 to 5). One of the reasons for this situation might be his very low and unchanged rating of "I stay relaxed, despite nuisances and stress" (#67, rating=1, S1=S2).

These ratings are reminiscent of a typical stage of discomfort many TW attendees go through, after realizing that their personal narrative is not working smoothly, any longer. This stage usually sets in earlier during the YT (typically halfway through the training), so that there is enough time left for insight, re-orientation and healing. While most attendees manage to update their self-image and develop a new, functional

narrative within the time frame of the YT, some require more time or opt for re-defining their goals.

Hence, overcoming the stage of discomfort is not a given – it is the result of determined work, fighting one’s weaker self, building up the guts to ask for advice or support and similar grown-up strategies. This attendee’s data set suggests that a YT is not a walk in the park for everyone, even though it seems to offer the opportunity to harvest a number of life-changing results, as the previous example indicates. Nonetheless, this respondent did not give up on himself and finished his YT despite apparently going through a hard time, rather than blaming others and quitting – another indicator pointing towards improved and more realistic self-assessment.

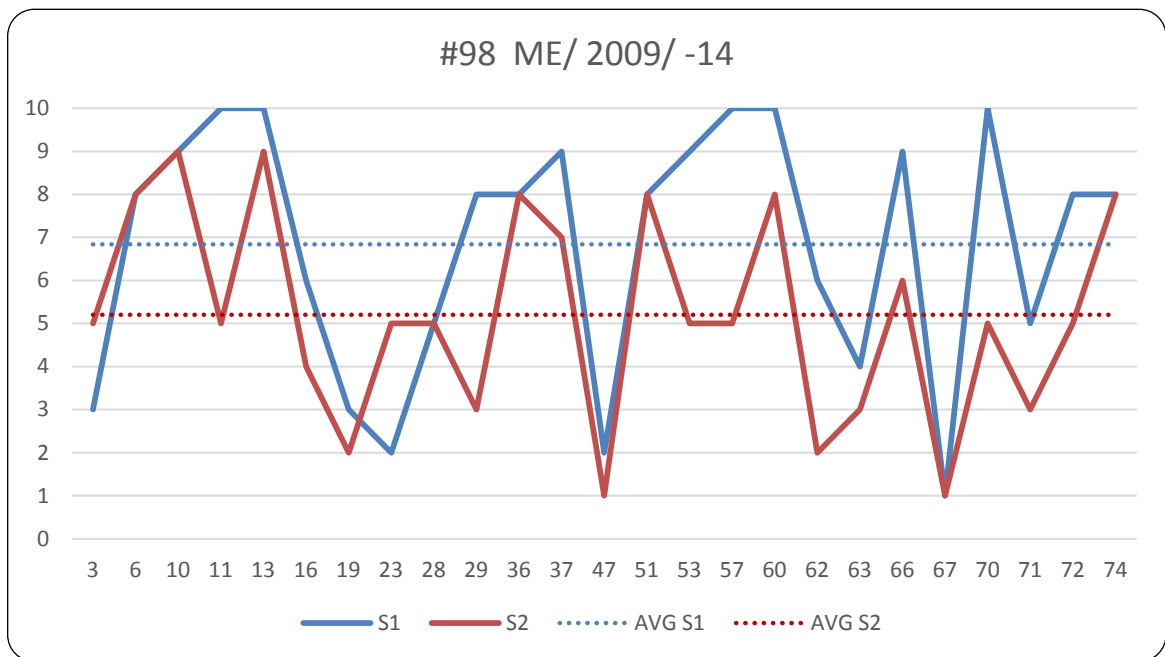


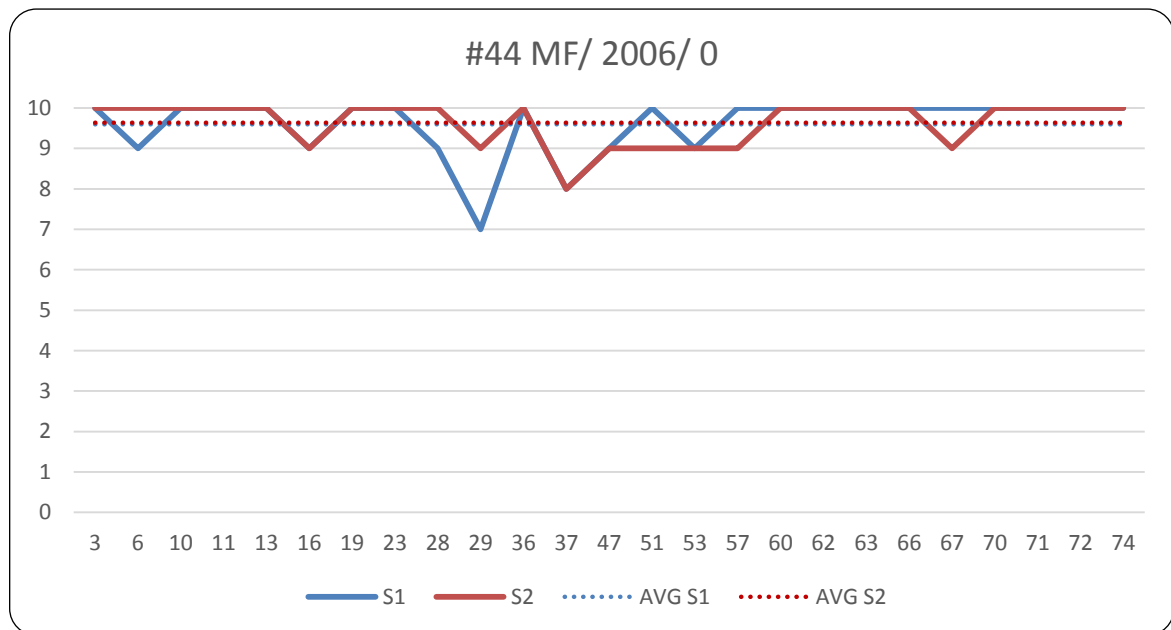
Figure 24 – Example 2 – Male E, Score -14

*Example 3 – Male F, Score 0*

This male, aged 60+ represents a number of respondents whose ratings were so high at S1, that they had barely any room for improvement in S2: of the 25 questions, he assesses 12 in S1 and 11 in S2 with the highest possible rating.

However, instead of describing someone just overly enthusiastic, this chart's remarkably high consistency (17 instances of S1=S2) possibly suggests a person who has, indeed, achieved inner stability and is not easily thrown off track – neither by challenging structures nor by group dynamics or profound introspection, while still keeping an open mind and a readiness to embrace change (#29, “reaching out to others”, S1=7, S2=9).

Finding a similar picture in a young individual would raise my suspicion, since the graph appears just too smooth for a person who is still inventing themselves and their life trajectory: note the difference between these unperturbed lines and the agitated impression the graph in example 2 provides. However, knowing that these are the data of a male age 60+ makes it more plausible: we might well be looking at somebody who has found his calling, his peace and his place in life, yet still enjoys challenges and opportunities to grow.



*Figure 25 – Example 3 – Male F, Score 0*

*Example 4 – Female C, Score -1*

The example of this female age 30-39 gives a very different picture of how to obtain a net score close to 0: both her S1 and S2 curves oscillate turbulently from very low to very high ratings; her increments and drops tend to cancel one another out; ultimately, they average out to a very slight gain.

A closer look into her ratings shows that she evaluated herself low in a number of questions that typically tend to increase. These results might suggest that we are looking at a person who missed the opportunity to grow and enhance her skills. However, she also dropped, even though just by one point, her initially rather high rating of Q#63 (“I am able to observe closely everything I do”, S1=7).

However, noting that her self-observation is not as good as it might be indicates rather solid self-observation; therefore, this one response in particular might suggest that we are, really, looking at a typical case of hedonic set point. This respondent might be in no way less able to observe herself closely, but rather on the contrary: she might be

observing with such intensity that the changes she goes through turn quickly into her new *normality* and become barely perceivable. This would be one way to interpret the relatively high number of slight drops (five times, -1).

While her confidence about her ability to shape her life according to her wishes may have declined (#70, S1=6, S2=5) – possibly due to the aforementioned hedonic set point – at the same time, she apparently made progress feeling more comfortable in her body (#11, S1=9, S2=10) and becoming familiar with its natural expressions (#19, “*Breath, voice and motion* kick in without even thinking of it” S1=4, S2=9). For anyone who aims for a healthy, productive life, body image is key, since “body dissatisfaction is known to be correlated with, and predictive of, physical and mental health problems” (C. B. Becker, Diedrichs, Jankowski, & Werchan, 2013, 6). Being at peace with one’s appearance and able to perceive one’s body as a cherished friend rather than an enemy is an important step on the way towards inner peace, as we will see in chapter 8 (cf. Audrey, Chloe).

Finally, the overall picture plus the steep increase of her rating of Q#23, “I can understand myself better now, than two months ago” (S1=2, S2=7), could be interpreted as an indication of a still ongoing, positive development process.

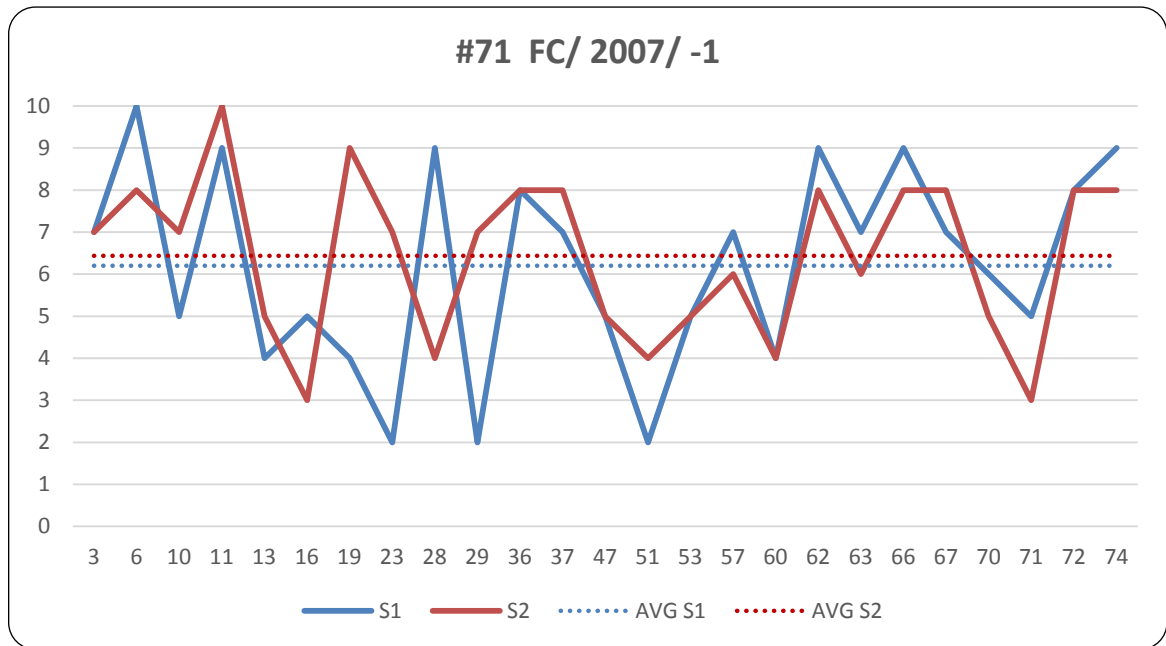


Figure 26 – Example 4 – Female C, Score -1

*Example 5 – Male C, Score -14*

This is the chart of a male in his thirties. His net score is low, as in Example 2 (-14), but his ratings are distinctly less extreme. His overall average drops by 1.0; we might therefore assume that he possibly did not really benefit from his YT. What also strikes the eye is that he left #62 (“Even when feeling lousy, overall I am still feeling pretty good”) blank in S1; also, he gave mostly very high ratings in S1 (18x between 8 and 10), and he shows an elevated level of consistency (S1=S2 x7). Generally speaking, these results might point towards a person with a strongly developed – perhaps overdeveloped – confidence and self-image.

My suggestion is that what we are observing here might be a quite common process of healthy downsizing: the respondent started out with very high ratings which might be rooted in a flattering self-image; he goes through the challenges of the YT and while keeping up many of his firm cornerstones (for instance, his relationship with his parents and his approach towards sexuality stay at the same high level), he does question

others and eventually re-assesses them, sometimes significantly: both #23, “I can understand myself better now, than two months ago” and #70, “I am the director of my own life script”, drop by 4, which might be interpreted as an internal process of re-evaluation.

Therefore, in this case the low score does not necessarily indicate a lack of development – on the contrary: the results might be understood as a process of adaptation to reality. Viewed this way, the respondent might be taking a chance to gain new perspectives on his life and to tackle issues where he previously thought there were none. This is a good example of how the YT affects different attendees differently, depending on their starting point.

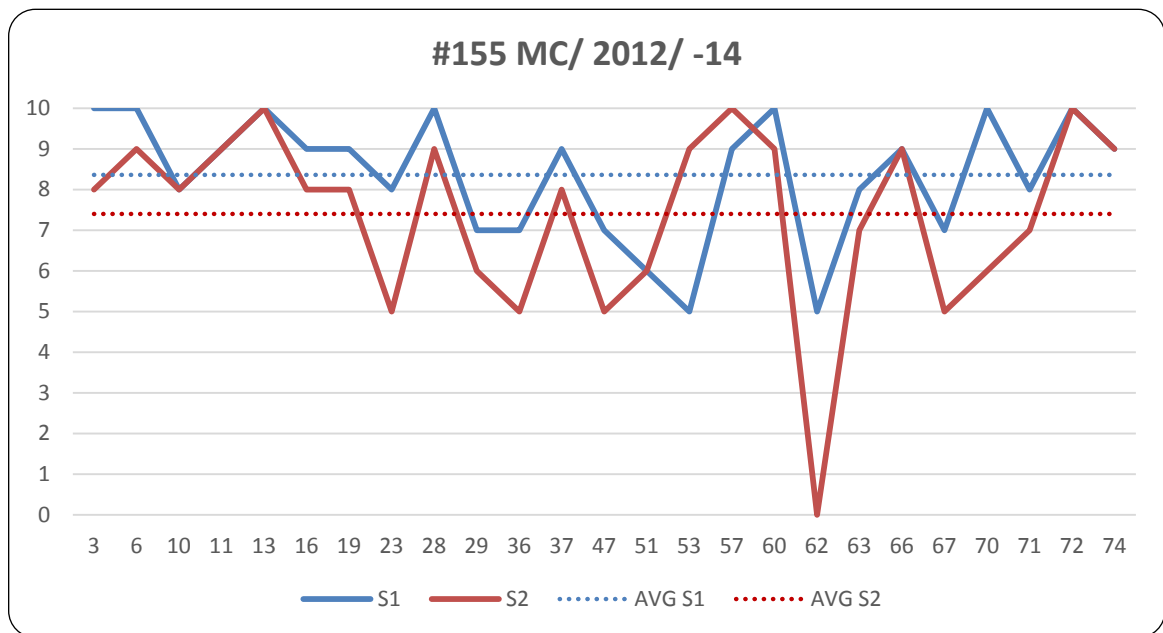


Figure 27 – Example 5 – Male C, Score -14

*Example 6 – Male B, Score +5*

This young man in his twenties presents a net score of +5 and an average increase of 0.4. He leaves #53 blank. His set of data does not sound particularly noteworthy; after all, neither does he considerably improve nor does he get worse (S1  $\bar{x}$ =6.8, S2  $\bar{x}$ =7.2).



However, it pays off to examine these data closer. There are two 10-ratings that stayed unchanged, S1=S2: #74, “I get along with my mother” and #57, “Basically, all is good the way it is”. This is remarkable, since it might be providing a firm foundation for the respondent to build upon: rooted in a nourishing relationship with his parents (#66, “father”, increases from S1=8 to S2=9) and a rock-solid basic trust – one of the main elements of inner peace.

What appears to be stable equanimity does not mean his work on a personal level is done: his #62 (“Even when feeling lousy, overall I am still feeling pretty good”) has improved but is still low (S1=1, S2=4) and understanding himself seems to be a task still to be mastered (#19, S1=2, S2=5). Nonetheless, #70, “I am the director of my own life script” at S1=9 and S2=10, could be interpreted as taking full responsibility for his thoughts, acts and emotions. I suggest this attendee is on track, aware of the tasks that are still awaiting him. The four slight decreases (-1) he reports may well be due to the hedonic set point.

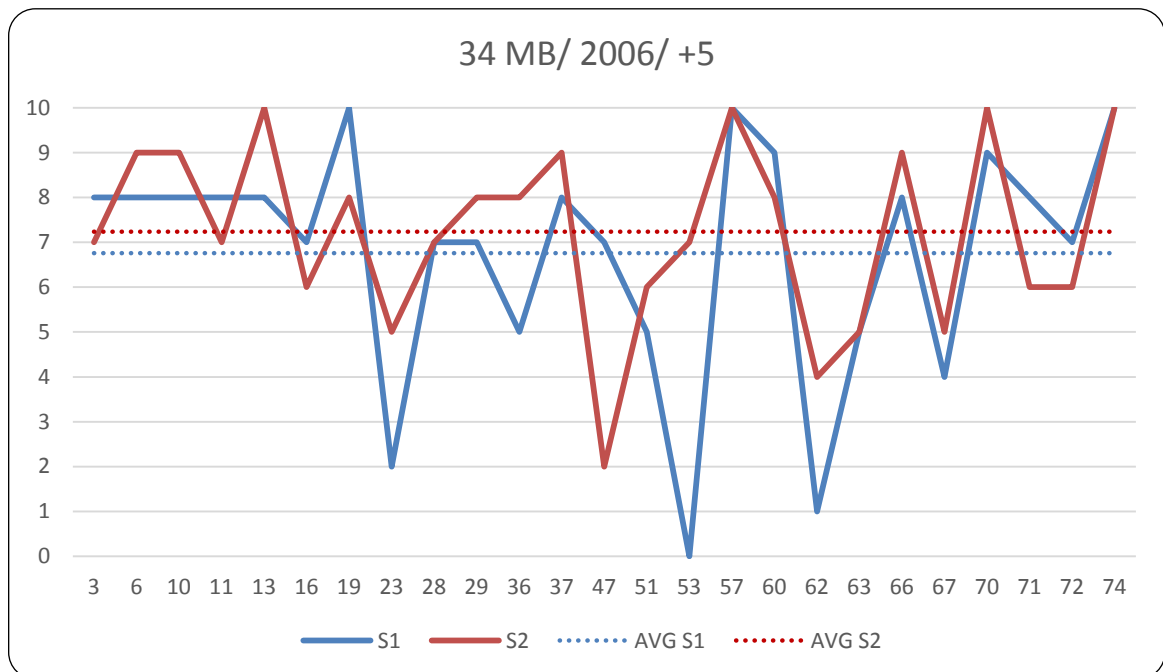


Figure 28 – Example 6 – Male B, Score +5

*Example 7 – Female F, Score +7*

This set of data belongs to a female age 60+. Despite the fact that this age cohort comprises only 3% of the sample (cf. Figure 9 – Age Cohorts Active Attendees, p 220) and is, therefore, representative only to some extent, I consider it important to point out the development mature attendees can achieve, once they set their mind onto it (cf. Figure 24 – Example 2 – Male E, Score, p. 256).

The data seem to reflect considerable stability, expressed by a ninefold S1=S2; the development appears solid, without huge leaps: the respondent rates up or down exclusively by 1 or 2. Even so, she ends up with an overall increment of +1.0. The respondent gives only two 10-ratings, which might be interpreted as not being carried away by her success. Precisely because of her apparent general caution, these two highest ratings (#29, “It is easy for me to reach out to people – not only here but in my everyday life, as well” and #62, “Even when feeling lousy, overall I am still feeling pretty good”), ring particularly true.

What catches the eye are her two blanks in S1 (#66+74), referring to the relationship with her parents. This suggests that the survey would have benefited from a wording which included deceased parents, as well. The missing rating at S1 might well indicate that the respondent did not conceive of a relationship with her parents – deceased, unknown or otherwise unreachable – being even possible. However, at the end of her YT, which included 2-3 Family Constellation workshops, it seems like it comes natural to her to assess this, now established and existing, relationship. Feeling safe and relaxed about one’s family of origin – be it in real life or by silently and unilaterally reconciling with family members – can be an enormous asset in an individual’s life: it is the rich soil from which inner peace grows (cf. chapter 8, Brian, Beth).

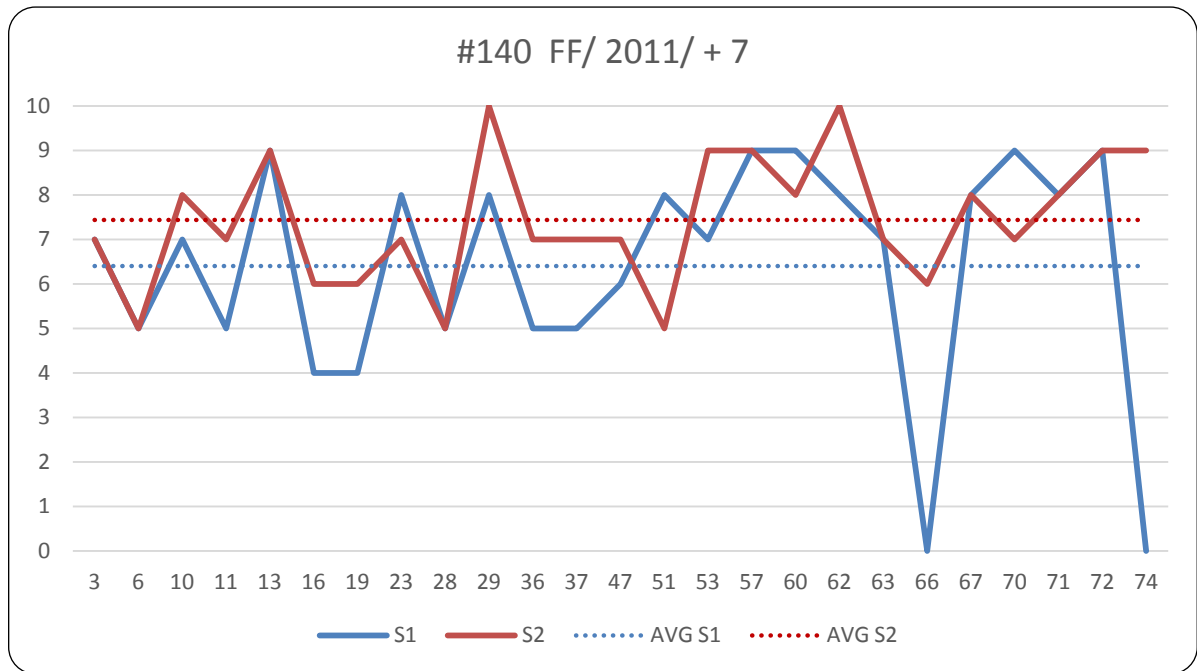


Figure 29 – Example 7 – Female F, Score +7

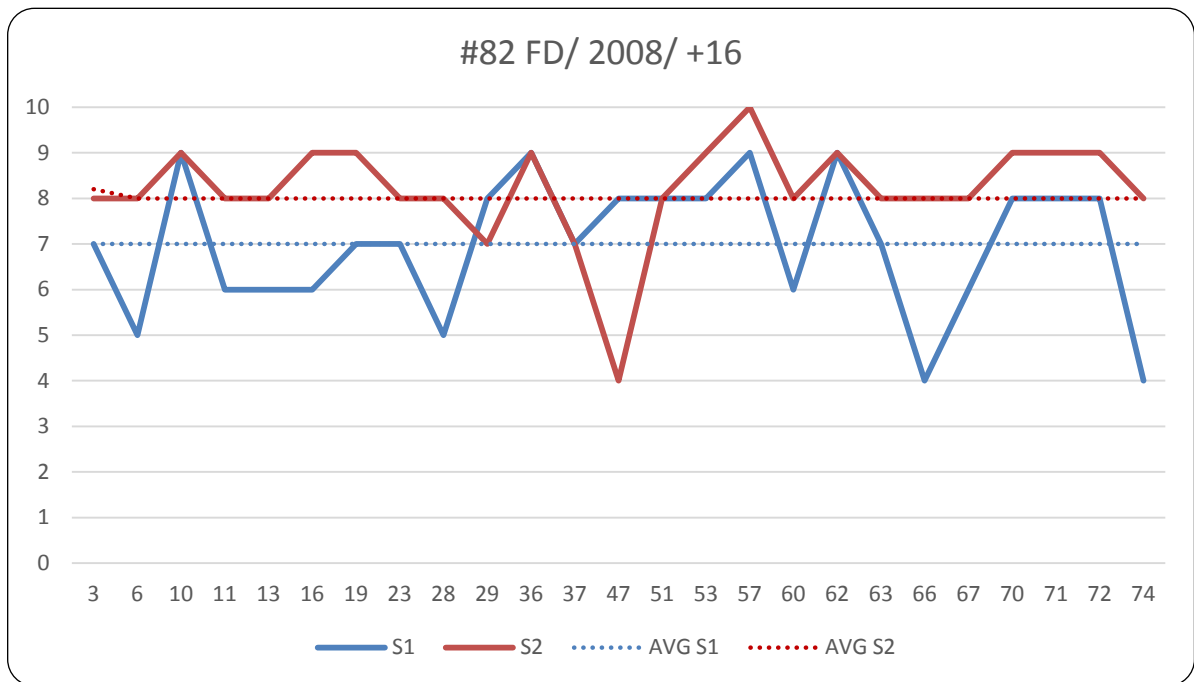
*Example 8 – Female D, Score +16*

These data belong to a female in her forties – representative of one of the larger cohorts. It shows increases or neutral results throughout the questions except for #47. Her S1 rating’s average is 7.0, which suggests a relatively high satisfaction with things as they were in the beginning of her YT, while still leaving room for improvement.

The most obvious growth seems to have been achieved in #66 and #74 (mother and father; S1=4, S2=8 for either), followed by increments of +3 in questions #6, “As a woman, I get on well with women”, #16, “When I want things to be different, I speak up” and #28, “I am able to say No when I mean No”. This points towards reconciliation not only with her parents, but also with her gender cohort; additionally, she seems to have found her voice to express her preferences, objections and boundaries.

All of these developments are essential for a feeling of “having a say” about one’s life, which helps boost categories such as #70, “I am the director of my own life script” or #72, “My view of the world and of people has grown milder, somehow” –

increases of +1 for either. Finally, the only 10-rating she gives is for #57, “Basically, all is good the way it is”, which suggests high levels of basic trust and inner peace.



*Figure 30 – Example 8 – Female D, Score +16*

**Summary: Intraindividual Changes**

Similar to the tendencies found in the analyses of trends and categories, the examination of intraindividual changes based on individual charts seems to point towards a tendency to higher ratings in S2. This might be interpreted as the individuals’ subjectively perceived improvements in varying areas.

The visual impact of the complete individual chart allows for a deeper understanding of the dynamics a particular attendee is subject to, the obstacles they cleared and the topics they still struggle with. Some of the attendees seem to be reporting considerable, occasionally even striking improvements. The individual growth and improvement of equanimity and peace seem detectable even in sets of data which, if

judging by net scores and averages alone, might be perceived as stagnant or even decreased.

#### **7.4.4 Summary Survey Discussion**

After having begun work on this study, and after an initial review of the survey data, I was surprised by the first results: despite what I had observed over the years of working with participants in the TW, the survey responses indicated only minor changes between beginning and completing the YT. This was unexpected, since, based on my observations, I would have anticipated significant and consistent improvement that would have been apparent in the results.

Some of this, as noted above, had to do with the survey design itself. However, similar studies have also shown some similar results; for instance, the Social Competence Training (Gollwitzer, Banse, Eisenbach, & Naumann, 2007) that indicated little change between pre-and post tests, but a significant difference with a follow-up test. Similarly, a follow-up test – for instance, a year after the attendees graduated from the YT – might provide more precise insight into the long-lasting effects of TWs. Also, a control group would have been helpful in order to increase the reliability of interpretation; this is certainly something to consider for future studies. Nonetheless, since the design of the questionnaire for the present study did not allow for rendering statistically relevant results, the survey data were used for basic orientation towards the qualitative analysis, exclusively.

The following suggestions might provide improved results in future studies:

- Reduced number of items: there must be a way of asking less than 82 questions. I found that useful and sound results are achieved by asking the right questions, not by asking more of them.<sup>71</sup>
- Avoid using 10-level Likert items, hoping for more precise results: some interviewees were still not satisfied with the sensitivity of 10 levels and marked their responses in between them, turning the item into a visual analogue scale.
- If choosing a 10-level scale, opt for 0-10 rather than 1-10: it gives the respondent both the option for a response without a numeric value (0) as well as – due to the odd-levelled scale – for a neutral response: 5 would signal “neither too good nor too bad”.
- Make sure the questionnaire is comparable to existing surveys in other fields, complementing it, for instance, with the Big Five Factors of personality traits (Soldz, 1998; Srivastava, 2017).

The tendencies detected in *Trends and Categories* cannot advocate a solid case of the YT’s efficacy in terms of *peaceability*. The individual charts deliver some more information, since the personality, mindset and unique approach of each respondent towards their development become visible: these charts with their “fingerprint quality” allow for an intimate view of the attendees’ journey through their YT. Some start with S1 ratings so high that they can hardly be improved; others apparently go through a process of “healthy downsizing”, show signs of confusion and helplessness or, on the contrary, seem to report improvements they possibly never expected. This broad variety of results has an interesting side-effect: it supports the assertion that this kind of TWs is far from cult-like brainwashing methods (cf. 6.4.5.1, “Is Tantra a Cult?”, p. 204). If indeed such methods were applied, the results should be expected to be much more uniform and predictable.

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<sup>71</sup> The *SkyDancing* Study had at least 139 items; also, a number of the questions asked offered vast room for interpretation, making it potentially difficult to choose a fitting response, e.g. “During a sexual encounter with your partner, have you ever experienced that your hearts became one?” {ta} (“Erlebten Sie bisher im sexuellen Kontakt mit Ihrem/er Partner/in, daß Ihre Herzen eins wurden?”)

When examining the 25 questions selected for this study, the data, gathered within the timeframe between 2005 and 2015 from a sample N=222, show an increase in the respondents' ratings:

Average S1 Response 7.08  
Average S2 Response 7.63

These two figures are indicators of a trend, at best. This trend is neither salient nor conclusive, since a quantitative approach based on the tools that have been applied does not allow for statistically relevant results. However, the tendencies we could observe in this chapter form a solid enough base to be explored further, using a qualitative approach.

Thus, *Trends, Categories and Intraindividual Changes*, which we have just discussed, give a basic introduction to the tendencies to be expected when examining the qualitative data. While the three ways of survey data approach, presented in this chapter, can only point in a direction, they do pave the road for the next, much closer zoom-in: the qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews.

## 8. Analysis of Interview Data

Quantitative tools are limited, when it comes to measuring highly subjective phenomena like feelings, states of mind, emotions, personal growth, life experience, self-esteem or inner peace: “A qualitative approach is best [...] when you want to grasp the meanings, motives, reasons, patterns, etc, usually unnoticed in standardized approaches, like those you would get with a survey” (London School of Economics and Political Science, 2016). All of these underlying dynamics are best studied by qualitative means, particularly by in-depth interviews. Also, qualitative interviews add further validity to the quantitative data previously obtained: they allow for deeper exploration of the participants’ motivations, values, experiences and individual conclusions drawn from the training.

For the qualitative evaluation, a sample of  $n=6$  has been selected. The selection criteria were crafted with the aim to ensure a broad spectrum of individual experience: an equal number of males and females, alumni of the Year-Training and representatives of the major age cohorts. Additionally, none of the interviewees selected had taken up the trainers’ training, which would include deepened background knowledge of the exercises and structures as well as require some distance from one’s own personal experience; neither would be helpful for the purpose of this study.

When selecting the interviewees for the qualitative evaluation, I applied Michael Patton’s approach: a small sample, selected purposefully as opposed to quantitative studies’ deliberate randomness; the main focus is, according to Patton, not the sample’s statistical relevance but the expected depth of information: “The purpose of purposeful sampling is to select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (Patton, 1990).



I chose a somewhat mixed approach: while adhering to Patton's recommendation about purposefully selecting information-rich cases, I also made sure the interviewees would represent different YTs, age cohorts and number of TW days attended; also, they should have comparable but not exactly the same experience levels, in order to cover a wide range of typical YT alumni. Lastly, I chose interviewees whose experience could be expected to confirm the surveys' results (Patton's category of "confirming and disconfirming cases"), while "adding richness, depth and credibility" (Patton, 1990).

The following criteria have been applied:

- Three females and three males, in order to achieve gender balance.
- All interviewees have graduated from the Year-Training (notwithstanding attendance to other workshops), which made their experiences and its impact comparable.
- One pair was selected from the most recently completed Year-Training (2015); another from a Year-Training three years earlier (2013); the third pair from the Year-Training of 2011, in order to sample across the period of the workshops' time line.
- One male interviewee had completed the advanced follow-up training *Ritualweg* (RW), one female had attended most of it; two interviewees had attended the Year-Training twice. These, then, are representatives who have a good understanding of the overall program and are able to reflect on the totality of the experience.
- The minimum of workshop days attended was 38, the maximum 123. This wide scale was intended, in order to provide some insight into the different responses when comparing them to the corresponding number of workshop days.
- All six interviewees were selected from the most representative age cohorts.

As it turned out, at the time of the interview half of the interviewees were in a relationship with former or current attendees of IN's workshops (3 out of 6). This was

an unintended side effect; such ratio is not representative for the typical TW group, neither for the surveyed sample.

The following table gives some background information about the interviewees, indicating their code names (assigned by me in male-female pairs, following an alphabetical order) and ages as well as the year of their YTs, the range of their experience and the individual total of their workshop days at the IN. I deliberately included two alumni who have (at least partly) completed two YTs, since signing up for a second lap or repeating part of the YT is increasingly common practice among YT alumni: in 2005, 34 individuals completed their YT, plus 21 additional alumni of previous YTs repeated one or more (up to three) parts of it; in 2011, the ratio was 19:38 and in 2016, 27:45.

The groups benefit largely from these more experienced attendees, drawing from their more relaxed mindset, while the second-timers report enjoying the contrast between their first and their second time around and are typically more than willing to be a source of wisdom, inspiration and support to their new peers.

	<b>Code name</b>	<b>Age (in 2016)</b>	<b>Year-Training</b>	<b>Experience</b>	<b>Workshop days, total</b>
1	Andre	50	2015	YT (Year-Training)	38
2	Audrey	48	2015+16	YT x2	69
3	Brian	50	2013	YT	56
4	Beth	48	2013+14	YT x2	81
5	Cesar	44	2011	YT + RW (Ritualweg, advanced training)	123
6	Chloe	39	2011	YT + RW (4 out of 5 parts completed)	125

*Figure 31 – In-Depth Interviewees*

As for the direct quotes within the following chapters, they are all taken and translated from the interview in question, unless indicated otherwise. In order to illustrate the analyses which follow each subchapter, I repeatedly refer to YT alumni testimonies. The source for all these testimonies are the sharing rounds during TWs as well as conversations and formal and informal counseling sessions (cf. Section 4.3.2, p. 70).

### **8.1. Andre: Serenity and full Potential**

Andre is 50 years old. He works in human resource development and is about to conclude his training to become a systemic psychotherapist. He became interested in Tantra several years ago, after a good friend had attended a Tantra Workshop at *Verein Lichtung*<sup>72</sup> and reported enthusiastically about her experiences there: “She came back in such a state of bliss and gratitude, excitedly depicting the impact it had on her... And since I was that guy who would rarely connect to his own feelings, let alone knowing how to show them, I thought to myself, I want that, too.”

Andre is in a committed relationship and has no children. His girlfriend has never attended a TW; however – unlike many other family members or significant others<sup>73</sup> – according to Andre, she does not hamper his participation in TWs, in any way.

Andre, who describes himself as “curious and driven to explore new things”, signed up for *Lichtung’s* men’s workshop first. He felt so inspired that he decided to keep going; however, for his following TWs, he switched to IN – mainly for reason of

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<sup>72</sup> Tantra school based in Upper Austria. [www.tantra.or.at](http://www.tantra.or.at)

<sup>73</sup> It is a common phenomenon to have a person sign up for a TW and then cancel, because “my girlfriend/boyfriend/husband/wife does not approve”. Even singles get frequently pressured into cancellation by their parents or even by their adult children. Misconceptions about TWs are deeply rooted in the public opinion, as discussed in Section 6.3, p. 103.

the *Jours Fixes* which he expected to “provide the continuity, stabilizing and group support I’d hoped for.” It is always favorable to have attendees with experience from other facilitators and also to encourage attendees to book other schools’ workshops: once they can compare, those who are convinced of “feeling at home” with the IN, will build more trust and benefit even more; those who find their needs better addressed elsewhere, will be happier and benefit more, attending there.

Andre confidently credits good part of the changes and transformations in his views on life, his emotional accessibility and calmer responses in the last few years to the TWs, because, as he explains, he had not been attending any personality development courses, before: “I might possibly have developed without the YT, as well – I can’t draw a clear line there. [...] But comparing my previous development with the changes in my life and the quality of these changes – what I experience and the things I can bring about now since I have been attending Tantra – I do credit the Tantric path for a lot of it.”

### **8.1.1 Interactions and Relationships**

Surprisingly to Andre, his girlfriend does not seem to notice much of a change in him. Either, he muses, she did not perceive him the way he used to see himself, in the past – i.e. withholding thoughts and wishes, not really knowing himself and therefore rarely sharing his own preferences or boundaries – or there have, indeed, been only small changes in his behavior. However, his own perception of other ongoing relationships indicates otherwise: due to his increased openness – speaking his mind, sharing thoughts and emotions – these relationships grew noticeably stronger and deeper.

Learning how to be open with others did not come easy to Andre, but today, he says, opening up does not feel risky to him, anymore. Now “it just feels normal” to address sensitive topics or to have intimate conversations in “former no-go-zones”, for

instance, about sexuality, or displaying closeness with somebody. He points out that while in the past, he would hesitate to speak his mind and often use meandering, hard-to-understand sentences, now he experiences more clarity and spontaneity in his communication. This allows for “good, deep thought exchanges which were impossible four, five years ago” and relationships where he can establish “loving eye contact as well as a naturally-flowing connection from heart to heart”.

When communicating, he feels like his words have an impact on others: he “gets his point across” and oftentimes can motivate his counterpart to act on it. This is not completely new to him, but what is new is the easiness and efficacy of it. Andre highlights that what is happening there is different from manipulating others: by respectfully making his own stance clear and sharing his opinion, his counterpart gains access to everything they need in order to make their own well-pondered decision.

As for family relationships, Andre’s father has already passed; he describes the relationship with his mother as “used to be shaped by stuck-in-adolescence resistance”, but has gone through considerable transformation which includes a more patient, forgiving and appreciative approach on his behalf: “I can say with certainty that our relationship changed, due to the Tantric path.” In his view, he was able to expand the indulgent attitude which he effortlessly displays towards his friends, to include his mother; now he feels gratitude towards her and can acknowledge her wisdom and her inner growth, achieved at an advanced age, when – according to him – striving for and engaging in personal development is not a given (cf. fig.9). “She’s developed more of her gentle qualities”, he states.

*Analysis*

What Andre describes – his girlfriend, not noticing much of a change, while he himself is aware of transformations – is highly untypical: what attendees commonly report – in sharing rounds or one-on-one conversations – is exactly the opposite, namely themselves, feeling frustrated about their “sluggish progress”, while their environment acknowledges blatant changes.<sup>74</sup> Not being aware of one’s transformations is a well-known effect: children rarely notice their own growth, until a relative calls and gasps, “My, how you’ve grown!”

Indeed, how can attendees measure their own improvements? According to my observation and to the attendees’ own reports, they gain a realistic view on their accomplishments whenever they attend a lower-level workshop or repeat one they have already graduated from. The familiar setting, the exercises they have already gone through at least once, the trust in the facilitators that had had time to deepen – all of these elements allow for a rather sober comparison between their current experience and their memories of how they felt the first time around. As the “repeaters” never get tired of pointing out during sharing rounds, this direct comparison is an invaluable clue to their own growth.

Additionally to their own observations, the “newbies” reflections help the “seniors” to see where they stand and to what extent they have already learned to deal with difficulties and afflictions less experienced participants are still struggling with. The lack of direct comparison while committed to the YT and growing alongside one’s peers might be one of the reasons why survey respondents would choose conservative ratings of their progress or even respond in a way that suggests their skills have decreased.

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<sup>74</sup> Partly, this knowledge is based on what attendees report their relatives and friends saying; occasionally, it comes from speaking with relatives, myself. One example of many is an attendees’ spouse who, noticing her husband’s new and more peaceful attitude, approached the IN to learn first hand what had changed him. {NA}

While Andre's report regarding his girlfriend's reactions to his development is uncommon, he represents much more of a pattern typical for the IN's clientele, when it comes to the relationship with his mother: for one, the prolonged grudge held against parents – oftentimes reaching into mature adulthood or even old age – and the gradual reconciliation that comes with developing awareness, insight and understanding, in brief, with successfully growing-up. Part of this process is the frequently reported “discovering of good qualities” in another person: while that person probably had those qualities before, it is presumably due to the individual's own development, matured worldview and deeper understanding of life, that they are now better able to perceive and acknowledge these qualities.

### **8.1.2 Confidence, Insight**

Andre discovered that it used to be the people around him who would be the focus of his kindness and caring, while to himself, he would relate “very differently, in an almost dismissive way”. Leaning on the YT's many structures that focus on developing compassion and understanding for oneself and for others, he learned to “be more relaxed, and more kind with myself – just like I do with others: when something happens, I'd not get upset but deal with the situation with an accepting, loving attitude. I can increasingly apply this skill to myself now.”

He is aware of having been “riding the You're OK, I'm not OK bike” (Harris, 1973), experiencing a lot of performance pressure due to his own high standards, constantly fearing failure, entailing attacks and blame. “I learned to be more indulgent with myself – on a scale from 1 to 10, I was a 5 before, and now I am, say, 7-8. Not a mind-blowing leap, but still a pretty considerable difference, isn't it?”

Another example for his increased confidence is the speech he gave during his birthday party. Public speeches “do not come naturally” to Andre; so the fact that not only did he not fuss about it but was, as he describes it, able to simply gather a few thoughts and leave it open to either becoming a genuine speech or perhaps just a brief “thank you guys”, confirmed that he is “on a good track”. “Eventually, it was a nice speech, but that was only possible because I had no pressure and no expectations about what it had to be like... and it felt right, just the way it turned out.”

### *Analysis*

Andre presents yet another pattern often observed among starting-out IN’s participants: being gentle with others, yet unforgiving with oneself. This “You’re OK, I’m not OK” strategy is, as Thomas Harris showed, the “universal position of early childhood” (Harris, 1973, 67), describing the helpless child looking up to the “almighty” adult, feeling inferior and hoping for protection. Also, it leads to relying on others to be in charge of one’s life and perpetuating this view into adulthood. Significant others, friends and colleagues are seen as a savior/mother/father, whose approval is critical and needs to be achieved at any cost, even if it requires the betrayal of the Self (Gruen, 1988).

Since this strategy is linked with high stress and anxiety, aside from preventing the individual from thriving in their most personal way, it is one of the goals of the YT to crack this pattern and to guide the participants to better balanced, self-assured, eye-level relationships, which facilitate the unfolding of peaceful qualities like serenity, compassion and peace of mind. Therefore, whenever attendees report an increase of gentleness towards themselves, it is reasonable to expect their stress levels to decrease. This is exactly what Andre is describing here.



His journey on this track is far from completed, as his estimate of his own progress shows: he suggests a rather conservative guess – an increase of 2-3 points out of 10. Considering the positive feedbacks from his family and friends as well as my own observation over the years, Andre’s self-assessment seems somewhat over-cautious. This can be interpreted as him, still not quite believing in himself and in his progress; it might also mean that he believes he should, really, perform even better. In other words, his modest assessment may be rooted in cautious down-to-earth attitude or in unabated high performance pressure – both possibly stemming from a still prevailing lack of self-esteem.

Even though there may still be room for improvement, Andre is already enjoying the results of his more forgiving relationship with himself: less expectations lead to more relaxation and to less stress; less stress leads to a more relaxed performance, and a more relaxed performance leads to peace of mind (which can be expected to generate more relaxed performance and thus, even more peace of mind), as properly illustrated by his birthday story.

### **8.1.3 Inner Peace, Equanimity, Joy**

To Andre, stressful situations seem less scary now: “I used to be frightened in certain situations, afraid of making myself vulnerable and of being, indeed, attacked and unable to protect myself... a belief rooted in childhood experiences.” The fear of being unable to prevent emotional hurt used to cause Andre stress, but in his opinion, this has changed considerably. He traces this change back to the fact that he is more confident and can handle situations with serenity, on the one hand; on the other hand, he feels like he is connected to and nourished by his “inner power”, which helps him to act with

confidence. Therefore, threatening situations simply occur less often: “You might want to think twice before you mess with a giant – unlike with a garden gnome.”

Similarly, he muses that in the past, he used to have few trusting and truthful encounters because “I simply wouldn’t allow myself to open up and get involved. Asked about his inner peace and serenity, Andre shows strong conviction: “Yes, they have definitely increased. Of course, I can’t stick to them in all situations, but I notice when I achieved this equanimity: I feel close to myself, I feel a deep calm, which allows for the strength required to act properly in a given situation.”

He also reports a greater tolerance for ambiguity: “There is less of this black/white-thinking now; I can tolerate shades of grey and embrace discrepancies more easily.” In the same breath, he mentions an increase of resilience which empowers him to deal better with whatever comes his way: “When things knock me down, I get back up faster; I am more like this bamboo, you see.”

While Andre had never been heavily consumption-oriented, he notices a further relativization of the importance of material goods: “What Tantra helps me to do is to set my priorities more clearly, to know what is important and what isn’t, and to be less attached to things that lack that importance... say, money.” A concrete example was that he chose to cut back his earnings in order to dedicatedly attend his psychotherapy training: “The training, the growth it provides, was the important thing – much more so than raking in money.”

### *Analysis*

It is safe to say that due to the focus of selected structures, all attendees of IN’s workshops face some of their fears, sooner or later. The field of psychology differentiates fear as a primal emotion, (Penzo, Robert, & Li, 2014) but also as stress,

anxiety, phobias and panic attacks, to name a few. For the purpose of this study, I categorize fears in helpful/life-protecting versus unhelpful/life-aggravating: people who are afraid of sabre-toothed tigers protect themselves appropriately, while those who believe that papier-mâché tigers are real, waste time and energy protecting themselves against a non-existent danger (Travis, 2004). Whoever is subject to fear cannot enjoy peace of mind, at the same time. It is therefore one of the highest goals in Tantra to find a way to live free from fear or, to be more precise, from fearful responses to the stimuli from our environment.

At the TWs, leaders and attendees are continuously dealing with unhelpful fears and stress responses of all kinds: the fear of being late, of looking ridiculous, of getting attention, of not getting any attention, of possibly not really existing, of losing control, getting emotionally hurt, the fear of death. The structures during the TW are set up in a way that often triggers hidden debilitating fears, such as the fear of speaking in front of a group, to touch somebody or to share episodes from one's childhood. This setting, similar to exposure therapy in vivo, (J. S. Kaplan & Tolin, 2011) leads the attendees into a set-up and safe, yet still challenging situation which they would tend to avoid in their everyday life. In this protected situation, they are encouraged to face their fear, thus by and by overcoming it.

Andre's option to choose serenity over panic in a stressful moment is one tried and tested way out of fear; since it requires a considerable amount of training, insight and experience, his ability to make this choice is proof of his success in fear management. Connecting with and finding support in an inner or outer source of confidence – a person of trust, a spiritual guide or a heartfelt *knowing* – can be another way. Combining the two can lead to such remarkable results of overcoming fear as in Andre's example.

Equipped with reliable tools to let go of fear, establishing relationships that nourish the newly found self-esteem is easier and marks the beginning of a beneficial spiral: the more Andre rests in a *peaceable* “deep calm”, the more bonded relationships he enjoys, which relaxes him even more and enhances his self-confidence. His “greater tolerance for ambiguity” and improved resilience certainly help to keep up Andre’s equanimity, since they broaden his view on life: when things stop being perceived as black and white, there are many more shades of what is tolerable, acceptable or even fascinating, rather than fear-inducing. Thus, the open, broadly interested mind becomes the fertile soil for a generally peaceful attitude.

#### **8.1.4 Body Awareness, Sexuality**

Andre’s increased confidence and relaxation translate into substantially decreased performance pressure in the sexual field: “I experience less stress and expectations now. When my Lingam does not become erect, I stay rather cool.” He describes a situation during an advanced ritual including erotic elements, when he felt genuine calm: not just telling himself, but really *knowing* that “nothing in particular needs to happen now – all is good the way it is. I’ve never felt such a deep peace and faith in myself and the situation, before.”

Exploring new, unexpected ways of awakening sensual energies in a counterpart was something he particularly enjoyed: “Stroking this one Shakti with nothing but a feather and watching her relish it was extremely exciting and satisfying for me, as well. There was no touching involved, at all – it was amazing.”

*Analysis*

Stress has, as anyone who ever experienced stage fright will confirm, a mostly negative impact on performance, particularly in sexual encounters, as epidemiological studies confirm: it is entirely possible for a man's erections to be affected by stress (Laumann, Paik, & Rosen, 1999). Indeed, according to attendees' reports, fearing being unable to live up to the high expectation posed on male sexual functionality is one of the most persistent anxieties. It takes months and more likely years of mindful training to not simply suppress this fear or to compensate for it, but to grow to genuinely embrace and overcome it.

Andre describes in his interview an ability often reported by advanced attendees, particularly males: by means of helpful teachings and their own perseverance, they learned how to let go of the omnipresent pressure of flawless sexual performance. They accept any given situation as is and are aware of their options, such as resorting to other ways of pleasuring themselves or their partner. This ability – to accept situations as they are, while being aware of one's alternative options – is, as so many other skills practiced in TWs, directly applicable to all other areas of the attendees' everyday life. Poised acceptance of the inevitable, combined with experience-based optimism provide a rich soil from which peaceful reactions and interactions can grow.

In this context, Andre's familiarization with new approaches to sexual pleasure – for instance, using a feather for gently stroking his partner – is remarkable, since it reinforces the effect of his more relaxed attitude: he who has other means at hand, does not need to desperately rely on their bodily functions. This sort of mindset has a relaxing, calming and bonding effect on relationships, as YT alumni frequently report.

### 8.1.5 Mindfulness, Spirituality

One way of defining spirituality could be *maintaining and deepening the awareness of all life being valuable and deserving respect*. In this sense, Andre aspires to share with the world what he feels is a bounty of riches he had received: “Look, I am doing fine in life; I can give back.” He describes his aim in life as developing his innate qualities and his potential further, making them available where needed. “Life should not be an egomaniac trip – in the sense of my connection with everybody else, on a deeper level, it is important to me to give, as well.” One of his ways of giving back is taking care of an unaccompanied refugee teen from Syria,<sup>75</sup> supporting him, teaching him, introducing him to local customs and traditions. “This is what I can do, and in this context, I understand the Tantric path as a good opportunity to develop my personality further, to unfold my potential and to remove whatever [inner] obstacles are in my way.”

Some of his YT experiences are “beyond description” – for instance, when during an eye-gazing exercise (cf. Section 6.4.4), he felt all of a sudden deeply connected to another Shiva: “It was so intense. This was, you know ... this was love. It was amazing to just gaze into each other’s eyes. I haven’t spoken to that guy before, and to experience such a high quality of warmth and heart-to-heart connection... pure beauty.”

This experience was not a singular event for Andre. He recalls an exercise with a Shakti who definitely was not on his “dating list” and where the task was simply to look into her face and gently touch it. “I got carried away by a sudden wave of love for her. I was completely fascinated by her face, the... well, I don’t know how else to put it – the divine I could see in her. It was breathtaking. I never knew it was possible to connect with anybody in this way.”

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<sup>75</sup> One of the roughly 100,000 refugees who arrived to Austria in fall of 2015.

He thinks there are a few main clues to the overall transformation he experienced: for one, there is the Inner Observer – the entity which provides Andre non-judgmental data about himself. For the other, there is the path of Letting Go: “letting go of internal imagery, concepts of what ought and ought not to happen in a given situation, what a Shakti has to look like, how I should perform... There is still a lot to do, but I do notice remarkable changes.”

Although Andre notices a decrease in conceptual thinking, he cannot trace it back to one single moment or event: “It is an ongoing process of increasing trust and faith when confronted with a potentially stressful situation. When I react in a relaxed way, any communication works better and I can be far more effective – my energy is clear, rather than muddled, and I can differentiate what is critical in a given situation.”

Andre hesitates to claim that he finds himself “resting in his center”, since he describes himself as “cautious and self-critical, far from being a near-enlightened guy who just observes life”; however, he admits that “fortunately, I seem to be headed in that direction.”

### *Analysis*

Developing a clear sense of Self includes elements such as body awareness, awareness of likes and dislikes, dark places, fears and hopes. This development is part of the first stages in the YT. It is essential, since attendees typically show signs of (and report having) a rather blurry image of their Self, commenting for instance on the uncertainty about their own boundaries as well as being vague about what they want in their lives. Often they are confused by the focus that is being put on the Self – many signed up, believing that spirituality is all about letting go of the Ego/Self. They are right, of course. However, it is not possible to genuinely give away something I do not quite possess,

therefore, in order to practice selflessness, the Self needs to be properly developed, in the first place.

Once established, the focus on the Self needs to give way to a broader view that includes and ultimately even favors the well-being of others, if what we want is an ethically sound development of personality. An attendee, taking selflessly care of somebody in need of protection, bonding and mentoring, is probably on a good track towards being an asset, rather than a burden, to society. Protecting the unprotected and supporting those in need is not just ethically valuable; additionally, it can help preventing vulnerable individuals from becoming desperately frustrated and seeking unwholesome valves for their estrangement, e.g. by becoming an easy target for radical groups' recruiters. This way, Andre – and many others – contributes to peacekeeping on a wider societal level.

When Andre reports noticing a decrease in conceptual thinking<sup>76</sup> – long before this Buddhist term is introduced in the advanced training – we can interpret that he notices changes in the culturally imposed “knowledge” that this is good, while that is not, or any other kind of “four legs good, two legs bad” thinking. This essential shift in perception opens the doors for a more fluid, permissive, all-embracing, and therefore, more peaceful approach to the world.

Being able to look beyond superficial criteria is another clue for a deepening level of insight. When the beauty perceived no longer depends on looks but seems to follow different rules beyond age, convention or even personal taste, a door into a broader understanding of our humanity opens. As attendees often describe it: “The need

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<sup>76</sup> “In Zen philosophy, while words and concepts can never fully grasp the essential world, they can help point us in the right direction. Confucius once said, ‘When a wise man points at the moon the imbecile examines the finger’ – this is a warning that while words and concepts can be useful, we mustn’t mistaken them for the whole of reality” (Handel, 2016)



to compete is gone. I don't care about their looks, anymore, nor about mine. We meet on a different level."<sup>77</sup>

Such mindset of unconditional acceptance is not unheard of; however, it is usually reserved for lovestruck couples or parents/children. Seeing somebody other than our beloved with this unconditional acceptance and non-judgmental openness is highly uncommon, and yet it is this "openheartedness" that, when well-developed, can transform everyday encounters and relationships into meaningful ones. Meaningful relationships are, in turn, what weaves reliable, peaceful social networks and stabilizes systems on small and large scales, be it families, neighborhoods or countries.

The experience of feeling suddenly "lovestruck" is not uncommon among Tantric practitioners; so much so, that – according to one of their participants' account in 1996 – the Austrian Tantra school *Verein Lichtung* used to hand out notices warning their participants of making any major life changes, such as quitting a job or starting/ending a relationship, within a few months after they attended a Tantra workshop. The profound feeling of transpersonal love experienced by many attendees is typically not tied to a particular gender, neither has it sexual connotations. As attendees keep reporting from their very first experience onward, it happens on a heart-to-heart level beyond external criteria: "I felt free to experience how love and joy are so close to fear and inhibition and how wonderful it is to cross that line and to feel that it is there, just like that, whenever I find the courage to let go."<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> {NA}

<sup>78</sup> {NA}

### **8.1.6 Andre – Summary**

Andre is a perfect representative of a YT alumnus who has learned to handle deep-rooted fears, such as sexual performance pressure and glossophobia. He is increasingly able to deliberately choose serenity over panic in tense situations. Handling his anxieties with confidence and improved self-esteem makes him, according to his testimony, more relaxed and outgoing, thus improving his relationships in general.

Andre's new-found confidence fuels his emotional accessibility as well as his zest to tackle demanding projects. He shows enhanced ambiguity tolerance by learning to accept more shades of grey between black and white and enjoys increasing calm and equanimity which permeate all of his relations. He strives to be a valuable member of society by "paying forward" what he himself has been generously given, thus planting seeds of care, affection and peaceful coexistence.

He is familiar with experiences of unconditional love even towards individuals who are not part of his closest circle; he has known glimpses of recognizing pure beauty in his counterpart. Andre enjoys moments free from conceptual thinking which are gateways towards stable inner peace.

### **8.2. Audrey: Sexual Healing**

Audrey is 48 years old; she works as a caregiver with mentally ill patients. At the time of the interview, she is in a relationship with Y, which she describes as challenging. The initial incentive to sign up for TWs was her "deeply unfulfilling sexual life" which she had "almost given up on"; a friend's advice who had attended several workshops at the IN convinced her to try it, herself. Another debilitating long-term issue is her "addiction to computer games as well as binge eating".

She graduated from her first YT in 2015 and decided to sign up for it again in 2016, in order to deepen her experience and to overcome obstacles she had been struggling with during her first time around. This refers particularly to “anything sexual, and my view on men in general”, which, according to her understanding, caused her to push back against some of the structures within the training, thus failing to obtain the full results she had been aiming for.

She sums up the main benefit she drew from the YTs: “What the workshops did for me – they started this life hunger in me... and life hunger is the very opposite of addiction. When I am stuck in addiction, I am like numb; I play video games, watch movies depicting somebody else’s life which isn’t mine – that’s worlds apart from feeling alive.”

### **8.2.1 Interactions and Relationships**

Yet another dominant issue is Audrey’s relationship with males. She describes how in the past, she would instrumentalize her lack of sexual interest as an excuse for keeping potential partners at bay, thus turning a defect (lack of contact) into a – questionable – asset (valid reason for not even trying to overcome her reservations): “That’s how I built my protection wall.” Whenever a relationship showed signs of deterioration, she would readily split, since the thought of feeling lonely was less frightening than being stuck in a complicated relationship. “Naturally, I was unable to admit that... and when on my own, I would cultivate my addictions, which is much harder to do when there is somebody around.”

Currently, Audrey is focused on learning to trust males and to open up, or even commit, to a relationship beyond its honeymoon phase. She had to accommodate to the fact that bonding does not come without downsides, either: now she has to deal with the

new phenomenon of neediness as well as with a new addiction: becoming attached to a person. Despite these difficulties, she is grateful for the relationship with Y., “since it forces me to look into my issues and makes it impossible to pretend they don’t exist. Questions like, ‘How do I take care of myself? What life am I living? How do I make sure I replenish and keep my energy?’ All these things are popping up.” She feels like having no other choice but working through her issues, if she wants to keep her current relationship: “If I don’t work them through, I am 100% sure this relationship goes South, and that’s not what I want. As it turns out, out of my neediness I am forced to get this job done. But I also notice [that working on my issues] makes me feel increasingly free.”

Regarding friendships, Audrey states that since she signed up for TWs, good part of her former circle of friends seems to have disappeared and given way to a new one, consisting mostly of former or current attendees of TWs. Within this group, she practices one of her new strategies, namely sharing her dark moments. “I feel much better cared for, listened to, understood and reflected by my Tantra peers [than by my former friends].”

According to Audrey, her close circle’s reactions to her transformation are positive. In her interview, Audrey mentions that her mother, who she is close with, was initially skeptical towards Tantra; however, a few months into Audrey’s training, she commented that it seemed like Audrey’s personality was getting stronger, that she was walking her talk and “being more of who she really was”. Other friends, Audrey recalls, remarked that they felt like she had become a better listener.

Audrey’s relationship with herself has transformed into a more kind and honest, but also a stricter one. “It’s tough love, really. When I feel drawn to the computer, knowing that there are more important things to do or that initially, I had a different plan, I tell myself, ‘Leave it alone’ – and mostly, I do.” She can hardly believe that only two

years ago, “before Tantra”, she said to a friend that she was getting old now and that it was okay; she would just make herself at home in that slow withering-away. “I really felt like that back then, I wasn’t even frustrated about it – I was merely 47!”

Currently she has the strong feeling that she has “a lot of catching up to do”, particularly experimenting with relationships and sexuality. This is why she did not follow through with the relationship with X., who she was with before Y. and whom she worshiped, but who favored a monogamous setting. “I need to see whether what he and I had is possible with others, as well. I haven’t had this [kind of gentle, trusting sexuality], before, and I knew I couldn’t promise him to renounce cutting my teeth just for his sake.” She is aware of the addictive potential of these experiments: “I could get addicted to experimenting with guys... if that was what filled my days, it would be alright by me!”

Audrey muses on whether this is really mere “catching up” or whether there is a neediness stemming from her childhood: “I never had a loving relationship with my late dad. There was nothing. A bit of love and then, back to lots of indifference.”

### *Analysis*

Audrey is well aware of her issues and describes her mental processes with great clarity. This is remarkable, since it requires highly developed reflection skills and self-awareness to look through the ways individuals dodge their own fear-laden situations, e.g. how they make sure sexual encounters “simply don’t happen”, even though such encounters are precisely what they yearn for. Intimately knowing the ways we try to fool ourselves is, however, the *sine qua non* for any self-induced transformation, similar to analyzing a person’s food intake before taking steps towards healthier eating habits.

Audrey systematically applies what she has learned in her YTs, by taking chances to practice trust in different situations. Such a training goal is not hard to achieve in a protected environment where the exercise settings are clearly defined, the group is being continuously supported and the individual is encouraged to follow the instructions, but even more so to be aware and to follow their very own sense of appropriateness. Based on these experiences, Audrey is able to turn the obstacles on her path into stepping stones, viewing for example a challenging relationship as a perfect opportunity for practicing patience, understanding and accepting others' views, but also for taking care of herself and safeguarding her boundaries. All of these qualities are the backbone of a confident, kind and peaceful character, as described in Section 3.3 (p. 44).

What might sound surprising is Audrey's decision to end her fulfilling sexual relationship with X. after such a long period of searching, because she "couldn't promise him faithfulness" since she felt the need to explore her sexual response with different partners. From a conventional point of view, it might seem like she either frivolously threw away something she claimed she had been desperate for, or perhaps, deep down she was not quite ready for a committed relationship. While these elements may have some influence, having observed and guided Audrey for several years, I lean towards a different interpretation. As it seems, she is being utterly honest with X., not wanting to betray him precisely because she holds him dear; at the same time, she courageously declines betraying her own Self by restricting herself to a setting she is not quite ready for, even though that means she will lose something precious she already had in hand.

Moreover, Audrey took a leap that only few dare to take – not to cling to the good, once we have found it, hoping it will stay forever, and burdening the loved one with the expectation of *being The One*. She decided rather to honor his wishes for monogamy as well as her own for "catching up", and to be open to meeting people who

she hopes to share different, but just as fulfilling moments with, in a future. As a side-effect of this decision, Audrey also manages to eschew a potential addiction trap.

A decision like this, where the individual leaves the safe yet limiting shore behind and embraces the uncertainty of the open sea, requires high levels of inner clarity, honesty, courage and confidence; it is hard to think of a situation that would fit the phrase “a leap of faith” more poignantly. Audrey shows that she is able and willing to have strong faith, to think out of the box and to go against the mainstream in order to stand by her truth: a definition of social courage which, in turn and according to Dieter Frey, Renate Neumann and Mechthild Schäfer (2001), is a cornerstone of functional societies. The odds to experience peace, again, are higher for functional societies, as opposed to dysfunctional ones.

Her increased trust in others is paralleled by the increasing trust she is gaining in herself, by “listening to her own advice”, particularly in the context of her addictions. This requires discipline, which, again, is a basic ingredient of any serious Tantric training (cf. Section 6.3.3, p. 150). Once she was, thanks to her newly developed discipline, able to break the downward spiral of failure and disappointment with herself for longer periods of time, Audrey’s zest for life came back, motivating her to tackle more and deeper-layered issues.

### **8.2.2 Confidence, Insight**

At the present, Audrey is working with the concept of her Inner Child (Bradshaw, 1990; Capacchione, 1991). She understood that this part of her Self is exceedingly needy; currently she is learning how to nourish herself but often struggles, since the concept is still new to her. “However, whenever it does work, I can look at my relationship [with

Y.] without fooling myself, and it doesn't seem as overwhelmingly important, anymore... This is when I am able to say 'yes' or 'no', according to what is appropriate.”

Her relationships with men used to be tainted with mistrust and the vague feeling that “women were the better people, anyway”. The TWs offered many opportunities to listen to her male peers share their very own struggles and difficulties; this “made men more tangible for me, more accessible”.

During her very first workshop she realized that something unexpected was happening: “Something within me opened up and I started to regain this curiosity about what life had to offer.” While Audrey used to avoid challenges before, now she started to enjoy facing them. She describes her former life as being broadly about dodging challenges and feeling “pretty comfy with my circle of friends and my addictions”, but at some point she started to realize that her life radius was becoming increasingly narrow. “Now I developed the courage to face challenges and to try new things, for instance to address conflicts. It feels like my path is growing wider again, and I feel 500% more alive than before Tantra.”

There were quite a few stressful moments for Audrey during her first YT, since the situational training (Section 6.4.4, p. 190) triggered a number of emotional reactions with which she was not accustomed to dealing, such as painful memories, debilitating dogmata (“I am a loser”) and self-doubt. Overwhelmed by these reactions, she would often feel tempted to console and numb herself with one of her addictions: binge eating or gaming.

The second time around, however, she was able to harvest the results of her last year's hard work; in the interview, she reports having gained remarkable control: “I can literally watch my issues and fears pop up and I am able to look them in the eye. Some



simply dissolve [when I apply the methods learned], others just remind me of their existence and that they would like to be tackled.” She notes a much lower drive to withdraw from potentially painful memories and patterns and celebrates being able to take good care of herself – not allowing the pain to overwhelm her but deliberately switching between facing her monsters and ensuring her “inner little girl” feels comforted and safe. “This year, I have many fewer difficulties in verbalizing things like, ‘this is what I want; this is what I want to explore; stop, I am not going any further’. This feels so, so good.”

As a result of her inner development, Audrey faces emotional states of which she had been mostly unaware of, before, since she used to cover them up with, and seek relief in, addictive behaviors. These newly-discovered emotions can occasionally grow overwhelming, but Audrey has a wide range of strategies available: “Sometimes I work through it on my own – I cry in my room and curl up in bed and just let it out, and I do things that do me good. Or I find a way to distract myself. Or I phone somebody who I know is kind and openhearted, won’t join in to my drama but help me to see things in a brighter light.”

### *Analysis*

Meeting challenges joyfully is an attitude which, in my experience, mightily propels personal development. As soon as Audrey stopped being afraid of difficulties and challenges – as a result of her improved self-esteem and confidence – and started enjoying the ride rather than exclusively focusing on the aspired goal, her world gained width and depth and she re-discovered her interest in life. From a Tantric/Buddhist point of view, vivid interest in life is not inconsistent with inner peace, at all; on the contrary, it is from this quiet place inside that an individual can fully embrace the joys and sorrows

of life, without getting entangled in them. As Zen master Kakuan phrased it in "Ten Bulls", an ancient description of the stages of personal growth: "I go to the market place with my wine bottle and return home with my staff. I visit the wine shop and the market, and everyone I look upon becomes enlightened." (Reps, 1961)

Being aware of the emerging of unpleasant memories and behaviors, but facing them rather than suppressing or covering them up with addictive patterns, is a remarkable achievement and proves Audrey's increased courage and awareness. Her ability to use her words to express likes and dislikes as well as her tender care for her "inner little girl" are valuable tools on her journey to a balanced, centered and kind mental state. When emotions threaten to overwhelm her, she has a number of effective strategies at hand to re-establish her inner peace and does not hesitate to use them. This way, she increases her feeling of independence and being in charge of her own life, rather than dependent on the good-will or mood of a beloved person.

### **8.2.3 Inner Peace, Equanimity, Joy**

Audrey describes herself as "a very impatient person – when something ought to get resolved, I want it to get done right away". What she certainly did "get done right away" was her access to her emotional landscape: "There is so much more joy now. But more pain, too... both. Much more emotion, in general." The new range of emotions allows for a closer look at them, as well: one primary example is her former feelings of superiority towards males, which have almost completely disappeared, allowing for more eye-level relationships: "My view on guys has changed. Now I can look at them with kindness ... I used to be so much more fault-finding and judgmental."

Being patient with herself while avoiding relapses into eating disorders or PC-gaming is still a challenge, although the episodes have become very rare in recent

months. She found that sticking to healthy routines – “being on track” – is very helpful: “I can be very patient while pursuing my goal [for instance, a trusting relationship], as long as I feel like I am working on my issues and like I take care of myself.” Whenever she has “ticked off” her self-care program for the day and still finds herself in front of the computer or the fridge, now she does not condemn herself for it as harshly as before: “I am aware that I am still learning.” On the other hand, when she gets sloppy and skips her little rituals – “do three little things you really enjoy, every day” –, and then finds herself slipping back into old patterns (neediness, self-pity, feeling of inadequacy which drive her into addictive behavior), she loses patience with herself and tends to beat herself up.

When strong emotions kick in, such as feeling rejected, she now has a choice where there used to be the sole option of giving in to numbing addictive behavior: “I tried [the old remedy]... I sat in front of the computer. But it felt extremely dissatisfying, repulsive even, so I turned it off, again. Then I lay down and stroked my body and cried and phoned a close friend who gave me good advice – and I ended up feeling good and empowered.”

One asset she has gained through TWs is a “new vocabulary”, words to use for anything referring to sexuality. “This is extremely helpful, not just with friends who often want to talk with me about it, but also in my job with my colleagues: I work with disabled patients, and sexuality is an ongoing topic.” Audrey’s light-hearted confidence when addressing sexual matters, “the absence of stammering when using certain words”, helps her counterpart to relax as well and renders trusting conversations possible.

Audrey’s confidence when dealing with emotions improved to such extent that she has been repeatedly requested to handle difficult patients who “got on everybody’s nerves with their unceasing crying”. Rather than leaving the patient to her emotional

pain, Audrey would take her in her arms and allow the patient to describe her inner processes, encouraging even emotions such as anger or sadness which, in her workplace context, are rather frowned upon. By doing so, now such an episode takes at most 30 minutes, rather than a full day: “With my newly gained ability of handling feelings and both physical and emotional closeness, I really feel like I can make a difference for these patients.”

Her life that had “felt like being basically over” a couple of years ago, feels exciting and intriguing, again. “There is so much more I want to do and try! Recently I attended a scuba diving course – a childhood dream I made come true for myself!”

### *Analysis*

Impatience is one of the biggest roadblocks for a large portion of TW attendees: new habits, mental patterns and worldviews are rarely implemented as quickly as one can stream a video from the internet, or establish a Skype connection. While the societal pace in developed countries increases on all levels,<sup>79</sup> transformation still takes time, just as a seed takes its time to germinate.<sup>80</sup> Therefore, overcoming the urge for instant gratification – considered by some researchers a “sign of immaturity” (Ray & Najman, 1986) is an important benchmark on an individual’s journey towards personal development and inner peace.

Audrey’s formerly hampered and now opening access to emotions facilitates a new understanding of old patterns; at the same time, it also shows ways to resolve them: Audrey’s growing awareness of her anxieties and her increasingly indulgent view

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<sup>79</sup> Ramesh Sitaraman, a computer science professor at UMass Amherst, examined the viewing habits of 6.7 million internet users in a study released 2012. How long were subjects willing to be patient? Two seconds. (College of Information and Computer Sciences, n.d.).

<sup>80</sup> “A lot of things that are really valuable take time, but immediate gratification is the default response. It’s difficult to overcome those urges and be patient and wait for things to come over time” (Muther, 2013).

on them helps her dissolve fear-induced strategies such as the feeling of superiority towards males. Being finally able to establish contact on eye-level, again, makes habits like belittling or judging men obsolete; a less-judgmental individual is by definition one that is likely to maintain rather peaceful relationships.

Audrey now has a full range of self-soothing strategies available which she readily applies rather than recurring to her self-harming behaviors, thus establishing a peaceful relationship with herself. Beyond that, she also developed confidence and familiarity in dealing with another person's overwhelming emotions. This and her compassion added to her assets as a professional and increased her feeling of being sought-for and appreciated in her work environment, which, again, enhances her feeling of "belonging". This development is certainly favorable, since having a secure place in a system an individual wants to belong to is an important element for establishing inner peace.

#### **8.2.4 Body Awareness, Sexuality**

In her interview, Audrey states that sexuality had never been joyful for her. Sexual encounters used to be frustrating and therefore tended to become increasingly scarce. The last relationship before she engaged in TWs failed mostly because of it: "I never had been too keen to have sex, but here my drive literally dried up. My clit was the only part of me that was still somewhat welcoming to touch – the rest of my body grew increasingly catatonic." So, she had to decide whether she should give up on men and relationships altogether and resign herself to the life of a single, or to look into the reasons for her situation. This was when she signed up for her first TW, vaguely hoping to discover a gate to her body and a joyful sexuality.

The first few TWs “did not prompt changes in my sexlife but rather something completely different” – she re-discovered her joy of life, in general, as well as a new courage to face life’s challenges. Despite her “impatient nature” she stuck to the training and found, after about one year, “hey, my Yoni<sup>81</sup> is alive! I didn’t know that, before. I thought my clit was alive but the rest of my Yoni was just dead. And then I realized, she just needs to be awakened properly, to just start buzzing... that was amazing.”

Audrey felt shy about trying out her newly discovered joy of touch, afraid that “it could go away”. She spent some time experimenting with cuddling and petting, anxious of not over-doing and particularly avoiding sexual union: “I had exclusively negative memories of ‘normal’ sexual union... all this ‘bang, bang’ that I just can’t stand. It’s never been joyful. I felt no pain, but I didn’t feel anything else, either – no fun at all. So I usually just waited for it to be over.” She noticed that men who intended to have intercourse with her would lose their erection on regular basis, and she blamed her own lack of passion for it: “With me being unresponsive, it just wouldn’t work, energetically. So I loaded this guilt onto my shoulders, as well: sure it would work for them... but not with me.”

By discovering slow sex (Richardson, 1999) with her then partner X., a whole new world opened up before Audrey. Even though she ended that relationship, these experiences enabled her to embrace a more “mainstream” sexual life with Y. “I wish we could go even slower – but I realized that the ways in which we are together are very enjoyable, as well; my Yoni is having lots of fun... there is much less fear now.” She is determined to protect her Yoni from “fierce screwing” – at least, at this moment: “Maybe the time will come when I say, okay, let’s see how this feels. But for now, I am not interested.”

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<sup>81</sup> Cf. fn 44, p. 157.

Her new abilities of self-determination help Audrey to deal even with anxieties that elicit somatic symptoms in her: when, after separating from X., she found the sexual encounters with Y. being less slow and gentle, she realized that her physical response started diminishing: “I was afraid I would lose my Yoni’s new-gained sensitivity... and indeed, I noticed her starting to withdraw again.” However, Audrey managed to handle her fear by not looking the other way but rather staying put and focused on the very moment: “There was a readiness to observe how this [potentially stressful, less than extremely gentle sexuality] would make me feel like. And I found that I could practice slow sex by not faking things the way I used to, but by simply being in the moment.”

Audrey’s sexual encounters are, for the most part, not orgasm-oriented: “I don’t get that high, I am far from peaking... but that’s not really important, right now. I so very much indulge in it, I love my Yoni being stroked on the inside, sweet and gentle. But it isn’t exciting in the sense of arousal, the way I used to chase after an orgasm, before – this clitoral excitement.” Audrey is rarely interested in having an orgasm, and if so, she takes care of her needs, herself: “When I really want to go for it, I perform a self-pleasuring ritual.”

She emphasizes that this is not about masturbation and quick relief. “This is something that changed completely for me, during the YTs. Before, I would just masturbate for relaxation, with an orgasm in the end. Now I practice this only in cases of absolute emergency, when I can’t fall asleep and nothing else would help.” As opposed to this, Audrey celebrates self-pleasuring rituals “that can simply end, at any point... whenever I realize I’m good now. There is no goal, you see, it is all about the time I spend with myself. I stroke my entire body, I simply do myself good. I am less goal-oriented – the journey is its own reward.”

During the YT, she also “totally learned to like” her own body. “That used to be very different; I used to be at odds with it. But during this one exercise [at the second workshop of the YT series], I realized that this had changed completely. Completely!<sup>82</sup> Last year [at the same workshop] there wasn’t much I could list that I liked about my body; this year, there may have been some things that I’d prefer to be different, but my body is definitely just fine the way it is, and I genuinely like most of it.” A statement like this is everything but a given, considering the triumph plastic surgery celebrates recently, even among very young women (Runacres, Hayes, Grover, & Temple-Smith, 2015). Also, her body awareness has increased noticeably: “I am so much more in touch with myself now. I am aware of my body. Also, the sensitivity of my whole body, of my skin, has increased incredibly!”

### *Analysis*

Given Audrey’s sexual history, her decision to allow herself time to “catch up” on pleasant experiences is all too understandable: for most of her life, sexual encounters were something that made little sense, because she would hardly feel anything, let alone enjoy it. However, before she was able to reclaim the joy of sex, she first had to re-discover her very own joy of life, as described in previous subchapters. Once this and a new courage to tackle difficulties were sufficiently established, her committed training and practice, indeed, sparked unimagined sensations in her Yoni and let the fear of sexual union diminish. This is a promising step towards a fulfilled sexual life which, as discussed in chapter 6.2, “Sexuality” (p. 126), is often linked with the feeling of being at peace.

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<sup>82</sup> This concrete exercise consists in choosing a partner and then to share with one another what each of them likes and dislikes about their own bodies.



Audrey is not orgasm-oriented but enjoys exploring subtle sensations and emotions during her encounters as well as during her occasional self-pleasuring rituals. This is another indicator for a less goal- and reward-driven behavior which facilitates achieving long-term goals in general. Her relaxed approach also allows her to focus on the subtleties of the here and now, giving way to deepened sensations and insights, typically observed in meditation practice. This way, her sexual activity is approaching meditation – a combination very much in tune with traditional Tantric goals, which ultimately lead to inner peace.

Comprehensive peace of mind embraces many components. One of them is being at peace with one's body and physical condition, as a study with 12,176 participants shows: "People [satisfied with their body appearance] had higher Openness, Conscientious, and Extraversion, were more secure in attachment style, and had higher self-esteem and life satisfaction" (Frederick et al., 2016). A similar opening-up can be observed when Audrey describes the difference between her perception of her body during her two YTs with striking clarity: not only the image of her body, but also her awareness of it and its sensations have reached a new high.

### **8.2.5 Mindfulness, Spirituality**

During her first YT, Audrey had a key experience which confirmed her decision to pursue the Tantric path: she discovered, during an energetic and non-sexual exercise, what it feels like when male and female principles merge, when "Shiva and Shakti tune in and really meet in a passionate embrace... that was amazing and so, so exciting!"

In her interview, Audrey shares that she used to keep her addictions a secret. Since she started working on her issues, she watches them closely, analyzes them, talks about them and "lays her cards on the table". Due to their unflattering visibility which

she herself induced, she now feels obliged to develop and strictly apply new strategies of dealing with stressful situations which in the past, she used to respond to with addictive patterns.

So far, Audrey's working on her mindfulness and her issues has rendered results which have recently been backed up by research: "Mindfulness-based approaches may reduce compulsive overeating, address associated behavioral and emotional dysregulation, and promote internalization of change." (Kristeller, Wolever, & Sheets, 2014). Concretely, Audrey reports recent times when she felt like distracting herself from distressing emotions and would automatically sit down to play a video game – and get back up, because, to her surprise, she would not feel attracted to it, at all. "It didn't require any discipline... it simply didn't feel like fun, so I didn't do it."

Audrey struggles to describe what exactly has changed that enabled her to just walk away from the computer: "It feels like some kind of a new freedom. In the past, I would sit there and play, even though I wouldn't want to. I was not free to leave, I had to sit there, or to binge eat, for that matter. Now... it is like a body sensation, I can't describe it. Some kind of liberation."

In her working place, her enhanced self-awareness, along with her confidence when addressing sexual issues, leads to more trust on behalf of her patients. Particularly in sensitive situations such as suspicion of abuse among residents, she describes how now she is being consulted as somebody who is comfortable addressing sensitive topics. By being gently and mindfully present, Audrey is able to calm high emotional swell, thus re-establishing the patient's inner peace, and to ensure clear yet kind communication: "My own openness clearly helps my counterpart to open up, as well."

*Analysis*

According to typical testimonies, it is highly rewarding and motivating to experience moments of deep insight and union such as the one between Shiva and Shakti, described by Audrey. Being beyond words, such moments cannot be properly communicated yet are nevertheless oftentimes life-changing. A brief moment of enlightenment like this can instill the certainty that there are other planes than the well-known plane of matter and competition, and other ways of relating to living things than fear and attachment. It can open the gates for a spirituality which does not require religious labels to acknowledge the kinship of all beings.

Another effect of Audrey's feeling at home in her body and in the world is the cessation of her anxiety to hide her weaknesses, specifically her addictions.<sup>83</sup> This has a twofold effect: for one, it simplifies her life and enhances her authentic self-perception, thus strengthening her confidence; for the other, it strongly motivates her to find alternatives to her addictive patterns, in order to be able to maintain her new and positive self-image. This way, she applying self-therapy and deliberately building an upward spiral – the opposite of a downward spiral, an effect all-too-well known to any addict.

Deepening her awareness and mindfulness through continuous reflection, Audrey gets to taste the liberation of compulsive behavior, the freedom of choice, which she describes as something physical, rather than mental. Liberation does not equal peace; yet whoever struggled with any kind of addiction will confirm that finally breaking free from the irresistible and self-harming urge is a huge step towards it.

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<sup>83</sup> The same mechanism, only starting at the other end, is applied by Alcoholics Anonymous® and similar groups: as group members grow familiar with being upfront about their shortcomings and weaknesses, i.e. by ceasing to hide them, they re-gain confidence in their bodies, minds and individual worlds.

### 8.2.6 Audrey – Summary

Audrey's main initial goals – claiming a joyful sexual life and tackling her addictions – were fully achieved by the contents of the YTs and her own committed effort. Audrey proves correct the observation that attending the YT – or at least parts of it – for a second time is extremely beneficial, particularly for attendees with deep-rooted personal problems. Being, once again, "supported by their trusted facilitating team" who "provide a safe and familiar environment"<sup>84</sup> aids attendees to develop the courage necessary to face persistent fears and their "dark places".

Audrey has developed new joy of life, courage in addressing and working on her issues; her body- and self-awareness have increased and her self-esteem as well as the clarity of her communication are remarkable. Most impressive is her success in overcoming her gaming addiction and eating disorder: the 47 years-old who was ready to give up on life and happiness, has managed to set up a firm base to build a balanced life upon.

Being back in charge of her life and knowing that she is the one who chooses its direction empowers Audrey to take her time in any given situation: even when facing unexpected turns, she is increasingly able to tune into her inner wisdom and to calmly listen to her own needs, emotions and sensations, before reacting. Grounded in the present moment and confident in her inner peace, she can act in a way that soothes her own emotional waves as well as those of her counterpart. The balanced life which she is building this way is, according to her report, a source of enhanced perception of subjective happiness; subjective happiness, in turn, is a pivotal precondition for inner peace and propagates outer *peaceability*.

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<sup>84</sup> {NA}

### **8.3. Brian: Inner Child**

Brian is a 50-year-old probation officer, originally trained as an engineer. He had been a committed Contact Improvisation<sup>85</sup> practitioner for 20 years and discovered TWs in 2007. Working on his personal development, he particularly embraced the analogy of the Inner Child and uses it broadly to describe the processes he is going through, on one hand, and when dealing with high-strung emotions, on the other. Brian is part of a patchwork family; he has two sons with two different women. He is now in a relationship which started at a TW, has weathered countless crises (some of which I witnessed) and is, according to his report, currently going through another one. He and his girlfriend attended the YT together in 2013.

#### **8.3.1 Interactions and Relationships**

As a child, Brian was led to think that his mother's second husband was his biological father; he was raised mostly by his grandparents. His family bonds as a grown-up are very loose: "I used to see my dad only once a year, and my mother's presence in my life is very reduced... if I don't reach out, I don't hear from her." The whole family is on bad terms, and Brian spent years trying to reconcile his relatives. "At some point, I gave up – it was killing me, it was useless... my mom wouldn't even attend my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration."

This situation saddens Brian, but in the same breath, he appears to be rationalizing his family's behavior: "I know that's just the way they are, they aren't communicative people. At home, we would never talk, and even less so about feelings."

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<sup>85</sup> "Contact Improvisation is an evolving system of movement initiated in 1972 by American choreographer Steve Paxton. The improvised dance form is based on the communication between two moving bodies that are in physical contact and their combined relationship to the physical laws that govern their motion—gravity, momentum, inertia." <https://contactquarterly.com/contact-improvisation/about/>, retrieved on August 4, 2016

He comforts himself with the thought that today, his real family is in the Contact Improvisation scene and among his Tantric peers, where he can open up, share and talk about emotions: “In my family of origin, that was simply a no-go.”

These friendships, which have taken the place of his lacking family bonds, have acquired more openness, depth and intimacy, due to the TWs: “I share with [my friends] things like how I feel when I dance, or during Tantric rituals... this atmosphere, the bonding with my dance- or exercise partner, or the community spirit we had among us guys during a men-only TW... this [intimacy and vulnerability] kind of rubs off [to my relations].” According to Brian, his friends notice the changes in him: they comment on his improved confidence, calm, and equanimity; they also find he stands up for himself more.

His enhanced calm and equanimity are qualities Brian understands as his “offering to the world”. However, he feels that these qualities require protection, which is why he abandoned TV and newspapers about 15 years ago: “I don’t think I could radiate calmness and self-composure the way I do now, if I were aware of all the negativity in the news. I think I’d get pretty aggressive, instead.”

Brian’s current romantic relationship of eight years was over a long period of time characterized by strong feelings of insecurity and inadequacy on either side, which, as he comments, translated into frequent and fierce clashes and episodes of jealousy. Despite involving two passionate personalities, these confrontations never turned abusive. The current “massive crisis” brought the couple once more onto the edge of splitting: “Stupid things happened, and things got out of control recently... But we both have a deep love for one another. Let’s see how this develops over the next weeks... I am keen to know.”

*Analysis*

What is most surprising at first glance is that Brian speaks of and describes his and his girlfriend's red-hot crisis, but his voice and his words sound completely calm – not indifferent or ironic, or repressing anger or hurt, but utterly composed. The same is true for his partner, as she leaves their home during Brian's interview: both exchange gentle, affectionate words and a hug, and if Brian had not listed their difficulties earlier in this interview, there would have been nothing to raise my suspicions about them, “balancing on the very edge of splitting”.

This observation suggests that, over time and applying the tools from their YT, both Brian and his partner have learned to deal with crises as a part of everyday life, without giving them the same anxious importance as they used to. This surprisingly serene approach became, apparently, possible for Brian after he grew aware of the evidence: the two of them were obviously successful at making amends and getting back together over and over again, despite major clashes. This may not be the end of all ground for Brian to be covered in terms of equanimity and serenity; nevertheless, he made undeniable progress in the area of communication and forbearance.

The lack of family bonding and backup may be one reason for Brian's tendency to find substitutes for a safe and welcoming environment in peer groups. His friendships are important to him and provide feedback about his transformation process. Despite the bleak family situation, Brian finds words of justification for his relatives' ways, rather than resorting to contempt or condemnation. While this may sow peace only in his own heart, at first, it is – according to systemic theory (Ruppert, 2007) – very well possible that over time, his own peace will expand into his surroundings.

However, keeping up his calm comes at a cost: he does not feel strong enough to also face the “daily negativity” of news broadcasting and chooses to withdraw, giving up

on being informed. This kind of peace of mind, based on head-in-the-sand politics, can hardly be the ultimate goal a person strives for in their personal development: such calm and peace could be toppled too easily if, at some point, dramatic external events affected the individual's personal life. Therefore, I suggest there might be still some development potential, since a number of his Tantric peers (cf. Section 8.4.1, p. 320) are proof of the possibility to reconcile inner peace with attentively observing or even engaging in the outer world's events.

According to his interview, Brian is still cautious about confronting uncomfortable feelings such as aggression. This suggests that he has not yet fully unfolded his potential of emotion regulation; nonetheless, he already shows clear signs of more secure attachment – i.e. having progressed in healing his sense of being worthy of love (Leyh et al., 2016) – by responding to the potentially overwhelming current situation with his partner in a convincingly composed way.

### **8.3.2 Confidence, Insight**

According to Brian, today he and his girlfriend tackle their difficulties mostly by having conversations about them. They analyze what went wrong and when; they try to understand where one of them or both felt hurt or unheard. Their problems, he comments, are more often than not connected with personal freedom and jealousy: the current crisis was unleashed by a three-years long period of opposing understandings of the agreement they had regarding sexual contacts outside their relationship. Brian acknowledges that he simply “extended the agreement we had during the YT... that it would be okay to have sensual encounters with others. However, I didn't communicate that clearly, and in the meantime, my partner went back to applying the monogamous



rules we had before. Now she feels hurt and betrayed because of this misunderstanding and lack of communication.”

Despite the serious glitches in their communication, both maintain awareness of the patterns they are subjected to and struggling with; behaviors which oftentimes seem to result in acting against the couple’s own best interest: “She felt betrayed and set out to hurt me – it worked; so I said to myself, everything you can do, I can do better... and so forth. Our Inner Children had grabbed the rudder<sup>86</sup> and it took us few months to realize that it was time for the grown-ups to take back over.”

During his YT, Brian learned to handle his Inner Child’s emotional outbursts and to communicate with it without having to suppress or reject it. Even in times of tension, he states, he increasingly manages to reflect on his controversial internal dynamics and to embrace them with self-compassion (Neff, 2004) while also taking care of the Inner Child’s needs.

Brian feels that despite, or perhaps thanks to his volatile relationship with his girlfriend, he learned to assume responsibility for himself and his actions. He relates this to another newly acquired ability – standing up for himself: “I used to feel lonely and would rather follow what other people said than believing in myself and doing my own thing. Now, whenever something really matters to me, I will do it, against all odds.” Discerning what is and what is not of real importance is one of the skills he credits the TWs for: “I learned to tune into what was happening inside me; to become aware of ‘what is really going on, is this truly important to me’? And if so, I am now ready to stand my ground even against opposing opinions.”

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<sup>86</sup> Reference to a metaphor often used during the YT: when we leave it up to our frightened, hurt Inner Child to steer the boat of our life, i.e. if we permit the pouty, angry, revengeful part of our personality to make the decisions, it is more than probable that our boat will crash against the next rock.

For instance, he stands by his strong sex drive which is sometimes frowned upon, particularly by his partners: “Today I simply say, yes, I am active – possibly more so than others, but this is me, and I don’t need to be measured by others’ standards.” This is also true for other expressions of his personality, such as his dancing style. He used to feel shy or, quite the opposite, pressed to impress; as a result of the many dance sessions during the YT, he discovered a key to unlock his authenticity: “Sometimes it feels like, gosh, this must look so weird what I’m doing... but I found that the less I cared and the more I was myself, the more people would tell me how much they’d enjoyed watching me.”

Overall, Brian feels like he is oftentimes calmly resting in his center; he trusts his own feelings and experiences more confidence when communicating with females; reaching out to males became more relaxed and he enjoys feeling at ease with his very own way to dance.

### *Analysis*

Talking about topics that touch one’s most vulnerable spots without getting defensive or resorting to counter-attacks is a genuine challenge, and not all couples master this art in the course of their relationship, as John Siegert and Glen Stamp (1994) describe it in their article “‘Our first big fight’ as a milestone in the development of close relationships”.<sup>87</sup> It is encouraging to see that Brian and his partner, relying on their experiences drawn from their YT, obviously developed the necessary problem-solving skills to handle their frequent conflicts in an increasingly peaceful way.

Despite theirs still being a high-risk relationship, it also forced Brian into accomplishing solid growing-up work, as taught particularly during the YT: assuming

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<sup>87</sup> Among the most memorable examples for toxic-neurotic communication in literature are the dialogues in E. Albee’s *Who is afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

responsibility for one's emotions, needs and actions, standing up for oneself, disentangling co-dependencies, building grounded self-esteem and confidence along with compassion and kindness and most of all – staying aware of their own inner processes.

### **8.3.3 Inner Peace, Equanimity, Joy**

Unlike during the first years of our acquaintance, Brian seems to be relatively composed and certainly not panicky when talking about the “massive crisis” in his relationship. He is aware of this transformation and credits his continuous development with it; plus “I trust the universe to produce the challenges that are right for me”. He developed more faith in the relationship, as a result of all the years they have shared and the difficulties they have gone through. On the other hand, he also trusts that “the universe knows my path and will ensure I end up in the right place. With or without my partner – I know things will keep improving.”

While – according to Brian – his girlfriend perceives their relationship as “ceaseless fighting”, Brian recalls good times and long periods of harmony and growth; however, he also admits that there have been times when “our [Inner] Children would strive against each other”.

One part of his transformation which he definitely attributes to the TWs is his increased patience with himself. As opposed to situations in the past, now he acknowledges when he made a mistake; however, he stopped beating himself up for it: “I’d say, ‘Yes, you are right, that was a crappy thing I’ve done’, rather than attacking back or looking for excuses. I can stay right there and calmly admit that I did wrong and can’t undo it, anymore. So I just account for it.”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> A similar account comes from T.G., an advanced and experienced alumnus: “I used to think that I had to cover up all my mistakes and make everybody believe that for me, nothing ever went wrong. It was

The Inner-Child analogy, which he uses frequently, helps him describe one of his most memorable self-healing experiences: “Towards the end of one TW, I decided to take my Inner Child to the zoo, and so I did, right after getting back home. I would take the little guy into my arms and lift him up so he could look over the fences, and I would show him all the animals. I remember it was looking at an alpaca where it touched me so... to be this close to myself, that I teared all up. Our dialogue hasn’t ceased, since then.”

This dialogue with Brian’s Inner Child is particularly helpful when the Child “yearns for mom and tries to find her in my partner.” He is able to calm this part of his personality, explain over and over that his girlfriend is not the mother the Inner Child is desperately looking for, and reassure it of Brian’s unconditional love and acceptance. “This is what I learned in our [his and the author’s] numerous emergency counseling sessions during workshop breaks – that there is a lot of work to do, but that I am able to do it.” This way, he has managed to find a “peaceful mode” with his critical or needy inner voices.

Brian describes a number of helpful skills he and his girlfriend developed, which efficiently prevent their Inner Children from “going rampant”: “We are more forbearing now, more patient with one another. Over time, we became more loving, kind and mindful, too.” While it still happens that their Inner Children go berserk, Brian notes that his “recovery time” from hurt feelings has grown substantially shorter – rather than days on end, he “sulks just a couple of hours”. The couple also invented little rituals that help

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during my YT when I slowly came to understand that others make mistakes, too, and that the world would not collapse because of them, admitting their mishaps – on the contrary, these peers were still well-loved and appreciated. So I tried that, myself, and with time, I became pretty relaxed about it.”  
(Personal conversation, Sept 2016)

them address sensitive topics, such as a little wooden heart on the kitchen counter that signals “Don’t worry, I’m not mad, I just need a little me-time right now.”

Regarding his difficult family situation, Brian gives the TWs credit for being able to make peace with his relatives. “I used to be extremely mad at them, because they never even tried to do things differently. But then, after hearing about it so many times [during the YT], I understood that they really might have acted as best as they could at the time. And I am grateful, because without them, I wouldn’t be alive.” Now he can think of his family of origin without grudge, “and that gives me a wonderfully peaceful feeling.”

His increasingly stable inner peace is also an asset at his workplace, where he supervises groups of offenders in a workshop. “There is a high aggression potential in the air there, but I noticed that when I just stay calm and centered, no matter the restlessness and chaos all around, it does rub off – the guys are less aggressive, more calm. This awareness of my own energy is something I definitely owe to the IN.”

### *Analysis*

Trust in a higher power, be it God, the Great Mother or the Universe, is a tried method of finding meaning and achieving or keeping one’s peace of mind. Examined as an isolated phenomenon, a deep trust in the Universe and its wisdom as displayed by Brian might sound naïve and, in fact, like the opposite of being an adult in charge of his own life. However, overseeing the whole picture and taking into consideration all the other signs of Brian’s personal development, his certainty about “being put into the right place” can also be read as a readiness to let things unfold rather than forcing them into a certain direction – an approach that brings to mind the peaceful qualities of meditative states and equanimity.

Brian managed to develop patience with himself, learned how to admit mistakes, bonded with his Inner Child, started to differentiate between the Child's yearning for the never-had mother and the adult Brian's female partner, learned to use small soothing rituals. The calm he radiates is an asset at his workplace; he not only justifies his family-of-origin's ways, but was able to make his peace and now even feels gratitude towards them. All of these steps towards *peaceability* – reconciliation, mature handling of one's needs, developing gratitude – are invaluable pillars for a stable peace of mind which, then, can become this individual's gift to the world.

#### **8.3.4 Body Awareness, Sexuality**

Brian defines himself as body-centered; he loves reaching out, particularly when body contact is involved. In his Contact Improvisation encounters, he found that sometimes he was perceived as transgressing boundaries, sexual and non-sexual, and he wanted to understand what was going wrong.

Since Tantra “has to do with sexuality and also with energy and personal development”, he decided to try it. His expectation was that “this is a setting where I can explore sexuality while being in a safe environment. Also, I wanted to expand my sexual horizon – not necessarily techniques, simply see what else is out there.” Another focus point was to possibly “meet a nice woman”, since he was single at that time and “you get the idea of what somebody really looks like much better when they wear little or no clothes”.

He discovered that his sexual thoughts and fantasies, which he had felt awkward and guilty about, were not anomalous but quite common: “This encouraged me and brought back some of my self-esteem.” Brian also found, much to his relief, that there were ways of exploring his low-key BDSM kinks together with his partner. On the other

hand, during sensual encounters, he learned to take his time and to set the scene for “encounters that would not focus on goals but on the journey”; he learned to build trust and to “offer gentle touch without second thoughts, lovingly and with mindfulness”.

### *Analysis*

One of the reasons Brian signed up for Tantra was the vague feeling that he “might be somehow transgressing other people’s boundaries.” His suspicion makes sense, given his unfulfilled longing for intimate bonding during his early years, as W. Marshall suggests: “The failure to achieve intimacy in relations with adults produces emotional loneliness, which leads to an aggressive disposition and a tendency to pursue sex with diverse partners in the hope of finding intimacy through sexuality” (Marshall, 1989).

Brian developed not only a gentler, less goal-oriented and more giving approach to sexual encounters, but also explored his sexual fantasies, was able to position himself within the wide range of the sexual spectrum and found that he did not need to feel guilty about his sexuality, any longer. The effect of guilt being lifted off one’s shoulders on that individual’s self-esteem, confidence and ultimately peace of mind can hardly be overestimated (Miceli & Castelfranchi, 1998).

A number of attendees sign up for the YT with the wittingly or unwittingly underlying hope “to meet someone”. As already presented in Section 6.3 oben, matchmaking is not what a Tantric Training is about, and those who focus on orgies and fun quickly face harsh disappointment. This said, it is not unheard of that attendees, indeed, meet a significant other who they not just have a workshop crush on but establish a long-term relationship with; Brian is one of them.

Brian's bluntness about "expanding his sexual horizon" and his undisguised interest in a woman's appearance as important selection criterion might be at the basis of what he himself vaguely perceives as "possibly transgressing". It may be linked to his relatively limited TW experience: only Andre has attended fewer TW days than Brian. However, Brian's example also confirms that during an individual's first YT, only so many issues can be addressed (cf. Audrey) and worked on. Reconciling with his family as well as getting a grip on his aggressive tendencies were, for Brian, apparently the more important steps to take at this time.

### **8.3.5 Mindfulness, Spirituality**

Brian has grown very familiar with the awareness training taught during the TWs, particularly with the use of the Inner Observer. He applies this new level of mindfulness during his Contact Improvisation sessions and is impressed with how much it allows him to lose himself in the experience. On the other hand, he struggles with implementing his Inner Observer into his everyday life, since here, "unlike during a TW, you don't get reminded of activating your Inner Observer all the time." Nevertheless, it does increasingly happen that he succeeds to be mindful of his current emotions and states of mind and is able to adapt them according to the situation.

There is, as he comments, one thing he cherishes over others, because it has helped him in many a tense situation with his partner: "This phrase you told me once: 'what if I got it all backwards?'" Brian refers to a simple method which, provided it can be recalled at the time of need, can help an individual stop doing whatever they are doing and open up to a revolutionary new view: things *might* be completely different than one had perceived them, so far. An individual's ability to question the belief that they hold the key to ultimate truth counteracts self-importance and facilitates *peaceability*: "More



than once,” Brian explains, “I had a situation where I blamed my girlfriend for something but later it turned out that I had it all wrong. This sentence helps me to stop my inner horror movies and get back to reality.”

### *Analysis*

As does the vast majority of the IN’s attendees, Brian successfully implemented his Inner Observer. Additionally, Brian points out another mental tool taught during TWs and rooted in Buddhist meditation techniques, that helps him overcome his own narrative that threatens to take over in stressful situations – the sober thought, “what if I got it all backwards?” It is an extremely powerful tool when applied at the right moment; however, it requires a whole range of abilities and skills that need to be mastered, beforehand, such as admitting that one could be wrong; being able to stop the chatter in one’s head, even for a few seconds; embracing the possibility that there might be a different view on things, even though he cannot see it yet – basically, having firm faith in the unknown, which is *per se* a remarkable spiritual accomplishment.

### **8.3.6 Brian – Summary**

The *hedonic set point* is not only responsible for individuals, frequently failing to really appreciate their own improvements. It can also be the underlying incentive for individuals, sabotaging any kind of success achieved: according to the findings of Positive Psychology, without added and diligent effort, the personal Set Point can be overridden only in the short-term (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). This dynamic might explain why Brian, despite his achievements, insights and improvements, still acted in a way that once again brought his relationship close to its breaking point: humans seem to

be able to handle only so much happiness before they feel like they do not deserve it and start sabotaging it (Diener, Lucas, & Scollon, 2006).

This said, there is nevertheless a remarkable difference between Brian's handling of crises before/during the YT, and now: panic and fear have increasingly given way to serenity and kindness, as well as confidence and a relaxed self-esteem. Brian learned to detect other peoples' boundaries and to respect them; he practices forgiving himself his imperfections and taking care of himself and his emotional needs. He proactively made his peaces with his dysfunctional family of origin and is on a good track as for his basic trust and finding his place in life.

Today, Brian stands tall when his strong libido is addressed and does not feel ashamed of it, anymore. In erotic encounters, he developed his sensuality and ability to stay in the moment without focusing on possible goals. He learned to maintain a peaceful attitude and a gentle tone of voice even amidst crises; he is able to admit mistakes and to apologize without feeling awkward. Brian draws inspiration and strength from the concepts of the Inner Observer and the Inner Child; either tool offers him access to his emotional landscape and ways to express his state of mind with *peaceability*, even when upset or distressed.

#### **8.4. Beth: Against all Odds**

Beth is a 48 years old single mother of one daughter. She used to be a career-oriented sales director at an IT company. Due to massive health problems, initially attributed to a burn-out syndrome, she was forced to quit her job; it was only years later that she was correctly diagnosed with Lyme disease. After regaining an acceptable health level, she went through a long list of somatic and psychological therapies before she tried Tantra. Her current partner of two years had participated in Beth's second YT and was with her

all the way after she was involved in a car accident which almost claimed her life, in 2014.

#### **8.4.1 Interactions and Relationships**

Beth had few committed relationships in her life, since her “job and career were always top of the list and guys were more of a pastime”. Unlike females whom she always saw as allies, males used to feel “sketchy” to her and while romance was never a problem, “the attempts to establish a lasting relationship never worked out”. The typical pattern used to be one partner’s statement, triggering an emotional response in the other and leading not only to a heated argument but immediately to her questioning the relationship itself. In view of these experiences, Beth recalls, she vowed “never to move in with a guy, again”.

The situation has radically changed, since she started attending TWs; now she shares her small home with her partner, although “in my current relationship, we had these communications issues, too. But then we started to look into it and understand the patterns and dynamics; we started to change our ways of communicating, to use the tools we’ve been given during the YT [such as active listening]. Today, I can’t recall when our last conflict was... in fact, I’ve never had such a grown-up relationship, before.”

Right after starting her YT, Beth reached out to her estranged daughter. The now 29-years old had rejected any contact for several years, after Beth had “kicked the girl out of the nest” at age 19. They reconciled, started building new trust and being part of one another’s lives: “Now my daughter just loves sharing with me – not only when she is in trouble; she would phone me when she is happy about something. Our relationship is completely happy and relaxed, now.”

According to Beth, the conflict with her daughter was not the only one in her family. Beth's mother died when Beth was age 19, which left her with the task "to be everybody's mom". The family grew used to it (and Beth admits to having allowed it to happen), to the extent that while Beth was severely ill with Lyme disease, her family members would task her with things to do for them, "because you have time, anyway". Additionally, her father's second wife used to pose an overwhelming problem for Beth: "I've been declared *persona non grata* several times. I always hated the stupid stuff she would spill, non-stop." Today, Beth can keep her calm when visiting, and "whenever 'the wife' takes a breath, I get a chance to say something to my father [giggles]". She does not feel challenged or annoyed by her stepmother's behavior any longer, and whenever Beth wants to be on her own with her father, she gets him to visit her, finding a robust reason – such as some handiwork to be done – to give to his wife.

Beth's relationship with the world has grown more relaxed, as well. While in the past, she felt she had to "save the world" and would get depressed about its countless problems – "everybody seems to be about money and resources, nothing but" – now she can keep a healthy distance, keeping herself informed but not emotionally vulnerable. She found that when focusing on her own environment and the people around her, she can be of more use and "do my best to live a good life".

### *Analysis*

According to sociological research, singles tend to grow even more individualistic, as they age, which for many is a real challenge when they fall in love later in life (Montenegro, 2003). It is, therefore, remarkable that Beth would not only cut back her personal freedom for being with her partner, but even would break her vow never to move in with anyone, again. With her current partner, Beth reports having faced the

same problems as with her former relations, particularly in the area of communication; however, this time she was better prepared and able to apply not only her Inner Observer to look through the ongoing processes but also a wide range of methods and tools to improve the communication and deepen the bond. This way, they reached a “conflict-free stage”, which she rightly describes as “a grown-up relationship”.

Reconciliation happened for Beth not only in the field of romantic relationships but also with her daughter. This gives, on one hand, evidence of another change of mind, encompassing a more forgiving and gentle approach to other individuals; on the other hand, since long-lasting conflicts and estrangement hardly contribute to an overall feeling of comfort, peace and happiness, we can deduce that by taking steps towards reconciling with her daughter, Beth has also improved her peace of mind.

Beth’s family of origin did not offer her much support after her mother died – on the contrary, Beth was expected to be the one providing care and support, the conflict with her stepmother being yet another source of distress. Since Beth learned to say, “No” and to stand up for herself, she does not feel the need to get defensive or passive-aggressive with her relatives nor regressing into unhelpful or even infantile behavior patterns (cf. Sisgold, 2014), any longer; she even finds humorous moments in situations that used to “drive her mad”. Her new, *peaceable* approach also enables her to get what she wants – for instance, being with her father – without alienating her stepmother. This way, Beth not only guards her own peace but also contributes to peaceful relations within her family.

Given the expectations and tasks she was burdened with at a young age, it does not come as a surprise that Beth used to feel like she had to “save the world”, to feel responsible for pretty much everything or, at least, depressed when things developed differently than they “should”. It can be hard work and requires courage and

determination to let go of views and beliefs that have rooted so deep in one's character that any change feels like losing ground. The reward for this hard work is, as Beth describes it, more balance, less anxiety and "a good life".

#### **8.4.2 Confidence, Insight**

Her Lyme disease has given Beth opportunities to re-think her approach to life, long before Tantra: "I loved my job. I made good money. But then I found that the real thing is adding by subtracting: I owned a ton of things, but I had no health." Due to her experience with numerous therapies, Beth had a solid base of self-reflection, awareness and mindfulness to build upon during her YT. "I knew that this was a space where I could reflect on things, where I would be given the chance to explore offbeat situations in order to see how I roll – and observe myself act and react."

During her YT, she learned to be less performance- and goal-oriented, gentler with herself. Beth also learned to regulate her emotions, particularly her temper, in a way that supports peaceful, nurturing relationships, rather than jeopardizing them: "I don't beat myself up anymore when things go wrong. And my emotions don't get the best of me, either; I learned not just to handle them but also to look beyond them, to see their source and choose an appropriate reaction."

Gradually owning gentleness does not mean that Beth's points of view have become less clearly defined. She stands up for her tough love with her daughter: "She had dropped out of school, her only interest was partying, and when at home, she would spend her time on my couch, demanding me to 'make less noise while vacuuming'. I had to make her get up on her feet." Beth made the difficult call to *help by stopping helping*; only after years of estrangement and aided by Beth's TW experience, both mother and daughter were eventually ready and able to re-establish a trusting relationship.

Beth feels responsible for her part of the universe, trying her best to contribute to its well-being, be it by recycling her garbage, buying locally or by helping a Syrian refugee family getting rooted in Austria. Despite her proactive approach, the stressful and energy-consuming “urge to be in charge of everything is gone”.

### *Analysis*

Due to the time to think her illness had given her, as well as her experience with various therapies, Beth stepped into the YT with an advantage over other attendees who had yet to explore new approaches to their old belief systems. This translated into a quick and thorough assimilation of the teachings and methods; it also led to a clarity of perception of herself that made her overall attitude and reflections stand out. Particular attention deserves her new ability to “choose a reaction”: this allows her to step out of her previous role of being a mere plaything to her emotions. Now she can deliberately choose to react in a way that benefits the outcome of a given situation.

Becoming more gentle on oneself and on others does not mean turning whiny or weak, as Beth convincingly demonstrates by not regretting “kicking the daughter out of the nest”, in order to help her stand up on her feet. However, neither does she hold a grudge or dig into a position forever, only because she had, at some point in her life, adopted it: after a prolonged phase of inner growth and gathering of insight, Beth was ready to reach out to her daughter with a peace offer and to celebrate reconciliation. Thus, Beth gives an example of kindness and resolve, not being opposites but two sides of the same coin.

### **8.4.3 Inner Peace, Equanimity, Joy**

Reconciliation with her image of males was one of Beth's achievements during her YT: "It was awesome to learn about guys in a completely new way, when I listened to them sharing their fears and concerns, speaking about their pressure to perform and to do the right thing. I understood that I'd been wrong all the way... it turned my outlook on men upside down."

Being less severe with others and herself has affected her environment, as well: not only did she soften her "oftentimes harsh tone", but things that used to upset her feel less upsetting now; she is able to get her point across in a way that is acceptable to others, "or, you know, I just don't get as triggered by the same ol', same ol' topics, anymore." She is happy to be a valued counselor to her daughter, who turned to her when her marriage went through a crisis. Beth is aware that she and most of her family members are not on the same page regarding their views on life, but today she accepts them as they are, making sure they do not take over her life. She determines when and where they get together and "this way, our visits are enjoyable, throughout".

Beth's "inner landscape has definitely become more calm and peaceful". She approaches people who used to make her impatient ("What a jerk! I won't even talk to that moron...") with a new, forgiving attitude, reminding herself that everybody acts as best as they can. This new relaxed approach makes her feel "happier, more joyful and more engaged with life... and finally, I got my laughter back! These are the things I'd been hoping for. Before my illness, I used to laugh lustily at any occasion, and I'd so yearned for it to come back."

Her confidence in the flow of things grew so strong that after her car crash, when she woke up at the ICU of a hospital, she did not feel the urge to fight for her life – she felt acceptance and peace. "It felt so natural. I thought, 'okay, everything is good the way



it is'. I didn't need things to be different. I was at peace." This experience was very different from two former opportunities where she almost lost her life: "This time, I didn't feel unfulfilled and in despair. There was no need to fight and to bargain for more time. It was an extremely empowering experience."

### *Analysis*

For a high percentage of female attendees, the YT leads to a re-shaping of the image they have of males (and vice versa); Beth is no exception. It is safe to assume that her "grown-up relationship" was only possible after she allowed the negative image of men which was wired in her brain to change.

An increase in patience with other people's shortcomings or habits (i.e. respecting their otherness, cf. Dietrich & Sülzl, 1997) is another typical take-away from the YT; so is the tendency to get less upset and to choose not only her reactions but also her words and her tone, so that her message is well accepted by her counterparts. Beginning with her relatives, Beth let go of expecting other people to change, thus achieving a major shift towards stability of peace of mind. She learned to make her boundaries clear. This is not only helpful to herself but also to her environment, as she states: her relations hear, rather than to guess, what she needs and what upsets her and why. Beth herself can enjoy whatever happens within those boundaries, without having to anxiously watch them, trying to prevent them from being trespassed.

All these results were doubtlessly aided by Beth's special circumstances: only few IN attendees have been as close to death as she was, let alone more than once. Death is something most individuals fear; this fear is, according to social anthropologist Ernest Becker, the logical result of human consciousness (E. Becker, 1973). Unlike animals, humans are painfully aware of their life's finite nature and try to distract themselves

from facing the fact, by pursuing what Becker calls a *hero project* – something bigger than us, something to leave a mark on. Becker argues that it is when an individual's *hero project* conflicts with others or fails altogether, that the sense of meaninglessness and fear of death overwhelms the individual and conflict, violence and bigotry arise.

In the context of this study, it is therefore remarkable whenever attendees deeply and genuinely make their peaces with their own mortality. Since the fear of extinction is one of the few hard-wired fears all humans share, (Albrecht, 2012) overcoming this fundamental fear even only partially means that the individual is less likely to become overwhelmed by other, less existential fears. This extraordinary step of embracing death as part of who we are is in accordance with the highest goals of Tantra: “no hope, no fear” (cf. 6.3.2, p.146), which can truly materialize only after overcoming the fear of death. But this is not all: by reconciling with death and not having to uphold the personal *hero project* at any cost, anymore, a deep-rooted incentive for conflict simply vanishes. Thus, this step is also in line with the quest for inner peace. Beth's account of her reactions which she observed in the ICU suggests that she achieved peace with the impermanence of things, including her own death.

#### **8.4.4 Body Awareness, Sexuality**

After she had brought her Lyme disease somewhat under control, Beth felt like reaching out to people, again: “I was ready to get active and also to do something about my sexuality; during my illness, I'd had virtually no sex, I even was unable to give me pleasure, myself.” This was an unusual and puzzling situation for her, who had always felt comfortable and highly interested in sexuality.

With her physical health back at a bearable level, Beth tried all kinds of therapies, “breath therapy, body-centered therapy, systemic psychotherapy, depth-psychology

therapy, you name it”, but still felt unsatisfied with her life: “There was no joy, no excitement, and no interest in sexuality, either.” Friends advised her to try Tantra at the IN, where she discovered that “this is like all the therapies I’ve done, blended together: there is breath work, it is about your body, your energy and psyche – and there is room for sexuality, as well. I kept raving of the YT as ‘the most holistic therapy I’ve ever done’.”

Regarding TWs, her one concern was nudity: “I’ve never practiced nudism, and showing off my body outside of a sexual context felt a bit uncomfortable to me, in the beginning. So it was an amazing liberation to learn that it just didn’t matter whether I was in the buff or not – it was always a ‘may’, never a ‘must’.”

To re-discover the gate to her own sexual energy was one of the highlights for Beth. “I’d been clueless about how to get it back, before the YT. I had no guidance, just a few friends to talk to and Richardson’s book on self-pleasuring” (Richardson, 2004). The intense examination and long-term involvement with the topic over the course of her YT, on physical as well as mental level and in a setting that provided ample opportunity for exploration and practice, helped her to “discover my new sexual self”.

### *Analysis*

During and after the traumatic journey through her illness, Beth tried a wide range of different therapies in order to find a way back into a life of engagement and joy. Despite the benefits these therapies provided, Beth remained unable to re-gain her zest of life and interest in sexuality. Her statement that it was the TWs “with their unique combination of approaches and methods” that helped her to literally re-discover her laughter and sensual joy, does not stand alone: attendees with a rich history of therapies frequently comment on the beneficial effects they experience in TWs, even at beginners’ levels.

It is critical to keep in mind that in Tantra, cherishing the body and its sensations is not the goal itself, but rather the means to a goal (cf. Section 6.3.3, p. 150). Nevertheless, even leaving higher Tantric goals like peace of mind aside, feeling comfortable with one's body and its sexual response is one of the prerequisites for a relaxed and balanced life. This transformation of self-image and *sensing oneself* does not come overnight: it requires effort and investment of will and energy over a prolonged period of time.

Not everybody is able or willing to invest in their own well-being: I recall a male attendee in his early seventies with a rather destructive self-image, who had given up on seeking sexual encounters, decades ago. When asked whether he would like to achieve a more positive self-image and a functional sexuality, he hesitated and then agreed, "...if it isn't too much work". Based on my observations of attendees of all age cohorts, I can confirm a strong correlation between the individual's determination and commitment to achieve their transformation, and the results they obtain. Beth is a good example of what can be achieved when tackling one's issues with zest and resolve.

#### **8.4.5 Mindfulness, Spirituality**

Beth shows extraordinary awareness of her own thought processes. As she states during her interview, observing her thoughts was not new to her when she signed up for the YT; however, she noted that the development started progressing faster with the YT. "Sometimes I fall back into my old thought patterns and then there is this negative thought spiral that pulls me down; all of a sudden, I start thinking some crazy stuff and have a hard time getting out of there." In therapy, she recalls, she had learned how to deal with her panic attacks by distracting herself and re-focusing; with the TWs, she was

additionally able to permanently install her Inner Observer, thus receiving a stream of non-judgmental data on her own state of mind.

Beth even seems to have achieved control of her own thoughts – a goal, highly valued by many spiritual schools – by choosing which thoughts she wants to think and which are rather not helpful: “The workshops with their hands-on approach helped me to really understand and assimilate many of the things I’ve heard of in therapy; today, I often think ‘what a weird thought, you don’t need to think that one’, and I can indeed make it go away.”

#### *Analysis*

Beth is a living example of how previous therapy can be beneficial for TW participants by accelerating their personal development. However, it works as well the other way around, as Beth explains: during the pragmatic structures and settings of the YT, the theoretical knowledge accumulated during therapy can be put to the test in practice and oftentimes deepened or even, eventually, understood.

Beth’s rather sober and unspectacular description of the way she chooses which thought she wants to follow and which she prefers to discard should not veil the fact that this skill is quite the achievement: the individual, able to decide which thoughts will take them down the path of anger, jealousy, depression or poutiness, even *before* they start thinking them, truly holds the key to their own peace of mind.

#### **8.4.6 Beth – Summary**

Beth was a successful business woman with little more than her career on her mind, when she fell seriously ill. It took her years to get physically back on her feet, but despite an impressive number of therapies, her joy of life was gone. Males played generally

a minor role in her life script and were rather an object of contempt, even though sexuality was – before Beth’s illness – an important and enjoyable part of her life. Nonetheless, relationships would not last, often due to her lack of communication skills. She had barely any contact neither with her daughter’s father nor with her daughter who, after persistent clashes, Beth had asked to move out.

Since Beth’s mother had passed while Beth, as the eldest sibling, was still young, her family became accustomed to exploit her attention, help and support, which over time made her grow angry and resentful; however, she lacked the means to set boundaries and improve her situation. She felt a burdening responsibility for the entire world and would get depressed about political and ecological problems. In three instances, she almost lost her life.

After Beth committed to the YT, her situation started to change. She developed self-reflection and communication skills and completely re-evaluated her approach to males. Despite her formerly determined refusal, she moved in with her new sir-friend who she met at a TW and they established a nourishing, mutually supportive and, most surprisingly to Beth, lasting relationship.

With self-reflection came mindfulness, and based on her Inner Observer, Beth was able to take the edge off her verbals and nonverbals, developing patience with others’ shortcomings and kindness with herself. Beth learned to gently refuse exaggerated demands from her family members and stopped feeling responsible for them and the entire universe. She reached out to her daughter and they reconciled; currently, they maintain a loving and respectful relationship. Beth re-gained her zest of life and deeply enjoys her body and her newly awakened sexuality. The peace that she now experiences in her surroundings has become part of her “inner landscape”: she is able to

observe stressful situations unfold with poise and compassion, without feeling anxious or urged to find immediate solutions.

Beth is an example of an attendee with rich, even extreme life experience. Her testimony gives valuable clues about the impact of the YT and the mutually beneficial interactions of psychotherapy and TWs. Beth's goal was nothing less than "getting her life back", and according to her account, that is precisely what she achieved – including her "most grown-up relationship, ever".

## **8.5. Cesar: Noble Heart**

Cesar is a 45 years old consultant, divorced, no kids, in a committed relationship with an alumna of the YT. He joined Tantra "in an emergency situation": at that time, he was feeling deeply frustrated with the way his relationships were working out; also, he believed that Tantra had to do with "everything physical" including sexuality, and he hoped to develop strategies to solve his sexuality-based issues which kept complicating his relationships.

### **8.5.1 Interactions and Relationships**

In his interview, Cesar shares that he had been struggling with his 'best buddy' image all his life: "All women would appreciate me for good, deep conversations, but no one seemed to see my desire, my manhood." He believes that the reason for "going unseen" was because he was "not quite ready to embrace Shakti's love", before he engaged in Tantra: "I myself was unable to handle my desire; on the other hand, whenever I fell in love, my desire would somehow choke off."

Feeling betrayed, rejected and abandoned by his then girlfriend, Cesar sought ways to avoid future heartache; Tantra seemed to provide the tools to accomplish that

goal. In hindsight, he understands that before the YT, he possessed no reflecting skills; he would barely notice and acknowledge his own inner processes, let alone those of his girlfriend. “Had I known then what I know now, things would have turned out very differently.”

His current relationship of two years seems to confirm this statement: according to Cesar, it is developing to his full satisfaction, the couple has engaged discussions, they respect one another’s space, different interests and thin places; they make efforts to find solutions for minor, yet in the long run potentially stressful issues such as their virtually opposed sleeping patterns or the different needs of an extrovert and an introvert.

Cesar credits the considerable transformation of his relationship with himself to his newly acquired compassion: “I am calmer, more relaxed, content ... more forgiving with myself and with others. I feel less tempted to get upset.” He had learned to love himself; “not just to accept – to really love myself, in a very simple, natural way.”

Another improvement Cesar emphatically attributes to the effects of TWs is the relationship with his parents. While their relationship used to be characterized by "hurt and blame" on his part, in the course of his YT – which also involves systemic constellation group work (cf. Section 6.4.6, p. 210) – he came to build a trusting, respectful and loving relationship with both his parents. Cesar had had his first introduction to models of a healthy parent-child relationship with Art Reade<sup>89</sup> before he joined the YT; nevertheless, he states that it was the thorough and systematic work on this relationship during his YT and RW that “enabled me to establish a stable, tension-free bond with my parents. Today I can say that I am always happy to see them – that’s a huge change.”

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<sup>89</sup> Art Reade is a life coach with Apache roots who has been giving workshops on personal development in the US and Europe for 30 years.



Friendships are an important part of Cesar's life. They "influence me strongly – however, my circle of friends has gone through some massive changes and now encompasses about 50% Tantric peers." Get-togethers, parties, socializing, sharing with his peers – all of these, he says, contribute to consolidate what he and other attendees have been studying during their TWs: "We have all been shaped by the ideas [promoted during the YT] of peacefulness, tolerance, value-neutrality and openness. Keeping in touch consolidates and enhances the skills of those who'd shared those experiences."

Cesar reports on cultivating deeply bonded friendships, where sharing of intimate thoughts, plans, emotions and states of mind, and giving one another honest feedback is standard: "I am having a hard time trying to think of somebody who I wouldn't be open with." To achieve this high quality of social environment, he had to break away from some old friends. He does not take it lightly, but understands that sometimes, people drift apart: "With a few [of my old] friends, I broke up gently, but deliberately – things had changed and it was time to let go and move on."

In his interview, Cesar says that his colleagues and the highly competitive environment at work pose a very different challenge to him. His attempts of bridging the "cultural gap" between them are considered weird, at best: "I tried to establish a sincere, cordial atmosphere, but there is no soil for it to grow. What dominates is competition, faster-higher-stronger and dismissive remarks about colleagues." Cesar does not despair but accepts the situation as a learning opportunity: "I don't need to count my colleagues among my best friends, and that's perfectly fine. At the same time, they have things to teach me, like clarity, structure, focus."

*Analysis*

Unlike Beth, Cesar was a blank canvas when he signed up for Tantra; he had first to conquer some insight about the skills he was lacking: self-awareness, confidence, empathy, responsibility. However, once he set his mind on developing his Self, he proved a quick learner. Genuine kindness towards himself and reconciliation with his parents were but the first steps on his journey.

Cesar represents the high percentage of YT-alumni who report that their circle of friends has changed, considerably. This phenomenon – one’s transforming mindset impacting the composition of one’s chosen socio-environment – does not take place overnight but is, as my continuous observation confirms, a gradual development over years, comparable to the effects of schooling. Nonetheless, precisely due to the change being so slow, attendees often report being surprised when they eventually realize how much has changed.<sup>90</sup>

Being able to choose the people an individual enjoys being with is certainly a huge asset when it comes to increasing levels of happiness; if these friends, in addition, do not just soothe one’s pains and woes but also, as reported by Cesar, give honest feedback and remind one another of the values they have committed to, such as authenticity and compassion, they have the chance to turn into a nucleus of mutual support, growth and peacefulness which branches out into each individual’s social sphere. To foster these bonds among all levels of attendees, the weekly *Jours Fixes* have proven to provide excellent opportunities.

It is, however, not possible for an individual to choose all of their social contacts. Therefore, to achieve a constantly peaceful mind, it is necessary to develop the

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<sup>90</sup> Aside from simple lack of information, this common change within the attendees’ close circles is possibly one of the reasons why relatives at times suspect TWs of being part of a cult. Cf. chapter 6.4.5.1 on “Is Tantra a Cult?”

*peaceability* skills required to keep centered and internally balanced, even and particularly in an environment that puts these skills to the test. Cesar seems to have mastered this task: he is clearly not enthusiastic about his colleagues at work, but he embraces the challenge without grumbling, as an opportunity to grow and learn even from those who he would not necessarily spend his spare time with.

### **8.5.2 Confidence, Insight**

When asked why he thinks he was, in the past, “not ready to embrace Shakti’s love”, Cesar suggests that it was most probably due to fear: “The fear to show my inner Self, to open up; also, the fear to lose her love some day and being unable to cope. So, in order to be on the safe side, I’d rather go without.” There was also the element of poor self-esteem: “It was hard to believe that anyone could love me, anyway.”

He signed up for the YT despite his expectation that engaging in Tantra “might bring along unpleasant or painful experiences, or make me feel vulnerable”, but at the same time, he was determined to learn as much as possible and to find the key to his own self. He appreciated being given the opportunity to experiment with different ways of response; “like in a lab, I was just playing around with things, experimenting, and I was allowed to do that until I got the right feel for it. Like developing the feel for a ball, if you will.” For him, the intense training, enhanced by the *Jours Fixes*, is beyond doubt the source of the changes he observes in his life.

One part of these changes is a new confidence when it comes to romantic relationships: “I know so much better where I stand, myself, to what extent I am ready to commit, how close or distant we are at a given moment. And I have a feel for where she stands, how she relates to me, where our issues are and how to get a grip on them – none of these skills were present before the TWs.”

In his current work-related relationships, he admits feeling extremely challenged. Despite his unsuccessful attempts to establish a casual, friendly atmosphere, he speaks about his colleagues with affability and appreciates the opportunity to weather conflict-laden moments: “I do like my colleagues; I can see a ton of good qualities in them. And their, to me, unfamiliar personality structures give me the opportunity to practice handling awkward situations.”

### *Analysis*

Cesar shows a remarkable ability to reflect on his innermost feelings and motivations, to “see through his own games”. This self-awareness is a *sine qua non* for inducing any kind of directed transformation of mental and behavioral patterns, as opposed to event-induced or even unwanted ones (such as developing claustrophobia after spending a few hours stuck in an elevator).

One key to Cesar’s success seems to be his firm determination to learn, to develop and to “figure himself out”, even at the price of temporary discomfort. He readily embraced the lab situation the TWs offered and, just like an athlete getting ready for the Olympic Games, he started a committed training regime. As a result of his determined focus, he was able to develop empathy, a feel for his own readiness to get engaged or his need to disengage, as well as respect for his counterpart's otherness.

This feature in Cesar, as well as the other interviewees, is particularly noteworthy, since the fear of “the other” is, for one, encoded in human DNA, (Neuberg & Cottrell, 2005) and for the other, the ubiquitous split in “us and them” is one of the main reasons for prejudice, racism and violence. Having developed not just tolerance, but respect for peoples’ otherness is therefore a major achievement on the journey towards inner and outer peace (Dietrich & Sülzl, 1997).

But Cesar goes even beyond respect: even interactions which he perceives as challenging trigger his curiosity and interest rather than defensive or hostile reactions. With these qualities, Cesar might be right when he muses on “having more potential available than he is currently giving to the world”: these qualities and skills form part of the key assets for peace workers and mediators and are pivotal for any kind of conflict transformation focused on eliciting, rather than prescribing solutions (Lederach, 1996).

### **8.5.3 Inner Peace, Equanimity, Joy**

When Cesar started his Tantric training, he was full of rage and despair: “I vowed never to get hurt by a woman, again – ever.” He confirms that his then most urgent aspiration has been fully achieved: to learn how to cope with rejection, failing romantic relationships and with pain in general. His once all-pervasive restlessness – which he remembers a friend describing as “an antsy teenage-elephant swinging his trunk” – has given way to higher levels of serenity and calm: “It isn’t perfect, of course, but the trend is more than clear.”

This quality of resting in his quiet center provides for improved communication and exchange: “Whenever I talk with people, we get quicker to the point where we ‘see’ each other; when I come out [and don’t conceal my thoughts and feelings] – they come out as well; our communication is more easygoing, enjoyable, efficient. When, on the contrary, I feel tormented by doubts and restless thoughts, it obviously affects the exchange.”

Cesar’s aspiration is not to just enjoy his calmer being by himself, but to offer it to the world, provided the world is interested. He recalls frequent situations where he was able to “give back to the community” by keeping or re-establishing peace between disputing parties, clarifying misunderstandings or offering comfort. “Friends keep saying

that they feel better after talking with me – without me, honestly, doing anything special.”

### *Analysis*

Cesar is part of a high number of over-achievers that sign up for TWs: managers, CEOs, single parents, teachers. No matter their profession, they seem to be haunted by the concept of perfection and a belief in “higher, faster, stronger”, oftentimes clearly disregarding aging and changed stages of life. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise to hear even advanced Tantric practitioners speak about things being “less than perfect”, despite perfection in a Western sense not being a Tantric category. In my experience, it takes years to let go of perfectionism and its underlying dynamics (frequently an unfulfilled yearning for parental praise and approval).

Despite still having perfection on his mind, Cesar has achieved other important goals so far: he managed to stop blaming others for his unhappiness and restlessness, and he started to assume responsibility for his state of mind by learning to cope with emotionally demanding situations. This is easier said than done – it is always easier to put the blame for one’s misery on somebody else, be it parents, opponents, partner or government – and developing this ability is a clear indication of his transition from immature coping strategies to increasingly mature ones.

Cesar seems to have genuinely made active listening – one of the everyday exercises during any IN’s TW – his very own: he does not need to think of setting his mind to it; it became his second nature. His interlocutors, on the other hand, notice the respect and appreciation he offers. This helps them to trust him and to relax, thus contributing to solution-oriented rather than problem-oriented conversations.

This positive development is being enhanced even further by Cesar, increasingly gaining access to his “inner quiet place”, which has rendered helpful on several levels: not only does he notice his conversations unfold more smoothly, without pressure or the urge to perform or obtain a result; he is also able to offer more of his authentic Self to his interlocutors. Unsurprisingly, this improves the rapport, since people are more ready to open up after their conversation partner has done so, first; this, again, opens the way for deeper, more honest and clear exchange, helps avoid misunderstandings and helps establish peaceful relations.

#### **8.5.4 Body Awareness, Sexuality**

According to Cesar, he was well aware of his insecurity and his awkward takes on everything physical and sexual, as well as of his unfulfilled desire, in the beginning of his Tantric journey. He set out to experiment in that field inside and outside of the workshops, and to catch up on missing experience, confidence and casualness. His aspiration “to find relief or a way to handle my then discombobulated sexuality” has been, according to his words, “perfectly fulfilled.”

As for his relation with his body, Cesar points out an important event in his life where his TW experience had been “of invaluable help”: in 2013, he went through a distressing time when he was told he most likely would have to undergo chemotherapy due to an unexpectedly diagnosed lymphoma. During the seven days in which the corresponding tissue sample was being examined by the lab, he “experienced a whole range of intense emotional states”. Simultaneously, and “for the first time”, he found deep peace in meditation and a “so far unknown strength and confidence”. While he noted his close circle being upset, he himself was “calm and mostly at peace; [...] able to accept the situation as is, rather than denying or compensating it.”

His ability to be gentle with himself and to stay calm and patient up to the moment he learned about the misdiagnosis, fills him “to the present day with joy and gratitude for the YT’s teachings”.

### *Analysis*

It does not come as a surprise that Cesar’s diligent approach to what he used to perceive as his deficiencies proved successful in the area of body awareness and sexuality, as well. It is a frequent statement among male TW participants that gaining confidence in their sexuality strongly impacts their overall self-esteem. Enhanced self-esteem, again, renders maladaptive compensatory coping behaviors such as aggression, restlessness or poutiness increasingly obsolete, which can be expected to have a positive, for instance calming and encouraging, effect on any given social interaction.

His composed way to cope with a potential threat to his body and life provides even more evidence for the skills he had acquired and his credits to the TWs: among others, the ability to find treasures like “deep peace in meditation” even in situations where untrained individuals might find all the good reasons to panic. Even though he did not get as close to his own death as Beth, he did spend a period of time with this sword of Damocles above his head and did not look away in fear but faced it, with courage and calm.

There was even a concrete physical transformation I noticed over the course of Cesar’s training, which he had not been aware of before I told him during his interview: when he first arrived to the TWs in 2010, he displayed an invariant malposition of his long neck, resulting in his head being positioned not straight above his shoulders but “in front of the body”, as if he were trying to read small print. It was quite striking to watch



this particular physical feature recede from TW to TW, until it disappeared, altogether, at the end of Cesar's RW.

### **8.5.5 Mindfulness, Spirituality**

Cesar highlights the importance of the Inner Observer for his personal development: "Today, I am much more aware and clearer about my own mental state. It is this camera, this Observer, you see. When I am confused and not feeling okay, having a bad moment – I can just realize that and tell myself 'well, this is how it is right now, I don't need to despair, it will change soon enough'."

Calm awareness is also predominant when Cesar is confronted with a loss: "Some things just slip away. Even friends and loved ones. I have learned to let go without regret or perceiving it as a loss – it is simply the way things develop. This serene dealing with good-byes and impermanence of all kinds is something I have definitely taken away from Tantra: I don't fight the finite nature of things, anymore."

This acceptance of things-as-they-are includes the big picture of the world he lives in: the European "refugee crisis" of 2015, Brexit, political shifts. Cesar is able to see beyond the impression of imminent threat and recognize the opportunities behind the apparent disaster: "I feel deeply connected to everything that's part of my world, and this feeling of connectedness helps me see that things are not going completely South: these are simply developments, and they offer huge chances, as well." He chooses to see the opportunity for people to "wake up politically, to make sure resources get distributed and to seize this chance to start a better world."

However, Cesar is well aware of the currently widespread mood of fuss and panic. "The fact that I am able to resist the temptation to join in this choir, that I refuse to

panic but instead, spread an atmosphere of assurance, I attribute to my development and ‘ennoblement of the heart’ achieved through the IN.”

### *Analysis*

Much like Beth, Cesar has learned to apply his Inner Observer, detaching himself from his inner processes and observing them “from the outside”. This gives him the opportunity to evaluate these processes with increasing objectivity, despite the emotional stress he may be going through at that very moment. This technique ultimately enables him to choose how to react in a given situation, rather than falling victim to his own projections.

Even though Cesar has not yet walked the fine line between life and death, he seems to have developed a relaxed and accepting approach to losses and impermanence, which helps him to preserve his inner peace. The resulting warm and unagitated calm which he radiates is one of his offerings to the world.

### **8.5.6 Cesar – Summary**

When Cesar started out with his TWs, he was enraged, panicky, insecure and blaming others for his situation. His sexuality was “not working”, he felt unseen in his manliness and did not quite know how to handle his sexual desire. At the same time, his self-esteem was low and he did not feel like anyone could love him. Cesar had no tools to deal with conflict in constructive, peaceful ways, be it at work or in a relationship. Since bonded relationships are of high value to Cesar, he suffered because of his inability to handle them properly.

Cesar was well aware that committing to TWs would not be always comfortable and pleasant; however, he was determined to open up, deal with his short temper, dare to

show vulnerability and explore new ways to transform himself and his life. He used his over-achieving character traits for his transformation project by rigorously sticking with the TW program, asking for support when needed and taking advantage of virtually every opportunity for practicing and exploring his new skills.

Applying what he learned in the YT to his everyday life, he developed empathy, forgiveness, self-esteem and a remarkable ability of self-reflection, while exploring the many facets of sexuality and deepening the connection to his “inner quiet place”. His respect for others’ otherness is not only well-rooted but became his second nature – this is particularly helpful in his currently complicated working situation.

According to Cesar, his friends notice his restlessness gone; he himself assumes that his genuine interest in people, combined with his listening skills, makes him a popular conversation partner. Cesar has not only the deep wish to contribute to this world’s peacefulness – he already does contribute, by offering communication advice or gently supporting quarreling friends and acquaintances in their attempts to clarify misunderstandings.

His self-reflective skills, kindness, *peaceability* and authenticity, as well as the fact that he has assumed the responsibility for his own mental and emotional states are assets in any relationship; however, they are particularly useful in the relationship with a significant other. Thanks to his personal transformation and having gained access to inner peace, Cesar is now part of a rewarding and nourishing long-term relationship.

#### **8.6. Chloe: Touch and Gender**

Chloe is a 40 years old professional musician. She is single and has no children. In her interview, she shares that since her teenage years, she had struggled with an extreme lack of, and yearning for, physical closeness, on one hand; on the other, with trying to

determine whether she is rather male or female – to the extent of wondering whether she was, possibly, transgender.<sup>91</sup> Her main aim at TWs was to find an answer to that question while solving her looming lack-of-touch problem.

Chloe shared her issues with a friend, who suggested to try Tantra. Chloe did some online research and even tried a one-on-one meeting with a male, offering private classes, but ended up unimpressed with the facilitator and the content: “That was complete crap.” Even so, when soon after that a female relative tentatively asked whether she could present Chloe with a TW for her birthday, Chloe recalls surprising her by agreeing “in a heartbeat.”

### **8.6.1 Interactions and Relationships**

Chloe never had a committed romantic relationship, neither with males nor females. She recalls that at age 15, she decided to refuse any kind of touch from her father, “and for fairness' sake, also from my mother”. There was neither a traumatic event nor any kind of abuse, as far as she can remember; she simply felt “fed up with his pokes in my ribs and his tickles.” Five years later, still true to her adamant decision, she had grown desperately starved for touch yet unable to touch anyone, or to accept any kind of touch: “A handshake was sort of okay, but fingers brushing my arm were already unbearable.”

Around that same age of 15, Chloe stopped wondering where she belonged – rather to the women’s or the men’s cohort – and tried to ignore the topic, altogether. “I was quite cunning, see – how do you know you are a woman? By having a man. So I focused on talking myself into ‘I so want to have a boyfriend’.” This way, she virtually brainwashed herself, “even though it wasn’t true... I wasn’t interested in boyfriends, at

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<sup>91</sup> In 2015, she would perform on stage under a male alias several times – “to see what that feels like and to test the audience’s reaction”; she also pondered attending a TW for men only, in order to explore herself among men and in a male role. (Source: Private conversations with Chloe during 2015)

all”. Her denial worked well until, aged 25, she realized that after all these years, she still had no boyfriend. “Why would that be, I wondered? And the ‘logical’ answer popped up: ‘Because I am no woman’.”

According to her account, Chloe's relationship with women used to be severely tainted, as well; females would be either objects of her contempt or simply non-existent. “It was in the course of the TWs that I understood that women are people, too [giggles]. And that there are even a few that can be trusted.” Today she concludes that this was a true reflection of her own inner processes: “Learning to acknowledge my own womanhood and even reclaiming some good things about being a woman obviously had a beneficial effect on my relationships with women.”

Her views that held her hostage to her own crippling beliefs have given way to an astonishingly relaxed approach: “Today, this part is healed. I know that for a fact, because I am nurturing a very good friendship with a woman, to give an example. And because there are women who I place my trust in. And the fear of getting touched has gone! I used to experience that fear with everybody, but even more so with females.”

The major shift in the relationship with herself was, for her, finding an access to femininity in general: “Just getting in touch with it and understanding better what it is all about... for instance, I found that my sexuality is a female one.” Currently, Chloe has mastered feeling and being conscious of both her male and female components, at the same time, which she describes as “amazing when it works... it is not easy to keep it up, and at times I lose it and feel lost again, not knowing where I belong.”

Shortly before and during her YT, Chloe underwent a body psychotherapy which was “a perfect supplement to the YT – the guy taught me how to *ask* for touch, and during the workshops, I had loads of opportunities to put it into practice”.

All these developments had an impact on her relationship with her parents, as well: “Now I hug my mother from time to time... hasn’t happened since I was 15.” It is different with her father who, according to Chloe, seems to share his daughter’s awkwardness, and hugging or touching are not in order. However, Chloe used to be bothered by her father’s “rants over petty issues” as she calls them; she has since learned to meet them with equanimity: “Overall, I would say that now I have a good relationship with my parents.”

### *Analysis*

Chloe’s relationship history is not unheard of: I recall several participants who shared with the group that during their childhood, they would receive no physical affection from their family members, at all: “My mother didn’t hug or kiss me, ever.”<sup>92</sup> What makes Chloe’s story unique is that it was her own decision to cut off any physical contact with her parents, and subsequently with everybody – apparently without any known traumatic incident that would have preceded it.

The IN’s mission is not psychoanalyzing its attendees but to help them with down-to-earth tools re-gain their very own competency to successfully manage their lives. Therefore, the IN does not spend more than the absolutely necessary time on trying to unearth the reasons for the attendees’ issues; the leading teams rather use that time to work towards a solution for these issues. This is why, in this and a number of other cases, the facilitators never push for/prescribe a solution but follow the attendee’s lead on how deep they want to go and what aspect of an issue they wish to tackle next. Hence Chloe’s doubts about her gender were taken as-is and not questioned; whenever she would ask for a chance to look into the issue from a new angle, she would be given all

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<sup>92</sup> {NA}

the support and opportunities available, be it specific constellation work or becoming part of a men-only group on a trial basis.

More concrete, tangible and therefore more likely to allow for transformation was Chloe's strained relationship with anything feminine, particularly with living, breathing women: she hesitated eight years before she signed up for a women-only workshop. Whatever the underlying reason for her deep-rooted and for rational thought inaccessible contempt towards everything female, it certainly made it sound logical that she would rather not want to be "one of those".

It was through the body-psychotherapy that perfectly complemented her YT as well as through the many opportunities during her YT to experience, explore and express her male and female components in a non-judgmental and nourishing environment, that she found a way to reconcile her male and female Selves. Despite still wondering about the cause of her scorn for anything feminine, Chloe was able to overcome it and to start building close and trusting relationships with women.

Reconciliation with her parents and a return to occasional casual touching with her mother is another sign of her development progressing down a positive track.

### **8.6.2 Confidence, Insight**

In her teens, Chloe realized that she was badly missing physical contact; however, as she expresses it, she gritted her teeth and ended up "not feeling anything at all, ever". At some point around her mid-twenties, she acknowledged that her situation was "simply shitty" and started looking for a way out. Her first attempt to unstick herself was Jung's psychotherapy, which in her view was a complete failure: "It annoyed me immensely – all that talking, or rather not-talking: I spent hours without saying a word." After that,

she worked with the aforementioned body psychologist who helped her re-claim her bodily sensations in a one-on-one setting.

During her YT, Chloe learned to stand her ground and communicate it when she disagrees with something. Unlike in the past, she does not grind her teeth and comply with things she is not happy with, any longer: “Whenever something’s not okay with me, I can speak out without endless hesitating; I don’t need to find excuses, anymore – I feel free to simply call a spade a spade and to list my reasons for not agreeing.” She has found ways to say *no*, “but also to say *yes* much more often”.

Some of her success stories describe seemingly minuscule steps, such as the episode at a book store: “There were these bookmarks at the checkout, and I asked the cashier whether I might have one. This seems like a ridiculously insignificant thing, but despite not being shy, I know I would never have dared to ask this, before the YT! I think it was about admitting that I might need or want something. Or about being a bother.”

Other effects of her new confidence affect directly her livelihood: she started declining gigs that would, in fact, cost her money rather than give her an income. “It is one thing to state, ‘this is my minimum fee’, and another, to say it in a relaxed and natural way, without feeling terrible about it.” She admits that her clarity would probably have developed, anyway – “at some point, I guess you just get professional; when you don’t charge money, you end up not having any”; however, her way of doing it is clearly different, after the YT: “Asking for money out of need used to make me sound uneasy, frustrated and harsh... now I can do the same and sound natural and pleasant.”

As for her male/female issue, she acquired the ability to choose between the male and female modes. “Before, I had no choice – the feminine would sometimes just



pounce.” Now she is increasingly able to switch between them at will, which she largely experiments with within the framework of her artistic career.

### *Analysis*

The tragic heroism of discovering that one is on the wrong track, but persevering stoically until they run out of all options, has one positive aspect: in my experience, these are the kind of people who, once determined, follow through with the goals they choose to commit to. Hence, once it dawned on Chloe that her path was leading her nowhere, she turned around and pursued her happiness with the same unwavering fervor that had taken her into an emotionally and physically near-catatonic state.

Despite being impatient to see results from her effort, Chloe learned to cherish and to celebrate the baby steps she makes. She has understood that it is not the spectacular leaps but precisely the little everyday things that indicate genuine transformation: peacefully standing her ground, speaking up, asking for a favor, not worrying about being a burden.

### **8.6.3 Inner Peace, Equanimity, Joy**

Chloe’s despair about the lack of physical contact used to be so overwhelming that she would even resort to desperate measures like literally banging her head against a wall. “That wouldn’t help, though... it just hurt.” Today, she adds, there are other ways of dealing with emotions and needs available to her: “I can ask somebody for a hug, and that works quite well in these cases of emergency.” She does not limit her choice to close friends, though – she is even able to ask a stranger after a concert who “seems to be straightforward and won’t fuss about potential strings attached.”

Another achievement is Chloe's ability to allow for failure: "I used to be very harsh with myself when I'd screwed up ... Today I'd rather think, 'oh, I've learned so many things already – I will get this one straight, too. Next time, I'll do better'." Another example is the fear of failure on stage: "To sit up there and to know, deep inside, that whatever happens is okay... that's big. It is much more than just shrugging the fear away, you see... to *know* deep down that even if I have a complete blackout up there, it would be simply part of the whole thing, and genuinely okay – that is a most beautiful experience, and I give Tantra the credit for it."

Chloe also stopped taking other people's actions too personally, naming her father as an example: "I used to suffer a lot during his rants – you know, about politics or when something just wasn't working. Now I can cope much better – it doesn't hit home so hard, anymore; I join in for a bit and then we're fine [laughs]."

Her gentleness with herself and others has increased, as well: Chloe reports that according to a comment from a former superior, Chloe grew from cross-grained to kind. "Sometimes, when I drive, I rant about some other drivers and the stupid things they do... and then, I think about it and I admit that, really, it was me who'd been at fault."

She feels excited about being approached by friends and acquaintances for support, counsel and comfort, even in unusual or extreme situations. Since Chloe had been through a few quite extreme stages, herself, she is open and non-judgmental towards others: "There was this girl – she is quite suicidal, and we had two long conversations... she appreciates it very much that there is somebody she can talk with about [her suicidal tendencies]." To Chloe's surprise, there are also a number of people who approach her and want to talk with her about sexuality and the problems they experience: "To me, that's a completely new situation."

*Analysis*

The shift that Chloe was able to make is, indeed, remarkable: it is not a given to go from virtually banging one's head against the wall to the emotional management of a mature adult within a few years. Similarly to Audrey, Chloe learned to discern her needs before they overwhelm her system and takes care of them in a socially acceptable way. She certainly benefits from being an artist: some eccentricities like performing under a male alias seem to go rather unnoticed or find tacit consent. This "wiggly room" de-stresses her and leads not only to a smoother emotional landscape, but also to a peace of mind through knowing that she is "okay and accepted just the way she is, warts and all".

A particularly convincing sign of progress on her journey of personal development and healing is the fact that today, Chloe is being approached by friends and acquaintances who appreciate her calm presence, her ability to listen and her counsel even in fields that, not long ago, were a book with seven seals to herself. However, being herself well acquainted with excruciating inner conflict, doubt, confusion and hopelessness, she is now able to lend her ear without judging, thus providing a safe and peaceful space for those in distress. Since she does not feel the urge to "fix" them but welcomes them just the way they are, she offers a pivotal element that makes her so trustworthy to others.

Evidently, Chloe has developed gifts and skills that can help others re-gain their inner peace. Her calm *knowing* radiates the peace of mind that others seek, which turns her, to her own surprise, into a soul shelter for others. A very similar development can be observed in Brian and Cesar, as well.

#### **8.6.4 Body Awareness, Sexuality**

“Skin hunger” is a term that describes a yearning for contact which “includes caressing, holding, hugging, and hair stroking.” (Turner & Crane, 2016). It’s the term that Chloe uses when describing her despair as a teen: “I knew what it was that I was missing so badly – so I clenched my teeth and got all tensed up; at age 20, my shoulders were half an inch below my ears. I could barely move, nor had I any feel for what I liked and what I disliked.”

She started her sexual life at age 25, but despite it being “sometimes nice”, it was not what she had hoped for: “Basically, I did it to appease my lack of touch. But I would get touch only wrapped in sex – and so I traded sex for touch.”

During the TWs, she explored and befriended her feminine aspects. This was particularly true for her explicitly female body parts: “I used to just forget about them, and when I would see myself in a mirror, I would cringe.” During her YT, Chloe developed new body awareness: “Now I know for real that I have boobs. It was a surprising insight, back then. Today, I don’t startle anymore when I look into a mirror.”

Chloe found out that her sexuality only works when she is in her female mode: “When I am in my male mode, nothing happens. No sex. Nothing.” Sensual feelings or arousal used to be unwanted to Chloe and she kept nipping them in the bud. “Today, they are allowed to thrive – and while in the beginning, I would virtually turn to stone during sex, now I am not afraid of it, anymore... I even discovered that it can be fun.”

All these changes and developments have, according to Chloe’s perception, consolidated “on a deep physical level, in my body”. She believes that they would not have been possible through talking, alone: “It takes talking and the physical experience, and the emotional stuff – all of them together. Some of the experiences I went through

literally changed my world.” She can pinpoint situations during her YT that triggered a very concrete shift, “and from that moment on, my [body-mind] system falls consistently back on it. Just like that.”

### *Analysis*

Chloe’s unfulfilled and suppressed skin hunger, combined with her gender-based doubts about herself, had serious physical consequences: she ended up living in a body she hated and therefore ignored, particularly for its unmistakable female elements; her body took vengeance by cutting her off from any physical sensation which, again, impeded her discernment of her own likes and dislikes. Chloe’s fight against her body had locked her inside that very body, and her depressing sexual life was not suited to be of any help in that matter.

It sounds almost inconceivable that a person would be able to turn around a locked-down situation such as this. However, Chloe’s determined mind, the sense of having reached a dead end, a fitting body-centered therapy and her diligent use of the YT’s structures made it possible for her to gradually make peace with her female body. In 2016, five years after her YT, she assesses that her new-found approach keeps developing positively.

### **8.6.5 Mindfulness, Spirituality**

Chloe is aware of those key moments when something shifted and she achieved a new level of insight or consciousness, or sensed a boost of basic trust. “The changes triggered in those moments are not fleeting – they are here to stay, firm and stable.”

One of these changes is her decreased tendency to panic or to react with fear. For instance, if, when sitting with her back towards an open door, she then suddenly hears

strange noises, Chloe can “stay put and concentrate on what I am doing – I don’t need to whirl around and check on what’s happening. I feel less threatened by things like that.” Another example: when picturing disastrous situations like an exploding nuclear plant – images that used to haunt her –, the first thought that comes into her mind is, ‘breathe!’. “It isn’t this existential, terrible panic anymore, that I used to feel... now there is this kind of confidence to my emotional reaction, a dash of ‘it’s okay, it’ll turn out alright’.”

Somewhat hesitantly, Chloe describes a key experience during one of her YT exercises which she carried out with another Shakti: “So I visualized this energy... and then the visualization started to change all by itself; first it was like water, and each of us had like her own source of water, or energy, bubbling up from deep down below. And then it felt like if it all came from a single source, to her as well as to me. It was water, first, and then fire, then suns... like the entire solar system or the universe, the whole creation, anew. It was like an overview... not just about this world, but about everything, all that emerges and vanishes and gives way to something new. There was such a... crystal clear insight into all of that. Some kind of unshakable inner knowledge.”

### *Analysis*

Chloe’s narrative suggests that spirituality can – or perhaps even should – be grounded in a solid bodily experience: when an event “boosts basic trust”, it is not a young girl’s pink dream of rainbows and puppy dogs but something utterly tangible, “firm and stable”, that changes an entire worldview. Chloe can increasingly let go of fear and anxiety, in small things as well as when imagining full-blown disasters which used to make her feel existentially threatened.

It is common for YT attendees to report vivid visions, overwhelming emotions and experiences of unshakeable inner peace, union, universal love or guidance they had

during or after certain exercises. Some seek confirmation of the importance of their images, some forget them quickly, while others treasure them as a source of peace, serenity and inspiration for the rest of their lives. The IN's approach to this topic is a systemic one: the experiences an attendee goes through are as important as they believe they are. Hence, it is not necessary to analyze or confirm Chloe's vision of shared and all-embracing energies. If this image and the "unshakable inner knowledge" she draws from it, are suited to deepen her basic trust and enhance her bond with herself and her world, then it is a valid one, because it is and will be, in a future, a reliable source of her inner peace.

Chloe's poetic way of narrating her spiritual experience is not uncommon in phenomenological research. As Joseph Kockelmans puts it, "in human reality there are certain phenomena which reach so deeply into a man's life and the world in which he lives that poetic language is the only adequate way through which to point to and to make present a meaning which we are unable to express clearly in any other way" (Kockelmans, 1987, ix).

#### **8.6.6 Chloe – Summary**

Chloe is a striking example for what is within reach for a determined mind when it meets the right circumstances to start its self-healing process. Chloe progressed gently, patiently and steadily, keeping her own pace at any time; this way, she gradually managed to trade self-hate for curious acceptance, desperate skin hunger for tentatively blossoming intimate relationships, contempt for friendship and existential fear for basic trust.

This process took eight years so far and is not concluded yet; however, Chloe has a fair number of "tools in her kit" and is skilled enough in their handling, so that she does

not require guidance, anymore: she has grown up and taken her life in her own hands. Occasionally, she would share a doubt or ask for advice, but the panic and confusion of her early Tantric years are gone. She has reached a relaxed, calm eye-level; she “walks in beauty” (cf. Annex C).

### **8.7. Summary In-Depth Interviews**

The qualitative approach with its discursive narrative analysis confirms my expectation that this method would allow for capturing the growth and transformation towards inner peace, experienced by TW attendees, with clarity and differentiation. Indeed, with this tool, I was able to put individual tendencies, strengths and weaknesses into perspective and assess them in a balanced way, considering the person’s individual circumstances. It seems that neither “high marks” nor apparent failure in a certain area, suggested by survey results, indicate real progress or genuine lack of success unmistakably; however, qualitative methods provide a suitable tool for evaluating the impact of the examined influence on an individual level.

Moreover, qualities such as *peaceability* or equanimity are better detectable through methods other than rating: a one-on-one interview offers a wide range of additional sources of information and clues about an individual’s approach, attitude and state of mind; even their set of values becomes palpable by their interactions with the interviewer, their pace, tone of voice, the pauses they take for pondering, their choice of words. All these elements supplement the overall impression of what the interviewees communicate verbally.

What is it that the attendees have revealed in their in-depth interviews? The interviews showed that, when asking an individual who has gone through the YT about the impact this training has had on their life, their views and particularly, on the peace



within and the peace in their surroundings, they confirm the concept this study has started from:

1. Their communication skills have improved and they have learned to calmly address delicate subjects, deal with rejection in a relaxed way, detect and express their emotions, to take a stance and to be a safe and sought for listening partner for individuals in distress.

Changes in *relationships* are being reported: some friendships break up when the attendee develops new approaches to life, such as finding less joy in complaining; from others, attendees distance themselves deliberately, and new friends who they feel supported, understood and challenged by, come into their lives. Family relations improve, be it by reconciliation – particularly with the individual’s parents – or becoming independent on seeking the family’s approval, or by allowing themselves and their family to be who they are without trying to change their ways. Peace within the individual’s family is, to many, a particularly valuable asset which has a positive impact on that person’s own inner peace.

In particular, the relationship with their own Self has deepened; some of the interviewees work particularly well with the model of the Inner Child, and their internal dialogue has become gentler and more forgiving, thus allowing for more *peaceability*.

2. The interviewees consistently report improved *confidence*: after the YT, they speak up when they are not satisfied with a given situation, rather than getting frustrated; they developed courage and face formerly stressful situations with increasingly sporting spirit. This transformation is predominantly based on their newly-gained *insight* – their ability to detect and understand their own mental patterns and to balance and adjust their acting accordingly. Understanding and forgiving one’s own patterns makes it easier to understand other people’s patterns and to relate to them in a peaceable way.

Attendees have learned to be clear with their “Yes” and “No” and enjoy applying the methods they have learned during the YT in their everyday lives.

They also report having made their peaces with their own gender group: women tend to stop looking at other women with contempt (cf. Beth), perceiving them as

competitors or outright dangerous (cf. Chloe); men start perceiving other men as potential allies rather than rivals (cf. Cesar). All of these transformations foster inner and outer peace.

- Attendees develop indulgence with their own imperfections (cf. Brian, Cesar), which, aided by deepening insight, helps them become more forgiving with the imperfections of others, rather than reacting with irritation and blame (cf. Audrey). They use their Inner Observer to stay in touch with their emotions without having to act on them (cf. Brian, Beth), which enhances their feeling of being in charge of their own life script and makes them less susceptible to blaming others.

They embrace qualities such as gratitude – awareness of the good and joyful elements in their lives – (cf. Audrey, Beth) and mindfulness, which allows them to stay poised and kind despite stressful and annoying situations (cf. Cesar, Brian).

They courageously face their own dark places, rather than avoiding them (cf. Audrey, Chloe), which leads to increased confidence and more inner peace by gradually letting go of fear.

- Attendees develop a new approach to their bodily self: they move towards acceptance of who they are, physically (cf. Audrey, Brian, Chloe) and step by step, they learn to love their body, “warts and all”. This kind of self-acceptance dismantles deeply ingrained feelings of inferiority and fosters a peaceful feeling of “being safe and at home within oneself”.

This bonding with their body strengthens the connection with current emotions by acknowledging them through physical expression: deep breathing, particularly in challenging situations, becomes second nature; attendees do not shy away from expressing an emotion with a connected sound (sigh, giggle, gasp), and when under pressure, they allow for physical motion, such as stretching, rather than to freeze.

The attendees’ approach to sexuality changes considerably, from being a matter of fear, awkwardness, embarrassment, unfulfilled desire and/or confusion towards an understanding of sexuality as a deeply natural human means to express closeness, build up energy, experience joy and unity or even find access to advanced mental states and spirituality. With this fundamentally transformed approach, attendees found new ways to connect with their inner peace.

5. The interviewees report heightened *empathy* with themselves and their surroundings: they are better able to understand another person's motivation for requesting something or acting in a certain way (Audrey, Beth, Cesar) and, equipped with self-awareness and self-respect, they are increasingly capacitated to respond in a positive and peaceable way.

Without ignoring or glossing over difficulties which they themselves, their surroundings and the world are facing, attendees learned to count their blessings, cherish the positives in their lives and to celebrate not just big victories and achievements, but every successful baby step on their way (Audrey, Andre). They nourish their basic trust in themselves and others, and in some, this process leads to deep, stable contentment with life as it is (cf. Beth, Audrey) – a basic ingredient to lasting inner peace.

All interviewees reported having had moments of special insight, enhanced mental states and/or spiritual experiences during their YT that deeply moved them and opened a door to new levels of understanding and being. The interviewees had difficulties putting these experiences into words and were rather hesitant about sharing them, due to these experiences' intimate nature.

During one of the interviews, I was offered a moment of particular insight, similar to a window into the other interviewee's reality *behind* the reality-window of our conversation: it occurred when Brian had a brief side-communication with his girlfriend. More than anything he could have said or claimed, overhearing this empathetic and gentle exchange between a couple on the very edge of breaking up spoke clearly of his (and her) achievements in the realm of *peaceability*.

As expected, the in-depth interviews provided a much more appropriate tool to explore the YT attendees' process of growth towards inner and outer peace. Connecting with them in a one-on-one setting, cautiously asking supportive questions and eliciting very personal memories helped them – as four out of six spontaneously reported a few

days after their interview – to better understand their own transformation and to see their success in a new light.

## 9. Summary

As a Master in Peace Studies and longstanding teacher of Western Tantra, I have a vivid interest in the impact workshops on Western Tantra may have on the *peaceability* of their attendees. For 20 years, I have been teaching Western Tantra at the Institut Namasté in Vienna (Austria); there I had ample opportunity to observe groups and individuals and collect data about their subjective experiences, particularly from their Year-Training – a series of seven workshops spread over nine months. I decided to combine my scholarly interest with my profession by studying the effects of Tantra Workshops in-depth, concretely regarding the growth of their inner peace. This led to my research question: “Do Tantra Workshops at the Institut Namasté, particularly the Year-Training, tend to significantly enhance the attendees’ serene and peaceful responses to challenging situations?”

While my initial intent was to include several Tantra schools and compare their results, I soon came to understand that the scope of such an endeavor would be too large. Therefore, I decided to focus on the most available material: the workshops taught by the Austria-based Institut Namasté, which my partner Amrit R. Fuchs and I have run since 1997.

To date, studies in the field of workshops on Western Tantra have been scarce, and none has so far focused on the impact they might have on the *peaceability* of their attendees. Lugmayr’s study (2003) focused on Sex and Enlightenment through Tantra Workshops and even sampled one of the Institut Namasté’s Year-Training cohorts for her purpose; however, neither her research question nor her methodology (quantitative analysis of questionnaires) allowed for meaningful comparison with this dissertation. Kropf’s paper (1999) shares my narrative analysis approach; however, her interview

partners were not attendees of TWs but their teachers. Lastly, the SkyDancing study (Kattenbeck et al., 1992) does sample attendees of a YT, but Kattenbeck's approach is quantitative and unfortunately, only the summary of the study is available. The review of existing literature was, therefore, not high-yielding for the purpose of this study. Nonetheless, there seems to be a tendency indicating that indeed, Tantra Workshops have a substantial impact on attendees. This observed impact points towards increased self-esteem, enhanced communication skills, deepened sexual and spiritual experiences and generally more joy of life. According to the examined studies, females seem to be able to draw more or more intense benefits from the workshops than males.

While the three reviewed studies leaned towards a more quantitative methodology, I chose the participant observer approach which reflected and took advantage of the specific role I had during the observation of my sample: I was not only observing the groups as a researcher but, as their teacher, I was also part of the groups and involved in their dynamics and processes. Such close involvement inevitably creates bias; acknowledging this, I proceeded with heightened awareness and exercised particular caution during research and analysis. On the other hand, this uncommon closeness and intimate knowledge of my sample also allowed for particularly deep insight and valuable findings.

This study's data were drawn from observation, surveys and in-depth interviews. The experience of two decades of observation was pivotal not only during the in-depth interviews but also for examination and analysis of the data. The surveys were not just the first step on this study's journey: they were also important for developing the areas of questioning, which were used in the questionnaires, and later consolidated into the analysis.

I developed the questionnaire in 2004 and had the YT attendees of 11 consecutive years (2005-2015) respond to its 82 questions in the beginning and then again in the end of their training. Although the areas surveyed were quite extensive, for the purpose of this study, the focus was on those areas of personal growth that were most closely linked to themes of *peaceability*, grounded in W. Dietrich's concept of Many Peaces. Therefore, I selected 25 of the 82 questions, which I considered best-fitting for the purpose of answering my research question, for examination.

It soon became clear that neither the design of the questionnaire allowed for rigorous statistical validation, nor did the quantitative approach I had initially intended take me closer to answering my research question. Therefore, the outcome of the N=222 sample's responses was used for identifying a number of useful categories and possible trends, and particularly, for identifying questions which seemed so significant for the surveys' respondents that addressing them in-depth within the qualitative interviews seemed highly promising.

These qualitative interviews involved six individuals – three males, three females – representing a wide range of characteristics regarding experience, commitment, age cohort and personal history. Despite their intended diversity, all six interviewees shared one criterion: just like the survey respondents, they have graduated from at least one Year Training.

Before turning to the data material, I made sure the terms relevant for and frequently referred to in this study were properly examined and defined: *peace*, *sexuality* and *Tantra*. First I looked into different understandings of peace with particular reference to Dietrich's families of peaces (Dietrich, 2008): *energetic*, *moral*, *modern*, *postmodern* and *transrational*, and determined that the peace I am relating to in the present study shares most common ground with Dietrich's transrational peace. It strives to reconcile

the seemingly irreconcilable – skillfully-used rationality with down-to-earth, unsentimental spirituality – while cultivating the respect or perhaps even the fascination for the others’ otherness. Also, transrational peace is not afraid of dissent but understands conflict as a potential source of energy to be used in order to transform problem situations: an approach which strikingly resembles ancient Tantric teachings.

As part of the examination of my approach to peace, I also discussed the links between peace and happiness; among others, by evaluating concepts such as delayed gratification, by shining light onto the credibility of the saying “happy people don’t fight”, by exploring the impact of *flow* and the effects of leading a meaningful life as well as ways of achieving lasting *eudaimonia*. In a next step, I discussed touch, sex and peace, showing how tactile stimuli, bonding, intimacy and reassuring sexual activity are linked to an individual’s inner peace. Overall, a fitting definition for peace in the context of the present study could be “a unique and powerful state of mind that starts with the individual”.

The next term to be explored was *sexuality*, its significance in Western societies, the awkwardness which still encompasses it despite more than half a century of “sexual enlightenment”, and the still prevalent voicelessness across the age cohorts when it comes to speak about one’s hopes, fears and experiences in this field. The ability to overcome sexual frustration rooted in education, upbringing and personal history, thus allowing for joyful and rewarding sexual relationships, can be understood as an important ingredient to an individual’s inner peace.

During the TWs, deep-rooted concepts such as associating any kind of touch with sexual connotations, or beliefs about male and female motivation, are gently dismantled. This allows for the discovery of new narratives and insight which create more respect between individuals as well as openness to the unexpected. Further, I discussed the



importance of the transformative power of sexual energy for higher Tantric goals, in our context, *peaceability*. I showed how generating, handling and applying this energy is easier after the individual has developed a relaxed, affirmative and loving approach towards their body and bodily functions. Generally, TW attendees come to understand that human relationships, the nature of sexuality and even their own personalities are more complex and multifaceted, but also more malleable towards peace than they used to think.

In the chapter on *Tantra*, I discuss a wide range of understandings of this term and its meaning. To start with, the term Tantra is not easy to define: scholars experience difficulties agreeing not only on one definition, but even on its first historic emerging, since the concept is extremely wide-ranging and can neither be pinned down nor described with scholarly consensus. The term is frequently occluded by popular and commercial usage, which often involves explicit sexual content. This usage has little to do with the ancient art of applying sexual energy for achieving higher/altered mental states, which a number of authors – along with the present study – refer to. These higher mental states are traditionally pursued in order to gain liberation from suffering, which can be understood as lasting inner peace. This goal can be attributed to both the original Hindu Tantra and its later development, Tantric Buddhism.

The present study rejects the interpretation of Tantra as a means for merely achieving a better sex life: such approach would do no justice to this ancient gate to Oneness through deep self-realization. The sexual elements that, according to the literature, seem to form part of traditional Tantric rituals, are not meant for mundane pleasure but always aimed at transcending it, thus gaining insight and inner peace.

Conceiving of sexuality not only as a means of reassurance, comfort, relaxation, competition, performance or deep bonding, but increasingly as a means to find one's

innermost sacredness (*Buddha nature*, in Buddhism) is an enormous challenge which questions the individual's deepest beliefs and concepts and requires committed work on behalf of the attendee on their personal worldview, growth and development. One of the definitions adopted by the Institut Namasté is "liberation through expansion" (*tan* – to expand, *tra* – to rescue, to liberate): the practitioners liberate their bodies and minds of patterns and habits that narrow down their view on reality; they achieve this by expanding their understanding, kindness and benevolence toward themselves and others.

Those who pursue these goals have a better chance for success if they can do so in a safe environment where they test and practice new views and approaches, question patterns, routines and beliefs while having support and expertise at hand. In order to provide such an environment, the Institut Namasté – among many more facilitators worldwide – offers workshops addressing precisely these topics. To grant insight into the methods and settings of such a workshop, I described the goals and methods applied in detail, giving a few examples of typical exercises.

The study includes a comprehensive list of factors, skills and abilities which I had observed during my research period of 20 years, and which are part of the personal trajectory of development the Institut's Tantra Workshops are aiming for. The list includes items such as the capacity to change one's experience of the world; enhanced resilience and frustration tolerance; pleasure of life and gratitude; kindness and compassion; distinguishing genuine from fake; assuming responsibility for one's own well-being; developing mindfulness; practicing nonviolent communication – even in inner dialogues; courage in the face of challenges and distress; self-respect and respect for others, particularly for their otherness; a loving/welcoming yet unattached relationship with their body and everything material.

In order for the Institut Namasté's team to support attendees during their journey as best as possible, trust on behalf of the attendees is of pivotal importance: if the leading team does not know that or why a person is having a hard time, and if this person does not trust at least one team member enough to open up, reassurance and guidance cannot be successfully offered, misunderstandings can possibly not be clarified. Since trust which is stronger than fear or embarrassment needs to be tested and gained over time, an ethically impeccable approach forms a critical part of the Institut's mission statement and code of conduct.

This study includes the detailed description of a Tantra Workshop's setting, schedule and focus, which helps understand the aims and methods in a pragmatic context. The description of the Year-Training, its building blocks and their particular goals provides a solid background "feel" for the ensuing examination of the collected data. Statistic material describing the Year-Training cohort within the observation period between 2005 and 2015 adds concrete figures regarding age cohort distribution, occupation and male/female ratio.

Unlike the surveys which – as mentioned above – were not entirely suitable for rendering statistically sound results but were nonetheless used in order to generate possible trends and tendencies, the in-depth interviews did provide rich material to be analyzed. Using the five categories established for the survey examination (*Interaction and Relationships; Confidence, Insight; Inner Peace, Equanimity, Joy; Body Awareness, Sexuality; Mindfulness, Spirituality*), I applied a narrative analysis to the six interviews. Each interview was then presented by subdividing it into these five categories and analyzing each category individually. This facilitates cross-reading and allows comparisons between all six interviewees' statements for each category.

Adhering to this cross-reading structure, the qualitative analysis of the six in-depth interviews yielded the following results:

*Interaction and Relationships*

A common denominator is that the interviewees' surroundings notice increased openness, sharing of opinions, preferences and emotions, thus strengthening bonds with friends and relatives. Sharing now feels much less "risky" to the interviewees, and delicate topics are tackled with clarity and courage. Regarding their relationships within the family, interviewees typically speak about "finally growing up"; this shift encompasses reconciliation – even in cases of severe dysfunctions –, compassion and gratitude towards their family members.

"Protective walls" against potential and existing partners are becoming obsolete since a new view of the other sex allows for trusting relationships. Needs can now be voiced, boundaries set and, if necessary, defended. It is common for the interviewees' circle of friends to transform: the respondents report their new tendency to select friends who both reassure and challenge them and who they can bond with deeply.

The relationship with themselves is reported to have improved remarkably: interviewees point out that they "don't beat themselves up" any longer over failures or inner conflicts; they developed self-appreciation and grew gentler with themselves, but also more rigorous when pursuing their goals towards inner growth, rather than giving leeway to their weaker selves.

Interviewees typically describe a strong urge to "give back to the world/community". Without feeling responsible for the whole universe, they are keen to share what they have learned, to support others and to contribute to a world of

understanding, solution-finding and peace, even if only by simply keeping their own mind at peace.

*Confidence, Insight*

The improvement of the interviewees' confidence is significant. They credit it particularly to their new-found ability to say, "Yes" or "No", i.e. to accept or decline requests/suggestions with kindness, clarity and resolve. As their confidence increases, their mistrust and contempt towards others diminishes. The Tantra Workshops provide ample opportunities for attaining insight about other people's struggles and difficulties; adding compassion to insight, interviewees feel their indulgence with their own and others' shortcomings grow, thus opening new space for *peaceability*.

With growing confidence, challenges and even life-long traumata seem less frightening: interviewees report having not just an enhanced joy of life but also having fun and enjoying challenge when tackling and overcoming obstacles. Typical examples given include addressing smouldering conflict or standing up for themselves or others with poise and *peaceability*. Interviewees apply techniques and knowledge learned in the Year-Training, to deal with overwhelming situations, to resist unhelpful drama and to take good care of themselves and their Inner Child.

*Insight* involves the interviewees' self-awareness and their ever-progressing capability to realize what they are doing, sensing and feeling (their Inner Observer); they are better able to regulate emotions and increasingly often rest in the awareness of a situation, without the urge to react, immediately. This gives them time for choosing more serene and peaceful approaches, rather than agitated and unmindful ones; also, interviewees typically stop to think about the reasons for the spontaneous inner motions

they observe, thus facilitating the discovery of underlying processes and motivations and their eventual disentanglement.

*Inner Peace, Equanimity, Joy*

All these new or enhanced abilities fuel the interviewees' equanimity and joy and contribute to a deepening experience of inner peace: they report feeling significantly closer to themselves, centered, calmer and more composed, despite chaos and challenges. Their tolerance for ambiguity has increased, lessening the necessity of painting things in black or white but accepting and embracing shades of grey. In response to depressing or frustrating events, they report experiencing more resilience and a more equanimous approach, thus opening up to peaceful moves.

Having gained easier access to their emotions, interviewees notice their emotional landscape turning more colorful: they open up to more joy, and they do not look away from pain, acknowledging both – celebrating the joy and drawing lessons from unpleasant experiences. This way, they increasingly welcome everything that comes their way with a peaceful mind, since they understand that whatever it is, it can be either pleasurable or provide a chance for insight – ideally both.

Improved kindness, patience and compassion are among the most frequently listed qualities that interviewees take away from the Year-Training, along with methods and reminders that help them stay on track. They report having more fun, laughing more frequently and lashing out or fighting back less, due to their more patient and forbearing approach towards life's vagaries. Their ability to approach life events with equanimity helped two of them face even their own possible death with serenity, while radiating calm and peace of mind.

Resting in their quiet center opens opportunities for improved and deeper communication to the interviewees: they describe many of their exchanges as fluent, enjoyable, efficient and bonding – even and particularly in work-related situations. Regarding work, some interviewees observe that material matters are becoming less important to them: they prefer occupations that may pay less but provide more satisfaction and meaning; they aspire to make a difference in the world.

### *Body Awareness, Sexuality*

All interviewees agree on having achieved a better body awareness as well as a more relaxed approach towards their bodies and their bodily functions, towards sexuality in general and their own sexual encounters, in particular. Both males and females experience substantially less internal performance pressure which translates into more relaxed and gratifying sexuality; additionally, both sexes – independently of their age cohort – report having improved their body image which, again, boosts their self-esteem and confidence.

The male interviewees state that their emotional dependence on flawless erectile function has decreased considerably, making room for increasingly stress-free enjoyment of whatever a given erotic situation allows for. Not having to “prove” anything, along with letting go of feelings of guilt about their desire, is experienced as major relief which increases their faith in themselves and the world and enhances their peace of mind.

The female interviewees highlight the importance of reconciling with their own womanhood, their bodies and their sexuality, before they are ready to embrace the joyous aspects of sexuality and to explore it further without relapsing into stress and anxiety. Depending on the individual personal history, this typically requires several steps of awareness-building, acknowledging and healing, which the interviewees were able to

take during their YT. Each of the three interviewed women give a moving account of re-awakening their sexual joy which they had begun to believe was gone for good.

Both males and females point out how feeling at home in their bodies and knowing how to generate elevated energy flow makes them feel alive and “at home” in their bodies. *Breath, voice and motion* have become part of their natural being and an everyday way to access or re-gain their quiet inner place. For some, experimenting with their flow of energy becomes more fascinating and rewarding than the purely physical aspects of sexuality. This is where the YT links with the traditional Tantra and paves the way for altered states of mind which many attendees associate with deep inner peace.

#### *Mindfulness, Spirituality*

Mindfulness is present in the interviewees’ lives not only as their well-established Inner Observer, “responsible” for detecting unhelpful thought patterns and reactions. Mindfulness is also in their increasingly strengthened tendency to find gratitude in what they have received in life and in who they have become. Other elements of mindfulness include consideration for others’ concerns as well as gentleness, which permeates not only interviewees’ speech but increasingly their thinking and even their ways of acting, such as closing a door or putting down a teacup.

Another indicator for deepening mindfulness, observed by some of the interviewees, is the ability to concede that their own view, however cherished, may be only one of many. This letting-go of attachments to one’s own favorite thoughts is linked to a person’s ability to virtually choose the thoughts they want to think and refuse those that are known to be pointless or harmful, such as thoughts reflecting anger, blaming or vengeance.



Being mindful, that is, aware of their state of mind, helps the interviewees to relax even when the emotional load is too heavy for them to lift: since they have observed their own mind long enough to be familiar with the mutability of emotions, they know that whatever the commotion may be, it will soon transform into something else. This helps them stay calm and peaceful, even when unable to solve a difficult situation.

Interviewees report an increased acceptance of things-as-they-are, without falling into lethargy: they acknowledge the finite nature of things, mourn their losses less and are more ready to embrace change. This is accompanied by a tendency to find the good in every situation, which contributes not only to the interviewee's peace of mind: the refusal to spread panic and anxiety and rather choose to inspire assurance and confidence is beneficial for their surroundings, as well. Typically, interviewees observe themselves growing towards altruism and away from egocentric attitudes; they believe that the reason for this development is their knowledge of inter-connection with others or even with everything that surrounds them. They are willing and ready to offer their time, wisdom and energy to benefit others.

According to the interviewees' accounts, some of the exercises they practiced during their YT opened gateways to unforgettable moments of Oneness, overwhelming joy, insight and peace. Comparable to Near-Death-Experiences, these moments dispel fear, foster basic trust and instill life-changing, existential *knowing*. In several cases, this kind of experience had a concrete impact on the interviewee's worldview, faith and commitment to kindness and *peaceability*.

The qualitative evaluation confirmed a number of suggested themes from the surveys' results. The most apparent were the improvements in personal relationships, particularly with parents, but also on an intrapersonal level: the interviewees reported

relevant improvements in categories like forgiveness, indulgence, understanding, kindness and forbearance – ingredients to a deepened sense of inner peace, but also to more peaceful relationships. A prominent theme among the interviewees is their intense quest for purpose. They want to be of service to others, not so much in order to leave their mark but rather to make a difference: they do not crave rewards but aspire to contribute to a more peaceful, joyful world.

Based on the narrative analysis of the six in-depth interviews, as well as on my observations as participant and observer, and the themes that have been identified through the collected material in the surveys, the research question has been answered affirmatively: indeed, Tantra Workshops at the Institut Namasté, particularly the Year-Training, do tend to significantly enhance the attendees' *peaceability* – their serene and peaceful responses to challenging situations. However, during the course of their YT, participants continue to be involved in many life experiences beyond the TWs, and it is not always possible to determine to what extent the TWs are the main factor in these changes. Also, the results vary with the person, depending on factors such as commitment and life experience. Despite encouraging indicators, further study would be needed to determine whether some of these results fade with time. Ideally, the Tantra practitioner develops a deeply compassionate insight about the dynamics of human life, and from there, with the understanding that everything is connected, a sense of unshakeable inner peace. This is where Peace and Tantra meet.

### *Conclusion*

This study contributes to a better understanding of how personal growth can aid growth in ways that contribute to peace-enabling practices and outlooks. It takes its place in the

literature of studies that indicate the value of personal growth in community, following a prescribed path rooted in traditional spiritual practices.

The general lack of research in this field is of concern, as there are many aspects of traditional approaches that can be recovered in order to aid in strengthening people's capacity and willingness to engage in peace activities. This area of research into the arena of transrational peaces is deserving of wider study, particularly from the viewpoint of positive psychology. Thus, this dissertation sets the stage for a more rigorous program of research that would examine the effects of components of Tantra Workshops on a set of well-defined outcome measures, for instance, applying the Big Five model and using a Principle Components Factor Analysis.

This study has reached its aim: to contribute to the knowledge about ways and methods to achieve inner and outer peace. It has shown that the traditional Tantric approach, adapted for contemporary audiences, can provide opportunity for a wide range of goals – from developing basic trust and mindfulness, thus fostering individual and societal peace, to spiritual experiences of cosmic unity and all-embracing peace. In this sense, Tantra Workshops have proven to truly comply with Urban's definition and literal translation of the term Tantra, *Spreading the knowledge that saves*, by helping the individual open up and embrace otherness, in line with the concept of transrational peace.

*Whenever I meet even a 'foreigner',  
I have always the same feeling:  
'I am meeting another member of the  
human family.'*  
*This attitude has deepened  
My affection and respect for all beings.  
May this natural wish be  
My small contribution to world peace.*

*I pray for a more friendly,  
More caring, and more understanding  
Human family on this planet.  
To all who dislike suffering,  
Who cherish lasting happiness -  
This is my heartfelt appeal.*

(His Holiness the Dalai Lama, 2012)

## Annex A – The Questionnaire

This is the questionnaire as the respondents received it, in their surveys 1 and 2.  
The [English translation](#) and the color code were added for the purpose of this thesis.

Color code: ■ Body & Sexuality      ■ Social Interactions & Environment      ■  
■ Inner Peace      ■ Philosophy & Spirituality  
 Personal Development & Consciousness

*Beobachtungsprotokoll JT 2013/MT*  
 Observation Record: Year-Training 2013/6th block

Übungen 

JA	NEIN
Yes	No

 gemacht  
 Practiced exercises

Welche/wie oft:  
 Which/how often:

Beobachtbare Ergebnisse:  
 Results observed:

**Kennung \*:**  
**Code\*:**  
**Datum:**  
**Date:**  
 \* Bitte stell deine Kennung wie folgt zusammen:  
 Please generate your code as follows:  
 Vorname (lt. Dok) 1.+ letzter Buchstabe,  
 First name (according to ID) 1st + last letter,  
 Familienname 1. + letzter Buchstabe,  
 last name 1st + last letter,  
 Geburtsdatum nur den Tag,  
 birthday – only the day.  
 Beispiel:  
 Example:  
 Reinhard Fuchs 12.9.1951 = RDFS12

		Überhaupt nicht! Not at all!	↔								Genau so ist es! That's it, exactly!
1	Mein Leben ist ein aufregendes Abenteuer. <i>My life is an exciting adventure.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2	Sexualität und Spiritualität sind Gegensätze. <i>Sexuality and spirituality are antagonisms.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3	Ich komme meinen Mustern immer mehr auf die Schliche. <i>I am increasingly figuring out my mental patterns.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4	Die Gruppe hängt mir manchmal zum Hals heraus. <i>Sometimes I get sick of this group.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5	Wenn ich an Sexualität denke, meine ich vor allem die Vereinigung. <i>When referring to sexuality, I think primarily of intercourse.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6	Ich komme als Frau gut mit Frauen/als Mann gut mit Männern zurecht. <i>As a woman, I get on well with women/as a man, I get on well with men.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
7	Meistens antworte ich so, wie es von mir erwartet wird. <i>I mostly answer the way I am expected to.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

		Überhaupt nicht! <span style="font-size: 1.2em;">↔</span> Genau so ist es! Not at all! <span style="color: blue;">That's it, exactly!</span>									
8	Ich bin eine erotische Frau/ein erotischer Mann. <i>I am a sexually attractive woman/man.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
9	Die anderen in der Gruppe haben eine gute Meinung von mir. <i>The other group members have a high opinion of me.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
10	Ich kann mir meine Unvollkommenheiten verzeihen. <i>I am able to forgive myself my imperfections.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	Ich bin stolz auf meinen Körper. <i>I am proud of my body.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
12	Ich bin froh, wenn mir jemand anders schwierige Entscheidungen abnimmt. <i>I feel relieved when somebody else takes difficult decisions for me.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
13	Sexualität ist für mich ganz natürlich. <i>Sexuality comes completely natural to me.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
14	Meine Körperhaltung ist jetzt irgendwie aufrechter und offener. <i>My posture is somehow more open and taller now.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
15	Die Eifersucht meines Partners/meiner Partnerin ist ein Problem für mich. <i>My partner's jealousy poses a problem for me.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
16	Wenn ich etwas anders haben will, sage ich es. <i>When I want things to be different, I speak up.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
17	Es fällt mir leicht, in der Feedback-Runde über meine Erfahrungen und Erlebnisse zu sprechen. <i>I have no problem talking about my experiences during the sharing rounds.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
18	Das Leben meint es gut mit mir. <i>Life is good.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
19	„Atem, Stimme und Bewegung“ funktionieren ohne nachzudenken. <i>Breath, voice and motion kick in without even thinking of it.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
20	Die Rückkehr in den Alltag nach einem Seminar ist für mich wie ein Schock. <i>Getting back into my everyday life after a workshop feels like a shock.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
21	Zustände erhöhter Energie sind Teil meines ganz normalen Lebens. <i>Stages of elevated energy are part of my everyday life.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
22	Ich habe das Gefühl, dass ich in dieser Gruppe keinen richtigen Platz finde. <i>It feels like there is no right place for me in this group.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
23	Ich verstehe mich selbst jetzt besser als noch vor zwei Monaten. <i>I can understand myself better now, than two months ago</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

		Überhaupt nicht! Not at all!	↔	Genau so ist es! That's it, exactly!																	
24	Ich sage klar meine Meinung. I speak my mind.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
25	In Wirklichkeit ist mein Leben von äußeren Einflüssen abhängig. Really, my life depends on external influences.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
26	Ich frage mich oft, ob ich den anderen nicht auf den Wecker gehe. I often wonder whether others perceive me as a nuisance.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
27	Ich brauche jetzt weniger Sex als noch vor zwei Monaten. I need less sex now than two months ago.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
28	Ich kann NEIN sagen, wenn ich NEIN meine. I am able to say No when I mean No.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
29	Es fällt mir auch in meinem Alltag leicht, auf Menschen zuzugehen. It is easy for me to reach out to people – not only here but in my everyday life, as well.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
30	Yoni/Lingam sind mir ebenso lieb und vertraut wie meine anderen Körperteile. Yoni/Lingam [female/male genitalia] are just as dear and familiar to me as my other body parts.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
31	Mein Körper antwortet sehr sensibel auf jede Berührung. My body is very responsive to any kind of touch.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
32	Was den Sex betrifft, ist mir Qualität wichtiger als Quantität. When it comes to sex, I prefer quality rather than quantity.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
33	Wenn mich etwas stört, kann ich es sagen. Whenever something irritates me, I am able to say it out loud.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
34	Das ewige Sitzen ist eine Tortur. The never-ending sitting [on the floor] is a torture.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
35	Ich kann JA sagen, wenn ich JA meine. I am able to say Yes when I mean Yes.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
36	Ich vertrage jetzt mehr Nähe als früher. I can deal better with closeness now, than before.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
37	Es gibt im Rahmen der Seminare Dinge, die ich ansprechen sollte, aber ich habe nicht den Mut dazu. Within these workshops, there are things I should address but I don't find the courage to do so.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
38	Ich fühle mich sicher und geborgen in der Gruppe. In the group, I feel safe and secure.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
39	Mein Sexualleben ist jetzt lebendiger als noch vor zwei Monaten. My sex life is more lively now than two months ago.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										

		Überhaupt nicht! <span style="font-size: 2em;">↔</span> Genau so ist es! Not at all! <span style="font-size: 2em;">↔</span> That's it, exactly!									
40	Meine Eifersucht ist ein Problem für mich. <i>My jealousy poses a problem for me.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
41	Erst in einem Kuschelhaufen fühle ich mich so richtig wohl. <i>It is the cuddle clusters [cf. the core of Cuddle Parties] where I feel really good, at last.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
42	Beim Tanzen kann ich mich ganz selbstverständlich gehenlassen. <i>While dancing, I can let my hair down completely and naturally.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
43	In mein Leben treten immer mehr nette „Zufälle“. <i>My life is offering increasing numbers of serendipities.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
44	Ich weiß gar nicht, warum ich mir diese ganzen Seminare antue. <i>I wonder why I put myself through all these workshops, after all.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
45	Hauptsache ist, den anderen geht es gut; ich bin nicht so wichtig. <i>The main thing is that everybody else is happy; I myself am not that important.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
46	Eifersucht ist eine notwendige Begleiterscheinung der Liebe. <i>Jealousy is love's indispensable companion.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
47	Ich kann besser nehmen als geben. <i>I am better at receiving than at giving.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
48	Das andere Geschlecht macht mir Stress. <i>The opposite sex stresses me out.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
49	Ich fühle mich als wichtiger Teil der Gruppe. <i>I feel like I am an important part of the group.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
50	Sexualität ist eher ein Problem als eine Quelle der Kraft. <i>Sexuality is rather a problem than a source of energy.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
51	Ich kann Emotionen und Energiezustände bei anderen wahrnehmen. <i>I can detect emotions and states of energy in others.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
52	Lust ist ein selbstverständlicher Teil meines Lebens. <i>Sexual pleasure is a natural part of my life.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
53	Meine schwarzen Löcher sind noch genauso bedrohlich wie vor zwei Monaten. <i>My dark places are just as threatening as two months ago.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
54	Das Leben wird irgendwie immer bunter und spannender. <i>In a way, life is getting ever more colorful and exciting.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
55	Es ist schwierig, wirklich jedeN als ÜbungspartnerIn zu akzeptieren. <i>It is difficult to really accept any given group member to be my exercise partner.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
56	Ich kann meinen Körper ohne weiteres herzeigen. <i>I can show my body just like that.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

		Überhaupt nicht! Not at all!	↔	Genau so ist es! That's it, exactly!																	
57	Im Grunde ist alles gut, so wie es ist. <i>Basically, all is good the way it is.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
58	Meine Schwächen werde ich wohl nie überwinden. <i>I am probably never going to overcome my flaws.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
59	Mein Körper ist eher ein Handicap als ein guter Freund. <i>My body is rather an obstacle than a good friend.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
60	Mit meinem Partner/meiner Partnerin über meine Gefühle zu sprechen ist... (1) ganz unmöglich – (10) völlig selbstverständlich. <i>To talk with my partner about emotions is (1) completely impossible... (10) an absolute given.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
61	Ich bemerke es, wenn mein Körper mir Signale gibt. <i>I notice when my body sends me signals.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
62	Selbst wenn es mir schlecht geht, geht's mir eigentlich noch immer ziemlich gut. <i>Even when feeling lousy, overall I am still feeling pretty good.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
63	Ich kann mir genau zuschauen bei allem, was ich tue. <i>I am able to observe closely everything I do.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
64	Ich genieße mein Leben mit allen Sinnen. <i>I enjoy life fully and with all my senses.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
65	Die Jours fixes helfen mir, dranzubleiben. <i>The [weekly practice] Jours Fixes help me to stay on track.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
66	Ich komme gut mit meinem Vater zurecht. <i>I get along with my father.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
67	Ich bleibe gelassen, selbst bei Ärger und Stress. <i>I stay relaxed, despite nuisances and stress.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
68	Meine Umwelt ist irritiert von dem, was sich bei mir verändert. <i>The people around me respond with irritation to the changes they notice in me.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
69	Irgendwie bin ich jetzt mutiger als noch vor zwei Monaten. <i>In a way, I am more courageous now than two months ago.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
70	Ich bin der Regisseur meines Lebens. <i>I am the director of my own life script.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
71	Was ich in den Seminaren gelernt habe, setze ich in meinem Alltag um. <i>The things I learned in the workshops I put into practice in my everyday life.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
72	Mein Blick auf die Welt und die Menschen ist irgendwie milder. <i>My view of the world and of people has grown milder, somehow.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
<i>Misnumbered question (no question #73 exists)</i>																					



		Überhaupt nicht! Not at all!	↔									Genau so ist es! That's it, exactly!
74	Ich komme gut mit meiner Mutter zurecht. <i>I get along with my mother.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
75	Ich kreierte mir auch außerhalb der Seminare sinnliche Situationen. <i>Outside of the workshops, I generate sensual settings, as well.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
76	Ich bin mir nicht sicher, ob ich den Großen Bogen weitermachen soll. <i>I am not completely sure whether I should follow through with the Year-Training.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
77	Meine Partnerschaft entwickelt sich unterm Strich erfreulich. <i>On balance, my relationship is unfolding positively.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
78	Es gelingt mir einfach nicht, regelmäßig zu üben. <i>I just can't get myself to practice on regular basis.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
79	Ich habe das Gefühl, dass ich immer weniger sicher weiß. <i>I have the feeling that I know less and less things for sure.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
80	Bisexualität ist ein interessantes Thema für mich. <i>Bisexuality seems like an interesting subject to me.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
81	Ich habe langsam die Nase voll vom Thema Lust. <i>Increasingly, I am getting sick and tired of all that sexual pleasure topic.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
82	Konflikten weiche ich weiträumig aus. <i>I shirk conflicts whenever possible.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
83	Ich kann mich sowohl öffnen als auch schützen – je nach Bedarf. <i>I am able to open up or protect myself, according to the situation.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

**Sonstige Beobachtungen, Anmerkungen, Wünsche etc.:**  
**Other observations, remarks, requests etc.:**

**Annex B - The Holstee Manifesto**

**THIS IS YOUR LIFE.**  
DO WHAT YOU LOVE,  
AND DO IT OFTEN. **LIFE.**  
IF YOU DON'T LIKE SOMETHING, CHANGE IT.  
IF YOU DON'T LIKE YOUR JOB, QUIT.  
IF YOU DON'T HAVE ENOUGH TIME, STOP WATCHING TV.  
IF YOU ARE LOOKING FOR THE LOVE OF YOUR LIFE, STOP;  
THEY WILL BE WAITING FOR YOU WHEN YOU  
**START DOING THINGS YOU LOVE.**  
STOP OVER ANALYZING, ALL EMOTIONS ARE BEAUTIFUL.  
WHEN YOU EAT, APPRECIATE  
**LIFE IS SIMPLE. EVERY LAST BITE.**  
OPEN YOUR MIND, ARMS, AND HEART TO NEW THINGS  
AND PEOPLE, WE ARE UNITED IN OUR DIFFERENCES.  
ASK THE NEXT PERSON YOU SEE WHAT THEIR PASSION IS,  
AND SHARE YOUR INSPIRING DREAM WITH THEM.  
**TRAVEL OFTEN;** GETTING LOST WILL  
HELP YOU FIND YOURSELF.  
SOME OPPORTUNITIES ONLY COME ONCE, SEIZE THEM.  
LIFE IS ABOUT THE PEOPLE YOU MEET, AND  
THE THINGS YOU CREATE WITH THEM  
SO GO OUT AND START CREATING.  
**LIFE IS** LIVE YOUR DREAM  
**AND SHARE**  
**SHORT.** YOUR PASSION.

THE HOLSTEE MANIFESTO © 2009

HOLSTEE.COM

DESIGN BY RACHAEL BERESH

*Rachael Beresh*

<https://www.holstee.com/pages/manifesto>, retrieved July 10, 2015

**Annex C – “She Walks in Beauty”**

*By Lord Byron (George Gordon)*

She walks in beauty, like the night  
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;  
And all that's best of dark and bright  
Meet in her aspect and her eyes;  
Thus mellowed to that tender light  
Which heaven to gaudy day denies.

One shade the more, one ray the less,  
Had half impaired the nameless grace  
Which waves in every raven tress,  
Or softly lightens o'er her face;  
Where thoughts serenely sweet express,  
How pure, how dear their dwelling-place.

And on that cheek, and o'er that brow,  
So soft, so calm, yet eloquent,  
The smiles that win, the tints that glow,  
But tell of days in goodness spent,  
A mind at peace with all below,  
A heart whose love is innocent!

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