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Chapter II

Psychological and Spiritual Well-being of Women with Breast Cancer Participating in the Art of Living Program

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Abstract

This study examined the psychological and spiritual well-being of women diagnosed with breast cancer who participated in the Art of Living Program--a yoga-based stress-reduction program. An 8-day yoga-based stress reduction course that includes yogic breathing techniques known as Sudarshan Kriya Yoga (SKY) was offered to women who had been diagnosed with breast cancer within the past 5 years. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 participating women following a 5-week maintenance period. These interviews were transcribed and coded using thematic analysis to identify themes and grounded theory was further used to examine relationships among the themes. The results suggested that the breast cancer experience was associated with growth and transformation as well as distress and challenges. Among the themes associated with distress related to the diagnosis and treatment phase were thoughts about death, shock, anxiety, depression, guilt and blame, sense of isolation, negative body image and more. Among the themes associated with growth were finding benefits from the breast cancer experience, developing more positive thinking and gratitude, enhanced relationships and receiving support, developing coping behaviors and resources such as spirituality, meditation and faith, learning to let go, slow down, and care for self, developing greater appreciation for life, and reaching out to the community. Participation in the Art of Living program was associated with a deepening of psycho-spiritual experiences that were initiated by having breast cancer. Themes associated with participating in the SKY program were (1) enhanced well being such as experiences of peace, love, joy, release and letting go, healing of body image, reduced fear of death and

fear of recurrence, and increased self care; (2) enhanced self-exploration and realization such as greater appreciation for life, enhanced sense of meaning, purpose and aspiration, acceptance, greater transcendence of "breast cancer identity," and an increased sense of empowerment and self esteem, as well as, accepting people and situations relating to pre-cancer life issues; and (3) enhanced spirituality, self-transcendence, and psycho-spiritual transformation such as experiences of divine love, internalization and personalization of spirituality, renewed relationship with God or religious practices, and using the breathing practices as prayer. These findings suggest the potential of a yoga-based practice such as SKY to enhance the psycho-spiritual well-being of women who have been diagnosed with breast cancer, highlighting the need for further controlled studies in this area.

Keyword: Art of Living Program, Yoga, breast cancer, stress reduction, spirituality

Introduction

Purpose

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the psychological and spiritual experience, transformation, and changes in well-being of women diagnosed with breast cancer participating in a yoga-based stress-reduction program known as the Art of Living course, a comprehensive yoga-based program. Specifically, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and reveal existential and psycho-spiritual themes associated with the cancer experience revealed through the participation in the Art of Living program. These parameters were determined using qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews with the participants.

This study contributes to the field of psycho-oncology by providing a better understanding of the experience of women diagnosed with breast cancer who participate in a mind-body-spirit yoga-based intervention focusing on the spiritual aspects of their experience within the broader context of their well-being. The results of this study may contribute to the integration of more holistic psychosocial and spiritual interventions for people diagnosed with cancer.

Background

Cancer is a life-altering disease that may challenge one's view of the world and one's sense of self and image. Cancer patients may be confronted with the existential challenges associated with uncertainty, vulnerability, hopelessness, isolation, fear, shock, depression, anger, and the search for meaning and hope (Breitbart, 2002; Moadel et al., 1999; Taylor, 2003). Adaptation difficulties during cancer diagnosis and treatments include themes such as fear of recurrence, body image changes, deprecation of self, physical dysfunction, occupation-related problems, relationship problems, and sexual functioning challenges (Andersen, 1992, 2002; Baum & Andersen, 2001; Cooper, 1984; Holland, 1989, 1998, 2002; Nezu, Nezu, Friedman, Faddis & Houts, 1998).

However, in contrast to viewing cancer as a trauma with uniformly negative effects, evidence supports the view of cancer as a psychosocial transition that can potentially bring

forth growth apart from distress (Andrykowski et al., 1996; Antoni, et al., 2001; Cordova, Cunningham, Carlson, & Andrykowski, 2001; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Thornton, 2002; Weiss, 2002). As reviewed by Thornton (2002), a large body of research literature suggests that most survivors adjust well to cancer. Furthermore, recently, researchers have become interested in expanding the focus of psycho-oncology research to include positive outcomes and several studies have shown that many cancer survivors find benefits in their illness. Cancer survivors have attributed positive outcomes such as increased life appreciation, enhanced interpersonal relationships, and improved personal self-perception of their illness. Some cancer survivors have described ways in which their lives have been enriched and transformed for the better by their disease (Thornton, 2002). Several studies have shown that cancer survivors expressed ways in which cancer has prompted them to revise their priorities, change their philosophy, or become more spiritual. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) explain that “the frightening and confusing aftermath of trauma, where fundamental assumptions are severely challenged, can be fertile ground for unexpected outcomes that can be observed in survivors: [they call this] posttraumatic growth” (p.1).

It seems that negative and positive outcomes of cancer may co-exist, and growth experiences do not put an end to distress in trauma survivors (Andrykowski et al., 1996; Antoni, et al., 2001; Cordova et al., 2001; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Thornton, 2002; Weiss, 2002). Experience of cancer may disrupt one's previously held beliefs of invulnerability, personal mastery and control and can therefore be a critical event which may surface existential struggle and therefore provide the opportunity for engagement in positive transformation through the process of self-reflection in order to possibly gain a new understanding and meaning of life (Gall, Charbonneau, & Florack, 2011). Individual's life context prior to illness and the use of coping strategies that touch on meaning-making also may be associated with perceived growth and positive transformation (Park, 2009). Several studies have revealed the significant role that religion and spirituality play in predicting growth and positive transformation following cancer (Cole, Hopkins, Tisak, Steel, & Carr, 2008; Gall, Kristjansson, Charbonneau, & Florack, 2009; Schreiber & Brockopp, 2011; Vachon, 2008; Yanez et al, 2009). This study explored the psycho-spiritual narrative and experiences relating to the broadness of the breast cancer experience in association with the participation in a mind-body-spirit yoga based intervention.

Psychosocial Interventions

The psychosocial interventions that have been found to have a positive effect on the psychological, social, and physical well-being of cancer patients can be grouped into four categories: educational techniques, behavioral training, individual psychotherapy, and group interventions (Fawzy, Fawzy, Arndt, & Pasnau, 1995). Group interventions may integrate existential, emotion-focused, cognitive, and behavioral therapeutic orientations. These group interventions include a focus on mind and emotions, but generally do not attempt to integrate body and spirit.

Scholars have concluded that interventions that include educational, behavioral, social, or emotional support components have a beneficial effect on emotional adjustment, functional adjustment, and treatment of disease-related symptoms of cancer patients (Andersen, 1992, 2002; Fawzy et al., 1995; Meyer & Mark, 1995). However, the effect size for the magnitude of changes associated with these interventions may be relatively small (Meyer & Mark, 1995). Patients who have participated in various kinds of psychosocial groups or individual

interventions have reported improved psychological well-being, as demonstrated in reduced psychological morbidity, as well as in enhanced benefit-finding and growth (Andersen, 1992, 2002; Antoni et al., 2001; Fawzy et al., 1990; Fawzy et al., 1995; Helgeson, Cohen, Schulz, & Yasko, 2001; Holland, 1998; Kissane et al., 1997; Kissane, et al., 2004; Spiegel, Bloom, & Yalom, 1981; Spira & Reed, 2003).

However, in a review of five studies of group psychological interventions (two of which included cognitive behavioral interventions and three had expressive-supportive therapy) on psychological and survival outcomes for women with metastatic breast cancer, Edwards, Hailey, and Maxwell (2004) concluded that there is insufficient evidence to support the notion that group psychological therapies should be made available to women diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer. Helgeson et al. (2000) argue that the research on benefits of psychosocial interaction for cancer patients has been inconclusive, due to individual differences in intervention responses. Perhaps different interventions work differently for different people based on demographic, psychosocial, and situational variables. In addition, it is possible that there is a need to assess more comprehensive integral psycho-spiritual interventions that include mind-body-spirit approaches to human experience, such as the intervention that was applied in the study.

Due to the expanding interest in the role of spirituality in dealing with cancer (Schreiber & Brockopp, 2012; Siman-Tov, 2008), it is not surprising that innovative new support groups that include non-cognitive mind-body-spirit approaches such as body movement, creative expression, meditation, hypnosis, guided imagery, yoga, and interventions including spiritual and existential components are emerging (Breitbart, 2002; Carlson, & Bultz, 2008; Elkins, Fisher, & Johnson, 2010; Garlick, Wall, Corwin & Koopman, 2011; Hermann, 2001; Mulkins & Verhoef, 2004; Ott, Norris, & Bauer-Wu, 2006; Smith & Pukall, 2009; Targ & Levine, 2002a). This study explored the psycho-spiritual well-being of women diagnosed with breast cancer participating in a yoga-based program that draws on a psycho-spiritual framework.

Spirituality and Cancer

There is evidence that the experience of living with cancer can increase one's awareness of the spiritual aspects of one's self (Halstead & Hull, 2001). Studies have also shown that spirituality can provide a sense of meaning and self-integration that can help the individual face the challenges that arise as a result of the cancer diagnosis and treatment (Brady, Peterman, Fitchett, Mo, & Cella, 1999; Breitbart, 2002; Hermann, 2001; Nelson, Rosenfeld, Breitbart, & Galietta, 2002; Schreiber & Brockopp, 2012; Yanez et al., 2009). Gall and Cornblat (2002) found that spiritual resources such as relationship with God, religious coping activities, meaning, and social support have a positive role in the response of breast cancer patients to their experience of the disease. Attitudes based on spiritual concepts can help the patients see their cancer experience as an opportunity for growth and meaning as they learn to cope with disease and also become more aware of their own life meaning and sense of self (Breitbart, 2002).

In a recent study on the relationship between religious/spiritual factor and perceived growth following a diagnosis of breast cancer, Gall et al. (2011) identified a complex relationship between spirituality at pre-diagnosis and long term adjustment to breast cancer. They suggest that prior to diagnosis, having a negative image of God while at the same time

trying to mobilize one's religious involvement may contribute to an inner state of conflict that can set the stage for greater spiritual disillusionment and struggle. If a more active attitude toward this struggle is applied, then this spiritual struggle may be an important factor in allowing women to work through their emotional distress and eventually contribute to their ability to find benefit or growth in association with the experience of breast cancer. In contrast, women who have a benevolent reappraisal of God during the early months post-surgery appear better able to see the benefits of their experience over the long-term. They conclude that having a more active approach toward the struggle and meaning making process may lead greater perceived growth.

These and other research findings point to the need for more integrative mind-body-spirit interventions that provide space for in-depth introspective existential exploration (Albaugh, 2003; Cole et al., 2008; Park, 2009; Rosequist, Wall, Corwin, Achterberg, & Koopman, 2012; Siman-Tov, 2008; Yanez, 2009). There seems to be a need for a more expanded paradigm of support for women with breast cancer, to provide tools and practices for meaning-making and re-creating balance in the midst of perceived uncertainty and existential vulnerability due to breast cancer diagnosis.

Schreiber and Brockopp (2012) recently reviewed 18 quantitative studies to examine the relationships among religion, spirituality and psychological well being among women diagnosed with breast cancer. The results of this review revealed an inconsistent positive relationship between religion, spirituality and psychological well-being due to the multiple definitions used in different studies for religious practice, religious coping and perception of God, spiritual distress, spiritual reframing, spiritual well-being, and spiritual integration. Due to the very subjective and personal nature of spirituality, qualitative studies may have an important role to play in exploring the role of spirituality in promoting reducing stress and promoting growth and positive transformation in women dealing with breast cancer (Albaugh, 2003; Chiu, 2000; Coward, 1997; Coward & Kahn, 2004; Gould, Wilson, & Grassau, 2008).

Defining Spirituality

Spirituality is a broad term that includes a variety of beliefs and behaviors. Among the beliefs and behaviors are religious values, religious practices, spiritual well-being, spiritual awareness, and religious thoughts (Miller, 2003; Moadel et al., 1999).

This study explored the psycho-spiritual themes associated with the participation in a yoga-based program that can be practiced by individuals of any religious affiliation, viewing spirituality as independent of any specific religious association, but as having the potential to be inclusive of any religion. For the purpose of this study, the definition of spirituality includes other definitions that have been described by other authors in the field of psycho-oncology (Brady et al., 1999; Breitbart, 2002; Mytko & Knight, 1999; Targ & Levine, 2002b). One such definition for spirituality is a "search for the sacred or Divine through life experience or route" (Institute of Human Research as cited by Mytko & Knight, 1999, p. 440). Spirituality can include feelings of connectedness with the self, a community, nature, a higher power, the meaning or purpose of life, and the feelings of wholeness, transcendence, joy, and peace (Mytko & Knight, 1999). Spirituality has also been defined as a construct that involves concepts of "Faith" and/or "Meaning" (Breitbart, 2001). Faith is described as having a belief in, or a relationship with, a higher transcendent power or spirit that may be identified as being external to the human psyche or internalized. The connectedness to the higher power

or spirit is an essential component of the spiritual experience. This relationship is linked to the concept of meaning.

Having a sense that one's life has meaning involves the confidence that "one is fulfilling a unique role and purpose in a life that is a gift" (Breitbart, 2001, p.). This sense of meaning leads to the realization that one has the responsibility and ability to live up to one's full potential as a human being, which will in turn lead to a sense of peace, contentment, or even transcendence through connectedness with something greater than one's self. A universal and accessible aspect of spirituality was described by Targ and Levine (2002a) as "a state in which the individual's identity is no longer limited to a personal body, a personal story, or a personal feeling. He or she experiences openness and dynamic flow between a sense of a small self and larger Self" (p. 340).

Connectedness with a higher power and the experience of self-transcendence may serve as resources in helping women through meaning making and growth processes (Coward, 1997; Thomas, Burton, Griffin & Fitzpatrick, 2010). Furthermore, spirituality may positively affect women's experience of breast cancer as their sense of connectedness helps them to adjust and cope with the impact of breast cancer through meaning-making (Siman-Tov, 2008).

Yoga in the Psycho-spiritual Context

Within the context of mind-body-spirit interventions for cancer patients, yoga can be offered as part of a more comprehensive support program or as a stand-alone intervention (Carlson & Bultz, 2008; Elkins et al., 2010; Smith & Pukall, 2009). In the West, yoga is often regarded as a set of physical exercises combined with specific breathing techniques and meditations, without much emphasis on the spiritual component of the practice. However, yoga is a particular path integrated within Hindu spirituality that is based on the realization of the non-dual Divine presence within individuals and the world; yoga adds a spiritual dimension how the mind and body are conceived to interact. The origin of yoga stems from the Sanskrit root word "yuj", which means to bind, join, unite, and control (Chaudhuri, 1981). This refers to the unification of the material and spiritual aspects of the self or to "the union of the mortal with the eternal" (Chaudhuri, 1981, p. 21). In other words, yoga means the unification or reunification of the personal self with the innermost center of one's being, said to be--in the yoga tradition--the universal Self, cosmic consciousness, or true Self.

Yoga does not dictate one standard path for all to follow. The basic position in yoga is that there are many paths toward the awareness of the Self that are appropriate for individuals with different psychological types (Chaudhuri, 1981; Feuerstein, 2003). The main yoga paths are *raja*, or classical yoga; *hatha*, body and breath control; *karma*, selfless action; *jnana*, knowledge; *bhakti*, love and devotion; *mantra*, potent or sacred sound; *tantra*, being energy (Aranya, 1983; Chaudhuri, 1981; Feuerstein, 2003).

In general, the yoga practices that are most widely used in clinical settings are postures and breathing exercises that belong to the hatha yoga path, which focuses on body and breath. Malathi and Damodaran (1999) found that the practice of yoga contributed to the reduction of stress and anxiety, a greater sense of well-being, a feeling of relaxation, improvement in concentration, self-confidence, efficiency, good interpersonal relationships, increased attentiveness, lowered irritability levels, and an optimistic outlook on life in medical students. As reviewed by Brown and Gerbarg (2005), several studies have demonstrated the beneficial effects of yoga practices on symptoms of anxiety and depression. Wood's study (as cited in

Brown and Gerbarg) found that, compared to visualization and relaxation, in a group of 71 adults, 30-minutes of asanas and pranayama was associated with significant improvements in mental and physical energy, alertness, enthusiasm, and positive mood.

Positive effects of yoga are thought to be linked to the relaxing qualities of yoga practice mediated through the breath, postures, and meditations (Becker, 2000; Brown, 2002; Brown, Gerbarg, & Muskin, 2003; Sovik, 2000). Studies of yoga instructors who used postures, breathing, and meditation have found that, in conjunction with the increase of alpha waves during yogic practice, there was a reduction in serum cortisol levels and an increase in natural killer immune cell activity (Kamei et al., 2000; Kamei et al., 2001). There is evidence that a different form of yoga, namely Yoga in Daily Life, may be useful in limiting distress in women diagnosed with breast cancer. Over a period of one month, the stress levels of the female subjects declined after partaking in this relaxation training (Kovačič & Kovačič, 2011). Furthermore, the quality of life of women breast cancer patients undergoing radiation therapy improved in a study in which yoga classes were taught to 61 women during the 6 week therapy intervention. After training, these women reported less intrusive thoughts, less sleep disturbances, and better general health perception (Chandwani et al., 2010). These studies suggest that different yoga practices may be beneficial for psychological well-being.

Yoga and Psycho-oncology

Yoga has become popular among cancer patients since several cancer centers have begun including yoga classes as part of their complementary psychosocial support (Astin, Shapiro, Eisenberg, & Forsys, 2003; Carlson, Speca, Patel, & Goodey, 2003). Yoga has recently undergone empirical research as potentially beneficial intervention for people diagnosed with cancer (Carlson & Bultz, 2008; Elkins et al., 2010; Smith & Pukall, 2009). Several studies have demonstrated the benefits of various forms of yoga interventions for the improvement of physical symptoms associated with psychosocial aspects of quality of life such as improvements in sleeping disturbances in patients with lymphoma (Cohen, Warneke, Fouladi, Rodriguez, & Chaoul-Reich, 2004), and reduction of chemotherapy induced nausea and emesis in breast cancer patients (Raghavendra et al, 2007), and hot flashes frequency severity and total scores and in levels of joint pain, fatigue, sleep disturbance, symptom related complaints and vigor (Carson & Carson, 2009). Several studies have demonstrated the benefits of various types of yoga interventions for improvements of psychological and spiritual aspects of quality of life such as anxiety, depression, and stress (Banerjee et al, 2007; Raghavendra et al, 2009), social well-being, emotional well-being, spiritual well-being, distressed mood (Moadel et al, 2007). Furthermore, Danhauer et al (2009) suggest potential benefit of Restorative yoga on emotional outcomes and fatigue in breast cancer patients, Culos-Reed, Carlson, Daroux and Hatley-Aldous (2006) reported significant improvements in emotional functioning and quality of life of cancer patients (primarily breast cancer) who participated in the a yoga treatment.

In Carson and associates' (2007) non-controlled study of 13 women with metastatic breast cancer who completed an eight-week Yoga of Awareness Program (involving various breathing, meditation, self study techniques and group discussions), daily diary entries regarding acceptance, distress, fatigue, invigoration, pain and relaxation were completed for two weeks pre-intervention and for the final two weeks of the intervention. Significant

improvements were found on daily reports of feelings of invigoration and sense acceptance. In addition, a positive correlation was found between greater time spent practicing yoga at home with same-day improvements in acceptance, invigoration, pain and relaxation (Carson et al., 2007).

In addition to the various yoga interventions offered independently either in a group format or as individual yoga sessions, yoga is offered as a major component of a widely applied program for people diagnosed with cancer that is known as Mindfulness-Based-Stress-Reduction (MBSR). A number of empirical studies have demonstrated the benefits of this intervention in women with cancer for improving physical parameters such as immune, endocrine and blood pressure outcomes and psychological and spiritual parameters such as stress symptoms, mood states, quality of life, post traumatic growth and spiritual well-being (Garland, Carlson, Cook, Lansdell & Speca, 2007; Carlson, Speca, Faris, & Patel, 2007; Mackenzie, Carlson, & Speca, 2005; Ott et al., 2006). Qualitative explorations of MBSR in a psychosocial oncology setting (Mackenzie et al., 2006) identified themes associated with the participation in this intervention that include opening to change, self control, shared experience, personal growth and spirituality. The researchers conclude that despite the secular nature of this intervention, "the development of spirituality may be an inevitable outcome of the practice as one becomes aware of the intricate interconnections among themselves, other individuals and eventually all aspects of nature through direct experience" (p. 67). A more recent qualitative study of cancer patients in Japan demonstrated some similar themes, suggesting the cross-cultural impact of this intervention (Ando, Morita, Akechi & Ifuku, 2011).

Art of Living Course and Sudarshan Kriya (SKY)

In this study, the comprehensive yoga-based mind-body-spirit intervention is a modern integration and synthesis of several yoga paths. Specifically, the intervention, developed by His Holiness Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, is a course offered by the Art of Living Foundation, which is an international non-profit educational and humanitarian organization and United Nations' chartered Non-Governmental Organization (www.artofliving.org). The course consists of yogic breathing techniques called Sudarshan Kriya Yoga (SKY) as well as yoga-based aspects of cognitive-behavioral therapy and psycho education in the values of acceptance, social responsibility, and community service (Brown, 2002; Brown et al., 2003; Brown & Gerbarg, 2005). A group of researchers at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuroscience in Bangalore, India have conducted research on the effect of SKY on depression (Janakiramaiah et al., 1998). Unlike the study presented here, which includes the whole of the Art of Living program, these researchers omitted the initial philosophical, cognitive, and emotional aspects of the Art of Living course and included only SKY practices in the intervention. They demonstrated that the practice of SKY over 3 months was associated with a reduction in symptoms of depression in patients diagnosed with dysthymic disorder. Their results suggest a dose-response relationship and no clinically significant side effects.

Although no formal studies have been done yet, participation in SKY has been observed to be associated with reduced symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Brown & Gerbarg, 2003). Sageman (2002) presents a model that attempts to explain how the Art of Living course, which includes SKY practices, can treat cognitive and psychodynamic neuro-

psychiatric problems of PTSD. Increased oxygen intake and vagal nerve stimulation, which occur during SKY (Brown, 2002; Brown & Gerbarg, 2003, 2005), can allow for suppressed emotions, cognitions, and trauma memories to be evoked, while providing a state of calmness and relaxation in a safe environment. Sageman concluded that “Sudarshan Kriya provides a corrective emotional experience for healing the cognitive distortions and deep emotional wounds resulting from trauma” (Sageman, 2002). The healing process that happens in SKY could restore a sense of emotional connectedness to people who have been disconnected from their own emotions or the emotions of others. The overall effect of this multi-modal program is amelioration of feelings of anxiety, fear, neglect, abuse, rejection, and worthlessness (Brown & Gerbarg, 2003).

The current study explores the psychological and spiritual well-being of women diagnosed with breast cancer participating in the Art of Living program.

Method

To explore the psychological and spiritual process of women diagnosed with breast cancer who participated in a comprehensive yoga-based stress reduction program, the study included a sample of 12 women who have been diagnosed within the past 5 years with primary or recurrent non-metastatic breast cancer. This sample was part of a larger study mixed method study consisting of 26 women (Warner, 2006). The participants underwent the Art of Living program, which initially included meetings of 3-5 hours a day for 8 days and 5 additional 2-hour weekly meetings. The 5-week period following the 8-day intervention was defined as a maintenance period. The participants were asked to practice the breathing technique on a daily basis during these 5 additional weeks and keep a time and date log of their practice.

To explore the psycho-spiritual themes that emerged and evolved throughout the intervention and to identify themes associated with the contribution of the yoga intervention to the psychological and spiritual well-being of the participants, 12 participants who felt they had meaningful transformative experiences throughout the yoga program were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview.

Open-ended answers to three spiritual well-being questions retrieved from the FACIT-Ex-Sp (Brady et al., 1997; Cella et al., 1993; Peterman, Fitchett, Brady, Hernandez and Cella, 2002; Webster, Cella, & Yost, 2003) were used by researcher and participants in order to reflect on and identify meaningful transformative experiences throughout the intervention.

Participants

Women diagnosed with breast cancer were recruited without regard to ethnic background, socio-economic status, education, occupation, religion, marital status, sexual orientation, complementary and alternative practices, or spiritual practices. However, the inclusion criteria excluded non-English speakers and, therefore, limit the variability in ethnic background. Demographic and self-report disease and treatment information questionnaires were administered to the patients.

Fifty five women called with an interest to participate in the larger mixed method study and 32 women signed consent forms and committed to participate. However, the final sample included 26 participants, due to last minute attrition because of medical or scheduling reasons. The sub-sample of 12 women to participate in the semi-structured interviews was chosen based on whether they felt that they had any transformative experiences during the program, their ability and willingness to articulate their experience, and their availability to be interviewed within 2 weeks after the 5-week maintenance period.

The Art of Living Program

The women participated in an initial yoga-based stress reduction course of 8 consecutive days (Art of Living course). The course was facilitated by a qualified senior experienced Art of Living teacher. As part of the Art of Living Program, participants were taught SKY, meditations, light yoga postures and movements, coping skills, and stress reduction techniques based on yoga lifestyle concepts. Participants were encouraged to discuss and share their thoughts and emotions relating to the material as part of the course. The Art of Living course consists of a variety of yoga practices and concepts affiliated with different yoga paths. This exposes the participants to different aspects of the yoga tradition, which allows them to choose and focus on specific practices depending on their momentary preferences or personality characteristics.

In addition to SKY breathing practices the Art of Living course includes yoga postures suitable for cancer patients, guided meditation, chants, and cognitive and emotional processes that address the application of non-dual philosophical and spiritual aspects of yoga to daily life. SKY consists of three sequential breathing components interspersed with normal breathing: Ujjayi “victorious breath”, which is a slow-strained breathing against airway resistance at 3 cycles/minute; Bhastrika “bellows breath” which is a forceful exhalation at 20-30 cycles/minute, and Sudarshan Kriya (SK) “action toward right vision”, which consists of rhythmic, cyclical breathing in increasing frequencies from slow to medium and to fast cycles.

Between Bhastrika and Sudarshan Kriya there is a brief chanting of “om.” All of these breathing practices are practiced while sitting with eyes closed and awareness focused on incoming and outgoing breath over a period of about 30 minutes. A state of relaxed sleepiness descends by the end of the last round of cyclical breathing and the procedure closes with a period of about 15 minutes of a tranquil state in a supine position.

Participants were given the option to choose between a course that includes morning weekday sessions and a course that includes evening weekday sessions. The short version of SKY was taught to participants during the 8-day course. After the 8-day course, participants were encouraged to practice a short version of SKY on a daily basis at home, which takes approximately 20 minutes of breathing and 10 minutes of relaxation daily.

Participants were encouraged to keep a journal throughout the program and were asked to reflect back on their journal-entries and discern whether they had experienced meaningful profound experiences that had altered any aspect of how they relate to themselves, others, or something beyond themselves. Date and time logs were submitted to the researcher at the end of the study.

Semistructured Interviews

Post-maintenance interviews consisted of open-ended questions relating to the participants' psycho-spiritual process and development as it relates to the cancer experience. Participants were asked to describe their aspirations, and their purpose and meaning in life as it evolved in relation to the cancer experience and in association with the participation in the Art of Living program.

The interview also included questions about the way they experience their connection with themselves, their body, their environment, and their spirituality.

In addition, participants were asked to share in their own words how the yoga-based program has affected their psychological and spiritual well-being and were asked to share any existential psycho-spiritual themes that have emerged and evolved during the program.

Analysis of the Data

Transcribed post-intervention interviews were analyzed using a combination of thematic content analysis and a variation of grounded theory.

Thematic content analysis (Krippendorff, 1980) was used to explore the prevalence of different themes associated with the psycho-spiritual experiences of the participants, and relationships between themes were explored using a variation of grounded theory approach that focused on examining relationships among themes, but did not go as far as developing theory (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003; Krippendorff, 1980).

The interviews were transcribed and each interview was coded and analyzed separately after listening to and reading the transcript of the audiotape three to six times. HyperResearch qualitative analysis software was used as an organizational tool to code the transcriptions.

Several words or sentences were coded throughout each interview based on the subjective descriptions. The software provided reports of each code with all the illustrating quotes described by each participant.

The next step involved categorization of several codes, with their specific quotes, from all interviews into themes that then were grouped into more abstract constructs.

The coding process was conducted "bottom up" where text was selected without pre-conceived ideas in mind.

That is, the transcribed interview, as a whole, was coded in a process that allowed the emergence of new themes based on the presented material without trying to fit the material into pre-fixed themes.

However, parallel to that, the analysis also included a "top-down" process especially for the exploration of the experience of breast cancer, because it has been previously studied. In the "top down" process, codes and themes were revealed based on pre-conceived theoretical constructs about psychological and spiritual well-being associated with breast cancer.

Tables were created for each theme, including brief descriptions of the theme's characteristics and illustrating quotes.

The number of women who expressed each theme was recorded.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics

Variable	n	%	M (SD)	Range
Age			54.9 (12.71)	35-78
Education				
Graduated from High School	0	0		
Trade school	1	8.33		
Some college	3	25.00		
Bachelor's degree	3	25.00		
Some graduate school	2	16.67		
Master's degree	2	16.67		
PhD, MD, and/or JD	1	8.33		
Employment				
Unemployed	5	41.67		
Part time	6	50.00		
Full time	1	8.33		
Marital status				
Married	7	58.33		
Single	1	8.33		
Divorced	2	16.67		
Widowed	1	8.33		
Did not answer	1	8.33		
Income				
< \$20,000	1	8.33		
\$20,000-\$39,999	3	25.00		
\$40,000-\$59,999	0	0		
\$60,000-\$79,999	0	0		
\$80,000-\$99,999	1	8.33		
≥ 100,000	5	41.67		
Do not know	0	0		
Do not wish to answer	2	16.67		
Ethnicity				
Asian American	0	0		
Hispanic	1	8.33		
Caucasian	9	75.00		
Other	2	16.67		
Religion				
Protestant	2	16.67		
Catholic	2	16.67		
Jewish	6	50.00		
Other	1	8.33		
None	1	8.33		

Results

Description of the Sample

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the demographic characteristics of the sample. Table 2 summarizes the participants' medical status characteristics

Table 2. Medical Status Characteristics

Variable	n	%	M (SD)	Minimum	Maximum
Time since diagnosis	12	100	19 months (10.29)	2.83	39.9
Stage (n=12)					
0 (DCIS)	2	16.67			
I	5	41.67			
II	4	33.33			
III	1	8.33			
Surgical treatment					
Mastectomy	5	41.67			
Lumpectomy	4	33.33			
Mastectomy and lumpectomy	3	25			
Time since last surgery	11	91.6	17.42 months (13)		
Surgery during intervention	1	8.33			
Reconstruction surgery					
Yes	6	50			
No	6	50			
Chemotherapy					
Yes	7	58.33			
No	5	41.67			
Time since last chemo					
Radiation					
Yes	6	50			
No	6	50			
Time since last radiation					
During intervention	1	8.33			
Hormonal therapy					
Yes	4	33.33			
No	8	66.66			
During intervention	4	33.33			

Breast Cancer: Distress, Challenges, and Coping

Distress and Challenges at Diagnosis, Treatment and Post-treatment Phase

Table 3 describes themes relating to the distress and challenge associated with breast cancer during different phases of the disease. All of the women reported that the diagnosis triggered different levels of reflections about their own mortality. Thoughts about death were either associated with fear of death and distress about death or with existential reflections on the matter. The breast cancer diagnosis triggered depression and anxiety in 10 women. Nine women experienced surprise in receiving the breast cancer diagnosis, either because they did not have a family history of breast cancer, they felt that they were leading a healthy life style and were healthy throughout their life, or they simply never thought about their vulnerability on a deep level. Five women reported that when they received their diagnosis, they began thinking about the possible causes of their diagnosis and often attributed the cause to their own behavior or attitude. Three women felt that they were being punished by God for the wrong they did in the past. Three women said that they felt isolated, either because they had

difficulty sharing their diagnosis and feelings with other people, or because they felt that their significant others were not able to understand them.

Although 11 women experienced some degree of distress relating to the breast cancer diagnosis, one woman emphasized that she had not experienced any distress associated with the diagnosis. She said that she “really didn’t get terribly upset about it” and she dealt with it in a “matter of fact way”. She reported being in good spirits and said that the breast cancer diagnosis didn’t affect her mood. This woman explained that, compared to other experiences in her life, such as deep depression that she had suffered from the previous year, her early stage diagnosis was much less distressing.

Eleven women reported some degree of emotional and physical challenges associated with treatment and post-treatment. Eight women discussed body image issues relating to the loss or modification of breast, and loss of hair because of chemotherapy. The main issue relating to post-treatment that was mentioned was fear of recurrence, raised by 8 women. Several women stated that because their cancer was caught early on and was identified as non-aggressive they did not experience a high degree of fear of recurrence, however they, too, had a fear of recurrence. Five women reported significant physical pain and weakness relating to treatment side effects that impacted their identity. Four women reported that they had difficulty dealing with their loss of identity as professionals, mothers, or wives, however, one woman reported that her breast cancer diagnosis allowed her to let go of her former identity as an addict by acquiring a new identity of a breast cancer patient.

Coping Attitudes and Behaviors

Table 4 describes the themes relating to coping behaviors and attitudes that were helpful in dealing with distress and challenges associated with breast cancer. All of the women also expressed some degree of benefit finding relating to their breast cancer diagnosis. Eleven women talked about their support systems, consisting of friends and family that helped them through the hard times, and six discussed joining support groups to relieve their anxiety or sense of isolation. Nine women expressed positive thinking and gratitude as a coping attitude. They mentioned that having a positive attitude was helpful or how they felt grateful that their cancer was diagnosed at an early stage, or that they were lucky to receive good treatment. Eight women talked about doing extensive research with the intention to educate themselves as much as possible about their diagnosis and the different treatment options that were available to them. They felt that they were regaining a sense of control over the course of the disease by engaging in extensive research. One woman, however, specifically said that she purposely did not want to do any research: “I don’t want to know any information; I just want someone to take care of it.” Six women said that their first reaction was “take the cancer out of me,” and they were ready to undergo surgery as soon as possible. Their focus was on obtaining treatment solutions to deal with the cancer directly and efficiently. However, two women said that they initially resisted the possibility of undergoing surgery, and they tried to avoid having their breast removed or modified to avoid anxiety about body image issues. Five women said that they turned to their faith or spirituality for support and strength. They said they turned to prayer and meditation in order to deal with their emotional distress and challenges. Four women remarked about how they were in denial before they began to take action and seek treatment. Three women said that facing their fears, rather than repressing them, was a useful way of dealing with the distress associated with breast cancer.

Table 3. Theme: Distress and Challenges

Characteristic	Participant illustration
Thoughts about death (all phases) (100%)	<i>And I think we, we think we are immortal and I think when you get a diagnosis like cancer you go 'hey', you know you really are terminal, everybody is terminal.</i>
Anxiety, fear, and depression (all phases) (83%)	<i>Everything about the initial stages of this was scary, like driving up to the cancer center, reading the word oncology, meeting with having the mammogram... you know all those things just reinforces that fear of that this is really happening.</i>
Shock and surprise (diagnosis) (75%)	<i>My experience with breast cancer was quite a shock because I never expected to have breast cancer because I live very healthy, I was sober on AA I have to say about 34 years and imagined that I was like bullet proof. I just didn't expect anything.</i>
Guilt and blame (diagnosis) (41%)	<i>I think a reaction to being diagnosed as you immediately think, why? What did I do, had I, if I would have done this different then this wouldn't have happened.</i>
Sense of isolation (all phases) (25%)	<i>There were times certainly, that I would look at other people and think 'Wow, they didn't have to go through breast cancer; they have no idea what this experience is like.'</i>
Punishment from God (all phases) (25%)	<i>Is God punishing me, and maybe that came from my childhood when you know when I was a child my mother would say or my grandmother if you don't behave yourself, God punishes you and how does God punish you? I don't know. She never said how.</i>
Body image (treatment and post treatment) (66%)	<i>I felt less than, as a woman. I felt that I wasn't normal, cuz the kind of surgery I had and the radical surgery that I had...having all this radical surgery and my chest had so much scars on it I just, my husband hasn't even seen it. I show him a little scar here and a little there. And I say you have to look at me naked from the waist down, that's it, you know</i>
Fear of recurrence (post treatment) (66%)	<i>It wasn't metastatic breast cancer that had gone all over. I was really catching it in time, though one never knows, but the fear of coming back or maybe progressing somewhere else will always be there to a certain extent.</i>
Physical pain and weakness (treatment) (41%)	<i>I would like not be able to walk at times because my hands were so on fire and my feet was on fire I at times crawled to the bathroom and this happened to my body the second week after I did my chemo and then the third week my head and hands and feet had been on fire, so hot that they were peeling like after you burn...and having sores inside my mouth and in my private parts and those were really some discomforts that I did not anticipate.</i>
Loss of identity and impact on close ones (treatment and post treatment) (33%)	<i>So, to be out of my traditional role "has been" very different as a mother, and a wife and being an occupational therapist and so forth. It has been different. I can easily mention that it has been hard on the children being 3 and 6 at the time, and being afraid because I used to have very long hair that they loved to play with and telling them that I was going to be bald, and that more than anything was a scary emotion for them because it was not right...But it took a while and it took a lot of family members comforting them so that they could accept that and the fact that I was out of commission. I was in bed for a long time and not able to interact with them as much. That was really hard on them and hard on my husband. He doesn't talk about his pain very much; it was very frustrating for him to have been so close to me for so many years.</i>

Breast Cancer: Transformation and Personal Growth

All of the women reported transformation and growth associated with the experience of breast cancer. Relevant themes included dealing with a pre-cancer issue that the breast cancer diagnosis triggered, focusing on spirituality and God, or reevaluating life priorities and values.

Pre-cancer Issue

All women expressed a specific area of growth and transformation triggered by the breast cancer experience that related to a situation or issue that was prevalent in their life prior to the cancer diagnosis. The experience of breast cancer seemed to have an impact on this pre-cancer situation or issue for these women. Some of the pre-cancer issues that were revealed during the interviews were struggles with addiction and recovery, anger, grieving, fear and anxiety, marital conflicts, low self-esteem and lack of empowerment, difficulties in connecting authentically, depression, and inhibition to self-care and nurturing. Although the pre-cancer issues were different for each woman, as shown in Table 5, the transformation and growth process were characterized as belonging in three main categories: letting go, taking time for self care, and developing a sense of empowerment.

Nine women reported that the breast cancer experience allowed them to begin letting go of previous fears, frustrations, attachments, distressing responsibilities, blockages, or judgments. They expressed that their breast cancer diagnosis increased their ability to accept themselves, people, and situations, and to let go of inhibitions.

Nine women reported that the breast cancer experience enabled them to begin slowing down and taking time for self-care. These women were not accustomed to nurture themselves prior to their breast cancer experience, and they said that their diagnosis and treatment introduced them to a new way of relating to themselves that included self-care and attention to self.

Table 4. Theme: Coping Behaviors and Attitudes Related to Distress and Challenges

	Participant illustration
Benefit finding (100%)	<i>It may sound different but, it may sound weird but I thought it was like a step up. Not going to AA groups but going to breast cancer groups and being informed about treatments and alternative medicine and healing.</i>
Support from family and friends (91%)	<i>What helped me a lot, a lot during this time was the support of course of my family in Israel and mostly friends here, really good friends...I was just so amazed to see. I mean really how much they helped, how much they called and wanted to be near me.</i>
Positive thinking and gratitude (75%)	<i>Rather than being negative about it, I pretty much embraced it. Because I pretty much felt like, if I'm really crabby and negative about this I'm not going to get anywhere, I'm not going to get well, I'm not going to feel better, so I didn't I wasn't negative, you can ask people around me. I wasn't real negative, I was always kinda like, I'm going to be ok.</i>

	<i>Participant illustration</i>
Research and education (66%)	<i>Treat it like a project. You go to the doctor, you have to know what questions to ask, make a list, just continue asking, read about it a little bit or more whatever you feel, and just go interview the doctor and it really helped focusing from this side. First of all its very practical and as little emotion are in it as possible because it's really like a project at work. This is the information you need to get, this how you how you're supposed to get it.</i>
Group support (50%)	<i>That first support group that I went to a woman reached out to me and she is a good friend of mine now and she just happened to live in [the same town] and she carried me through moments where nobody else could like console me and I had to call her and just cry on her shoulder.</i>
Get the cancer out (50%)	<i>My immediate reaction was: get it the hell out of me, now. That was my instant reaction...I just decided not to go ahead with the full modified radical mastectomy, have it done, get it over with, get everything off, out, away, I wanted that cancer off of me.</i>
Spirituality, meditation, and faith as a way to cope with distress (41%)	<i>I went to the library and I got books on positive thinking and meditation, that's what kind of, and I got books on, not really the bible, but religion based books...The whole time, again, you know, I had read these books so whenever I started to feel sort of panicky I would do these meditations in my head: God is with me, God will send you through, that kind of thing, you know it was weird how I kind of carried myself through, God carried me through.</i>
Denial (33%)	<i>And I was just in denial; I don't think I want to deal with this cancer.</i>
Facing the fears (25%)	<i>By facing the fears and going through them and you know having talks with myself and comforting myself and being with myself helped me to kind of recover mentally quicker then had I not allowed myself to address those awful feelings...but that's how I chose to go through my experience with breast cancer is I didn't mentally run away from feeling, you know, having the fear of dying or having the fear of what the test result was going to be or having the fear.</i>

Table 5. Theme: Transformation and Growth Associated with Pre-cancer Issue

Characteristics	Participant illustrations
Letting go (75%)	<i>It's almost like a part of me died...the part of the attachment to fear...and there was a part of me that felt very yucky, and it got deeper and it was right before the cancer manifested itself, that part of me died...it was almost like there was this dark gloomy cloud hanging over me right before the cancer manifested and I can later say that it was the attachment to fear. I have had a lot of unexpressed stuff. I don't want to call it anxiety... there is a situation that have [sic] been going on with my older son... I started judging myself for what other people might be thinking and might be doing... There was definitely a huge build up of all of that and so I kept trying to work it out, you know, at school and stuff...I think that [since the diagnosis] there is more of an openness or a genuine accepting of whatever is. I remember accepting of the fear or just accepting [son's name]</i>
Self-care: slowing down and receiving support (75%)	<i>I learned that I needed to slow down, that I needed to take more time for me and that that would benefit my family in the long run... there was a need for me to stop and just look at where I was and go hey, you are working yourself to death. I am not a receiver. I don't usually like to let people help me do things... I have to allow them that same gift joy of giving to me. And um...it was so good for me to realize that there needed to be a back and forth with it. Not just me giving to others, but receiving as well. To receive graciously. The breast cancer experience has led me...to the resources that I would have probably never taken the time to do for myself.</i>

Table 5. (Continued)

Characteristics	Participant illustrations
Empowerment and self-esteem (41%)	<p><i>And just in general I felt that I had sort of regained the ability to cope with things that I felt not to competent about the year before.</i></p> <p><i>But I felt like I was in control of the situation. I felt good about myself and it really improved my self confidence... And the experience, going through the breast cancer and taking care of it myself strengthened me. So it has made me better prepared for the next aspect of my life.</i></p> <p><i>I managed my medication, I made a log for every time I dosed so I wouldn't be overdoing. And so, it proved something to me, that I can handle myself.</i></p>

Five women reported that the experience of breast cancer enhanced their self-esteem and sense of empowerment, especially because they had been experiencing low self-esteem, lack of empowerment, or depression before their diagnosis. These women reported that they felt empowered by the fact that they were able to be pro-active in researching different treatment options and take control over the course of their treatment. They reported perceiving the breast cancer experience as strengthening because it has showed them that they were able to cope with the distress and challenges in a way that was satisfying and empowering.

Table 6. Theme: Spirituality

Characteristic	Participant illustration
Enhancing spirituality (66%)	<p><i>I won't say deny totally, but negate the existence of this healing spirit or whatever because I just really don't believe in that. But just because I had that experience and it happened. I began to, I sort of started to think along those lines a little bit more so...in that sense something good came ...of getting the cancer because of that wish that I had expressed the year before and then it came true and then I thought well, I didn't know what to quite make out of that one... I guess possibly that specially that that particular experience with the depression and the cancer. Certainly made me think a little bit more about what is this force or whatever.</i></p> <p><i>It's like a finding almost. You know like finding my faith in God. You know, discovering it, maybe. I've always believed in it and I've always believed in God and I've always tried to follow the golden rule ... but it was not, it was a completely different meaning for me when I went through this experience... for me it was more of a discovery of how I believe or what I believe.</i></p>
Feeling taken care of by God/the Divine (50%)	<p><i>And there was a time during that night, it was a semi-conscious state but I do remember feeling very surrounded by angels or presence of something there, very connected to something, that was in my opinion unearthly, but that was a very difficult night. At that point, I kind of felt like ok I'm going to get through this somehow, I'm going to get through this.</i></p>
Feeling taken care of by God/the Divine (continued)	<p><i>I just reached both my hands up like this, straight up...I had a vision of blue light of consciousness and it was reaching down to me and it was like from the heavens connecting me to the earth and I felt that everything was going to be ok and everything was going to be taken care of. And from that point it was different... this is where I am and it's all going to be ok. I don't know how exactly it's all going to work out but everything will be ok. A clarity about that. I think that was all part of the plan for me. But he really, this higher power, which I chose to call God does really care about me.</i></p>

Characteristic	Participant illustration
No change in spirituality (33%)	<i>Well I don't know if it's changed it because I still feel the same but the God is, the spirit is within us and it is strong... I don't really think it's made a big difference. I think I felt this way for a long, long time.</i>
Existential reflection (16%)	<i>I think just being totally vulnerable. Being, knowing that I had no control over what was happening to me. Totally, no control, and that the only way was to get some kind of help outside of myself. A higher power.</i>

Spirituality and God

As described in Table 6, focusing on spirituality and God was another theme relating to transformation and growth. Eight women reported that their breast cancer had some level of enhancing effect on their spirituality. They reported that they felt that their spirituality deepened, became more personal, or was re-confirmed in association with the breast cancer experience. Six women reported that they were able to feel taken care of by God or the Divine throughout their experience of breast cancer. They reported having a sense that everything was going to be all right due to Divine intervention or that their breast cancer diagnosis was a Divine intervention as a meaningful wake-up call in their life. Four women reported that their spirituality had not been affected by their diagnosis or their experience of breast cancer. Two women reported that they had a transpersonal experience the night before or after their surgery during which they felt a direct connection with un-earthly beings or sensations. These experiences gave them an embodied experience of being taken care of by the Divine. Two women defined spirituality from an existential point of view and said that their breast cancer experience has deepened their awareness about their vulnerability and mortality and made them reflect on meaning and purpose. Another woman said that her breast cancer experience made her doubt her agnostic attitude toward spirituality. None of the women reported that their spirituality was affected negatively by the experience of breast cancer.

Evaluation of Priorities and Values

As portrayed in Table 7, a third theme associated with transformation and growth relating to breast cancer is evaluation of life priorities and values. Nine women reported that the breast cancer experience made them re-evaluate what is important and meaningful to them. The shift in their priorities was characterized by an enhancement of relationships with family and community members for 7 women, by a deepening and enhancement of gratitude and appreciation of life for 6 women, and by an increase in willingness to contribute to community and others in need for 5 women.

Experiences Associated with the Art of Living Program

All of the women reported a wide range of psychosocial, somatosensory, and psycho-spiritual reactions to their experience of the Art of Living program. Psychosocial experiences relating to group participants and course instructor are presented in Table 8, somatosensory experiences are presented in Table 9, and psycho-spiritual experiences are presented in Table 10. More specific themes of transformation and benefits directly associated with the breast cancer experience and relating to pre-cancer issues are presented in Table 11 and specific spiritual transformation characteristics are presented in Table 12.

Psycho-social Aspects of Art of Living Program

Relating to other Group Participants

As presented in Table 8, appreciation of and connection with other women was reported by 11 women as another psychosocial theme associated with the experience of the Art of Living course. Nine women reported their appreciation of the support and sense of community created among the women. They reported that the element of group support and sense of belongingness was a great added value to their experience of the program.

Seven women reported experiencing a sense of solidarity with the other women in the course based on the experience of breast cancer. They appreciated the fact that they knew that they all had one thing in common, and, at the same time, they reported also appreciating the fact that the course content did not revolve around the breast cancer diagnosis. Two women felt that being with other women who were diagnosed with breast cancer and who seemed to be doing well was inspiring and strengthening for them. One woman reported that it was helpful for her to hear about the wide range of experiences that other women had, in order to gain perspective about her own experience of the disease.

Connection with Course Instructor

Ten women reported that they were appreciative of the connection with their instructor. Ten women expressed their appreciation of her uniqueness and said they felt grateful to have had this particular instructor. Six women reported that they appreciated the personal guidance she offered them and said that they felt as though her words were directly targeted to their personal process. Six women reported that they felt that they had an internal representation of the instructor, which manifested as their ability to hear her voice, see her face, experience her presence, or receive her guidance at different times following the program.

Somatosensory Experiences During SKY

All of the women who were interviewed reported having experienced a wide range of somatic experiences during the practice of SKY that could be related to their psycho-spiritual process. These experiences, presented in Table 9, include somato-sensory experiences such as smells, visions, and tactile and temperature fluctuations that related directly to the practice of SKY. Six women reported having had sensations of tingling, heat, or cold throughout their body. One woman reported specifically feeling heat during the practice of SKY on the area of her right breast, which was the breast that underwent mastectomy. Others described heat and tingling sensations in their bodies that they felt enabled them to become more aware, attuned, and present to their bodies. Five women reported having visions during the practice that included visions of open space and fields; one person's mother, spiritual or religious visions, such as the cross or Krishna; personal symbols relating to one's psychological process, such as a brick wall or faces; visions of light in different forms, and visions of past memories. Four women reported having experienced scents of flowers during some of the practices, when there were no flowers or external scents present in the room. None of the participants reported any adverse reaction to the participation in the program.

Psycho-spiritual Experiences

As presented in Table 9 the participation in the Art of Living program was associated with a wide range of positive experiences for all of the women who were interviewed. These emotions were evoked and experienced either during the practice of SKY or in association with the processes that were introduced during the 8-day course. The women reported that these positive experiences were desirable and pleasant to them and enhanced their sense of well-being. For example, one woman reported, "When I'm doing my relaxing pose I'm checking myself and I really end up smiling, because I find myself okay, I find myself feeling good."

All of the women reported that they experienced a great sense of peace and calm while practicing SKY. Eight women reported having had strong feelings of love in association with the practice of SKY or with the participation in the Art of Living program as a whole, because of the processes and discussions in the course. They described the feeling of love as something not necessarily associated with or projected toward someone or something specific, but rather as an all-encompassing experience. This will be re-addressed when presenting the data about spiritual transformation. Six women reported that they experienced an increased sense of joy either during the SKY practices or during one of the processes introduced in the course. They said that this joy stayed with them and that they were able to experience it also during the interview while they were reporting it. Four women reported feeling a greater sense of gratitude and appreciation. They said that the practice itself evoked an experience of gratitude or that they noticed that the participation in the course resulted in an increased sense of gratitude in general. The women reported that they were able to feel the impact of or re-access these experiences in their day-to-day lives and were able to experience the transformation in several areas of their lives. Three women reported that the practice of SKY made them feel more centered or grounded, and one reported that it increased her mental clarity.

All of the women who were interviewed acknowledged the significance of being able to continue practicing the SKY practices on a daily basis. They noted their appreciation of the Art of Living course specifically because of what they perceived as the long-term effect of the program due to the possibility of continuing the practices on their own beyond the structure of the program. They expressed that they were aware that they had received a tool that they can take with them to apply for the rest of their lives. One woman reported: "It's something that you don't, [sic] it's not a pill that you have to buy or something that you have to drink. It's your breath and it's just that simple." The women reported that the daily practice of SKY was a time for self-care, or a time for them to reconnect with the unique experiences and benefits associated with the practice.

Nine women said that the practice of SKY evoked feelings of interconnectedness that were experienced on a deep somatic level. The women reported that the breathing practices, as well as several other processes in the course, enabled them to feel interconnected with the rest of the universe and everything and everyone in it on a somatically experienced level. They reported that these experiences provided them a deeper experience of inter-relatedness between people in a way that felt transformative. Seven women reported that they felt a sense of release and cleansing during the practice of SKY. They described feeling as though a psychological or spiritual issue was being somatically cleansed and released during the breathing. Seven women reported that the SKY practices allowed them to experience a greater sense of being present in the moment. Six women reported several embodied psycho-

spiritual experiences in which they felt that they were out of their bodies and were able to observe or witness themselves from above.

Table 7. Theme: Re-evaluation and changes of Priorities and Values

Characteristic	Participant illustration
Appreciation and strengthening of personal relationships (58%)	<p><i>The relationship with people are [sic] like for me now is one of the most important thing [sic] in life, if not the most... And like family and friends, relationships with people is [sic] like really became[sic] much much higher. I mean it had the high priority before but it moved it to a different scale.</i></p> <p><i>After I had the cancer and I realized what you know, I realized my family is what is really important... [husband's name] and I are so much closer than we were before I got cancer. My family is closer.</i></p>
Greater appreciation of life (50%)	<p><i>It's given me a greater appreciation of people places and things. I smell the roses, I enjoy life, I thought I did before, but I didn't to the level I do now.</i></p> <p><i>A sense of what is important in life; um I have been able to look past material needs now. I just don't...I don't need anything, I don't want anything.....There is just not a lot of wants anymore... After I had the cancer and I realized what you know, I realized my family is what is really important.</i></p>
Reaching out in the community (41%)	<p><i>Because of this I feel more human and I reach out more to people in need. You know, until you walk a mile in someone's shoes you don't really know what they are going through. And when I went through breast cancer it sort of softened me to really see this is what it really feels like and I became more compassionate and so there were a lot of softening in my characters with people. I see people on the street and my husband gets mad I always give homeless person a dollar or two, every time I never, ever say no.</i></p> <p><i>In a way...the cancer allowed me to pass on what I learned to someone else and hopefully they can benefit from that somehow, whatever way they end up benefiting for the positive...um so I know that was another way that it helped me for sure.</i></p>

Specific Benefits and Types of Transformation Associated with the Art of Living Program

As presented in Table 10, all of the women who were interviewed reported that the experience of the Art of Living course and the practice of SKY brought benefits in their psychological and spiritual well-being. They reported that the experience of the program and SKY had been transformational in their lives. Seven women reported that the benefits and transformations felt irreversible; as one woman expressed: "It's always there in your mind, in your body, inside of you I think once you do it...you know it's an experience that you have it's just going to be with you and you are going to feel it all the time, that's the way I feel

about this.” Another woman reported, “My life will be forever changed in that I know that there is another way to relax my body.”

Three types of benefits and transformation were reported: those directly relating to the experience of breast cancer, those relating to pre-cancer issues that evolved with the experiences of breast cancer and the Art of Living program, and spiritual transformation associated with the experience of the program, whether in association or not with the experience of breast cancer. These categories are parallel to the themes that described the multifaceted experience of breast cancer.

Transformation Relating to Breast Cancer

All the women reported that the participation in the program and practice of SKY has given them a tool for self-healing and self-care, which had a direct and positive impact on the way they related to disease in general and to cancer diagnosis specifically, as expressed by two women: “With taking this course, it’s going to always assist me in having breast cancer” and “It helps to get our head back into the game and not be caught up on this disease that’s happened to you...it helps to make a bigger picture so that you can do your part to heal yourself.” Ten women reported a subjective experience of decrease in fear of death. They attributed the decrease in fear to the Art of Living course and practice of SKY. Some of the women reported that the decrease in fear of recurrence or fear of death was associated with the overall increased sense of peace and calmness experienced as a result of the practice.

Four women reported that their participation in the program and practice of SKY allowed them to let go of the “breast cancer survivor” identity by “dis-identifying” from the label of breast cancer survivor and open up to additional aspects of their human experience beyond their breast cancer survivor identity.

Deepening and Transformation Relating to Pre-cancer Issue

In addition to the transformation and benefits associated directly with the breast cancer experience, all of the women also reported transformation and benefits associated with issues that were prevalent prior to the breast cancer experience and were either independent of it or triggered by it. Women reported that the participation in the program and practice of SKY resulted in an improvement in their psychological well-being associated with specific states of mind and issues not directly associated with the breast cancer.

All of the women reported an increased sense of peace and calmness in their lives as a result of the participation in the Art of Living program. In addition, all of the women reported that the participation in the Art of Living program enhanced or confirmed their sense of appreciation for life and eagerness to live life fully. They reported that, as a result of the program, they experienced a sense of urgency and priority to realize their potential, to be present to each moment fully, and participate in life to its maximum potential. They expressed their readiness and willingness to realize their purpose and aspiration that clearly would manifest differently for every woman. Nine women reported that from participating in the Art of Living program, they developed an increased ability to experience the present moment with an enhanced sense of peace. The ability to be more present was reported in the context of living life more fully: “The change is that I want to live really in the present and to get the best out of it...life is now, I don’t know what the future brings and I want to just live today.”

Table 8. Theme: Psycho-social Group Aspects of Art of Living Program

Characteristic	Participant illustration
Relating to group participants: Support and community (75%)	<p><i>It just helped me learn, I mean I learned a lot from each other. I was, I got to learn about that, I wasn't alone on a certain thought or feeling, that there is a way that we all help each other when they would say something they were helping me and I would say something I was helping them, emotionally deal with balancing emotions.</i></p> <p><i>The thing I like the most was being part of the group and the people. A feeling of, communal feeling about it.</i></p> <p><i>Well I just know in the group I felt closer to the women, which is good. And you and the leader as really like a sisterhood. A real bonding, it was real good. Kind of I felt connected.</i></p>
Appreciation of diversity (66%)	<i>The women from different ethnicities, different ages, different lifestyles, I mean we were all so different in the way we present ourselves...But the experience of knowing other women from all walks of life was very incredible.</i>
Sense of solidarity based on breast cancer diagnosis (58%)	<i>I really enjoyed being around the other women It was the nice; it was nice to be in a room with other women that have been diagnosed with breast cancer.</i>
Relating to course instructor: Appreciation of uniqueness (91%) Receiving guidance (50%) Internalization (50%)	<p><i>I think that Raji [the teacher] with her personality had a big, she deserves a big credit for what we felt in the class ... she had such a strong personality and dominant and it was...I liked her, I liked her confidence in the way she talked and all this since the beginning.</i></p> <p><i>So, her presence also afforded me that [acceptance of my body] a different way of wearing clothes, thinking about clothes.</i></p> <p><i>I don't wanna expound on Raji but I, I thought she was pretty profound. I hear her voice a lot in my head. [pause] I see images of her walking around doing this and listening to things that she said.</i></p>

Furthermore, 10 women reported that their participation in the program made them more aware of their need for self-care independent of their breast cancer diagnosis. They reported that they felt that the participation in the program has increased their ability to be more self-caring and self-nurturing in general and in ways not directly relating to their breast cancer diagnosis. These women reported that, although it was difficult for them to receive support or take time for self-care even prior to their breast cancer diagnosis, their participation in the Art of Living program allowed them to continue the transformation process in this aspect of their lives that had evolved with their breast cancer experience. Interestingly, two women reported

that they felt that their ability to take better care of themselves was related to their enhanced willingness to be of service for others. They said that the participation in the course allowed them to focus more on themselves, so that they could eventually be of better use for others in their lives: "So I guess the most important thing I can do now is make sure I take care of myself well enough so that I can help and give to others." Nine women reported that they were more able to accept situations and people in their live; 8 women specifically reported improved relationships, enhanced intimacy and communication, and an increase in, or sustaining of their willingness to be of service for others. Eight women reported either an increase in positive thinking or a reduction in negative thinking.

Table 9. Theme: Somato-sensory and Psycho-spiritual Experiences Associated with Participation in the Art of Living Program

Characteristics	Participant illustrations
Somato-sensory experiences	
Heat and tingling (50%)	<i>I felt warmth in my right breast. And that is the breast that I had the mastectomy. There is absolutely no doubt that I had this warm feeling go all across my chest.</i>
Visions (41%)	<i>I just had all kinds of images that I saw in my mind and of funny things, happy things or very strange things. I suddenly saw like gold fish in the in an aquarium and he was going back and forth, like left to right and right to left. When during the, with the speed of the breathing and then of course when the breathing became more and more faster and faster it was, I just saw this poor fish just moving so fast.</i>
Smells (25%)	<i>The first time we did the Kriya I remember just the smell of fragrance was so intense...but the first time was so strong...that intense flower fragrance. And then when they said there are no flowers around here....I was like, weird, WOW that is bizarre. How did that happen?</i>
Psycho-spiritual Experiences	
Peace (100%)	<i>Well, sometimes when I felt really peaceful, I just felt a light on, light is absence of color, but I mean, sort of like a light and I don't know if it was the sun shining into the room or what it was. Or if it was just a feeling of peace.</i> <i>The very last Kriya that we had I breathed in and I breathed in peace. It was really interesting. I breathed in peace.</i>
Love (66%)	<i>I think I liked the love that was in the room...think the only kind of things I felt was more love. If I'd feel anything I just think, love.</i>
Joy (50%)	<i>I felt, I felt excited, excitement. I felt I can say the joy, joy came when I was doing the meditation, breathing...the Kriya brought out joy in me...It's interesting because I had a lot of smile and joy...That was my biggest, biggest thing with the Kriya is the joyness [sic], the joyfulness I had. Just the happiness and joyfulness of just the images and everything.</i> <i>A sense of joy that goes beyond actually food or drinking or any of the sense pleasures...and that sounds so basic but there is so much joy.</i>
Gratitude (33%)	<i>So I stayed focused on that plate and all of a sudden I said what a wonderful gift it was wonderful, because what a gift I just got from the person next to me...That's what I thought was wonderful and the amount. So I thought it was a gift, I thought it was wonderful gift I received.</i>

Table 9. (Continued)

Characteristics	Participant illustrations
Mental clarity and centeredness (33%)	<i>When I did the Kriya in the morning it seemed like things that I did turned out better and if nothing more it was the mental clarity of how I was living the rest of the day was clear.</i>
Feeling interconnected (75%)	<i>The feeling of connecting to other people mostly and to the whole universe, to the whole whatever surrounds me and whatever I'm a part of in the whole universe is like is one... the way we belong. The way I belong to the universe and to everything in it, this feeling changed, changed during the class, like to feel part of the whole universe.</i>
Release and cleansing (58%)	<i>The Kriya- I definitely feel a lot more cleansed... I remember when I first started doing this course there was a sense of burning in my nostrils similar to when I was going through chemo... And I feel like there has been a lot of clearing.</i> <i>I noticed that after the Kriya session in laying down there I just felt this sense of release. Release from people, places, and things, release from fear. And I was getting that with the Kriya.</i>
Experience of being in the present moment (58%)	<i>My brain will go on and when I think I go in the past, to the future and never to the present. So what it did was brought me to the present.</i> <i>That's the best thing that the Kriya has taught me is to be present, be here, be now and be in the present.</i>
Witness consciousness, out of body experiences (50%)	<i>I would be sitting down and doing my regular practice and my spine, particularly on my right side would...shifting, kind of oscillating and swaying and then sometimes I really strongly thought that there was another presence there, almost like breathing right into it and opening beyond the place where there is blood and bones and organs and everything There's an opening, I think it's happened about 3 times.</i> <i>I remember I had the feeling of being out of myself, of looking at me. But it wasn't during the Kriya it was laying down...It was like looking, looking at myself from above, looking at the world from above... I just saw for a few seconds a very nice scenery of white clouds. And being out of... myself. I mean I was looking at myself, so it was weird.</i>

Seven women mentioned that participation in the Art of Living program has improved their self-esteem and sense of empowerment. This transformation process that had begun for some women with their breast cancer experience—was associated with personal non-cancer situations and issues in their lives.

These women described individual personal situations and issues through which they were able to experience the enhancement of their transformational process associated with empowerment and growth.

These women who had all been struggling with issues of low self-esteem and lack of empowerment in their personal relationships, at work, or in society in general, reported that the participation in the program enabled them to gain more strength, courage, and confidence, and, therefore, to experience a positive transformative process.

Table 10. Specific Benefits and Transformation Associated with Participation in the Art of Living Program

Characteristic	Participant illustration
<p>Benefits directly relating to breast cancer.</p> <p>Self-healing and self-care (100%)</p>	<p><i>It gives me a renewed confidence in my body, that you know, that it can heal and that I can heal it, you know, through the breath.</i></p> <p><i>I walk around all day going, I have energy, I have life energy in me and it's a really positive...I love feeling that my cells are surrounded by energy...It's really invigorating.</i></p>
<p>Decreased fear of recurrence and fear of death (83%)</p>	<p><i>What the course has done for me is has given me a more of a calmness in accepting that we don't know anything really about the future... doing the Kriya and taking the course in itself has given me a chance to settle in to the uncertainty, to accept uncertainty with strength and grace and a stronger spiritual connection.</i></p> <p><i>Death is not the end; death is not equal to end. It's not bad, it's a, it's a different thing, it's a different being, it's not the end of you, it's maybe transformation to something else but it's not. Death is not done, not finished.</i></p>
<p>Art of Living as benefit of breast cancer (58%)</p>	<p><i>Having this breast cancer as horrible as it was I had a lot of really great experiences and great life things of life to come out of it. Because how would I ever learned about this Art of Living.</i></p>
<p>Letting go of "breast cancer survivor" identity (33%)</p>	<p><i>After the course, I really felt ready to shed the label of cancer survivor...I don't need to be a cancer survivor anymore. I am a person who had cancer and that is very different...The words, "Cancer Survivor". And I don't feel like that is part of my identity any more. I feel like I just let that go. It's just not that survivor thing.</i></p>
<p>Healing body image issue (33%)</p>	<p><i>I think the class gave me more of a sense of centeredness and just being calmer about aspects about my body... this class gave me a chance to accepting um, accepting the physical image of me. The new physical image.</i></p> <p><i>I just noticed that when I used to come out of the shower, I used be really negative when I would see myself. Oh, I look terrible and repeating those bad negative messages in my head, [however], I noticed myself the other day when I got out and I went....Oh that spot on that side, it's not so bad, that is just so different for me...to think that, and I can't help but think that some of that has got to come from being happier, I mean being more relaxed and I definitely think that getting my frustrations out, maybe I am blowing it away.</i></p>

Table 10. (Continued)

Characteristic	Participant illustration
Deepening of Transformation Relating to Pre-cancer Issue or Situation Increased sense of peace, (100%)	<i>It just calmed me down and centered me and just put me in a place where I can just put up with just about anything that is going to happen today.</i>
Greater appreciation for life purpose and aspiration (100%)	<i>The course has given me a lot of thoughts about how to live in the fullest which is something I've always thought. But it's totally made it stronger. And how I have the strength and joy within me and I just have to use it and not let it go</i> <i>The change is that I want to live really in the present and to get the best out of it.</i> <i>Probably strengthened it. If anything, strengthened it, made it more clear to me that I have a reason for being here. I have always been a dancer, I danced in college and I performed a little bit, since this course I have been dancing a lot whether it's in the living room or other places.</i>
Self care (91%)	<i>I take time to do the Kriya. Because I usually won't allow myself to do anything for myself...and I forced myself to do it because I have this long standing habit of always feeling I have to do things for other people...and I just think, I deserve this time, it's mine. So I do it.</i> <i>Here I was doing this Kriya thinking, I am doing this just for me. I am the only person who is going to benefit from this...it's just for me. It was outstanding.</i>
Acceptance of people and situations (83%)	<i>Things happen that are bad, things happen that are good and things get moved and switched and that [realization] was very meaningful and I thought a lot about that. I feel that whatever comes, comes.</i> <i>I think the whole course... and including [the eye gazing process] showed me how to be much much much more patient to people and try to understand and not to judge. I mean it's hard not to judge but not judge not so quickly maybe.</i>
Increased positive thinking (66%)	<i>I'm learning rather than to concentrate on the half [empty] you know to put more energy into concentrating on the half full glass... that awareness, I think it is helping me somehow to not...start getting negative, to sort of stop myself sometimes and be a lot more positive.</i> <i>The more relaxed, I got the more feeling of love I felt, the more selectively I forgot all the bad stuff that happened.</i>
Empowerment and self-esteem (58%)	<i>I've always felt you have to live up to some kind of goal, some kind of rules before you can deserve anything but now that's not true, everybody deserves stuff.</i>

Characteristic	<i>Participant illustration</i>
	<p><i>To some extent. You deserve to be able to care about yourself; you deserve to be able to receive love.</i></p> <p><i>It has given me more strength and it has helped me center myself and think more of bringing positive things into my self into life and into myself.</i></p>
<p>Spiritual Transformation Associated with Art of Living program and SKY</p> <p>Spiritual Self-realization (66%)</p>	<p><i>But definitely it did something to my ability to get out of myself a little bit. Something that I didn't think I could ever do. Because I told you from the beginning that I absolutely did not think of myself as being a spiritual person, Well that I went through this experience sort of automatically, without my mind trying to think of something...and so that makes me think maybe there is something more than just the conscious me.</i></p> <p><i>I really experienced that I just am my breath and I am my soul... I have this body but there is so much joy in knowing that there is so much more eternally... I am a Divine goddess and I enjoy the royal feast. And it wasn't like a feast of food, delicious fruit or anything. It's the prana. I love prana. I love to love...I just love to love the Divine and I'm just so grateful that I could constantly drink the nectar of it.</i></p> <p><i>When I do the Kriya, I feel like I am really connecting inside that part of myself, that spiritual side of myself, is definitely affected.</i></p>
<p>Experience of Divine love (66%)</p>	<p><i>I want to listen to it [the words of the teacher] again because it just helped me love. Not that I didn't love God but it helped me love because God gives me love. It's a gift that God's given to me</i></p> <p><i>God is love.</i></p>
	<p><i>I have a beautiful spiritual life and I also have a very spiritual romance and it's not just with my husband. I absolutely fell in love. The Divine love... I felt like I was kinda walking on air. I felt so ecstatic walking out</i></p> <p><i>Table continues.</i></p>
<p>Renewed relationship with God or religious practices (41%)</p>	<p><i>It has made me realize there is a void in my life. That I'd like to do more with. I haven't really done well with it.</i></p> <p><i>Just that I need to bring God into my life more.</i></p> <p><i>It really sparked my interest into finding out more about the Catholic religion...It just made me more interested in my religion... after going through the class I actually am looking forward to going and seeing, being more into the [communion] process rather than just going through the process to get to the end of it. Which is great, I love it.... just being more, spiritually, I think more aware of those traditions and just symbolic meanings behind.</i></p>

Table 10. (Continued)

Characteristic	Participant illustration
	<i>I think what the course has done is given me an opportunity to read more into the words. Read more into what is really being said.</i>
Internalized experience of God/ welling within/ Inner strength (25%)	<i>My experience of God has always been that there's an external God that you worship. Um, not necessarily in a parenting sense, peer sense or some all mighty but that this gave me a chance to feel that I was a part of God. That I was one, that was also godly. And that was a very different way of thinking for me. So, the internalized experience of having a God, being Godlike.</i>
<p>Spiritual Transformation Associated with Art of Living program and SKY (continued)</p> <p>Internalized experience of God/ Dwelling within/ Inner strength (25%) (continued)</p> <p>Less skepticism (16.6%)</p>	<p><i>I totally get it now...I just feel like I totally get it....I get it that there's just one being up there...it's all one....I am just That is when I got it...I got it that it's here...it's in me...that I already hold it...and then I didn't need to find it somewhere else... everything all the strength that I need is inside myself. I don't need it from someone else. I don't to have someone else give it to me...it's here, it's already here... to me I feel like it's all day every day, all the time, everywhere I go. God is with me, whatever, the spirit, whatever you want to call it...I don't feel like I have to go somewhere to be with him...or on a certain day.</i></p> <p><i>I haven't really thought a lot about higher power only when I need it...maybe this has made me think about it more in my everyday life to be a little more spiritual... I feel like there is a higher power more than I might have thought...So maybe the higher power, the Divine what do you want to call it the spirit. I had a feeling it was always there but I was a little skeptical because of all the horrible things that happen in the world. Yeah, I'm thinking now it's a little closer to me and I do think it's there more than it was and it's in my mind a lot.</i></p>
SKY as prayer (8.3%)	<p><i>I really came closer...I had more of an awareness... The fact that I even thought about that...of a higher power that is more than the power I give myself...that there is both the Divine with the capital D. Rather than the Divine to which I refer the power of my own power that comes from me what gives me that power I don't know where the hierarchy ends I don't know, I mean I owe that to, I at this point spell Divine with a small d instead of with a capital D. Maybe I would now spell Divine with a medium size.</i></p> <p><i>I had this cross that came, just like the second Kriya, I think, the cross came but it was a little cross, a light across, came across my face, so I thought of my eyes and this thing kind of went over my eyes and so I use meditation as a form of, same as praying for me.</i></p>

Characteristic	<i>Participant illustration</i>
	<p><i>Meditation is praying that is how I explain it. So I just asked to have. I put my energy on my eyes and said, I like to have moist in my eyes, tears in my eyes. When the cross came I asked to have that done, you know, and I put the energy there...so when we opened our eyes tears came out of my eyes. Not from nothing, tears from the moist in my eyes, so I got my moisture in my eyes ever since then I've had moist in my eye. Every time I do my Kriya I have a moist in my eyes.</i></p>

Some of the women described the transformative process as a breakthrough and letting-go related to their personal issues. For example, one woman who had been grieving her husband's death prior to her diagnosis of breast cancer reported that her breast cancer diagnosis made her confront her feelings of loneliness and grief more deeply and that her experience of the Art of Living program, following her diagnosis, allowed her to release pain and sorrow around this issue.

During that meditation...I sort of felt like my husband was moving further away in space...I've been saying goodbye ever since he died, but it was as if, sort of he was moving further away and maybe making space for someone else. Which I know is ok, which he would want me to.

Another woman, who was struggling with serious marital conflict prior to her breast cancer diagnosis, reported that on one hand, her experience of breast cancer worsened her struggles, yet on the other hand, forced her to begin gaining more sense of empowerment. This woman reported that her participation in the Art of Living program, and specifically her practice of SKY, enabled her to come to terms with a deep awareness within herself that was helpful in her family situation.

I was doing Kriya at home, I did a real deep, deep Kriya and went into an almost trance like state and had a real epiphany...I had truly an opening of the mind, which did make me more realistic about our relationship and I do think it's going to help. ...this course too is helping me realize that I have to take more responsibility for my actions.

Spiritual Transformation

All of the women reported that the participation in the Art of Living course and the practice of SKY were associated with some level of spiritual transformation. As in the case of psychological transformation, the spiritual transformation processes reported were often described as a deepening of a process that started with the breast cancer diagnosis.

But I was facing those things, I was consciously facing those things going through this so in a way I was practicing this whole way of what we learned on my own through some weird way experiencing it through the breast cancer and then it was like I take this class and all of these things that I had discovered on my own here we are talking about them and I had lived, you know, lived through them...the class has helped me to reinforce those things and not forget the lessons that I learned.

Some reported that their spiritual transformation and deepening was directly triggered by the participation in the course: "My spirituality actually really changed...in our

classes...that's when it really started, I started actually opening up that door to...to open up the spirituality in my life...that's when I started deepening it.”

Eight women described how their participation in the program and practice of SKY enabled them to connect to a spiritual eternal aspect of themselves with which they were not familiar prior to the program. These women did not refer to spirituality in religious terms, but rather in terms of Self-realization and experiencing of a greater, deeper, or more expansive part of themselves. For example, a woman reported that the experience of the course has not changed her approach toward spirituality, or a higher power, in religious terms, since she defined herself as non-spiritual and not believing in the existence of a higher power. However, when asked about how the program has affected her spirituality, this woman explained that her participation in the course enabled her to experience the eternal aspect of herself, that which feels connected to the whole universe and will never die.

Eight women reported that during the program they had experiences of Divine love. They reported either feeling loved by the Divine or feeling great love toward the Divine. These women explained that these experiences occurred to them either in the SKY practice or during processes in the program that involved some kind of interaction between the participants. However, they described these experiences as spiritually transformative because they had never experienced this kind of deep love and because they reported being able to re-access these experiences beyond the participation in the program and the practice of SKY in a way that felt integrated and meaningful to their sense of spiritual connection.

Participating in the Art of Living program was viewed by five women as enabling them to feel a sense of renewal of their relationship with God or of their own religion. These women specifically referred to spirituality in terms of God and religion, and they expressed that they had always believed in God or had been connected to a religious practice, but somehow recently felt distant from these feelings. One woman, for example, explained that, although she was raised a Catholic and had been immersed in her religion as a child, her life experiences as an adult had broken her trust and innocence and, therefore, have created a sense of isolation from her spirituality:

I feel that spirituality, my spirituality, is really given to me as a child through my parents...I have this innocent love and innocent faith that it was just so overwhelming. And I loved it. And as life goes on you challenge things and you kind of feel like you take the child out of you... Oh, my God, I remember in church that I turn my cheek and later on as I grew up people would hurt it.

This woman specifically reported that it was her participation in the program and her practice of SKY that allowed her to re-establish the child-like connection with her spirituality. A Catholic woman reported that the breast cancer experience provided a trigger for her to re-establish a personal connection with her religion and that the participation in the program deepened that process for her toward a personal relationship with God and her practices. A Jewish woman reported that her experiences in the program helped her relate to God and her scriptures on a personal level, whereas, in the past, she would not have been able to identify with the words she would regularly recite in synagogue.

Three women reported that the participation in the program has transformed their experience of God or spirit from a relationship with an external entity to an internalized experience of God or the Divine inside of them or being part of them.

A couple of women who described themselves as non-spiritual or skeptical reported that their experience of the program had changed their perception of themselves to some degree. These women emphasized that they were not full believers in God or a higher power as a result of their experiences, but felt less skeptical or distant from spirituality.

As a final illustration of a spiritual transformational process, one woman experienced SKY as an opportunity for personal prayer. She reports using her SKY practice as a way to communicate her prayers to God.

Quality Check

Qualitative data analysis aims to be transparent in that the coding and the categorization process are presented clearly with the inclusion of sufficient quotes to illustrate each theme. The transparency manifests also in that the rationale of the analytic process is described throughout the presentation of data. Communicability is ensured by using clear themes or by defining and explaining the themes revealed in the analysis. Nine of the 12 women were interviewed about their reactions to these results. They all reported that they understood the analysis clearly and that they felt it was representative of their experience.

Conclusion

Experience of Breast Cancer

In accordance with previous studies, the findings of this study revealed that the breast cancer experience can be associated with distress and challenges on the one hand, as well as growth and transformation on the other. The results indicate that the 12 women used different coping methods to help them deal with the distress and challenges associated with breast cancer diagnosis. Furthermore, the results of this study show that all of the women were able to find benefits in their experience of breast cancer. All of the women expressed that, although the experience of breast cancer was very distressing, they felt that it had brought them some benefits and contributed to their lives positively. The reports of growth and transformation, such as greater appreciation for life, improvement of inter-relationships, gratitude for support, better self-care, greater self-esteem and self-empowerment, and enhanced spirituality were also demonstrated in other studies (Andrykowski et al., 1996; Ashing-Giwa et al., 2004; Cordova, et al., 2001; Gall & Cornblat, 2002; Park, 2009; Taylor, 1983; Zemore & Shepel, 1989). These findings are in concert with the Coward and Kahn's (2004) argument that people faced with adversity such as that associated with breast cancer diagnosis, tend to reach within and without in order to find renewed purpose and meaning in their lives. In accordance with Coward and Kahn (2004), all of the coping behaviors or meaning-making processes reported in this study reflected ways of resolving spiritual disequilibrium. Furthermore, the results suggesting that the breast cancer experience may have provided an opportunity for growth and transformation are supported by other in-depth qualitative explorations pointing to the transformative process associated with coping mechanisms such as outer and inner resources leading to new meaning in life and a sense of

balance in relationship with self, other and the transcendent (Mulkins & Verhoef, 2004; Vachon, 2008; Gould, Wilson & Grassau, 2008; Siman-Tov, 2008).

On a more specific level, analysis of the interviews revealed that breast cancer diagnosis and treatment were associated with psychological and spiritual transformational processes pertaining to issues that may have existed prior to the breast cancer experience. Prior to diagnosis, each woman had different psychological issues associated with different aspects of life, such as a history of addiction, a history of depression, marital conflicts, grief, lack of self-esteem and sense of empowerment, fear and anxiety, lack of self-care, overload of responsibility, and more. The analysis of themes demonstrates that the breast cancer experience provided a platform for processing, integrating, or letting go of inner conflicts, and dynamics relating to pre-cancer issues. This suggests that the breast cancer experience was more than an external diagnosis that needed to be dealt with; it could have been a means through which each woman could access deeper parts of herself and awaken to her authentic self. All the women who were interviewed demonstrated different levels of self-reflection processes in association with the experience of breast cancer. As indicated by the data, self-exploration processes manifested themselves uniquely for every woman based on her individual nature and psychological and spiritual state. For example, women who tended to be busy with the well-being of others in their lives were called by the breast cancer experience to slow down and find time for self-care, become more attuned to their bodies, their spirituality, their needs, and their psychological well-being. These women started learning to accept support from others and become more receptive and accepting of what comes. For women who were dealing with issues of low self-esteem and lack of empowerment, the breast cancer experience enabled them to begin taking more control in their lives and start becoming proactive about their treatment and their life in general. Women who were dealing with relationship issues, frustrations, fears, anger, grief, or recovery issues were provided the opportunity by the breast cancer experience to begin working on their issues, letting go, and re-evaluating life priorities, values, aspiration, and purpose.

Therefore, the breast cancer experience, which has been termed by several women as a “wake-up call” or “horrible experience”, also provided opportunities for growth and transformation. The results of this study support the notion that the process of growth and transformation associated with breast cancer diagnosis is triggered by the spiritual disequilibrium that compels women to reach outwardly toward their faith and other people for support and information in order to reduce their fears and their sense of isolation. In addition, the disequilibrium may also compel women to reach inwardly for strength and to re-assess life priorities and values (Coward and Khan, 2004; Mulkins & Verhoef, 2004). The results of this study indicate that the women were confronted with challenges to their self-concept initiated a process of transformation that both involved and resulted in expansion of self-concept, expansion of perception of others, and even expansion of spiritual experience.

Spirituality

Women said that the experience of breast cancer had initiated a process of self-reflection regarding their attitude toward their spirituality. This self-reflection process was also related with spiritual deepening and transformation for many of the women. Results suggest that spirituality may have served as a resource to cope with uncertainty and distress associated

with breast cancer through a process of active acceptance including the recognition of a higher value or greater good in the midst of the perceived negative experience, through a sense of enhanced connectedness with self, other and the transcendent (Rosequist et al., 2012). This may have been an outcome of a meaning-making process that is part of the resolution of spiritual disequilibrium or struggle relating to breast cancer diagnosis and treatment (Coward & Kahn, 2004; Gall, Charbonneau, & Florack, 2011). Furthermore, spiritual transformation associated with the experience of cancer may play a role in improving adjustment to cancer and overall enhanced meaning, balance and well-being in life (Cole, Hopkins, Tisak, Steel, & Carr, 2008; Coward, 2004; Gould, Wilson, & Grassau, 2008; Mulkins & Verhoef, 2008). Although the effects of religiousness and spirituality on adjustment to illness are complex (Gall et al., 2011; Schreiber and Brockopp, 2011; Yanez et al., 2009), there is evidence to suggest that positive spiritual resources and coping may help individuals to manage their distress and to find comfort and meaning in their illness (Park, 2007) and that spirituality is positively correlated with physical and psychological well-being in people dealing with life threatening illness (Chan, Ng, Ho, & Chow, 2006; Jenkins & Pargament, 1995; Yanez et al., 2009). These results point to the possible benefit of an integrative intervention that includes spirituality in order to support and deepen individuals' spirituality both as a way to cope and adjust to cancer and as a way to enhance self-exploration, growth and transformation associated with the breast cancer experience.

Improvements in Well-being Associated with Participating in Art of Living Program

Women reported improved well-being in multi-faceted aspects of their lives: physical, social, emotional, functional, and spiritual that they attributed to their participation in the Art of Living program. This extends the findings of other studies that demonstrate that psychosocial interventions for cancer patients have a positive effect on their well-being (Andersen, 1992, 2002; Antoni et al., 2001; Fawzy et al., 1990; Fawzy, Fawzy, Arndt & Pasnau, 1995; Greenstein, 2000; Holland, 1998; Kissane et al., 1997; Kissane, et al., 2004; Meyer and Mark, 1995; Spiegel, Kraemer, Bloom, & Gottheil, 1989; Spira & Reed, 2003; Postpone, 1998).

Future studies should include assessments several months after women's participation in the 8-days course to explore the long-term qualitative psycho-spiritual process of the women after their participation in the program. Nevertheless, the women felt that the benefits and transformations associated with the experience of the Art of Living program were going to be long lasting. They reported feeling that the benefits and transformations were experienced on a deep level within them, and that they could easily re-access the sensations, as well as the benefits, either by engaging in the SKY practice or by remembering the experiences they had during the program. The women said that the program gave them a tool for stress reduction and improvement of well-being that they could apply at any time and that, therefore, they felt that the transformation had the potential to have long-term effects. These results corroborate findings from other studies, which demonstrate the stress reduction and positive impact of yoga on quality of life and well-being of women diagnosed with breast cancer (Banerjee et al., 2007; Carson et al., 2007; Carson, & Carson, 2009; Cohen, Warneke, Fouladi, Rodriguez, and

Chaoul-Reich, 2004; Culos-Reed, Carlson, Danhauer et al, 2009; Daroux and Hatley-Aldous; 2006; Moadel et al, 2007; Raghavendra et al, 2009; Smith and Pukall, 2009).

Beyond Breast Cancer Identity

Participants felt encouraged to apply the skills and attitudes attributed in the program to better cope with stresses of life not only related to breast cancer but in other domains as well. They viewed their participation in the program as enabling them to gain a different perspective of the cancer experience and recovery, providing the opportunity to re-evaluate one's larger purpose in life and to develop skills resources for better coping and transformation in life.

One of the themes was the letting-go of "breast cancer survivor" identity, which suggests that Art of Living course and practice of SKY was associated with a sense of relief and the ability to let go of breast cancer worries and concerns. One way of explaining these outcomes is that the Art of Living course may help the women regain a sense of normalcy in terms of their identity and their self-definition. This explanation is consistent with Coward and Kahn's (2004) findings that women with breast cancer are challenged to regain equilibrium in terms of their identities, self-perception and conceptualization. However, the results may also suggest that the participation in the Art of Living course and the ongoing practice of SKY was associated with the women's greater ability to expand beyond their breast cancer survivor identity and not only regain an equilibrium, but rather reach a new, more expanded sense of well-being, sense of self, and spiritual connection.

Notably, the Art of Living program did not include any breast cancer related activities or any specific psycho-educational components related to breast cancer. In fact, breast cancer was discussed very little throughout the 8-day course and not at all during the 5 additional weekly meetings. Some women expressed gratitude that the program did not revolve around the issue of breast cancer, although all of the women mentioned that the experience of solidarity with other women who had been diagnosed with breast cancer was beneficial. Similarly, other studies have found that relationships with other women with breast cancer are described as helpful in dealing with breast cancer related psycho-spiritual challenges (Coward, 2004). It is possible that the participation in the program had a deep impact on issues relating directly to the women's experience of breast cancer not because these issues were directly discussed, but because the women were able to experience and perceive themselves as more than their breast cancer identity, while still sensing the solidarity with women in their situation.

According to the yoga path as well as integrative approaches to health and well-being, the impact of such an experience may be transformative and promote growth and health (Chan et al., 2006; Garlick et al., 2011; Mulkins, & Verhoef, 2004; Rosequist et al., 2012). The notion is that the transformative processes that are set in motion in association with yoga practices and way of life may enable the women to better deal with situations in life. Based on yoga principles (Feuerstein 2003; Fields, 2001; Shankar, 2002), and in accordance with the results of this study, the ability of the women to experience stress-free moments, without tension, anger, fear, and worries about either the past or the future, allowed them to let go of their self-perception as breast cancer survivors and experience additional aspects of their human experience. It is important to note that the women's ability to experience that which is beyond damage or change within them does not mean that they were repressing or denying their breast cancer experience. The embodied psycho-spiritual experiences they had throughout the

program allowed them to experience themselves as more than their body and diagnosis, while enabling them to address and deal with the diagnosis in an effective manner. Yoga principles do not encourage one to bypass the psychological and physical aspects of one's self, but rather to develop the ability to observe and mindfully accept and deal with the situations from a clear, peaceful place. These principles are in accordance with integrative approaches of psychotherapy such as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), MBSR and other interventions which include meditation and mind-body-spirit processes and focus on mindful awareness and acceptance of the present moment and situation enabling the re-establishment of one's world-view, balance and meaning in life (Garlick et al., 2011; Hayes, Follette, Linehan, 2004; Mackenzie, Carlson, Munoz, & Speca, 2006; Targ & Levine, 2002a; Walser & Westrup, 2007).

Spiritual Transformation

Sixty six percent of the women reported that the breast cancer experience itself had an enhancing effect on their spirituality; however, all of the participants in the Art of Living program reported that it had a deepening, strengthening, or positive transformative impact on their spirituality. These results confirm the notion that the Art of Living program was designed to help people access the spiritual aspect of themselves, rather than directly addressing only psychological issues. Consistent with the theoretical orientation underlying the Art of Living program, 66% of the women reported that the experiences that they had during the program enabled them to connect to the spiritually eternal part of themselves in a way that felt transformative. According to the psycho-spiritual yoga principles underlying this intervention there are many ways to unite with one's true nature and attain a sense of meaning and growth in life. However, as revealed through the results of this study, and in accordance with integrative approaches to psychological and spiritual well-being including the yogic approach, all of the ways are associated with a processes of self-inquiry, self-awareness and acceptance that leads to self-transformation and realization of one's self-expanded nature, what is perceived as one's true Self (Fields, 2001; Feuerstein, 2003).

The findings indicate that the Art of Living program enabled the participants to reach down within themselves and connect to the more expanded aspects of themselves, their spiritual self, by experiencing a certain level of union of mind-body and spirit.

These results collaborate with qualitative and quantitative studies, which suggest that integrative psycho-spiritual interventions for people diagnosed with cancer are associated with improvements in quality of life, both through helping them to cope with distress through development of self-observation and inner reflection skills, active acceptance, self control, self regulation and stress reduction processes and by enhancing growth and transformation through meaning making, transcendence and greater connectedness (Chan et al., 2006; Garlick et al., 2011; Mackenzie, Carlson, Munoz, and Speca, 2006; Mulkins & Verhoef, 2004; Rosequist et al., Smith and Pukall, 2009; Targ & Levine, 2002b).

Clinical Implications

The findings of this study suggest that the Art of Living course can be integrated safely as a psychosocial, mind-body-spirit intervention for women diagnosed within the previous five years with non-metastatic breast cancer. The study suggests that the yoga framework is

clinically applicable for the enhancement of well-being of women with breast cancer and for deepening of their personal psycho-spiritual journey of self-exploration.

In addition, this study provides preliminary support for the contention that the Art of Living program can be integrated as a psycho-spiritual resource for women with breast cancer. The Art of Living program can be offered to women in addition to other support groups or individual psychological and spiritual resources, and the program may enable an element of community building. The findings indicate that the women appreciated the connection with each other and considered the fact that the program included only women with breast cancer as a great benefit. There seemed to be an unspoken subtle sense of solidarity without having to discuss the details and specifics of each woman's diagnosis.

Study Limitations

Methodological limitations included: (a) non-randomized controlled design; (b) external validity issues arising because the sample was a convenience sample consisting only of women with non-metastatic breast cancer; (c) small sample size and homogeneity of sample in terms of education and income; (d) selective sub-sample; (e) variability and multifaceted aspect of the intervention that are impacted by the teacher's style, which may be a challenge for replication purposes and in order to identify the most effective component of the intervention; and (f) researcher's bias, as the lead researcher herself (AW) is a seeker on the yoga path and practices SKY regularly. It is, therefore, possible that the researcher had an impact on the qualitative results both during the interviews and during the analysis.

Future Research

These pilot data represent an investigation of the relationship between yoga-based practices and psycho-spiritual well-being of women with breast cancer. Future research needs to include multi-centered and multi-cultural sample sizes, controlled-randomized designs, as well as three-arm designs comparing the Art of Living program with other psychosocial interventions.

Future research may include studies exploring the impact of the Art of Living program on the well-being of women diagnosed with all stages of breast cancer, including metastatic breast cancer, as well as on men and women with other types of cancer. These studies should also include biological and medical markers in order to assess the effect of the Art of Living program on the progression of the cancer or on the functioning of the immune function, in addition to its affect on spiritual well-being.

Future research should include more elaborate qualitative explorations, in order to reveal the subtle psycho-spiritual experiences associated with cancer diagnosis and the participation in the Art of Living program. These may include analyses of journal entries, art work, and in-depth interviews conducted throughout the intervention, rather than only at the end. Additionally, the data collected in this study could be analyzed using other qualitative analytic methods, such as phenomenology, narrative, or case study. Furthermore, future research ought to include longitudinal studies, in order to explore the psychological and spiritual process related to cancer diagnosis and the impact of the Art of Living program at different phases of treatment. The Art of Living program may be beneficial for people diagnosed with other types of cancer, but this should be evaluated by further research.

Conclusion

The results suggest that the Art of Living program was associated with experiences of self-expansion and self-transcendence that were coupled with psycho-spiritual processes and transformation. In addition, the results point to the possibility that the breast cancer experience may have triggered a process of spiritual transformation and growth that then further deepened and evolved throughout the Art of Living course. The experience of breast cancer in association with the participation in the Art of Living course provided the space for transformation and integration of psychological and spiritual experiences and growth.

The results show that, in association with the participation in the Art of Living program, the women were able to connect to spiritual aspects of themselves on one hand and, on the other, to release and transform psychological issues that were either related directly to the breast cancer experience or were triggered by it. The experience of the Art of Living program facilitated a process of self-exploration and reaching within and without that enabled the multifaceted transformation and realization of benefits involving experiences of expansion beyond previously defined self-boundaries. These experiences were experienced as having positive effects on women's well-being.

This study suggests that yoga can be integrated within the context of psycho-oncology as an approach in which women diagnosed with breast cancer can engage in a profound, multifaceted self-exploratory process to improve their quality of life. The yoga path is more than a set of practical techniques, yet it includes practical tools to use on the path toward experiencing the Self. As described by Feuerstein (2003) "yoga is a continuum of theory and practice...yoga is not a mere armchair philosophy, nor is it merely a battery of practices" (p.22). Consistent with this approach, benefits and transformations were viewed as associated with the breathing practices as well as with the yoga and philosophy principles made applicable to everyday life and personal development.

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