

Ange : [00:04](#) Hi and welcome to the One Love Fits All online conference benefiting the embody love movement. My name is Ange Atkinson and I am a faculty member for the embody love movement and I had the pleasure of interviewing our RW Alves who is a social justice educator, certified yoga therapist. Yoga Teacher Trainer and Somatic Experiencing Practitioner based out of Seattle. Her work in the world and in yoga is informed by her experience as a fat white queer fem with a lifelong involvement in social justice and activism. She works at the intersection of social justice, spiritual practice by developing curriculum, training and mentoring yoga teachers and yoga therapists. She facilitates spaces for self care and community care for activists and teaches about body positivity, body liberation, inclusive languaging and teaching trauma informed yoga, nervous system resilience and accessible asana, justice, privilege, and spiritual practice. In our interview, RW discusses the intersection of social justice, somatics, and trauma, as well as creating inclusive spaces for wellness educators, spirituality, and so much more. I hope you enjoy

Ange : [01:37](#) Hi RW. Well, welcome. Welcome. I'm so excited that you're here. And, um, we're gonna talk about some really fun things. So can you start off by telling us a little bit about your own journey with yoga and semantics and all the different things that you do?

RW: [01:55](#) Yeah, definitely. I was thinking about this actually because I was thinking about the way that I normally talk about it and then maybe the pieces that I sometimes leave out. The that I usually talk about the way that I came to yoga is, um, to different kind of routes. One was that I was a pre professional ballet dancer as a kid and as a teenager, um, and like loved that and got a lot of really great stuff out of that and really developed a terrible relationship with my body through that. So partly I think I came to yoga to find an embodied practice where I could really feel okay in my body and find a sense of like goodness in my body rather than a sense of critique and kind of constant perfectionism around like my body and my relationship with my body.

RW: [02:46](#) And then I also kind of grew up in came of age in queer activist frontline and direct action kind of communities. And love that work and love those. And that's really like my home and where I come from and really came to a place of a lot of burnout. And so I think I also came to yoga and somatics looking to heal from some burnout, but I'd gone through that. I was kind of sitting with, um, at that point, um, and really needing practices that could actually sustain me in showing up in the work that I

wanted to do in the world and figure out some ways to do that work that felt more holistic and less kind of couched in and enmeshed in a really damaging perfectionism and hyper critical illness, which I think was also a part of the activist communities that I was a part of.

RW: [03:38](#) So I came to yoga to heal those different pieces that like body image and relationship with body piece. And then also the burnout and the feeling really unsustainable in activism piece. And then through yoga I kind of came to somatics. I became more and more interested in the ways that we hold things in our bodies and the ways that we hold trauma and the ways that our bodies hold our stories. And the healing that I think all of us have to do around that. But for me, particularly as a queer person and as a fat person, the healing that I had to do around that and the ways that I'd been really harmed by the world in my relationship with my body and the ways that my body was holding that. And so that was kind of how I came from yoga into somatics and into doing more kind of trauma healing and trauma informed work.

Ange : [04:27](#) Hmm. What a beautiful journey. Can you tell us a little bit more about, you know, your work as a somatic experiencing practitioner and the way it's different from yoga and maybe how it like partners with yoga for anybody that kind of doesn't know what somatics is.

RW: [04:48](#) Yeah, absolutely. Well, I mean somatics is a really broad term. So the way that somatic experiencing works with somatics might be different than other forms of somatics. Generally somatics is work that is focused on processing through the body and through movement. And specifically really noticing and paying attention to our internal experience of our bodies. So it feels distinct from dance and from some forms of yoga in that way that it's not about like the external form or shape that we're putting our body in. Although we might be putting our body in shapes. And I think to me that some of the connection between somatic experiencing and somatics and yoga is that they can go together, right? Like, we can teach yoga, we can facilitate yoga spaces in ways that really encourage people to sense into their bodies and to notice what's happening in their bodies and to kind of unravel some of that relationship. And I think that we can teach yoga and we can hold spaces for yoga in ways that really don't encourage people to do that or that actually create spaces where people don't feel like they can. So to me, and I think the way that the lineages of yoga and the teachings of yoga, um, teach yoga and hold yoga, it is a somatic

practice. But I think that it's not always taught in that way, particularly in the West.

Ange : [06:12](#) Yeah. Some of that knowledge has been completely lost or, um, and the different ways that we've, you know, appropriated cultures.

RW: [06:22](#) Yeah. Yeah. And I think, I mean, it seems to me like it really makes sense that yoga would become what it's become in the West and in the U.S. Given the like hyper focus on the body and on the body looking a certain way, way and on things being perfect. And that meaning a certain thing, um, like it all really makes sense that that yoga kind of shows up in the way that it does in the U.S. And in the West. Um, and that people, wouldn't you say yoga people think only of yoga Asana, right. Like all of that makes sense. I think given the cultural context that we're in and yeah, I definitely think that that is not unrelated to cultural appropriation and to taking a practice from one culture without all of its context and without all of the teachings around it, and then kind of fitting it into the culture that we're in or that we're working with in that moment.

Ange : [07:10](#) Yeah. So with, you know, somatic experiencing, one of the things that you said was, you know, how we hold things in our bodies. So can you talk a little bit more about that and, you know, how that plays a part in healing and in the yoga room, you know, and when you're teaching yoga.

RW: [07:32](#) Yeah. So Somatic Experiencing is based on the work of Peter Levine, who wrote *Waking the Tiger* and *In an Unspoken Voice*. And it's really focused on the idea that our, our nervous systems are constantly, um, kind of modulating our experience and they're constantly like checking out in any space. Am I safe? Am I not safe? Like does this feel okay, does this not feel okay. Um, and when the things happen that, um, we like don't have the capacity to process or we don't have the capacity to hold in a particular moment, that patterning gets kind of stuck in our nervous systems and then we're going to tend to like play that out or we're going to tend to like be holding that in our system. So as it relates to yoga, to me one of the biggest things is really holding a space in yoga where people can feel safe enough or contained enough that it feels okay to notice sensations coming up through the body because sometimes the sensations coming up through the body are, you know, the body telling us what it's holding or the body kind of moving through a process of discharging maybe what it's been holding or, um, what's been stuck in it. But if we can't resource enough, if we can't feel safe enough or contained enough to have it be okay to maybe sit

with some uncomfortable, then the body isn't going to have the space to be able to move through that process and kind of unpeel some of those layers.

Ange : [09:02](#) Yeah. And so, as you're explaining this, I'm thinking, you know, every person's going to have healing work, like things that are programmed into their bodies. And then kind of like what we were just talking about with cultural appropriation or just all the other work that you do with social justice. Like how there's gotta be so much intersection between healing and somatics and social justice work. So can you talk a little bit about that? I feel like that's such a broad topic cause I just, my mind kind of exploded as you were talking. Like there's gotta be so many things there.

RW: [09:42](#) Yeah, I mean I could talk about that topic for a very long time, but yeah, I definitely, like that's one of the intersections that I'm really passionate about is the intersection of social justice work and trauma healing work. Um, because I don't think that we individually or collectively can fully do trauma healing work without incorporating a social justice lens. And I don't think that we can actually do social justice work in a sustainable, holistic, like actually doable way, um, without incorporating trauma healing work that, because I think so, so many of the ways that we've been inculturated in the ways that we've been socialized in the systems that we're socialized within have to do with a lot of trauma and then have to do with, you know, holding those things in our bodies and taking on certain shapes and starting to kind of embody those systems.

RW: [10:41](#) And so our nervous system is having to like process all of that, right? So if I'm like a white person walking through the world, I've maybe been taught that I have a right to comfort and I should feel completely comfortable in every situation. And if anything happens where I start to feel uncomfortable, I think that there's something wrong with that. Whereas if I have a social justice lens, I can start to say like, Oh, because of my identity, because of my social group membership, I've been taught that I'm, I should be taking up all of this space and maybe actually I've been taking up like more than my fair share of space. And it's okay for me to sit in my discomfort. It's actually important. It's actually necessary for the process of coming into more justice in the world. For me to shift the way that I've been kind of carrying myself and moving through the world. And so to me, social justice work and trauma healing work are so interconnected, that I don't think we can do one really responsibly or sustainably without the other. And both of them have to inform each other, right? Like it's kind of like a

constant dialogue between them. It feels really like they're interwoven together.

Ange : [11:48](#) I'm curious how identity would come into play in trauma healing. Like, um, you know, if like you just pointed towards, you know, dominant white person. I love that. Um, and so I guess I'm curious like, um, a person that experiences microaggressions on a daily basis, like what kind of trauma is being held in those bodies?

RW: [12:25](#) Yeah, I don't know. Yeah, I mean, I would say I would say that, um, there's some kind of discussion about how specifically to categorize the trauma of oppression, but like oppression itself is a trauma. And so the experience of microaggressions or aggressions or macroaggressions, the experience of dealing with racism as a person of color every day or dealing with homophobia as a gay or queer person every day. Those are experiences of trauma, and particularly because they're ongoing. That's something that our bodies are going to be holding and that our nervous systems kind of have to figure out how to navigate from day to day. And so I do think that folks who have experiences of marginalization have particular work to do an unraveling of that trauma to do. And that needs to be a part of our conversations about trauma healing, right, too.

RW: [13:23](#) We can't just speak in this really individualized way as if every single human being is having the exact same experience or as if every single human being has the exact same access to resources for healing. Because one of the pieces of the conversation around trauma and oppression is also that not only is oppression itself a trauma, but that when folks who experience oppression and marginalization decide that they want to do some trauma healing work often they're then experiencing microaggressions, they're experiencing racism or sexism or fat phobia when they reach out to practitioners and try to do trauma healing work. So there's also an issue of differential access to resources for healing when people want to do their healing work.

Ange : [14:08](#) Yes, definitely. And so what, as wellness practitioners that are probably tuning in, you know, what is the work, that we need to do so that we are having inclusive spaces that are truly inclusive and not just inclusive in the words that we're using.

RW: [14:33](#) I mean, I think that that's a really deep, long process. I think that some of the first things that we can do are acknowledging to ourselves that we are biased, that we come from a particular perspective and only have the experience that we have in the

world, right? So we can't know what the experience of someone else is and if we haven't done some thinking about that and really done some deep self reflection around where we're coming from and what biases we're bringing because of how we've been taught and how we've been treated by the world. We're going to play those out with students who have different experiences and different identities without being aware of them and we can really cause harm. So to me, the first part of it is really doing deep self study. Like, I think about that as the svadhyaya right, the self reflection, self study part of it.

RW:

[15:21](#)

Um, and really like learning about the systems of oppression in the culture that we come from and the culture that we're working in. So, learning about the ways that like white supremacy operates. Learning about the ways that the patriarchy operates, learning about these systems that we've been enculturated in and really being in a continuous process of examining the ways that that's shaping how we're showing up and that's influencing the ways that we are with other people or the immediate assumptions that we make about people who are coming from different places or different identities. And then educating ourselves. So I just think there's so many resources out there for people to, you know, read to, to watch, to get more information about different experiences. I was actually recently teaching on a teacher training and one of the pieces of homework I gave the students was to seek out a piece of writing or some kind of reflection from someone who had a different identity, a different experience than them in yoga.

RW:

[16:18](#)

So that they can be learning about what does that experience look like? And certainly that one person that they're reading something from or watching something from, can't represent, you know, all people of color in yoga or all fat folks and younger, all queer folks in yoga. But just starting to open our minds to like, what are the different experiences that people might be having that are really different from my own? Because particularly if we hold a lot of positions of privilege, part of what that's gonna mean is that we have systematically been taught not to think about and not to be aware of other people's experiences. We've been taught that we are the center and we're the norm. And so it's totally possible that we maybe haven't spent a lot of time thinking about what other people's experiences are, what other people's perspectives are.

Ange :

[17:02](#)

Yes, definitely. And, and so as a yoga teacher trainer what are other, you know, tools that you incorporate into your trainings as you're, you know, bringing in new yoga teachers into the world, you know, what are things that you do besides like that

one example that, um, you know, work to be anti-oppressive and to be within this whole social justice realm?

RW:

[17:32](#)

Uh huh. So I think part, part of it is like what I would do with anyone who wants to be more aware of how they're showing up and how their social group memberships are impacting that. So, doing work around acknowledging and looking at where we come from and what our are and how that's influencing us looking at implicit bias. So really starting to like dive deep on the biases that we all hold, right. That are, that are a part of the culture and we've all been taught. And then doing some work around specific tools for like undoing bias and there's like lots of different research about that. Some of that is about like learning about other people's perspectives or like putting yourself in other people's shoes. Some of that is about identifying specific biases, like specific thoughts that come up and then literally coming up with a counter-narrative or counter-message that you can pair with that every time you notice it.

RW:

[18:30](#)

Um, so doing that kind of implicit bias work and then also talking a lot about, um, languaging and about accessibility and Asana. And again, with that, to me it's so much about acknowledging where we ourselves are coming from and that that's just one perspective. That I can't possibly, you know, present some asana in a class and tell people that they're all going to feel it in the exact same place in their bodies. Because all of our bodies are different. So I'm wanting people to have an experience for example of rest. I can't just say let's all rest in child's pose because that may not be restful for some people, but I can offer child's pose and then I can say if there's something else that's restful for you or if you'd like to modify it in some way so it can be restful. So really thinking about like what the heart of the pose or what the heart of the teaching is, what experience I'm, I'm hoping to hold for people in that moment. And then giving people the option and helping people really start to have a sense of empowerment and self efficacy around figuring out what gives them that experience in their body because it's going to be different for each of us.

Ange :

[19:34](#)

And that to me, you know, ties back into what you were talking about with like trauma healing and somatics of tying in, you know like what is the sensations, like what is that person's body holding in that moment and not knowing like how do you navigate as the teacher? Like you don't know what they're experiencing or you don't know what they're coming in with. How do you navigate that?

- RW: [20:03](#) Yeah, I mean, to me, one of the biggest things for that and something that I think trauma-informed yoga is really strong in advocating for is really focusing on resourcing. So helping people have an experience of what feels resourcing, so what feels grounding or what feels orienting or what feels centering or calling for themselves in their bodies. And then helping people get to practice those tools. So getting to have experiences of like, Oh, if I really focus on feeling my feet on the floor, then I can actually like feel my system settling. Like that's useful information for me. And that's going to be different for each person. But I think talking about resourcing and really focusing in classes on resourcing is going to be really helpful for everyone. Right? That's going to give people the kind of container for their experience that will enable them to be able to move through whatever else is coming up. And potentially to hold things that don't feel as calming or don't feel as comfortable. Um, because we have that resource that we can always go back to
- Ange : [21:05](#) One of the things that you said, and I think I also read it on your website, was about, you know, you're talking about this resourcing, but it's like not adapting. You talked about like not, um, adapting your body to oppose, but it's like the other way around like that you get to be more trauma informed. So can you talk a little bit about that? Um, just kind of that mentality, that whole shift.
- RW: [21:38](#) Yeah, it's something that the, the way that I was trained in yoga really wasn't that focused on a pose looking a very particular way in every body. But the more that I've kind of had conversations and band around the broader yoga world, they see how much that kind of gets to be the narrative that gets perpetuated. And to me it really feels like an echo of the dance world that I spent years in, of this idea that the point of yoga Asana or the point of moving our bodies is for every single body to look the same in a pose. Which to me is a fundamental misunderstanding of like the point of yoga Asana and yoga in general. And so like not only are all of our bodies different on the outside, right? Like our limbs are proportioned differently, our body parts are different sizes and different shapes and like for various reasons, our poses aren't gonna look the same, but also our bones are different, right?
- RW: [22:42](#) That we're all put together in such different ways. That to me, what I'm really interested in is not like what oppose looks like from the outside, but what experience someone is having on the inside. Which I think has actually been a part of my own shift in moving from the dance world into yoga. Like my shift in

my relationship with like how I think about like my body and interact with my body is really moving from kind of this object relationship with the body of like thinking about how it looks like from the outside and like trying to make it look a certain way or make a movement look a certain way from the outside, which is to me not a very like embodied way of moving or working with the body. Like it's very much about thinking about what the body looks like from the outside versus what I'm really interested in now in my own practice and in holding space for other people is what experience are we having on the inside? Like what sensations am I noticing, what energetic shifts or flows? Like where do I feel grounded? Where do I feel stuck? Where do I feel movement? And really helping people have an experience of their bodies from the inside. Because that's the way that we can get the information that our bodies are sending us. That's the way that we can actually be in more of a kind of reciprocal relationship with our bodies and really honor the wisdom and the messages that our bodies are holding.

Ange : [24:10](#) Mmm. That's so beautiful. Yes, definitely. Yeah. Yeah. I'm just so curious about, I guess the, the healing process with somatics and trauma, and again, going back to social justice and like, and, you know, what are the ways that, um, somatics can help move and heal trauma, just as you know, as a practitioner?

RW: [24:43](#) Yeah. To me, I mean, there's like a couple of different layers of that, right? One, one layer might be like the way that I would work with a client in Somatic Experiencing, and that's going to look different in with different clients with like working with different things. But a lot of it is about like tracking the sensations that are happening in the body and tracking the activation and deactivation of the nervous system. And kind of noticing what that patterning is and then really lending focus to the places where there's settling, where there's calming, um, where there's like a sense of regulation. But I think that we can do that in kind of a broader sense in like yoga spaces and yoga classes as well by lending attention to resourcing, and that because the nervous system is actually going to do the work itself.

RW: [25:37](#) Like with Somatic Experiencing and with a lot of kinds of somatics, it's much less about like me as the practitioner or you know, the person as the client or the student like kind of doing something kind of like messing with the nervous system or like changing it in some explicit or overt way. It's much less about that and much more about really letting the system have space and giving the system enough resource and containment that the system can kind of unwind itself and its own processes. And

sometimes that looks for people like shaking and sometimes it looks like crying and sometimes it looks like just a shift. And I don't mean to say just because a shift in sensation is really big, right? And look a lot of different ways or feel a lot of different ways for people.

RW: [26:25](#) But really I think the goal is to be able to show up in the world more authentically as ourselves and to be able to live our big, right sized truest lives without the things that we're holding or the things that we've gone through kind of getting in our way or making our concept of our possibilities for ourselves smaller, which I think is one of the things that happens with trauma. Um, and I think that's another place that we can really see the relationship between oppression and trauma, right? Because oppression, internalized oppression. I think one of the things that it does is it can give us, it can limit our sense of possibility for ourselves and for our own lives in the same way that trauma does. Right. And so the work of trauma healing and kind of unfeeling and unpacking and unraveling those layers to me is about being able to unravel and unpack some of that so that we can show up more fully in our lives and for ourselves and in our own bodies.

Ange : [27:31](#) Yes. Wow. Like I love what you just said about trauma and oppression, both being things that make us feel smaller, or just having not as many options in our life. Wow. Yeah. So can you, um, can you expand on that a little bit more? You know, like, I don't, I'm not really quite sure where to go with it, but just, you know, what are the ways that, you know, if you're in a, you're teaching a yoga class that we can expand our resources so that, you know, that experience can be there for everybody and not just for those that, you know, already are in the dominant culture.

RW: [28:19](#) And I do want to be clear, I think particularly because you just named folks who are in the dominant culture, the ways that systems of privilege and oppression work means that those who are in the like agent category in the like privileged category are, will tend to be even more resources and all of that, right? Like there, there is a um, uh, like giving of more resources and it taking up more space. But I also want to name that the systems of privilege and oppression are also really damaging for people in positions of privilege. So for people who are in the dominant group, and I think that's important to name, especially when we're talking about oppression and trauma because the work of folks who are in the dominant group is going to be different. And there there's some amount of like sitting with our own discomfort and taking responsibility and accountability.

- RW: [29:17](#) And there's also some embodied trauma healing work, right? Whiteness for example, also disconnects us from our own whole humanity. And that's not to say that white people suffer from racism in the same way that folks of color do. Or that we want to like take over that naming of harm, but whiteness does harm white folks too. And so I think when we can name that people both in the position privilege and the position of oppression within these larger systems are being cut off from being able to access our whole humanity. We can aim that there's embodied, like body based trauma healing work to do in both of those places and both of those locations.
- Ange : [29:59](#) Wow. Yes, definitely. Yeah, that's so important to me. Like you just said. And not the lens that I was looking at. Um, so I so appreciate you naming that. I'm curious too, because you've mentioned it a couple of times, not just, you weren't just talking about sensations but energies and then like spiritual practice, like how that intersects also with everything that we're speaking about, you know, trauma, systems of oppression. And so how has that, intertwined within your work as well?
- RW: [30:34](#) Yeah. I mean, my understanding of the teachings of yoga is that yoga fundamentally teaches that we are all manifestations of the divine. And you might use different words for that and you might have a different framework that works for you, that is kind of naming that. But, um, to me on a fundamental level of yoga is a spiritual practice. It doesn't mean that everyone who does yoga Asana has to be using it as a spiritual practice or naming it in that way, but that is my relationship with it. And to me that, part of what that names is that, that yoga is really a process of unpeeling the layers, unpeeling the conditioning. And this is one of the ways that to me you'll get in social justice are the same thing. Or they're not the same thing, but the processes are very, very similar.
- RW: [31:26](#) Right? Like to me, both of them are processes of unpeeling, the layers of conditioning and layers of who we've been taught that we are or been told that we are, how we've been treated by the world. To come back to that center of who we actually are, um, which is a manifestation of the divine, which is completely whole. Right. Um, and I, I say that to name that, that's my orientation. But then I also really want to be careful not to say that that has to be everyone else's relationship with yoga or relationship with their practice. Because particularly for folks who grew up with a particular kind of relationship with religion, for folks who may have felt or been marginalized by the religion that they grew up in, having an explicitly kind of religious or

spiritual frame on yoga can feel really disconnecting and mean that people can't access it.

RW: [32:25](#) So I, I don't always talk about that in classes. It's more like that's the orientation that I'm coming from. Um, and that's the way that I'm interested in seeing and interacting with other human beings is like as manifestations of the divine. Right. And so that's a part of my practice, but it's not necessarily a thing that I talk about a lot in classes or a frame that I expect other people to be practicing with because I think for various reasons that can actually make yoga less accessible for people. And I don't want to create more barriers for people getting to have experiences of, of healing or coming back to their own wholeness as much as possible.

RW: [33:10](#) With that in mind, what are some barriers that you have, like when you first started into the yoga world? Like what were barriers that you experienced? Wow. Well, I mean I was very resistant to yoga for a long time before I came to yoga. Because in my mind and from what I'd seen of the ways that yoga was represented, yoga was for very thin people. Yoga was for straight people. Yoga was for people who were very interested in like athletics and fitness and running marathons and like all of these things that I was not interested in. And like this, this kind of normative relationship with fitness and the body that my body had never fit into. So I think to me one of the biggest barriers, and I feel like this is similar to what I've heard other folks say, in terms of like what feels like a big barrier to yoga is literally feeling like people like me do not do yoga or like yoga spaces.

RW: [34:22](#) We're not going to be like safe for people like me. We're going to be safe for my body. Um, and that's something that I continue to, to kind of be in process with and be in relationship with in yoga spaces. In fat acceptance and fat liberation spaces I am very often one of the like smaller fat people in yoga spaces. I am almost always the largest person in the room. And the ways that people talk about bodies, the ways that people will talk about their own bodies. The ways that people kind of conflate some of the like energetic or trauma healing pieces on to certain kinds of bodies can be really, really damaging for larger bodied folks. I think about a lot of the narratives around like people have this idea that, when people are in larger bodies, that's because like they haven't done their trauma healing work or it's like they're protecting themselves from the world, right?

RW: [35:23](#) You kind of hear some of those narratives that I think really come from a like very surface understanding of some spiritual

practices and then get paired with very common dominant narrative about what kinds of bodies are acceptable or valid or okay, and what kinds of bodies aren't in ways that I think are really damaging for a lot of people. Particularly larger bodied people, but really damaging for anyone. Right. In the same way that, you know, some people are targeted by a particular oppression and experience that in a certain way. But even the [inaudible] people who are thin or in more normative bodies are also harmed by that oppression and that system. So those are some of the things that I think really like felt like barriers to me when I came to yoga and I want to acknowledge that there are ways in which I think I was able to access yoga probably more easily than a lot of other folks, right?

RW: [36:19](#) Like I'm white. I don't have any mobility disabilities. I'm hearing. There were all these ways in which like I was able to access it and there weren't as many barriers as for a lot of folks. And so that I think was part of what helped me like come into yoga spaces initially. Even though there were places where I wasn't sure I would fit or I wasn't sure if it was going to be safe enough for me because I had enough privilege that I was able to show up in that and then kind of suss it out from there.

Ange : [36:51](#) I'm curious, I know a lot of my own yoga work, I hear a lot of talk of like well, you kind of just have to like work on the voice in your head and just get that, you know, get your ego in check. And that I think almost can be used to say like similar to what you were just saying, if somebody is in a larger body that it's like the surface level of like, Oh, well they haven't done their healing work. And, I'm curious to what you would say to those things that happen in our heads as well. Like what's going on? Maybe it's ego talk, but also there's, you know, what's happening because of trauma, you know, is that just kind of one of those things that people, it's almost used as an excuse of like, Oh, well I don't need to include somebody because it's, it's their job to do their own healing work narrative. Like where, you know, navigating that.

RW: [37:54](#) Yeah, yeah. That, that feels like a tricky one. I'll say first that, you know, I do think like, we all have different voices in our heads that give us different messages probably all of which are informed by the society and the culture that we were socialized in. Right. And so I do think that there is utility in, you know, doing work around those. And I don't necessarily think that we can do all of that work, um, as individuals without also being in community with each other and having conversations with each other about like, this is what, you know, my voice says, what does your voice say? And like, where does that come from?

Because I don't ever want to locate the work solely as an individual thing. The individual is a piece of it and we have to be talking about the larger systems that are at play and where those voices ultimately come from.

RW: [38:51](#) But then I think what I'm also hearing in what you said, is kind of a question about when, for instance, if I'm teaching a class or holding a space and someone has an emotional reaction or has a reaction to something that I say, kind of that question of, is the appropriate thing for me to be like, Oh, that person is like having their own emotional thing and it has nothing to do with me versus is it an inappropriate thing to, to actually look at like, what did I say? You know, what impact did that have? And I think particularly in kind of like yoga and wellness spaces, as people really want to... I think that they can turn into very like individualist lenses of like, we create our own reality with our thoughts and therefore if you're having a bad time in the world, you just haven't shifted your thoughts enough.

RW: [39:48](#) I think that's an incredibly damaging narrative to perpetuate. When we live within a world that has systems like racism and sexism and homophobia and fatphobia and ableism and classism, like to tell working class folks or folks of color or disabled folks that they're having a frustrating experience with the world because they just haven't manifested their own reality yet is incredibly disempowering and patronizing and not a narrative that I would like to perpetuate and then I think that that can play out in yoga spaces for us as teachers when we want to be like, Oh, someone's having an emotional experience, but like that's their emotions and it has nothing to do with me. And there is an extent to which that is true for all of us as humans, right? Like we are all having our own emotional experiences and sometimes that doesn't have anything to do with me.

RW: [40:40](#) And if I'm in the seat of the teacher, like that is a place of responsibility. And particularly if I've said or done something out of my own experience of privilege and my own experience of unknowing that has created harm for someone else, I don't think that it's responsible or kind or loving or showing up to the role of the teacher appropriately to say that has nothing to do with me and I don't need to deal with it because that is actually my work. I have harmed another human beings through my own ignorance, through my own unknowing, through my own not having done my own work. And I think it's really important to name that, like that harm happened and I do have to take accountability for that and I do need to do work to really look at how that happened.

RW: [41:29](#) It doesn't mean that that person isn't also having their own emotional experience, and particularly for someone who potentially is showing up to a yoga space and they're not sure if it's going to be safe enough for them or not, and they're not sure if they're going to be the only one, like they're already carrying a lot of energy around that. Right. And potentially this is also a person who has been experiencing aggressions and microaggressions and marginalization and oppression like all day today and all week and all year and their entire life, right? I want to acknowledge that people are showing up with all of that. And I think we do everyone in the relationship and in the space a disservice if we say that's just about that person and their experience rather than really looking at and taking responsibility for the ways that we have perpetuated harm or caused harm.

RW: [42:23](#) And to me like the thing to do in those moments is to thank the person. Like if someone is telling me that I have created something that's harmful for them, that's a gift that they're giving to me, if they're willing to tell me that. Um, and it's not my role to like critique how they're telling you that or to tell them that they have to tell me that with a different emotional tone or anything like that. It's my responsibility, especially as the teacher. I have more of a responsibility as the teacher to say thank you for that gift and I'm sorry that I created harm and I am going to do my work so that I can show up better next time.

Ange : [43:00](#) Yes. That is so important. Being a teacher on every level. You know, I teach yoga and I teach other things too and recognizing that we're already in a position of power just as a teacher. And then if you add on top of that, if you are a teacher that comes from whiteness, you know, that there's all these things happening. And as you were speaking when I was thinking was, you know, just my presence, like I just went back to like, some of the work that I've done is just, my presence could be causing harm based on what I represent to somebody else and I can't control that, but I have to do that. It's my responsibility. Like what you were just saying to do that work.

RW: [43:52](#) Yeah. I think it's our responsibility if we're in that role of teacher or facilitator and it's also our responsibility if we are the person who's showing up with like even slightly more ability to like be resourced or to stay grounded in the conversation or to really stay centered in our practice when things get hard, it's, it's our responsibility to as much as possible show up and sit with what people are bringing and what comes up for people. And I think that's a really good point, right? That sometimes even my presence because of what I represent and because of

someone's experiences with a system with other people who look like me can cause harm.

Ange : [44:35](#) Yes, definitely. Well, I know that I could just speak to you all day about, just all the work that you do. You are making such a difference in the world. But to wrap up, I'm curious if you would just share, you know, a little bit more about like where you are in your journey with, you know, your relationship with your body. And, you know, we started with where you started and kind of like where you are now and how I guess you know, what, what you're continuing to do in the world.

RW: [45:14](#) Yeah. Um, well I think that I named earlier that I really have been in a process of shifting from more of a objectified object relationship with my body of like, I mean in dance people have very different experiences in dance. But my experience in dance was largely that like I was interested in my body for what it could do and what it looked like from the outside. And those were the things that were important about it. And I think those things were reinforced by a culture that generally is interested in what bodies look like from the outside and has very particular ideas about what bodies are acceptable or valid or okay or attractive and which aren't. And, so all of that I think that I got incorporated into my relationship with my body and dance. Um, and then through my practice of yoga and through meditation and through somatic experiencing, I'm much more interested in having more of a relationship of mutuality with my body and really being curious about it and checking in with like what's happening internally and what's happening internally when I do different poses or different movements or different life activities.

RW: [46:33](#) Sometimes in yoga classes I like to talk that yoga Asana is kind of like science experiments. We do different movements or we put our bodies in different shapes and then we like notice what happens when we do that. Um, and it might be different things on different days or in different moments. But I think really having an experience of, and a relationship of like curiosity towards like what my body has to tell me and what sensations are happening in my body. And also really wanting to lean into like pleasure and joy. Like, can I have a relationship with my body of appreciating how awesome it feels after a really long day to like get horizontal on a couch and like really like sink into it. And getting to have that relationship with my body of like really getting to lean into joy and lean into what feels good and what feels pleasurable and calming and exciting and, not kind of treating or having this relationship with my body where it's like the body is a problem that has to be solved. But more like the

body is, is an experiment and is a curiosity and is a wonder and like, what are all of the things that it can tell me and all of the things that we can do together.

Ange : [47:56](#) Hmm. Yes. It's like your paintbrush for life. You get to just, yeah. It's so beautiful. Yeah. Well where can people find you and what work are you up to now?

RW: [48:11](#) So I'm doing a couple of different things. I'm based in Seattle. And so in Seattle, I'm working with the collective of folks doing, um, work around whiteness. And so doing embodied work around like how we show up in whiteness, like how we as white people have taken that on and the ways that we're that we're perpetuating that in a, in embodied way. So I'm doing that work. I'm doing some trauma-informed yoga trainings. I've been working with some colleagues to update some curriculum to have more of an integrated social justice lens to it. Um, so that's gonna come out soon. And then I work with Bending Towards Justice. So we do a social justice and anti-oppression trainings for yoga teachers and yoga studios. So really bringing the work of trying to like help folks figure out how to hold more inclusive space and how to really take responsibility for the ways that we show up and the places that we don't have awareness and the places that we can do some growing into. So that the spaces where people can access yoga and can access meditation and can access this like healing somatic embodied work, are hopefully more and more spaces that feel like spaces of healing rather than spaces that are perpetuating harm or perpetuating exclusion. So that's really one of the things that I'm passionate about. So you can check out the Bending Towards Justice website. So I learn more about that work and, um, eh, and bring us into your studio organization if you want to learn more about that.

Ange : [49:52](#) Excellent. Well, RW thank you so much. I am looking forward to continuing to learn from you and just thank you for you and the work that you're doing and the way that you have taken your own healing journey and really created it into your Dharma and into teaching. So thank you. Yeah. It's such a pleasure to talk to you. Yes.