



Perspective Article

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Yoga Nidra Beyond Outcomes: A Mind Genomics Perspective on What People Seek from the Practice

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Abstract

Yoga Nidra research has primarily examined outcomes such as sleep, stress, anxiety, mood, and well-being, while emerging qualitative and experiential evidence suggests that individuals may approach and value the practice in different ways. This Perspective highlights an underexplored methodological question: what do individuals seek from Yoga Nidra, and which motivations, expectations, perceived benefits, and meanings are most personally relevant to them? Mind Genomics is proposed as a methodological approach for systematically examining these dimensions through combinations of Yoga Nidra-related attributes and identifying recurring patterns of valuation across individuals. Future empirical research can examine whether such patterns give rise to stable, empirically derived mindsets and whether they can be reproduced in subsequent studies. This Perspective thus extends the inquiry from what Yoga Nidra does to what people seek from the practice, offering a person-centered direction for understanding how Yoga Nidra is perceived, valued, and experienced.

Keywords: Yoga Nidra, Mind Genomics, Perceived Value, Individual Perspectives, Motivations and Expectations, Mindsets

Introduction

Yoga Nidra, commonly described as “yogic sleep,” is a guided contemplative practice characterized by profound physical and mental relaxation while some degree of awareness is maintained. Contemporary descriptions generally portray the practice as involving a structured sequence of guided attention, systematic rotation of consciousness, breath awareness, sensory exploration, visualization, and the use of a personal resolve or sankalpa [1]. Although elements associated with Yoga Nidra have older roots within yogic traditions, its modern systematic presentation was substantially shaped by the teachings of Swami Satyananda Saraswati during the twentieth century [1]. Contemporary accounts

similarly describe Yoga Nidra as a guided, low-effort practice that can be performed while lying down or, when necessary, in a seated position, distinguishing it from physically demanding forms of yoga [2,3]. Scientific interest in Yoga Nidra has expanded, with intervention research examining a range of outcomes across stress, mood, well-being, psychological dysfunction, biomarkers, sleep, and other domains. An integrative review of 29 intervention studies synthesized these reported outcomes and highlighted clinical heterogeneity in sample populations and intervention session lengths, frequencies, and durations [4]. Research has also examined Yoga Nidra in relation to stress, anxiety, depression, sleep,

psychological well-being, autonomic functioning, pain, menstrual symptoms, and other dimensions of health and functioning [1]. Individual studies have examined diverse populations, including college students, college professors, adolescents, individuals with chronic insomnia, women exposed to sexual trauma, and older adults [5-10]. For example, research among college professors has reported improvements in anxiety and stress, while an adolescent mixed-methods study reported improvements in happiness, perceived stress, psychological well-being, self-confidence, and self-awareness [6,8]. A study of older adults likewise reported reductions in anxiety and stress accompanied by improvements in well-being, relaxation, sleep, and emotional balance following a Yoga Nidra program [10]. These findings collectively illustrate that Yoga Nidra research has not been restricted to a single psychological or clinical endpoint.

Sleep represents another prominent area of investigation. A randomized controlled study involving 41 patients with chronic insomnia compared Yoga Nidra with cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia and reported improvements in several subjective sleep measures in both groups; objectively, Yoga Nidra showed marked improvement in N2% and N3% of total sleep time, together with a significant reduction in salivary cortisol [9]. These findings illustrate how Yoga Nidra has been investigated using specific and measurable sleep-related outcomes. More recently, a systematic review of randomized controlled trials identified six trials involving 244 participants across populations including individuals with chronic or acute insomnia, hypertension, healthcare workers, and sportspersons. Most studies reported improvements in key sleep parameters, including sleep onset latency, total sleep time, and sleep efficiency. However, the review also identified heterogeneity in intervention protocols, outcome measures, and intervention duration, together with moderate-to-high risk of bias, incomplete outcome reporting, and inadequate reporting of adverse events and safety data [11]. Thus, although these findings provide encouraging evidence regarding the potential of Yoga Nidra for sleep-related outcomes, the available evidence also shows substantial methodological heterogeneity and limitations.

The broader literature reinforces this multidimensionality. A recent systematic review and meta-analysis identified 73 studies involving 5,201 participants and reported significant benefits of Yoga Nidra for stress, anxiety, and depression; however, the authors emphasized low methodological quality and variability in intervention delivery, recommending cautious interpretation of the observed effects [12]. The same review identified substantial variation in how Yoga Nidra interventions were described: 38 of the 73 included studies reported details of session structure, while 53 reported the presence of an instructor. Across the included studies, reported training duration ranged from 30 to 4,550 minutes, with a median of 750 minutes [12]. These findings are important for interpreting the evidence and illustrate substantial variation in intervention structure, delivery, and dosage across the Yoga Nidra literature. Importantly, the multidimensionality of Yoga Nidra is

evident not only in research outcomes but also in descriptions of the practice itself. The literature describes Yoga Nidra in relation to profound relaxation, stress management, personal resolutions, self-transformation, creativity, learning, and broader psychological and physiological effects [1]. Public-facing and practitioner-oriented accounts similarly associate the practice with relaxation, rejuvenation, self-exploration, emotional experience, self-awareness, and contemplative states [2,13]. Such accounts should not be interpreted as evidence of clinical efficacy, but they are relevant to understanding the range of meanings and anticipated benefits that may surround the practice.

This breadth raises an important question that differs from the conventional efficacy question: what are individuals actually seeking from Yoga Nidra? The answer may not be uniform. Individuals may approach Yoga Nidra with different desired outcomes, such as better sleep, relaxation or stress reduction, emotional well-being, self-exploration, concentration, attention, or broader contemplative experience. Importantly, emerging qualitative evidence provides direct support for considering variation in how Yoga Nidra is experienced and engaged with. An exploratory mixed-methods study of 33 participants examined participants' experiences of a single Yoga Nidra session through focus-group discussions and identified themes involving relaxation, sleep, sense withdrawal, engagement, and potential applications for sleep, anxiety, and pain [14]. Previous experience with Yoga Nidra or other mind-body practices was also identified as an intrapersonal factor that could influence participants' perceptions and engagement with the practice [14].

Preliminary evidence from public conversations provides a further indication of this possibility. A 2024 social-listening analysis examined 28 Reddit conversations and three Mumsnet discussions concerning Yoga Nidra and identified multiple reasons and perceived benefits associated with the practice, including sleep, general well-being, anxiety and mental well-being, pain relief, focus, attention, and productivity, alongside other experiential interests [15]. The analysis was explicitly exploratory and limited in scale and was not intended to provide representative estimates. Nevertheless, its relevance here lies in illustrating that people discussing the same practice may attach different purposes, expectations, questions, and perceived benefits to Yoga Nidra.

These observations point to an important distinction within the existing evidence base. Much of Yoga Nidra research is organized around predefined outcomes. Researchers typically begin with a specific endpoint—such as sleep quality, anxiety, stress, depression, well-being, physiological regulation, or a particular symptom—and then evaluate whether Yoga Nidra is associated with measurable change in that endpoint [5,6,9,11]. This outcome-oriented approach is essential for evaluating whether the practice may produce measurable effects. However, an outcome-centered design does not necessarily reveal the psychological landscape that individuals bring to the practice: their reasons for trying it, the benefits they

expect, the meanings they attach to it, or the relative importance they assign to different aspects of the experience. The distinction can therefore be expressed as a shift from asking “What does Yoga Nidra do?” to also asking “What do people seek from Yoga Nidra?” These questions are complementary. The first concerns the effects associated with the practice; the second concerns how individuals perceive, interpret, and approach the practice. Existing qualitative research has already begun to provide insight into participant experiences, perceived benefits, expectations, and engagement [14], while practitioner-oriented accounts suggest that Yoga Nidra may be valued for a range of experiential and personal purposes. Thus, the research gap is not the absence of evidence that people experience Yoga Nidra differently.

Rather, the available evidence points to an underexplored methodological question: whether the multiple motivations, expectations, perceived benefits, and meanings associated with Yoga Nidra can be systematically characterized as combinations of attributes across individuals. Existing systematic reviews demonstrate substantial heterogeneity in study populations, intervention protocols, delivery characteristics, and measured outcomes [11,12], but methodological heterogeneity should not be equated with heterogeneity in what individuals seek from the practice. Similarly, qualitative studies and exploratory social-listening analyses can reveal diverse experiences and perspectives, but they do not establish whether recurring combinations of motivations, expectations, and perceived value exist across a broader population. The gap, therefore, lies between descriptive evidence of diverse individual perspectives and systematic quantitative mapping of how these perspectives are structured across individuals. Mind Genomics offers one potential methodological approach for investigating this underexplored dimension. Rather than requiring individuals to select a single reason for practicing Yoga Nidra, a Mind Genomics study can systematically vary combinations of statements representing different motivations, anticipated benefits, experiential meanings, and expectations associated with the practice. Respondents can evaluate these combinations, allowing the relative contribution of individual elements to be estimated and patterns of response across individuals to be examined [16,17]. Subsequent analysis could reveal recurring patterns of response across individuals, providing an empirical basis for investigating whether distinct Yoga Nidra-related mindsets emerge.

Such mindsets should not be assumed in advance. For example, sleep, relaxation, emotional well-being, self-exploration, cognitive functioning, and contemplative experience could be represented as candidate elements, but any resulting groups would need to emerge from empirical response patterns rather than being imposed beforehand. In this respect, Mind Genomics could complement conventional outcome research by adding a person-centered investigation of what different individuals value, expect, or seek from the same practice. This perspective is particularly relevant because Yoga Nidra is already described across multiple contexts—

as a relaxation practice, a sleep-related practice, a contemplative experience, a means of self-exploration, and a complementary wellness or therapeutic practice [1,2,3,13]. The question is therefore not whether Yoga Nidra has one universally applicable meaning, nor whether different individuals necessarily require different Yoga Nidra protocols. Rather, the question is whether people differ systematically in the aspects of Yoga Nidra that they find meaningful or desirable. This distinction avoids assuming clinical personalization while opening a testable avenue for understanding person-level variation in perception and motivation. Accordingly, this Perspective Article considers Yoga Nidra not only as a practice whose physiological, psychological, and sleep-related effects warrant continued investigation, but also as a multidimensional experience that may be perceived and valued differently by different individuals. We propose that a Mind Genomics lens applied to perceptions, motivations, expectations, and meanings associated with Yoga Nidra could complement the predominantly outcome-oriented literature and provide a methodological direction for future empirical research. Such work could help extend the field from asking primarily whether Yoga Nidra produces a particular outcome toward a complementary question: which aspects of Yoga Nidra matter to different people, and can these patterns of meaning and expectation be systematically identified?

From What Yoga Nidra Does to What People Seek

The growing Yoga Nidra literature demonstrates that the practice is associated with a broad range of outcomes, including sleep, mood, stress, anxiety, pain, and psychological well-being. However, the experience of Yoga Nidra cannot necessarily be reduced to any single measurable outcome. Qualitative evidence suggests that participants may experience the practice through several overlapping dimensions, including relaxation, sleep or sleep-like states, sense withdrawal, and emotional and mental changes, while also considering its potential relevance to concerns such as sleep, anxiety, and pain [14]. Participants’ engagement with the practice may also be shaped by intrapersonal factors, including previous experience with mind–body practices and expectations about what the practice will be like [14]. These observations suggest that the value of Yoga Nidra may be understood at more than one level. An individual may approach the practice because of a desired outcome, such as better sleep or relief from stress, whereas others may place greater value on experiences such as deep relaxation, sustained awareness, or a sense of connection with the self. Practitioner accounts provide further examples of this broader experiential landscape, describing Yoga Nidra in terms of accessibility, rejuvenation, personal experience, sankalpa, deep relaxation, awareness, and deeper self-connection [18]. Such accounts are not equivalent to controlled empirical evidence, but they illustrate the range of meanings through which practitioners may understand and value the same practice.

Importantly, even the experience of the practice itself may not be uniform. Experimental evidence indicates that patterns

of engagement during Yoga Nidra are associated with different short-term mood measures. Greater alpha and high-beta activity, interpreted as indicators of relaxed attention and cognitive focus, was associated with greater vigor and lower confusion and fatigue, whereas theta and delta activity was associated with greater confusion, fatigue, and anxiety [19]. These findings do not establish that individuals require different Yoga Nidra practices; rather, they provide further evidence that different patterns of engagement and experiential states during the same practice may be associated with different subjective outcomes. Taken together, these findings support a complementary way of viewing Yoga Nidra research. Rather than asking only whether Yoga Nidra produces a particular outcome, it is also useful to consider what individuals hope to obtain from the practice, what they perceive as valuable, and which aspects of the experience are most meaningful to them. These dimensions may overlap within the same person rather than representing mutually exclusive categories. A person seeking better sleep, for example, may simultaneously value relaxation and emotional relief; another person may approach the same practice primarily for self-awareness, personal reflection, or a contemplative experience. This distinction provides the conceptual bridge to the proposed Mind Genomics approach. The relevant question is not simply whether different motivations exist—which existing qualitative and experiential evidence provides preliminary indications of—but whether combinations of motivations, expectations, perceived benefits, and meanings can be systematically examined across individuals. Such an approach could move beyond describing individual experiences toward investigating whether recurring patterns of valuation and expectation emerge when people consider multiple aspects of the same Yoga Nidra practice.

Mind Genomics as a Proposed Approach

Mind Genomics provides an experimental approach for examining how individuals respond to combinations of elements rather than evaluating each element only in isolation. The approach combines elements into short vignettes that respondents evaluate using a common rating scale, after which the responses can be deconstructed to estimate the relative contribution of individual elements and to examine patterns of response across individuals [16,17]. Mind Genomics has been used across a range of fields, including food and feeding, marketing, education, healthcare, social and political sciences, and law [20-22]. Within healthcare and public-health research, Mind Genomics has also been used to examine health-related communication, public-health decision-making, perceived well-being, and responses to health messages [23-25].

Drawing on the literature describing Yoga Nidra, four domains can be considered as candidate domains for a Mind Genomics exploration: reasons for seeking Yoga Nidra, desired benefits, experiential meaning, and personal expectations [1,8,14]. A 4 × 4 structure can illustrate how these domains might be represented through sixteen candidate elements. BimiLeap (www.bimileap.com) is a web-based platform for designing, implementing, and analyzing Mind Genomics studies. Its Idea Coach is an AI-based tool that can assist in generating candidate questions and elements for a Mind Genomics study. For the present Perspective, Idea Coach was used to generate candidate elements based on the four domains identified for the proposed Yoga Nidra model. The sixteen candidate elements are presented in Table 1 to illustrate how the proposed four-domain structure could be translated into a Mind Genomics design (Table 1).

Table 1: Illustrative 4 × 4 Mind Genomics structure for Yoga Nidra.

Silo and Story Question	Candidate Elements
Silo A — Reasons for Seeking Yoga Nidra <i>Why might an individual seek Yoga Nidra?</i>	A1. I would seek Yoga Nidra when I want better sleep or deeper rest.
	A2. I would seek Yoga Nidra when I want relief from stress or mental tension.
	A3. I would seek Yoga Nidra when I want greater emotional balance and inner calm.
	A4. I would seek Yoga Nidra when I want to explore myself more deeply.
Silo B — Desired Benefits <i>What might an individual value from Yoga Nidra?</i>	B1. I would value Yoga Nidra if it helped me experience deep physical and mental relaxation.
	B2. I would value Yoga Nidra if it helped me feel mentally refreshed and restored.
	B3. I would value Yoga Nidra if it helped me become more focused and attentive.
	B4. I would value Yoga Nidra if it helped me understand and respond to my emotions.
Silo C — Experiential Meaning <i>How might an individual understand or experience Yoga Nidra?</i>	C1. For me, Yoga Nidra could be a period of deep rest and restoration.
	C2. For me, Yoga Nidra could be an opportunity for greater inner awareness.
	C3. For me, Yoga Nidra could be a space for personal reflection and self-exploration.
	C4. For me, Yoga Nidra could be a contemplative practice that goes beyond ordinary relaxation.
Silo D — Personal Expectations <i>What might an individual expect from Yoga Nidra?</i>	D1. I would expect Yoga Nidra to help quiet mental activity while maintaining awareness.
	D2. I would expect Yoga Nidra to give me a sense of calm without requiring physical effort.
	D3. I would expect Yoga Nidra to allow me to remain aware while entering a deeply relaxed state.
	D4. I would expect Yoga Nidra to create an opportunity for personal insight or reflection.

The sixteen elements shown in Table 1 are illustrative candidate elements, included to demonstrate the proposed Mind Genomics model rather than to constitute a finalized empirical stimulus set.

In a future empirical implementation, BimiLeap would systematically combine the elements into experimentally designed multi-element vignettes. Mind Genomics typically presents respondents with combinations of elements rather than isolated attributes, allowing the overall response to each combination to be examined while retaining the ability to estimate the contribution of individual elements [16,22].

For illustration, a vignette might combine elements such as:

Illustrative vignette 1

I would seek Yoga Nidra when I want better sleep or deeper rest.

I would value Yoga Nidra if it helped me feel mentally refreshed and restored.

For me, Yoga Nidra could be a period of deep rest and restoration.

I would expect Yoga Nidra to help quiet mental activity while maintaining awareness.

Another illustrative combination might be:

Illustrative vignette 2

I would seek Yoga Nidra when I want to explore myself more deeply.

I would value Yoga Nidra if it helped me become more focused and attentive.

For me, Yoga Nidra could be a space for personal reflection and self-exploration.

I would expect Yoga Nidra to create an opportunity for personal insight or reflection.

In an empirical implementation, respondents would evaluate the resulting vignettes using the following rating question:

"How personally relevant is this description of Yoga Nidra to you?"

- a. Not at all relevant
- b. Slightly relevant
- c. Moderately relevant
- d. Very relevant
- e. Extremely relevant

The rating would capture the respondent's overall personal relevance of the combination of Yoga Nidra attributes presented in the vignette, rather than clinical efficacy, treatment response, or the effectiveness of a specific Yoga Nidra protocol. The use of combination-based ratings is consistent with the fundamental Mind

Genomics approach, in which respondents evaluate combinations of ideas and the resulting ratings are subsequently deconstructed to estimate the contribution of individual elements [16]. Following completion of data collection, BimiLeap would automatically analyze the accumulated vignette ratings using its integrated Mind Genomics analytical workflow. The platform would estimate the relative contribution of individual elements to the overall personal-relevance rating using Ordinary Least-Squares (OLS) regression and group respondents with similar response patterns into empirically derived mindsets using clustering approaches, including K-means clustering. These analyses would provide an empirical basis for examining both the relative salience of individual Yoga Nidra elements and differences in patterns of valuation across respondents [22,23,25].

The resulting vignette responses would allow BimiLeap to identify patterns in how respondents value different combinations of Yoga Nidra-related attributes. Through its integrated analytical workflow, these response patterns would be used to identify empirically derived mindsets reflecting different patterns of valuation. If distinct and sufficiently stable mindsets were subsequently identified, a Personal Viewpoint Identifier (PVI) could be explored in later research to examine how new respondents align with these empirically derived response patterns. PVI has been used in a range of Mind Genomics applications, with examples from health and communication research including communication regarding child obesity and diabetes-related messaging [22,23]. Through this approach, Mind Genomics may complement the predominantly outcome-oriented Yoga Nidra literature by providing a structured way to examine what individuals seek, what they value, what they expect, and which aspects of the Yoga Nidra experience they find personally relevant. Rather than assuming these patterns in advance, the proposed approach allows them to emerge from respondents' evaluations of systematically varied combinations of Yoga Nidra-related attributes.

Potential Significance and Future Research

The proposed Mind Genomics perspective may add a person-centered dimension to the predominantly outcome-oriented Yoga Nidra literature. Conventional research can examine whether Yoga Nidra is associated with changes in outcomes such as sleep, stress, anxiety, or well-being, whereas the proposed approach asks what individuals seek from the practice, what they value, and which expectations or meanings are most personally relevant. Understanding these patterns may have value beyond describing individual preferences. If empirical Mind Genomics research identifies recurring combinations of motivations, anticipated benefits, and experiential meanings, these patterns could generate hypotheses for future outcome-oriented research. For example, aspects of Yoga Nidra that are highly valued by respondents but relatively underrepresented among commonly measured outcomes could provide directions for further investigation. The approach may also contribute to understanding engagement and communication. If different patterns of perceived value emerge, future research

could examine whether different ways of describing Yoga Nidra—such as emphasizing sleep, relaxation, emotional well-being, self-awareness, or contemplative experience—are perceived as more personally relevant by different groups. This would concern how individuals understand and engage with the practice, rather than implying that different individuals require different Yoga Nidra protocols.

Future empirical research will be needed to determine whether the proposed elements produce meaningful and reproducible response patterns and whether empirically derived mindsets emerge. If distinct and sufficiently stable mindsets are identified and reproduced in subsequent research, a Personal Viewpoint Identifier (PVI) could then be explored as a later extension.

Conclusion

Yoga Nidra research has increasingly examined a broad range of outcomes, including sleep, stress, anxiety, mood, and well-being, while qualitative and experiential evidence also indicates that individuals may approach and experience the practice in different ways. This Perspective highlights a complementary methodological question: what do individuals seek from Yoga Nidra, what do they value, and which expectations or meanings are most personally relevant to them? Mind Genomics provides a potential empirical approach for systematically examining these dimensions through combinations of Yoga Nidra-related attributes rather than treating motivations, anticipated benefits, and experiential meanings as isolated choices. By analyzing how individuals respond to such combinations, future research can investigate whether recurring patterns of valuation and expectation emerge and whether empirically derived mindsets can be identified and reproduced. This perspective therefore proposes a shift from considering Yoga Nidra only in terms of what the practice does toward also examining what people seek from the practice. Such an approach may broaden the understanding of individual perspectives on Yoga Nidra and generate new directions for research into its perceived value, engagement, and communication. If stable and reproducible mindsets are established through future empirical research, subsequent work may further explore their practical applications, including the potential use of a Personal Viewpoint Identifier.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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