


COLUMBIA

NEWS SERVICE

[Home](#) » [Student Work](#) » [Columbia News Service](#) » [Apr 4, 2006](#)

Striking a pose, stark naked

By Charlotte Maitre

 [CLICK THIS TEXT for high-resolution images and text-only story \[http://jscms.jrn.columbia.edu/cns/2006-04-04/maitre-nudeyoga/story_syndication\]](#)

Though "Hot Nude Yoga" is the name of Aaron Star's exercise class in Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood, he insists that his classes are not a meat market in disguise.

"People come to the class to get over being self-conscious," Star said.

For the past few years, naked yoga has been growing in popularity, especially among gay men who are flocking to private yoga studios from Oregon to Los Angeles to exercise au naturel.

Women and straight men, although in smaller numbers, are also getting into the scene. They rave about the sense of community they say practicing yoga in the buff creates and the feeling of freedom they experience.

Naked yoga even spurred the San Francisco district attorney's office to declare that nudity was not a crime. It all started when Georges Monty (aka Naked Yoga Guy) caused a stir at Fisherman's Wharf. In broad daylight, the 58-year-old naturist practiced yoga naked, a move that infuriated some passersby. He was charged with a misdemeanor count of creating a public nuisance but the DA dropped the charges.

In the summer of 2003, a 22-year-old female yogi in Salem, Mass., had no such luck when police received multiple complaints from witnesses who saw her doing nude yoga in Minto-Brown Island Park. She was jailed.

In Manhattan, Wendy Tremayne introduced coed naked yoga in February 2005 in the Union Square area. Tremayne, 38, started the classes at the urging of a group of nudists.

"Personally, I prefer to teach naked yoga than clothed yoga," she said. "I'm being with myself however I am. I am not hiding."

Thom Praxis, a naked yoga teacher in San Francisco, said that enthusiasts of yoga are exploring the freedom of naturism (going without clothes as a social practice) and combining that experience with other activities, including athletics.

In yoga, he said, "You're so busy with engaging your body that you lose sight of the fact you're not wearing any clothing."

Star argues that it does not seem natural to put clothes on.

"Clothes get in the way," he said. "They're cumbersome." Star, 34, has recently launched a line of four DVDs titled "Hot Nude Yoga."

Joseph Doherty is a psychotherapist in California who practices tantra yoga. He

says that his naked classes honor body, mind and spirit by blending psychology, Buddhism and tantra yoga in an open, safe and natural state of being unclothed.

"I also wanted a place for gay/bi men to be able to be together naked and honor their maleness that was not about having sex, but that honored our sexuality as a part of the whole of who we are," he said.

Praxis echoed the sentiment. After participating in and teaching nude yoga at various naturist gatherings over the years, he decided to create a class for men in 2001.

"For me, it's the celebration of the body in its purist form, and the healthy athletic camaraderie of community with men," Praxis said.

For students like Clark Shu and David Pasteelnick, naked yoga teaches first and foremost tolerance of other's imperfections and the ability to let go of one's ego.

Shu, who has taken the "Hot Nude Yoga" class with Star, found the experience to be very challenging in the beginning. Standing in a line full of men waiting to take the class, he said, "freaked" him out.

"But as soon as I entered the studio and saw the practice of letting go of your judgment of another person's naked body or the judgment of your own, I did start to benefit from the practice and felt a new form of energy that I never knew existed," he said.

Doherty says that although his classes cater mainly to gay men, men of any sexual orientation are welcome. The classes are about honoring maleness, not just gayness. While straight males are welcome in Doherty's class, the classes are not coed.

Tremayne, however, says that her coed group benefits from the same sense of community.

"They did not come with a sexual agenda," she said of her students. "They preferred the freedom of being themselves without being judged, even for an hour."

A ballet dancer for many years, Shu said nude yoga helped him to let go of the insecurities that he had about his self-image.

"No room here to try and improve one's appearance with clothing," Shu said. "But certainly a chance to really see what a perfectly placed asana is supposed to look like." Asana is a Sanskrit word that literally means "a seat" but in the practice of yoga refers to a pose or posture.

Star said that men who are afraid of stripping naked for yoga should think of it as a very natural state that clothes can hinder.

For her part, Tremayne is seeking more female students.

"I think women are missing out by being inhibited," she said. "Naked yoga is an open-minded and terrific place for women to explore body acceptance and being that free in a safe environment."

E-mail: cm2373@columbia.edu

