

# University of Alberta

Making Meaning in Modern Yoga:  
Methodological Dialogues on Commodification and Contradiction

by

Laura Graham

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## **Abstract**

This study explores the meaning of commodification in modern yoga and finds that commodification often contradicts yoga's ethical principles. Two different analyses of this phenomenon also produce contradictory accounts. One analysis attempts to understand how practitioners experience commodification, while the other critiques discourse and power relations. Both draw on seven main themes: authenticity, health, openness, balance, service, social good, and access. Practitioners evinced a practice-focus and found commodification positive insofar as it generally supports the themes and increases participation. It was negative, however, when it contradicted them or decreased access. The second analysis argues that through the main themes commodification generally reifies existing power relations, often re-articulates yogic philosophy and practice through western discourses, and can deter people from practicing. The contradictions between the two analyses point toward larger methodological and theoretical issues, however, and can therefore open up a conversation about the always political and partial nature of research.

# **Making Meaning in Modern Yoga:**

## **Methodological Dialogues on Commodification and Contradiction**

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**Chapter 1**  
**Introductions**

## Introductions

Modern Yoga is an increasingly popular practice, a mercurial phenomenon, and a highly polysemic signifier. Given the complex, often problematic processes which have resulted in its current diversity and popularity, one cannot ignore its increasing commodification and some of the contradictions this involves. Modern, transnational yoga is both commercial and ascetic; fitness-directed and spiritually inflected; innovative and traditional; legitimated by medical science while claiming to move far beyond it; intensely individual and deeply community-oriented; espousing equality and non-judgement while remaining highly elitist. This study explores the meaning of commodification in modern yoga, and specifically examines two important aspects of this phenomenon: the experience of commodification for practitioners, and the discursive formations and power relations at play in modern yoga.

I utilize multiple methodologies and methods to address this question. Three methods are employed: participant-observation at an Edmonton yoga studio, in-depth interviews with eight yoga instructors and one studio owner/instructor, and a discourse analysis of the *Yoga Journal* website. I also conduct two analyses using different methodologies, and these constitute the axis around which the research question gravitates. The first methodology, hermeneutics, rests on a political and ethical commitment to represent practitioners' experiences as faithfully as possible. In contrast, the second analysis is based in a post-structuralist paradigm and examines the discursive construction of commodified modern yoga and the operation of power/knowledge strategies therein.

The hermeneutic analysis finds that commodification is problematic but beneficial overall because it increases general awareness of, desire, and ability to practice yoga, which will improve the world on both the micro and macro scales. This argument is a result of the practice-

focus evinced in the data, the insistence that one must *actually do* yoga to understand it. Because of this experiential value, commodification must deter or devalue practice to become problematic. In contrast, the poststructuralist analysis is much more critical of commodification in yoga and argues that through commodification yoga increasingly re-ifies problematic power relations and discourses. In the process it loses conceptual cohesion regarding its own doctrines, yet this conflict is essential to the production of modern yoga as a commodity which purports to solve the problems of modernity. Seven themes are central to the meaning of commodification in yoga: authenticity, health, openness, service, balance, social good and access.

The contradictions between these two analyses open up an interesting theoretical discussion rooted in deeper issues, particularly in their ontology, epistemology and criteria for reliability and validity. Conversely, we find that there are more agreements between the two perspectives, more common theoretical ground, and more locations from which they can proceed in productive dialogue than one might have supposed. But this is not the only interesting discussion to be had. Increasingly large numbers of people practice yoga, and my analysis indicates that their experiences and the discursive field in which those experiences occur can inform a diverse set of conversations. From embodiment and practice to (non)-judgement and critique; disciplinary technologies and practices of freedom to representation and modernity; health and commodification to authenticity and social good. These are large questions, and as such the study of modern yoga can contribute to larger conversations in sociology, cultural studies, and the humanities more generally.

There are seven chapters in this project. The initial terms of analysis are laid out in this introduction, providing a working definition of modern yoga and examining the context of its commodification. Chapter two explores the theoretical and methodological configuration and

concerns of the project, while chapter three provides a literature review of modern yoga research and analysis of authenticity relative to this literature.<sup>1</sup> In chapter four I take a brief detour to reflexively locate myself in relation to the project. Chapters five and six comprise substantive analyses through hermeneutic and post-structural methodological lenses, respectively. Finally, the conclusion examines some important points of dialogical exchange.

### **Modern Commodified Yoga? Terms of Analysis**

“Modern Yoga” designates our subject matter but it does not, in fact, tell us very much about it. The first term in this dyad, “modern”, offers a useful beginning point, as the content of “yoga” is historically bound in significant ways that reflect the division between modern and pre-modern. Further, this division is fundamental to both the representation and practice of modern yoga, a complex relationship which will come under close consideration in chapter 3 relative to authenticity. At this stage, however, it is important to stress that “pre-modern” and “modern” yoga should not be seen as distinct entities but as conceptual heuristics representing a diverse set of practices and beliefs. Indeed, as Singleton (2008) suggests, we might be better served to think of both modern and pre-modern traditions as *yogas*. Elizabeth De Michelis (2005; 2008) offers a useful timeline for defining modern yoga. She argues that the practice within approximately the last 150 years marks the modern era, and most scholars of modern yoga have adopted this timeline as well. It is generally considered to be the point at which *substantively different* modifications than those that had occurred before 1850 began within yogic practice, philosophy and representation, largely due to contact with Western colonialism (De Michelis, 2008).

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<sup>1</sup> I am aware that placing the theory chapter before the literature review is an unusual decision. The reason I have chosen to structure the thesis this way is that the literature allows for a useful critique of both the literature and some of the main themes of the project, particularly authenticity. However, this analysis would prove more difficult to understand in the absence of a theoretical orientation.

In addition, I follow Strauss (2005) in “seeing modernity as an attitude, a society’s way of relating to the world. More specifically, I define modernity as a critical mode of engagement in the world – a ‘project’ – that assumes unlimited progress is both possible and desirable. As a way of approaching the world, modernity directs our attention to certain key values, among them freedom and health” (p. 12). Strauss highlights the importance of twin emphases on individuality and globalization in modernization projects. Due to the uneven spread and vastly different successes and failures of such projects, Strauss (2005) conceptualizes “alternative modernities, here seen as many ‘fractured’ and perpetual projects reflecting a range of different aspirations.” (p. 13) Her concern with the manifold character of modernity and uneven spread of modernization is clearly echoed by Saukko (2003) in her dialogic methodology.

What do we mean by “yoga”, then? Though I have talked around it thus far, and particularly around its historical development, we still do not have a working definition. I have stated that yoga is a highly polysemic signifier, and this is arguably the case. It can refer to a wide array of religious, philosophical, metaphysical, esoteric, secular, therapeutic, health, fitness, and physiological theories and practices. De Michelis (2008) provides a useful definition of modern yoga as it is generally treated here. It will constitute the basic operational definition throughout this paper, regardless of specific elaborations or usages that might come under consideration:

those disciplines that are, to a greater or lesser extent, rooted in South Asian contexts and more specifically draw inspiration from certain philosophies, teachings, and practices of Hinduism. These teachings and practices, by way of export, syncretic assimilation, and subsequent acculturation processes have by now become an integral part of (primarily) urban cultures worldwide and are usually represented, disseminated, and discussed primarily (though not exclusively) by way of the English language. (pp. 19-20)

De Michelis proposes 5 different types of modern yoga, which again should be used as heuristics rather than set categories: Psychosomatic, neo-Hindu, Postural, Meditational, and

Denominational. Postural yoga (MPY) is the leading transnational form and focuses on *asana* (postures) and *pranayama* (yogic breathing) and usually occurs in a sessional or classroom environment. Common transnational usage of the term “yoga” generally refers to MPY, though modern meditational yoga (MMY) is also popular. The other variants of yoga are less likely to be found in the transnational context on which I will focus. MMY and MPY consist of a wide range of philosophical, metaphysical, religious and theoretical articulations, but these are all grounded in an experiential epistemology. Their religio-philosophical doctrines are therefore less developed and more polyvalent than most pre-modern traditions or other modern types (De Michelis, 2005). MPY has, however, “contributed the most to developing and codifying relatively advanced and sophisticated canons of postural theory and practice” (De Michelis, 2008, p. 22). Due to its experiential epistemology, it is assumed that practitioners will grasp these theories and practices based on their own experiences and rationalizations. In contrast, Denominational forms of modern yoga expect a high degree of loyalty from their members and jealously guard their much more developed doctrines, while downplaying *asana* (De Michelis, 2005). Yoga can also refer to a set of strictly physical exercises, divorced from the religious, spiritual, philosophical and metaphysical meanings described above; but these are not hegemonic models of yoga, despite anxiety in yoga communities and media that they are on the rise.

Marx defines a commodity as an object with a use-value and an exchange-value, which may not be equivalent, embedded in relations of production and consumption. Commodification is the process whereby an object or practice becomes a commodity produced within relations of production and consumption (<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/ch01.htm>). This is the basic foundation for my conceptualization of commodification as yoga has indeed become a practice with a use-value and exchange-value circulating in

relations of production and consumption. However, this may not necessarily be different from pre-modern yoga, or at least not all pre-modern forms. For example, De Michelis (2008) stresses that pre-modern forms of yoga were also entangled in issues of wealth and power in relation to caste structures and religious schools. Singleton (2010) shows that militarized *Hatha* yogins controlled trade routes in Northern India from the fifteenth century until the early nineteenth and yogic renunciators begging alms while practicing ascetic poses were a common presence in public spaces. It is not the fact of commodification, but the degree which is truly remarkable in modern yoga; much like the differentiation between modern and pre-modern forms, this should be seen as a heuristic definition. In addition, De Michelis (2008) lists several of “the forms of commodification characteristic of global capitalism and postmodern consumer societies” which exemplify both the degree and character of modern yoga’s commodification: “The proliferation of ‘yoga goods’ and media; the growth of commercially run yoga studios and retreats; the registration (carried out or attempted) of yoga patents, trade marks, and copyrights.” (De Michelis, 2008, pp. 25) I would consider several other examples as central to this process and my work: the registration and certification of yoga instructors, the marketing and discursive strategies utilized to sell yoga, yoga services and products, and those discursive strategies that use yoga to sell other items through lifestyle branding.

Commodification’s location within an ideology of consumerism should also be taken into consideration as relatively unique in modern yoga. Gilbert (2008) conceptualizes consumerism as an ideology that “privileges the consumer/retailer transaction as the normative form of social relations and which seeks to promote it as such even in social spheres where it does not manifest spontaneously or easily” (p. 554). He uses the example of the relationship between teachers and

students to demonstrate this, which is particularly apt for this study as it was a problematic topic for many of my participants.

Finally, it is worth noting that the definition of yoga I have provided is quite open, and purposefully so. Sara, an instructor and owner of the studio at which I volunteered, describes her studio as a “Yoga Generalist”, and in this spirit her studio will be called Yoga Generalist from here on in. Though in practice this refers mainly to the wide array of postural forms performed there, the studio does indeed offer non-postural systems on occasion, particularly meditative ones. Many of the instructors interviewed espoused this view as well, mixing a number of lineages and practice traditions in their teaching in addition to fitness and health sources. Likewise, the *Yoga Journal* website offers a wide picture of yoga, though again it focuses implicitly, and often explicitly, on postural forms. Many scholars of modern yoga focus on a specific system of yoga such as Iyengar yoga (De Michelis, 2005) or Sivananda’s Divine Light Society (Strauss, 2005) due to the specificity that these systems offer. Yet it would be inappropriate to do this given the context of my study.

More importantly, however, it is this very lack of specificity in the term which interests me, particularly given that while the primary sources consulted in this study may be practicing and referring to mainly postural forms of yoga, they generally *do not conceive of it this way*. This most often translates into “yoga off the mat”, the application and embodiment of philosophies and experiences that are, none the less, firmly embedded in MPY. They purposefully utilize yoga as a sliding signifier, a term which can be used in any number of ways, and this polysemy is in fact deeply implicated in yoga’s commercial and personal possibilities.

### **Popular Practice, Brilliant Branding, and Booming Business**

“Yoga is the *Survivor* of the culture wars: unbloodied, unmuddied, unbothered by the media’s slings and arrows, its leotard still as pristine as its reputation.”

(Love, 2006, pp. 80)

In 2008 *Yoga Journal* conducted a survey titled “Yoga in America”. They found that Americans spent \$5.7 billion a year on yoga classes and products, ranging from equipment, clothing, vacations and media (including DVDs, videos, books and magazines). As their press release notes, this number is up 87% from the previous study conducted in 2004; yoga-related spending has nearly doubled since that time. Yoga has also remained a popular practice over this period, sitting at about 15.8 million people in the US, or 6.9 % of the population. Another 8% of non-practitioners (18.3 million people) are “very or extremely interested” in yoga, a triple increase from 2004, while 4.1% (9.4 million) say they will definitely try yoga in the next year. Yet *Yoga Journal* is quick to point out that while the number of practitioners is sizable and their spending has increased substantially, the actual number of people practicing yoga has *decreased*. In 2004 16.5 million people did yoga, compared to the 2008 number of 15.8 million. How do we make sense of this relationship?

I approach the journal’s findings with a degree of scepticism, particularly because the website acts as one of my primary sources and *Yoga Journal* has good commercial reasons to post high numbers regarding yoga’s popularity and profitability (and therefore considerable potential bias). In addition, I was unable to determine what *Yoga Journal* defines as “practice”; this may mean having attended one class, occasional classes, or a daily home practice, all of which have different implications. Likewise, there is no indication of how spending was calculated. Nonetheless, I will use these numbers as some of my main evidence regarding commodification and take them, relatively speaking, at face value. As there are no substantial academic statistics available on yoga practice and consumption most modern yoga scholars rely on this data set or similar, often commercially produced ones; indeed, studies conducted in other

countries and through other sources find very similar results (see De Michelis, 2005; Markula & Pringle, 2006; Strauss, 2005). Given their general acceptance within academic work and in lieu of alternate academic sources, I consider this an acceptable risk. In addition, though these numbers should be taken with a large grain of salt, the basic relationship they find between spending and practitioners is troubling. It is unlikely that methodological issues, such as the definition of practice, could substantially effect this large a difference between spending and population. If for example, practice was under-operationalized at only one class, this would likely indicate a larger difference between spending and population, rather than smaller one.<sup>ii</sup>

This rise in spending relative to population is consistent with my observations that yoga has become increasingly commodified over the 2004-2008 period, both in terms of representation and practice. Indeed, I expect that this trend has continued (if not intensified) since 2008 based on my field observations. Nor should this development be considered unique to the 2004-2008 period, as many modern yoga scholars have noted the unprecedented commodification of modern yoga discussed in the previous section. More intense commodification is not a substantial enough explanation for the significant increase in spending *Yoga Journal* notes, but rather a description; how and *why* has yoga become increasingly commodified during this time?

Patricia Fox, senior vice president and group manager of *Yoga Journal's* parent company Active Interest Media's (AIM) 'Healthy Living Group' offers one explanation: "While the yoga population has stabilized, spending among practitioners has nearly doubled...Yoga practitioners

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<sup>ii</sup> According to the website, "data for this survey were collected by the Harris Interactive Service Bureau on behalf of *Yoga Journal*. The poll surveyed 5,050 respondents, a statistically representative sample of the total U.S. population. *Yoga Journal* commissioned RRC Associates, a research firm in Boulder, Colo., to perform the data analysis." [http://www.yogajournal.com/advertise/press\\_releases/10](http://www.yogajournal.com/advertise/press_releases/10)

are a devoted consumer group supporting a thriving and vibrant market.” The suggestion that the yoga population has stabilized holds, but the idea that devotion can act as an adequate explanatory mechanism requires further exploration. As Jenkins (2006) argues, brand loyalty motivated by emotional attachment and trans-media production has increasingly informed marketing theory and practice over the past decade. One CEO encourages companies to “develop multi-sensory (and multi-media) experiences that create more vivid impressions and to tap the power of stories to shape consumer identifications” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 70). This strategy is indeed evidenced on *Yoga Journal’s* website. A brief detour recounting the commercial history of the magazine offers some useful insights and indicates how the strategy suggested by Jenkins (2006) has been implemented at *Yoga Journal*. It is useful not only for providing necessary background information on one of my primary sources, but I would also argue that it might reflect larger trends in the yoga industry.

*Yoga Journal* was established in 1975 by members of the California Yoga Teachers Association in San Francisco. The magazine expanded its circulation from 55,000 to 66,000 between 1990 and 1995, was purchased in 1998 by yoga practitioner and former Citicorp investment banker John Abbott, who re-launched it in 2000. Kathryn Arnold was appointed editor in chief in 1998 and stayed in this position until 2006, when Kaitlin Quistgaard took her place and AIM purchased the publication (<http://www.yogajournal.com/global/34>). During Arnold’s stay circulation tripled and advertising revenues quadrupled (Love, 2006). Though it began as a small publication, *Yoga Journal* is now one of the largest magazines available on modern yoga, with a current circulation of 360,000 per issue and a readership of 1,500,000 (<http://www.yogajournal.com/global/34>).

The website was launched in 2001 and Schultz (2006) reports that in 2006 it garnered 500,000 unique visitors per month. The website's inauguration is a particularly important milestone because the site is a highly inter-textual, multi-media, multi-sensory platform. It utilizes articles, images, podcasts, videos, music, downloads, applications for other media platforms (such as i-phones), message boards, blogs, a sequence builder (complete with legal disclaimer), studio finder and advertising for both its own products and others. In addition, *Yoga Journal* lists conferences, books, DVDs, calendars, for-sale website content (including many of its' downloads), and studio insurance among its ancillary businesses, all of which appear on the website. This intensifies the degree of commodification and inter-textuality, as readers are constantly cross-referencing the website, magazine, other media and 'real-life' content (attending conferences, practicing along to videos, attending a local studio found on the website, or purchasing the advertised natural health care products, for example). Clearly, *Yoga Journal* is a trans-media franchise offering multi-sensory and multi-media experiences, and these are not confined to the website but intersect in this space.

AIM also owns a number of other interests that focus on lifestyle brand-building, advertising for many of which appear on the *Yoga Journal* website. This multi-media, multi-sensory strategy is not confined to large companies like AIM or publications such as *Yoga Journal*; Yoga Generalist offers workshops and retreats, sells clothes, mats, blocks, books, music, DVDs, and other items. The studio has been in operation for seven years, and did not begin selling yoga merchandise (outside of books and music) until five years ago. Though Sara attempted to run the studio without commercial products, and was in fact opposed to selling these items, she found that she was unable to sustain the business without them. Sara was not actively pursuing the same kind of marketing strategy as AIM, but the possibility that this

strategy has penetrated deeply into the lives of many practitioners in a normative way finds support in this case. Though of course basic cost/sales economics enters in here, it seems clear that practitioners expect this kind of multi-media, multi-sensory experience and are willing to pay for it.

Jenkins (2006) also argues for the central role of affect in this new marketing paradigm and in fact calls it 'affective economics'. Affective economics seek to understand and exploit the emotional underpinnings of purchasing decisions rather than rational processes or traditional quantitative measures. This is what makes multi-media, multi-sensory advertising strategies so effective; they generate emotional attachments alongside rational decision making, and this in turn generates greater consumer loyalty. Jenkins (2006) uses Coke and American Idol as an example because the success of this show and its sponsor(s) rests as much on the emotional attachments loyal fans develop as the multi-media and multi-sensory experiences they utilize (ranging from the show itself to albums, concerts, online content, etc.). Indeed, the depth of market penetration into everyday lives in this strategy depends on loyal fans seeking out these various experiences for emotional gratification. Consumers now have more power to do so in the increasingly multi-media environment of today's market, or alternately to ignore media messages, than ever before. As Jenkins (2006) argues, advertisers must adapt to this changed environment and AIM's claim that it "serves its **LOYAL** base of constituents" certainly speaks to a forced democratic turn. But this does not guarantee practitioner's increased agency or ensure that their needs will be better served; after all, AIM is "serving niche consumer **GROWTH** markets" because of their potential profitability, not the other way around. As Jenkins (2006) argues, the democratic turn in new media offers as many opportunities for commodification as agency, but it *does* give fans more room to move. In choosing to listen to and exploit consumers

in this emotion-focused way, consumers are given more opportunities to speak out and against their favourite companies than ever before.

Affective economics are front and centre on the *Yoga Journal* website. Its multi-media, multi-sensory strategy ensures that *Yoga Journal* can become deeply embedded in everyday experiences and practices, encouraging emotional attachment and loyal commitment. I would argue that emotion plays a more important role in yoga than this, however. A site search for the key term “joy” yields 11,400 results and, in addition, was a key coding theme in interviews. The ‘ShopYJ’ section of the site unambiguously appeals to consumers emotionally: “Yoga Journal products are about transformation. Our books, back issues, and yoga dvds will help you lead a more balanced and nourishing life”

([http://www.yogajournal.com/shop/?utm\\_source=yjbusinessnav&utm\\_medium=link&utm\\_campaign=yjbusinessnav](http://www.yogajournal.com/shop/?utm_source=yjbusinessnav&utm_medium=link&utm_campaign=yjbusinessnav)). Transformation, balance, health and wellness are key themes across yogic discourse, and were coveted by my participants and under frequent discussion at Yoga Generalist. Emotion is integral to yoga practice, and emotional health was one of my participant’s primary reasons for practicing yoga. Given modern yoga’s experiential epistemology, yoga is a potential gem for affective economics! The *Yoga Journal* website suggests that this practice can and should be augmented by commercial products. In addition, one wonders whether the emotional experience itself is being sold at yoga events like the *Yoga Journal* conferences. My participants would likely disagree with this idea, but discursively it seems very likely that this is what is happening. In short, though loyalty does in fact go a long way in explaining the increased profitability of *Yoga Journal* over the past decade (and possibly the yoga industry more generally), this is by no means a transparent, natural or accidental

occurrence. It is, more likely, a cumulative effect of commercial strategies in yoga media and practice.

Bill Harper, publisher of *Yoga Journal*, also claims that “Yoga is no longer simply a singular pursuit but a lifestyle choice and an established part of our health and cultural landscape”. This statement reflects both the emotional and lifestyle potentials of yoga branding. It is important to clarify here, as the statement indicates, that there is in fact a *double* branding occurring in the yoga industry. The first lies at the level of the specific product or service (or “pursuit”, in Harper’s terminology). Instructors must brand themselves in order to recruit enough students to earn a living, compensate their time and costs (in the case of part-time teachers) or to turn a large profit (as is the case for mega-gurus), and this can vary from mustering charisma on a bad day to legal patenting of yoga styles, as Bikram is known for. Studios and lineages must establish a brand to remain commercially viable, particularly with the increasing number of studios and chain studios (like the Canadian-born Moksha). Specific products or media texts (such as *Yoga Journal* or clothing mogul Lululemon) must present themselves as sufficiently authentic and authoritative in comparison to other products in order to persuade consumers to purchase them, and so on. The second level, which Harper references as a “lifestyle choice”, consists of branding yoga generally. Yoga’s polysemy is extremely important here; the word sits at a semantic register which can be both very specific and very vague, allowing yoga to represent specific products and a “lifestyle” at the same time. Given that most pre-modern and modern traditions involve a code of ethics for living (see chapter 3), this is not necessarily out of step with yogic systems of belief and practice. But it also means that AIM can easily draw discursive connections between its various businesses by drawing on various strands of meaning. Like the loyalty which has pushed yoga’s commercial profitability upward, these discursive strategies are

not accidental but historically and institutionally grounded, easily pulled into a constellation of similar, polysemic “lifestyle” meanings.

That *Yoga Journal* found three times the number of people interested in yoga in 2008 compared to 2004 is a fairly clear indication that Yoga’s branding power at the general level has increased. Not only its recognition (which outpaces participation!) but its positive semiotic values are up. In 2006 the media produced approximately eight stories a day on yoga (Love, 2006). It has appeared twice on the cover of *Time*, is endorsed by many A-list celebrities and has “ascended to the category of ‘platform agnostic,’ the highest praise marketers can conjure for any kind of content, trend, or person” (Love, 2006, p. 81). Love (2006) analyzes the representation yoga in American media beginning in the 1800’s and notes that “it has been feared, loathed, mocked, kicked to the fringes of society, associated with sexual promiscuity, criminal fraud, and runaway immigration. Really. Which makes its recent media beatification all the more surprising” (p. 81). The use of yoga in unrelated commercial product sales is one of the prime indicators of yoga’s adoption into consumer systems and popular discourse, as yoga must signify a wide range of meanings to be usefully attached to other products. A recent Koodoo mobile commercial, which draws on themes of flexibility and harmony while showing a class of yogis moving through various poses, offers a good example here. Flexibility is a key theme in modern yoga which extends from the flexible body through to the flexible mind and life, allowing individuals to adapt to the stresses of modern existence (Saukko, 2005). Koodoo draws on these themes to indicate that their flexible plans allow this same kind of freedom while capitalizing on the cultural cache of flexible bodies open to the objectifying gaze. In this respect it is particularly relevant that the class is populated by young, attractive women who are asked suggestively to “hold, hold, hooollldd...” by the leering Koodoo mascot.

The percentage of people practicing yoga in Canada is relatively similar to that found by *Yoga Journal* in the United States, though there are no numbers available on the value of the industry here. The Print Measure Bureau found that in 2005 5.5% of adults or 1.4 million people practiced yoga, an increase of 15% from 2004 and 45.4% from 2003. One in twelve non-practitioners, approximately 2.1 million people, claimed they would try yoga in the next twelve months (Philp, 2009).<sup>iii</sup> While it would be ideal to obtain financial figures on the Canadian side, given the number of practitioners in Canada and their access to American media and products it is reasonable to allow the American numbers to stand in, particularly given that *Yoga Journal* is widely available and accessible in Canada despite being an American company. When all of this evidence is pieced together, it is fairly clear that yoga is very popular, and even more profitable.

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<sup>iii</sup> The same caution applies here regarding data sources as applies to the *Yoga Journal* survey, as do the same defences.

## **Chapter Two**

# **Strategic Research: Theory, Methodology, Methods**

## **Strategic Research: Theory, Methodology and Method**

There are a number of ways one could approach the commodification of modern yoga. As my initial analysis indicates, one tactic might revolve around the analysis of statistics and marketing strategy to determine the ways in which modern yoga is commodified. But this would not necessarily address its meaning or take us very far; or at least, not very far in the direction I am aiming with my research questions – the experience of commodification and the power/knowledge effects it generates.

Though these questions are both concerned with commodification, they tend to represent different methodological and political commitments which can easily clash, as I found to be the case during a pilot study conducted in the fall of 2009. Indeed, this pilot study asked the same questions using four of the interviews included in this project and the *Yoga Journal* website, crystallizing the methodological strategy adopted here when the data left me with conflicts I could not resolve using one method. How could I respectfully, faithfully represent participants' assertions that commodification would increase yoga practice and thereby improve the world while critically evaluating the ways in which this discourse normalizes commodification? Likewise, how does one make sense of the experiential, emancipatory emphasis participants placed on concepts like spirituality or health in light of a post-structuralist analysis that demonstrates the restrictive discursive function these discourses often play in modern yoga?

This would not be possible within a singular methodological approach without subordinating one methodology to another. I am unwilling to settle for the disadvantages resulting from following only one methodology, nor is my previous training in cultural studies amenable to this choice. Saukko (2003) offers a compelling explanation for the academic origin

of my discomfort, as well as a research strategy which is well-suited to examining the questions posed above.

Cultural studies has traditionally been interested in three main areas of research and the interplay between them: “lived experience, texts or discourses, and the social context” (Saukko, 2003, p. 11). However, these agendas are grounded in different theoretical and political assumptions, making it difficult to examine their interactions. Developments in cultural studies theory and practice over the past 40 years have also increased this challenge.

Representing the lived experiences of individuals and groups faithfully demands a political and ethical commitment to participants and concomitant assumption that the scholar is capable of doing so. In this vein, new ethnographic methodologies have developed in response to criticisms that this research often did more to support the theoretical and political agendas of scholars than to faithfully represent the lived realities of the people under study, reifying institutionalized racism, sexism, classism, etc. These new methodologies aim to be truer to lived realities and eschew the notion of an ‘objective’ scholar better able to describe, analyze and explain phenomena than others, thus demanding more collaborative and attentive forms of research.

Studying discourses and texts demands a commitment in the opposite direction, evaluating that which shapes experience rather than experience itself. New methodologies have been developed in this area as well. They are driven by changes in media institutions, forms, content, and saturation alongside theoretical challenges to rigid structuralist methods, which often failed to conceptualize or problematize discourses and texts in suitably complex ways. The resulting poststructuralist methods strive to destabilize and unravel established truths, emphasising that there is no such thing as absolute truth and revealing the theoretical and

concrete operations of discourse and power in assertions that there are. They also demand a reflexive awareness of the researcher's political and historical position, insisting that research is part of the discursive formations under consideration, and often on the privileged side of power relations.

Finally, changing national and global structures have produced increasing inequality, demanding new approaches to studying them and highlighting the urgency of analyzing structural inequality over sometimes ineffectual-seeming analyses of media and culture. As Saukko (2003) says, "the new ethnographic quest to be truthful to the lived realities of other people runs into a contradiction with the poststructuralist aim to critically analyse discourses that form the very stuff out of which our experiences are made. The aim to understand 'real' complex, contemporary global economic and political processes and structures is also not easily combined with the new ethnographic and poststructuralist insistence that there are multiple 'realities'" (Saukko, 2003, pg. 15). If each of these analyses produce contradictory results, how much harder to identify their interactions?

Saukko (2003) proposes a solution to this dilemma: the contradictions these analyses produce are problems only *if* we assume that they are examining the same things and must all be assessed using the same measures of validity. Instead, we can work in the opposite direction by arguing that because these analyses are located on different theoretical and political ground, they need not be measured by the same ruler. They are not, in fact, scrutinizing the same things, as there are multiple realities. Saukko offers three methodological approaches roughly equivalent to the three main areas of interest in cultural studies research: hermeneutic, poststructuralist, and contextualist. This methodological framework allows us to highlight the always partial and political nature of research which, despite claims to the contrary, never has an exclusive,

objective and unified view of reality. Rather, research represents and reproduces multiple realities and truths, and must still follow measures of validity and reliability appropriate to each paradigm. Given multiple, contradictory and valid analyses one can then proceed in a dialogue, identifying their theoretical and practical agreements, disagreements and interactions. Though this methodological strategy destabilizes truth by conceptualizing realities in its place, they are not laissez-faire realities independent of one another. Rather, there is indeed interplay between them and rules of validity specific to each, and this is indicative not only of research methodology but also of social ontology.

While different methodologies may examine different realities, they can do so by utilizing same or different methods, writing styles, representational strategies, etc. (Saukko, 2003). The yoga instructors that I interviewed, for example, argued that commodification is problematic but ultimately useful because it increases awareness of and opportunities to practice yoga. This statement could be interpreted through a number of methodologies, but it is drawn from the same method. Are participants emphasising the importance of practice over commodification in lived reality and social relations, the experiential ‘actually doing’ core of modern yogic discourse? Are they demonstrating the discursive naturalization of commodification or articulating a means of coping with structural forces which are in many ways beyond their control? I have argued all of these things at various points based on different methodological perspectives and utilizing different measures of validity. But despite their different theses and validities, they all derive from the same method and the same data set. Likewise, my authorial strategy in representing the interviews greatly impacts the argument I can effectively make. Which quotes do I include or exclude? Do I draw narrative chunks from interview data or brief snippets, articulating my analysis in the language they have adopted or my

own analytical bent? All of these decisions contribute to the creation of research within certain political and theoretical boundaries, and may be used in different paradigms to entirely different effect. This remains true of analyses of other kinds of data, as well, such as *Yoga Journal*. They are not simply modes of presentation; they are productive elements of representation, creating research and realities. This project will therefore adopt multiple writing styles, which serves to highlight the partial and political nature of research and the role of the researcher, whose presence is not negated by writing strategies which erase her visible traces.

### **Two and a Half Methodologies**

Validity, as it is conventionally approached, is based on:

the positivist notion of science, which understands the purpose of research to be the creation of true and objective knowledge of self and reality, following a scientific method. The goal of positivist research is to produce valid results, understood to be nothing less than ‘the truth’... This criterion of truthfulness or validity is understood to be universal. This means the same rules of truthfulness apply, whether research wants to capture ‘objective reality’ (social facts, such as economic developments) or people’s subjective or intersubjective experiences (the meaning people give to their lives and actions) (Saukko, p. 17- 18).

In addition, positivist science understands its objects, including society, to be stable and observable (Saukko, 2003). Clearly, this definition of validity could never apply to the methodological framework or individual methodologies adopted here. In addition to the specific problems described in the previous section, Saukko further demonstrates the difficulty with general measures of validity in positivist paradigms. Both reliability and neutrality, for example, presume a detachment of the researcher which is not possible in either practical or theoretical terms on many occasions.<sup>iv</sup> This does not mean that we should disregard them entirely, as Harding (1992, 1995) argues, nor that positivist modes of analysis are never appropriate. Rather

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<sup>iv</sup> See Saukko (2003) for a detailed discussion and further references.

it indicates that we must be judicious in their use and reconfigure them to address their weaknesses.

In any case, both the data and the literature for this project indicate that a positive approach to validity would be inappropriate here. I have already indicated this issue regarding the data, which will be borne out through the project, while the literature will come under consideration in chapter 3.

In a hermeneutic approach the researcher should be as faithful to and respectful of the lived realities of others as possible, without presuming the role of an “objective” outsider, as this ignores the commitments of the researcher and the intrinsic sociality of research. One of the reasons Saukko (2003) chooses to call this methodology hermeneutic is that it often draws on hermeneutic and phenomenological theories and methods, such as “a dialogic shifting between the scholars’ Self and the perspective of the Other people being studied” (p. 57). But the conceptualization of hermeneutics being taken up here it is not limited to these theories and methods, nor are the two terms completely philosophically aligned.

A hermeneutic analysis should follow dialogic validity, which has three main criteria: Truthfulness, self-reflexivity and polyvocality. Truthfulness refers to the ability of participants to agree with the bulk of the study and often involves forms of collaborative research. Self-reflexivity requires that researchers should make themselves visible in the research process by constantly reflecting on their own personal, social and political commitments. Finally, polyvocality should be true to the diversity of the community or subject being examined. This study will focus on truthfulness and self-reflexivity; though polyvocality was sought by interviewing a variety of instructors regarding age, gender, employment-status, etc., it was not one of the main criteria of the study. All instructors teach a mix of styles as opposed to only one,

for example, and other members of the yoga community such as general practitioners or non-postural yogis were not consulted. Given the large scope of the project, short timeline, small sample and limited resources, this could not be avoided. Nor is the sample intended to be representative, but to capture a small slice of experience. In this case, however, the attention to alternate paradigms provides a degree of theoretical polyvocality, if not an experiential one.

In addition, truthfulness will be grounded largely by my experience of yoga and yogic culture over the past 10 years,<sup>v</sup> time spent at Yoga Generalist during which I conducted observation and discussed my ideas with various teachers and students, my familiarity with many (though not all) of the participants through interaction in classes and at the studio, and my knowledge of hermeneutically-oriented scholarship in the area. Though Saukko (2003) suggests measures such as member checking, she does not require them and there was no desire on the part of my participants to do so, nor was it practically feasible. This raises the question of whether dialogic validity can work in situations where the researcher is unable, or unwilling to, conduct collaborative research, or where their own relation to the subject matter and subjects might be problematic – or both. The short answer to these questions is that yes, dialogic validity can work under such tenuous conditions; however, it is not appropriate for all research situations, both in terms of the researcher and the material under consideration. Saukko, for example, offers the example of Ginsburg's (1997) study on pro-life and pro-choice women, in which the author was involved in a tense political situation and also disagreed with the pro-life women. She developed strategies to none the less convey these women's stories in a faithful way, which I will not go into here, but there are certainly cases where this approach would not work.<sup>vi</sup>

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<sup>v</sup> This includes my consistent practice throughout the project, which my participants indicated was important to understanding yoga and which is an integral element of the literature, a point which will come under consideration shortly.

<sup>vi</sup> See Saukko (2003) for a more in-depth discussion of this issue.

Because dialogic validity does not require objectivity in the traditionally scientific sense, it is not conceptualized as simply describing an “other” world. Rather, hermeneutic encounters are exactly that: encounters between two worlds, that of Self and Other, in which the researcher is measured by an ethical commitment first and foremost. The attempt to understand the Other world, rather than explain it, and ability to do so through dialogic analysis of both worlds comes a close second in assessments of validity (Saukko, 2003). This dialogic shifting allows the researcher to reflect on the similarity and differences between the two experiences, obeying the logic of both truthfulness and self-reflexivity (Saukko, 2003, p. 57). Davey’s (2006) conceptualization of philosophical hermeneutics as a dialogic practice rather than method is also quite useful here, particularly given participant’s focus on practice and experiential knowledge. His dual propositions that philosophical hermeneutics are experientially based and re-interpret transcendence within this framework give additional punch to his argument. Because a hermeneutic approach is able and willing to acknowledge the value of experiential knowledge, it is not bound so closely by method but rather by the practices which allow experiential knowledge to accrue. Transcendence occurs when we have surpassed our own experience by dialogic exchange with an Other: “Transcendence does not betoken surpassing the range or grasp of human experience. It does not concern what lies beyond experience but what lies within it or, much rather, it has to do with experiencing those fundamental shifts within passages of experience which can quite transform how those passages are understood.” (Davey, 2007, p. 8). Transcendence occurs, then, when we have understood ourselves, and Others, as different because of a dialogical exchange.

Hermeneutic methodologies also frequently take interest in “modes of experiencing the world, such as emotions, embodiment, or the sacred” (Saukko, 2003, p. 57). Because these

themes focus on non-rational experiences, they have often been excluded by the Western, white male focus on rationality. They are all important in yogic discourse and to my participants, but this sets up a particular problem: hermeneutic and new ethnographic methodologies often consider these topics *because* they are argued to parallel the experiences of marginalized and disenfranchised groups and knowledges. Saukko's (2000; 2003; 2008) own work revolves around women with anorexia, for example, and is concerned with critically analyzing discourses on anorexia while also faithfully representing the experience of these women as a disenfranchised group whose voices are rarely respected. As such, she interviewed women who were or had been anorexic and reflected on her own experiences with anorexia. These experiences led her to criticize mainstream definitions of anorexia and anorexics, and she expected the same critical perspective to appear in her interviews. She was disappointed when this did not happen and recounts: "I was torn between my feminist commitment to be true to the women's voices and my feminist commitment to criticize discourses that define us in problematic ways" (2000, p. 299).

This description resonates for me, as my experience was very much the same despite the fact that our areas of study are very different. Yogis are not anorexics, though they may certainly have some things in common. Lloyd (1996), for example, demonstrates that there is a shared global strategy of power between anorexia, bulimia, and fitness: the pressure for women to be thin and fat-free. Aerobics is "produced intertextually across a range of discourses" including aesthetics, sports science, health, fitness, dis/ease with fat, femininity and corporeal work ethic, but likewise these are all organized under the global strategy of thinness (Lloyd, 1996, p. 87). Yoga is articulated through many of these same discourses and often organized by the same strategy, and while this argument is more closely related to post-structuralism it can still be

martialed to argue that anorexics and yogis are not, in fact, so different. This does not address the issue of marginality, however, as this is exactly what Lloyd (1996) finds to be problematic about the comparison; anorexics are considered different from fitness followers because they are marginalized, even though the discourses shaping their behaviour follow the same strategy. By focusing on aerobics within the same of frame of reference as anorexics, she hopes to combat this marginality.

It was not the possible similarity between anorexics and yogis which originally struck me, however; rather, the similarity lay in what I expected practitioners to articulate relative to yoga and what Saukko anticipated her participants to express about anorexia. I expected my participants to criticize the ways in which commodified yoga supports unequal power relations and problematic structures in society, as this was what I had come to do myself. I was deeply troubled when, for the most part, they did not, or to be more precise they did so on very different terms than I expected and had done myself. I felt deeply conflicted about whether to represent their perspective faithfully or offer a more critical one, as demonstrated on the first page of this chapter. Saukko's dilemma rested on the fact that her feminist commitment to represent a marginalized group conflicted with her (also feminist) commitment to criticize the discourses that marginalized them, a project which would, in turn, marginalize them in a different way.

Is there a political duty to ensure that yogis are represented truthfully as a marginalized group? And if not, what else might support the decision to pursue a hermeneutic analysis that emphasises "modes of experiencing the world, such as emotions, embodiment, or the sacred" (Saukko, 2003, p. 57)? Yogis are most often women and yoga is undoubtedly a feminized practice, which arguably reproduces unequal gender relations;<sup>vii</sup> however, this project is not

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<sup>vii</sup> My preliminary work in this area has suggested several feminized and devalued characteristics of modern yoga which support its marginalization: forms of movement, the type of body it produces (thin and toned), and themes

primarily concerned with gender, though this is a promising direction for future research. In addition most practitioners are middle to upper class and, as the poststructuralist analysis demonstrates, yoga generally reproduces power relations which *favour* many yogis. Nor is yoga a form of marginalized knowledge, as amply demonstrated in the introduction. The historical exclusion of yogic knowledge does offer a substantive connection to this ethical agenda. Indeed, yoga has been increasingly validated through a shift away from the experiential, non-rational knowledge articulated by practitioners and into scientific and positivist modes of analysis. Many of the arguments made by my participants would be excluded in academic analyses on these grounds, including poststructuralist ones. None the less, though yoga's non-rational themes have trouble finding scientific or poststructuralist validation, they are not *ipso facto* marginalized or disenfranchised. By way of commodification they assume a different, privileged space in power relations which greatly contribute to yoga's efficacy as a disciplinary technology (see chapter 6). My own experience as a practitioner for the past 10 years is a self-reflexive tie holding me to a hermeneutic perspective insofar as it has the potential to impact the integrity of any other analysis I might undertake. But this cannot be conceptualized as a political commitment to fighting marginalization either.

Why then, would do I find a hermeneutic reading of yoga so enthralling, when following only one methodology would be much simpler and easily as informative? The discussion above collectively meets the threshold of a convincing argument, and it can also be argued that *every* group, regardless of power, deserves ethical and faithful representation.

The answer, however, is simpler than the above discussion implies: it is the embodied nature of yoga, the insistence on “doing” that makes a hermeneutic reading so compelling, as

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such as caring or spirituality, for example. These examples are not fully developed or exhaustive, but indicate the kind of marginalization most likely to be found in the forms of modern yoga examined here.

Strauss (2005) demonstrates. Indeed, in the hermeneutic analysis the practice-focus of participants is central to understanding their experience of commodification. This methodology shifts the focus from the question of “why doing” to the experiences and politics of “actually doing”, and my years of actually doing yoga draw me in this direction. Smith (2007) observes that research striving to understand embodied experience must begin with the researchers own experience, and this approach, he argues, is in fact under-developed in modern yoga studies (Smith, 2007). Likewise, Nevrin (2008) argues that “this means not only looking at the body from the outside – as an object being talked about in discourse or as behaviourally conducted in social and material spaces – but understanding the body itself as a locus of experience” (p. 123). This approach shares some concerns with post-structuralism: the process of subjectivization, the relation of self to self, experience and the body as the products of power relations and discourse. Hermeneutics shifts the terrain significantly, however, as post-structuralism would not seek to address experience *on its own grounds or in and of itself*. Or, to put it in Saukko’s (2003) terminology, hermeneutics seeks to understand experience for its own sake, while post-structuralism does so to explain it.

Poststructuralist analyses should attempt to “unravel social tropes and discourses that, over time, have come to pass for a ‘truth’ about the world” (Saukko, 2003, p. 20). There are two important criteria for validity in this approach, referred to as deconstructive validity. First, research should “expose the historicity, political investments, omissions and blindspots of social ‘truths.’” Secondly, a poststructuralist critique should be “aware of its own historical political and social investments, continually reflecting back on its own commitments” (Saukko, 2003, p. 21). Though Saukko (2003) suggests three strategies that constitute good research, I will not be following her formula exactly, but will rather be working more loosely from a post-structuralist

perspective, drawing in particular on Foucault. Saukko (2003) suggests that a post-structuralist critique may attempt to destabilize the problematic binaries that constitute our thinking, while Foucauldian analyses should reveal the ways in which certain ‘truths’ are products of specific historical and political programmes. I accept both of these premises, but further qualify that a Foucauldian analysis should also demonstrate the ways in which power/knowledge strategies work to reproduce more or less equitable relations between people, groups, and institutions. This focus on power relations should also be incorporated into the measures of validity, showing not just the construction of social truths but their impact. Like hermeneutics, these approaches assume the existence of multiple realities.

A critique of the signifying practices in yogic discourse, particularly in relation to notions of authenticity, assists in analyzing the many problematic binaries which underlie *modern* yoga. As this term indicates, modernity is one of the central binaries deployed here, a point which will be considered in chapter 3, however other important binaries will be considered throughout the project.

The primary theoretical approach adopted for the poststructuralist analysis draws on Foucault’s work. This includes genealogy, which he describes as a “history of the present” (Foucault, 1977, p. 31). Genealogical analyses examine “the relations between history, discourse, bodies, and power in an attempt to help understand social practices or objects of knowledge” (Markula & Silk, 2005, p. 32). A number of specific theoretical concepts and tools developed out of this framework are also pertinent. I will therefore lay out the theoretical orientation taken up here, followed by these more specific concepts and tools.

Like the phenomenologists he scorned, Foucault was quite interested in experience, but on a completely different register than the one conceptualized in a hermeneutic paradigm. He

was interested in how a “matrix of experience” was constituted through three related axes: “the correlation of a domain of knowledge [*savoir*], a type of normativity, and a mode of relation to the self” (Foucault, 1994, p. 58). Knowledge about humanity is produced through these three axes, which makes us objects, and this influences our experience of being human and constitutes us as subjects. Though he focuses on different axes in separate genealogical analyses, he argues that all three are usually operating at any given time.

Power is also at work in all three axes. Foucault’s conceptualization of power is relational and non-binary, diffused and always already present. Rather than being something held by groups or individuals, power resides in the relations between them, and is therefore immanent in many types of relationships (i.e. economic, sexual, medical, psychological, personal, etc.). Power is productive, not simply oppressive, and it produces bodies, subjectivities, technologies<sup>viii</sup> and knowledge. Knowledge is also productive of power: “We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth.” (Foucault, 1980 as cited in Markula & Pringle, 2006, p. 54). Power is multiple, and there are many forms of it. In modernization programmes, and particularly in neoliberal states which seek to diminish state power, this conceptualization can be analytically useful when models of sovereignty lose explanatory efficacy. This makes it useful when examining forms of popular culture, such as yoga, which might otherwise be dismissed as unimportant in power relations.

Power also masks its productive capacity. Foucault explains this phenomenon as a result of its ontological threshold of possibility: “Power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms.

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<sup>viii</sup> Foucault defines technologies as “techniques that human beings use to understand themselves” and are specified in 4 ways: “(1) technologies of production, which permit us to produce, transform, or manipulate things; (2) technologies of sign systems, which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification;” (3) technologies of power; and (4) technologies of the self. The last two will be adopted throughout this project (Foucault, 1994, p. 146).

Would power be accepted if it were entirely cynical? For it, secrecy is not in the nature of an abuse; it is indispensable to its operation...Power as a pure limit on freedom is, at least in our society, the general form of its acceptability” (Foucault, 1978, p. 86). No identifiable individual or group determines the strategic operation of power, nor is it always exercised with a “series of aims and objectives” which are perfectly clear – it is intentional and non-subjective (Foucault, 1978, pg. 95). This aspect is particularly important to the project, as commodification’s naturalization in yogic discourse is largely dependent on it.

Though it cannot be held, powers’ relational character ensures that it can be used and that everyone has access to it. This access is not evenly distributed, however, so power relations are generally unequal. Local and contingent dominations occur as a result (as well as larger dominations), wherein discourses and power relations become relatively immobile, restrictive and imbalanced. Finally, power is unstable, and this ensures that there is always the potential for change. Because change or resistance follows the ontological logic of power, it more often consists of multiple, varied, and relational strategies rather than singular, binary, radical ruptures or revolutions. This cannot be conceptualized as a humanist subject’s agency, resistance, or liberation from power – there is no “outside” of power relations, and no “true self” to be liberated. Foucault is therefore especially concerned with the ways in which power relations limit the possible subjectivities that we can experience or recognise, the knowledges that are mobilized or marginalized through it, and the strategic dominations that occur by its use. (Foucault, 1978). The combination of relational strategies and humanist self, both of which yoga espouses at times, results in a mixed bag when it comes to yoga’s uptake as source of domination or resistance.

Several concepts developed in Foucault's genealogical work, which he referred to as tools, are useful for this project: governmentality, bio-politics and bio-power, techniques of discipline and technologies of the self. Governmentality is "understood in the broad sense of techniques and procedures for directing human behaviour. Government of children, government of souls and consciousness, government of a household, of a state, or of oneself." (Foucault, 1997 as cited in Rose, O'Malley, & Valverde, 2006, p. 83). Ouellette and Hay (2008) conceptualize governmentality as attempts to guide and shape the behaviour of populations *and* individuals. They argue that it is necessary to

look beyond the formal institutions of official government to also emphasize the proliferation and diffusion of the everyday techniques through which individuals and populations are expected to reflect upon, work on and organize their lives and themselves as an implicit condition of their citizenship. These techniques do not emanate directly from the state, nor can they be traced to any particular power centre. Rather, techniques of government are circulated in a highly dispersed fashion by social and cultural intermediaries and the institutions that authorize their expertise (p. 473).

In late modernity, governmentality often follows neo-liberal strategies. Foucault argues that "American neoliberalism seeks... to extend the rationality of the market, the schemes of analysis it proposes, and the decision making criteria it suggests to areas that are not exclusively or not primarily economic." (Foucault, 1994, p. 207) This description sits very well with Gilbert's (2008) characterization of consumerism, and also provides a framework in which the commodification of yoga can be seen as a governmental technology wherein power is at work.

Governmentality often entails forms of bio-power, whose strategies focus on "the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis for biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary. Their supervision was effected through an entire series of interventions and *regulatory controls: a bio-politics of the population*" (Foucault, 1978, p.139, emphasis in original). Foucault therefore argues that governmental and bio-political

forms of power are closely tied to the development of capitalism, as they maintain and increase economic growth through production. Bio-politics are generally used as a means of domination, and are closely related to technologies of discipline. Rather than focusing on population, however, disciplines focus on individual bodies. Disciplinary technologies are an “*anatomo-politics of the body*” (Foucault, 1978, p.139, emphasis in original) and they define “how one may have a hold over others’ bodies, not only so that they may do as one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency one determines. Thus discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, ‘docile’ bodies” (Foucault, 1977, p. 138). Technologies of discipline and bio-power are the corollary of the last two axes of experience, the techniques through which power produces bodies and subjectivities which often favour particular dominations.

There are two important steps in the process of subjectivization, which constitutes the last axis of experience: “first, it makes the individual a subject to someone else by control and dependence, and second it ties him/her in his/her own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge” (Markula & Pringle, 2006, p. 138). Foucault found through his genealogy of sexuality that in modern, western modes of subjectivation bio-power and governmentality encourage people to incessantly reflect on and confess their experiences in a “hermeneutics of the self”. Though this kind of subjectivization now appears natural and normal, it often ties individuals to limiting and inequitably valued identities and is a technology of domination (Markula & Pringle, 2006, p. 138). Technologies of the self, however “permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality” (Foucault, 1994, p.

146). These operations still occur within power relations, however, and it is therefore difficult to determine what constitutes a technology of the self given the dominance of hermeneutic subjectivization.

Foucault looked to ancient Greek ethics to explore alternatives to current paradigms, rather than to suggest that we adopt these practices. Ethics are the ways in which “the individual is supposed to constitute himself as a moral subject of his own actions” (Foucault, 1983, cited in Markula & Pringle, 2006, p. 140). Greek ethics were modeled on a notion of the self as a work of art, called aesthetic self-stylisation. In contrast, current ethics tend to conceptualize the self in relation to science or law and this is, he argues, more constraining for individuals. Ethics were also conceptualized in Ancient Greece as a practice of caring for the self so that one might have more caring (and less dominating) relations with others. This practice allows one to master one’s own use of power. Foucault calls it a practice of freedom because “freedom is the ontological condition of ethics” (Foucault, 1994, p. 30). Yet he stresses that these practices exist within a context of liberty rather than liberation, because liberation implies freedom from power, which is not possible (Foucault, 1994).

Though both post-structuralist and hermeneutic methodologies are primary here, they still rely on the final methodology, contextualist realism. It strives to describe “how the world ‘really is’” by identifying concrete social and historical structures, inequalities, and contexts (Saukko, 2003, p. 21). Clearly, this contradicts the fractured ontology of hermeneutic and poststructuralist paradigms, but it also highlights their reliance on conceptualizations of ‘real’ marginalization and inequality. This is particularly true considering the impacts commercial structures have on teachers and practitioners, ranging from teaching environments to access. As such, contextualism highlights a reality which is intrinsically implicated in hermeneutics and post-structuralism, even

when they don't directly address it (Saukko, 2003). Though there is no fully developed contextual analysis in this study, a realist basis underlies many of my arguments – a 'half' methodology. The first chapter, for example, relies heavily on contextualism by presenting a picture of who practiced yoga in 2008 and what the industry was worth at that time. Though there are methodological cautions required here, this analysis purports that this is, in fact, a factual account. Likewise, many of the foundational studies on modern yoga (such as De Michelis and Singleton) utilized herein are historical analyses that adopt a contextualist approach. Careful contextual research is, in large part, what makes the analysis presented in chapter 3 effective. As such, it is important to specify the requirements of validity for contextualist realism. First, this research should display sensitivity to the social context by careful, comparative analyses of multiple sources and views. Second, contextualist researchers should be cognizant of their works own historicity and the ways in which it may be implicated in producing and reproducing the context under examination.

### **Fragment and Fracture: Realities in Dialogue**

It is now fairly clear that multiple realities can be researched and assessed in valid ways. However, it still remains to be seen how these realities relate to one another, particularly in studies which pursue multiple approaches. Saukko (2003) insists we avoid the positivist model of triangulation, whereby each methodology becomes simply another lens on the same object, combining to produce a 'truer' picture of reality. This is clearly not the case, as hermeneutics and post-structuralism highlight that reality is multiple and unstable. They also assert that the thing being viewed is in part constructed by how it is looked at. If multiple analyses are not engaging in triangulation, however, what are they doing?

Saukko (2003) argues that we should think in terms of dialogues between different methodologies. We can imagine “different realities and methodologies in terms of soundscapes that each have their distinctive chords, but that also resonate and interact with one another. An example would be a jazz trumpeter’s solo, which gets translated into the audience’s tapping of their feet and plays into and out of other multicultural sounds and politics of contemporary urban neighbourhoods” (p. 30-31). Rather than the triangulation of multiple methods looking in at the same thing, then, we have multiple methodologies, with some shared ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions and some distinct differences. These shared and fragmented assumptions form a dialogue which interlaces realities in constantly shifting and nuanced ways.

It is helpful, therefore, to quickly identify some of the shared assumptions and different stances taken by hermeneutics and post-structuralism. Both assume a fragmented ontology and subjective epistemology, reflexively produced and reproduced in research. Veyne (1997) clarifies the pivotal ontological difference between them, however, while commenting on *Madness and Civilization* (Foucault, 1965):

Phenomenology goes awry not when it fails to explain things (since it never promised to explain them) but when it describes them on the basis of consciousness, taken as constitutive and not constituted. Every explanation of madness presupposes first of all an accurate description of madness. For such a description, can we rely on what our consciousness allows us to see? Yes, if consciousness is constitutive, if, as the saying goes, it knows reality “as well as if it had made it itself.” No, if consciousness is constituted without its own knowledge, if it is the unwitting dupe of a constituting historical practice. And our consciousness is indeed duped (p. 180)

This ontological position is not commensurable with hermeneutic dialogic validity, particularly the criteria of truthfulness to lived experience. The knowledge of experience participants provide cannot be truthful and therefore valid if it is not understood by them; in a hermeneutic ontology subjects must know what they know.

## More on Methods

Three methods have been used for this project: discourse analysis of the *Yoga Journal* website, in-depth interviews with yoga instructors and participant-observation at the local Edmonton studio Yoga Generalist. This section will provide more detailed information on the primary sources, procedures and methods used, as they will come under discussion in both methodological paradigms.

The *Yoga Journal* website is an excellent candidate for analysis in this project. It is easily and widely accessed, highly commodified, the leading large-scale publication in North America, provides highly inter-textual, multi-media, multi-sensory primary data and is relevant to the main forms of commodification I am interested in. As the historical review of the business shows and as the remainder of this project will demonstrate, it also mirrors larger patterns in modern yoga's popularity, growth and the discourses which have shaped it (i.e. health and authenticity). Finally, the site maintains the experiential and practice focus that participants emphasised, and many participants characterized it as a useful resource while simultaneously regarding it with suspicion for a number of reasons. The website was consulted from September 2009 until June 2012, during which time the content remained relatively stable (barring some new additions such as the Livemag section). I began by conducting an overall survey of the website, browsing the main categories and reading content titles and abstracts. Given the size of the website, I did not read all content; but, following the main themes, read a variety of articles from each section and did close analysis of those which best demonstrated the overall tenor of the site, the themes at hand, and the appropriate theoretical approach.

The *Yoga Journal* website groups its 'substantive content' under several main headings: Home, Poses, Basics, Practice, Wisdom, Health, Lifestyle, Teachers, Community, Blogs,

Multimedia, Newsletters and Livemag. Each of these has a list of sub-headings which will come under discussion when relevant but will not be listed here due to space and time limitations.

Smaller tabs in the upper right hand corner also offer a more commercial range of options:

Marketplace, Subscribe, Conferences, Yoga Directory, Shop YJ, Insurance, and Free Stuff. On

the homepage a large window featuring Feature articles appears directly below the substantive headings and occupies about one third of the left hand side of the page. To the right of these

‘feature’ sections sits a subscription advertisement, which appears on every page in the same

spot and accounted for 15 to 20% of all net Web orders in 2006 (Schultz, 2006). Below this ad

follows further commercially-oriented links, including the Yoga Directory and Conference links.

Finally, centered below these items is a large subscription ad offering 2 free trial issues and 4

free gifts to viewers who subscribe for the magazine; this ad also appears as a pop up, which

generated 25% to 35% of web orders in 2006 (Schultz, 2006). Advertising links to related AIM

interests appear below it: *Better Nutrition*, *Black Belt*, *Backpacker*, *Muscle and Performance*,

*Optimum Wellness*, and *Vegetarian Times*. This page format remains relatively stable as one

browses the site. Featured articles for a given section (i.e. Wisdom) or the substantive content

accessed by the reader (i.e. an article or video) are moved to the centre of the page, while

navigation and multi-media content links are added to the left margin. Commercial links

continue to appear on the right.

My choice of the term ‘substantive content’ requires further elaboration. While the layout

privileges the ‘substantive content’ headings against the ‘commercial content’ by making them

larger and more centered, this should in no way imply that they are non-commercial. Indeed,

most articles and videos include consumptive suggestions either directly or indirectly. Likewise,

the ‘commercial content’ headings contain substantive content, but articulate commercial

interests much more clearly. The ‘Yoga Journal Directory’ acts as a business directory but is also a way of finding teachers and communities, making the distinction difficult; in the practice-oriented world of yoga, readers are more likely to focus on the latter than the former. Inasmuch as *Yoga Journal* is a commercial enterprise and yoga itself a highly commodified form of culture, commercial content is in a very real sense substantive. A useful reformulation of these titles would be ‘topical content’ and ‘commercial content’, with the understanding that neither is mutually exclusive but leans in a particular direction. In the current commercial environment of *Yoga Journal* and yoga more broadly neither could exist separately.

In-depth interviews were conducted with nine yoga instructors: Beth, Mary, Rebecca, Lindsey, Allison, Gail, Chris, Emily, and Sara.<sup>ix</sup> Table 1 shows their employment status and teaching locations. Full-time employment in this context was more often an indication of yoga being the primary (or only) employment, rather than a function of income or hours – both of which could be inconsistent. This is, in large part, why most full-time instructors taught at multiple venues, and most were not sole earners. Commercial or non-commercial locations indicate whether students were expected to pay for classes. Teaching locations included community locations (churches, community halls, outdoor spaces, schools, etc.), studios, University classes, or professional locations (offices, companies, etc.). Sara, in addition to being an instructor, is also the owner of Yoga Generalist, while Chris owns a small yoga travel company. All participants varied in age, but it is notable that all are white women with the exception of Gail, who is Chinese, and Chris who is a white male. This again reflects larger trends in yoga participation; approximately 70% of practitioners are female, though there is no statistical information available on ethnicity or on the specific demographic distribution of

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<sup>ix</sup> Names and personal information have been anonymized as far as possible, however personal information relevant to the analysis (i.e. important life events) will be included and could potentially constitute identifiable characteristics. Informed consent was attained for this procedure.

instructors (Philp, 2009). Even without this information, however, it is fairly clear that race and ethnicity are salient themes in yoga given its colonial history (though not primary ones in this project), and ethnicity was indeed a theme in Gail's interview. East/West dichotomies were also frequently discussed in interviews without specific reference to race or ethnicity, but it is reasonable to infer that race and ethnicity are discursively implicated in these themes.

The interviews occurred in two waves in various locations (including coffee shops, yoga studios or homes) and were audio-recorded and transcribed. The first set of four were conducted for the pilot study and took place between October and December 2009. The second set of five were conducted between January and April 2011 during the research phase of the thesis and included several participants from Yoga Generalist. Yoga instructors were chosen rather than general practitioners because they are information-rich, likely to be deeply committed to yoga practice and teaching while simultaneously being deeply embedded in the commercial practices and structures of interest to this study. They consistently invested large amounts of money and time to acquire certification and most spent many hours a week practicing and teaching, even those who were part-time teachers. While it is possible that regular practitioners may invest equal energy and time, they may not do so with the same degree of consistency individually or as a group. More importantly, however, instructors were also able to provide insight into the business of yoga (in terms of income, teacher training, teacher-student relations, branding, etc.) in institutionalized structures that general practitioners could not.

Finally, the participant-observation took place at Yoga Generalist from January 2011 until August 2011. Yoga Generalist is located in Edmonton and is a multi-room studio which also offers a limited number of holistic medicinal treatments. The main lobby area includes a reception desk, seating for clients, clothes, books, CDs, mats, and other for-sale items. Teachers

at Yoga Generalist receive a base salary per class and then an additional amount for each student in that class. Not all studios use this per-student payment system, and generally those who pay a flat rate per class do so at a higher salary than Yoga Generalist. The studio also offers a limited number of non-yoga fitness classes in addition to a wide range of yoga styles. These include various types of Hatha and Ashtanga, Yin, Restorative, Kundalini, Flow, Iyengar-inspired yoga, acro-yoga, Gay yoga (which is designed to provide a gay-friendly, community-oriented class), Family yoga for children with autism, Meditation and *pranayama* (breath work). Multiple classes run throughout the day and classes generally last 1 – 1 1/2 hours. Most follow a drop-in format, which provides a great deal of flexibility for students and requires teachers to be flexible in terms of curriculum (adjusting to meet the needs and abilities of any given class) and student-teacher relationships. The studio sometimes offers multiple-week, pre-registered sessions which often entail pre-payment, a progressive curriculum and participation requirements (i.e. beginner vs. experienced practitioners, pre- and post-natal classes, etc.). This format is more common in community-based and University classes, while drop-in formats are more popular in studios.

It costs approximately \$15 to drop-in to a Yoga Generalist class, which is the average or below average cost in most Edmonton studios. The studio offers a 10 class pass with no expiry (for \$120) or one month unlimited pass (at \$110), as well as discounted prices for students and seniors.<sup>x</sup> Unlimited passes can also be bought in 3 month increments up to a year, however most clients purchase either 10 class or 1 month passes. This pass and pricing system is fairly standard in Edmonton, and participants reported that the price range is similar for the community-based classes they teach, which generally range from \$10-15 per lesson. I observed that the flexibility of drop-in and short-term pass participation at Yoga Generalist appeared to result in a very fluid clientele base, a point also raised by several participants in relation to pre-registered sessions,

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<sup>x</sup> Prices are approximate to maintain anonymity.

which are more stable. It is difficult to know how this might compare to other fitness-industry organizations such as gyms, which require longer-term commitments, but this might be an interesting point of future study. Workshops run by studio staff or visiting instructors occur semi-frequently, and range in price depending on the length and prestige of the course. These workshops cover a wide range of yoga styles and topics, and sometimes combine meditation, music or other arts-based curriculum with yoga.

Yoga Generalist also offers Teacher Training, a 200 hour program certified by the Yoga Alliance which costs \$3025. The studio offers a partial scholarship for one student each semester based on a 2000 word essay, and while teacher training at Yoga Generalist is expensive it is also about the average cost of teacher training in Edmonton. From there prices tend to go up; Canadian chain Moksha charges \$4000 and Bikram, whose intensive nine week course requires students to travel to Los Angeles, charges \$10,900 for tuition and accommodations. Every Sunday a teacher-trainee leads a class in order to obtain in-class teaching experience and, in addition, a reduced price is offered to clients who provide a donation for the food bank. This strategy clearly aligns with profit-maximizing business practices insofar as student-teachers are unpaid, but also with yogic principles of service and charity. In addition, it evinces a practice-oriented pedagogy in Yoga Generalist's certification program. Offering limited discounted or donation-based classes is a semi-common practice in Edmonton (often in the form of once-a-week sessions like Yoga Generalist's), but Yoga Generalist also began running classes on a free-with-donation basis (either cash or food-bank items) one day a week in early 2011. This is unusual in Edmonton, and explicitly extends yogic principles that Sara has increasingly attempted to incorporate into her business. The participant-observation involved two components: a Karma yoga shift and participation in studio classes. As such I worked as a

receptionist for four hours a week from 4-8, when the majority of classes take place. My duties included vacuuming, sweeping, and cleaning practice rooms and the main lobby area, cleaning rental mats used by students, maintaining the clothing and other items available for purchase in an orderly and attractive way, conducting in-take for classes and selling various passes, clothes, etc. Karma shifts are offered at several studios in the city. I also attended classes, with the style and frequency varying. My goal was to attend 2-3 classes per week, and some weeks I met or exceeded this goal. Other weeks, however, I attended only one class or none at all. The style also varied, although generally I attended at least one fast-paced class (such as Ashtanga) and one slow-paced class (i.e. Hatha) per week. There were a number of reasons for my inconsistency in attendance, which will come under consideration in chapter 4. Though they may appear at first glance to be merely the luck (or un-luck) of the draw, further analysis demonstrates that this is far from the case.

**Table 1**

<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Employment Status</b>	<b>Teaching Locations</b>	<b>Commercial/ Non-commercial</b>
Beth	Part-time	Community locations	Commercial
Mary	Part-time	Community locations	Commercial
Rebecca	Part-time	Community locations, University classes	Both
Lindsey	Part-time	Friends, Family, Charity, Karma Yogi	Non-commercial
Gail	Full-time	Studios	Commercial
Allison	Full-time	Studios, Community locations, professional locations	Commercial
Chris	Full-time	Studios, Owner of a Yoga Travel Company	Commercial
Emily	Full-time	Studios	Commercial
Sara	Full-time	Studios, Yoga Generalist owner.	Commercial

## **Chapter Three**

# **Authentic Yoga Stories: (Pre)Modern Yoga Research**

## (Pre)Modern Yoga(s)

The pre-modern/modern division is a useful heuristic when discussing yoga as it is practiced and represented in 2012 for several reasons. Most importantly, it is the primary foundation for conceptualizations of authenticity in this project, and one of the most developed areas of study in academia.<sup>xi</sup> Yet despite the fact that a definitive description of Authentic Yoga (modern or pre-modern) is impossible, these signifiers continue to be deployed in many places. I am not, therefore, interested in proving (or disproving) the authenticity of modern yoga, but in how and why these often problematic claims are made.

In academia, pre-modern yoga has often stood as the primary yard stick against which modern yoga is judged and against which it most often fails. Singleton (2010) refers to this as the “gold standard” approach, a treacherous undertaking because it fails to consider modern yoga or yogis on their own terms, endows the scholar with problematic forms of authority, and is unable to address the complex, transnational production of modern yoga. Indeed a growing body of work confirms these limitations (De Michelis, 2005, 2008; Liberman, 2008; Singleton, 2008, 2010; Strauss, 2005). A similar phenomenon occurs in modern yoga texts and practices themselves, where representation of a strong, linear link to pre-modern yoga allows modern forms to claim authenticity and authority, as well as for specific styles or texts to do so over others. Further, modern yoga as a whole is discursively constructed as a legitimate way of redeeming modern life *because of* its pre-modern characteristics. Yet, as singleton (2010) astutely observes,

to reject [the] ‘gold standard’ approach to yoga is not to embrace the kind of relativism that regards all truth claims about yoga as ‘true’, in the sense of being accurate historical statements about tradition. The problem is that in spite of the

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<sup>xi</sup> The most developed area of study in modern yoga is arguably scientific analysis of the practice, particularly, medical ones. However these are outside of my expertise and the theoretical framework of this study (although they could conceivably come under consideration as primary sources in a post-structuralist analysis).

sincerity with which such claims are made, they often do not stand up to the slightest critical scrutiny. To adopt an artificial naivety in this regard is to ignore (or defer) one's own awareness of the history of ideas (p. 14).

These lines of argument regarding the relationship of modern and pre-modern traditions are, in turn, deeply implicated in the branding and selling of yoga. Things become even more complicated when this is taken into consideration, as practitioners and scholars often identify commodification as one of the main characteristics dis-qualifying modern yoga from being an authentic practice. And while it is indeed one of the main differences between modern and pre-modern forms, that difference is by no means absolute, as I have already argued. Further, it does not imply that modern, commodified yoga cannot be a legitimate or useful practice. My engagement with the topic is based on exactly the proposition that it can be, despite the fact that I am extremely critical of commodification. I argue, however, that one should be critical of commodification based on its effects and genealogical history, not on the premise of comparison to a 'pure' tradition which arguably did not exist.

Like Cushman (<http://www.yogajournal.com/wisdom/466?page=7>), Liberman (2008), Singleton (2010) and Strauss (2005), I believe that a scholarly treatment of these topics which is both critical of and faithful to accounts of yoga's history and practitioners experience's does not need to be disrespectful or naïve, but can in fact deepen the potential of yoga in the modern era. As such, this chapter will provide a brief account of the relevant literature, more in-depth discussion of what we mean by "yoga", and begin to explore the discursive and experiential bases of authenticity through a critical analysis. Finally, I will introduce several post-structuralist and hermeneutic works in the area that have also motivated my methodological choices.

### **Regarding the Historiography of Yoga: The Yoga Story**

One of the trends which emerged during my analysis of modern yoga scholarship, *Yoga Journal*, the field data, and my own experiences was that they often followed a narrative format. On *Yoga Journal* and in the field data, many of these stories were about practitioners' experiences with yoga and commodification, and they will receive more attention in chapters 4, 5, and 6. But lurking behind them, and often foregrounded on their own, were stories about yoga's historical development and its nature; these stories form the bedrock of authenticity. As such, narrative inquiry is a useful approach for this study because it argues that we should begin our work with the stories that so often organize our world. This argument, however, goes deeper than a means of analysis, or even of representation. Rather, narrative inquiry argues that we live in an ontologically storied world (Markula & Silk, 2011). Narratives "are not merely ways of telling others about ourselves, but of constructing our identities, of finding purpose and meaning in our lives" (Berger & Quinney, 2004, p. 6). We also draw from larger discourses and cultural forms of meaning making in telling stories, and in turn we tell collective stories about ourselves as a culture. They are not always linear, singular, or coherent, nor are they a "window" on the truth. A storied world, then, fits very well with Saukko's (2003) notion of a fractured ontology, because narratives are always constructed, multiple, and partial. They also fit neatly with her sound-based, dialogical approach to multiple-methodologies.

Some scholars argue that narrative inquiry can express the details of lived experience vividly because it often (but not always) involves creative forms of writing, and because it begins "with experience expressed in stories, not with theory" (Markula & Silk, 2011, p. 139). This makes a narrative approach to research and writing useful for hermeneutic and reflexive analysis, and also provides a means of structuring hermeneutic dialogues as the interaction between stories (Davey, 2006; Saukko, 2003). Yet the constructed and constructive nature of narratives also

makes them useful for destabilizing social truths that appear linear, cohesive, and natural. Richardson (2000) points out that “when we view writing as a *method*... we experience ‘language-in-use,’ how we ‘word the world’ into existence (Rose, 1992). And then we ‘reword’ the world, erase the computer screen, check the thesaurus, move a paragraph, again and again. This ‘worded world’ never accurately, precisely, completely captures the studied world accurately, yet we persist in trying” (p. 923). As such, narrative inquiry is also an excellent post-structuralist method. <sup>xii</sup>

This chapter, then, will begin a critical, narrative analysis of *The Yoga Story* – though by the end of the project, it will consist of many yoga stories. It is told through a number of different academic and lay perspectives, some of which begin here and are picked up again and explicated in subsequent chapters. And while these accounts sometimes agree, there is no absolute consensus among them and disagreements occur both within and between academic, media, and practitioner stories. Ultimately, yoga stories tell us a great deal about the construction of authenticity in modern yoga, particularly relative to pre-modern traditions.

A significant portion of the most relevant academic literature on modern yoga explores the historiography of the practice and often produces stories that are heterogeneous, multiple, and non-linear. The contradictory aspects of this narrative will be explored throughout the project, but I would like to begin by presenting a basic narrative framework, on which these texts largely agree, and which therefore forms the contextual background of modern yoga in this project.

Pre-modern traditions developed in and were influenced by many different religions, regions, and eras. These include but are not limited to Central, Western, and South Asian, Indian,

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<sup>xii</sup> It is worth noting that Richardson’s worded world describes, in many ways, a constant process of letting go and detachment; a task to which yoga can be well suited. Indeed, I have always found that yoga facilitates writing for this very reason.

Tibetan, Chinese, Hindu, Tantric, Buddhist, and Jain contexts. Pre-modern yogas therefore involve a wide range of practices, metaphysics, and philosophies and were often syncretic, conducting ongoing dialogues and debates between them. The age of pre-modern yoga traditions are also debated in academia, particularly as different traditions date from different eras and interacted with one another over long periods of time. But scholars generally agree that the oldest traditions date back at least 2,500 years, and are probably older than this (De Michelis, 2008, 2010; King, 1999a; Singleton, 2010, 2008).

The *Bhagavad Gita*, a Hindu sacred text, proposes three forms of yoga: the yoga of knowledge (*jnana-yoga*), the yoga of good works (*karma-yoga*) and the yoga of devotion (*bhakti-yoga*) (King, 1999a). However, Patanjali's Classical Yoga (also known as *Astanga/Ashtanga, Raja, Royal, or the Eight-limbed path*)<sup>xiii</sup> and *Hatha* Yoga (the Yoga of Force) are generally accepted as the two primary forms of pre-modern yoga by both academic and lay sources (De Michelis, 2005; Feuerstein 1990; King, 1999a;). *Asana* was not a main aspect of pre-modern forms, though it was often an element of them, particularly in *Hatha* traditions – the extent of *asana*'s role is another point of contention, but the basic argument is not. Indeed, it stands as a primary method for de-bunking modern yoga in the gold standard approach. Singleton (2010) goes so far as to say that “the primacy of *asana* performance in transnational yoga today is a new phenomenon that has no parallel in pre-modern times” (p. 3),

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<sup>xiii</sup> While these names are generally used interchangeably in popular yoga texts, they take on more specific meanings in academic accounts. However, the main scholars discussed here (King, De Michelis, Strauss and Singleton in particular) are not in complete agreement regarding the use of these terms or their history. Please see their texts regarding these issues, as they cannot be elaborated here. In addition, De Michelis (2008) proposes a different scheme of pre-modern yoga which draws on four cornerstone orientations: *Karma, Jnana, Bhakti* and *Tantra*. It should be noted that De Michelis' (2008) model represents yet another scholarly disagreement over pre-modern yoga, reinforcing its diverse and controversial nature. However, as the Classical model is both more common and relevant to this thesis I have not adopted De Michelis' (2008), and would recommend reviewing her article for further information.

but he takes this as a reason to question why and how the difference developed, rather than to dismiss modern yoga's authenticity.

The division between modern and pre-modern yoga, then, does not indicate pre-modern yoga's unity or inertia. Rather, it indicates the introduction and impact of substantively different discourses, power relations, and practices than had previously influenced its development and which, further, rendered significant changes. The nature of these changes is another topic of debate – De Michelis and Singleton, for example, are in disagreement about some of them, but both agree on the general heuristic.

From 1750 onward western Orientalist scholars in India began to take a keen interest in Eastern Religions and worked alongside upper caste Indian intelligentsia in developing analyses and accounts of Hinduism and yoga. However, by the 1850's westerners' interests had shifted to include Eastern religions as possible forms of practice as well as objects of study, and this is why De Michelis (2005; 2008) uses 1850 as the turning point between modern and pre-modern yoga. It was not until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that yoga was first introduced in a substantial way to western audiences, however, and began to be exported. It witnessed a slow growth from the turn of the century fuelled by continued transnational activity, particularly the circulation of export gurus and their pupils, organizations, and texts (De Michelis, 2005, 2008; Singleton, 2010; Strauss, 2005). This period was marked by stages of decline and expansion until a major boom occurred in 1990, in part due to increased attention and validation from the medical establishment (De Michelis, 2005; 2008; Douglass, 2007).

Swami Vivekananda is widely recognized in both yogic and academic circles as the first major export guru to bring yoga to the West and was an upper-caste, English speaking, charismatic man. This of course should indicate to us that Vivekananda was, to some extent, a

product of western colonialism himself. At the Chicago's Parliament of the World's religions in 1983 he presented an interpretation of Classical yoga and the three forms described in the *Gita*. It is widely agreed that this re-reading of yoga was ideologically aligned with Western values and norms in a number of ways. He used a synthesis of classical texts, neo-Hindu thought, western esotericism, New Age religious thought, western philosophy, science, medicine, and psychology. Syncretic dialogues such as these have continued through to the present day, and have indeed expanded to include further discourses. This eclecticism marks one of the differences between the syncretism of pre-modern and modern forms; while both drew on multiple discourses and geographic areas, the scope and compatibility of ideas adopted in modern forms is much larger and less stable (De Michelis, 2008).<sup>xiv</sup>

Like most early forms of modern yoga, Vivekananda's formulation paid very little attention to *asana* and in fact often vilified it, particularly its connection to equally-besmirched *Hatha* traditions. However, yoga was re-imagined during the neo-Hindu renaissance as a means of strengthening what was perceived as a weak nation composed of weak bodies, opening a legitimate space for *Hatha* traditions and new possibilities for *asana*. This process drew on and was deeply intertwined with western physical culture movements, such as body building, which were intended to develop strong bodies, spirits, minds and, by extension, a strong nation – an emphasis which remains in modern yoga, though the focus on nations has arguably shifted to global and ecological unity. In India, these kinds of mind-body-spirit systems operated on colonial discourses of Indian degeneracy, expounded with the intention of redeeming an uncivilized nation. However, they were adopted by the nationalist movement in a bid to reverse racist colonial discourses, and yoga became one of the preferred incarnations of man-and-nation

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<sup>xiv</sup> Though this list is based on De Michelis' 2008, there is a consensus on this information in almost all sources cited here. See De Michelis' references on page 23.

building regimes. It represented the nationalist work-ethic of physical culture, a scientific system of physical and spiritual development *and* an authentically Indian tradition, superior to Western ones despite being partly derived from them (Singleton, 2010; Strauss, 2005).

Thus, though *Hatha* yoga of the stretch-and-relax variety is one of the most common styles in MPY milieus today and draws from pre-modern *Hatha* traditions, it is also significantly different from them; the degree of dislocation is also an ongoing debate (Lieberman, 2008; De Michelis, 2005; Singleton, 2010). Likewise, the Ashtanga yoga most commonly offered in studios is a system developed by one of the early export gurus, Sri K. Pattabhi Jois, rather than Patanjali's formulation. It is a highly aerobic and *asana*-heavy style, thus clearly demarcated from Classical forms – though Classical Yoga continues to exert considerable discursive force over it, particularly insofar as it references Classical Yoga's authority for legitimation (Smith, 2008).

During this process western and Indian academics had a large impact on the development of Hindu religiosities and modern yogas: “Scholarship structured and informed practical modern yoga by obliquely sanctioning its choices of texts and endowing ‘classical’ status to certain methods and belief frameworks. In this sense scholarship is not a meta-discourse that reveals the truth about yoga (though, of course, it may) but a constituent part of its historical production in the modern age” (Singleton, 2010, p. 10). Further, the power relationships involved often operated in favour of western academics and colonial discourses, despite being a fundamentally joint venture. Western scholars brought their personal and cultural beliefs, standards, and biases to bear on yoga traditions, including scientific measures of validity,<sup>xv</sup> Christian religious frameworks, Orientalist orientations toward Other cultures, and reliance on textual evidence.

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<sup>xv</sup> For example, the scientific analysis of yoga to confirm its effectiveness or to prove the existence of the subtle body, an endeavour Indian scientists were deeply involved with as well; see Alter, (2004).

This often excluded or transformed Indian knowledge's, the degree and effects of which are debated. It also favored the authority of scholars over practitioners, which further complicates "gold standard" approaches to modern yoga and those that disregard practitioners themselves, insofar as they position the scholar as more knowledgeable (King, 1999a, 1999b; Singleton, 2008, 2010). This history therefore supports the adoption of multiple methodologies in studying yoga as an attempt to balance the difficult relations at play. While it makes the need for attention to the lived experience of yoga clear, it also highlights the necessity of adopting a critical stance.

Finally, it is worth noting that commodification has in fact been implicated in the production of modern yoga for a much longer period, for different reasons, and with different power effects than is sometimes supposed. Vivekananda utilized an essentialized image of India as spiritually wealthy contrasted against the material wealth (and spiritual hollowness) of the West. He argued to both Indians and North Americans that it was necessary for Indians to exchange their venerable spiritual knowledge for the West's valuable material goods, allowing both parties to acquire what they needed from the transaction. By once again drawing on racist colonial discourses intended to maintain British hegemony as a modern nation, Vivekananda was able to perform a discursive reversal (Strauss, 2005). This utilization of eastern spirituality against western materialism as a pivot for transforming yoga into a spiritual commodity has continued. This approach has also served to further entrench the modern/pre-modern binary, as materialism is linked to modernity and spirituality to pre-modernity.

Nor is this strategy limited to western audiences. The contemporary situation is one in which "yoga has become a way to sell the packaged essence of India to tourists both Indian and foreign" (Strauss, 2005, p. 137). As Liberman (2008) points out, this becomes even more complicated as Western media products circulate through India and influence Indian yoga.

“When Westerners come to India to learn about a yoga that is now partly a response to, and an appropriation of, Western reductions of yoga, the very reflexivity of the authenticity here can lead to vertigo” (p. 111).

### **Yoga Stories: A Theoretical Demonstration**

Given the historical account above, how do participants and *Yoga Journal* conceptualize the relationship between pre-modern and modern traditions, and what might this tell us? What do they consider Authentic Yoga, and how do they tell The Yoga Story? This section will begin to answer some of these questions and explore their implications, developing them through hermeneutic and post-structuralist lenses in the ensuing chapters.

One of the most common narratives regarding “Authentic Yoga” relies on a foundational representation of yoga as an Ancient, Eastern practice. This narrative was found in both the field data and *Yoga Journal*, and is prevalent in other modern yoga texts and academic work of the gold standard variety (Singleton, 2010). It is also reflected clearly in Vivekananda’s approach to selling yoga. While it echoes the story told thus far, insofar as yoga generally does have its roots in ancient Eastern cultures, this narrative is also much simpler and often unable to account for the processes described above. Setting aside the urge to use this as evidence of modern yoga’s illegitimacy, the discrepancy is still problematic because it is built on a set of binaries which operate through difference and power (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). If authentic yoga is Eastern then inauthentic must be not-Eastern, in this case Western, and if it is ancient (pre-modern) then the inauthentic is contemporary (modern). There are two key assumptions in this foundational narrative that are amenable to analysis: (1) that there is a single, ancient, authentic yoga which must necessarily reside in the East (read implicitly as India), (2) a modern, inauthentic yoga that must necessarily reside in the West.

What, then, is yoga according to my participants and *Yoga Journal*? One of the easiest pieces of information to find about yoga in both academic and popular texts is the meaning of the word, which comes from the root *yuj* and means “to bind or yoke together” (King, 1999a, p. 67). This can denote a variety of things depending on the tradition under consideration and is often theoretically, metaphysically and philosophically complex in pre-modern forms but considerably less so in modern ones, particularly MPY with its experiential epistemology. King (1999a) suggests two interpretations of *yuj* in classical Indian philosophy which are particularly relevant. Theistic traditions largely interpret it to mean union with the divine, while others view yoga as unification of the mind or self in *samadhi* (meditative concentration). He astutely observes that the second reading is much more agreeable to modern, transnational forms of yoga as it encourages psychological interpretations and secularisation.

*Yoga Journal* offers good proof of this, as well as more complicated and, conversely, reductive readings. Three separate definitions of *yuj* taken from the website are instructive:

The word yoga comes from the ancient Sanskrit root *yuj*, which means "to yoke" or "to join"... Today, yoga is commonly defined as union, because the practice helps unite—or join together—many things. On the most basic level, yoga unites the body and the mind through the breath. On the most cosmic level, yoga unites the individual with the universe.

([http://www.yogajournal.com/dailyinsight/yjnl\\_20101117.html?utm\\_source=home\\_page&utm\\_medium=site&utm\\_campaign=dailyinsight](http://www.yogajournal.com/dailyinsight/yjnl_20101117.html?utm_source=home_page&utm_medium=site&utm_campaign=dailyinsight))

Our practice is based on the notion of connection—for our purposes, between a flexible mind and a flexible body—and that this connection is what leads to balance. (<http://www.yogajournal.com/practice/1407>)

The ultimate goal of yoga is liberation, also known as *samadhi*, through the union of the individual self with the universal soul.

(<http://www.yogajournal.com/practice/2574>)

The first excerpt begins with yoga’s (presumed) ancient (Indian) roots, and then proceeds to its modern meanings, thereby implying a linear development. It leans heavily toward King’s (1999a) second definition, though it is vague enough to allow for more religious and theistic readings through reference to union with “the universe”, which may be read as God or the divine

but need not be. Some academic texts use this kind of language, but generally proceed to elaborate on what precisely “the universe” means metaphysically or philosophically, whereas *Yoga Journal* tends to remain at this broad level. It also provides a strictly secular and physical interpretation of *yuj*, which the second passage makes even more explicit than the first. Not only this, but the second paragraph relies on three key themes prevalent in modern yoga generally and the data specifically: flexibility, balance, and connection (Saukko, 2003).

The third definition is more technical and closely tied to academic accounts; however, it is not necessarily the same as scholarly definitions. It draws a direct connection to yoga’s classical literature<sup>xvi</sup> through reference to *samadhi* and liberation in the quoted section, and the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, *Yoga Sutras* and *Upanishads* as the article proceeds. But the treatment of this literature is very brief and does not acknowledge the large differences between them in philosophy, theory, practice, time period, etc. The article collapses these texts’ understanding of the specific nature of the “universal soul” into one term and does the same with “liberation”. This strategy supports the first problematic proposition of authenticity – a single, authentic tradition based in pre-modern India. But it is also historically grounded in modern yoga’s development. The article draws on Iyengar, who purposefully adopted vague usages of “self-realization” and *samadhi* when creating his system in order to support the broad, unstable syncretic approach favored in modern yoga. Indeed, this strategy was important both in meeting the needs of modern practitioners and in increasing yoga’s popularity – a cause to which Iyengar is extremely devoted.

Overall, *Yoga Journal* is inconsistent in recognizing yoga’s complex history; while there are a large variety of articles recognizing its diversity, the website still frequently employs linear

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<sup>xvi</sup> By “classical literature” I am referring here to texts produced within (largely) pre-modern yoga traditions, which are addressed further in this discussion. This does not refer to academic literature.

and monolithic references, particularly through modern renditions of pre-modern traditions which reify the first proposition. The definitions of yoga described above are a good example of this, as they highlight different aspects of the practice and its history while maintaining a degree of ambiguity which makes them compatible with one another, supports modern iterations, and elides important historical differences.

None the less, *Yoga Journal* is still quite willing to tell us what yoga is and where it comes from. Indeed, the variety of perspectives deployed on the website serves exactly this end. In contrast, participants often had difficulty describing what yoga is or what it means. References to concepts and traditions which were generally identified as Eastern and pre-modern, either directly by participants or correlatively in sources such as *Yoga Journal* or academic texts, were consistently paired with the hesitancy to define yoga and the inclusion of multiple perspectives. None discussed the meaning of *yuj* directly, for example, but they regularly described these varying definitions of union, often including several of them within an interview: union of self; of body, mind, and sometimes spirit; of self and universe; of divinity and self, etc. This is an important point, as *Yoga Journal's* provision of multiple perspectives often confines each one to an individual article or synthesizes them *to create one cogent piece* that supports the authenticity of Ancient, Eastern yoga. Participants, on the other hand, were quite insistent and reflective that multiple perspectives were necessary to meet individuals' needs for an authentic practice and to teach authentically, though this often supported the two propositions as well. This may be, in part, because of the medium of the data in each case. But it is also reflects the practice-focus participants stressed, on the one hand, and the journal's need to solidify a variety of authentic spiritual commodities on the other. These points will be developed in chapters 5 and 6. Thus, rather than clearly identifying modern yoga as Ancient and Eastern (or clearly identifying it at

all, in some cases), participants often deployed a variety of strategies which strongly implied these elements.

Participants also expressed varying degrees of specificity regarding yoga's history, sometimes referring to it in a linear and monolithic manner even while recognizing that it was taken up in numerous religions, contexts, and lineages. My conversation with Allison was quite demonstrative of this trend as she spent some time talking about different styles and traditions (both modern and pre-modern), but admonished:

I think that's fine if you um, if you use a name to refer to a shorthand way of describing a similar way of approaching the class, for a group of people who keep approaching it that same way then that's just a way of communicating by saying the word, so, for sure I've done pretty much all.. I don't even know If I can say all because there's probably some I don't know, but yeah, a lot of different styles, and I myself don't feel like I belong in one or the other I feel like I just teach yoga. And because it all comes from *Hatha* the same place... there's no style that has something the other ones don't have, they just happen to be using one slice of the pie more than another slice of the pie.

That she refers to naming styles within the context of "classes" certainly indicates that we are dealing with an articulation of MPY, which when coupled with the argument of yoga's foundational unity in pre-modern *hatha* yoga traditions constructs a linear time line. This quote and the conversation in which it is located point to several other important elements of authenticity, and I will therefore continue to draw on it. However, the pieces of her narrative fall in a different order than the one I am constructing here; thus, her arguments may appear disjointed, reflecting a hermeneutic approach to the dialogue between stories and a post-structuralist focus on non-linearity.

Participants and *Yoga Journal* made reference to the yoga traditions described in the *Bhagavad Gita*, though *Yoga Journal* was more consistent in doing so. Participants sometimes argued that study was as a necessary form of practice linked to *jnana-yoga* – books were often interpreted positively for this reason. *Karma-yoga*, from which the theme of service was derived,

received more attention, however. Karma yoga shifts generally take their name from this tradition and participants often viewed teaching as a form of *karma-yoga*, while De Michelis (2005) identifies “the performance of voluntaristic ‘good works’” (p. 219) as a key tenet of modern yoga which in fact *differentiates* it from pre-modern forms. This is a point where we see not only a scholarly disagreement on pre-modern forms, but also participant understandings which fall in line with both, depending on the angle from which they are viewed. Participants saw *karma-yoga* as an important element of yoga tied to its pre-modern roots, but also clearly demonstrated De Michelis’ argument that good works are, indeed, characteristic of modern yoga. Thus, regardless of whether the pre-modern connection is historically accurate, it *is* important in deploying service as an authentic practice in modern yoga.

*Yoga Journal* also confirms this. “Do Yoga, Do Good”, for example, has this to say:

In the West's never-ending quest for high-speed, user-friendly spiritual growth, an ancient solution to the problem, karma yoga, is usually overlooked. The Bhagavad Gita touts karma yoga—the Hindu path of service to others—as the fast lane to spiritual fulfillment (<http://www.yogajournal.com/wisdom/1492/>).

Aside from highlighting the Ancient Eastern character of *karma-yoga*, this quote shows that *Yoga Journal* is not above identifying the inauthenticity of Western modernity and spirituality while simultaneously espousing an approach to yoga which meets those modern needs. The article also provided another approach to service which reflected the theme of social good, widely espoused as an outcome of yoga across the field data, *Yoga Journal*, and Strauss’ (2005) study, though the connection to *karma-yoga* or service was not always present. Social good was sometimes deployed as an outcome of authentic yoga:

The first mystery comes wrapped in the definition of karma yoga, which doesn't, strictly speaking, mean "service" (often referred to in yogic circles by its Sanskrit name, *seva*). Instead, the desire to do service is part of what's revealed on the karma yoga path. Karma yoga is usually translated as "the yoga of action"—that is, using the ordinary actions of your life as a means of "waking up." Essentially, everything you do—from household chores, like washing the dishes, to

"important" duties, like your job—becomes a way of nourishing the universe that nourishes you.

At some point, however, the distinction between ordinary actions and service, or actions to relieve the suffering of others, disappears. Yoga teaches that as we develop spiritually, our awareness and compassion grow, making us more alert to suffering around us and less able to turn away from it.

While these traditions were important in the data, Patanjali's Classical Yoga and *Hatha* Yoga received by far the most attention. *Yoga Journal* and my participants regularly referenced them, as Allison's quote regarding *Hatha* as the source of all yoga indicates. Yet, unlike her quote, historical research indicates that these two forms of yoga were very different.

According to scholarly accounts, the goal of *Hatha* yoga is to transform or perfect the body to achieve immortality, a divine body, or Self-realization, depending on the academic or lay text consulted; thus it has a much stronger emphasis on *asana* than classical yoga. In *Hatha* yoga *yuj* is seen not only as a matter of Self or God-realization but also as the union of the internal sun (*Ha*) and moon (*tha*), or male and female principles, representing God (*Siva*) and Goddess (*Sakti*). Yoga Generalist offers Kundalini classes which draw on *Hatha* traditions, while Emily draws quite specifically on *Hatha* physiology by discussing the *nadis*, or energy channels. Practitioners also made more or less oblique references to various *Hatha* concepts, though these were often tempered with ambiguity or other potential readings.

In contrast, Classical Yoga is radically dualistic and strives to realise the isolated status of pure consciousness or transcendental Self (*purusa*) from matter or transcendental world-ground (*prakrti*). It is important here that matter includes body *and* mind (Feuerstein 1990; King, 1999a), contrary to some (but not all) of the discussions provided by *Yoga Journal* – the second definition of *yuj*, which defines it as the unification of body and mind, is a good example. Indeed, this is one of the marked disagreements between many modern and pre-modern forms,

and one which has serious consequences for the kinds of subjectivization they produce (Carrette & King, 2005). This point will be examined in chapter 6.

Classical Yoga consists of eight limbs, most of which were referenced in all of the data: Restraint (*yama*), Self-discipline (*niyama*), Posture (*asana*), Control of breath/vital energy (*pranayama*), Sense-withdrawal (*pratyahara*), Concentration (*dharana*), Meditative-awareness (*dhyana*) and Meditative-concentration (*samadhi*) (King, 1999a). There was in fact little reference in the *Yoga Sutras* to the *asanas* (Singleton, 2010). The *yamas* consist of five moral observances or vows: nonharming (*ahimsa*), truthfulness (*satya*), nonstealing (*asteya*), chastity (*brahmacharya*), and greedlessness (*aparigraha*). The *niyamas* are comprised by five practices: moral, mental and physical purity (*shauca*), contentment (*samtosha*), ascetic practice (*tapas*), study or self-analysis (*svadhyaya*), and contemplative devotion to the Lord (*ishvara-pranidhana*) (Feuerstein 1990; King, 1999a). All of these elements were referenced across the data.

The *yamas* and *niyamas*, as well as *samadhi*, are the most frequently cited limbs of Classical Yoga on the *Yoga Journal* website outside of *asana* and *pranayama*; their treatment remains problematic on a number of levels which will be dealt with in chapter 6, and thus not explored extensively here. Most participants also discussed at least one of these aspects, and these concepts or themes derived from them were frequently deployed in classes I participated in – though their connection to tradition was not always identified by the teacher. Allison, for example, talked about the eight limbs extensively in the same conversation I have been following thus far:

So, in a general yoga class it's mostly *asana* based, it's mostly pose-based, but that's only one of 8 limbs of yoga, so there's the breath, the *pranayama*, and there's *yamas* and *niyamas* so these are like lifestyle areas. The *yamas* are how we relate to the rest of the world, and whether it's environment and the plants and animals and people, and the *niyamas* are how we relate to ourselves. And um, I often weave something from those into a class, like a theme or something like that. So those would be things like the quietness of our minds and our world and our lives that could incorporate fewer objects in our home, or clear, cleaner

apartment, it would include things like truth and it would include things like contentment rather than always reaching and yearning or, and like something like *asteya* non-stealing, where you're um, not stealing someone else's experience, for example if I always help someone and bring their hand to their hip or whatever it is then I'm stealing their opportunity for them to learn themselves they can learn how to do it, so there are lots of things that are related to the lifestyle that I try to bring into the class related to the poses with the hope that they can take it off the mat into their regular life and that's where that transformation happens.

This quote demonstrates that even though participants consistently discussed yoga as more than *asana*, it often remained closely tied to the physical practice within the context of MPY. The implications of how Allison and others have applied these concepts will be taken up in chapter 5. But it is worth noting that this part of the conversation occurred shortly before the discussion of yoga as a single pie with many slices, linking the two descriptions of different traditions as fundamentally united.

Indeed, Classical Yoga and *Hatha* were often treated as continuous or synonymous in the field data. This is not necessarily untrue historically, as some scholars argue *Hatha* may have developed from Classical yoga, be complimentary to it, and that both traditions are syncretic (King, 1999a; Liberman, 2008). But it *is* problematic insofar as they are clearly discrete traditions, and this trend supports the first assumption of authenticity. *Yoga Journal* often does the same, though they provide more variety and depth. This ensures the two traditions are more clearly differentiated, but where the website addresses this problem, it often creates others, taken up in chapter 6.

One of the most frequently cited source texts in scholarship, modern practice and media is Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, which comprises the first wide-ranging synthesis of yoga techniques and theories (in a sense, the first Yoga Story). When I asked Emily how she felt about the many yoga books available, for example, she responded "that's tough isn't it? Awesome books we have in yoga, such amazing books we have". This response appears quite confusing when it is

decontextualized from the conversation – why is it tough if the books are so wonderful? One explanation for this ambivalence rests in the tension between authenticity and practice: “You shouldn’t read too much about yoga, you need to read the *Sutras*, that’s one book, and you can read it, there’s millions of beautiful translations out there. That’s what you read”. As the primary text of Classical Yoga, the *Sutras* were considered necessary reading, but the experiential nature of the practice meant too much reading could be detrimental.

The *Yoga Sutras* were written in approximately the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, the period in which Classical Yoga is argued to have emerged, while *Hatha* yoga dates from around the 9<sup>th</sup> century and its primary text, the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, from approximately the 14<sup>th</sup>. The *Bhagavad Gita* originates in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE and the *Upanishads*, which contain the first textual references to yoga, approximately the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE (De Michelis, 2005; Feuerstein 1990; King, 1999a; Singleton, 2010). While these varying dates cast a wide net, the age of yoga is perhaps one of its most difficult attributes to confirm, most frequently cited in the data, and one of the clearest strategies for representing pre-modern and modern yogas as linear traditions connected umbilically to one another. Many participants adopted this strategy, and Allison cites yoga’s age in the conversation we have been following:

Well, there’s two different things, I guess. One thing is to have a name, and that’s fine, I guess, if that helps for, um a shorthand way of describing similar classes each time. It’s another thing I think to brand it in terms of suggesting that you have... patented it or discovered it, because I mean it’s 6000 year old, so... no one now can really do that, so... um, with much respect that I don’t think that’s appropriate to brand yoga because it’s much older than any of us are.

This quote falls *between* her discussion of Classical Yoga and analogy of yoga as a single pie, deriving from *Hatha*, whose different slices are used by different people. Her appeal to the age of yoga and treatment of Classical and *Hatha* yoga in the context of MPY classes as continuous delineates this conversation as one supporting proposition number 1. But it is also performing a second, unexpected function. This quote and her pie analogy were raised when I asked how she

felt about branding yoga, and these strategies allowed her to argue that yoga's basic unity and antiquity makes branding individual styles inappropriate. Thus, while it is clear that authenticity as Ancient Eastern practice is mobilized to sell yoga as a commodity, this demonstrates that authenticity can also be mobilized to *prevent* yoga being sold.

The *Yoga Journal* website also offers interesting insights into the way signifiers of archaic authenticity can be deployed. The site consistently refers to yoga as ancient and frequently uses the figures of 5,000 and 2,000 years. A 5,000 year old tradition is in fact included in yoga journal's mission statement: to "give readers insightful articles on yoga, filled with the most current scientific information available, while honoring the 5,000-year-old tradition on which it is based" (<http://www.yogajournal.com/global/34>). This date gives yoga the deepest roots possible and favors practitioners; though there is no reliable evidence for it, it also cannot be disproved. The second oft-quoted date on yoga's ancient origins is the 2,000 year mark which signals Patanjali's creation of the *Yoga Sutras*. Singleton (2008) argues that Orientalist scholars translating the *Sutra*'s during the mid-1900's had great difficulty finding pandits teaching his system, indicating that it was no longer a living tradition. In essence, Singleton argues, Classical Yoga and Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* were installed as a "source-authority" of yoga through Orientalist and Neo-Hindu reform discourses rather than any relation to an actual historical authority. While this interpretation constitutes a continuing debate amongst scholars, it does show clearly the problem with ignoring hermeneutic approaches to yoga. Rather than starting with living practices, these scholars often began at the point of textual authority and sought the practices with which they were associated.

This is a tricky point, as there was most certainly a Patanjali tradition and it is often recognized by both Indian and Western scholarship and practitioners as truly "authentic". Hence

its representation, even when re-interpreted through western ideologies, appears to be an honest endeavour. But Singleton's (2008) work reveals that this is a potentially problematic proposal, and even King (1999a, 1999b), who is extremely critical and works in a post-colonial theoretical framework, presents Patanjali's Classical Yoga as the primary system *while* acknowledging that orientalism and modernization may have irreversibly altered Indian spirituality to this effect. Hence, Classical Yoga is a representational conundrum. To ignore it would be yet another major step in dislocating yoga from a specific historical tradition (even if it is only one of many). This is particularly troublesome given the uneven power relations at play, yoga's susceptibility to distortion, and its current transnational adoption. Yet to include Classical Yoga as a stamp of authenticity is equally problematic given its complicated past and the tendency of modern yoga to over-represent, re-interpret and homogenize it.

Many yoga texts include Indian cultural signifiers such as Hindu deities and Sanskrit chants, revealing that when popular representations and practitioners refer to yoga as an "Eastern" practice they often mean "Indian". Liberman (2008) compares modern yoga's treatment of Indian-ness to the semiotic conventions of Western films which have very little to do with the historic frontier. "Yoga in the contemporary West similarly invokes a choreography whose semiotic elements are widespread yet whose connections to an actually existing Indian yoga, past or present, are tenuous," and which discourage us from investigating past or present traditions any further (p. 107). I disagree with the assertion that semiotic conventions in modern yoga are disconnected from a past or present "actually existing" yoga, as it is too close to the gold standard approach; this is, in fact, a controversial statement in the milieu of historiography I have been discussing. However his observations about the semiotics of representation are very astute in so far as the elements he describes are mobilized to authenticate particular texts over

others *regardless* of their relationship to modern and pre-modern Indian yogas, and this can certainly have the effect of dissuading further investigation.

The deployment of Sanskrit *asana* names which are touted as deeply meaningful and authentic because they are thousands of years old and representative of Hindu religious themes is a common strategy employed by *Yoga Journal*. The instructions for *Virabhadrasana I* (Warrior 1), for example, include this account of the *asana*'s origins:

It may seem strange to name a yoga pose after a warrior; after all, aren't yogis known for they're non-violent ways? But remember that one of the most revered of all the yoga texts, the Bhagavad-Gita, is the dialog between two famous and feared warriors, Krishna and Arjuna, set on a battlefield between two great armies spoiling for a fight. What's really being commemorated in this pose's name, and held up as an ideal for all practitioners, is the "spiritual warrior," who bravely does battle with the universal enemy, self-ignorance (*avidya*), the ultimate source of all our suffering (<http://www.yogajournal.com/poses/1708>).

The lack of reference to *asana* in pre-modern traditions makes its vintage highly questionable, as is the explanation for its origin. It is important to clarify that this example does not automatically debunk the meaning or value of Sanskrit *asana* titles for practitioners, even as they support the Ancient Eastern-ness of yoga. Sara, for example, places great value in the vibrational and spiritual qualities of Sanskrit *asana* names, and they support the presence of a shared nomenclature with different cultural connotations across Eastern and Western practice, contrary to Liberman's (2008) argument.

Most participants expressed some kind of East/West binary, though this was most often through emphasis on the west. At least half of participants made some reference to the East and/or India, however. Lindsey, for example, had already started saving for travel to India and spoke about it in reverential terms. Her case was the most extreme, but not inconsistent with other interviews. She argues that:

the meditation side of things is a big thing in India, like you have to be able, like a lot of the practice that you do there, like it's not a lot of yoga, it's not a lot of *asana*, you're not doing a lot of posture, it's the, it's breathing and it's meditation

and becoming one with your mind. And I think that's something. That, that's where they want you to be...

While Lindsey appears to be referring mainly to MPY when she says 'yoga', the drift of her claim appears to be that the practice in India is focused more on non-postural yoga traditions, and this is supported by some accounts; De Michelis (2005; 2008) argues, for example, that non-postural forms of modern yoga tend to be much more common in India than elsewhere. But Strauss (2005) finds that MPY is quite popular in India as well, and Sara felt that India was not the best place to go for yoga – though the context of this conversation may indicate that she was referring to MPY, while non-postural forms were best studied in India. The factual basis of Lindsey's statement is important, but its discursive function is the more significant point here. First it shows the importance of yoga conceived as a holistic practice greatly exceeding *asana*, most pure and authentic in India. It also demonstrates a clear East/West contrast through the implication that Lindsey is unable to access this kind of practice in the West, a point bolstered by her consistent reference to modern, western culture as inauthentic and unhealthy.

Further, she draws on Classical Yoga in this conversation, connecting the discursive strategies described thus far. She also provides a description of Indian ascetic yogis living in isolation:

There are 8 limbs of yoga.. and there's... they're very hard rules to live by, there's like the self-restraint aspect, there's the breathing aspect, the meditation aspect, and like, there are so many different aspects that you, technically everyone is striving to combine in their life. And most people only get to about the 5th limb. The 8th limb, which is... um, what is it called again... *Samadhi*... It's ah... pretty much... when you have... become... one with the universe. And the yogi's who get there, they live in complete isolation and they, they don't have, like hygiene is something that they no longer worry about. They live in the woods and they, y'know, like yoga can get very intense in that way. And ah, I think when you. When you actually come to terms that you're making an effort to acknowledge these 8 limbs and you're really taking them into your life, and... they want you to be able to control your thought process and not let the petty things in the world get to you, not let anger, and be able to control your emotions essentially is what you need to be able to do.... and that is my philosophy on yoga, is.... Being able to... cause it really, your emotions they take over you and they effect everything, they affect your health even.

This description strongly re-enforces the suggestion that Indian yoga remains pre-modern, particularly as Lindsey associates modern life with uncontrolled emotion, ill health, and lack of balance throughout the interview, another common strategy. The Indian Holy Man she describes is a popular image with a complex history based in colonial and post-colonial politics, and emphasises the barbarism of Orientalist images despite being romanticized in this case (Narayan, 1993; Singleton, 2010). The holy man's body is "a site in which cultural difference was first derisively emphasized and then commodified for entertainment. Alternatively, when he was admired, his body as a medium of spectacular and bizarre difference tended to be bypassed, and his philosophical concepts coopted instead" (Naryan, 1993, p. 478). Lindsey's statement reflects this analysis, and her many hesitations and reformulations also highlight how much difficulty participants experienced when articulating the nature and history of yoga.<sup>xvii</sup>

We can now see that the assumption of an authentic, ancient, pre-modern yoga which must necessarily reside in the East (read as India) is problematic, yet widely adopted in the data. *Yoga Journal* tends to identify authentic yoga as Ancient and Eastern in fairly straightforward ways, and while participants proved less willing to do so overtly they nonetheless adopted key representational strategies which made this connection. This was problematic not because of its dishonesty, but its discursive effects. What of Modern, Inauthentic Yoga, then? How is it (or is it not, as the story goes) connected to pre-modern (or modern) Eastern forms?

*Yoga Journal* spends very little time dismissing modern, western yoga outright, though they certainly view modernity as problematic. Modern forms of yoga (such as MPY) are seen as authentic when they can be represented as Ancient and Eastern or as directly derivative of pre-modern forms, and indeed these are the forms that the magazine overwhelmingly focuses on. It

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<sup>xvii</sup> While Narayan's quote refers to this process as coopting, I feel somewhat uncomfortable with this word. In a post-structuralist analysis, which in part constitutes this analysis, it is certainly a fitting one. But in a hermeneutic one it is inappropriate given the practice-focus of yoga, as this re-interpretation does indeed suit participant's needs.

does, however, still present some fitness-oriented, medicalized, and modern-identified forms as legitimate; in this respect, it places more emphasis on proposition number 1 than 2, though it adopts both. Further, it consistently presents Authentic, Eastern yoga in contexts which reflect these other discourses. This pattern fits the profit-oriented goals of the journal insofar as it depends on the strategy initiated by Vivekananda *without* forfeiting other kinds of yogic commodities, and is also directly in line with the journal's mandate.

Participants, however, placed more emphasis on proposition number 2 than 1, though they clearly adopted both. They were much quicker to dismiss modern yoga, or to be more precise they were quick to dismiss western modernity and its accompanying ills, constructing yoga as modernity's solution. Indeed, all participants articulated criticisms along these lines. Gail argues that people need yoga because they need a practice with "a solid background, the philosophy, the history, and um, that make people *rethink the modern life*" (emphasis added). Chris, likewise says that "as you go deeper into some techniques it's very apparent that uh, that there's a part of our daily life, aah *in the west* that we are hugely missing out on, and you know whether you wanna call that spirituality or, personal connection," (emphasis added) it is something yoga can remedy. Statements like these position yogas produced within western, modern cultures as inauthentic.

It is also worth noting that those forms of yoga which were seen as least authentic were not seen as bad, but as unimportant. There were two reasons for this. First was the assumption that yogic practice would eventually fade away or develop into authenticity, so inauthentic practices would not have a lasting impact. This was due in large part to MPY's experiential epistemology, which was constructed as being based on pre-modern traditions despite the marked difference of this element in modern and pre-modern forms, and also supported the

deployment of multiple perspectives. Secondly, participants argued that even if a practice remained inauthentic in relation to tradition it would, at a minimum, be harmless and could still help practitioners by improving health, for example. This logic involved one small twist, which in fact provides an excellent insight as to why this pattern appeared amongst practitioners. The “wrong” kind of yoga was often defined as one that would harm its practitioners, and participants suggested that a practice which followed tradition would not do so. They did, however, worry that a purely physical practice that was not grounded in deeper philosophies could cause damage of the physical or spiritual variety. This most often meant pre-modern, eastern philosophies, but it also included psychological or medical ones. What made the latter philosophies less desirable was their grounding in modernity – medicalization, for example, was considered responsible for many problems, so purely medical yoga was viewed as having serious limitations. Emily described this kind of practice as “unwise”, a term which is reminiscent of *Yoga Journal*’s wisdom section.

*Yoga Journal* generally maintains an uncritical deployment of authenticity, as described above, in its articles. However, there is also a remarkable plasticity between uncritical and critical reflection at play on the website which deserves recognition and suggests that yoga representations need not always follow the path I have presented. Indeed, Singleton has published an article on the website based on *Yoga Body* (2010). While many articles remain in the frameworks described above, others are in fact quite critical of modern traditions, the interpretations of those traditions and/or pre-modern traditions.

One article in particular, however, provides an excellent example of this odd ambiguity. “New Light on Yoga” runs the bi-line: “From loincloths to leotards, yoga has come a long way in 5,000 years. But is yoga as we know it really that old?”

(<http://www.yogajournal.com/wisdom/466>). This story initially caught my attention with its use of the standard 5,000 year old tagline, and the equally stereotypical binary representation of scantily clad Indian ascetic and leotard wearing westerner. The title and bi-line are actually hooks, however, designed to appropriate and reverse these standard themes and reconceptualise the notion of yogic tradition. The author, Anne Cushman, relies heavily on a seminal study by Norman Sjoman<sup>xviii</sup> which has subsequently informed much of the scholarly work on modern yoga cited herein. And she concludes, remarkably, that though yogis talk almost constantly about tradition, “there really is no one monolithic yoga tradition”, marshalling a host of academic evidence to support her argument. She suggests that “yoga fundamentalists” are one of the most dangerous results of traditionalist rhetoric, as they attempt to control and narrow the potential of yoga and yogis. But, she argues, the lack of a monolithic tradition need not be read as negative:

This realization can be unsettling at first. If there's no one way to do things—well, then how do we know if we're doing them right? Some of us may long for a definitive archaeological discovery: say, a terra-cotta figure of a yogi in Triangle Pose, circa 600 B.C., that will tell us once and for all how far apart the feet should be.

But on another level it's liberating to realize that yoga, like life itself, is infinitely creative, expressing itself in a multitude of forms, re-creating itself to meet the needs of different times and cultures. It's liberating to realize that the yoga poses are not fossils—they're alive and bursting with possibility  
(<http://www.yogajournal.com/wisdom/466>).

This statement is followed by the insistence that we should still recognize the importance of yoga’s diverse traditions and the common threads binding them together. Cushman is not suggesting that tradition is unimportant or that yoga can be *anything*, rather that yoga is a living tradition with deep and diverse roots. Indeed, she does not refute the idea that yoga is 5,000 years old, only that there is an unbroken line of singular tradition stretching back to this time. What is remarkable about this passage, however, is its striking similarity to the attitudes of many of the

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<sup>xviii</sup> I have been unable to obtain a copy of this book; however, it is cited consistently by many of the authors in this project. De Michelis, Singleton, and Strauss in particular draw on his work.

modern scholars working within the milieu I have drawn on thus far. It reflects an awareness regarding the complexity of archaeological evidence and, further, historical evidence generally. It acknowledges the importance of this evidence, the diversity of yogic history, and the nature of yoga as a set of living practices. It echoes Liberman's (2008) argument that "no one would argue that forms of culture should not be adapted to the local needs and contingencies of a society that comes to adopt them, but how much licence can be taken?" (p. 107). And it further answers this question by reframing all of these issues in a way that does not take away from modern yoga. It suggests that modern yoga, as a diverse set of practices stemming from an older set of equally diverse practices is also equally valuable, even if the relation between the two is problematic at times. In this respect Cushman is most certainly more optimistic than some of the authors I have cited. But the majority of scholars cited in this project *do* share her basic attitude, including myself.

### **Yoga Stories: What Does It All Mean?**

The Yoga Story told above introduces many of the themes relevant to the analysis of commodification in modern yoga: authenticity, modernity, health and medicalization, spirituality. But, as should be clear by now, there are a number of ways to approach these themes, and a distinct split in the literature.

What, for example, do we mean by spirituality? This term is notoriously vague and carries a large number of meanings in popular discourse, and two separate approaches will serve to demonstrate the methodological split in the literature. Spirituality as it is now conceptualized is a relatively modern invention, with the word emerging in a European context during the 17<sup>th</sup> century and taking on its current connotations in New Age religion at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Carrette & King, 2005). According to *Yoga Journal*:

spirituality, it could be said, has to do with one's interior life, the ever-evolving understanding of one's self and one's place in the cosmos—what Viktor Frankl called humankind's 'search for meaning'.

Religion, on the other hand, can be seen as spirituality's external counterpart, the organizational structure we give to our individual and collective spiritual processes: the rituals, doctrines, prayers, chants, and ceremonies, and the congregations that come together to share them (<http://www.yogajournal.com/lifestyle/283>).

This definition of spirituality is in fact quite typical of the modern meanings of spirituality in its broad cultural usage. It generally refers to a focus on the individual's internal relation to god, gods or the universe, a tendency toward criticism or rejection of institutionalized religion and, at the same time, encouragement of a religious syncretism which employs specific practices or beliefs from various religions to suit one's own individual spirituality (Carrette and King, 2005). It is significant that *Yoga Journal's* definition specifically states that yoga is spiritual, not religious. This claim is frequently made across yoga media, and marks another tricky historical point. While pre-modern yoga was not a religion, it *was* a religious practice, even when assessed using *Yoga Journal's* definition. Some pre-modern yoga traditions did indeed have a strong focus on individual liberation or relation to god, but they almost always did so in institutionalized religious settings. Likewise, pre-modern syncretism, aside from being more stable, was also adopted within and across lineages, schools, and religions rather than in the individualistic environment modern spirituality supports (De Michelis, 2008; King, 1999a, 1999b). As such, pre-modern yoga could never have been spiritual in the sense employed in most modern yogic discourse, including *Yoga Journal* and my participants. Nor, one might add, does *Yoga Journal's* own definition stand up well to scrutiny. Though modern yoga is based on an experiential epistemology and individual syncretism, it most certainly contains “rituals, doctrines, prayers, chants, and ceremonies, and the congregations that come together to share them”.

As Carrette and King (2005) argue, it is quite significant that while Spiritual practices are

often presented as non-commercial, or even anti-consumptive, the ambiguity of the term makes it easily amenable to co-option by business interests. Yoga has been re-articulated into a ‘spirituality of the self’ to be sold to the ‘spiritual consumer’, and this “religion of the self is effective because of its allegiance to the free market of individual choice” (Carrette & King, 2005, p. 78). They also implicate psychology as one of the main agents in this process. Before yoga can be commodified in this way, the explanation for all experiences (including religious ones) must be ontologically established within the individual self, and psychology has been crucial in establishing ‘spirituality’ as a dominant, individualized and internalized form of religious experience. As demonstrated in this chapter, pre-modern traditions were much more likely to proceed in the opposite direction, revealing through internal experience the *lack* of an individual self.

Carrette and King’s (2005) interpretation of spirituality is grounded in post-colonial and post-structuralist theory, and is extremely critical. They argue that in modern yoga “an arduous path to enlightenment and liberation from the cycle of rebirths through the conquest of selfish desires becomes yet another modern method for pacifying individuals to the world in which they find themselves” (Carrette and King, 2005, p. 120). The strongest point in this analysis, for our purposes, is not the analytical breakdown of spirituality’s discursive structure in pre-modern and modern traditions, represented scathingly in the first half of this quote. Carrette and King (2005) are decidedly opposed to the privatization of religious traditions generally, and particularly of Asian wisdom traditions, at least in part because of the extent to which they stray from pre-modern forms. Though this analysis is helpful insofar as it highlights the different metaphysics of pre-modern and modern traditions, it remains too much within the scope of the “gold standard” approach to stand comfortably alone. Rather, Carrette and King’s (2005) analysis of how

the commodification of modern spirituality operates within relations of power, nicely summed in the second half of the quote, hits directly on the mark; here we escape the “golden standard” and the commodification of modern yoga can be criticized on its own grounds. Yogic spirituality, in its dominant discursive forms, is not only profitable for companies at the expense of yoga as a potentially resistant mode of practice, but a hugely successful technique for maintaining the status quo.

This is clearly a very different approach to the discursive structure of spirituality in modern yoga than that pursued by Strauss (2005), both in terms of her reading of Vivekananda’s use of colonial discourse and her more general approach. Strauss (2005) is working in a hermeneutic framework, as she conducts a transnational ethnography of Sivananda’s Divine Life Society, and defines spirituality according to her participants’ concerns and, more importantly, their experiences. She is therefore not overly concerned by the term’s ambiguity or genealogy. Likewise, her reading of Vivekananda’s discursive strategy remains within a hermeneutically-oriented framework. Her participants’ define spirituality as a component of health, which must be balanced with physical, social, and mental elements. Health allows individuals to achieve the flexibility considered imperative to surviving (let alone enjoying) modernity and, most importantly, to be independent and therefore free. While this supports, in many ways, exactly the criticism Carrette and King (2005) level against modern yoga, it acknowledges exactly what their definition cannot; that yoga *does* operate this way on an experiential level. As my field journal entries reflect, this is one of the main purposes yoga serves in my own life, and there are indeed material consequences to ill health in any of these terms. This definition of health was also espoused by my participants, for the most part. While Carrette and King acknowledge the potential health benefits of yoga and the possibility of an authentic practice, *that practice could*

*never be defined in Strauss' (2005) terms*, and will therefore always be out of step with the experience of practitioners. There is a serious ethical danger here, insofar as this is exactly the misstep made (albeit for entirely different reasons) by the Orientalist scholars King (1999a; 1999b) is so critical of. While Carrette and King's (2005) criticism of commodification regarding relations of power takes place on the ground of modern yoga rather than the "gold standard", it remains within a post-structuralist paradigm. It cannot achieve hermeneutic validity without contradicting itself. Strauss' (2005) definition however, has left me with a question which I cannot escape, even hermeneutically: if yoga is the road to health, and health forms the road to freedom, what becomes of those who do not or cannot practice it?

## **Chapter Four**

# **Personally Speaking: Reflexivity, Embodied Knowledge and the Scholar-Practitioner**

## Personally Speaking: Reflexivity, Embodied Knowledge and the Scholar-Practitioner

One of the most notable trends in recent research on modern yoga, and particularly the work relevant to this project, is that many scholars are also practitioners. This is consistent with the experiential epistemology, emphasis on practice, and community focus of yoga. Strauss (2005) is a scholar-practitioner and argues that “although there are a plethora of classical texts on the philosophy of yoga, and countless popular ‘how-to’ guides for all levels of aspiring yogis, yoga remains a form of embodied knowledge, which no amount of reading or telling can impart. Only actual bodily engagement – ‘doing yoga’ – can provide the sensory and muscular memories that are essential” to understanding it (p. 10). This kind of first-hand embodied knowledge is indispensable to representing her participants truthfully. The role of embodied knowledge and practice in yoga has deeper implications, however. De Michelis (2005) begins her book by asking: “What is this yoga? This was the question that started haunting me in the late 1980’s, a decade after attending my first ‘yoga classes’” (p. 1). Though her work is historical it *begins* at the point of practice, and in fact I began at a very similar point. I might, however, have worded my question differently, and this is hardly surprising given my educational background: “What does this yoga *mean*?” Several years into my practice and my academic career, this question became ever-more pressing.

Many of the authors in “Yoga in the Modern World: Contemporary perspectives”, a collection of essays on modern yoga, are also practitioners and in some cases certified instructors. Singleton (2008) demonstrates that arguments regarding the importance of practice versus theory have been central to academic work and yogic practice over the past century. While many philosophers and historians have dismissed and denigrated the practical and physical practice of yoga, particularly *Hatha* and *asana*, practitioners have likewise dismissed

academic work as missing the point, unable to access the experiential knowledge furnished by practical yoga. Singleton (2008) argues that these false dichotomies obscure the ways in which scholarship often relies on experiential knowledge, while yogic practice requires intellectual engagement. Likewise, Shusterman (2008) argues for the importance of embodied knowledge and physical practice in academic knowledge production. If we are to take Foucault at his word regarding docile bodies and techniques of self care, then physical practice and embodied knowledge must take a central place in this study.

The problem of yogic practice breaks down, in fact, into three separate issues: ethical representation of participants, ethical representation of embodied knowledge, and ethical (or reflexive) representation of the scholar-practitioner. Participants' consistently emphasised that yoga couldn't be fully explained; it had to be *done*. They insisted that I needed to practice, and much of my credibility as a conversational partner came from my willingness to do so; representing them ethically requires following their wishes and their explanations. As Strauss (2005) argues, I cannot possibly write knowledgeably about yoga as embodied knowledge *without* embodying this knowledge. As such, yoga practice was a necessary part of the participant-observation, but it was also unavoidable. Given my already well-established and complicated history with yoga, to pretend otherwise would have been academically dishonest. This leads us to the third point of ethically or reflexively representing the scholar-practitioner.

Anderson (2006) suggests that in analytic autoethnography we should be a "complete member in the social world under study" (p. 379). And while I am not writing an autoethnography, I am practicing a reflexive style of research; both the hermeneutic and post-structuralist analytic paradigms require that the author be visible and reflexive. Nor can embodied yogic knowledge be comprehensively represented without a first person perspective.

There are two ways that one can become a complete member of a social world: opportunism, in which we are a member of the culture prior to beginning study, or conversion, in which we begin as a scholar and end up a member. Because my relationship with yoga is more complicated than either of these categories allow, they offer a good jumping off point for exploring my experiences as a scholar-practitioner. Therefore, following the narrative method of *The Yoga Story* presented previously, this is My Yoga Story.

### **A Short Intermission: My Yoga Story**

It should first be noted that I am a white, 29 year old woman with one degree under my belt (the ubiquitous BA, in cultural studies), an MA in progress (sociology, this time) and a PhD just beginning. I began practicing yoga in 2002 at the eager age of 19, during my second year in a psychology BA at Dalhousie University through on-campus classes. This introduction to yoga, and my continued interest in it, are in no ways coincidences; *Yoga Journal* found that in 2008 40.6% of practitioners were 18 to 34 years old; 41% were 35 to 54; and 18.4% are over 55. 71.4% of yogis are college educated and a whopping 27% have postgraduate degrees. And, as I have already shown, the majority of practitioners are also women. It is fairly clear that when I began my yogic journey I was a prime candidate to do so, demographically speaking. And though I am not well off personally (how could I be, in graduate school at 29?) I *do* come from a middle to upper-middle class family and still lived at home during this time. This holds with *Yoga Journal's* survey: 44% of practitioners have yearly household incomes of \$75,000 and 24% exceed \$100,000.

My first classes were large 'yoga-fit' style classes, which often involved as many as fifty or sixty people in a large gym area with music and a microphone for the instructor. The classes were based on the aerobics-oriented style of yoga so roundly criticized by scholars and

practitioners alike. Although there was some attention to breathwork, they were fitness classes' first and philosophical lessons not at all. This aerobics-oriented style may not have been so accidental either, however. I have already described the influence physical culture brought to bear on the development of modern yoga. In 2004 the IDEA Health and Fitness Association, the largest organization representing fitness industry professionals in the US, identified yoga as one of the most quickly expanding forms of fitness. By 2005 66% of their members offered yoga or Pilates classes. IDEA classifies yoga as 'mindful fitness': "physical exercise executed with a profound, inwardly directed awareness or focus" (Markula & Pringle, 2006, pp. 155). Mindful fitness practices include Yoga, Tai Chi, and Pilates (amongst others), and are characterised by a focus on movement patterns, proprioceptive awareness, breathing, body alignment, and use of intrinsic energy. They encourage 'being' in the moment, process orientation, embracing the activity in which one is involved, and slowness. (Markula & Pringle, 2006).

Here, though, my story diverges somewhat from Anderson's (2006) expectations of social membership. One might expect I became an opportunist, fully emerged in the social world of yoga, and then undertook scholarship on the matter. Though I continued to practice yoga from 2002-2004, I remained in mindful fitness style classes for the most part and did not progress much further into the culture or philosophy, with the exception of learning more about mindful fitness. I was not a full member of the community during this period, though I did begin to develop an interest in yogic philosophy. My attendance was also inconsistent at this time, I expect in part due to my age. Lindsey, Rebecca, Mary and Beth reported similar experiences, but there was a second significant factor in my unpredictable attendance. I have had asthma since I was a young child, which has resulted in general breathing problems, a weak immune system and frequent illnesses/infections. I have also experienced depression, migraines, knee, back and neck

problems. While yoga helps me to remain healthy, my health is also a consistent factor in my *not* practicing, as I was ill or injured for large periods of time between 2002 and 2004. This, too, is not accidental. *Yoga Journal* found that

almost half (49.4 percent) of current practitioners started practicing yoga to improve their overall health. In the 2003 study, that number was 5.6%. And they are continuing to practice for the same reason. According to the 2008 study, 52% are motivated to practice yoga to improve their overall health. In 2003, that number was 5.2%.

6.1%, or nearly 14 million Americans, say that a doctor or therapist has recommended yoga to them. In addition, nearly half (45%) of all adults agree that yoga would be a beneficial if they were undergoing treatment for a medical condition.

Indeed, *Yoga Journal* suggests that the adoption of yoga as medical therapy was the most noticeable trend in the 2008 survey and represents the next great wave of popular yoga practice ([http://www.yogajournal.com/press/yoga\\_in\\_america](http://www.yogajournal.com/press/yoga_in_america)). The bio-medical model of health referenced here and generally prevalent in mainstream medicine, “concerns itself with disease seen as a biophysical condition: it regards conditions as abnormalities in the structure and/or function of organs and organ systems. It refers to pathological states whether or not they are culturally recognized... Biomedicine *cures disease*” (p. 185), and sees health as the absence of disease. Scholars agree that medicalization is one of the most prominent developments of modern yoga, although many differ on the dates. Love (2006) and Douglass (2007) trace the medicalization boom to the early 90’s, for example. De Michelis (2008) and Alter (2005) show it has deeper roots at the turn of the century and that even pre-modern yoga was therapeutically-oriented, though this meant very different things than the bio-medical model *Yoga Journal* references. Though I began yoga before my doctor recommended it, he did in fact eventually suggest it as part of a therapeutic program in response to migraines, pinched nerves in my neck and eventually, in 2006, a bout of clinical depression. This has been one of my main reasons for doing yoga over the past eight years, as it has indeed been an effective therapeutic health practice

for me. De Michelis (2005) argues that though the bio-medical approach is adopted in yoga, the practice is most compatible with holistic medicine, which “*heals illness*” and focuses on the whole individual conceptualized to include physical, mental, social and spiritual components. “This type of medicine regards non-health as illness, meaning a person’s perceptions and experiences of certain socially devalued states including, but not limited to, disease,” and focuses on balancing the individual (p. 184). This definition agrees with Strauss’ (2005) work, as well as my participants’, and it informs my own practice beyond the basic bio-medical concerns I have already described. During a particularly difficult period of this thesis, for example, I used yoga and meditation to witness, analyze and mend my interactions with those closest to me, accessing the social dimension of holistic healing as well as the mental and emotional. Emily’s focus on the energy channels (*nadis*) allowed me to visualize spiritual health within my body – a new experience, even after 10 years of practice.

In late 2004 I left Dalhousie University without a complete degree, unhappy with a science-oriented psychology curriculum and tired of living my entire life in the same city. This is certainly a common experience in the modern western world and speaks to the cosmopolitanism Strauss (2003) finds characteristic of many practitioners. And while it did not prove to be an easy time in my life, it still speaks to my privilege. I could afford to become disenchanted with a University program (let alone to have gotten there at all!) and to leave home voluntarily rather than being forced out by economic downturn, job scarcity or family violence, for example. I moved to British Columbia and fell out of yoga practice, working several minimum wage jobs and living in a rural area with limited transportation, limited yoga options and even more limited funds. As should be fairly clear by now, yoga is an expensive pursuit and when my health has not been an obstacle, cost often has been.

When I returned to Halifax in the summer of 2005 I resumed my practice. I attended a lunchtime class in a friend's office building, which was remarkably cheap and cozy, only a few people joining each day. That fall I returned I returned to school, this time attending Mount Saint Vincent University for the Cultural Studies program. I began registered yoga classes which took place in the campus chapel and were smaller, more philosophically oriented lessons than my previous experiences. University classes in Halifax are cheaper for University students than studio ones, as is the case in Edmonton, and though I was living at home again cost remained an issue. When I moved into my own apartment with my boyfriend in 2006 cost became *the* issue, but I managed to maintain a semi-regular practice. I also attended sporadic classes in other locations, and what I think this period in particular speaks to is the wide variety of environments in which yoga can now be found: from the university to the studio, the community hall to the church, the office to the gym and places I never expected to find it, like night clubs and outdoor festivals. Not to mention the places I haven't been! Most Lululemon stores, for example, offers lessons occasionally or even weekly – Chris teaches these classes as a Lululemon ambassador.

I continued to learn more about yoga philosophy over this period, eventually writing several small papers on the topic. My practice remained semi-consistent for the same reasons as in prior years, and though I was now a member of the yoga community, I was a marginal one; I was almost but not quite, in Anderson's (2006) sense, fully emerged. In 2007 I dropped to part-time status as a student and did a one-year honours project focused on yoga. The project was a general survey of modern yoga, as I knew I wanted to pursue the question in graduate school, and involved significant reading on pre-modern yoga, modern yoga and media. I was working in a Cultural Studies paradigm and department that focused on media and popular culture. One of the important theoretical standpoints which structured my work and continues to do so was the

pervasive argument in Cultural Studies that the meaning of any text or practice is made at both the level of the individual interpretation and social discourse. As such, the title of this thesis is a nod in the direction of its own historicity and the larger field in which it exists. The meaning of commodification in modern yoga is made, not given.

But here is, so to speak, the rub: I had finally become thoroughly engaged with yoga philosophy, and I simultaneously disengaged from the practice more fully than ever before. During the 2007-2008 academic year I worked a full-time minimum wage job and took only enough student loan to pay my tuition. I had no financial cushion. I had no free time. Sometimes I had no food. And I never had yoga classes, though I did home practice whenever I could. I remain highly ambivalent about home practice, as were a number of my participants, while others insisted that home practice was one of the great benefits of yoga relative to commodification, as it reduced cost. While I appreciate that it offers practitioners a free and individualized opportunity to practice, this is in some ways illusory. One must have already reached a high level of competence and confidence (which I did not have) to avoid injury, experience growth, and maintain commitment, and while books or videos are useful they lack the dynamism and sociality of classes. Between this ambivalence, my inability to afford lessons and my academic searching, I experienced what might be called an un-conversion. Not so much in my attitude toward yoga, but certainly in my immersion, I was removed from this world where I had finally made inroads and was instead surrounded by academic data about it (Anderson, 2006). Not only did I learn the philosophy, but I developed a critical awareness of yoga as popular culture that I had not experienced in any depth until that time.

Finally, I finished my undergraduate degree and moved to Alberta in the spring of 2008. I was now a scholar and hoping to become, again, a practitioner. I was employed by the

Government of Alberta in a call-centre environment, which is notoriously stressful work, and slowly began taking yoga classes again while submitting applications for graduate school. This period marks my first experience with yoga studios, which I greatly enjoyed for their flexibility, and though their cost was higher this was not an issue. For the first time in my life I had a steady and substantial, if not significant, income and yoga was fully affordable. But alas, it was not to be; my immune system took a drastic nose-dive in September 2008, and for an entire year I was sick every two or three weeks, on average. I attended when and where I could, but I was rarely well enough to do so consistently and eventually gave up. As I began graduate school in September 2009 at the University of Alberta I began the pilot project for this study. In the methodological appendix for that paper I told My Yoga Story briefly and wrote this passage, which I feel deserves to be repeated here verbatim:

Finally, during the summer, my immune system started to make improvements and I entered graduate school healthy and excited in the fall of 2009, once again intent on studying yoga. And I found, as I began this project, that I couldn't find a way to fit yoga in. My participants talked about balance, and I could barely sleep for stress. There was never enough time and the refrain of "tomorrow" settled into a comfortable pattern. And then, before tomorrow arrived, I started to get sick again. I started to live in fear of my body. When I wasn't sick, I was recovering and I was afraid of making myself sick. I was exhausted trying to catch up from being sick. It took most of the semester to overcome these barriers, and I am beginning to wonder if I had it backwards. Were these barriers that placed themselves in front of me or did I construct them, as yogic philosophy suggests? ... Yet I questioned, and still question, the structure of graduate school, that it should remove balance so thoroughly from my life. How do you maintain health when there is no time to be sick, to recover, to catch up? How do you establish balance when there are more things to do in a week than you are able to achieve? How can this all boil down to *choice?*

My participant observation [in this pilot project] has not been the experience of conversion, or the continuation of an opportunistic relationship; it has been the struggle to return to a community, a practice, and a way of life with which I have a complicated past. And it has offered the opportunity to follow my own emotional cues, as Sprague (2005) suggests, to a useful methodological dynamic: the struggle between a practice in which I want desperately to invest myself and the critical awareness that makes me question the impediments preventing me from doing so and the practice itself.

This paragraph has indeed carried over into the thesis, and I continue to struggle in this vein.

During the summer and fall of 2010 I was able to return to a regular practice, as my health finally

steadied. The summer practice consisted of a university course taken with Rebecca in May and June, and then a return to studios which resulted in the return of concerns regarding my finances. I had wanted to take 2-3 lessons per week, but it generally did not work out this way due to cost; instead I generally took one class a week and did home practice where I could. While the pilot participant-observation involved only practice at local studios (and very few, at that), during the winter of 2011 I was able to begin the participant-observation Karma yoga shift at Yoga Generalist. For the first time I felt well and truly-immersed in the yoga community, and as I continue the shift this feeling remains. I am a scholar-practitioner, though not as a result of conversion or opportunism per se.

None-the-less, the road has not gotten easier. The Karma shift has resolved the issue of cost, at least for the moment, but my health has again become variable. From January 2011 until mid-March my practice was consistent at 2-3 classes per week on average. However, on March 13, 2011 I made an emergency trip home to Halifax, where my grandmother was in the hospital with pneumonia. I was able to say goodbye before she passed away, and was very lucky in that respect. But, as Shusterman (2008) argues, body and mind are not separate. When my grandfather passed away in 2006, I experienced my first (diagnosed) bout of depression in response to his loss and a number of other issues in my life. I experienced this depression physically as well as mentally, and I very much *felt* my grief. This was not the case with my grandmother – more than anything else, I felt numb. However, one exhausting month after returning I injured my lower back. It was a month filled with paper-marking, transcribing, interviewing and end-of-term duties, all made somewhat distant by a pall of grief. I attended yoga less consistently for this month, although I did indeed attend. One moment stands out in stark relief, shown in my field journal entry for that day:

#### April 1, 2011

I went to Emily's class today, and I really love this class. She has such a unique approach, I love the attention to small muscle movements, energy pathways and visualization, it really gives depth to the practice. But I am feeling some tightness in my back, especially when I go into backbends – I still have the strength for them, but the flexibility isn't there. She had us do a twist where we laid on our sides with our foot planted to the wall and twisted from the waist, keeping the foot anchored and trying to get the shoulder blades down. I could barely get anywhere at all! It was incredibly uncomfortable, and Emily helped me get as far as I could, but that wasn't much. She asked me after class if I had scoliosis! I was floored, that I have this much tension in my back she thinks my spine is literally twisted. I told her that I had just gotten back from two very long flights home, because I had gone home for a family emergency. I told her granny had passed away and I almost cried. This isn't like grampa, I don't feel that overwhelming hole, but I feel so listless and I want to cry even though I know how sad she was, how confused and how much she missed grampa. She had lost so much in the past year. 'We carry our stress and our grief in our bodies' said Emily, and I know how true this is. Apparently I carry it in my back. The sun was shining in the windows as we talked.

My injury was individual and random in only the barest sense of the words. Death is always a social event, and one we all face as social creatures. This incident undermines the idea of a clear separation between body, mind, and social world, as Shusterman (2008) argues. Nor do I believe this is strictly a matter of grief. I had returned to Alberta on March 22, and by April 1 I knew that something was wrong; on April 29 I sustained the injury by simply moving in the wrong way at the wrong time. I intended to see a massage therapist after my April 1 class with Emily, as this has been another form of therapy recommended to me that I have benefited from receiving in the past. However, due to the immense pressure and workload from my end-of-term duties and thesis, combined with the general malaise of grief, I did not do so. Back injuries are one of the most common injuries experienced in the work place, and Shusterman (2008) in particular is concerned with the bad somatic habits and postures derived from modern culture, including extended computer use. As a graduate student I have spent most of the last two years at a desk, computer or otherwise occupied reading and writing. Nor do I expect that the year spent at a call-centre office was particularly helpful in this respect. It hardly seems surprising in this institutional context that I sustained a lower back injury. The yoga world is full of injury stories,

some very like mine and others very different, but they are consistent, and they are always accompanied by yoga recovery stories. This may very well be reflective of yoga's discursive and experiential location as a health practice; certainly, these stories offer an interesting point of future study.

My back injury has, in turn increased my somaesthetic awareness, as Shusterman (2008) suggests we must do, requiring mindfulness to correct the bad habits I have developed. It has impacted my yoga practice in two ways: in the short term to reduce the number of classes I could take, and in the longer term to search for a better balance between gentle and strengthening classes. Finally, the injury led to further delays in producing my thesis by limiting my ability to sit and write and, conversely, forcing me into longer hours of writing. At the end of June, I also experienced a computer failure, luckily with no loss of data, but certainly a lack of funds with which to replace the computer. This machinery is not really optional in graduate school, however; though one could in theory use computers at school, etc., the amount of work and effort this requires is staggering. I did find the required money and replaced the computer, but this also increased my debt. So while I maintain the privilege of computer-use, which many in the world and in Canada do not have, there is still a very real cost; student debt is also a serious issue in Canada.

My point here is not that I should be exempt from responsibility for failing to make the massage appointment which might well have avoided the injury. I am not suggesting that graduate school or a death in the family caused my back injury, or that I absolutely had to buy a computer and the debt will be the last financial straw I can bear, so to speak. I am not arguing that I had no choices at all in these various situations, and I am well aware that I had many more choices than many other people do. Rather, my argument here is that the institutional and social

contexts in which I am located impose limitations on the set of choices before me and my ability to make them. These contexts have material impacts including mental, social, spiritual, physical and financial ones, and we should absolutely be critical of them while simultaneously considering how we reproduce them. My Yoga Story, and in particular the last several months of it, are arguably related to social and institutional contexts from which *few* people in Canada are exempt, and not the other way around. Indeed, in many ways this is why my participants see yoga as such a necessary practice. Many of the themes I have discussed in this story will come under consideration in the hermeneutic, contextualist, and post-structuralist paradigms. I feel, in this respect, similar to Chin (2007), who argues that while scholars should and do criticize consumer culture they are still deeply imbedded in it, and we must be willing to critically analyze and reflect on our own behaviour as well as others. As such, I will continue to reference both my field journal and My Yoga Story throughout this paper. Though she may not know it, Chin (2007) uses very yogic language when she says:

The dangers of implicit claims to being above consumer entanglements strike me as many. Not least among these dangers is that of the self-aggrandizement (and what could be more archetypically white, hetero-normative and patriarchal than self-aggrandizement?) that results from using the platform of publishing in order to accord oneself the privilege of judging others, a privilege that is exercised while exempting oneself from such judgements? (p. 336)

I would extend her comment further. My goal here is not to judge, but to distinguish the line between criticism and judgement. I will criticize power, discourse, practices, others and myself, but in the spirit of a yogic academic practice, I hope to avoid judgement.

## **Chapter Five**

# **Speaking Personally: A Hermeneutic Analysis**



This component has also been important in highlighting the contingency, structural logics, and sociality undergirding the research process. A distinct narrative emerges here, which coincides with many of those expressed by my participants (particularly Sara), insofar as it pulls together the sometimes-productive capacity of contingency and the structural coordinates which underlie it. The participant-observation component marks a point at which this is most clear, as it was added after a number of circumstances required that I change supervisors. Dr. Kaler, who ultimately supervised this project, suggested that participant-observation would be a useful component and would strengthen the project. This necessitated the arrangement of new relationships and working conditions with both a local yoga studio and Dr. Kaler (correlative to the termination of previous ones) and submission of an ethics application.

It would be neither ethical nor relevant to provide the specific details of this process here, but the institutional trajectory I have described is one that many academics, including graduate students, instructors, researchers, and professors, are forced to contend with at some (or many) points in their careers. Seeing these circumstances as socially and institutionally located (both within academic institutions and across other social locations) is thus quite productive, just as seeing my introduction to yoga from this light was useful. Individual career paths may stall or veer in unanticipated directions, while academic mentoring and partnerships at all levels may end for any number of reasons. These include, but are not limited to: inter-personal relations, changing life circumstances, economic challenges, changing goals or requirements within particular projects or careers, increasing workloads and competition between academics, alignment with specific scholarly or departmental factions and traditions, or institutional interference. The intricacies of these academic politics arguably have material impacts on the research produced within these institutions alongside impacts on the researchers themselves.

But there is also great degree of contingency in the research process, and while my ethics application churned through bureaucratic channels, I searched for local studios willing to join the project. I had little luck until, nearly 3 months after initially contacting them, Yoga Generalist agreed to take me on as a karma yogi *on the eve of receiving ethics approval*. I would later come to discover that the studio had not employed a karma program until that time. Sara explains that karma yogis

sometimes don't know enough and it just, you know, the person sitting there might not know what to do, and it looks worse than if there was nobody sitting there, right? And I always thought well we either pay for them or we're, ya know (clears throat). And then one person came along and I really liked them, and I kind of opened my mind a little bit toward it, just as a support position not as a main position, so there's still a manager and stuff. And you know we had two or three and I liked them and it worked, so if you had come 6 months earlier I wouldn't even know you.

Hence, even if my ethics application had been approved more quickly, or had I decided to pursue participant-observation in the original design, I may not have had a place in which to conduct it! This kind of contingency (and the flexibility it requires as a response) seems particularly endemic to qualitative work, given its more open methodological approaches, frequently subjective epistemology, and the unstable, localized nature of field work.<sup>xx</sup> Strauss (2007), for example chooses several Sivananda-based locations to practice yoga and conduct field work; one is with Swamiji, the resident-swami at her hotel. Her choice to stay in this particular hotel was not random, as she provides clear and strong reasons for making it, but there is also an undeniable element of contingency present: “In the lobby of the hotel stood a large sign proclaiming the availability of free yoga lessons daily, and it was this advertisement that sparked the idea of making the hotel my permanent residence. Where else could I find such a convenient yoga teacher? Swamiji turned out to be an extremely pleasant, articulate, and talkative person, and the opportunity to observe him in action for the year proved fruitful” (p. 61). I am not

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<sup>xx</sup> Indeed, even the idea of “the field” as a separable entity is contested in qualitative methods.

suggesting that quantitative work is free of contingency – it demonstrably is not (Saukko, 2003; Seale et. al., 2007). However, this trend is eminently more visible in qualitative research, and acknowledging the ways contingency and social or institutional locations intersect can therefore make this kind of work more rigorous and increase its potential by generating unexpected connections.

Many of my participants stressed yoga's capacity to provide meaningful, individual ways of making sense of such contingency and the larger social pressures and structural forces with which we are confronted every day. *Yoga Journal* often stresses this theme too, and Strauss (2005) finds similar results insofar as her participants argue that yoga is a means of coping with a modern lifestyle which proves both contingent and structured. These coping mechanisms rest on openness. Sara argues, for example, that “when you stay open, you get directed; when you're directed, you're not open”, a statement startlingly reminiscent of some qualitative methodology texts I have read. I have found this yogic sense of contingency-as-productive incredibly useful for both this project and larger occurrences in my life, and I agree with Strauss (2005) that yoga does indeed provide concrete skills for coping at the individual level with both contingent *and* structural circumstances – such as the delays and difficulties I have described thus far. My participants and *Yoga Journal* often display a disheartening tendency to remain silent on collective ways of meaning making regarding these pressures, and when they break this silence it frequently remains in a problematic register, a point I will return to in the post-structuralist section. But this is certainly not always the case, and the possibility of improving our *collective* situation through *individual* practice and *community* effort appears to be endemic to yoga – the article “Do Yoga, Do Good” cited in chapter 3 is a good example of this. It is, in fact, this characteristic which makes commodification a potentially positive occurrence. Health, openness,

balance, service, authenticity, social good, and access emerged as key themes in the interviews, revolving around yoga, commodification, and modernity, and were clearly reflected on the *Yoga Journal* website.

### **Speaking Personally: Practice, Teaching, and Commodification ...*But Mostly Practice***

*I believe it's your personal responsibility as a human to have a practice of some sort.  
So this is mine.*

– Emily

During interviews and informal conversations at the studio, participants often talked about the meaning of commodification through practice and teaching meanings and experiences, within the context of yoga culture and modern Western life more generally. In fact, the majority of interview data was comprised of these kinds of discussions, which yielded the themes described above, and frequently followed a story format. I was surprised by how infrequently commodification was discussed explicitly, even during moments focused solely on it, a point which became particularly evident while coding the data. Commodification did not emerge as a primary or frequent theme during initial coding, and while further investigation solidified it as a main code it was still *less* common than others and rarely appeared by itself. That practitioners did not address commodification extensively may indicate it is not a substantial issue for them, despite its significance in poststructuralist analysis, and even despite consistent concern and discussion in yogic communities and texts. More compelling, however, is the fact that when commodification did appear it usually did so in connection to one of two things, and sometimes both: 1) *practice and teaching meanings* articulated in relation to or within larger yogic and cultural discourses (particularly health, openness, balance, service, social good, and authenticity) and 2) *access* to yoga, articulated as the awareness of, desire and ability to practice yoga within the general population. As such, commodification was mediated by these two points – it was

generally taken into consideration when it interacted with them, rather than on its own, a point which will be demonstrated throughout this chapter. That commodification was not the primary focus of most participants, then, does not necessarily indicate that it is not an issue for them. Rather, this indicates that commodification is tied specifically to the *practice* of yoga in various contexts and the skills thus produced, insofar as it supports, impedes, or contradicts them.

The interview format may account in part for these findings, as it had several potential drawbacks and strengths. The guide focused on progressively investigating participants' experiences of yoga *and* its commodification, beginning with questions about their history and understanding of yoga, yogic practice, and teaching, and then moving toward the different aspects of commodification discussed in the introduction (i.e. teaching/employment, studios, props, clothing, media, branding, etc.). The initial focus on participants' general understanding of yoga provided a solid basis for discussing commodification within that experiential context and decreased the possibility of my leading their responses. By the same token, however, it is likely that it pre-disposed participants to frame the later commodification-focused questions in terms of practice, thus deflecting explicit discussion of commodification. None the less, it seems unlikely that this can account for more than a small portion of the results given the consistency of interviews, particularly as participant-observation and *Yoga Journal* reflected the same trends. The theme of access tended to emphasise the importance of yoga's positive benefits beyond the practice and teaching meanings drawn out by the initial questions, particularly in relation to notions of social good, something the format of the interview guide cannot account for. Finally, Strauss (2005) also finds that "practice is indeed central to understanding the role yoga has come to play in the lives of its advocates; it entails both the bodily enactment of yoga ideology as well as the specific physical postures and methods for breathing described in many texts" (p. 10).

The interview guide also supported a narrative turn by beginning with participant's yogic history, and may therefore have produced a narrative effect that could have been smaller or absent otherwise. The fact that narrative coding was most prominent during the beginning of the interviews when questions focused on participants' personal history with yoga supports this conclusion. However, the meanings drawn out through these narratives remained consistent through the remainder of the interviews, and narratives continued to emerge beyond these initial questions. Further, it was echoed in many *Yoga Journal* articles as well as my own field notes, which suggests it was not simply an effect of the interview guide. The initial narrative-focused questions also generated the benefit of building rapport and transitioning to more complex conversations.

Because a substantial portion of the data focused on practice and teaching meanings, and these often connected to understandings of commodification, I will begin with them before discussing their implications for the experience of commodification in yoga and the importance of access. Health, openness, balance, service, social good, and authenticity interacted with one another and formed the basis for most practice and teaching meanings. Health was the most commonly raised and all participants referenced a bio-medical model of health in some way, wherein yoga served as a practice to prevent or cure their own or students' diseases. They often tied the bio-medical model to modernity as either a product of it or a cure for its damages, and sometimes both. Sickness, injury, and stress-related disorders were seen as the result of modernity and yoga as a bio-medical cure. But modern bio-medical medicine was also seen as incomplete and likely to over-medicate its patients, a state of affairs yoga could remedy through holistic care. For Allison, Beth, Lindsey, Gail, Rebecca, Sara and myself bio-medical models of health were particularly prominent, and further were often couched in terms of personal

narratives. Both Beth and Lindsey reported having anxiety issues and found that yoga helped to control them, just as I found yoga useful during my depressive episode and subsequent periods of high stress or depressive tendencies. Gail and I both sought relief from back (and in my case neck) problems and school stress, and Gail viewed yoga as a means to address weight gain upon beginning studies in Canada. Beth and Rebecca expressed a desire to age well, and Sara also found that yoga was “a sustainable practice over a lifetime”, unlike some of her other pursuits such as marathoning. Allison expressed a much more immediate concern in regards to health, as she suffers from several auto-immune disorders. She started practicing yoga approximately ten years ago while teaching high school but was forced to leave this position when she could no longer function. As her yoga practice increased she found that the auto-immune diseases became better controlled. Because of this, she tells me, “I don’t have to be in a wheelchair. It’s like, literally my lifeline”. Lindsey has asthma and finds that yoga helps to reduce the difficulties associated with this chronic condition by learning to strengthen her breathing and lungs. As an asthmatic myself I found this narrative compelling; though yoga has not always provided significant symptom relief for me, it may be the case that I have not been consistent enough in my practice to experience benefits, as Lindsey suggests.

Health was more than just the absence of illness, however, as quickly became apparent. Sara, for example, also couched her conceptualization of health in narrative terms, but what began as bio-medical health transitioned to something different: “I’ve practiced yoga through pregnancies, um really stressful times, ah, injury, you know, injury care, injury prevention, um, I practice it and I feel like, a more calm, centered human being, and then it started to permeate into all kinds of, social consciousness and an ability to.. care for other people in a different way and relate to people and it just became.. pervasive, you know it just started to web in through like

fascia, in my body it was webbing through my whole life”. The description of holistic medicine provided by De Michelis was clearly reflected in conversations like these, and Strauss (2005) offers a definition of health based on her work which captures the holistic elements of health for my participants: “To be healthy means to be balanced, to have equal parts of physical, mental, spiritual, and social well-being. Moderation in all things is the best way to achieve this balance.” (pg. 71). In contrast to the bio-medical model, simply being free of illness did not meet these requirements. These components of health were all reflected in my interviews, and indeed most participants drew on all of these elements *in exactly this language* when asked to define health. Even when not prompted to define health explicitly, these elements arose in discussions of health or were implicitly connected to it. Most participants emphasised the holistic nature of yoga and some connected it to other holistic practices such as Reiki or Tai-chi; Chris, for example, relates: “I like the physical activity and stuff but I, it’s the one practice I’ve found that ah, kind of encompasses everything”.

Physical benefits included bio-medical ones as well as improved strength and flexibility, and many participants focused on the emotional grounding, improved concentration and positive mental outlook afforded by yoga. While the physical and mental elements of yogic health moved beyond the bio-medical through emphasis on positive states of well-being rather than the absence of illness, they remained closely tied to bio-medicine. Spirituality, however, was less clearly or easily defined. Sara talked about spirituality as being in the body, perhaps one of the clearest expressions of holistic health as spiritual:

I have my own spiritual kind of philosophies that are grounded in yoga.. but when I talk about spirituality as a teacher I’m talkin about that process of going from your frontal lobe into your body, into, anything that ignites you to know yourself better, and that at some point, my hope is that somebody who is doing that process will discover something greater than themselves within that so that they have a connection, um, back to self, or back to the divine, or back to where they came from.

Though spirituality was not always linked explicitly to health it was often brought up in tandem. Issues such as *pranayama* and *prana* (breath) as vital force became difficult to disentangle as solely health or spirituality, a struggle I experienced while coding the interviews. Likewise the *yamas*, *niyamas* and other yogic philosophical concepts were often tied into these kinds of discussions. Openness, as discussed in the first section of this chapter, was also implicated in spirituality insofar as remaining open allowed participants to experience and appreciate various spiritual and non-spiritual experiences and to follow their intuition or intention. Indeed, openness was often considered a spiritual attribute, and one with which I more easily identified as I have often felt this way myself.

Sociality was raised by all participants as a component of health and was one of the main reasons for practicing and teaching, ranging from being introduced to yoga by friends, a sense of community in classes and studios, to having entire social networks based on yoga. Allison makes the connection between sociality and health explicit: “I think I practice it to stay sane and to stay myself, to stay healthy, to stay happy, um, to take care of myself for other people, like to be a healthy body, mind and heart for my husband, for my friends, and that kind of stuff.” As such, health was seen as something which inevitably involved inter-personal relations moving in *both* directions – sociality affected one’s health, but one’s health also affected sociality. Sara, in particular, saw sociality as a core value of practice:

When you’re in a classroom and you’re seen and you’re part of something bigger, that energy propels all of us forward. When it’s so serious and it’s an internal experience that’s exclusively internal... what propels? Like wh.. where’s the, the pleasure in that? And I mean I get there’s times when you really wanna be alone, then be alone. That’s called solitude, go, be alone. But don’t come to a community class and be mad that people are talking because you wanna be alone, wh what the hell? (laughs) Like it doesn’t make any sense to me, you know, we do this because we wanna be with other people. We wanna be seen and we wanna interact and we wanna... be inspired to do something more than what we’re doing, right.

This approach contrasts strikingly against the internally-focused, individualized, experiential epistemology of modern yoga, and while Sara still placed a strong emphasis on these things, she drew out the social component of yoga more forcefully than most participants. This is perhaps less surprising given that she is a studio owner, and sociality appears to be a large part of what continues to push her forward in this endeavor.

When participants were pushed to clearly articulate their understanding of yoga, and particularly of yogic spirituality, few could do so, though they often relied inherently or directly on notions of yoga's Eastern Authenticity as discussed in chapter 3. Lindsey had an especially difficult time explaining her experiences, particularly meditation:

I think that everybody needs to do research on it, cause when I did my teacher training it was more, once I started taking it, it was more of an awakening and just educational. I was, I don't even care if I become a teacher, I just wanna learn this because I had no idea how complex this was, and how amazing it is. Once you understand how you can empower yourself, and just... When you're able to meditate and leave your body and have your awareness focused completely on your body and your breath, like it feels incredible. It really does. It's just an amazing sense of... I just love it. I went to a class, um, last Friday and it was a meditation class and... It is the most incredible experience that I've ever had with meditation, it was amazing. You can really... I, I wish I could put it into words, how, how it feels...

This description resonated particularly strongly with me, as I have had a few (though not many) experiences that were very much the same. One occasion specifically springs to mind, in which I lost time meditating during *savasana* (corpse pose), and felt incredibly peaceful and happy afterwards, though neither of these words really encompass the experience. Mary clarifies that “um, it's just so airy to try and explain in words to somebody who hasn't reached some sort of level of that on their own”. This is clearly indicative of an experiential epistemology, practice-focus, and “embodied form of knowledge, which no amount of reading or telling can impart,” (Strauss, 2005, p. 10). But it may also suggest that participants were unable to access discourses *other* than culturally dominant ones and those prevalent in yogic discourse which, as chapter 3 demonstrated, are largely dependent on the dominant cultural contexts in which MPY developed

and the foundational binaries of The Yoga Story. Hence, participants' hesitation may be the result of their attempt to find other kinds of words, which generally ended in capitulating to and reifying the dominant discourses they were attempting to avoid. Rebecca also shows both the difficulty of expression characteristic of these conversations and influence of dominant discourses. When asked "what is yoga?" she responded with a large pause:

it is a big question... ok, well how do I explain it... what I tell people is, I say it's an opportunity to... connect with yourself, in a very individual way, ah, in a way that's safe, it's gentle, um, you can participate as much or as little as you wish, but it's a way for you to be, um, more connected to yourself and then you... by doing that you learn much more about yourself as an individual, what's, important for you, what's a benefit for you, and not just in body physically but also mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, and um, by doing the, different aspects of yoga it helps you ground, it helps you be strong, it helps you be more balanced. And of course more flexible but that also includes, you know not just the physical being but the mind as well. So I think the biggest thing for me is connecting more, integrating the body-mind and um, just, self-learning, self-knowing. And...

Balance and moderation, particularly a focus on yoga as a lifestyle or yoga "off-the-mat", were frequent themes. When I asked Mary what yoga meant to her she had this to say: "it's more of a lifestyle thing so you just, everything becomes one breath at a time, like it just helps you to keep things in balance." Connection at multiple levels (with oneself, the divine, one's students, friends, family, and community, etc.) was also important, as were flexibility and openness. All of these themes tended to be articulated quite closely and relied on one another, and are therefore well-summarized by balance and openness despite subtle differences. Balance and openness were seen as necessary elements in maintaining health, but also in coping with the stresses of modernity and further, enjoying it – a means of achieving the good life.

Strauss (2005) found that health was conceptualized by her participants as a way to achieve the good life, a sentiment which my participants echoed. The good life is most often seen as one that is healthy, happy, open, and balanced. According to one of Strauss' discussants, however, "a good life means 'Be Good and Do Good'... An ideal life is one in which I am happy

and along with me, society is happy” (Strauss, 2005, p. 79). This statement is startlingly reminiscent of the article “Do Yoga, Do Good”. The participants in my project indicated consistently that one of their reasons for doing and teaching yoga was to perform a kind of service, to “Do Good” by helping people (whether themselves, students, family, or friends), a decision further bolstered by the interdependencies of sociality – helping oneself often constituted a service to others, while helping others could constitute a service to oneself. Emily, for example, exclaims about teaching: “I mean, oh god, it feels like such good karma. Cause things, like, life is good to me, because of that. So that I’ve had enough history with it that there’s ah, something right about it”.

But they were also clear that service was about more than helping the individual. Lindsey sums it up well: “I just wish that people could be more... yogi. Friendly, understanding, compassionate, karma, doing things for people out of the kindness of their heart. And that’s all it’s gonna do, the more people that take the initiative to learn about it and introduce it into their life. That’s all it’s going to do. *It’s just going to better us, I think as a society*” (emphasis added). As Sara’s earlier quote indicates, she extends sociality quite purposefully to include this kind of social good in the form of “social consciousness”. She argues that her MA in history is one reason for this, and when asked to define social consciousness she had this to say: “once you awaken to yourself and you have compassion and.. support for yourself, then you realize that, the disconnect that you had with yourself, is also the disconnect that we have with each other, with the planet, with, people who are starving on the other side of the world, everything, animals, everything, and so what happened to me is once I reconnected, then I reconnected with everything.” As such, the theme of service ran from the micro to the macro level and was also closely tied to notions of social good, while social good and the good life were considered

mutually re-enforcing and tied closely to sociality and openness. The good life and social good were also often treated as more-or-less natural and sometimes unstoppable outcomes of yogic practice, although Sara was an exception. Though she still felt that yoga *could* lead to these things, she was less certain of its guarantee:

I don't know if that's true. because um, what if you're doing this kind of yoga and it's devoid of all the elements that make it a spiritual practice, then does that mean that everyone who's doing yoga and doing it devoid of spiritual practice, does it mean it's actually going to make the world a better place? Or is it just going to make everybody have better biceps? So in order to make it broad, you need to make it shallow, and you make it so shallow that it has no effect, then it's just broad, just broad commodification, and so, the shallowness of it makes it, um, flaccid, it's flaccid, it's not erect, it's not got what it needs, to move, in people. Because it's, it's empty. So I wonder about that, and I've heard that said, and it's kind of a way of making people shut up. It's a bit of shaming, 'well, at least they're doing yoga so, you can't poo poo them, cause well, you know well look at all the people doing bikram. Shame shame shame on you, shut your mouth'

This excerpt begins to hint at an alternate reading of this argument, which will be taken up in chapter 6: the practice-focus and social good used to silence criticisms of commodification, either purposefully or unintentionally. It also points to the importance of authenticity in these arguments.

### **Reflecting on Hermeneutic Authenticity**

*“Yoga is a skill in action, yoga is... yoga is action.  
It's not something that can be real or not.”  
-Emily*

Participants sometimes classified social good and the good life as *authentic*. Though this was not the only term used or the most frequent, I developed authenticity as a theme to encompass a number of things. First, as shown in chapter three, the good life and social good were often considered a result of authentic practice, and the hermeneutic context finds this to be true as well. But authenticity can also be seen as the product of a good life, a life that is well-lived: true to the individual's needs, purposes, experiences, and abilities; generally in accordance with yogic values ranging from health, openness, service, and balance to specific yogic

philosophies and principles like the *yamas* and *niyamas*; and a “bodily enactment of yoga ideology” (Strauss, 2005, p. 10). Chris, for example, talked about teaching authentically:

you know, importance.. is that you’re teaching... authentically... like that you’re teaching, from your own purpose, I think that’s important, because I could honestly say if we spent two hours, and I was able to get you into some real deep *pranayama* like some breathing and then we did some postures and, you know, it’s like, the longer you have to cultivate something, the more you’re gonna absorb out of it. But, you take an hour noon class.. you got an hour, I will try to round it as much as I can in an hour, I wanna keep their interest and their attention, I wanna keep the energy up, but I want to take them a level below, the surface, so you know that’s my intention though, that’s what I’m getting out of it I’m, I’m seeing, a mass of people here and I wanna take them here and this is the route that I see as being best. You might take a left on jasper, I might take a right on jasper, so the importance of, it being one way or another, I think the importance is that people are safe, that they’re they’re that they’re aware that um... that teachers are aware that they don’t know everything.

In the same way, authenticity is also the cause and product of social good, insofar as the good life and social good are mutually supportive.

Second, as chapter three demonstrated, I found that authenticity encompassed the foundational binaries of The Yoga Story; modern, western life was seen as not only unhealthy, but inauthentic. Thus, the articulation of the good life and social good were often coached in the same terms as authenticity in the academic literature and *Yoga Journal*, even when the word “authenticity” was absent.

These observations will be picked up again in the post-structuralist section as they clearly reflect the problematic representational strategies analyzed previously. There is an essential distinction between the way these observations are taken up here in contrast to chapter 3 which aligns them quite closely with hermeneutics and gives hermeneutic authenticity a third dimension, however. I have argued that the overall pattern of representing authenticity in interviews was, in fact, the inverse of the one found in the literature and *Yoga Journal* – rather than implying inauthenticity through the articulation of authenticity in Ancient Eastern form, participants often clearly articulated the inauthentic as Western and Modern while implying

authenticity. There was therefore a much more complex relationship between conceptualizations of practice and teaching styles as authentic. Participants indicated that this may be due in large part to the individualized, experiential epistemology of modern yoga, the emphasis on non-judgement of others and their practices, the importance of intention in practice which precludes the performance of the “right” practice without intention or vice versa, and the necessity for growth which can be limited by prescriptive accounts of the “right” way. Most prominently however, hermeneutic authenticity often aligned with the foundational binaries and analytic propositions which identify authentic yoga *only insofar as they fit within the main teaching and practice themes*. If a practice, specific teacher, style of teaching, lineage, or text was considered unhealthy, unbalanced, closed, performed no service or produced no social good – things often considered consequences or characteristics of modern western life – it was often seen as inauthentic, but if it allowed these characteristics to flourish, it was not. Once again, *practice* trumped other potential meanings in a hermeneutic analysis.

Sara was particularly aware of this difficulty, emphasising both the importance of tradition and of finding one’s own way during a discussion of whether Sanskrit, chanting Om, and mantras were appropriate and meaningful in the context of modern western classes: “There’s all these reasons [for them], right. Philosophical underpinnings. But you know the historian in me is always going to be... tied to certain parts of it, yet I’ll run a class with R&B [music] and drop f-bombs through the whole thing, but I’m talking Sanskrit, so you might see there’s an inherent conflict or contradiction, but it’s like, what I’ve decided is important about it and what I’ve decided isn’t”.

Likewise, Emily’s comment regarding the difficulty of assessing books in yoga reflected how she felt about the marketing of yoga texts: “just like in practice there are amazing books that

are the real deal...and there's bullshit". Emily in particular tracked back and forth throughout our conversation as to what "the real deal", "the right way", and "bullshit" might be – what, in the end, authenticity was. In most instances that a description of "the right way" came up, Emily paused to reflect on it: "it's just, I get jealous, (laughs) you shouldn't get this, you're not doing it right... *ah, there's that word again*". Yet she also asserted that criticism was necessary, as opposed to judgement, and tradition, integrity, and wisdom were important: "so there you go... sometimes we have to credit [others], sometimes we have to fight a battle". This approach supports Saukko's (2003) conceptualization of yoga and modernity as reflexive projects and was shared to varying degrees by participants, particularly Sara and Rebecca.

The theoretical move to develop authenticity as a separate theme runs the risk of disregarding the hermeneutic perspective, insofar as it imposes a meaning which may be out of step with those of participants'. One may also argue that the main codes are able to summarize good practice, the good life, and social good without need of an additional code, let alone this particular one. However, there are several reasons for this decision. First, this particular code is an excellent opportunity to open a dialogical relation between my own horizon and that of my participants. Health, openness, service, social good, and balance were largely within my experiential horizon and therefore posed fewer hermeneutic obstacles, though there was still a dialogical relation insofar as I continued to approach them, to some extent, from my own horizon and an academic perspective. For example, the differentiation between bio-medical and holistic health, while endemic to the interviews, required some dialogical development and abstraction on my part and was influenced by larger academic conversations, such as De Michelis (2005) and Strauss (2005); likewise, my accounting of participants' difficulty in articulating spirituality required theoretical interpretation, and was further bolstered by the difficulty I experienced conceptualizing spirituality in my own practice. None-the-less, holistic and bio-medical

approaches to health are experiential realities I encounter daily. Openness is implicated in my own sense of spirituality, which I also have trouble articulating outside of dominant discourses, and I encountered new spiritual experiences through participant-observation which were often facilitated by the interviews. Thus, these codes were easier to develop hermeneutically.

The good life, however, is a much more challenging proposition. This is due largely to my academic training, particularly in post-structuralism, which has inculcated a deep scepticism and occasional ambivalence toward ‘the good life’. This ideal is often discussed and advocated for in the discipline, and is one in which Foucault was deeply interested toward the end of his career, but it is also subjected to constant criticism. Even yogically I do not always share the same vision of a good life as my participants, though there are similarities, and I am particularly skeptical of the often-expressed belief that the practice evolves naturally beyond its physical aspects and will inevitably benefit society. Likewise, the connotations of modern, western inauthenticity were particularly difficult to embrace. Thus, authenticity represents a code which, more than the others, required explicit working out of experiential horizons – it clearly derives from both myself and the participants.

### **Accessing Pathways to Practice and Teaching: Crossroads with Commodification**

*“You know what’s interesting about that, what you said... being inside the practice, living it, took you outside of just being critical on the outside, that’s a huge discovery... That’s at the cornerstone of, why commodification’s dangerous, it’s cause you, cannot talk about [yoga], you have to be inside of it, it is a practice... you never arrive, no one person has got the market on it, you know?”*

*-Emily*

Participants became yoga practitioners and eventually teachers through a number of paths, which embedded them more deeply in commercial structures. Both their teaching and practice influenced the way in which they viewed these structures, and generally followed the themes described in the previous section. Access became a particularly important subject as I

traced these pathways; the benefits of yoga make it such that any impediment to its perception or practice becomes problematic, while those things which make pathways more accessible are considered positive. Commodification often sat at the intersection of these pathways.

Participants consistently expressed a great love for yoga and that they wanted to make a living from it, even though it could be or was a meagre one. Because of the auto-immune disorders which forced Allison from her previous teaching career, her own health was one of the reasons she became a full-time teacher. “I do it because I love it, um if I stop doing it my body falls apart and my health falls apart, so I might as well get paid”. Emily, Rebecca, and Allison had already been involved with teaching and found yoga to be a natural extension of this love, while Emily, Gail, and Lindsay had previous experience with dance which they felt transitioned naturally to a love of yoga. Gail began to teach in order to supplement her limited income as a student while maintaining her health and love of the practice. Beth, who plans to teach more when she retires, declares that “if I can be doing stuff with teaching yoga, something I enjoy (laughs) for once in my life, it’d be great”, and Lindsay sought her teaching certificate during a period of unhappiness with current employment. Lindsey, Beth and Mary were encouraged by teachers, friends, or fellow students to pursue teaching, and most participants also took training to deepen their own knowledge in addition to an interest in teaching as service work. Chris attended only *one* yoga class before enrolling in a certificate program, having already taken Reiki (another holistic healing practice) and finding that yoga was “exactly what I needed”. He enthuses that “it was like wow, this is actually.. a thing? Like this is a practice?” Sara’s love for yoga prompted her to open the studio *before* she had even certified as a teacher, which she explains was a great adventure:

I was so moved by yoga, I planned to become a teacher first and then, open the business but, the way things happened it was just.... you know, the opportunity came up, the space was available I had some money and so I just did it, thinking that you know having business experience would be enough... owning your own business means you have business skills, but owning your own yoga business, the true test is can you manage yoga. Can you, manage yoga teachers, can

you..... you know, swim in that ocean of, the market place of yoga... and it's funny because the business dragged me into yoga, which was really the true calling, teaching, but it was not the way I went in it, I went in it kinda the other way and then realized afterwards that.. it was the teaching that I really wanted to do.

These are all instances in which an aspect of yoga's commodification, income from the sale of lessons and in Sara's case owning a yoga business, were addressed through the personal and teaching meanings of health, service, and openness, rather than as a concept unto itself. This trend continued through more detailed conversations regarding the challenges of teaching in commercial environments, where participants discussed specific impacts of the kinds of relations characteristic of capitalist exchange and consumer structures. Most participants found that teaching yoga for pay, and particularly as a full-time job, created a different set of pressures and expectations than personal practice, or even free instruction to friends, community, or charity classes. Paying bills, attracting, retaining, counting and tracking students, creating lesson plans, perfecting public speaking and instruction skills, focusing on student's progress rather than their own, and giving adjustments appropriately all created tension, particularly in large-class settings.

Several instructors note, for example, that in some locations teachers receive additional pay for every student in attendance, resulting in a lower base rate but potentially higher earnings in comparison to those who pay a flat rate. Gail in particular found these obstacles difficult to navigate as she argues that a flat rate is better for the slower classes she prefers to teach, such as Yin, Restorative and some styles of Hatha, because teachers need to give more adjustments and demonstrate poses. In contrast, high-paced classes such as Ashtanga or flow require less interaction and generally boast larger numbers, making a per-student rate beneficial. Teaching fast classes with few demos is especially challenging for Gail because of her heavy accent, so slow classes at per-student rates tend to be less profitable but more rewarding and manageable. Since most full-time teachers work at multiple studios, they can theoretically diminish this effect by choosing only studios with their preferred payment method and teaching style, but choices

can be limited due to competition within the yoga market place. Finding a position can require extensive networking and sometimes travel around the city; Allison, for example, only takes jobs close to home, Sara prefers to hire her own graduates or people with whom she is familiar at Yoga Generalist, and Lindsey sees her karma shift as a foot in the door for future employment. Teachers can make more money by setting up their own classes, but this comes with a set of challenges all its own, including acquiring a space, recruiting and retaining students to usually fixed class schedules, advertising, and managing costs; in studios or other institutional settings (such as a university or community centre), many of these tasks are already taken care of. Participants in studios without front-desk reception or running their own classes reflected that it can be difficult to focus on teaching when dealing with the business side, such as counting students, ensuring correct payment, etc. Some teachers, such as Beth, reported experiencing nervousness before teaching, while others found the necessity of selling oneself difficult, particularly Gail who felt it contradicted her own principles and inclinations, yogic philosophy, and Eastern spirituality more generally (she cited Buddhism and Confucianism as examples). It is worth noting that this concern extended to the general marketing of yoga at all levels, from individual instructors and studios to whole lineages, media texts, and un-related branding schemes.

Despite the challenges commercial structures posed, most of these things were framed positively within the themes of service, authenticity, and access. Though they caused difficulties for participants, they were usually considered minor issues relative to the greater reward of helping people and society through an accessible and authentic practice. Overall most participants tended to forget that teaching was a job; Allison, for example, has to consciously remind herself to do invoices. Practice and teaching values therefore generally trumped or mediated the impacts of commodification on teachers and student-teacher relationships, but that does not imply that these impacts were non-existent.

Rebecca offers a particularly interesting case in regards to teaching in commercial structures. She instructs commercial classes through the University of Alberta and local community centres, but also works in non-commercial community-based programs for adult learners and adults in transition. These yoga classes are free to participants and usually embedded in larger programs (such as literacy programs). As such, she is exposed to both commercial and non-commercial environments characterized by significant socio-economic and cultural differences, particularly important given the middle to upper-class and higher educational bias of yoga. She explains that:

the context is.. very different, and the needs are very different. So, when I go to the university it's all set up for me, I have um, a contract I sign, the classes are organized, and I just show up, and then adhere to.. policy, right? And um.. there's also a change over in participants, just because of the... ebb and flow of students and faculty, and also there are changes, there are schedule changes, so.. there might be a fair bit of turnover in the classes from term to term. Ah, and the classes are large.. uh it's an economy of scale, I think is what they are after. But my work with the community groups is ah, takes a lot more networking on my behalf and um, and linking with the program and very often what's required is for me to um.. sort of sell the concept of yoga and how it can be beneficial for the participants and their program so first it's, it's um, linking it and selling it to the program co-ordinator or the person making the decisions is um.. how, do we schedule it? So it's not just an add-on piece but it's really embedded into the program it's a part of. The other challenge is how to invite people in to participate.. because we like to always have it voluntary... um, but how can you make a decision if you've never tried it and you don't know what it is? So there are all kinds of sort of those ethical, philosophical, issues, sort of underlying underneath this and, ah, the other piece, what I need to do, is I have to go after funding. So, it means writing proposals and again, convincing the funder that this is worthwhile... and then further to that is, um... because of the nature of the group, um.. very often in order for people to participate, you have childcare issues... transportation issues... (laughs) time issues...

This passage highlights many of the institutional and structural differences between the two venues and the impact of social location on students – the childcare, transportation, and time issues faced by those in lower socio-economic strata, for example, may be one of the reasons for yoga's upper-class bias. Likewise, the institutional logic of the two is different: “with the [non-commercial] community group there's more of an emphasis on inviting people in, supporting them.. having them feel safe, um..... ah-eh supporting them with their life situation, so if they

come late, you know, come in, you're welcome, and um.... Yeah, so it's, um.. a different, different emphasis there. Too. Less on the number and more focus on the.. the individual, I think". Nor are the non-commercial programs free of selling, but where most studios or commercial community programs sell to students already informed about yoga, Rebecca must sell to funders while *inviting* participants in. The two programs clearly require different skills from Rebecca as an organizer and instructor, highlighting some of the cultural differences she observes. She later explains that it is often necessary to educate funders and participants in the non-commercial programs who know nothing about the practice, and to defuse fears about it, such as religious conflicts. This is further complicated by media texts (like *Yoga Journal*) that she feels may misrepresent or mythologize yoga. She observes that while some may think paying for lessons makes people more committed to them – an argument espoused by some modern export gurus, such as Indra Devi – she finds this to be untrue. Her non-commercial students attend in very difficult situations once they experience the benefits of the practice.

All participants were clear that they do not make much money from teaching, and according to Allison full-time teachers are few and far between. It is significant that teaching was often not seen as a form of commodification or conceived as, and arguably is not, a form of profiting from yoga. However, teachers who profited *at the cost of an authentic practice* were seen as an example of commodification and some of its negative consequences.

Emily: Because [yoga's] so commodified it's really freaking people out that are, I'm gonna say the real deal, cause there is a difference, big difference between people just bringing people in to make a bunch of money... and people really helping people, being more centered and in the moment... and, I I'm allowed to make money teaching yoga. I've done really well with it. I've traveled and, um, because I'm, I trust my um, intentions... it's not about getting, well yeah I'll help people get thinner, they're getting married and y'know I will, it's a beautiful bi-product... ah the cornerstone of the class that I lead is in... as close to at this time... the true quest, of being kind to oneself, like it fits... so people will come or they won't come, I try not to market or press too much...

I'm of the belief that.. hm, I'm always, everything kind of works out on that front. Um.. I think it's ok to get rich... if you're doing it

Me: if you're doing it the right way then it's ok?

Emily: yeah, Then I say the right way, what's the right way? But I mean it's kind of hard cause you know I'm gonna just say the words, [unnamed studio], I've gone to that studio and I'm willing to say to them, I don't, this is not behind the back, this is something that's... the people at Yoga Generalist where I'm teaching now agree too, eh, there I have a, I have a camaraderie of I go to those classes and people are not doing asanas really wisely... and they're packed in there, it's really really hot, and it's a money making machine... I get envious... and kind of edgy when I see that the teachings not up to snuff.

This fit with the general pattern that commodification was more likely to be seen as negative under circumstances which diminished the authenticity, healthiness, openness, balance, access, social good or service aspects of yoga, and conversely as positive if it increased these things. This also goes some way toward explaining why participants addressed commodification in teaching obliquely through practice and teaching meanings; for them, situations in which instructors do not profit significantly from teaching may not be considered commodification. This is a notable instance of divergence between my own understanding of commodification and theirs.

When asked whether she earned enough money Allison informed me that teaching does not pay highly and as a result things were tight, but she loves it and wouldn't quit. She astutely observed that "I don't know what enough is for somebody (laughs)". This kind of statement was echoed by many participants, and was closely tied to social good and the good life because yoga was argued to lead naturally to a *less consumptive life*, which would be healthier for individuals and society. Certainly, yogic philosophy and the *yamas* and *niyamas* support this kind of statement, and this logic was also echoed on *Yoga Journal*. I will pick up this argument again in the post-structuralist section, as it requires critical interrogation. Within this hermeneutic framework, however, it reflects one of the main reasons that commodification was often seen as a positive thing, an argument with no small amount of irony. Through its own consumptive logic,

commodification multiplies the audience for yoga, thereby increasing access, and *possibly decreasing the negative effects of commodification*. Commodification in and of itself was often considered a negative concept, though Mary and Chris were strong exceptions to this as they saw commodification positively at the general level. Further, commodification was seen as one of the *inevitable* consequences of western modernity, closely tied to other negative effects such as unhealthiness and lack of balance, and was thus also tied to authenticity. Beth, for example, says that manufacturers “do get a carried away but that is our society, ya know, there’s people that are out to make money, and they see a market, they’re gonna start, y’know, making all kinds of crap for people to buy, and people just like to buy a bunch of crap (laughs)... I think it’s just that’s the way it is”. Participants were sometimes hesitant to judge capitalists for this and argued that from a systemic perspective there was little option but to work within commercial structures. Thus any positive benefits it could bring in terms of access were considered bonuses. For all the reasons discussed thus far, participants were willing to bear the potentially negative effects of commodification because it has demonstrably increased access – the number of people practicing and aware of yoga. In most cases the commodification of yoga was considered good *no matter* the costs or downsides; “whatever it takes,” says Lindsey in the spirit of most participants.

There were, however, lines to be drawn. This excerpt from Allison demonstrates these ideas well:

Assuming that, um, the products being made aren’t using horrible slave child labour, um the, I feel like there’s a positive to it, because the more marketing there is, the more that non-yogi’s might take up yoga, then more people are getting along as colleagues at work, getting along as family members, getting along with themselves, accepting themselves, enjoying life, de-stressing. Yeah, so assuming that there is no harm, that *ahimsa* concept to the environment, to the workers, to the people practicing yoga, I would say this big rush of marketing is helping the world to bring more people practicing yoga.

Invocation of the *yamas*, *niyamas* or other yogic philosophical elements was one of the ways in which participants drew a line against commodification. Overall, the line (or lines) at which commodification “went overboard” were most often related to the teaching and practice

meanings discussed thus far and to the general values participants' held in their lives. The same concerns or principles were not, therefore, invoked across interviews, though they clustered around the main themes and certainly held the same tenor. The individualized basis of yoga may account for this in many ways, as each participant put particular emphasis on different areas. Beth, for example, is a raw foodist who focuses on maintaining a pure body and felt that using yoga in a Tim Horton's commercial was not appropriate. While Tim Horton's was presented as an example of yoga lifestyle marketing for non-yoga products, it was not the concept but the specific example – coffee which creates an “acid environment” in the body – that bothered her. Some participants did feel that this concept was problematic in and of itself, but most still saw the benefit of increased access. At the end of every interview I used “free time” to ask each partner whether there was anything important they would like to add or felt I'd missed. During this time Lindsey re-enforced that yoga was not a competition and should never be treated as such; hence it is not surprising that she was worried about the competition and envy clothing companies like lululemon can create between practitioners, a concern most participants shared. She felt that these forms of conspicuous consumption were not very yogic.

Likewise, practice styles which sacrifice this element or the element of *ahimsa*, with Bikram and Moksha being the most frequently cited, were seen as problematic. Indeed, while most participants expressed negative perceptions of Bikram and connected this to commodification, few took issue with him based solely on his commercial enterprising. Claims to have discovered the best or final way of teaching or practicing yoga were seen as particularly destructive, and proprietary styles such as Bikram and Iyengar were sometimes seen as problematic because they circumscribed the growth of practitioners and instructors by preventing innovation or inclusion of other styles and practices. Emily, for example, notes that she draws on her dance teaching experience while instructing yoga. This was particularly troubling if, like Bikram, a style or instructor was already seen as inauthentic, unhealthy, unbalanced, etc.

Iyengar was a particularly interesting case in this regard because most participants considered his style eminently healthy and authentic, empathized with his desire to brand and maintain a lineage and following, but remained uncomfortable with the resulting obstacles to growth and access.

Teacher training was also considered an area of concern because mass-production of yogis bears the risk not only of de-valuing the practice (and the tradition of lineages) for a profit and excluding people by way of cost, but also of producing inept teachers who could harm students.

Participants considered commercial products with clear practical use especially positive. The large variety of books available was seen as a particularly wonderful outcome of commodification as they increase the depth and breadth of yoga knowledge, though they were again considered to have certain drawbacks. Reading a lot of books without consistent practice was considered harmful, as were inauthentic books, and participants expressed concerns that practitioners might inadvertently injure themselves through unsupervised practice or poor understanding, an inherent danger of textual sources in an experientially-based practice. Videos received the same treatment, while gear was also seen as a useful accessory *when used appropriately*. Gear which was superfluous, overpriced, made from harmful products or which impeded practice, for example, was considered unnecessary and even dangerous. When asked about how these products were marketed, participants argued that they increased access by increasing awareness, so that even books and videos which contradicted other values could be interpreted somewhat positively. The cost of lessons and gear, the type and style of classes (strong vs. gentle, spiritual vs. physical, brand vs. mixed styles, etc.), the visibility of advertising, and the location of practice (studio, gym, office outdoors, etc.) were all factors that participants contemplated in relation to access. Expensive gear was perhaps the only common thread that was seen as a substantial obstruction. It was widely argued that not only the actual cost of the gear, but the “yoga image” of expensive clothes and, as Emily put it “fucking bullshit, white people, skinny abs, nice hair,” discouraged people from participating and, further, contradicted yogic

principles like greedlessness (*aparigraha*), contentment (*samtosha*), nonharming (*ahimsa*) and non-competitiveness. It is important to note here that there was no consensus on what constituted the “most accessible” environment outside of cost, and even then not all agreed on which locations offered the least expense (i.e. studio vs. community). Overall, however, participants did not feel that commodification resulted in significant structural barriers to yoga practice; indeed, many argued that the available variety benefits practitioners, just as marketing increases awareness. The ability to “shop around” was seen as useful because everyone learns differently and requires different things from their practice. Being able to access this variety would increase the number of people practicing, and that could only be good.

One of the most interesting and challenging views on commodification was presented by Mary, who says that she is “a capitalist at heart” and is offended by false promises in advertising. The literature is often critical of the ways in which yoga is disconnected from its spiritual, metaphysical and religious roots in modern commodified yoga. Some participants expressed this apprehension, though most were not overly concerned with it because they felt that yogic spirituality developed naturally with practice. Mary’s argument, however, is quite the opposite of both the literature and most participants. She believes that it is better to sell yoga as a strictly physical practice because it is so easily misrepresented. “You’re better off to just market the physical and allow everything else to flow... cause it’s not stoppable, if you, if you’re doing the practice with any diligence at all it evolves on its own.” While most participants stated something similar to the second half of this sentence, they would be surprised by the first; they generally preferred to maintain yoga’s spiritual elements as far as possible in commercial environments. Perhaps most compelling is Mary’s argument that “you can’t market being enlightened, I think that that’s impossible. I can’t, it doesn’t come in a box, I can’t sell it to you... So. You can’t, I can’t make you get enlightened, I could stand by you and make you do poses all day but that alone won’t do it. So it’s a, it’s a personal growth that you can’t push”.

## Closing

The careful reader will notice that I have said very little about the participant who, logically, might have the most to say regarding commodification: Sara. Her position as a studio owner as well as teacher resulted in a different set of concerns, but this is not what makes her interview most interesting. Indeed, quite contrary to my expectations, Sara was by far the most critical of commodification in yoga, and further, her criticisms more often aligned with or approached post-structuralist ones. There appear to be a number of reasons for this. Chris, for example, also had a small eco-travel yoga business and was an ambassador for Lululemon, but he was in fact the least critical, so one cannot account for her perspective based entirely on ownership. His business was new, however, while Sara has been running Yoga Generalist for approximately seven years. During this time the studio has undergone many changes, including expansion to a chain and then eventual reduction to a single studio again. Sara has purposefully remodeled the business over this time to more closely reflect yogic philosophy, and so has spent much more time giving specific thought to the impacts of commodification; further, while one might expect that the dependence of her business on capitalist models would encourage a blunting of her critical reflections, the opposite appears to have happened. Finally, Sara characterizes herself as a strong critical thinker and credits her MA in history for strengthening this part of her thinking, and indeed she is the only participant who was familiar with Foucault and post-structuralism. It is therefore less surprising that she expressed similar criticisms. In some ways, this makes Sara a difficult case in terms of ownership; one has little way of knowing whether other owners experience similar processes, and there is neither time nor space for that exploration here. But she also offers an entirely unique perspective as a scholar-practitioner who is embedded in the heart of commodification. Indeed, the productive contingency of this situation could hardly be better. As such, her interview is complex and confusing in places; she contradicts herself, but speaks with intense and moving sincerity; and her position is highly

dialogical. I will therefore abstain from in-depth analysis of our discussion here. Instead, her voice will be taken up again in the concluding chapter, where it can effectively resonate in methodological dialogue.

Participants argued that the commodification of yoga could not be understood hermeneutically without practice, could not be reduced to a single authentic form but could most certainly be inauthentic, and could therefore never be fully captured within the web of commodification. Commodification could certainly cause problems for the practice and for practitioners, and commodification was itself often negative, but yoga's practice-based resiliency meant that it could also draw benefits from commodification by extending its reach and its effects. Therefore, participants experienced a relatively trouble-free, often positive relationship with commodification and valued their practice both personally and as teachers. Though commodification was not always seen as a good thing, it was rarely considered outside of practice and teaching meanings or access. As such, it becomes very clear that in a hermeneutic analysis one must place the emphasis on *actually doing* yoga, a point which falls very much in line with those academics that have emphasised yoga as an embodied practice.

## **Chapter Six**

# **Silence Speaks: A Post-Structuralist Analysis**

## **Commodification: Silent in Practice, Loud in Theory**

I argued in the hermeneutic analysis that participants were relatively silent regarding commodification due to their experiential focus on practice. There is, however, another explanation for this noticeable absence; in Foucauldian terms, the power-knowledge effects of discourses such as commodification are determined largely by their ability to remain unseen, and commodification seems to have achieved this end admirably. Indeed, it is a good indication of commodification's naturalization that it was often framed as inevitable when addressed on its own terms. *Yoga Journal* negotiates this naturalization in several different ways, relying heavily on the inter-textuality of commercial and topical content; in some cases this results in vocal support of commodification and in others silent complicity. Overall the website reproduces current, unequal power relations through this naturalization to a degree both more robust and more distinct than that found in the field data. Thus, health, openness, service, authenticity, social good and access are also important themes on the website and important to a post-structuralist analysis, though balance proved not to be significant.

Though I have attempted to draw on the data from all methods in both analyses, the hermeneutic chapter focused largely on analysis of the field data, while maintaining a connection to textual material; however there was very little attention given to specific examples from *Yoga Journal*. There are several substantial reasons for this, and they also support a stronger focus on textual analysis of the website in this chapter. First, in Saukko's (2003) formulation, hermeneutic methodologies are concerned with representing the experiential realities of specific groups or individuals, and while this logic can certainly be applied to textual material or to how people interpret that material, it is not best suited to doing so. Indeed, the new ethnographic contexts from which hermeneutics derive rely to a large extent on field methods rather than textual analysis, though this method is often included. Strauss (2005), for example, examines Sivananda-based documents, but interprets them in line with her participants' concerns and the ways in

which the documents build and connect a transnational yoga community. Dialogic validity is also most amenable to field methods, particularly the criteria of truthfulness, which would be difficult to apply to textual analysis in the absence of interviews or participant-observation. This is especially the case in situations where the researcher has no close connection to the material or cultural concerns of those being represented and does not have the opportunity to member check. Finally, the political interests of hermeneutics – specifically, representing the experiences of others faithfully – are best served by field methods for the same reasons.

In contrast, post-structuralism's goal to "expose the historicity, political investments, omissions and blind spots of social 'truths'" is far easier to achieve with an array of textual data and historical research at one's disposal. Foucault certainly developed his work in this context, and as Markula and Pringle (2006) point out he developed genealogy and archeology specifically for the analysis of large bodies of textual material. They are therefore easily adapted to smaller sources (such as *Yoga Journal*) while yielding particularly useful concepts in these contexts.

If one chooses to analyze interview data from a post-structuralist perspective, failure to faithfully represent participants should hardly be considered an impediment, though it is something I have difficulty doing. It remains to be seen whether this hesitancy would transfer to a subject I was less passionate about or one in which disregarding experiential knowledge would not be contradictory, as is the case with yoga. However, the second reason to focus on textual analysis in this chapter and interviews in the previous one lies in the data itself. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 demonstrated that the two sources have different logics. The practice-focus of interviews certainly opens windows on political and historical programmes; for example, an emphasis on practice was instrumental in developing the broad syncretism and experiential epistemology which allowed MPY to be exported and, eventually, profitable. But this kind of analysis also bears the risk of drifting toward a "gold standard" approach in which participants' perspectives or arguments are contrasted against more or less "real" textual sources to determine the historical

or political programmes at work, a trap I had difficulty avoiding at times. The practice-focus of interviews also limited the topics discussed by participants, a problem *Yoga Journal* tends to avoid while maintaining a practice-focus. Sheer volume enters in here; the number of statements available for analysis is much larger on the website.

The different logics which applied to the analysis of authenticity also extends to the majority of the website; its commercial purpose and the need to produce a variety of viable commodities requires representational strategies that are highly amenable to post-structuralist analysis. The website's inter-textuality also means that the content is always and irrevocably connected to consumption, even when consumption is not mentioned in the articles. One might think of this as running in the opposite direction of interview data. Where participants discussed commodification through practice, the website generally discusses practice through commodification – the foundational, conceptual relations are reversed. This makes *Yoga Journal* more open to post-structuralist analysis in terms of commodification, rather than practice, and additionally highlights the limits of the interviews. The discourses discussed are endemic to much of modern yoga's representation, however, particularly MPY and other highly commodified forms. Further, they are grounded in yoga's historical development and are clearly reflected in participants' concerns, which will be attended to as well.

The interviews and website are fundamentally connected, however, insofar as they cover many of the same topics. Though there are other themes present which one could examine, I will continue to focus on health, authenticity, service, social good, access, and openness as these remained important. This choice also maintains a close connection to the interviews, the experiential basis of yoga, and sets manageable limits on the discussion. Health is one of the most prevalent themes on both the website and in the field data and is therefore an excellent place to begin this chapter. Further, as in the hermeneutic analysis, all of the themes interacted.

Health is frequently treated as a matter of personal responsibility in late-modern, capitalist societies rather than a structural issue for which governments or other collective bodies should be considered accountable. Conceptualized not only as a physical but also a moral state, health operates as an important agent of normalization and discipline. Thus, individuals who are not healthy also fail to be normal, morally upstanding people and citizens. This conceptualization is intensified in neo-liberal societies, which increasingly offload responsibility for health to individuals through market mechanisms. (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009; Strauss, 2005).

Further, the bio-medical model of health has been important in maintaining these conceptualizations and functions, particularly their individualizing, totalizing, disciplinary, and bio-political effects. The bio-medical model's basis in scientific knowledge lends it the discursive status of 'truth' in "a field of scientificity or *episteme*" (Markula & Pringle, 2006). Markula and Pringle (2006), for example, find that fitness discourses which construct a "healthy body" through bio-medical models are especially normalizing and disciplinary; though yogic health is discursively constructed in other ways, this is certainly an important one, particularly on *Yoga Journal*. A bio-medical approach to health in fitness often results in an exercise prescription that produces normalized and disciplined bodies through progressive exercise regimes that measure and hierarchize bodies. When physical fitness regimes are imposed on entire populations as a means of bio-political governance, it is then possible to govern individuals. "By individualising the connection between health and physical fitness, it is possible to divert the surveillance of health risks to the deficiencies of individual bodies" (p. 70).

The medical model is also much narrower than other potential definitions of health (such as holism) thus tying individuals to more limiting identities (Markula & Pringle, 2006). Yoga, insofar as it adopts bio-medical approaches to health, often falls into this characterization, but its built-in focus on holistic health fortunately opens it up to more (though not necessarily better)

forms of subjectivization. Likewise, though yoga “individualises the connection between health and physical fitness” through its focus on practice and personal growth, this also allows it to adopt more open prescriptions which vary by style/lineage, teacher, location, individual, etc. Yoga is more hesitant than many other forms of physical fitness (such as cardio-vascular workout programs) to assess progress, though it certainly does so.

The concept of healthism offers a useful example of how commodification is naturalized by demonstrating the ways commodification and health work together discursively in yoga. Healthism designates the point at which the disciplinary, normalizing and individualizing discourses described above intersect with consumerism and commodification, and is likewise intensified in neo-liberal states – indeed, one can argue that healthism is distinctly neo-liberal. Commercial systems require incessant purchases and meet this goal in part by creating a “culture of lack” in which individuals are unable to attain the healthy ideal. Rather than questioning discourses on health or directing people toward alternate routes of attaining this ideal (such as structural accountability), healthism suggests bodily practices and services which are available for purchase as solutions. This encourages individuals to strive for, but never achieve, the ideal healthy state in ways that remain at the level of the individual and benefit capitalist owners. Capitalist consumer systems also limit or exclude those in socio-economically disadvantaged groups from attaining healthy ideals to a greater degree than those with more privilege. Thus while most people are put at a disadvantage by healthism, some groups are far more vulnerable. Like neo-liberalism, the success of healthism is largely determined by its ability to remain unseen (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009).

Most participants articulated ideas about personal responsibility in line with healthism and did not demonstrate strong concerns about access in terms of structural barriers, though many expressed some concerns and occasionally stepped outside of healthism. Lindsey, for

example, talked about how yogic discipline must originate within the individual and allows us to engage in healthy and socially responsible behaviors. Participants' argument that the proliferation of commercial venues gives practitioners more choices to suit their health, learning and practice needs also fits this model. But these conceptualizations leave out the impediments that might prevent one from accessing commercial options<sup>xxi</sup> or achieving dedication, as well as the discursive implications of discipline and access – particularly when discipline is approached from a Foucauldian perspective.

While participants saw discipline as both a requirement for and result of consistent and demanding practice, yoga can also function as a form of disciplinary power which produces docile bodies. This is not to suggest that a practice which requires discipline will always act a disciplinary technology; as Heyes (2007) observes, this is clearly not the case. Practices of freedom also require personal discipline. But insofar as yoga “increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience)” (Foucault, 1977, pg. 138), it can be disciplinary. By increasing physical, mental and social capacities while maintaining a neo-liberal focus on individualized practice and consumption, it dissuades criticism. Though practice was not always equated to the individual and usually had strong ties to community, it was still frequently associated with individualization and sometimes collapsed onto this concept, particularly through the focus on personal growth.

Likewise, the articulation of access as the awareness of, desire and ability to practice yoga fails not only to recognize the distinction between these elements and their uneven distribution, but also the ways in which articulating them together constructs access as an

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<sup>xxi</sup> This does not suggest that non-commercial venues would be free of obstacles – indeed, as participants point out, there is little reason to believe many people would be practicing yoga in North America at all without commodification. The centrality of commodification to yoga's transnational development also supports this claim, and it's pre-modern forms show that access has always been influenced by a variety of factors such as class/caste, religion, region, period, style/lineage, etc. (De Michelis, 2005, 2008; Singleton, 2010). However, it is also clear that the particular set of obstacles introduced by commodification, like healthism, leave lower socio-economic groups at a particular disadvantage. What accessibility would look like in a non-commercial environment on a large scale is beyond the scope of this thesis.

individual choice. As has been demonstrated already, yoga is firmly located as a practice of the middle to upper-classes, leaving many people out of the healthy life it envisages. In this respect, access is an important issue predicated largely on consumptive barriers and structural impediments, and is thus far less of a choice than discursively recognized in both field data and the website. Rebecca, in particular, sheds light on this problem, emphasising the different needs and challenges faced by participants in her non-commercial programs. These include not only actually paying for expensive yoga classes, but also making time for them, finding transportation, obtaining and paying for childcare, community integration of classes, exposure to cogent information about yoga, and the cultural capital necessary to interpret and embody that information. Having one or several of these elements does not guarantee the others, and articulating them together elides the complex relationships between them. These lacunae are problematic in both post-structuralist and contextualist analyses. They were also considered troublesome at times in the hermeneutic analysis, but with less consistency because they were mediated by practice. In this chapter I will therefore refer to access in terms of who may be (and may not be) able to practice and what this implies, considering awareness and popularity as separate entities.

It is crucial here to recall Strauss' (2005) definition of health discussed in chapters 3, 4 and 5: "To be healthy means to be balanced, to have equal parts of physical, mental, spiritual, and social well-being. Moderation in all things is the best way to achieve this balance. Without health one lacks the basic equipment required for self-reliance; one cannot make choices independent of the desires and abilities of others. So, to be healthy is to be free to pursue one's own ends. To be unhealthy is to be dependent on others" (p. 71). During the hermeneutic analysis this definition stopped at moderation, as participants did not express concerns directly in line with the last section consistently or strongly, though they did occasionally acknowledge these elements. If Strauss' (2005) participants are correct, however, this formulation leads to a

specific problem within the context of commodification. If one cannot achieve independence without the balanced life offered by yoga, achieving this balance remains the sole moral responsibility of the individual, *and* the practice is bound by commercial structures, what happens to those whose socio-economic conditions might exclude them from practice? What are the discursive implications of this state of affairs? I will now turn to *Yoga Journal* to begin exploring these questions.

### **Breaking Down Health on *Yoga Journal***

*Today, the yoga body has become the centerpiece of a transnational tableau of personalized well-being and quotidian redemption, relentlessly embellished on the pages of glossy publications like 'Yoga Journal'. The locus is no longer at the centre of an invisible ground of being, hidden from the gaze of all but the elite initiate or the mystic; instead, the lucent skin of the yoga model becomes the ubiquitous signifier of spiritual possibility, the specular projection screen of characteristically modern and democratic religious aspirations. In the yoga body – sold back to a million consumer-practitioners as an irresistible commodity of the holistic, perfectible self – surface and anatomical structure promise ineffable depth and the dream of incarnate transcendence.*

(Singleton, 2010, p. 174)

Like the hermeneutic analysis, bio-medical and holistic health are important distinctions in this chapter, but an additional element is added: health-as-beauty, in which health is defined by the attainment of the proper body. Health-as-beauty is an increasingly visible element in MPY, as Singleton's (2010) quote above indicates, and a particularly important strategy for healthism, where "the appearance of a fit body, rather than the reality of fitness, has become a critical determinant of social status and a factor that is self-policed by individuals as they negotiate social positions" (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, p. 12). Thus, even those who have attained the healthy ideal in bio-medical or holistic terms (an unlikely occurrence in and of itself) may still be enticed to make further purchases by images of health-as-beauty reflected in media such as *Yoga Journal*. This strategy also echoes the "yoga image" that bothered participants. They felt it distracted practitioners and deterred those interested in trying yoga by bringing too much focus

to bear on the body, appearance, status, and clothing. They were concerned that individuals would self-police and exclude themselves because of this semiotic strategy, and were in fact most aware of structural barriers and problematic discursive practices in this context. Their concerns included the cost of clothes; the intimidation created by thin models in well-staged, difficult poses; and the possibility that focusing on beauty could cause people to ignore other elements of yoga such as spirituality or personal growth. While these criticisms remained rooted in practice, participants were also closely articulating post-structuralist concerns and clearly articulated the connection to commodification as problematic in these cases. None the less, their perspectives did not align exactly with post-structuralism, as will be demonstrated throughout this chapter – for example, the focus on beauty is often mutually supportive of spirituality and personal growth, given the connections between health, healthism, health-as-beauty, and morality.

Indeed, the bio-medical, holistic, and beauty models of health are interconnected in yoga and all of them interact with healthism. This is quite visible in the organizational scheme of the *Yoga Journal* website. Though topical content appears to be segregated, with *Health*, *Wisdom*, *Lifestyle*, and *Practice* possessing their own sections, many articles turn up in multiple categories and each section addresses more than one approach to health. The category of *Health* itself, for example, contains four sub-headings: *Ayurveda*, *Holistic Healing*, *Well-being* and *Therapeutic Downloads*. The emphasis here is mainly on the holistic approach, though there are some articles that take a more bio-medical slant. “Back to Back”, for example, focuses on scoliosis. The *Lifestyle* section takes us much farther into the land of holistic well-being, and further sometimes links holistic care to health-as-beauty in the *Self Care* sub-heading, where the largest number of articles overtly addressing this model appear – though health-as-beauty is not very visible in the

organization of the website overall. *Wisdom* tends to exemplify the esoteric, spiritual elements of yogic health. The *Poses* section contains subheadings for *Anatomical Focus*, *Therapeutic Focus*, and *Contraindications*, all of which focus on strengthening or healing specific parts of the body or mind. Contraindications, particularly, speaks volumes as it is explicitly bio-medical terminology. Articles related to a medical model are scattered throughout the website, particularly under *Practice – Anatomy*, and they often including medical jargon such as the titles of muscles. The articles and videos are not generally easy to classify either, however, as they often adopt more than one model of health as well.

Though health-as-beauty is less readily visible than the other models, both in the organization of the website and the articles themselves, it proves to be particularly important in a different way. Some articles focus on specific beauty goals, for example: “Organic Beauty” or “Yoga Before or After Weight Loss?”, but these are less common than other topics and the other two models, which have a plethora of articles addressed to them overtly. The *Practice – Anatomy* section has articles that are more specific to attaining a fit body such as “Great Glutes”, but these can be tricky to interpret. “Fab Abs”, for example, has this to say:

The pose has a well-deserved reputation as an abdominal strengthener, but we aren't talking about the rectus abdominus, the long, flat muscle that shores up the belly between the pubis and ribs, which bodybuilder types, like California's governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, transform into cosmetically flashy six-pack abs. But UPP's [*Urdhva Prasarita Padasana* (Raised Stretched-Out Foot Pose)] real benefit is to a pair of deeper abdominal muscles, the psoas, which Ida Rolf, the originator of Structural Integration (popularly known as Rolfing), deemed "one of the most significant muscles of the body."  
<http://www.yogajournal.com/basics/2302>

While the article talks about physical appearance, contains an image of a thin, young female with fab abs, and plays blatantly on beauty appeal, it is still not a strictly appearance-based fitness. The *Anatomical Focus* subsection is revealing in that it offers specific body parts to focus on: butt, abdomen, or arms, anyone? This is particularly important when taken into consideration

with Dworkin and Wachs (2009) finding that fitness magazines consistently promise spot-reducing and toning exercises despite the impossibility of achieving these goals. There is no direct correlation between their findings and *Yoga Journal* insofar as the descriptions do not generally promise weight-loss or toning in the targeted area but promote ‘strengthening’. There are also anatomically focused poses for non-visible body parts such as kidneys and ovaries. However, the connotation of these articles is effected by more than simply the words themselves. In the instructions for the abdomen-focused *Setu Bandha Sarvangasana* (Bridge Pose) under the *Poses* section, the model is remarkably toned, slim and does indeed have fabulous abs. The text instructions give no information at all in regards to how it will strengthen the abs, but the picture provides a very clear message.

Indeed, perhaps the strongest argument for the health-as-beauty approach on *Yoga Journal* resides in the images and inter-textuality of the site. Despite the open and accepting attitude of the written or spoken content, the images which accompany them are almost exclusively of thin, toned, young people, often white women, performing perfect *asanas*. The surface of the body is made to stand for the different conceptualizations of health deployed in the text, though the connection between them is not a given. As Dworkin and Wachs (2009) argue,

in the process of advertising and selling the right kind of bodily object through consumption, the bodies of the privileged are legitimated and idealized as moral actors. This is because the right kind of bodily object – the cumulative effect of one’s purchases, social practices, and the ensuing surfaces of the flesh – is always out of reach by some and attainable by others... Cause and effect have been reversed, and the invisibility of one’s cumulative social practices make the flesh seem natural and the right kind of flesh more moral (Butler, 1990; also see Spitzack, 1990). The resultant body you see on the surface is a result of individual and collective expressions of pleasures, purchases, cultural ideals, social positionings, and self-surveillance (p. 11-12).

There is no doubt that the site is advertising and selling a certain kind of bodily object, not only in their desire to sell the magazine and its ancillary businesses and products, but also in selling yoga. One can purchase the services and products offered in side-bar advertising, downloads, and

the *Marketplace* section, or find classes in the *Yoga Directory*, to try and achieve the yoga body. The overall result is the creation of a “culture of lack” and healthism. This quote from Dworkin and Wachs (2009) is also startlingly reminiscent of the one from Singleton (2010) which opens this chapter. The “lucent skin of the yoga model” does indeed signify health, moral strength, and personal responsibility. Where Singleton is concerned with a metaphysical “invisible ground of being, hidden from the gaze of all but the elite initiate or the mystic”, Dworkin and Wachs (2009) see a different kind of invisibility based on social practices, often equally hidden from MPY practitioners.

Further, the three models of health are tied in complex ways to authenticity. It is significant, for example, that *Yoga Journal's* mandate is to “give readers insightful articles on yoga, filled with the most current scientific information available, while honoring the 5,000-year-old tradition on which it is based” (<http://www.yogajournal.com/global/34>). In actuality, this most often means medical science. Douglass (2007) suggests that the bio-medical approach to yoga “lends a marginalized practice authenticity and authority. The medical model is America’s gatekeeper. It has sanctioned our culture’s use of practices that emerge from East Indian mystical traditions” (pg. 40). Based on my analysis of authenticity in chapter three, these two statements appear at first glance to be contradictory – is it yoga’s pre-modern character or its medical benefits that make the practice authentic? Despite the initial dissonance, these claims are not, in fact, inconsistent; yoga’s Eastern, pre-modern roots were not widely recognized *as* signs of authenticity outside of certain sections of the academy and yogic communities prior to bio-medical legitimation, though they are now widely deployed. Love (2006) finds that from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the mid twentieth century yoga was often associated with mockery, fear, or derision in the media because of its Indian origins and mystical elements. Douglass (2007), Narayan (1993) and Singleton (2010) demonstrate that western scholars were also often dismissive of or even

hostile toward Hindu and Yogic traditions during modern yoga's formative years because of their perceived inferiority and barbarism. This was aggravated by western attempts to approach yoga as a viable practice which often conflicted with other cultural values, particularly Christian ones. These trends continued until at least the 1960's, influenced by ongoing events such as scandalous gurus and xenophobic immigration panics, along with the more positive processes which supported the growth of transnational yoga described in chapter 3. Even after the 1960's yoga retained a marginal status because of its foreignness, religious connotations, and counter-cultural associations, however. (Douglass, 2007; Love, 2006). Though modern yoga was being reinterpreted through scientific, medical, and psychological lenses consistently throughout this period by both eastern and western scholars, it was not until the medical boom of the 1990's that yoga's Eastern Authenticity could be deployed as a convincing signifier *broadly*. Indeed, *Yoga Journal's* former editorial director, Kathryn Arnold, attributes the rise in yoga's popularity to "the defining moment when the medical community started taking notice" in 1990 – well after the journal had begun printing in 1975 (Love, 2006, p. 90).

Thus, yoga generally and *Yoga Journal* specifically have a strange relationship with bio-medicine. The medical model legitimates the practice but also provides the basis for some of yoga's claims regarding holistic healing insofar as it purports to extend *beyond* the narrow confines of medical science. This recognition of bio-medicine's narrow parameters allows yogic perspectives to fall somewhat in line with post-structuralist criticisms, but is also paradoxical because of yoga's discursive reliance on medical boundaries. Further, yoga is represented as a cure for modernity by simultaneously drawing on pre-modern, holistic knowledge while utilizing bio-medical conceptualizations of health, such as curing diseases perceived to be the product of

modernity (i.e. back pain or depression). Finally, yoga is represented as a potential cure for the ills of bio-medicine itself – this discursive web is dizzying!

This tension was reflected in field data, as shown in chapters 3, 4, and 5. A good example of the dynamic described above can also be found on the website in the article “Assessing Your Student's Progress in Yoga, Part 1”, which is located under the sub-heading *Yoga as Medicine* in the *Teachers* section – an article which also features an image of a thin, young woman performing *Bitilasana* (Cow Pose). The article argues that while students may come to the practice for relief from specific illnesses, this end will not always be achieved.

Even if you can't guarantee a specific result, it's absolutely appropriate to design a practice for your students that you hope will be effective for the health problems that bring them to you... But whether it happens or not—or how quickly it happens—depends on factors that may be beyond your or your students' ability to control.

In the modern I-need-it-now world, you are likely to encounter students who are impatient for results. They may be accustomed to visiting doctors who give them pills that start to work almost immediately. (Of course, one of the reasons patients come to yoga therapists is that drugs often don't provide lasting solutions, or they cause intolerable side effects.) Remind your students that yoga is a powerful modality, but that it works in a different manner than conventional medicine. Rather than simply treat a specific complaint, yoga seeks to improve, in a holistic manner, the functioning of various systems of the body: lowering stress, improving immunity, relaxing muscle tension, improving posture, boosting mood. Do all these things (and more) through a yoga practice, and the body is able to correct many problems on its own ([http://www.yogajournal.com/for\\_teachers/2603](http://www.yogajournal.com/for_teachers/2603)).

This passage, and the article itself, clearly identify the modern world as a source of many problems, and bio-medicine as a limited and problematic modality of healing. The article also points to the importance of measuring progress in a holistic way rather than focusing on whether specific illnesses or goals (such as weight loss) are met, admonishing that “progress in asana does not necessarily mean progress in life”. This move can defer hierarchization and measurement, thus producing less disciplinary practices.

The article does suggest that progress should be made, however, and advises that instructors should attempt to work within the bio-medical modality when possible. The author is

Dr. Timothy McCall, a medical doctor whose credentials authorize his statements, and the article approaches illness as a largely bio-medical concern which can be addressed by yoga *even when results are not readily apparent by bio-medical standards*. Discussing health within the context of “various systems of the body” and espousing benefits such as “improving immunity”, “improving posture” and “relaxing muscle tension” remain largely within a bio-medical register, for example. “Lowering stress” is a particularly problematic benefit, given that Dr. McCall writes another article (in the same section) called “The Scientific Basis of Yoga Therapy” which enumerates the bio-medical benefits found in scientific studies of yoga, including the many bio-medical advantages of stress reduction. As he argues, stress has been shown to influence a large number of illnesses, bringing it very much under the aegis of bio-medicine. Though stress reduction can and often is argued to be an essential part of holistic definitions of health because it impacts physical, mental, social and spiritual states as well as overall well-being (De Michelis, 2005), the increasing bio-medical focus on stress allows it to be measured and individualized in a scientific *episteme*.

Dr. McCall also argues in “The Scientific Basis of Yoga Therapy” that scientific studies of yoga are able “with increasing precision... to look at the brain and body and detect the sometimes subtle changes that practitioners of yoga and meditation undergo”. Near the end of the article, an attempt is made to translate yogic philosophy into clear bio-medical terms:

The modern understanding of the brain is that rather than being a static structure (which is what I was taught in medical school), this organ is constantly remodeling itself, a phenomenon scientists call neuroplasticity. Repeated thoughts and actions can rewire your brain, and the more you do something, the stronger those new neural networks become. Almost 2,000 years ago, Patanjali was onto this when he suggested that the key to success in yoga is dedicated, uninterrupted practice over a long period of time. The resulting neural networks— or *samskaras*, as yogis call them—get stronger and stronger as you stay with the practice. Slowly but surely, these healthy grooves of thought and action help guide people out of the ruts in which they've been stuck ([http://www.yogajournal.com/for\\_teachers/2016/](http://www.yogajournal.com/for_teachers/2016/)).

While this can be read as an opening up of medical discourse, it seems more likely to run in the opposite direction. By tying yoga and representations of Classical Yoga philosophy to medical models which are restrictive and individualizing, this transformation may allow new forms of government and discipline. This is particularly troubling given the vast differences between the metaphysics of the self in Classical Yoga and neuroscience. One might look at the approach to practice described here, relative to Markula and Pringle's (2006) work, as individualising the connection between health and practice, which deflects the surveillance of health risks to the deficiencies of individual practices. It is likewise problematic to suggest that Patanjali could possibly have been thinking in bio-medical terms or that *samskaras* might simply be neural networks.

That the author has written 2 articles in this section championing bio-medicine *and* holistic health (as well as many others drawing from both perspectives) should not suggest that he is inconsistent. Rather, these examples demonstrate the interconnections and delicate balance played out on the website between bio-medicine, holistic healing, pre-modern traditions and conceptualizations of modern life. The articles' location in the *Teachers* section is also significant, as it ties these approaches immediately into commercial systems.

Returning to the four-part, holistic definition of health provided by Strauss (2005), we can see that most participants talked about yoga in terms of psychology and mental health, and this is a prevailing trend on *Yoga Journal* as well. Psychology often relies on the Cartesian split between mind and body, which re-enforces the humanist self and the mechanist docility of the body (Heyes, 2007; Shusterman, 2008). Psychology is also an important part of bio-medicine and, as Foucault (1978) identifies in *The History of Sexuality*, an important form of governmentality and subjectivization. Yet it is also an important part of holistic approaches to health (De Michelis, 2005; Strauss, 2005), and holism attempts to circumvent the Cartesian

body/mind trap (Heyes, 2007; Shusterman, 2008). Holistic approaches to mental well-being in yoga can therefore, on occasion, produce discursive practices which lean more towards freedom than domination, though Carrette and King (2005) find that modern yoga largely relies on the Cartesian split. It is likely that modern yoga in fact does both; participants, for example, often made references to conceptualizations of the self which escaped this trap while simultaneously referencing ones that reinforced it, as demonstrated in chapter 3. This may be accounted for in part by the unstable syncretism of yoga, insofar as it draws on bio-medical and holistic models, pre-modern traditions like Classical Yoga which often escape the Cartesian binary and modern ones that don't, as well as the presence of localized and contingent strategies of power.

Though stress is increasingly important to bio-medical analyses and central to holistic approaches, it is perhaps most clearly identifiable as a psychological concept. "This is Your Body on Stress" is a notable example of this within a bio-medical context, and also points to larger issues around healthism, health, and power. The article discusses the causes of stress in largely bio-medical, psychological terms and recommends yoga as a solution, stating that "luckily, there are lots of ways to reduce stress or even to head it off in the first place. They fall into three main categories: changing your situation, changing your attitude, and taking good care of yourself" (<http://www.yogajournal.com/health/1514/>). Although the author acknowledges that changing your situation may be both unfeasible and unwanted, it is significant that all of these solutions are formulated at the level of the individual. Yoga is a successful "stressbuster" because it accomplishes the second and third goals. Aside from yoga, taking care of oneself also includes "eating right, avoiding harmful drugs, exercising, making rest a priority, and scheduling time in pleasant environments with nice people." Advertisements for natural health remedies, products and services of self-care are placed conveniently outside the frame of the article, should the reader have any doubt as to how to achieve these ends. Thus managing stress is not only located at the level of the individual but also firmly placed within consumer structures,

demonstrating quite clearly one of the ways in which healthism can operate. It is even more problematic that these suggestions for taking care of oneself ignore the fact that many people are unable to access them; they may not be able to afford time away from work or family duties to make rest a priority, nor may they have the financial means and cultural capital to “eat right” and do yoga. Even though home practice offers a cheap option, *Yoga Journal* is well aware of the pitfalls and potential hazards here. The sequence builder, for example, contains an explicit liability waiver for this very reason ([http://www.yogajournal.com/poses/sequence\\_builder](http://www.yogajournal.com/poses/sequence_builder)).

The article includes the story of Sally Stresscase, a mother and wife whose career, happiness and family are being derailed by stress:

For Sally Stresscase, the day went from bad to worse. She awoke with allergies clogging her nose. Work was full of hassles. Her car stalled in rush hour traffic, and other drivers honked and scowled at her, turning her frustration into fury. Sally picked up her four-year-old, Sara, at day care. That cheered her up, but when they arrived home to a dark house, her heart sank. Her husband, Sam, was not there—again. He had been working late a lot recently, and acting so distant and withdrawn that Sally was feeling insecure and suspicious.

Though the story (and the marriage) have a happy ending, this excerpt is notable not only for its narrative format and focus on smooth productivity (which is impeded by stress), but also its emphasis on family and gender. It re-enforces that though stress may be an individual problem with individual solutions, its impact is not necessarily limited to this level; stress not only destroys individuals, but families. The moral imperative latent in health is thus crystallized around familiar gender tropes.

Caring for oneself, as the article suggests, is a concept that can also be taken up in Foucauldian terms as a practice of freedom rather than domination. One cares for the self, however, to care for others and to use one’s power more ethically. As demonstrated in chapter 3, my participants specifically and modern yoga more generally rely heavily on the discourse of caring for oneself in order to care for others. Participants were often cognizant of the power relations involved in this approach to care of the self on at least the interpersonal level (i.e.

between friends, family, students and coworkers), but less consistently in regard to institutional, discursive, or structural relations such as commodification. But while this strategy is also picked up on *Yoga Journal*, the magazine's treatment of care of the self is more clearly grounded in the humanist ontology of psychology, bio-medicine, and science, and is often not cognizant of power relations at all. This keeps the language of care for the self tied to limiting forms of subjectivization while remaining in a disciplinary mode – Sally Stresscase, for example, may care for herself to care for others, but she does so on scientific and patriarchal terms. Though practitioners also exhibited these tendencies, they were not as pronounced. The difference may be due in part to the roles of commodification, which tended to produce more disciplinary practices on *Yoga Journal*, and practice-focus, which ensured a more open stance toward the ontology of the subject in the field data.

In addition, critique is paramount in technologies of the self (Foucault, 1994; Heyes, 2007; Lea, 2009; Markula & Pringle, 2006; Shusterman, 2008). It is “the movement by which the subject gives himself the right to interrogate the truth on its effects of power and question power on its discourses of truth” (Foucault as cited in Heyes, 2007, p. 117). *Yoga Journal* clearly does not encourage a critical stance in relation to consumer and social structures, bio-medicine, or gender relations, and generally maintains this attitude throughout its contents – though as I argued in chapter 3 there are certainly exceptions to this rule. This was a problem also encountered frequently in the field data, where a critical stance was consistently decreased or deferred by the mediation of practice and non-judgement.

Psychology is also closely related to spirituality. The two are often articulated together, and further spirituality is often expressed in psychologized terms. Psychology has been a key player in privatizing religion, resulting in the form of spirituality with which we are now familiar, discussed in chapter three. Through this process religion becomes a personal experience

rather than a social one and is simultaneously rendered amenable to self-surveillance and consumption (Carrette & King, 2005). Though spirituality does appear independently in *Yoga Journal* the relationship between spirituality and psychology which concerns Carrette and King (2005) is readily visible in articles like “The Scientific Basis of Yoga Therapy”, discussed previously. Openness as a psychological concept is also important in this formulation, tied into personal growth. De Michelis (2005) tells us that “in a general sense, ‘personal growth’ can be understood as the shape ‘religious salvation’ takes in the New Age movement: it is affirmed that deliverance from human suffering and weakness will be reached by developing our human potential, which results in our increasingly getting in touch with our inner divinity.” (p. 186). Psychologised language such as “personal growth” and “openness” opens out into nirvana in most modern yogic narratives.

This is certainly the case in “Protective Services”, an article about the importance of opening to vulnerability as a spiritual practice, framed largely in psychological terms. It discusses the vulnerability of childhood and creation of the ego as a defensive strategy in a pop-Freudian manner, and advises that one must be careful when attempting to open to vulnerability, as it is an advanced and difficult practice. The article demonstrates the interplay between psychology and spirituality. They are sometimes articulated together, at other times as complementary, and spirituality is also expressed as an individual psychological experience. Opening to vulnerability allows personal growth and moves one’s spiritual practice toward enlightenment, though other articles stressed the elements of personal growth and inner divinity described by De Michelis (2005) more explicitly. But there is also something else going on here that struck a chord with me:

In order to hold and bear the acute experience of vulnerability, you need an appropriate container. The practice of consciously putting up boundaries is part of creating a container. Creating a boundary can mean something as simple as

maintaining a physical distance between you and another person, setting personal limits, being able to say "no" appropriately, and understanding whom you're willing to let into your intimate inner circle. Another form of container is a relationship of trust—certain friendships, your teacher, or a practice community can help you find safe spaces in which to open.

But ultimately, the container I'm talking about is the inner-body vessel created through focused practice and contemplation. All yogic disciplines aim at strengthening not just the physical body but the energy body as well—through concentrating your mind, practicing stillness, and learning how to find and occupy the core of your being, the center from which you can safely ride out internal and external storms. Short-term practice can be helpful, but ultimately, that container is formed through accumulated practice and self-inquiry (<http://www.yogajournal.com/wisdom/2564?page=2>).

This description of yoga and other means of putting up boundaries and creating a container to deal with vulnerability fits, almost exactly, with my own experiences. And while this has proved a successful technique for me, it also forces me to step back reconsider the discursive and ontological repercussions it may have.

One of the most interesting illustrations of how psychology and spirituality meet on *Yoga Journal* occurs in an interview with Liliás Folan. She argues that yoga has profound effects in relation to physical and mental health insofar as we are a “traveling stress management machine,” language which clearly draws on modern bio-medical conceptualizations of the body. However, after this assertion she states that

Now I know what the yogis meant about mental health and bringing it to balance... so much is learned in relaxation because we have to quiet the outer shell, and then we go inwards, and it's that wonderful moment as a student to look at thought, and go wow, I am not my thinking. Oh my, what a wonderful moment. And in relaxation is the time, so you go through the different layers, still remaining conscious, and then you can kind of go, who am I? If I'm not this [touches arm] and if I'm not my thought, and if I'm not the emotions, all important but I'm not that, my goodness who am I? And there's the journey of the great saints. (<http://www.yogajournal.com/video/75>)

Here we have the continuation of psychological and medical language, particularly as she refers to “relaxation” rather than meditation and retains the separation of body, mind and spirit. Yet, she does so specifically to discount psychology and medicine, as she states that we are not our thinking or emotions, let alone our body. This means that experience is not located in the mind,

as psychology argues, nor in the body as the health sciences do – this appears to be a vision of the self based on Classical Yoga, though she is not specific enough to confirm this. Here we see a strange kind of syncretism which creates tension between eastern and western thought, metaphysical and hard science philosophies, and modern/pre-modern binaries. This video is one of *Yoga Journal's* moments of critical engagement, which opens care of the self up to non-humanist ontologies. It highlights how metaphysics of pre-modern traditions may have the potential to support less limiting ontologies of the self, though of course this is not guaranteed and does not disqualify new or modern approaches. It also imagines a self which is never completely finished and must be constantly worked on and questioned. Lea (2009) emphasises this element through the category of “struggle” in her three-part analytic of yoga as a practice of freedom, while the other two parts consist of the “critical” and “curative and therapeutic” functions (pg. 74). The video speaks strongly to aesthetic self-stylization, the attitude of seeing oneself as an artwork always in the making, and certainly to the process-focus of modern yoga. Indeed, openness is perhaps one of the most useful themes derived in this study for considering yoga as a practice of freedom. Openness and vulnerability encourage a constant becoming rather than a fixed material, and sometimes even elide a final goal.

### **Selling Authentic Spirituality: Social Good and Commodification**

Though Beth may be uncomfortable with selling yoga as a spiritual practice, *Yoga Journal* certainly is not. In some instances the magazine does so quite clearly; the *Marketplace*, for example, sells jewellery that draws on Hindu iconography and terminology. *Malas*, or prayer beads, are some of the most clearly spiritually-identified products available, and also often emphasise ethical, sustainable production. Likewise, many of the articles in the *Travel* section sell yogic retreats which trade on their spiritual value. *Yoga Journal's* strategy is not always

explicitly consumptive, however, and often relies on both the inter-textuality of the website and the signs of authenticity; indeed, the depiction of authentic yoga as inherently spiritual against western materialism, described in chapter 3, marks the most visible point in the sale of spirituality. Given that this strategy is utilized to mobilize particular brands or styles of yoga available on the market as authentic, representations of spirituality within the context of *Yoga Journal* are often implicitly connected to commodification.

“When less is more” demonstrates a salient moment in constructing the Materialist West/Spiritual East dichotomy, the role of spirituality, and the problem of commodification. It touts the benefits of spiritual fulfillment over material gain and even suggests spiritual gain through material loss, by promoting “voluntary simplicity” (buying less) (<http://www.yogajournal.com/lifestyle/2665>). It talks about consumer culture in almost exclusively American terms, arguing, for example, that “many of us fail to make the connection between everyday shopping and... ‘the negative global impact of U.S. consumer culture’”. This sets up an East/West binary which is reinforced by (and reinforces) the sites’ emphasis on authentic Ancient, Indian Yoga and the ills of western modernity and consumerism. Indeed, as one would expect given my analysis in chapter three, the article pulls out Patanjali, several *yamas* and *niyamas*, and yoga’s pre-modern character by arguing that “that simplicity is a little more complicated than it was in Patanjali's time”. In addition, however, the article tells the story of a yoga teacher from California who decreases her consumption using the Eastern spirituality of yoga after hiking along Nepal's Annapurna circuit. She relates how tourists generally purchased water along the way, “using 50 to 70 bottles each. ‘I saw piles of hundreds of thousands of plastic water bottles that visiting Westerners had discarded’”. While this example is moving and offers legitimate criticism of the tourism industry, it also explicitly sets up a Spiritual East/Materialist West dichotomy. Nor, one might add, does it acknowledge the problems of pollution, materialism, and capitalism so prevalent in modern East Asia.

“When Less is More” promotes an austere lifestyle and connects a less consumptive life and spirituality directly, echoing my participants argument that yoga leads to a naturally less consumptive lifestyle. The article states, for example, that:

The desire for external wealth causes unhappiness on both a practical level and a spiritual one. In order to afford things, you have to work long hours, leaving you less time for what truly sustains you, whether that's yoga and meditation, a hobby, or time with your kids. An expensive lifestyle also limits your choice of career, forcing you to take a high-paying job that may not be fulfilling. It's hard to transcend the desire for external things when we see hundreds of ads implying that happiness lies in a new iPod, laptop, or car. But despite those commercial messages, acquisition doesn't equal happiness. Many yogis find that if they transcend their material cravings, they can lead more satisfying, albeit more modest, lives.

This description, while a moving and valid criticism of consumption (indeed, one not far from those I am articulating), simultaneously elides the yoga industry and the websites’ commercial content, despite these being constantly within the frame. Statistical information (taken from *Yoga Journal's* own survey, one might add!) and the discursive structure of the magazine itself do not support the notion that yoga naturally leads to less consumption, nor even that practitioners do in fact consume less – though they certainly might. Confirmation in either direction would require research which cannot be conducted here, but the large increase in yoga-related spending between 2004 and 2008 certainly does not indicate a shrinking market. It is fairly clear that practitioners are considerable spenders, at least when it comes to yoga. *Yoga Journal* not only depends on advertising revenue from other products and companies, they also advertise for their own ventures extensively on the website. While the article exhorts the benefits of not spending, the website offers many opportunities and suggestions to purchase things and plenty of encouragement to do so.

It is also crucial that participants and *Yoga Journal* consider consumption to be a *bad* thing outside of raising awareness of yoga, thus connecting decreased consumption directly to social good. Yet none of the participants advocated against commodification on more than the personal level of buying less, nor does the magazine do so with any consistency. I am not

suggesting that participants, the author of this article, or even *Yoga Journal* are being dishonest in advocating “voluntary simplicity”. Indeed, this may have been a simple survival tactic on the part of participants who felt there was no other means of supporting social good and fighting the negative effects of commodification. But it also demonstrates that spirituality, enshrined in commodification and individualization, tends to ultimately support the market. Without appearing or necessarily intending to, the magazine sells spirituality even as it argues against doing so.

A second and related issue here resides in the pick and choose approach encouraged by this model of spirituality, which usually entails the adoption of various spiritual and religious traditions, practices, rituals, beliefs and philosophies. Beth, in particular, adopted this style:

Um, well the spiritual aspect of it as well... I'm not, I don't know a lot about that but I am learning, little bits as I go along, and ah, yeah, I just, haven't really found, like I said I went to a church for awhile, er and y'know I haven't really found any “religion” (emphasis and scepticism in voice) that (laughs) I like, and um.... yeah, just yeah, it seems to like Buddhism seems to make sense to me and the native American, y'know, their beliefs make sense to me, so kind of y'know, building my own.

This quote reflects the difficulty in articulating spirituality discussed in chapter 5, but it also points to a more troubling aspect of cafeteria-style spirituality in modern yoga and commercial systems. Religious traditions, practices, rituals, and beliefs are often disconnected and abstracted from their traditional contexts, structures and philosophies while any contradictions are either ignored or glossed over – chapter 3 demonstrated this strategy well. This approach to spirituality was also reflected in participants’ suggestion that commodification provides many options to choose from. On the *Yoga Journal* website, Gary Kraftsow comments that the most beneficial part of *Yoga Journal* conferences is their ability to expose students to different practices and philosophies in order to choose those they would like to study in depth (<http://www.yogajournal.com/video/28>). This certainly emphasises the neo-liberal potential of this kind of spirituality, yet it does not address the underlying problems which necessitate (and

allow) it (Carrette & King, 2005). This observation is particularly apt for my participants, who believed that the world would be a better place if more people did yoga, yet often treated the reasons for it being so bad in the first place as unavoidable, natural, or outside of their control save for individual practice and change.

### **The *Yoga Journal* Story: Radicals for Social Good?**

*Yoga Journal* has its own story, many parts of which have already come under consideration. This is not just a story pieced together from various articles in and about *Yoga Journal*, however; the magazine quite literally tells its own tale in “The Yoga Journal Story” (<http://www.yogajournal.com/global/34>). And the way they choose to open this story is quite telling:

For over 35 years, one magazine has shaped the *yoga revolution in America* -- Yoga Journal. Founded in 1975 by members of the California Yoga Teachers Association (Rama Vernon, Ike Lasater, Judith Hanson Lasater, Rose Garfinkle, Jean Girardot, Janis Paulsen, and William Staniger), Yoga Journal was created to *unite the growing yoga community* and provide "material that combines the *essence of classical yoga* with the *latest understanding of modern science*." In May 1975, the first issue of Yoga Journal -- *all 10 pages and 300 copies of it* -- was born (<http://www.yogajournal.com/global/34>, emphasis added).

Some of the most important elements in this passage, which I have italicized, have already come under analysis, including the magazine’s commercial development, modern yoga’s rise to popularity, medical science, and authenticity. The opening line, however, suggests something particularly interesting about the development of modern yoga generally and the magazine specifically. The phrase “yoga revolution” – which arguably allocates quite a bit more authority to yoga than it currently has, despite its popularity – is not a neutral choice of words. It speaks quite clearly to the claims made on the website and by my participants that yoga has the capacity to bring permanent change to individuals and to society as whole *directly through* its action on individuals. This formulation is distinctly neo-liberal, but also an odd variant of neo-liberalism

insofar as the website provides multiple commentaries on the importance of community, service, and activism, always enshrined between two fairly disparate points: the need to profit from yoga's commodification and the need to combat commodification's ills!

The article "Do Good, Do Yoga", discussed in chapter 3, is a good example of service producing social good. Rana Lee Araneta's video presentation on artistic environmentalism – filmed at a *Yoga Journal* conference so as to maximize advertising – also exemplifies this sentiment as she insists that a yogic mentality of non-judgement and peace has the potential to result in individualized kindness. This kindness will then move outward from person to person and result in a kinder, more informed and environmentally friendly populace of yogis *working together* (<http://www.yogajournal.com/video/9>). In this formulation activism for structural change happens first through activism on the self, but structural change is indeed a desired object to be achieved through community means – a very anti-neo-liberal sentiment.

A second line of argument in relation to the "yoga revolution" and activism emerges in a video interview with teacher Aadil Palkhivala. In "Activism and Yoga" he argues that "since all life is yoga, we must do what we are called to do, and I believe that activism is an integral part of that, if that is a calling for me. So it's not about right and wrong, it's about what is my heart is saying. And for me it is, which is why I participate in everything that helps humanity become more sane, become more focused" (<http://www.yogajournal.com/video/105/>). He goes on to describe his brand of activism as the choice to found an organic farming company in India called Eastern Essence. The company is currently taking a loss on sales, a cost he considers justified to maintain the health of the planet. The description of activism as an individual choice rather than a moral one is striking, as well as the equation of economic activity with activism. Surely this is a formulation which could only occur in neo-liberal formations of individual choice and market

logic. The totalizing implication of yoga as life in this conceptualization is also important as it allows neo-liberal philosophies to penetrate ever deeper into the life of yogis. Yet it is also significant that Palkhivala *is* taking a loss on this venture. There is no evidence that his loss will have any substantial effects, but it is worth noting that he speaks with remarkable passion. The scene is shot with a beautiful natural background behind him, providing visual impact to reinforce his comments. Though none of this provides evidence that he is sincere, he likely is given the connections between environmental movements and modern yoga as a holistic practice, which were clear in the data, in the literature, and have become particularly strong in recent years (De Michelis, 2004; Strauss, 2005). And if he is sincere, this is far more useful in demonstrating the effectiveness of neo-liberal discourses than any disingenuous scheming for profit on Palkhivala's part could be.

### **Dialogues on Philosophical Contradictions**

The final criticism of commodification that underlies many of the stories and analyses presented thus far was expressed in the field data and *Yoga Journal*, found in the literature, and is one I have raised on many occasions. This is the notion that commodification in fact contradicts yogic philosophy itself, and there are two important elements amenable to analysis here.

First, from hermeneutic, contextualist and post-structuralist perspectives one of the greatest risks in modern yoga's commodification is exactly this loss of coherence regarding its own doctrines in commercial contexts. This is a valid criticism and one often made by scholars and practitioners alike. Classical yoga, and particularly the *yamas* and *niyamas*, are frequently cited as being in conflict with capitalism. *Aparigraha*, variously translated as greedlessness, non-covetousness, or non-grasping, is unarguably difficult to maintain when commodification is built around a "culture of lack"; indeed, capitalism often depends on greed. Thus, a commodified yoga

must depend, to some extent, on breaking this *yama*. *Brahmacharya* (celibacy) is equally difficult to uphold; when looking at *Yoga Journal* the profusion of slim, toned and sexualized female models contorted at impossible angles cannot be ignored. Nor is sex necessarily discouraged in the articles themselves. Though a number of perspectives are presented, the overall tone does not insist upon celibacy, and many articles extol the sexual benefits of yoga. This *yama*, of course, is not universal to all forms of yoga. Tantric lineages, for example, were often not celibate (King, 1999a). Yet given the ascendancy of Classical yoga, this remains problematic. *Niyamas* such as *santosha* (contentment) and *tapas* (austerity) are problematic for the same reason as *aparigraha* – consumerism is dependent on our *not* reaching either state. Participants pointed out that *ahimsa* (non-harming) is also problematic in terms of commodification, ranging from the production and transportation of yoga goods which harm workers and the planet, to the consumption of unhealthy products and styles of practice. Most elements of the eight limbs and other yogic philosophical concepts can be marshalled to criticize commodification and positioned as contradictory to it. I will not, therefore draw them all out.

This position is one of the consequences of the ways in which yoga and commodification are conceptualized relative to authenticity, health, social good, and many of the other themes. If commodification is a negative aspect of modernity solved in part by yoga's non-modern philosophy, then this philosophy must be positioned as contradictory to commodification in at least some ways. None the less, this was not sufficient grounds for participants or *Yoga Journal* to disavow commodification in either the hermeneutic or post-structuralist analyses. There are good reasons for this as both analyses have shown, and this is the second point of analysis. In hermeneutics, the practice-focus and positive effects of MPY make the dissonance bearable, while in post-structuralism their apparent contradiction is central to successfully selling yoga in the context of naturalized commodification. This dissonance does, however, require some smoothing over, even from a post-structuralist perspective. As shown in chapter 5, this is

achieved largely through embodied, experiential means in hermeneutics. As is the case with many of the other themes, a post-structuralist analysis finds that the right mix of dissent, ambiguity, complicity and support constructs these contradictions as tolerable.

Like much scholarship, *Yoga Journal* refers to Classical Yoga, the *yamas*, and *niyamas* frequently, sometimes asking directly whether they are in fact contradictory to commodification, but also when discussing any number of issues around capitalism, modernity, materialism, health, social good, authenticity, etc. which touch on this question implicitly. There is no consistent answer given, but several lines of argument emerge. *Aparigraha* is one of the most commonly raised *yamas* in this context, and one of the most common responses to the question of whether *aparigraha* is problematically contradictory to commodified yoga is that yes, indeed it is. But it also provides strategies for consuming less, and can therefore be adapted to make this flawed (and thus naturalized) system function more positively *even if* we can never be completely greedless in it. “When Less is More” certainly takes this track by highlighting how yoga can allow us to participate in consumerism in less harmful ways by “*keeping* only what you need and *wanting* only what you need”. It also points up the ways in which this argument fails to adequately account for the material conditions and discursive practices of the yoga business, however as demonstrated earlier in this chapter. “When Less is More” also highlights how articles often begin with one element of yogic philosophy, such as *aparigraha*, and use this as a bridge to others: “*Aparigraha* leads naturally to one of the *niyamas*: *santoshā*, or ‘contentment,’ being satisfied with the resources at hand and not desiring more. Ultimately, Frawley says, Yoga is about transcending the desire for external things, which is the cause of suffering, and finding peace and happiness within”.

Some articles argue that these are not issues at all, or more importantly that they are issues which can be used to strengthen the practice. “Branding a Style of Yoga” advises that “The key to reconciling marketing and yogic principles may lie in taking advantage of branding's

beneficent aspects without going overboard into abusing an emphasis on marketing” ([http://www.yogajournal.com/for\\_teachers/1683/](http://www.yogajournal.com/for_teachers/1683/)). It suggests several guide lines for doing this: balance tradition and innovation; be authentic; refrain from overstatement; beware of overzealous promotion; remember what yoga is about; and understand the legal implications of branding. Two of these are particularly interesting. First, consistent with the analysis thus far, “remember what yoga is about” does exactly what we would expect authenticity to do. It advises that while the point at which a style of yoga becomes something else is difficult to discern due to MPY’s experiential epistemology and syncretism, that point *does* exist, and Classical yoga offers one of the best guides for recognizing it. Second, while the author clearly deploys authenticity as I have analyzed it by consistently referencing traditional philosophical components throughout the article, particularly Classical Yoga and *aparigraha*, “be authentic” in this case means “make it your own” – indeed, this is one of the few tips listed above that *does not* emphasize authenticity in my analytical terms. Indeed, this is exactly the kind of authenticity that was prevalent in the hermeneutic analysis, and which from a Foucauldian perspective emphasises the humanist self that one must be true to.

Other articles suggest that yoga is indeed contradictory to commodification, and *aparigraha* can therefore be used to undermine the negative effects of modern capitalism at either the personal or structural level, though these articles rarely call directly for non-commodified yoga. “Strapped for Time?” is a particularly interesting case in this vein. It does not talk about capitalism or commodification directly, as “When Less is More” does, nor does it tap social good to suggest that *aparigraha* can undermine capitalism at the structural level. But it does tackle modern capitalism through a number of references which link the problems of our culture to these phenomena and, further, which draw out their essentially disciplinary effects. “We live in a culture that prizes *productivity and speed*. Before we know it, we’re embroiled in a perpetual battle with time, missing out on our connections to our deeper self and to others”

(<http://www.yogajournal.com/lifestyle/2622>, emphasis added). While the article is clearly critical of the negative impacts of discipline, the nature of the self in this case is unclear; at times, the author draws on psychological concepts and the language of the “true self” which can indicate a humanist ontology. But it is also particularly interested in disrupting the linear time so closely tied to modernity, proposing extraordinary time as an alternative and highlighting the non-linear aspects of post-structuralist narratives. Extraordinary time is:

A state of intense focus, of being in the moment... a slowing of time, accompanied by a deepening of internal awareness and connection. It doesn't matter how fast or slow you move, but whether you're present enough to find the state of optimal experience that embodies extraordinary time.

Once you taste how rejuvenating extraordinary time can be, you're more willing to let go of your hold on linear time. And that's where the yogic principle of *aparigraha*, nongrasping, comes into the picture. *Aparigraha* teaches you to let go of the need to produce more, achieve more, acquire more. It motivates you to relax your iron-fisted grasp on material or measurable accomplishment.

This quote more directly points up the elements of capitalism and discipline with its reference to production, consumption, materialism and measurement. But more importantly, it highlights that non-linear time allows us to view these discourses more critically and to step out of the disciplinary modes connected to commodification. Indeed, the article touches on all three of the modes suggested by Lea (2009): the non-linearity of time opens the self up to a constant process of re-making and *struggle*, the opportunity to be *critical*, and serves a basic *therapeutic function*. In addition, this mode is dialogically connected to hermeneutics, insofar as it is firmly based in our experience and embodiment of time, as described above. The author calls this “timefulness practices”:

The heart of these practices is yoking your awareness to the moment; each and every moment holds the potential for a transformative experience of time. In my work as a psychologist and yoga therapist, I've seen that transitional times (when you're between jobs, partners, stages of life, or even yoga poses) are full of possibility. Because you're not rooted in your old awareness and habits, yet not fully anchored in the new, your potential for timefulness—openness to the present moment—is at its highest.

It remains to be seen whether this transformation would remain within a disciplinary mode or present the opportunity for practices of freedom.

**Chapter Seven:**  
**Conclusions**

### **Methodological Dialogues: Abstaining from Judgment**

In the beginning of chapter 6 I asked what the conceptualization of health as the path to freedom in a commodified yoga practice implied post-structurally and contextually. The analysis confirmed that this approach not only excludes people of lower socio-economic status in concrete ways, but also supports disciplinary practices for those who are able to access it. Though this analysis showed the potential for yoga to act as a practice of freedom, it rarely appears to do so in intensely commercial environments. Indeed, *Yoga Journal* is perhaps one of the best examples of such an environment; conversely, participants demonstrated that the experience of commodification, with its practice-orientation, tends to remain more open. However, both provide examples in the opposite direction; the data source did not overdetermine the role of commodification. Practices of freedom offer an excellent opportunity for dialogue with hermeneutics, because both focus both on the experiences and practices of subjects, even if those subjects are ontologically quite different.

The strongest thing the two analyses have in common, however, rests in the injunction not to judge; practitioners and *Yoga Journal* alike insist on the value of non-judgement. In hermeneutics, non-judgement is a mark of ethical research, as one can hardly represent faithfully those she passes judgement on, either explicitly or implicitly. Indeed, this is one reason why I had such difficulty in articulating a post-structuralist criticism of commodification in yoga without hermeneutic consideration. Given the importance of practice-focus and non-judgement in yoga, this felt not only like a judgement of their critical capacities, but a judgement of their meaning. *Asteya* (non-stealing) comes to mind here as well. Where Alison found that she needed to let practitioners discover their own way to move in poses so as not to steal their experience, I

feel much the same. Interpreting their behavior in line with post-structuralism not only judges their meaning, but co-opts it for my purposes.

In contrast, non-judgement can act as an important element in practices of freedom because judgement is central to discipline. Not only judging others but also judging oneself is a key element in the measurement, hierarchization, normalization, and surveillance so important to the diffused character of discipline. Yogic perspectives which deem judgement to be harmful therefore open up less dominating relations with others and with oneself.

But non-judgement was also problematic insofar as it inhibited critique if practitioners did not have a clear analytic division between the two. This made them hesitant to engage in critique, mistaking it for judgement. As such, a clear conceptualization of critique and non-judgement must be present for the practitioner to fully engage practices of the self. This is something that Sara was remarkably good at doing with a high degree of consistency, though she often also acknowledged that she was in fact judgemental. This was an interesting point, as her moments of judgement tended to remain rooted in her criticisms:

I am quite, critical, I'm a strong critical thinker and I've, I had to figure out where there's a place for that, and where there isn't.. and, generally in relationships I don't find that critical or criticism, critical thinking or criticism is very useful, but when you're dealing with a big, structure, like..... you know, capitalism, or, um, feminism or, patriarchy, those things, require a different, approach, and, I would say on account of the um, the [yoga chain stores], I am both critical thinking, criticizing, and judgemental... I am, I am judgemental. Um, yeah.... Because I... I guess I'm angry, that.. the foundations of where, yoga has come from, and I'm not a traditionalist, but there's some things you take it away it's not, the same any more, yeah, and then, you know, you would if you were um, a contender in this then you would say well, who are you to decide what pieces if you take it away it's not yoga anymore? Well I'm not deciding, I'm just telling you what I think, I think that you pull away Sanskrit, you pull away the philosophy, you put it in a corporation and you make it big... what are you doing, I don't understand, this is calisthenics this is like, you can get this by going to the gym. So... I-I mean I know I'm not "supposedtobejudgemental" (in a high, mocking tone) but I actually am, I actually am, I'm judgemental. I am, and I-I don't know maybe that's part of my process and I'll let go of that someday, but right now, I'm not that impressed. But, what am I,

some little, ma-and-pa kettle fuckin yoga studio, who gives a shit what I think  
(laughs) right? – but, I’m still thinkin!

Though Sara was willing to judge individual teachers, practitioners, and business owners, she was only willing to do so in regards to authenticity (of both the hermeneutic and post-structuralist variety) and commercial contexts. This excerpt reflects her conceptualizations of the different elements of judging and criticism, which are clearly based in her critical thinking skills, experience, and, as she later indicated, her schooling. While relying on her academic skills and experiential knowledge, both of which she found crucial, the main themes also ran throughout our conversation. She was clearly still operating within the same discursive and institutional field as the other interviewees, reinforcing that there is no “outside” of power relations. How then, did she see and approach this context?

### **Playing for Keeps in the Yoga Business**

*“If I have to be a total hard-core capitalist in a yoga world...  
I’m not sure I wanna play.”  
-Sara*

Sara reflects that starting the studio without teaching experience created problems in communicating with instructors.

It was really hard because I didn’t understand teaching, and so I didn’t understand.. teachers, and so I had a hard time hiring people, and knowing what was, what made a good teacher and what didn’t. And I didn’t really understand where teachers were coming from, I found them a little bit, flaky and difficult to manage, and um, you know, when you’re running a business those are two things that aren’t really optional like, cause you’re paying for everybody else’s.. wages, so you have to have, um, an element of groundedness not flakiness.

This initial mismatch between the business, her critical understanding of yoga, and her experience of it was difficult. Jumping in to the business “back asswards” meant that she did not discover right away her true passion for teaching, though she had done some teaching in the past

as an MA student; she reflects that teaching led her to a more yogic understanding not only of her employees, but of the business itself. She says that

[teaching] it's like my playground, you know it's the way I express is through teaching and through helping other people, and um, learn about yoga and (sighs)... it's not just, teaching yoga isn't just teaching yoga. It's friendship, it's social consciousness, again, it's.. inspiring, igniting, awakening, people to different things... it's very, playful and light, and introspective but, in a way that's not judgemental and... mm you're expecting yourself to be somewhere you're not, rather than, y'know judging and creating expectations I'm, I'm all about just stretching just a little outside of your edge, so that you know you're within a zone where you can handle but you can still.. ask a little more everyday. And so it's not goal-oriented, it's more, process-oriented, internally-oriented, but fun, like playful, and enjoying your body, and the bliss of the whole thing, right?

Sara's teaching style reflects quite clearly many of the aspects of practices of freedom described thus far, particularly non-judgement, as well as the main themes of the project.

The process of learning to teach and run the business authentically is what led her to bring her critical faculties to bear on the yoga business and her own practice. She also points up the problems with binaries in this excerpt, something which continued throughout the conversation, and emphasises authenticity again:

I used to have, yeah I used to have a dichotomy, there was my "business side" (deep serious tone) and then there was my yoga side, and I went ok this is really not working... so then I had to merge them into something that was more, integrated and, so that was what happened is, my business, merged more into my yoga then my yoga into my business, it kind of, I had to change all my conventional thinking about capitalism, business, how you treat employees, "never be friends with your employees" (deep voice again) well, it's like that doesn't work here, right? yeah, um... you know.. don't make exceptions because no, all these rules and like, "advertise, advertise, advertise" (deep voice) I don't advertise anymore, I-I don't follow any of the conventional business rules anymore, I follow, the yoga rules. And the philosophies of yoga.

She explains how she expanded the business to a chain and was forced to close the additional studios, operating only her original location during my participant-observation. Time clearly plays into this analysis as well:

I had three locations I closed 2 locations and that point I realized.. you know my application of how I thought I had to make it in the yoga world, created a problem for me so I had to pull back, contract, get really amalgamated and then

re-try, so at that point I went ok, so whada I want this to look like? And if I can't have a chain, cause it's gonna kill me, and I can't make more with a chain it's just, making less rather than more, and my focus being on making more has really got me into trouble, what do I want my focus to be on? So I shifted my focus to, the very best possible teaching inspiring, warmest community that I can provide, um.. and I lightened up on a lot of things, in my business right then, took away the expiry, got rid of contracts with my teachers, just stopped, all the business stuff. and, everything shifted, it was crazy.. you know everybody just was like ah (breaths out a sigh of relief, I think) god, right? And I'd spent years trying to explain to people we have an expiry so that I can match the sales to the output so that the sales that I'm getting in can match the number of classes I slot. and then I thought well, why don't I just trust.. that the classes I have running are, are good and it's enough, and that the sales will match that every month, why can't I just trust that? And it was like well cause I have no faith (laughs) well why don't you have any faith well because, you're scared shitless well why are you scared shitless, well because that's how I was raised, so it was kind of like...so I'm trying to find a way to make it my playground, my rules, but still, function enough in the mainstream, and so far.. the shift in philosophy, like the lightening up and not being so afraid of loss of money and not being so afraid of, you know making ends meet and, you know just being under stress all the time, the shift has made a huge difference in the business because that energy was here because I was here and now it just sorta settled down a little bit and people seem to be a lot more, calm and, it seems a lot more inviting and more fun and, not just we're putting on a fun class but we're actually all having fun through the whole process (laughs).

Thus, though Sara does not hold any punches critically, her decisions and criticisms remain deeply rooted in her practice and the experiences she has accrued. She also shows that while commodification is most certainly contradictory to yoga, it appears to be possible to work within it, and further that doing so requires staying within at least some of the discursive boundaries the business sets. This experiment, as she calls it, is not finished, and it remains to be seen whether Sara will be able to maintain her approach, or if she will even want to.

### **Return of the Scholar-Practitioner**

As argued previously, Sara is in many ways the ultimate scholar-practitioner due to her location as an academic, a practitioner, teacher, and an owner. Scholar-practitioners also have a place on *Yoga Journal*, as indicated previously, though this place can be tenuous at times. One definition of *Yuj* from the website provides an interesting example in this direction, which was not discussed previously:

Yoga is the actuality of our union with the absolute, the supreme reality of ourselves and everything, the blissful void, freedom, or what is called Absolute Glory (*Brahman, nirvana*), God (*Ishvara*) or Buddha, Reality Embodied (*Dharmakaya*), and many other names. In addition to that union itself, yoga is all the mental and physical technologies of realizing, enjoying, and manifesting that union. (<http://www.yogajournal.com/wisdom/456?page=3>)

Of the various definitions of *yuj* discussed thus far, this definition is the most concise in terms of providing academic references, the accuracy of which I cannot fully assess, yet it is also strangely vague. While it may give the correct names, it does not explain what they mean within their original historical, cultural, institutional, philosophical or religious settings, and phrases like “the supreme reality of ourselves and everything” retain a high degree of ambiguity. The rest of the article does in fact give more historical detail and philosophical elaboration, but this continues to be mixed with modern references (drawn from popular discourse generally and modern yoga discourse specifically) and imprecision. It reflects the experiential, rather than historical, goals of the journal and its audience, despite moments of academic intervention; indeed, not just in spite of, but often because of these moments. The author makes this explicit. He recounts how he headed to India (again indicating a foundational binary) in 1961:

I had studied some Eastern philosophies in college and I liked their ideas as reflected in Thoreau, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Jung, and Hesse. I urgently wanted to join my knowledge to my life, to experience whatever turned out to be the "real" reality. I wanted to yoke my whole being—sensation, emotion, thought, and deepest awareness—to "truth," whatever it might turn out to be. I left the West because, except for the Delphic oracle's maxim "know thyself," its authorities all said you could not know reality.

We are all philosophers, all scientists. Not only intellectuals know what is real and what is unreal. Everyone must know who they are, where they are, what they are doing, and what they should do.

Sara also reflects explicitly on her status as a scholar-practitioner, which sometimes results in conflict for her:

So I feel that, I feel like there's that conflict, with me, and it's um.... so yeah, I was born in this era, I'm a yoga practitioner, I'm a yoga business person, I'm a teacher, um... being a historian and political scientist, it effected my decision to do yoga and be in a yoga business, because I looked at the structure, and I looked at my degree and I went... I have no power in this system, I have way more

power on a one to one basis, teaching yoga, having inspiration in people's lives, giving them personal, a sense of personal power and a sense of personal finding so that they can then, web out into the world just like I have, right? So.. it's a grassroots approach that says no I can't change the world by being a judge, but I can change the world by, meeting people one on one, face to face, in a really, intimate setting that's very public, all the same. And so, it all ties together for me, it's not just like I'm just, a yoga teacher with no awareness of political systems, no awareness of, you know, what we're doing to the environment, no awareness of, the struggles that the individual goes through. Like, I think most people are so busy, making ends meet, in the cycle, the hamster cycle, that by the time they're 70 or 60 and retire and y'know, have some fatal illness two years later and die, they don't have time.. for spiritual development sometimes, and for, you know, understanding the political system and voting, y'know they're trying to get their kid from daycare, their kid is sick, their wife is, their kid is or the other teenager's doing drugs, like, the insurance payments due, fuck.. y'know, how are we gonna get to Cuba this year so we can drink our faces off and get a break? Like...

Ironically, running a yoga business is in many ways the solution to the dilemma she experiences. But it is clear that Sara's various experiences with the academy, yoga, teaching and business are in constant dialogue, and that she incorporates more than one methodological framework in her own reflective and reflexive analyses. Her emphasis on practice and experience connect her firmly within a hermeneutic framework, her reference to structures and history a contextualist one. But she also makes references to post-structuralist concepts, as demonstrated in the opening section, though how much of this is my interpretation and how much she sees her own meaning in this light remains to be seen.

I would argue, however, that post-structuralism most likely influences her views as we discussed her familiarity with the subject and it seems unlikely that subsequent examples which reflected these concepts were purely coincidental. For example, she argues that "I think that you know we're 5 years old we go to school, we sit in chairs, we're not taught to move we're not taught to appreciate, the power in the body, understand it, children don't understand their own digestive systems, they don't understand, the connections between how they feel and what their body's like, so w-we start a long process of shutting ourselves down". While there is clearly some hermeneutic influence here, the reference to schooling as a form of controlling or

disconnecting the body is very reminiscent of Foucault's analysis. He argues in *Discipline and Punish* (1977), for example, that the school room disciplines and controls the body by measuring and controlling its time and space. Given her familiarity with Foucault, it seems unlikely her perspective was not influenced by it.

Luce Irigaray offers another example of how yoga practice might lead to different formulations of self and other, cultural, and social formations, particularly regarding gender. She too attempts to discern the meaning of her practice and study, influences of Eastern and Western philosophy, and works in the post-structuralist paradigm of psychoanalysis. In this respect, her book offers a very different post-structuralist approach than the one undertaken here, and one quite different from much of the literature I have surveyed. Indeed, many of her arguments are closer to the hermeneutic understanding of spirituality and the body, for example, or to Davey's (2006) conceptualization of dialogical exchange between self and other. It also, therefore, offers another possibility for dialogical methodological analysis. I do not have the space or expertise to conduct this analysis here, but it offers another potential avenue of exploration.

As a scholar practitioner I have wrestled with the same kinds of issues as Sara, Irigaray, and Thurman. This project has been an initial step in resolving these issues, and one I hope to continue. It has brought into sharp relief my own need for a balanced and healthy life, my current inability to obtain one, and the possibilities and barriers facing me on this journey. As such, any future study on this topic will require as much depth in my personal life as my academic one (Sprague, 2005).

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