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Varieties of embodied yoga practice: a typological exploration of modern yoga

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GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Dissertation

**VARIETIES OF EMBODIED YOGA PRACTICE:
A TYPOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF MODERN YOGA**

by

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Boston University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, 2017

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ABSTRACT

As a distinct category of yoga practice, “modern yoga” evades simple definition. Researchers study modern yoga within a variety of disciplines, adding to the ambiguity of the category. These diffuse approaches can harden the disciplinary boundaries that surround certain expressions of the category. Consider that although yoga originated within South Asian religious traditions, some current expressions of yoga practice, such as those found in fitness or biomedical contexts, can appear to have little to do with Religious Studies. However, I suggest that bracketing off such expressions of modern yoga practice—although necessary for specialized analysis—can hinder the fruitful investigation of “yoga” as a more complex category and limit the potential reach of Religious Studies inquiries.

In this dissertation, I draw on methods from intellectual history, phenomenology, and comparative analysis to explore the category of modern yoga by developing a typology built around three organizing principles:

legitimacy, embodiment, and American identity. Legitimacy represents the various ways that types of modern yoga practice are considered authentic. Embodiment represents the common theme among the various expressions of modern yoga practice that each is an embodied form of practice. I develop embodiment further to analyze the concept of connectedness, which includes connection with oneself, others, and one's environment. Finally, American identity represents how the varieties of modern yoga practice dynamically respond to their cultural contexts.

The typology proposes that modern yoga comprises five sub-categories: religious yoga, spiritual yoga, fitness yoga, wellness yoga, and biomedical yoga. Like the unique colors on a palette, these categories are themselves distinct. Yet, also like colors on a palette, each represents just one shade among a nearly infinite number of real-world expressions. I argue that this classificatory system is useful to Religious Studies, because comparative analysis of the subcategories illustrates how even the most apparently secularized forms of yoga practice are relevant for Religious Studies inquiries. By constructing the categories of this typology, while simultaneously blurring their internal boundaries, I provide an expanded conceptual vocabulary with which to discuss the expansive expressions of modern yoga and to support future interdisciplinary work.

Table of Contents

Dedication	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Abstract	vi
Introduction	1
Methodology	2
Structure of the Dissertation	6
PART I: BACKGROUND	9
Chapter 1: Yoga and Modern Yoga	10
Introduction	10
Yoga	11
A Brief Overview of Pre-modern Yoga	11
Yoga, Vedānta, and Sāṃkhya	13
Patañjali's <i>Yoga Sūtras</i>	15
The Eight Limbs of the <i>Yoga Sūtras</i>	17
The Tantric Turn and Haṭha Yoga	20
Tantra	20
Haṭha Yoga	21
Modern Yoga	23
The Transition to Modern Yoga	23
Intellectual development of modern yoga: The merging of worlds	24
Yoga comes to the United States	25
Swami Vivekananda and <i>Raja Yoga</i>	27
The Study of Modern Yoga	30
What is Modern Yoga?	35

Descriptions of “Modern Yoga”	38
Characteristics of Modern Yoga	39
Elizabeth De Michelis’s Typology of Modern Yoga	42
Conclusion: A New Typology	44
Chapter 2: Embodiment	47
Introduction	47
Mind/Body	48
Phenomenology of the Body: Merleau-Ponty	51
Phenomenology of Origins	53
The Body	55
Perception	58
Contemporary Embodiment	59
Embodiment and Yoga	62
Why Embodiment?	66
Connectedness	67
Conclusion	71
PART II: A TYPOLOGY OF MODERN YOGA	72
Introduction to the Typology	73
Introduction	73
Typology as a Comparative Project	74
Overview of the Typology	77
Cross-threads of the Typology	79
Chapter 3: Religious Yoga and Spiritual Yoga	83
Introduction	83

A Brief Discussion of Terms: Religious and Spiritual.....	85
Category: Religious Yoga	90
Legitimacy	92
Embodiment: The Religious Body	93
Category: Spiritual Yoga	97
Legitimacy	100
Embodiment: The Spiritual Body.....	100
Comparing Religious Yoga and Spiritual Yoga.....	103
Intellectual Development of Religious Yoga and Spiritual Yoga	105
Vedānta and Neo-Vedānta	105
Haṭha Yoga vs. Rāja Yoga	107
Further Blurring the Categories: Interpreting Attributed Characteristics ...	112
Conclusion	114
Chapter 4: Fitness Yoga and Wellness Yoga.....	117
Introduction	117
Category: Fitness Yoga	120
Legitimacy	123
Embodiment: The Physical Body	123
Category: Wellness Yoga	127
Legitimacy	129
Embodiment: The Bodymind	130
Comparing Fitness Yoga and Wellness Yoga	137
The Visibility of Fitness Yoga and Wellness Yoga	139
Gateway Yoga	139

Consumer Yoga.....	141
Further Blurring the Categories: Old and New	145
Conclusion	147
Chapter 5: Biomedical Yoga	149
Introduction	149
Category: Biomedical Yoga	150
Legitimacy	152
Embodiment: The Biological Body	153
A Closer Look at Biomedical Yoga	155
Early Biomedical Yoga in India	156
The Foundation for Biomedical Yoga in the United States	163
Connections with Mind-Body Medicine.....	166
Mind-Body Medicine in the United States.....	167
The Medicalization of Yoga.....	171
Yoga Therapy: Yoga as a Contemporary Health Science.....	172
Clinical Yoga Research	175
Bibliometric analyses and research reviews	178
Reflections on yoga clinical research.....	182
Conclusion: The Limitations of Boundaries.....	185
Conclusion	190
Religion, Science, and a Final Blurring	190
Implications for Religious Studies	195
Yoga Beyond the Categories	202
Bibliography.....	205
Curriculum Vitae	221

Introduction

In recent decades, yoga practice has become ubiquitous in the United States and around the world, often in the context of health and wellness. The increased presence of yoga practice in health and wellness contexts raises opportunities for discussion about the nature of yoga practice itself. On the one hand yoga is a religious practice with historical and ideological links to South Asian religious traditions, and on another hand it is a secular health practice apparently devoid of any overtly religious or spiritual elements. In the common binary debates within contemporary American culture, it is difficult to see yoga practice as both.

However, yoga scholars have noted that the ability to transcend boundaries and take on new shapes is one of the hallmarks of yoga practice historically. David Gordon White writes, "Every group in every age has created its own version and vision of yoga."¹ Andrea Jain writes, "the most important lesson from the history of yoga and the divergent meanings attached to it is yoga's malleability...in the hands of human beings."² Like yoga generally, modern yoga practice in the United States is difficult to define and/or characterize because so much depends on both its context, physically and conceptually, and its perception by an observer. One might assume that the "Americanization" of yoga practice, with its commercialized and apparently secularized image, has

¹ David Gordon White, "Yoga, Brief History of an Idea," in *Yoga in Practice*, ed. David Gordon White (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012), 2.

² Andrea R. Jain, *Selling Yoga: From Counterculture to Pop Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 159.

somehow removed yoga practice from its roots or its “traditional” forms. Things are not so simple.

What does “Americanization” or “modernization” of yoga mean? How is yoga presented and perceived, and how should modern yoga be studied academically? In this dissertation I offer a comparative typology that recognizes yoga as an all-of-the-above phenomenon and categorizes varieties of modern yoga practice through the lens of embodiment.

Categorizing modern yoga practice by way of embodiment helps to establish continuity among the categories via a common element, the body, and to illuminate the relevance for Religious Studies of some modern yoga practices that on the surface seem outside the realm of that field. My typology of modern yoga includes five categories of modern yoga practice: religious yoga, spiritual yoga, fitness yoga, wellness yoga, and biomedical yoga. As I develop this typology, I will also critique its boundaries, as ultimately I aim to provide a useful conceptual vocabulary with which to discuss modern yoga practice within Religious Studies, not a definitive classification system.

Methodology

This dissertation is mostly concerned with modern yoga in the United States. To develop my typology, I use methods of intellectual history, phenomenology, and comparative analysis. By intellectual history I mean the history of ideas. Though I do not have the space to cover the entire intellectual

history of yoga and modern yoga, I will present some relevant highlights of the development of yoga as both an idea and a practice from its earliest known forms to its contemporary expressions. This method will include philosophical analysis as well as more direct history of parts of yoga's journey from South Asia to most places on the globe.³

Within the broad field of Phenomenology, I am focusing on works that address theories of embodiment. In particular, I draw on the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Thomas Csordas.⁴ In short, I aim to explore the implications of the seemingly simple idea that as embodied beings, humans perceive and experience the world via their bodies.⁵ I then apply these implications to modern yoga, which is an especially embodied practice.

Finally, as a project in Religious Studies, this dissertation uses the comparative methodology developed by Kimberly Patton. In *Religion of the Gods*, Patton writes,

The methodological approach guiding this work is based on the belief that religious evidence is at the same time culturally and historically specific as well as part of a larger picture in which common structures emerge, and can be talked about interpretively. It is essential to start with primary religious evidence, and *equally essential that we assume that it was in fact*

³ A good example of a similar approach can be found in Elizabeth De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga: Patañjali and Western Esotericism* (New York: Continuum, 2004).

⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (London: Routledge, [1945] 2012); Thomas J. Csordas, "Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology," *Ethos* 18, no. 1 (1990): 5–47; Thomas J. Csordas, "Introduction: The Body as Representation and Being-in-the-World," in *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self*, ed. Thomas J. Csordas (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1–24.

⁵ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 418.

meaningful to those who created it... It is especially important in dealing with material evidence when no texts are available to aid in interpretation.⁶

Here, the various expressions of modern yoga practice provide the “religious evidence.”

Most of the background and foundational materials come from secondary sources, which I will analyze in terms of modern yoga practice generally, and the categories of my typology specifically. In developing examples for my typology, I use websites and medical literature as primary sources because they illustrate the ways modern yoga is expressed and presented to their audiences. For example, a website of a particular school of modern yoga practice may provide insight into how the school views its practice; how medical literature presents (or does not present) aspects of yoga practice offers insight into the perceptions of the practice within the biomedical community.

Though anthropological⁷ and historical⁸ studies have discussed the general categorization of modern yoga, Religious Studies has not sufficiently engaged with it. A notable exception is Jain’s *Selling Yoga*, which argues that even popularized forms of modern yoga can be religious.⁹ Religious Studies perspectives like Jain’s enhance discourse by assaying the ambiguous religious dimensions of yoga practice as it developed into its current forms, especially

⁶ Kimberley C. Patton, *Religion of the Gods: Ritual, Paradox, and Reflexivity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 20. (emphasis added)

⁷ For example, Sarah Strauss, *Positioning Yoga: Balancing Acts Across Cultures* (New York: Berg, 2005).

⁸ For example, De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*; Mark Singleton, *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); and Stefanie Syman, *The Subtle Body: The Story of Yoga in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010).

⁹ Jain, *Selling Yoga*.

those forms perceived as entirely secular. In return, the study of seemingly secularized yoga practices, like those practiced in biomedical contexts, contributes to the discourse in Religious Studies about on-the-ground religious practice. This dissertation takes Jain's argument seriously and expands its implications to additional areas of inquiry.

The wide spectrum of modern yoga practice makes this typology a useful tool for inquiry within the religion and science discourse. The categories of "religion" and "science," which are themselves ambiguous, are at play across my typology. In each category, conceptions of "religion" and "science" appear in the foreground or background to varying degrees, depending on the practice itself, the perception of the practice by outside observers and the practitioners, and the applied definitions or descriptions of "religion" and "science." For the purposes of this dissertation, I understand "religion" to refer to phenomena that groups or individuals consider connected to perceived religious/spiritual traditions and/or perceived spiritual/religious experiences. This is admittedly broad, but I hope to demonstrate that the category is necessarily broad. For the purposes of this dissertation, I understand "science" to refer to phenomena that seek to explain or understand reality in an organized manner. This, too, is admittedly broad, but it allows for inclusion of a wide variety of methods of knowing, which I suggest create more opportunities for interdisciplinary conversations.

Within Ian Barbour's classic typology of science and religion relationships, my project falls mostly within the category of "dialogue," (as opposed to "conflict,"

“independence,” or “integration”).¹⁰ The appeal of the “dialogue” relationship has to do with its scope and its distance from what I view as overly strong claims in his other three categories. Barbour writes, “*Dialogue* starts from general characteristics of science or of nature rather than from particular scientific theories.”¹¹ I understand the “dialogue” relationship to have the same approach to religion. This generality may seem like an odd approach for a dissertation focusing on a particular practice: modern yoga. However, I suggest that modern yoga practice provides an extended example that speaks to the possibilities of interdisciplinary work between the sciences, Religious Studies, and other areas of inquiry.

Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is structured into two parts. Part I contains chapters 1 and 2, which are background chapters that build the foundation for my typology of modern yoga. Chapter 1 discusses the intellectual history of yoga and the study of modern yoga. Chapter 2 discusses theories of embodiment, primarily the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Thomas Csordas, and how those theories relate to yoga practice.

Part II begins with an introduction to my typology of modern yoga and then moves on to chapters 3, 4, and 5, which develop my typology. Chapter 3 discusses the first two categories: religious yoga and spiritual yoga. Chapter 4

¹⁰ Ian G. Barbour, *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 77-105.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 90.

discusses the next two categories: fitness yoga and wellness yoga. Finally, chapter 5 discusses the last category, biomedical yoga, and goes in depth into the relationship of yoga and healthcare.

In each of the typology chapters, I introduce the categories by describing them in relation to Elizabeth De Michelis's existing typological categories,¹² which are still dominant in the field of Modern Yoga Studies, and by developing them in terms of three organizing principles: legitimacy, embodiment, and American identity. Legitimacy includes how the types of yoga practice are taken seriously or considered "authentic." Legitimacy can range from concrete facts, such as direct teacher lineages in religious yoga or scientific data in biomedical yoga, to ambiguous concepts, such as the perception of "results" in fitness yoga. Embodiment includes both how the expressions of modern yoga practice within the category interact with the body and how the practice expresses connectedness, a concept that includes feelings or expressions of connection with oneself, others, and/or one's environment. American identity includes how the forms of modern yoga practice reflect both obvious and subtle aspects of American identities. For example, modern yoga practice can reflect the American ideals of independence or community, sometimes within the same type of practice.

By the end of the dissertation, I hope to have established a useful vocabulary with which to discuss the various types of modern yoga practice. The

¹² De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, 187-189; Elizabeth De Michelis, "A Preliminary Survey of Modern Yoga Studies," *Asian Medicine, Tradition and Modernity* 3, no. 1 (2007): 5-7.

usefulness of the categories, though, should not reify them as having rigid boundaries. Instead, I see my typology as similar to a color palette. The categories are base colors, but the majority of the palette is comprised of mixtures, which represent opportunities for interdisciplinary inquiry.

PART I: BACKGROUND

Chapter 1: Yoga and Modern Yoga

Introduction

In *Yoga Philosophy, In Relation to Other Systems of Indian Thought*, S. N. Dasgupta argues, “Yoga is not merely a system of practices but a system of philosophy as well.”¹³ When something is so broad as to be both a practice and a philosophy, it is easy to see why yoga is difficult to define. While I will not provide a comprehensive definition of yoga within the scope of this project, my aim in this dissertation is to offer another framework to better understand yoga practice as it exists in the contemporary world and how its existence is important for Religious Studies. When someone refers to yoga, to what do they refer? Certainly there are multiple references available, but is there something general enough in common among these references beyond just those four letters? What does *yoga* mean?

Joseph Alter argues that attempts to understand what yoga is violate the very principle of yoga. He writes, “Comprehension, by virtue of being rooted in the senses and located in the intellect, is precisely that which Yoga seeks to transcend. Many adepts have said that Yoga cannot be understood. It can only be experienced as such.”¹⁴ Yoga defined by experience, particularly embodied experience, is a theme that will emerge in this dissertation alongside others, such

¹³ S. N. Dasgupta, *Yoga Philosophy: In Relation to Other Systems of Indian Thought* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, [1930] 1996), 5.

¹⁴ Joseph S. Alter, *Yoga in Modern India: The Body Between Science and Philosophy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 10.

as yoga being a product of its particular time and place in history.¹⁵ In this chapter I will provide an intellectual history of yoga practice and examine what characterizes “modern yoga” and how it is studied. This chapter will help set the stage for a typology of modern yoga where phenomenological theories of embodiment serve as lenses through which one can study modern yoga within Religious Studies.

Yoga

A Brief Overview of Pre-modern Yoga

Though making the case for the study of modern yoga within Religious Studies takes some work, pre-modern yoga fits squarely within the standard realm of the field. It is a concept featured in certain texts considered by practitioners and/or scholars to be religious, such as the *Upaniṣads* and the *Bhagavad Gītā*,¹⁶ and it takes on a soteriological purpose even though it is predominantly developed as a practice.

Yoga is hardly a recent concept, but some modern depictions of yoga make overly grand claims about its extensive history. Though yoga as it is understood today did not exist in any systematic form in the years before the *Yoga Sūtras*, elements of what would become yoga date further back. How far back has become a point of contention. Some renditions of yoga's history claim

¹⁵ Ibid., 5.

¹⁶ Stephen Phillips, *Yoga, Karma, and Rebirth: A Brief History and Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 28-31.

that seals found in the ruins of the Indus Valley Civilization depicting a seated figure that looks similar to later images of Śiva, the great yogin, point to ancient yogic roots.¹⁷ Though the Indus Valley civilization was impressive for many reasons, historian Geoffrey Samuel doubts that development of yoga was one of them. He writes:

At the end of the day, we know quite a lot about the daily life of the people of the Indus Valley urban civilisation, but little or nothing for certain about their religious practices. In particular, it seems to me that the evidence for the yogic or 'Tantric' practices is so dependent on reading later practices into the material that it is of little or no use for constructing any kind of history of practices.¹⁸

A clearer depiction of what would become the yoga tradition appears in the early *Upaniṣads*. It is in these early *Upaniṣads*, dating from 800 to 300 BCE, that one begins to find talk of a universal consciousness capable of being experienced by cultivating one's abilities.¹⁹ On yoga in the *Upaniṣads*, Mark Singleton writes,

the first occurrence of the word "yoga" itself is in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (third century BCE?), where it is revealed to the boy Naciketas by Yama, god of death, as a means to leave behind joy and sorrow and overcome death itself (2.12 ff). The *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* (third century BCE?) outlines a procedure in which the body is maintained in an upright posture while the mind is brought under control by the restraint of the breath (2.8-14). The much later *Maitrī Upaniṣad* describes a six-fold yoga method of yoga, namely (1) breath control (*prāṇāyāma*), (2) withdrawal of the senses (*pratyāhāra*), (3) meditation (*dhyāna*), (4) placing of the concentrated mind (*dhāraṇā*), (5) philosophical inquiry (*tarka*), and (6) absorption (*samādhi*).

¹⁷ Georg Feuerstein, *The Yoga Tradition: Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practice* (Prescott, AZ: Hohm Press, 2001), 100.

¹⁸ Geoffrey Samuel, *The Origins of Yoga and Tantra: Indic Religions to the Thirteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 8.

¹⁹ Phillips, *Yoga, Karma, and Rebirth*, 30.

These technical terms will later (with the exception of *tarka*) be used to designate five of the eight elements of Patañjali's *aṣṭāṅgayoga* scheme.²⁰

Even given these examples of solidification of a yoga tradition in the *Upaniṣads*, it is important to note that the *Upaniṣads* themselves do not in any way offer a single school of thought. The *Upaniṣads* are diverse from any angle and have given foundational support to schools of dualism, monism, and nearly everything in between.²¹

Yoga, Vedānta, and Sāṃkhya

Much like in pre-modern Western traditions, the distinction between religion and philosophy in pre-modern South Asian traditions is nearly nonexistent. Therefore in order to establish the religiosity of pre-modern yoga, I will say a few words on yoga philosophy. Yoga philosophy includes influences from other schools of Indian philosophy, notably Vedānta and Sāṃkhya. The key influence from Vedānta is the possibility for self-realization, a concept that manifests in yoga philosophy as a method by which one can transcend one's everyday conception of self.²² Stephen Phillips notes that the “self-monitoring consciousness” found in the yoga philosophy goes beyond the “self-illuminating” ideal of self found in Vedānta because it introduces intention on the part of the self.²³

²⁰ Mark Singleton, *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 26.

²¹ Dasgupta, *Yoga Philosophy*, 26.

²² Phillips, *Yoga, Karma, and Rebirth*, 30.

²³ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

The influence of the Sāṃkhya school of Indian philosophy lives on strongly in yoga philosophy. Two characteristics of Sāṃkhya, described by Christopher Chapple in *Yoga and the Luminous*, stand out as particularly influential to yoga. First, Sāṃkhya teaches a strict dualism. *Puruṣa* and *prakṛti*²⁴ are forever separate and cannot be combined ontologically in any way. The entire reason for suffering in Sāṃkhya is the mistaken identity of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, and thus to recognize them as separate is the highest knowledge. Second, Sāṃkhya refuses to attach any sort of name to *puruṣa*. It is not Śiva, or Viṣṇu, or even Brahmā; it is just *puruṣa*.²⁵

Though heavily influenced by Sāṃkhya, yoga differs in its directional focus. While Sāṃkhya allows for notions of liberation, yoga aims directly at liberation through self-cultivation. On this Chapple writes, “In Sāṃkhya, there seems to be an almost ‘fatalistic’ unfolding of *saṃskāras*²⁶ until the point of

²⁴ The Sanskrit terms *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* are translated differently by different scholars. Mircea Eliade translates *puruṣa* as “spirit” and *prakṛti* as “matter.” *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, [1958] 2009), 8. Ian Whicher translates them as “spiritual state” and “material existence” respectively. *The Integrity of the Yoga Darśana: A Reconsideration of Classical Yoga* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 2. Richard King translates them as “pure consciousness” and “primal matter” respectively. *Indian Philosophy: An Introduction to Hindu and Buddhist Thought* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1999), 38. Christopher Chapple translates them as “one’s higher self” and “the manifest realm” respectively. *Yoga and the Luminous: Patañjali’s Spiritual Path to Freedom* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 3. In his glossary supplementing his translation of the *Yoga Sūtras*, Edwin Bryant defines *puruṣa* as “the innermost conscious self, loosely equivalent to the soul in Western Graeco-Abrahamic traditions” and *prakṛti* as “the material world with all its varieties within which the *puruṣa* is embedded; the raw stuff from which the world is formed.” *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali: A New Edition, Translation, and Commentary with Insights from the Traditional Commentators* (New York: North Point Press, 2009), 571.

²⁵ Chapple, *Yoga and the Luminous*, 21.

²⁶ Chapple describes *saṃskāra* as “the residue left by activity.” *Yoga and the Luminous*, 22.

death; Yoga advocates an active path to their dissolution.”²⁷ A simpler way to put it is that other schools present the theories while yoga presents the practice.²⁸

Patañjali’s Yoga Sūtras

If yoga is indeed a method, then the most well known guide of classical yoga is the *Yoga Sūtras*. Patañjali compiled the text of the *Yoga Sūtras* around the year 400 CE, and it is in the *Yoga Sūtras* that one begins to see a more coherent and unified picture of yoga. Phillips notes that the *Yoga Sūtras* is compiled in a style wherein collections of verses are threaded together in the form of a “textbook” (*shastra*) that depicts a particular discipline.²⁹ This textbook style further distinguishes yoga as a practice.

The *Yoga Sūtras* defines *yoga* in its second verse: “*Yoga* is the stilling of the changing states of the mind.”³⁰ In Sanskrit, the word for these changing states is *vṛtti*, which can be alternatively translated as “modifications,”³¹ “movements,”³² or “fluctuations.”³³ *Vṛttis* represent the nature of the material

²⁷ Chapple, *Yoga and the Luminous*, 92.

²⁸ Andrew J. Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism: Philosophy and Identity in Indian Intellectual History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 116.

²⁹ Phillips, *Yoga, Karma, and Rebirth*, 36.

³⁰ Bryant, *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*, 10. Unless otherwise noted, all quotes from the *Yoga Sūtras* come from Bryant’s translation.

³¹ Whicher, *The Integrity of the Yoga Darśana*, 46; Swāmi Hariharānanda Āraṇya, *Yoga Philosophy of Patañjali*, trans. P. N. Mukerji (Albany: SUNY Press, 1983), 6.

³² B. K. S. Iyengar, *Light on the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993), 46.

³³ Georg Feuerstein, *The Encyclopedia of Yoga and Tantra*, Rev. ed. (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2011), 407.

world and fall under five categories, which Chapple translates as “cognition, error, imagination, sleep, and memory.”³⁴

Citta, “mind,” which can also be translated as “mind-stuff”³⁵ or “consciousness,”³⁶ is the thing on which *vṛttis* act. Chapple describes *citta* as “like an unprogrammed computer,” which is written upon by *vṛtti*.³⁷ Phillips adds that *citta* also “includes emotion as well as thought and perceptual experience.”³⁸

The interaction between *citta* and the *vṛttis*, which Chapple calls “conventional consciousness,” is associated with “the sense of self (*ahaṃkāra*).” This sense of self is not illusory, but it is not fully correct since it masks the true Self, *puruṣa*. Chapple describes *ahaṃkāra* as “ego,” which suggests for the reader the belief that what one is experiencing is simply one's own experience. This process of mistaken identity leads to suffering. Herein one can see that there is a sense of devolution at play stemming from a fully pure state to one awash in ignorance and mistaken concepts of the self.³⁹

In the *Yoga Sūtras*' definition of *yoga*, *nirodha* is the “stilling,” also translated as “cessation,”⁴⁰ “restraining,”⁴¹ or “control.”⁴² Chapple notes that *nirodha* is the process of *yoga* and can be considered the *yoga* practice itself. He

³⁴ Chapple, *Yoga and the Luminous*, 4.

³⁵ Swami Vivekananda, *Raja-Yoga* (New York: Ramakarishna-Vivekananda Center, [1956] 1982), 101

³⁶ Iyengar, *Light on the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*, 46; Feuerstein, *The Encyclopedia of Yoga and Tantra*, 92.

³⁷ Chapple, *Yoga and the Luminous*, 22.

³⁸ Phillips, *Yoga, Karma, and Rebirth*, 268n7.

³⁹ Chapple, *Yoga and the Luminous*, 23.

⁴⁰ Iyengar, *Light on the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*, 46.

⁴¹ Vivekananda, *Raja-Yoga*, 101.

⁴² Feuerstein, *The Encyclopedia of Yoga and Tantra*, 247.

adds that among the varied uses of *nirodha* in the *Yoga Sūtras*, each method shares the single goal of control or restraining of the fluctuations of mind.⁴³ Importantly, the cessation of the modifications of mind does not imply world-negation since *prakṛti*, the material world, is real. “However,” Chapple writes, “the purpose of Yoga is not to describe the world ‘out there’ but is, rather, to show a means by which the practitioner may have direct access to the intended world without the interference of impure residues.”⁴⁴ In other words, the goal of yoga is not to deny or lessen the world, but to see it and its parts more clearly, developing a connection with oneself and the world.

The Eight Limbs of the *Yoga Sūtras*

The eight limbs of Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras*, which appear from verses II.29 to III.8, are important for understanding the forms of modern yoga, though perhaps more in presentation than in practice. The limbs are “abstentions” (*yama*), “observances” (*niyama*), “posture” (*āsana*), “breath control” (*prāṇāyāma*), “disengagement of the senses” (*pratyāhāra*), “concentration” (*dhāraṇā*), “meditation” (*dhyāna*), and “absorption” (*samādhi*).⁴⁵ *Yama*, which can also be understood as “self-restraint,”⁴⁶ includes “nonviolence” (*ahimsā*), “truthfulness”

⁴³ Chapple, *Yoga and the Luminous*, 24.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁵ *Yoga Sūtras* II.29; A concise and clean listing of the eight limbs can be found in King, *Indian Philosophy*, 69-71. A more in-depth listing can be found in Bryant, *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*, 241-315 and Gregory P. Fields, *Religious Therapeutics: Body and Health in Yoga, Āyurveda, and Tantra* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001), 106-131. My listing derives from a combination of these sources.

⁴⁶ Iyengar, *Light on the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*, 135.

(*satya*), “refrainment from stealing” (*asteya*), “celibacy” (*brahmacarya*), and “renunciation of [unnecessary] possession” (*aparigraha*).⁴⁷ The second limb, *niyama*, includes “cleanliness” (*śauca*), “contentment” (*santoṣa*), “austerity” (*tapas*), “study [of scripture]” (*svādhyāya*), and “devotion to God” (*Īśvara-praṇidhāna*).⁴⁸ Limbs one and two of the *Yoga Sūtras* are not so much considered first steps to take before one undertakes further practice, but instead seen as constants throughout one's practice.⁴⁹

Chapple notes that the inclusion of *Īśvara* speaks to Patañjali's “brilliance” as a compiler. Chapple writes,

By restricting his discussion to techniques for alleviating distress, by delicately avoiding a commitment to a specific deity manifestation, by appealing for adherence to a foundational set of ethical precepts, and by personalizing the process of spiritual self-discovery, Patañjali evades many conflicts that normally would arise regarding the existence of God and the existence or nonexistence of a soul.⁵⁰

The inclusion of *Īśvara* in the foundational steps of yoga practice may appear odd to contemporary practitioners of yoga since this theistic and devotional aspect seems mostly out of place in contemporary presentations of yoga practice. This explicitly theistic element of yoga practice from the classical text often cited in modern yoga classes should give some pause to those who may too easily dismiss the notion of modern yoga as religious and/or spiritual.

⁴⁷ *Yoga Sūtras* II.30.

⁴⁸ *Yoga Sūtras* II.32.

⁴⁹ Chapple, *Yoga and the Luminous*, 6.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

The third limb, *āsana*, is posture practice. This limb is likely the most well known element of yoga in the modern world and will be elaborated upon extensively in the remainder of this dissertation.

The fourth limb, *prāṇāyāma*, refers to breath (*prāṇa*) control. The concept of *prāṇa* is a bit difficult to grasp in its popular translation as “breath.” B. K. S. Iyengar translates it as “vital force.”⁵¹ Phillips, referencing Iyengar’s *Light on Yoga*, writes, “‘Prana’ is not just the breath but an energy that flows in occult cavities and canals, not only the lungs. It animates the physical but also a subtle body.”⁵² Chapple notes that the efficacy of *prāṇāyāma* stems from the “fundamental” nature of this breath or vital force. In other words, *prāṇa* is so basic and necessary to life that it represents a strong closeness to the self and serves as a gateway for the control of the less fundamental senses of the body.⁵³

The fifth limb, *pratyāhāra*, aims toward sense-withdrawal. *Pratyāhāra* serves as a transition from the more outer limbs to the latter three inner limbs by controlling the outer senses to such an extent that one can turn them in on oneself. Phillips compares *pratyāhāra* to phenomenology,⁵⁴ which will be discussed in the following chapter.

The final three limbs— *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi*—are all meditative in nature. Their descriptions and distinctions are subtle and will not be central to the purpose of this dissertation.

⁵¹ Iyengar, *Light on the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*, 152.

⁵² Phillips, *Yoga, Karma, and Rebirth*, 12, referencing B. K. S. Iyengar, *Light on Yoga: Yoga Dipika*, Revised Edition (New York: Schocken Books, [1966] 1979).

⁵³ Chapple, *Yoga and the Luminous*, 5.

⁵⁴ Phillips, *Yoga, Karma, and Rebirth*, 14.

The central philosophy expressed in the *Yoga Sūtras* marks the practice of yoga in the classical era. As yoga practice developed from the classical era toward the modern, it picked up more physical elements that resemble features of modern yoga practice.

The Tantric Turn and Haṭha Yoga

Tantra

Over the centuries between the classical and modern eras, an intellectual shift took place among South Asian traditions wherein influence from the esoteric tantric traditions permeated mainstream religious philosophy and practice. Phillips writes, “there occurs a shift in both Hinduism and Buddhism from a world-denying model of enlightenment to a world-affirming one. This is the ‘tantric turn.’” Phillips offers the *bodhisattva* ideal as an example of this shift within the Buddhist traditions, wherein the adept decides to remain in the world instead of extinguishing into *nirvana*.⁵⁵

The word *tantra* translates as “woven,” like a fabric or a complex system of beliefs and teachings. In its generic use, *tantra* refers to “any systematic instruction.”⁵⁶ In its more specific use, *tantra* refers to highly esoteric spiritual and religious traditions within the larger scope of South Asian traditions that carry certain features that contrast with the more mainstream elements of a tradition.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 64.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 38.

Tantric traditions tend to value practice over abstract knowledge and direct experience over distanced learning.⁵⁷ A notable aspect of tantric traditions is the strong microcosm/macrocosm understanding of the universe: one's body and one's ritual practices with one's body directly relate to and influence the larger universe.⁵⁸ Tantra uses this microcosm/macrocosm aspect to justify "interiorization of ritual" since internal ritual—through meditation, austerities, etc.—corresponds to the universe as a whole.⁵⁹

Of greatest importance for this dissertation, though, is the prominence tantra grants to the physical body. This shift in focus onto the physical body as a vehicle for liberation elevated the third limb of Patañjali's *aṣṭāṅgayoga*, *āsana*, to high prominence in haṭha yoga, a form of medieval yoga practice that influenced modern postural forms of yoga.

Haṭha Yoga

Haṭha yoga emerged as a distinct school sometime around the thirteenth century CE. Based on the ideas set forth in tantric texts—mostly the *Śaiva Tantras*—haṭha yoga is concerned with the cultivation of the body into a perfect vessel that is beyond the reach of decay. *Haṭha* can be translated as "forceful," suggesting a more rigorous physical element to the practice.⁶⁰ This focus on the

⁵⁷ Fields, *Religious Therapeutics*, 30.

⁵⁸ Rolf Sovik and Yogacharya Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani, "History, Philosophy, and Practice of Yoga," in *The Principles and Practice of Yoga in Health Care*, ed. Sat Bir Singh Khalsa et al. (Edinburgh: Handspring Publishing, 2016), 23.

⁵⁹ Fields, *Religious Therapeutics*, 35.

⁶⁰ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 27-28.

physical body is a large shift away from the foci of classical yoga. Whereas in classical yoga the body is *just* a means to an end, tantra-influenced haṭha yoga, as Fields notes, aims “to involve illumination of body as well as consciousness.”⁶¹ Thus, haṭha yoga texts tend to provide various bodily cleansing practices in addition to the more familiar *āsanas*. Regarding *āsanas*, the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā*—one of the most well known haṭha yoga texts, composed sometime in the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries CE—describes *āsana* as the preliminary practice and lists several physiological benefits of physical practice.⁶²

Up to this point, this chapter has been a brief review of some major points of interest in the history and philosophy of yoga in the pre-modern era. Part of the intent here is to at least give pause to those who quickly make the argument that practicing yoga today, even in a fitness or medical context, has nothing to do with religion or spirituality. One response would be to dismiss the history and philosophy of yoga and focus solely on how yoga appears in the modern world. But that would be disingenuous to modern yoga practice as it would undermine how modern yoga is often presented, i.e. as a practice rooted in South Asian traditions. The history of yoga practice and its development in modern contexts begin to connect a few more of the dots, but the ambiguity remains and poses fruitful challenges to the way modern yoga is categorized and taught, especially within Religious Studies.

⁶¹ Fields, *Religious Therapeutics*, 92.

⁶² Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 28-29.

Modern Yoga

The Transition to Modern Yoga

Yoga is at its core a practice and has been since its earliest formulations. Chapple writes, “Yoga provides a phenomenological investigation of suffering and its transcendence.”⁶³ This is certainly not to say that the more abstract elements of yoga philosophy are not of value, but they are not the distinct features of the yoga tradition. More accurately, as Jain notes, yoga is a practice that reflects the philosophical and intellectual situation within which it is practiced.⁶⁴

It is this practice aspect that became even more prominent as yoga headed into the modern era. This emphasis on practice, as opposed to philosophy or even theology, allowed yoga to spread into other religious or philosophical contexts in both South Asia and abroad.⁶⁵ It is also through this dissemination and assimilation that yoga shed many of the remaining elements characteristic of the Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain religious traditions and became a more ecumenical tradition. Elizabeth De Michelis notes that by the end of the nineteenth century, yoga was “routinely regarded as a practice to be taken up by

⁶³ Chapple, *Yoga and the Luminous*, 4.

⁶⁴ Andrea R. Jain, *Selling Yoga: From Counterculture to Pop Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), xiv.

⁶⁵ Chapple, *Yoga and the Luminous*, 2.

all, rather than as a subject of purely scholarly interest or specialist religious endeavour.”⁶⁶

Intellectual development of modern yoga: The merging of worlds

In *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding*, Wilhelm Halbfass writes, “For modern Indians, dealing with the West is not a matter of choice or predilection: it is a historical necessity and predicament.”⁶⁷ Though the physical (and often militant) presence of the British is the obvious example of such dealing, assimilations and syntheses were being made on an intellectual level as well. In *A History of Modern Yoga*, De Michelis seeks to address the dialectical intellectual lineage of yoga and challenge the assumption that it is a discipline foreign to the West.⁶⁸ This assumption is found explicitly and implicitly in the way yoga is presented in contemporary society. Appeals to foreignness carry the weight of perceived authenticity, or simply exaggerate otherness in effort to appear unique or exotic. But the phenomenon of yoga practice is by no means a cultural import exclusively from India; it draws significant elements from locations more geographically familiar to American audiences. As Singleton and Jain have demonstrated, modern yoga is not solely the product of Indian culture or of Western culture, but a dynamic combination of both.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Elizabeth De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga: Patañjali and Western Esotericism* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 139-140.

⁶⁷ Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 218.

⁶⁸ De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, 2.

⁶⁹ See Jain, *Selling Yoga*, and Singleton, *Yoga Body* for detailed elaborations of this claim.

Just as Asian thought influenced Western intellectuals in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (e.g. Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Thoreau), so too did Western thought pervade modern Indian thinking. Modern Hinduism, while related to and derived from classical Hindu thought, gleaned significant insights from Enlightenment sources, Western religious traditions, and Western esoteric schools of thought to reconstruct a national identity.⁷⁰ However, in certain cases Neo-Hinduism tended to reject outright elements of traditional religious views and practices. For example, consider the case of haṭha yogins in India in the late nineteenth century. As Hindus were reconstructing their national identity with European influence, they were also outwardly distancing themselves from haṭha yogins, who were often derided and scorned in both Western and Indian literature.⁷¹ Singleton writes that toward the end of the nineteenth century, “it is common to find European scholarship characterizing yogins as dangerous, mendicant tricksters, often in contradistinction to the contemplative, devotional practitioners of ‘true’ yoga.”⁷²

Yoga comes to the United States

In the late nineteenth century, Indian thought in general and yoga in particular were gaining notice in Western intellectual circles. Yoga caught on quickly in the United States because the intellectual context for yoga-like

⁷⁰ De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, 30.

⁷¹ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 35; Also see David Gordon White, *Sinister Yogis* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).

⁷² Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 41.

teachings already existed (for example, Transcendentalism and Theosophy⁷³) and, De Michelis points out, because utilitarian leanings in America saw value in yoga as a practice, something that one could actually *do*, not just believe.⁷⁴

Transcendentalism, as it was formulated in nineteenth-century America, gleaned significant influence from Asian ideas as they came trickling in via translated texts from the early generations of scholars of Asian traditions. As the Transcendentalists sought alternatives to their native Christianity, Hinduism stood out as agreeable with their valuing of intuition and methods for knowledge.⁷⁵ Thoreau is famously perceived as the first Westerner to self-identify as a practitioner of yoga, writing in a letter in 1849, “To some extent, and at rare intervals, even I am a yogin.”⁷⁶ De Michelis notes that until this point in American history, yoga had been largely a “third person” thing, something to be talked about, something “out there” and “other.” Thoreau and the Transcendentalists made it possible to *practice* yoga.⁷⁷ All it would take to spread yoga in the United States was a teacher who would popularize the practice.

⁷³ Robert C. Fuller, *Spiritual, but Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 10-11.

⁷⁴ De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, 118.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 80-81.

⁷⁶ Henry David Thoreau, *Letters to a Spiritual Seeker*, ed. Bradley P. Dean (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), 50, referenced in De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, 2-3.

⁷⁷ De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, 3. It is important to note that Thoreau and his intellectual contemporaries did not focus on yoga specifically, nor any particular non-Western tradition. They quoted liberally from a variety of traditions and provided a broad intellectual foundation for non-Western traditions in America. Catherine Albanese, “Sacred (and Secular) Self-Fashioning: Esalen and the American Transformation of Yoga,” in *On the Edge of the Future: Esalen and the Evolution of American Culture*, ed. Jeffrey J. Kripal and Glenn W. Shuck (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 48.

Swami Vivekananda and *Raja Yoga*

Swami Vivekananda had a significant impact on both the development of modern yoga generally and its transmission to America specifically, though at the time yoga practice was far from mainstream. De Michelis notes, “he was the first Indian to succeed in acting as an effectual bridge-builder between Eastern and Western esoteric milieus.”⁷⁸ Though Vivekananda is often associated with the great Indian mystic Ramakrishna, who was one of his teachers in India, in practice Vivekananda was more directly influenced by his predecessors in the Neo-Vedānta intellectual tradition, notably Keshubchandra Sen. Like Sen, Vivekananda presented Neo-Hinduism and yoga in terms that would reach a more contemporary, less religious audience.⁷⁹

Vivekananda had a clear goal in mind; he went to America to make money in order to help his home country overcome its rampant poverty. He felt as if he was making a fair trade; in exchange for money, he would give Americans what they lacked: “spirituality.”⁸⁰ Despite this rather humble goal, he accomplished far more in terms of intellectual influence on the development of modern yoga. Vivekananda was a hit in America. After his famous appearance at the 1893 Parliament of the World's Religions, he became a high-society celebrity sought out for numerous intellectual gatherings. Vivekananda hosted what De Michelis says could be considered the first modern “yoga retreat,” gathering groups of

⁷⁸ De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, 92.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 109.

⁸⁰ Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works*, vol. 6 (Calcutta: Advaita Asrama, 1995), 254-256, quoted in De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, 108-109.

people practicing breathing exercises and meditation at Thousand Island Park on an island in the St. Lawrence River.⁸¹ On the surface this celebrity and ease of transmission may seem odd for a foreign figure promoting an exotic tradition, but one should keep in mind two things. First, the message Vivekananda was spreading was helped along by certain intellectual trends going on in America at the time.⁸² Second, as his views were influenced by the development of Neo-Vedānta, a school of thought heavily influenced by European intellectual traditions, there was a familiar ring to them among American intellectuals.⁸³

Focusing in on the notion of yoga as something practical that one can *do*, it is important to note that the teachings of Vivekananda had a sympathetic relationship with the work of William James. Both figures rose to prominence around the same time, and each mingled in similar intellectual circles. James was aware of Indian thought, and of yoga in particular, writing, “In India, training in mystical insight has been known from time immemorial under the name of yoga.”⁸⁴ In the other direction, Vivekananda was familiar with and influenced by James's work. De Michelis notes that Vivekananda discusses the “superconsciousness” in terms of “James' Functionalist psychology.”⁸⁵ James's psychological methods also influenced Vivekananda's promotion of a “science of

⁸¹ De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, 121.

⁸² De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, 150-151; Fuller, *Spiritual, but Not Religious*, 10-11.

⁸³ De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, 51-90, 110-126.

⁸⁴ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, ed. Martin E. Marty (New York: Penguin Books, [1902] 1985), 400.

⁸⁵ De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, 171.

yoga” aimed at looking into the mind.⁸⁶ Here Vivekananda broke slightly from the Neo-Vedānta trends in India in favor of a more American approach. Whereas Indian Neo-Vedānta’s “science of yoga” still resided heavily in the religious side of Indian traditions by aiming to bring about engagement with divinity, Vivekananda’s “science of yoga” describes the functional abilities of the practitioner to realize fully their own “true *nature*.”⁸⁷

Therefore Vivekananda offered an interpretation of yoga that fit in well with the technologically driven utilitarianism of turn-of-the-century America and the omnipresent American desire for freedom. On an ecumenical level, he taught yoga as a form of “Universal religion” that anyone was capable of practicing, even within one’s own freely chosen tradition.⁸⁸ Speaking directly to American sensibilities, Vivekananda writes:

The goal is to manifest this Divinity within, by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy—by one or more or all of these—and be free. This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details.⁸⁹

In terms of utility, Vivekananda presented yoga as “a science based on 'natural laws', or a 'spiritual technology' for attaining *samādhi*” for which Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras* was “perceived as a sort of DIY manual of practice.”⁹⁰ In Vivekananda's

⁸⁶ Ibid., 173.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 181. (emphasis original)

⁸⁸ Ibid., 123.

⁸⁹ Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works*, vol. 1 (Calcutta: Advaita Asrama, 1907) 257, quoted in De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, 180.

⁹⁰ De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, 143.

words, “The science of Raja-Yoga proposes to put before humanity a practical and scientifically worked out method of reaching this truth.”⁹¹

The publication of *Raja Yoga* in 1896 continued Vivekananda's appeal to American intellectuals and offered what may be described as the first textbook of modern yoga. *Raja Yoga* presented the basic concepts of yoga as seen through Vivekananda's Neo-Vedānta lens, which put emphasis on the practical elements, namely on Patañjali's *aṣṭāṅgayoga*.⁹²

In the period of time between the publication of *Raja Yoga* and today, yoga in the United States evolved quickly in a vast array of directions. A detailed history of this evolution is outside the scope of this dissertation, but certain pieces will emerge as I present my typology of modern yoga.⁹³ For now, I will shift to a brief discussion of the academic study of modern yoga, wherein a new typology of modern yoga would be useful.

The Study of Modern Yoga

Though the focus on practice in yoga occurred well before the modern era, Alter rightly points out that yoga practice was typically unaddressed or marginalized in early scholarly literature on yoga. He writes, “it is clear that

⁹¹ Vivekananda, *The Complete Works*, vol. 1, 128, quoted in De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, 144.

⁹² De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, 150-151.

⁹³ For detailed research on mid-century developments of modern yoga, see Michelle Goldberg, *The Goddess Pose: The Audacious Life of Indra Devi, the Woman Who Helped Bring Yoga to the West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015); Jain, *Selling Yoga*; Robert Love, *The Great Oom: The Improbable Birth of Yoga in America* (New York: Viking, 2010); Sarah Strauss, *Positioning Yoga: Balancing Acts Across Cultures* (New York: Berg, 2005); and Stefanie Syman, *The Subtle Body: The Story of Yoga in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010).

Orientalist scholars were almost exclusively concerned with philosophy, mysticism, magic, religion, and metaphysics. They were not particularly concerned with the mundane physics of physical fitness and physiology.”⁹⁴

Singleton and Jean Byrne suggest that one of the reasons for the lack of early scholarship on yoga practice “may be the long-standing, mutual prejudice between those who *study* yoga professionally...and those who *do* it.”⁹⁵ Within the field of Religious Studies in particular, this “mutual prejudice” between scholars and practitioners is nothing new, and perhaps discussions around this issue alone serve as an opportunity to bring Modern Yoga Studies into Religious Studies discussions.

In contrast to early scholarship on yoga, the scholarly literature in the last couple decades has become almost exclusively focused on yoga practice. Even the modern philosophical interpretations of Phillips and Chapple are rooted in a regular practice of yoga presented in terms of modern understandings of the physical body, perhaps themselves influenced by scholarly shifts toward more phenomenological approaches.⁹⁶ This embodied understanding of yoga practice has coincided with a reduction in the aspects of yoga perceived as more abstract and metaphysical. The personal goals of the yoga practitioner are often couched in terms of fitness and bodily health, not liberation and immortality. The modern practitioner aims to enhance their experience of this world, not abandon it. In

⁹⁴ Alter, *Yoga in Modern India*, 7.

⁹⁵ Mark Singleton and Jean Byrne, “Introduction,” in *Yoga in the Modern World: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Mark Singleton and Jean Byrne (New York: Routledge, 2008), 3. (emphasis original)

⁹⁶ Phillips, *Yoga, Karma, and Rebirth*; Chapple, *Yoga and the Luminous*.

Alter's words, "In the context of modern practice...the body has come to be understood in ever more pragmatic, rational, and empirical terms, just as the final goal of Yoga—*samādhi*—has come to be understood as more and more abstract."⁹⁷

Early and mid-20th century scholarly work on yoga largely ignored modern yoga as a distinct topic, but recent scholarship has made up for this lacuna by studying modern yoga as its own entity from several angles, of which De Michelis points out two: 1) "from the humanities and social sciences," and 2) studies from the hard sciences, particularly the medical sciences.⁹⁸ De Michelis goes on to note that modern yoga as its own distinct field of practice is still a relatively new subject for scholarly research, only emerging in the late 1980s.⁹⁹ For this dissertation, I want to highlight two major works of scholarship that have laid the groundwork for the study of modern yoga, De Michelis's *A History of Modern Yoga* and Singleton's *Yoga Body*.

A History of Modern Yoga focuses on the history of "Modern Postural Yoga" (MPY) in general—i.e. the form of yoga practice wherein *āsana* makes up most, if not all, of the practice—and on the Iyengar school of MPY in particular.¹⁰⁰ Broadly speaking De Michelis considers modern yoga to have two crucial foundational years: 1849 and 1896. 1849 is the year Henry David Thoreau refers

⁹⁷ Alter, *Yoga in Modern India*, 8.

⁹⁸ Elizabeth De Michelis, "A Preliminary Survey of Modern Yoga Studies," *Asian Medicine, Tradition and Modernity* 3, no. 1 (2007): 2.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁰⁰ De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, 4.

to himself in a letter as a yogi, making him the first known Westerner to do so in writing, and 1896 is the year Swami Vivekananda's *Raja Yoga* was published.¹⁰¹

Two arguments from De Michelis's book stand out. First, she makes the case that in *Raja Yoga*, Vivekananda presented not so much a continuation of the Indian schools of yoga, but a rather modern and distinct entity. She writes that in *Raja Yoga*, he "carried out a major revisitation of yoga history, structures, beliefs and practices and then proceeded to operate a translation...of this 'reformed' yoga into something quite different from classical Hindu approaches."¹⁰² Part of the reason for Vivekananda's presentation of modern yoga as a distinct entity has to do with De Michelis's second argument: Western esotericism, via Neo-Vedānta, strongly influenced the development of modern yoga. She critiques early yoga scholars, such as Mircea Eliade, for not taking into account the rise of Hindu nationalism and the influence from Western esoteric schools of thought into their presentations of yoga.¹⁰³

Singleton's *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice* offers another historical look at the development of modern yoga. What concerns Singleton are gaps in the scholarly literature on the issues of how modern yoga became so posture-centric and how, and from where, these *āsanas* emerged. There are two important issues within these gaps. First, with the exception of basic postures in the classical and medieval yoga traditions, there is a significant

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 2-3.

¹⁰² Ibid., 3.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 9-12.

lack of evidence for any pre-modern development of the modern yoga postures. Second, early formulations of modern yoga, such as those popularized by Vivekananda, lacked or even disparaged *āsanas* in particular and *haṭha* yoga in general.¹⁰⁴

Singleton seeks to fill the historical gap between Vivekananda's *Raja Yoga* and Iyengar's *Light On Yoga*, during which yoga went from a practice with little attention to posture to an almost entirely posture-centric practice.¹⁰⁵

Singleton writes:

Posture-based yoga as we know it today is the result of a dialogical exchange between para-religious, modern body culture techniques developed in the West and the various discourses of “modern” Hindu yoga that emerged from the time of Vivekananda onward. Although it routinely appeals to the tradition of Indian *haṭha* yoga, contemporary posture-based yoga cannot really be considered a direct successor of this tradition.¹⁰⁶

Singleton’s goal is direct: “critically examining modern yoga’s truth claims while seeking to understand under what circumstances and to what ends such claims are made.”¹⁰⁷ Such claims include those made by modern yoga teacher K. Pattabhi Jois, who states that the *sūryanamaskār* sequence of *āsanas* stem from teachings in the *Vedas*.¹⁰⁸ Singleton lays out the reasons that such a claim is unfounded and spends the rest of *Yoga Body* making the argument that the sorts of yoga that are familiar today are partially remnants of the rise in physical culture in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century in Europe merged with elements of

¹⁰⁴ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 3-6.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 14, 221-222n4.

Hindu nationalism.¹⁰⁹ (This argument is a relatively new addition to the academic study of yoga, and it is not without its critics.¹¹⁰)

What is Modern Yoga?

I agree with contemporary yoga scholars Singleton and Samuel that modern yoga should be studied as its own entity, an entity related to, but significantly distinct from classical or medieval yoga.¹¹¹ However, this assertion raises the question, what is “modern yoga?” Thus far I have used the term “modern yoga” without much critical analysis into to what it refers.

How is one to understand modern yoga as a distinct entity? Perhaps modern yoga is a certain type of practice that only incorporates certain posture-centric practices. Perhaps it is a religious or spiritual practice that can demonstrate some link to the traditional texts and teachings. Perhaps it is a health-centric practice defined by care for the physical and mental well-being of the practitioner.

The question “what is modern yoga?” breaks down further into considering not only what modern yoga is, but how it is distinct from that which is not modern yoga. Perhaps it is a temporal distinction, and we should use one of De

¹⁰⁹ In particular, see Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 113-162.

¹¹⁰ James Mallinson, “A Response to Mark Singleton’s *Yoga Body*,” in *Yoga in Theory and Practice Consultation* (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, San Francisco, CA, November 19, 2011 [Revised December 9, 2011]), accessed October 19, 2012,

http://www.academia.edu/1146607/A_Response_to_Mark_Singletons_Yoga_Body.

¹¹¹ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 14; Geoffrey Samuel, “Endpiece,” *Asian Medicine, Tradition and Modernity* 3, no. 1 (2007): 178.

Michelis's two prominent dates, 1849 and 1896, to demarcate the dividing line between traditional yoga and modern yoga.¹¹² Perhaps it is a conceptual distinction where characteristics of yoga practiced today are distinct enough to render modern yoga its own intellectual category. Perhaps it is a geographical distinction, and the forms of yoga practiced in certain locations around the globe (and in certain types of centers in those locations) can be categorized as modern yoga and not.

Another aspect of the question "what is modern yoga?" is where modern yoga is studied and taught. In an American college or university, a course on general yoga could show up in a Religious Studies department, a Theology department, a South Asian Studies department, or a Philosophy department. Some of these courses may devote a section to modern yoga, but they likely focus on the historical, religious, and philosophical elements of pre-modern yoga. A course more focused explicitly on modern yoga, however, could show up additionally in departments of Anthropology, Sociology, or Cultural Studies. Indeed, as the study of yoga has transitioned into the study of modern yoga, scholars doing research on modern yoga have spread out from the Religious Studies and Philosophy realms into several other disciplines. To illustrate my point, consider the appointments and research positions of several yoga scholars. Contemporary scholars of yoga and modern yoga are found in Religion

¹¹² De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, 2.

departments,¹¹³ in Philosophy departments,¹¹⁴ in South Asian or Asian Studies departments,¹¹⁵ in Anthropology departments,¹¹⁶ in multiple areas,¹¹⁷ and as independent scholars.¹¹⁸

In reality, modern yoga is, is distinguished by, and is studied by, all of the above. In this section I will discuss the nuances of the necessarily impossible task of defining modern yoga by presenting a few descriptions of modern yoga from yoga scholarship and by distilling a few notable characteristics that will help set the groundwork for my typology of modern yoga.

¹¹³ For example, Edwin Bryant (Rutgers University, Department of Religion, “Core Faculty,” accessed May 27, 2017, <http://www.religion.rutgers.edu/faculty-all/core-faculty/>), Christopher Key Chapple (Loyola Marymount University, Department of Theological Studies, “Faculty,” accessed May 27, 2017, <http://bellarmine.lmu.edu/theologicalstudies/faculty/>), Ellen Goldberg (Queen’s University, School of Religion, “Ellen Goldberg,” accessed May 27, 2017, <http://www.queensu.ca/religion/faculty-and-research/ellen-goldberg/>), Andrea Jain (Indiana University School of Liberal Arts @ Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis, “Faculty and Staff Directory,” accessed May 27, 2017, <http://liberalarts.iupui.edu/directory/bio/andrjain/>), Ian Whicher (University of Manitoba, Faculty of Arts, Department of Religion, “Faculty and Staff,” accessed May 27, 2017, <https://www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/departments/religion/staff/index.html/>), and David Gordon White (University of California - Santa Barbara, Department of Religious Studies, “David White,” accessed May 27, 2017, <http://www.religion.ucsb.edu/people/faculty/david-white/>).

¹¹⁴ For example, Stephen Philips (The University of Texas at Austin, Department of Philosophy, “Faculty,” accessed May 27, 2017, <https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/philosophy/faculty/index.php>) and Stuart Sarbacker (Oregon State University, College of Liberal Arts, “Stuart Ray Sarbacker,” accessed May 27, 2017, <http://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/users/stuart-ray-sarbacker/>).

¹¹⁵ For example, Andrew Nicholson (Stony Brook University, Department of Asian & Asian American Studies, “Andrew Nicholson,” accessed May 27, 2017, <http://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/asianamerican/facultystaff/AndrewNicholson.php>) and Mark Singleton (Department of South Asia at SOAS, “Staff Members,” accessed May 27, 2017, <https://www.soas.ac.uk/southasia/staff/>).

¹¹⁶ For example, Joseph Alter (University of Pittsburgh, Department of Anthropology, “Joseph S. Alter,” accessed May 27, 2017, <http://www.anthropology.pitt.edu/node/214>).

¹¹⁷ For example, Suzanne Newcombe (Suzanne Newcombe, “Suzanne Newcombe,” accessed May 27, 2017, <https://inform.academia.edu/SuzanneNewcombe>).

¹¹⁸ For example, Elizabeth De Michelis (Elizabeth De Michelis, “Elizabeth De Michelis,” accessed May 27, 2017, <https://modernyogaresearch.academia.edu/ElizabethDeMichelis>).

Descriptions of “Modern Yoga”

In broad terms, “modern yoga” is described in contrast to “traditional yoga,” which covers “classical yoga” and sometimes “medieval yoga.” From an historical view, this distinction works. But as Singleton cautions, contrasting “modern yoga” with “traditional yoga” creates an implicit suggestion that modern yoga is removed from some esteemed tradition and therefore less authentic.¹¹⁹ It may be tempting to toss “philosophical yoga” into the “traditional yoga” category, but there are types of modern yoga that may embrace, to some extent, tenets of yoga philosophy. It may also be tempting to make an initial distinction based on geography and say that “modern yoga” is in contrast to “Indian yoga.” However, forms of yoga practice that look very similar to those seen in the contemporary United States are currently thriving in India. Definitions or even descriptions of modern yoga are elusive.

De Michelis writes that her book *A History of Modern Yoga* might serve as an elongated “definition of Modern Yoga.” “Modern yoga,” to her, “refer[s] to certain types of yoga that evolved mainly through the interaction of Western intellectuals interested in Indian religions and a number of more or less Westernized Indians over the last 150 years.” Perhaps referencing Iyengar's tree metaphor, she adds that the term “may...be defined as the graft of a Western branch onto the Indian tree of yoga.”¹²⁰ David Gordon White also describes

¹¹⁹ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 13.

¹²⁰ De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, 2. Iyengar's tree metaphor appears in B. K. S. Iyengar, *The Tree of Yoga* (Boston: Shambhala, [1988] 2002).

modern yoga in mostly chronological terms, agreeing with De Michelis that Vivekananda serves as a founding figure for the various forms of yoga practice that came after him.¹²¹

Chapple also takes the historical approach to describing modern yoga in contrast to other forms, but with a larger gray area than others. In particular, I will point out that he titled his chapter on modern yoga in *Yoga and the Luminous*, “Contemporary Expressions of Yoga.”¹²² This seems to be a more accurate mode of description than setting a hard chronological or geographical divide. It maintains the central concept of yoga and puts the focus on the lenses through which one sees yoga practice in the world, and it allows for some continuity in the yoga tradition, even when that continuity is not as obvious or tangible as one would like.

Characteristics of Modern Yoga

I will note four aspects that characterize modern yoga. First, in terms of its representation, modern yoga is predominantly studied in English, a characteristic that De Michelis notes is pertinent to understanding its origins in English-speaking India and the West.¹²³ This is due in part to the prominence of English-speaking scholars who study modern yoga, and also to the fact that several of the “founding” figures of modern yoga, such as Swami Vivekananda, Sivananda,

¹²¹ David Gordon White, “Yoga, Brief History of an Idea,” in *Yoga in Practice*, ed. David Gordon White (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012), 20-21.

¹²² Chapple, *Yoga and the Luminous*, 249-259.

¹²³ De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, 8n9.

and B. K. S. Iyenger, composed their messages to the world in English. Singleton also notes that English is the dominant language of modern yoga since it was the “*medium*” through which modern forms of yoga were developed across multiple cultures.¹²⁴

Second, in terms of its practice, modern yoga is recognized by its focus on *āsana*, posture. Catherine Albanese argues that as much as modern yoga in America was influenced in its early days by esoteric and peculiarly interpreted elements of tantra, the strongest remaining feature of this influence is the focus on the enlightenment and enhancement of the “body-self.”¹²⁵ Though elements of modern yoga like meditation and *prāṇāyāma* can be traced back well into the South Asian yoga traditions, the nearly exclusive use of *āsana* is unique to modern yoga.¹²⁶ Given the rich historical and philosophical background of the yoga traditions and of yoga practice, what is it about *āsana* and the body that helped yoga practice survive into the modern era? Part of the answer is built into the development of yoga traditions themselves. In the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā*, *āsanas* are described alongside their mental and bodily health benefits. But *āsana* is just one part of a process leading toward immortality in haṭha yoga. When medieval haṭha yoga is taken as a whole system, the health benefits described seem tangential. But when one just focuses on *āsana*, the health benefits seem to be of primary importance. Indeed, Ellen Goldberg writes, “the

¹²⁴ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 9-10. (emphasis original)

¹²⁵ Catherine Albanese, “Sacred (and Secular) Self-Fashioning,” 70.

¹²⁶ Alter, *Yoga in Modern India*, 23.

overall importance of *āsana* and similar ritual techniques lies primary in their therapeutic and purificatory benefits for body and mind.”¹²⁷ These benefits, both real and perceived, helped buoy yoga practice in the modern era and have become part of the definition of modern yoga practice.

Third, modern yoga is characterized by its increased commercialization and professionalization.¹²⁸ In terms of my typology, this characteristic is most notable in the categories of fitness yoga and wellness yoga, but to some extent it describes the full spectrum of modern yoga practice. Modern yoga is or is perceived to be a business, and only those who have the proper credentials, which vary depending on the type of modern yoga, are allowed to engage fully in the business.

Finally, despite its multifaceted and international status, modern yoga practice does carry at least the perception of being a singular community. Anthropologist Sarah Strauss builds on the definitions of Jean Lave, Etienne Wenger, and Benedict Anderson in describing Swami Sivananda’s Divine Life Society (DLS), for example, as a “community of practice.” Strauss writes,

A community of practice, as I define it, follows the basic definition given by Lave and Wenger that is, “a set of relations among persons, activities, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice (1991: 98). It is an imagined community in Benedict Anderson’s sense, in that the majority of its members “will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet

¹²⁷ Ellen Goldberg, “Medieval Haṭhayoga Sādhana: An Indigenous South Asian Bio-Therapeutic Model for Health, Healing and Longevity,” *Acta Orientalia* 70 (2009): 102.

¹²⁸ Allison Fish, “The Commodification and Exchange of Knowledge in the Case of Transnational Commercial Yoga,” *International Journal of Cultural Property* 13, no. 2 (2006): 189–206; Jain, *Selling Yoga*.

in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson 1983: 15).¹²⁹

This idea of a community of practice extends beyond the DLS and includes the practice of modern yoga as a whole.¹³⁰ Yoga practitioners of all skill levels and purposes can go to just about any other place on the planet and settle into a studio and practice. It may not be the same exact style, but the communal aspect of modern yoga makes it familiar enough.

Elizabeth De Michelis’s Typology of Modern Yoga

The typology I will present in the following chapters will certainly not be the definitive typology of modern yoga, nor should there be such a definitive typology. Singleton and Byrne rightly point out that typologies can too easily overshadow and obscure relevant historical and/or conceptual details. Referring to De Michelis’s typology of modern yoga described below, Singleton and Byrne state that good typologies are intended to be “provisional and workable constructs.”¹³¹ I offer my typology with the same intention. My typology exists in the context of, and is influenced by the typology developed by De Michelis.

De Michelis’s typology is the most well developed in the field of Modern Yoga Studies and is particularly useful in making sense of types of modern yoga

¹²⁹ Sarah Strauss, “‘Adapt, Adjust, Accommodate’: The Production of Yoga in a Transnational World,” *History & Anthropology* 13, no. 3 (2002): 246-247, referencing Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 98 and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 15.

¹³⁰ Sarah Strauss, *Positioning Yoga: Balancing Acts Across Cultures* (New York: Berg, 2005), 40-41.

¹³¹ Singleton and Byrne, “Introduction,” 6.

in terms of intellectual lineage. De Michelis's overarching category of modern yoga is "Modern Psychosomatic Yoga (MPsY)," roughly considered to be the massive school of yoga practice "dedicated to body-mind-spirit 'training'" that emerged from Vivekananda's teachings.¹³² Thus *Raja Yoga* can be seen as the foundational textbook for MPsY. De Michelis notes that every school that would emerge from under the umbrella of MPsY maintained the particular "interpretation of Patañjali's *aṣṭāṅgayoga*, to which other elements from (neo-) Hindu or western esoteric traditions are added."¹³³

From MPsY, a set of traditions that branches off early on is "Modern Denominational Yoga (MDY)." MDY includes several groups that tended to be led by particular gurus who were more or less in debt to Vivekananda's influence on Western, particularly American culture. Early forms of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) and the Rajneesh/Osho movement are the most well known examples of MDY. MDY schools "have more marked sectarian tendencies" and are not particularly influential in terms of the development of what one would likely think of as contemporary modern yoga practice.¹³⁴

"Modern Meditational Yoga (MMY)," like its name suggests, tends to focus more "on techniques of concentration and meditation" in yoga practice. MMY includes traditions like Transcendental Meditation (TM). Though not as exclusive

¹³² De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, 187.

¹³³ De Michelis, "A Preliminary Survey of Modern Yoga Studies," 6.

¹³⁴ De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, 189.

as the MDY schools, MMY schools tend not to be as inclusive as those of “Modern Postural Yoga (MPY),”¹³⁵ the final category stemming from MPY and that which is likely the most visible form of modern yoga.

MPY includes familiar schools such as Iyengar Yoga, and K. Pattabhi Jois's Ashtanga Yoga. As the name suggests, MPY schools focus heavily on *āsana* with occasional reference to *prāṇāyāma*. De Michelis correctly notes that when people in modern industrialized societies use the word *yoga*, they are most likely referring to MPY.¹³⁶ Unlike MDY and some schools of MMY, MPY schools tend not to be as demanding, making them quite practical for modern living.¹³⁷ Both the MMY and MPY schools also lack a strong sense of the perceived religious, spiritual, or philosophical underpinning of traditional yoga, though some elements remain in parts of practice. Instead, much attention is placed on individual experience and personal cultivation achieved through practice.¹³⁸

Conclusion: A New Typology

While De Michelis's typology is certainly useful, she admits that it is problematic because on-the-ground divisions between these types of yoga schools are not so clearly cut.¹³⁹ Singleton is also skeptical of the use of typologies of modern yoga. He argues that such typologies have preliminary use, but have run their course in the scholarship of modern yoga. He finds them

¹³⁵ Ibid., 187.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 8.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 260.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 6, 187-188.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 189.

limiting and disingenuous to the history of yoga and argues that too often discussions of modern yoga make categories more concrete than their originators (specifically De Michelis) intended.¹⁴⁰

Yet I still want to offer another typology, because in a field as diverse as Modern Yoga Studies, a structured approach, even if fragile, has heuristic value, particularly from within a certain field. Scholars within Religious Studies, who are my primary audience for this dissertation, can use a typological approach to modern yoga in order to expand their areas of inquiry into realms that may not immediately seem relevant. Apparently secularized forms of yoga practice in fitness or medical contexts, for example, may not immediately seem relevant for Religious Studies. However, by considering those forms of practice within an intentionally porous set of categories, the religious aspects in those forms of practice seep through and become more apparent.

I do not aim to improve on the existing typologies so much as provide a slightly different typology of modern yoga that is intended to cultivate discussions of modern yoga specifically within the field of Religious Studies. My typology will accomplish this by expanding to address more contemporary expressions of yoga practice while remaining grounded in theories of embodiment that connect the various forms of modern yoga practice with various understandings, or lack thereof, of religion and/or spirituality as expressed through the body, a necessary part of all modern yoga practice. In the next chapter I will continue providing

¹⁴⁰ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 18-19.

some background for my typology by introducing and discussing these theories of embodiment as they developed and as they relate to modern yoga practice.

Chapter 2: Embodiment

Introduction

Modern yoga is a full body practice. This is a deceptively straightforward claim. A surface reading would glean the obvious statement that modern yoga practice is posture-centric and therefore involves bodily movement. Someone deeply within a religious tradition may read the claim as emphasizing a devotional aspect to yoga practice. Another observer who identifies as spiritual may read it as emphasizing personal intention toward something. Someone with a fitness mindset may hear a statement about the physical intensity of modern yoga practice. Someone reading from a more holistic health perspective may see “full body” as a way of expressing a unified bodymind cultivated by yoga. Finally, a medically minded individual may read it as an apparently secular assertion that yoga practice is useful as a means to address multiple parts of the human body. These five views of modern yoga as an embodied practice roughly characterize the five categories within my typology of modern yoga, and each relates the practice directly, indirectly, or in intentional contrast to yoga’s religious dimensions.

The existence and importance of bodies are self-evident. Humans all have bodies and use those bodies every moment of every day. However, though humans are aware of their bodies in this literal sense, they often lack such awareness in the experiential sense. Experiential awareness of one’s own and

other bodies is at the core of modern theories of embodiment. In this chapter, I will argue that these theories of embodiment may be affirmed by yoga practice, and yoga practice may demonstrate these theories. Thinking about embodiment in modern yoga practice helps to describe modern yoga practice within the field of Religious Studies because the practice may nurture a sense of connectedness with oneself, others, and the world. Modern yoga practice offers a method through which one can gain or regain an awareness of one's body that carries implications for understandings of religion, spirituality, fitness, health, and medical care.

In this chapter I will discuss embodiment in two ways: as grounds for critiquing mind/body dualism and as a phenomenological starting point for perception of oneself and one's surroundings. Building upon these two foundational elements I will use embodiment as a variable descriptor of the types of modern yoga practice that establish modern yoga as a relevant topic for Religious Studies.

Mind/Body

One of the prominent aspects of modern theories of embodiment is that they serve as rallying points for those who are fighting the intellectual battle against Cartesian dualism. To sum up the general argument, the body is not just a purely material entity that exists separately from the mind. It is integral to the whole being and is the basis for one's being in the world. Therefore anything that

affects or involves the physical body also must influence one's mental activities, and vice versa. I support the argument that the body is an integral means of perception by including yoga practice as a method of honing one's embodied awareness, which I suggest may include one's sense of connectedness with oneself, others, and one's environment.

Mind/body dualism as we currently know it in the Western intellectual context originated in the philosophy of René Descartes. In *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes argued that the mind is of an ontologically separate nature than the body and other forms of materiality.¹⁴¹ The mind/body duality became dominant in Western philosophy, and it has become so ingrained in the Western worldview that one has a hard time even speaking about the idea of their integration. Consider a few common statements one might hear uttered about the body. "I have a body." "I love/hate my body." "My body gets me where I need to go." In all of these examples, the body is assumed to be separate, even if causally connected. The body is a vessel that carries "me." Even in the second paragraph of this chapter I resorted to writing in such terms to introduce a point. Avoiding the mind/body separation is difficult. One prominent task of modern theories of embodiment is to rethink this dichotomy and in some cases to outright refute it in order to promote a more integrated understanding of mind and body.

Anthropologist Michael Jackson critiques the mind/body distinction through a discussion of "body praxis" and "verbal praxis," where he argues that

¹⁴¹ René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Donald A. Cress, 3rd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, [1641] 1993).

anthropologists tend to prioritize the verbal side of practice over the bodily side.¹⁴² He suggests that focusing on the linguistic and verbal elements of communication misses the bodily dimensions. He writes, “thinking and communicating through the body precede and to a great extent always remain beyond speech.”¹⁴³ In everyday experience we know the importance of body language and how it dictates communication. In his discussion of the distinction between verbal and body praxis, Jackson agrees with Maurice Merleau-Ponty that an act and the meaning associated with that act should not exist in separate realms. Citing the work of Ludwig Binswanger, Jackson discusses the example of falling and notes that when one uses metaphors of falling, the connection one has with the deeper experience of falling is not due to an abstract association of an action with a term, but with a direct association with a bodily experience of falling.¹⁴⁴ In other words, the meaning runs deeper than mere association of a term with a separate quality of existence. Jackson quotes philosopher David Best: “Human movement does not symbolize reality, it is reality.”¹⁴⁵

In the early planning for this project, I intended to refer to the body as an instrument of perception, an instrument that may be honed by the practice of yoga. However, that phrase itself carries with it an assumption that the body is something connected to (but separate from) the mind. Jackson correctly critiques

¹⁴² Michael Jackson, “Knowledge of the Body,” in *Lifeworlds: Essays in Existential Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 54.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*,” 55.

¹⁴⁴ Jackson, “Knowledge of the Body,” 55, referencing Ludwig Binswanger, *Being-in-the-World: Selected Essays*, trans. Jacob Needleman (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 222-225.

¹⁴⁵ David Best, *Philosophy and Human Movement* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1978), 137, quoted in Jackson, “Knowledge of the Body,” 55.

this view of body as “instrument”, denying that the body is “a kind of vehicle” for communication.¹⁴⁶

Phenomenology of the Body: Merleau-Ponty

The second way I will discuss embodiment, as a starting point for perception, is grounded in the phenomenological tradition and continues in certain contemporary approaches in anthropology. Embodiment in phenomenology fully comes to life in the mid-twentieth century, culminating in that generation with the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. A central idea of much work on embodiment is that without a body, one does not perceive the world as one does. One’s perception of anything, be it a physical object or an idea, is intimately and inextricably entangled with one’s body.

In the preface to *Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes phenomenology as

the goal of a philosophy that aspires to be an “exact science,” but it is also an account of “lived” space, “lived” time, and the “lived” world. It is the attempt to provide a direct description of our experience such as it is, and without any consideration of its psychological genesis or of the causal explanations that the scientist, historian, or sociologist might offer of that experience.¹⁴⁷

He continues by writing that phenomenology is not about “explaining or analyzing,” but about simply “describing.”¹⁴⁸ As such, phenomenology can be

¹⁴⁶ Jackson, “Knowledge of the Body,” 56.

¹⁴⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (London: Routledge, [1945] 2012), |xx.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, |xxi.

seen as more of a “*practice* rather than a system”,¹⁴⁹ similar to yoga in not so superficial ways. Phenomenology presents a method for experiencing reality *through* the living being, specifically through the *embodied* living being.

This method does not, though, limit its understanding to the material body. Merleau-Ponty criticized what some in the contemporary context have come to call *scientism*, the extreme materialistic view that everything can be explained eventually and fully through scientific, material means. Merleau-Ponty argued that this sort of view goes too far by ignoring the fact that all empirical observation is still done through human perception of the world. Science is necessarily “second-order.”¹⁵⁰

By devaluing or attempting to bracket off the subjective, those who hold the strict scientific worldview limit their explanatory capabilities. If you cut off the subjective, you cut out a significant part of the human being. If you cut out the human being, who is doing the science? And why? This is, of course, a simplistic rendering of the situation, but it is an issue that still exists in contemporary discussions of science. For example, any medical study of yoga immediately faces the dichotomy that the phenomenologists were working against. How can one set up a control group for a yoga study? How can one study yoga *objectively*? From a phenomenological point of view, I argue that one cannot and ultimately would not want to if one wants realistic and useful results.

¹⁴⁹ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 4. (emphasis original)

¹⁵⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, [xxii. Also see Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 13-14.

Phenomenology of Origins

Merleau-Ponty argues that in order to experience and interpret the world, one has “to see the world anew.”¹⁵¹ He believed that with fresh eyes, one could see the interconnectedness of reality and the integration of mind and body as grounds for our experience of the world. This is the premise behind Merleau-Ponty’s “phenomenology of origins.”¹⁵² It is thoroughly “*naturalistic*,” humans are in and of this world, and one’s experience of the world cannot adequately be represented in abstraction.¹⁵³ His goal in *Phenomenology of Perception* is not to objectively describe the nature of experience, but to think through how one might articulate “pre-reflective experience” and therefore pre-reflective perception.¹⁵⁴ In other words, one should consider the experiences of the world as they appear, which includes acknowledging the fact that one cannot completely bracket out subjectivities.

Dermot Moran describes Merleau-Ponty’s approach as a “*dialectical naturalism*.” One engages in a relationship with the world. One is in and of this world, and all of one’s experience is of this relationship between the world and a person via one’s body.¹⁵⁵ The body is where the world and consciousness merge.¹⁵⁶ One’s experience and therefore one’s perception cannot exist

¹⁵¹ Ibid., |xxxv.

¹⁵² Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 401-406; translated as “phenomenology of genesis” in Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, xxxii.

¹⁵³ Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 403. (emphasis original)

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 402-403.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 403-404. (emphasis original)

¹⁵⁶ Komarine Romdenh-Romluc, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 3.

otherwise. If one takes this dialectical relationship as the foundation of one's experience, then one can truly begin to perceive the world without being weighed down by abstractions of mind as separate from body. One merely perceives experiences as they appear.

Merleau-Ponty writes that attempts to understand either the subject or the object of experience are both ultimately flawed because they take the mind and body separateness as a given. His phenomenology of origins asks one to describe the world as it appears to them, and in that experience is the true "*in-itself*."¹⁵⁷ What he describes is admittedly paradoxical; one is using one's relative, subjective self as a basis for determining the objectivity of something perceived. But this is only paradoxical if one assumes the ontological distinction between the subject and object instead of an integral relationship.

Anthropologist Thomas Csordas discusses Merleau-Ponty's ideal type of perception by referencing the example of the famous optical illusion with two lines of equal length, but with inverse arrows on each end. One perceives them initially as differing in length, but one knows that once one measures them, they are the same length. One can ultimately force oneself to perceive them as the same length, but to do so is an abstraction. The "preobjective" perception is of unequal lines.¹⁵⁸ But, one might object, do we not ultimately care about what is objectively real? Certainly one can, but that is not the only approach.

¹⁵⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 74. (emphasis original)

¹⁵⁸ Thomas J. Csordas, "Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology," *Ethos* 18, no. 1 (1990): 8-9.

Phenomenology in the work of Merleau-Ponty and Csordas is more concerned with one's immediate perception of the world and what that means for one's experiences. This, Csordas argues, is a much more interesting, beneficial, and paradoxically accurate method with which to carry out anthropology.¹⁵⁹ To ignore the integrated nature of being human creates a partial picture. Yoga practice certainly moves toward this type of understanding as a method of increasing embodied awareness of oneself, others, and one's environment in a variety of contexts.

The Body

If one considers one's day-to-day life, this integrated nature of being human is an accurate description. One interacts with the world, and one typically does it consciously. One is constantly going back and forth, often unnoticeably, between actual objects in the world and one's "preobjective" perception of them. Three observations that derive from this approach are worth noting here. First, consciousness is integrally embodied; there is no reason to think there could be consciousness without a body. Komarine Romdenh-Romluc writes, "the body is a form of consciousness."¹⁶⁰ Second, consciousness-embodied selves are integrally nested in a world, i.e. they have no way of perceiving (or even knowing how to perceive) anything outside of this world. This is what Moran means by

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 9.

¹⁶⁰ Romdenh-Romluc, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception*, 3. (emphasis original)

“*naturalistic*.”¹⁶¹ Finally, there are other consciousness-embodied selves, and the ways one interacts with them determine one’s experiences as much if not more than one’s interaction with mere objects.

Given these three points, the body is quite the centerpiece. Bodies serve as foundations for all experience, and, Moran argues, bodies provide natural limitations. Everything someone ever experiences is done within the boundary of their body, and “the finitude” of the human body is the boundary of one’s experience of the world.¹⁶² Merleau-Ponty writes that the body is the “pivot of the world” and that one only knows what one knows about the world due to the abilities of one’s body and its engagement with the world. He adds, “I know that the objects have several faces because I can move around them, and in this sense I am conscious of the world by means of my body.”¹⁶³ Citing observations of patients who have lost a limb, Merleau-Ponty notes that “manipulable” objects still carry an appeal to those patients, despite their inability to fully act on that appeal. The embodied nature of their consciousness remains even when the limb is lost.¹⁶⁴

Romdenh-Romluc discusses how a climber’s motor skills develop from the environment of climbing. Because of this development, a climber actually sees the rock face differently than would someone who was not a developed

¹⁶¹ Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 403. (emphasis original)

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 418.

¹⁶³ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 84.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 84-85.

climber.¹⁶⁵ How might this look when one expands the idea to include yoga? When one practices yoga and learns the motor skills along with new ways to perceive the body and the world, does the practitioner see their body and the world differently? Does the yoga practitioner see the world as connected in ways that the non-practitioner may not? In *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty provides the example of a typist. After much practice, a typist develops their skills and forms “a knowledge in [their] hands.”¹⁶⁶ One could say that the continued act of yoga as a fully embodied practice may bring about “a knowledge in one’s body.”

The combined importance and function of the body in one’s understanding of and relation to the world apply directly to discussions of modern yoga practice. Modern yoga is a bodily practice. Yoga practitioners manipulate their bodies for a variety of ends, but no matter the end, the body is at the center. Whether for purely physical reasons or some more spiritual intention, the body and its manipulation are the means. But what separates yoga from any other physical practice, especially those often considered to be “just exercise?” On the surface, there is not much. But yoga stands alongside other “spiritual” physical practices, such as Tai Chi, for its more integrated approach to the manipulation of the whole bodymind.

¹⁶⁵ Romdenh-Romluc, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception*, 84.

¹⁶⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 145.

Perception

The phenomenology of origins and the body come together in Merleau-Ponty's view of perception. Phenomenology is centrally concerned with perception of the world as it is, but phenomenology also understands the limitations of perception. Perception is the way one makes sense of the world around oneself and one's place in the world, but perception is a process. One does not experience everything at any given time.¹⁶⁷ That would simply be impossible; consider William James' "blooming, buzzing confusion."¹⁶⁸ Csordas writes that "perception is by nature indeterminate" and that perception cannot possibly take in everything.¹⁶⁹

Taylor Carman and Mark B. N. Hansen write that Merleau-Ponty's view that embodiment is at the foundation of all our experience means that perception is integrally involved in all parts of being.¹⁷⁰ One cannot study perception as an abstract process just like one cannot study consciousness as situated anywhere beyond the body. Donald Landes writes, "Our body is our perspective on the world, and the incomplete intentional and horizontal structure of perception is not a limitation to our access to the world and truth; it is the very possibility of this

¹⁶⁷ Romdenh-Romluc, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception*, 17.

¹⁶⁸ William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, [1890] 1981), 462, quoted in Russell Goodman, "William James," ed. Edward N. Zalta, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed May 21, 2017, Forthcoming: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/james/>.

¹⁶⁹ Csordas, "Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology," 8.

¹⁷⁰ Taylor Carman and Mark B. N. Hansen, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, ed. Taylor Carman and Mark B. N. Hansen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 14.

access.”¹⁷¹ Without one’s body and one’s embodied perception, one could not access the world. And even if one could in theory access the world otherwise, it would be nothing like the embodied experience. Merleau-Ponty is not claiming that this idea of perception will lead to the absolute truth. He writes, “To seek the essence of perception is not to declare that perception is presumed to be true, but rather that perception is defined as our access to the truth.”¹⁷² In other words, perception can end in something near objectification, but it must start in the body.¹⁷³

Contemporary Embodiment

Contemporary discussions of embodiment more often dismiss the notion that the body is a totally separate entity from the mind. Csordas points out that work on embodiment has also turned toward a critique of what the body is. For example, the body is not a static entity without context.¹⁷⁴ In the context of modern medicine, the body might be seen as an object to be fixed. Certainly the body has “parts” that can be “fixed;” a broken limb comes to mind. However, the body is also a subject in the sense that one experiences the world through means that are inescapably mediated through the body.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ Donald A. Landes, “Translator’s Introduction,” in *Phenomenology of Perception*, by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, trans. Donald A. Landes (New York: Routledge, 2012), xxxvi.

¹⁷² Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, xxx.

¹⁷³ Csordas, “Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology,” 9-10.

¹⁷⁴ Thomas J. Csordas, “Introduction: The Body as Representation and Being-in-the-World,” in *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self*, ed. Thomas J. Csordas (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1-2.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 6, 8.

In the same way that the phenomenologists argued for the body as the foundation for any philosophical or scientific inquiry, Csordas claims that the body should be the starting point for anthropology, since embodiment is “the existential ground of culture and self.”¹⁷⁶ This dissertation takes up this methodological approach to analyze modern yoga practice.

In an embodied approach, the mind/body union is understood, but how is one to describe the relationship between the body and the world? Csordas argues that an anthropology of the body requires something to be opposed yet complementary to “representation,” which is “fundamentally nominal” in its characterization of the body. He takes a note from the phenomenological tradition and suggests “being-in-the-world.” “Being-in-the-world” here represents “sensory presence and engagement” and a “preobjective reservoir of meaning,” adding up to actual “lived experience.” He adds, “In general terms, the distinction between representation and being-in-the-world corresponds to that between the disciplines of semiotics and phenomenology.”¹⁷⁷ Csordas is not saying that the semiotic approach should necessarily take a back seat to the phenomenological approach, merely that the latter is an equally valid anthropological method and a productive “dialectical partner.”¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 6. Feminist scholars have had similar discussions on the role of the body. For example, see Sherry B. Ortner, “Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?” *Feminist Studies* 1, no. 2 (1972): 5–31 and Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Reprint (New York: Routledge, [1990] 2008).

¹⁷⁷ Csordas, “Introduction,” 10.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 12.

Csordas applies this anthropology of the body in discussing religious healing, which can bring out expressions of emotions that can be described as spontaneous and organic.¹⁷⁹ Csordas's embodied approach yields a complex interpretation. Writing on a particular healing ritual, he notes,

The preobjective element of this process rests in the fact that participants...experience these manifestations as spontaneous and without preordained content. The manifestations are *original* acts of communication which nevertheless take a limited number of common forms because they emerge from a shared habitus.¹⁸⁰

By taking the body as foundational, one no longer “explains away” the manifestations of the religious healers. In other words, by using this method, one takes the participants' experiences as valid and builds one's interpretations from there. Csordas offers speaking in tongues as another example.¹⁸¹ In this case he argues, “just as vernacular speech facilitates and is the embodiment of verbal thought, so glossolalia facilitates and is the embodiment of nonverbal thought.”¹⁸² Here again, the embodied approach promotes analysis of the phenomenon as experienced by the person. Csordas adds, “From the perspective of embodiment, then, glossolalia asserts the unity of body and mind, establishes a shared human world, and expresses transcendence—as does all language.”¹⁸³

Jackson criticizes his own fieldwork by recognizing that certain things said or done by the Kuranko people of Sierra Leone may not actually rest on some abstraction. When one observes a ritual act or some other physical movement,

¹⁷⁹ Csordas, “Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology,” 12-23.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 15. (emphasis added)

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 23-31.

¹⁸² Ibid., 26.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 31.

one tends to assume an abstract meaning that may or may not actually be there.

He writes,

I failed to accept that human beings do not necessarily act from opinions or employ epistemological criteria in finding meaning for their actions....It is probably the separateness of the observer from the ritual acts that makes him think that the acts refer to or require justification in a domain beyond their actual compass.¹⁸⁴

I understand Jackson to be suggesting that if X is observing Y, and X assumes that X is thinking accurately and that Y is not, then X is less willing to entertain the notion that Y is also equally grounded in embodied perception. Jackson's self-recognition leads him toward a method similar to Csordas' anthropology of the body. By taking embodiment as the starting point, one can focus more on phenomena themselves instead of rushing to tackle meaning and causes, which are bound to be burdened with "a priori references to precepts, rules, or symbols."¹⁸⁵

Embodiment and Yoga

When it comes to modern yoga, two concepts within discussions of embodiment stand out: perception and practice. While on first glance one would assume that a discussion of embodiment and modern yoga would focus on the level of practice, I will instead be focusing on embodied perception, perception of oneself and one's surroundings. Certainly the practice of yoga is an important element of the study of yoga, but the experiences that arise and the

¹⁸⁴ Jackson, "Knowledge of the Body," 59.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 61.

connectedness that comes to the forefront have more to do with the development of one's perception. This development may not be the primary purpose of practicing yoga for a given practitioner, but it may be a "side effect" that carries interesting implications for how one studies modern yoga within Religious Studies.

In a philosophical exploration of Merleau-Ponty and yoga, Sundar Sarukkai seeks to augment Merleau-Ponty's work with a phenomenological analysis from the standpoint of yoga practice. Sarukkai writes, "I begin with the claim that it is possible to have phenomenological experiences of the inner body."¹⁸⁶ Yoga offers a way, according to Sarukkai, to focus on this inner experience and cultivate an awareness of it. He writes, "we should understand *āsanas* as attempts to make 'visible' the inner body. This making visible through hearing, grasping, touching, and controlling the inner organs is the phenomenological experience of the inner body."¹⁸⁷ By performing the *āsanas* and *prāṇāyāma*, one may make the inner body more noticeable; one may raise awareness of different processes typically hidden from one's everyday experiences.¹⁸⁸ Sarukkai argues that *āsana* practice may serve as a form of "perception" into one's body.¹⁸⁹

Some scholars have used embodiment as a methodological approach to study certain religious practices, such as religious healing services and

¹⁸⁶ Sundar Sarukkai, "Inside/Outside: Merleau-Ponty/Yoga," *Philosophy East and West* 52, no. 4 (2002): 462.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 469.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 469-471.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 472.

glossolalia,¹⁹⁰ but yoga presents a slightly subtler case. Yoga exists diffusely in the continuum between religious and secular, which I argue makes it particularly interesting for interdisciplinary analysis. In this dissertation I heed Csordas's call for a paradigm of embodiment and apply it as a methodological approach to the study of modern yoga practice. This approach will provide new and useful insights for Modern Yoga Studies specifically and Religious Studies generally. Yoga practice offers an example of an embodied practice wherein one understands *embodied* to include the full bodymind complex that can be manipulated. In Drew Leder's terms, yoga practice may support a "surfacing" of one's awareness of self, inside and out.¹⁹¹

Jackson provides a parallel to this view of yoga in his discussion of observing certain village rituals. In one example, men and women switch traditional roles. As the roles become unsettled, participants essentially live outside of their normal reality. The new situation is not totally out of the realm of possibilities; such roles are potentialities that are just not normally expressed. In this event, participants have the opportunity to fundamentally shift the way they understand the world, an opportunity that may have lasting meaning.¹⁹² Jackson writes,

the habitual or "set" relations between ideas, experiences, and body practices may be broken. Thus, altered patterns of body use may induce new experiences and provoke new ideas, as when a regulation and

¹⁹⁰ Csordas, "Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology"

¹⁹¹ Drew Leder, *The Absent Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 105.

¹⁹² Jackson, "Knowledge of the Body," 57-63.

steadying of the breath induces tranquility of the mind or a balanced pose bodies forth a sense of equanimity.¹⁹³

There is a strong parallel here to yoga practice. Yoga practice may be introduced into one's life as a change in regularity, whether as part of spiritual seeking, desire for a greater physical fitness, or medical therapy. In all cases, adopting a yoga practice has the potential to influence one's embodied experience of the world.

Many practices that Jackson describes are bodily practices. By understanding embodiment as the foundation of perception, he interprets the bodily practices as cultivating the meanings of the acts. He adds, "From an existential point of view we could say that the bodily practices mediate a personal realization of social values, an immediate grasp of general precepts as sensible truths."¹⁹⁴ In other words, Jackson argues that the meanings and/or values that accompany an action that physically disturbs regular habits could be absorbed as integral realities, not just as abstract concepts. Though an average yoga class may not have the same significance of meaning as an initiation ritual (in some cases), even the slight jarring of everyday acts with a sense of connectedness with oneself and others that comes with yoga practice may have some meaning-giving effect on the practitioner.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 62.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 66.

Why Embodiment?

Theories of embodiment in the tradition of Merleau-Ponty and others provide a language to discuss the living body. The concept of the living body breaks through the mind/body distinction on both a philosophical and scientific level. There is a physical body and there is a mind, but these are not ontologically separate entities. To think of them as such disallows progressive inquiry into one's self as a living being and into the state of one's well-being.

In addition to blurring the lines between mind and body, theories of embodiment offer an opportunity to bring religious and/or spiritual considerations into new or understudied areas of inquiry. Indeed, Leder notes that the body and bodily practices are often the centerpiece of religious and spiritual practices,¹⁹⁵ so perhaps Religious Studies scholars should analyze bodily practices that are not overtly religious and see if there are more subtle aspects involved. Consider yoga in biomedical contexts, which will be discussed further in chapter 5. While yoga practitioners in a biomedical setting may not have religious or spiritual intentions, some studies suggest that participants may experience an increase in spirituality while practicing yoga.¹⁹⁶ I am not arguing that yoga practice will definitely lead a practitioner to increased religiosity or spirituality, merely that practices utilizing the whole living body, such as yoga, may create an opportunity

¹⁹⁵ Leder, *The Absent Body*, 168.

¹⁹⁶ For example, K. A. Dittmann and M. R. Freedman, "Body Awareness, Eating Attitudes, and Spiritual Beliefs of Women Practicing Yoga," *Eating Disorders* 17, no. 4 (September 2009): 273–92 and M. D. Duncan, A. Leis, and J. W. Taylor–Brown, "Impact and Outcomes of an Iyengar Yoga Program in a Cancer Centre," *Current Oncology* 15, Supplement 2 (August 2008): S72–S78.

for experiences that one could label spiritual and/or religious. If a person does label an experience as such (or does *not* label it as such), I agree with the tradition of “attributional” methods that it is the scholar’s responsibility to take that person seriously.¹⁹⁷

Of the numerous possible lenses through which I could have analyzed modern yoga, I chose embodiment because it provides a relevant conceptual vocabulary to discuss yoga; yoga may affirm theories of embodiment that stress embodied experience; and a sense of embodiment developed in yoga practice may cultivate a sense of connectedness with oneself, others, and one’s surroundings. As central as the body is in one’s everyday and extra-daily lives, it still all too often lacks the prominence in analysis that it deserves. Though this dissertation is not a defense of embodiment as such, I hope that this analysis of modern yoga practice through the lens of embodiment will help to elevate the profile of theories of embodiment in Yoga Studies, Religious Studies, and beyond.

Connectedness

I use the term “connectedness” here as a technical term for an embodied experience of connection with oneself and/or one’s surroundings, including the material world, ideas, and other selves. In *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty describes the internal and external senses that I include in

¹⁹⁷ Ann Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 88-102.

connectedness. For the internal sense, in a critique of mind/body dualism he writes, “The union of the soul and the body is not established through an arbitrary decree that unites two mutually exclusive terms, one a subject and the other an object. It is accomplished at each moment in the movement of existence.”¹⁹⁸ For the external sense, in a discussion of relation, he writes, “Given that relations among things or among the appearances of things are always mediated by our body, then the setting of our own life must in fact be all of nature; nature must be our interlocutor in a sort of dialogue.”¹⁹⁹ Putting the ideas together, one is unavoidably connected to one’s self and one’s context.

Connectedness in the external sense carries an even more intimate weight when one considers connectedness with other people. In another critique of mind/body dualism, Merleau-Ponty writes that Descartes’ *Cogito* “devalued the perception of others” by making “the I” the only true thing in the world. In opposition, Merleau-Ponty urges,

In order for the word “other” not to be meaningless, my existence must never reduce itself to the consciousness that I have of existing; it must in fact encompass the consciousness that *one* might have of it, and so also encompass my embodiment in a nature and at least the possibility of an historical situation.²⁰⁰

By shifting the experiencer from a specific “I” to the more general “one,” one makes room for the reality of others and gains a fuller experience of interaction with them as equally perceiving beings.

¹⁹⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 91.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 334.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, |xxvi. (emphasis original)

With a more anthropological grounding, the idea of connectedness becomes more real to one's everyday experiences. Scholars are often taught that one must observe from afar in order to get good, "objective" knowledge. This approach to the natural world is rather limited and undervalues the I-ness of others. If, on the other hand, one does not hold the observational distance to such high esteem and instead recognizes one's connections with others, one may gain a new world of understanding. This of course does not mean anthropologists and other scholars should throw caution to the wind and eschew ideals of objectivity, but it does suggest recognizing one's connectedness as a human being carrying out actions that are grounded in one's body.

Moving away from notions of the body as static, Csordas references historian and feminist scholar Donna Haraway. Csordas writes that Haraway "advocates the recognition of *location*, that is, non-equivalent positions in a substantive web of connections."²⁰¹ In an earlier article, Haraway discusses this concept:

I am arguing for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims. These are claims on people's lives. I am arguing for the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity.²⁰²

This idea of the body emphasizes that the body is the grounded but dynamic standpoint from which all perception and communication takes place.

²⁰¹ Csordas, "Introduction," 2, referencing Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991). (emphasis original)

²⁰² Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 589.

Understanding the external connectedness inevitably provides insights back toward the inner connectedness and how both types are themselves connected. Certainly this begins to appear circular, but it is also more realistic. The real world is rarely clear cut in any sense, and so instead of forcing abstraction in one's attempts at analysis and explanation, an embodied approach embraces the chaos in a sense and allows scholars to learn from the dialectical interactions they observe externally and experience internally.

More to the point of this project, this same approach applies to non-scholarly endeavors. Connectedness is something one may observe in oneself and in others in one's day-to-day existence. It is in this sense that connectedness emerges as a description for experiences developed during yoga practice in a variety of contexts.²⁰³ I do not know if the theorists discussed in this dissertation had this more mundane sense of connectedness in mind, but their descriptions of how embodiment plays into one's worldview easily apply to the prosaic interactions one has with oneself and others. Connectedness as I use it here is a

²⁰³ For example, Amy Caldwell, "Ecstatic Reunion: Tips to Remembering Connectedness & the Present Moment," *Yoga Digest*, accessed May 21, 2017, <http://yogadigest.com/ecstatic-reunion-tips-remembering-connectedness-present-moment/>; Melinda Dodd, "How Yoga Fosters Real Community + Relationships in a Digital World," *Yoga Journal*, 2016, <http://www.yogajournal.com/lifestyle/yoga-fosters-community-relationships>; Farah A. Jindani and G. F. S. Khalsa, "A Yoga Intervention Program for Patients Suffering from Symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Qualitative Descriptive Study," *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* 21, no. 7 (July 2015): 401–408; Julia E. Keosaian et al., "We're All in This Together": A Qualitative Study of Predominantly Low Income Minority Participants in a Yoga Trial for Chronic Low Back Pain," *Complementary Therapies in Medicine* 24 (February 2016): 34–39; Patricia Anne Kinser et al., "A Feeling of Connectedness: Perspectives on a Gentle Yoga Intervention for Women with Major Depression," *Issues in Mental Health Nursing* 34, no. 6 (2013): 402–411; and Shane McIver, Michael McGartland, and Paul O'Halloran, "Overeating Is Not About the Food": Women Describe Their Experience of a Yoga Treatment Program for Binge Eating," *Qualitative Health Research* 19, no. 9 (September 2009): 1234–1245.

philosophically and physiologically grounded feeling that is always present to some degree but rarely noticed.²⁰⁴

Conclusion

Theories of embodiment provide means to characterize meaningfully and discuss modern yoga practice as it exists in contemporary American society in a variety of contexts. For example, recent scientific studies on yoga have suggested that yoga practice may cultivate one's "proprioceptive and interoceptive abilities".²⁰⁵ Laura Schmalzl, Mardi A. Crane-Godreau, and Peter Payne consider yoga practice as a type of "movement-based embodied contemplative practice (MECP)," and "since movement increases the intensity of proprioceptive stimuli (Prochazka, 2011), it is possible that MECs may offer a more efficient form of practice than seated meditation when it comes to cultivating bodily awareness and the sense of self."²⁰⁶

Embodiment is unavoidable in our everyday perception and in our more attuned moments of connectedness. It is therefore a solid foundation on which to build my typology of modern yoga in the following chapters.

²⁰⁴ On "absence" of the body, see Leder, *The Absent Body*.

²⁰⁵ Sat Bir Singh Khalsa et al., "Introduction to Yoga in Health Care," in *The Principles and Practice of Yoga in Health Care*, ed. Sat Bir Singh Khalsa et al. (Edinburgh: Handspring Publishing, 2016), 8.

²⁰⁶ Laura Schmalzl, Mardi A Crane-Godreau, and Peter Payne, "Movement-Based Embodied Contemplative Practices: Definitions and Paradigms," *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 8, no. 205 (2014): 1-2, citing Arthur Prochazka, "Proprioceptive Feedback and Movement Regulation," in *Comprehensive Physiology, Supplement 29: Handbook of Physiology, Exercise: Regulation and Integration of Multiple Systems* (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2011).

PART II: A TYPOLOGY OF MODERN YOGA

Introduction to the Typology

Introduction

Modern yoga eludes definition. One could easily view modern yoga as a curious offshoot of New Age culture that gained traction in the fitness community without any strong connection to overtly religious practice. One could also hold the view that serious yoga practitioners are firmly grounded in some sort of religious and/or spiritual tradition, even if such a tradition lacks the perceived structure of mainstream religions. One could potentially focus on the health and biomedical aspects of yoga practice, perceiving the context as irrelevant as long as there are therapeutic results. Each of these views on its own is extreme in some way, and each can usually be tempered through further inquiry. Ultimately, though, why cannot modern yoga be all of the above? Each of the views above is both right and wrong to some extent, and that apparent opposition is perfectly reasonable given the complexities of the practice and its contexts. Out of this idea emerges my typology of modern yoga, which sets up distinct categories of modern yoga practice that are as solid as sandcastles. Their fragility makes them real, interesting, and faithful to the day-to-day practice of millions of modern yoga practitioners.

The purpose of this section is to introduce my typology of modern yoga practice and the method behind its creation and deployment. How can one categorize the various forms of “Americanized” yoga in a way that is fair to the

practices, informative, and useful to Religious Studies? I argue that one can use a comparative method to categorize modern Americanized yoga practice through the lens of the body in order discuss how those categories help to understand modern yoga's relationships with American identity and religiosity.

Typology as a Comparative Project

This dissertation takes inspiration in part from the subfield of Comparative Religion within Religious Studies. However, it is not a traditional comparative project in that I am not comparing different religious traditions. Rather, I am comparing certain expressions of a particular practice with a religious history mostly within a specific geographical and temporal context.

Why comparison? Even granting the limitations and pitfalls of comparison, it is a natural and enlightening act. Jonathan Z. Smith writes, "The process of comparison is a fundamental characteristic of human intelligence."²⁰⁷ Comparison does not provide definitive answers, but that is not the point of such inquiries.

In its productive form, comparison indeed prevents definitive answers, giving way to an open-ended, yet grounded appreciation for complexity. Kimberly C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray write, "comparison is an indeterminate scholarly procedure that is best undertaken as an intellectually creative enterprise, not as a

²⁰⁷ Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), 240-241, quoted in Barbara Holdrege, "What's Beyond the Post? Comparative Analysis as Critical Method," in *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age*, ed. Kimberley C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 77.

science but as an art—an imaginative and critical act of mediation and redescription in the service of knowledge.”²⁰⁸ Much as the exercise of defining “religion” has problematized the category in fruitful ways, this typology aims to give new life to the term “modern yoga” and what it means for Religious Studies and beyond. Its complexity is its draw. Making sense of complicated aspects of the human endeavor is an impossible and necessary task.

David Gordon White rightly argues that making sense of these sorts of things is one’s job as a religion scholar, and that “we do so in the certain knowledge that everything we say and write is provisional and condemned to revision if not ridicule by future generations, as well as by our own proximate and distant others.”²⁰⁹ An emphasis on scientific inquiry in academia has created a fear of being less than 100% correct, yet a glimpse through the literature of even the hardest of sciences will demonstrate that such a standard is impossible. Instead, scholars should embrace the complexity of comparison, figure out what it may or may not say about humanity, and accept that ideas are subject to augmentation, revision, or rebuttal.

Comparing expressions of modern yoga practice brings out potentially unconsidered aspects of the central category, “modern yoga,” and the larger category, “religion,” of this dissertation. This method behind my typology is inspired by the method of Patton as expressed in her introduction to *Religion of*

²⁰⁸ Patton and Ray, introduction to *A Magic Still Dwells*, 4.

²⁰⁹ David Gordon White, “The Scholar as Mythographer: Comparative Indo-European Myth and Postmodern Concerns,” in *A Magic Still Dwells*, ed. Patton and Ray, 49.

the Gods: Ritual, Paradox, and Reflexivity. She writes, “What other religions express in analogues both ideational and in praxis possibly represents something fundamental in the divine nature itself, or, if one prefers, its human construction.”²¹⁰ In other words, looking across religious traditions reveals something about religion and its practitioners. Likewise, looking across expressions of modern yoga practice reveals things about modern yoga and its practitioners. In the specific case of depictions of ritual worship, Patton writes,

In many other religions of the world...other “high gods” were also portrayed as themselves engaged in worship. Therefore, we may have to rethink the category of ritual worship itself. In the self-understanding of religious traditions that portray the gods as religious actors, is ritual, when performed by gods, understood to be the same thing as when it is performed by human beings?²¹¹

Comparison forces us to rethink our categories. One may think that one knows what modern yoga is, but when one sees its various forms, that assumption is weakened.

Also on the notion of gods being the subject of worship, Patton writes,

If, in the historical evidence we will encounter in the traditions to be considered, the divine is not the object (the recipient) but the subject and agent of the religious action (the sacrificer or devotee), I would suggest that it is heuristically unhelpful to persist in the idea that there is something peripheral or exceptional about this phenomenon. Rather, we must rethink how we understand “religion.”²¹²

In other words, Patton is arguing that just because something does not fit within the standard definition or description of a phenomenon does not mean that that

²¹⁰ Kimberley C. Patton, *Religion of the Gods: Ritual, Paradox, and Reflexivity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 9.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 15.

something should be dismissed. Instead, the category should gain nuance. In the context of the category of biomedical yoga, for example, if a participant in a medical trial describes their experiences of highly medicalized yoga in terms that may more commonly appear in discussions of spirituality,²¹³ it would be detrimental to both categories of biomedical yoga and spiritual yoga to dismiss this overlap as belonging to only one or the other.

Overview of the Typology

I have created my typology in the model of a color palette. There are no hard distinguishing lines between each category, and there are few examples of modern yoga practice that fall 100% within one category. Each category can be understood as a base color (cf. RGB or CYMK), where they do exist independently, but more often than not they appear in some combination to form a unique hue.

This typology is not derived directly from examples or groupings of examples, but neither is it created in the abstract. It is grounded in expressions of real world modern yoga practice with a sincere appreciation for the fluidity of the relevant characteristics. White writes, “We may legitimately compare other

²¹³ For examples, see K. A. Dittmann and M. R. Freedman, “Body Awareness, Eating Attitudes, and Spiritual Beliefs of Women Practicing Yoga,” *Eating Disorders* 17, no. 4 (September 2009): 273–292; Farah A. Jindani and G. F. S. Khalsa, “A Yoga Intervention Program for Patients Suffering from Symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Qualitative Descriptive Study,” *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* 21, no. 7 (July 2015): 401–408; and Julia E. Keosaian et al., “‘We’re All in This Together’: A Qualitative Study of Predominantly Low Income Minority Participants in a Yoga Trial for Chronic Low Back Pain,” *Complementary Therapies in Medicine* 24 (February 2016): 34–39.

people's myths not only because this is what we ought to be doing as scholars of religion, but also because when we do so we know that we are comparing relations and aspects rather than things."²¹⁴ This typology is comparing aspects of different forms of modern yoga practice more than the forms themselves. The categorical forms are merely bases from which to begin analysis, and the aspects appear in opposition, complementarity, and everything in between.

This typology is not triumphalist or progressive. It is not an evolution toward a "best" or "most accurate" expression of modern yoga. The order I chose reflects a movement from forms of modern yoga practice that have "traditional yoga" in the foreground to those that have these elements in the background. Thus it goes from religious yoga to biomedical yoga. Biomedical yoga falls last and will receive more expansive discussion than the other categories because it is a form of modern yoga practice that provides a novel area for exploration within the realm of Religious Studies, which is the main field within which I am writing.

Given that the placement of "traditional yoga" shifts, it is fair to say that what counts as "yoga" at various points on the color palette also changes. The order is therefore provisional and could easily be altered depending on which comparative aspects one chooses to emphasize. The categories could also be presented in clusters rather than linearly; each category comfortably pairs up with another depending on which comparative aspect is in the foreground.

²¹⁴ White, "The Scholar as Mythographer," 53.

At times the categories in my typology are better characterized by what they are not rather than what they are. For example, biomedical yoga can be characterized by its exclusion of religious and/or spiritual elements. However, these negative characterizations do not always go both ways. Religious yoga and spiritual yoga practices may not characterize themselves in biomedical terms, but these practices do not exclude the medical elements with the same vigor as might the biomedical practices exclude the religious and spiritual elements.

Cross-threads of the Typology

I will describe each of the five categories in my typology by noting how each expresses three common categorical threads: legitimacy, embodiment, and American identity. For each of my categories, I will discuss legitimacy and embodiment in the description of the individual categories, and I will discuss American identity in a comparative discussion at the end of each chapter alongside relevant examples.

The thread of legitimacy addresses what each category of modern yoga practice accepts as authoritative or supportive to its claims. Proponents within each category accept and promote different currencies of legitimation while deemphasizing or ignoring others. For example, proponents of biomedical yoga may care deeply about randomized controlled trial results published in peer-reviewed medical journals, while spiritual yoga practitioners do not put as much stock into those results. In nearly all cases there are degrees of weight.

The thread of embodiment anchors the typology as a whole by addressing a common feature in all categories: the body. What kind of body is prominent in a particular category of modern yoga practice, and what role does the body serve? For example, embodiment in fitness yoga is predominantly about the physical body. In particular, this thread will explore two aspects of embodiment. First, I will consider how the category of modern yoga relates to “connectedness,” a concept that I described in chapter 2 as “an embodied experience of connection with oneself and/or one’s surroundings, including the material world, ideas, and other selves,”²¹⁵ which is grounded in the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Thomas Csordas and the anthropology of Michael Jackson.²¹⁶

Second, I will consider how the category handles what I am labeling the “chakrbody,” which refers loosely to the subtle body described in traditional yoga and tantra texts.²¹⁷ The chakrbody includes *chakras*, *nāḍīs*, and other elements of the subtle physiology present in many South Asian traditions. A *chakra*, which translates to “wheel” or “circle,” is a location within the human body that is considered a center of power. The concept of *chakras* and other elements

²¹⁵ See p. 67 of this dissertation.

²¹⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (London: Routledge, [1945] 2012); Thomas J. Csordas, “Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology,” *Ethos* 18, no. 1 (1990): 5–47; Thomas J. Csordas, “Introduction: The Body as Representation and Being-in-the-World,” in *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self*, ed. Thomas J. Csordas (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1–24; Michael Jackson, “Knowledge of the Body,” in *Lifeworlds: Essays in Existential Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 51–71.

²¹⁷ Courtney Bender uses the phrase “chakra body” while discussing “Spiritual practitioners in the United States” and their use of the subtle body elements in their lives. In this dissertation, I am using the term “chakrbody” as more of a technical term that generally identifies the expressions of how South Asian ideas of the subtle body appear (or do not appear) in different yoga practice contexts. Courtney Bender, *The New Metaphysicals: Spirituality and the American Religious Imagination* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 95.

of the subtle body gained prominence in the tantra traditions of South Asia and were picked up by yoga traditions.²¹⁸ These concepts have become a feature of modern yoga practice, ranging from direct correlation to the biomedical body to symbolic representation of the body, if there is any mention at all. Gavin Flood argues that in medieval tantric traditions, the *chakras* are bodily expressions of tantric “principles” as opposed to centers of the body waiting to be “discovered.”²¹⁹ In modern versions of yoga practice, the *chakras* and other elements of the subtle body likewise are not static bits of anatomy, but symbols that vary in meaning depending on the modern yoga tradition in which they are expressed. For example, in spiritual yoga, the category is characterized by how the *chakras* are both acknowledged and augmented by elements of other traditions.

The thread of American identity addresses aspects of American culture that are represented and/or manifested by modern yoga practice. These aspects include ideals of independence, freedom, community, commercialization, and scientific objectivity, among others. These aspects help make the case that modern yoga practice can act intentionally and unintentionally as a conduit for the intellectual and cultural context within which it is practiced.²²⁰ This thread also emphasizes the comparative aspect of this dissertation. Winifred Sullivan writes,

²¹⁸ Gavin Flood, *The Tantric Body: The Secret Tradition of Hindu Religion* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 157; Also see Harish Johari, *Chakras: Energy Centers of Transformation* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 2000).

²¹⁹ Flood, *The Tantric Body*, 6.

²²⁰ Andrea R. Jain, *Selling Yoga: From Counterculture to Pop Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 3.

“American religion is ‘naturally’ comparative....American religion is distinctive in form because of its history. It is not age-old. It is new—and proudly so. It has invented itself quite purposely from the ground up in a very short and specific historical context.”²²¹ As with more obvious forms of religion, yoga practice in America has also quite purposely invented itself.

Ultimately this typology helps categorize the modern yoga body in a way that clarifies discussion of modern yoga practice within several fields of study, particularly Religious Studies. It also gives examples of how yoga is practiced in Americanized forms and how those examples express certain aspects of American identity.

²²¹ Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, “American Religion Is Naturally Comparative,” in *A Magic Still Dwells*, ed. Patton and Ray, 123.

Chapter 3: Religious Yoga and Spiritual Yoga

Introduction

In her study of modern spiritual practitioners, Courtney Bender describes a yoga teacher who, in a given week, “taught two classes over the lunch hour in corporate offices, two classes at a local wellness and complementary health spa, a local Unitarian church, the Mt. Auburn Fitness Club, and a free-standing yoga center.”²²² In each of these settings, this yoga teacher may have taught a slightly different form of yoga practice, depending on the context, both in terms of physical space and the type of audience. Each practice may fall under a different category in my typology; the classes at the corporate offices and the ones at the spa may fall under wellness yoga, and the classes at the fitness club may fall under fitness yoga, for example. Classes at the church may carry an element of religious yoga depending on the style and content of the presentation. Yet this one teacher goes through all of these classes as a single practitioner. Bender writes that the teacher “likes to think of herself as being more interested in the spiritual than the exercise aspects of yoga,”²²³ and Bender concludes that this teacher’s schedule “provides an example of how a single technique, taught by a single person, takes various shapes, meanings, and legitimacies in various contexts.”²²⁴

²²² Courtney Bender, *The New Metaphysicals: Spirituality and the American Religious Imagination* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 42.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 42.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

This movement across styles demonstrates the fluidity of modern yoga and necessitates the fluidity of my typology of modern yoga, not only in terms of categories and groups, but also in the day-to-day practice of individual people. In this chapter and the following two chapters, I will elaborate on the five categories of my typology of modern yoga practice and their often porous distinctions.

The first two categories in my typology of modern yoga are directly linked to religious and/or spiritual data and are therefore familiar to the field of Religious Studies. For that same reason, these first two categories are perhaps the most unfamiliar to secular American society, wherein the latter three categories are likely more familiar. After a discussion of my use of the opaque terms that label them, I will lay out the categories of religious yoga and spiritual yoga. In presenting these categories, I will describe them using the organizing principles of legitimacy, embodiment, and American identity, providing relevant examples along the way.

Legitimacy refers to the means by which the categories ground their authority and/or sincerity both to their practitioners and to external observers. These currencies of legitimacy can be as open-ended as personal experience in the case of spiritual yoga or as direct as being featured prominently in highly respected medical journals in the case of biomedical yoga. Describing the categories in terms of legitimacy helps not only to characterize the categories, but also to open discussion on how and where these categories of modern yoga practice fit in cultural conceptions of them.

Embodiment refers to how each category relates to the body, which I will discuss in terms of “connectedness” and the “chakrabody.” Connectedness refers to individual experiences of connection with oneself, others, and one’s contexts. Each type of modern yoga practice has its own variation on the idea of connectedness, whether they refer to it in direct terms or not. Chakrabody refers to elements of the subtle physiology, such as *chakras* and *nāḍīs*, commonly found in South Asian depictions of the body within yoga and tantra traditions. How these elements of the subtle anatomy appear (or do not appear) within modern yoga practice provides some insightful distinctions and parallels between the categories.

Finally, American identity refers to how practitioners within each category express prominent elements of American culture. Because American identity is such an amorphous and multifaceted concept, I will not include it in the description of the particular categories of modern yoga practice. Instead, I will discuss the relevant facets of American identity in the form of a comparative discussion after presenting the first two categories in my typology. I will follow this same pattern in the following chapters, focusing on the categories presented within a given chapter, and bringing in the other categories as they are relevant.

A Brief Discussion of Terms: Religious and Spiritual

Yoga scholar Suzanne Newcombe writes that yoga and Indian teachings generally found their way into what she calls “‘the Quest’ for spiritual meaning” in

twentieth century America.²²⁵ Outside of the overtly secular depictions of yoga, one often hears yoga described as “spiritual” in the same vein as those who claim to be “spiritual, but not religious.” Newcome notes that this label of “spiritual” allows practitioners to see yoga as separate from “religion,” or at times as “a supplement to existing religious affiliations.”²²⁶ But what is spirituality? What is religion? In this section I will explore briefly the idea of spirituality in contemporary America, especially how it relates to modern yoga, in effort to both describe “spirituality” and inversely describe “religion” as I use the terms in this dissertation.

Up to this point I have used the words “religion” and “spirituality” without distinguishing them significantly from each other or from any other category. In literature on the topic of religion and spirituality, one typically finds something like these general definitions, which are discussed at length by Wade Clark Roof: “religion” refers to some set of beliefs, texts, rituals, and/or distinct communities; “spirituality” refers to something more ephemeral, personal, and/or psychological.²²⁷ The history of the modern use of “spiritual” as a descriptor can be tied to a cultural desire to separate it from “religious.” Peter van der Veer argues that the term “spirituality” arose in the nineteenth century as a concept in

²²⁵ Suzanne Newcome, “The Development of Modern Yoga: A Survey of the Field,” *Religion Compass* 3, no. 6 (2009): 991.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 988.

²²⁷ Wade Clark Roof, “Religion and Spirituality: Toward an Integrated Analysis,” in *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Michele Dillon (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 137-148.

the West alongside notions of “secular.”²²⁸ He goes on to describe how people seeking to distance themselves from the mainstream traditions of America and Europe tended to latch on to “spirituality” as something either separate from the mainstream traditions or identified with the relatively newly discovered traditions of Asia.²²⁹ Robert Fuller argues that the dividing line between “spiritual” and “religious” developed in the twentieth century parallel to the line between “private” and “public” aspects of life. In both sets of terms the former emphasized personal experience while the latter linked to institutions and formal rules and rituals.²³⁰ Fuller further describes “spirituality” as follows:

Spirituality exists wherever we struggle with the issue of how our lives fit into the greater cosmic scheme of things. This is true even when our questions never give way to specific answers or give rise to specific practices such as prayer or meditation. We encounter spiritual issues every time we wonder where the universe comes from, why we are here, or what happens when we die. We also become spiritual when we become moved by values such as beauty, love, or creativity that seem to reveal a meaning or power beyond our visible world. An idea or practice is “spiritual” when it reveals our personal desire to establish a felt-relationship with the deepest meanings or powers governing life.²³¹

Of the two terms, “spirituality” is arguably the harder to pin down, and I have two reasons for avoiding definitions of it in this project. First, generally speaking “spirituality” is innately and intentionally a vague term, and any attempt to define it is futile from the start. Nancy Ammerman argues based on qualitative data that even to attempt to distinguish between “spirituality” and “religion”

²²⁸ Peter Van der Veer, “Spirituality in Modern Society,” *Social Research* 76, no. 4 (2009): 1098.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1097–1120.

²³⁰ Robert C. Fuller, *Spiritual, but Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 5.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

creates a detrimental loss of nuance in the former and assumes little to no overlap between the two when the opposite is the case in modern society.²³² Second, I suggest a definition of “spirituality” should not be dictated broadly, especially to those who claim to experience it. One should not restrict the meaning of spirituality, and one should not ignore its impact. To do so would undermine the practitioner and erect artificial barriers to one’s observation. This method aligns with that of Linda Barnes and Susan Sered in their edited volume, *Religion and Healing in America*. In this work, the editors did not require the contributors to “adhere to particular linguistic usages” associated with terms such as “religion” and “spirituality.”²³³

My method and use of these two terms also aligns with Ammerman’s 2013 study of qualitative data from a variety of Americans on the topics of religion and spirituality. In the study, the team intentionally avoided defining “religious” and “spiritual” for participants, allowing the participants to find the meanings themselves or sometimes mull over what they might mean.²³⁴ As an example, Ammerman sums up a common theme across participants’ attempts to define “spiritual”: “hard to define, but important.”²³⁵ I would extend this even further and say that “spirituality” is fluid and therefore impossible to define, yet its importance

²³² Nancy T. Ammerman, “Spiritual But Not Religious? Beyond Binary Choices in the Study of Religion,” abstract, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 52, no. 2 (2013): 258.

²³³ Susan S. Sered and Linda L. Barnes, “Introduction,” in *Religion and Healing in America*, ed. Linda L. Barnes and Susan S. Sered (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 11.

²³⁴ Ammerman, “Spiritual But Not Religious?” 262, 265.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 265.

in the lives of those who claim to experience it must not be overlooked due to semantic uncertainty.

Exceptions and clarifications to definitions and descriptions point out to what extent those definitions and descriptions are unstable. Explanations of categories illuminate the challenges of definitions and descriptions and the amount of overlap present in the context of the real world. The project of categorizing modern yoga practice provides a useful example of this heuristic endeavor, and in this project I chose to develop the categories of religious yoga and spiritual yoga by first analyzing various traditions of modern yoga practice and then using them as discussion points for the concepts of “spiritual” and “religious.” Therefore when I say that religious yoga is X and spiritual yoga is Y, it is for heuristic purposes and not for absolute distinction since there will often be more parallels than differences.

While I grant the apparent conflict between intentionally avoiding concrete definitions and at the same time presenting a typology, the purpose of my typology is not to fence in the categories or limit discussion, but to give that discussion a more robust vocabulary and a greater appreciation for the shades on the palette that fall outside the base colors. More accurately, my focus in this dissertation is on the nuances of and between the categories, those human phenomena where the academic tendency to fix definitions runs up against real-world experience. In this spirit I will offer up descriptions of “religious” and “spiritual” in my typology of modern yoga with the caveat that they are starting

points, not absolutes, and that are derived from where and how they are used relative to the category being discussed.

Category: Religious Yoga

Religious yoga is a form of modern yoga practice that is at once connected to yoga's past and expressive of yoga's place in the contemporary religious marketplace. It may well be the most obscure among my categories, but it is the category that sparks controversies like the one surrounding the teaching of yoga in the public schools of Encinitas, CA.²³⁶ Religious yoga is the form of modern yoga most explicitly connected with established religious traditions; its practice has more in common with the classical and medieval schools of yoga within the Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain religious traditions. Yet the existence of modern posture practice at all, even minimally, betrays claims of 100% continuity with those older schools.

In the terms of Elizabeth De Michelis's typology of modern yoga, the religious yoga category is similar to her category of "Modern Denominational Yoga (MDY)," which includes some forms of American Hinduism and guru-centered groups. De Michelis describes MDY forms of modern yoga as "collectivist and more tightly structured, they make more demands on members, and have more stable belief and organizational systems which often result in more intolerant and/or exclusivist attitudes" than other forms of modern yoga,

²³⁶ Jain, *Selling Yoga*, 163-164.

and she includes ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness) and Rajneeshism as examples.²³⁷ To this list I would also add the Divine Life Society established by Swami Sivananda.²³⁸ In a later article, De Michelis shifts her description toward more what I mean by religious yoga, describing “denominational” yoga as

groups that promote their own forms of (usually meditational) yoga, but seemingly as a means to propagate, affirm or reinforce very distinctive and sometimes controversial worldviews, belief systems and lifestyles, rather than to connect with wider societal, ideological or religious webs of meaning.

De Michelis continues by noting that the formulation of denominational yoga as a category is part of an ongoing discussion.²³⁹

Andrea Jain continues that discussion by creating the category of “modern soteriological yoga,” which she contrasts with postural yoga. Jain describes modern soteriological yoga as those forms of yoga practice that “have emphasized traditional devotion to guru figures and have maintained strict organizational structures and doctrinal commitments.”²⁴⁰ These forms of yoga practice are often centered around a “godman” or “godwoman,” someone thought to be a representation of divinity on Earth. Jain cites Siddha Yoga as an example of modern soteriological yoga, and she describes its founder Muktananda as “an

²³⁷ Elizabeth De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga: Patañjali and Western Esotericism* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 188-189.

²³⁸ See Sarah Strauss, *Positioning Yoga: Balancing Acts Across Cultures* (New York: Berg, 2005).

²³⁹ Elizabeth De Michelis, “A Preliminary Survey of Modern Yoga Studies,” *Asian Medicine, Tradition and Modernity* 3, no. 1 (2007): 7.

²⁴⁰ Jain, *Selling Yoga*, 49

apt example of a late-twentieth century entrepreneurial godman.”²⁴¹ Other examples in Jain’s category include “insight meditation,” popularized by Satya Narayan Goenka; a form of rāja yoga taught by Guru Anjali in Long Island in the 1970s; and preksha dhyana, “a modern variety of Jain meditation and yoga.”²⁴²

My category of religious yoga takes cues from De Michelis’s and Jain’s categories, and expands them slightly. For my typology, religious yoga is modern yoga practice that is primarily within an existing religious tradition, such as Hinduism. For the purposes of my typology, religious yoga is typically described by one or more of three characteristics: 1) it is a tradition as such, meaning that it has a distinct characterization of itself as a tradition and not simply as a loosely affiliated group or association, 2) it is led by some figure or group of figures who claim direct lineage (either some founder in the distant past or a more recent person), and 3) it features an overt soteriological element with a delineated path that involves the body as a vehicle.

Legitimacy

The currencies of legitimacy for religious yoga practice are lineage and “authenticity.” Lineage refers to the direct connection between one’s teacher/guru and some exalted figure in the near or far past. Regardless of the recentness of

²⁴¹ Ibid., 50

²⁴² Ibid., 56. It is worth noting that many of the leaders of groups in the Religious Yoga category, including Muktananda, have troubling records of scandal and abuse. A further elaboration of these cases is beyond the scope of this dissertation. In addition to Jain, *Selling Yoga*, see Mark Singleton and Ellen Goldberg, eds., *Gurus of Modern Yoga* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) and Stefanie Syman, *The Subtle Body: The Story of Yoga in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010).

the exalted figure, that figure is likely rooted within a tradition that falls under the umbrellas of Hinduism, Buddhism, or Jainism. For example, contemporary teachers within the Divine Life Society cite their lineage to other teachers in the tradition, ultimately tying back to Swami Sivananda, who himself was influenced by others.²⁴³

“Authenticity” in this case refers to a strong textual or oral tradition within the practice that ties the modern practice to something “pre-modern.” These ties supposedly demonstrate authenticity as opposed to something newly created or appropriated. However, such a view is problematic. Jain’s *Selling Yoga* explores “how yoga has been perpetually context-sensitive, so there is no ‘legitimate,’ ‘authentic,’ ‘true,’ or ‘original’ tradition, only contextualized ideas and practices organized around the term *yoga*.”²⁴⁴ Nevertheless, *perceived* authenticity often wins the day.

Embodiment: The Religious Body

In religious yoga practice the body is a vehicle for enlightenment, regardless of if the particular school promotes separation from or integration with mind. The body in religious yoga practice is part of religious ritual; it is sacralized for the purposes of something greater. In the Hindu tantra traditions mentioned in chapter 1, yoga practice was intensely focused on the physical body, but not in the way a practitioner of fitness yoga would be focused on the physical body.

²⁴³ Sarah Strauss provides a lengthy discussion of Sivananda, including a brief lineage. Strauss, *Positioning Yoga*, xvii.

²⁴⁴ Jain, *Selling Yoga*, xvi. (emphasis original)

Instead, the religious yoga practitioner is focused on ways to cultivate the body toward a divine status. These seemingly strange (to our modern popular conceptions of yoga) bodily cultivations are not limited to medieval South Asia, though. In some early Americanized forms of yoga, practitioners carried out similar exercises to sacralize their bodies. Ida C. Craddock, who founded the Church of Yoga in 1899, became a controversial figure in the United States for promoting a yoga practice that embraced the body and sanctified sexuality, something quite outside the mainstream at the time.²⁴⁵

In terms of connectedness, the practitioner of religious yoga may feel some connection with themselves and/or the external world, depending on the religious tradition involved, but the central connection is with something greater than oneself and this world, be it a divine figure or idealistic concept, such as “Bliss” or “Liberation.” Consider Siddha Yoga and ISKCON as examples.

According to its website, Siddha Yoga promotes “oneness with God.”²⁴⁶ In the website’s description of haṭha yoga practice in particular, it does mention the physical benefits of practice, but that mention comes after the claim, “We practice hatha yoga to recognize that a divine light shines within us.”²⁴⁷ Another page states that one of the core teachings of Siddha Yoga is that the practitioner

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 22-24.

²⁴⁶ SYDA Foundation, “The Siddha Yoga Practices,” *Siddha Yoga*, accessed June 3, 2017, <http://www.siddhayoga.org/practices>.

²⁴⁷ SYDA Foundation, “Hatha Yoga,” *Siddha Yoga*, accessed June 3, 2017, <http://www.siddhayoga.org/practices/hatha-yoga>.

should “See God in each other.”²⁴⁸ Thus in Siddha Yoga, the concept of connectedness certainly applies to connection with oneself and others, but ultimately connection with the divinity within is more important.

On ISKCON’s website, one finds a similar presentation of the relationship between the physical aspects of yoga practice and those viewed as more important. Under the “Beliefs” section, a page on Bhakti Yoga reads,

Today, some yoga practitioners consider the physical benefits of yoga to be the end in themselves. But according to the traditional yoga systems, physical exercises are just one step on path of God realization. The *Gita* ultimately prescribes bhakti-yoga (the path of dedication and love) as the culmination of other yoga practices.²⁴⁹

Another page on “Meditation” discusses the use of mantra and adds, “Repetition of this mantra awakens the soul and brings strength, peace and happiness. It ultimately connects us with Lord Krishna and reveals our original spiritual life of eternal bliss and knowledge.”²⁵⁰ Here again the ultimate connection sought is one with something greater than oneself and the world, in this case Lord Krishna. Therefore in both cases, the body has a particular role, one that facilitates a soteriological end, not an end in itself.

In religious yoga, the “chakrbody” can be taken more literally than in other categories. The familiar visuals of the subtle body (*chakras*, *nāḍīs*, and *prāṇa*) directly correspond to practitioners’ perceptions of reality. The literal

²⁴⁸ SYDA Foundation, “Essential Siddha Yoga Teachings,” *Siddha Yoga*, accessed June 3, 2017, <http://www.siddhayoga.org/teachings/essential>.

²⁴⁹ The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), “Bhakti Yoga,” *ISKCON*, accessed June 3, 2017, <http://www.iskcon.org/bhakti-yoga/>.

²⁵⁰ The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), “Meditation,” *ISKCON*, accessed June 3, 2017, <http://www.iskcon.org/meditation/>.

interpretation of the subtle body is not limited to traditions pre-dating modern biology. In his presentation of rāja yoga, Vivekananda describes the subtle body as real, going so far as to argue that yogis have known what modern scientists are just now discovering.²⁵¹ The Siddha Yoga website describes haṭha yoga in terms of the subtle body. It reads, “After working the body in various postures, the hatha yoga classes end with *shavasana*, the relaxation pose. At this point in the practice, our subtle energy channels are open and the spiritual energy flows freely.”²⁵² Whether the description is meant literally or not is unimportant; what is important is the degree of prominence of the subtle body in contrast to that in other categories in my typology (with the exception of perhaps spiritual yoga).

Religious yoga emphasizes the devotional aspect of the body, but not in the sense of worshiping the physical body as such, which may accurately describe some versions of fitness yoga. Instead the body is the means of devotion, which is often expressed in one of two ways. First, it can be expressed in terms of physical movements toward some image (or conceptual idea) of a divine figure, deity or otherwise. The famous sun salutation series of postures (*sūryanamaskār*) may carry with it a perception of using the body as a means of devotion toward the sun or nature generally.²⁵³ Second, the body as the means of devotion can be expressed as the cultivation of one’s own body as a method for perceiving divinity in and/or through oneself. Paradoxically, this can be

²⁵¹ De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*,” 166-167.

²⁵² SYDA Foundation, “Hatha Yoga.”

²⁵³ Mark Singleton, *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 179-184.

accomplished by either building the body up toward some state of perfection or by breaking the body down via austerities to better perceive the divine. In all cases, the body in religious yoga is an important element of devotion, but it remains secondary to the ultimate goal.

Category: Spiritual Yoga

Spiritual yoga characterizes yoga practice by those who eschew things that look too much like organized religion, but want to explore something greater than themselves. It exists at the intersection of a number of religious and spiritual traditions, intentionally pulling from several without identifying with any. This is the yoga found in the New Age section of a bookstore instead of the Religion or Eastern Philosophy section. It is freeform yoga practice with an Om delicately woven inside a Celtic cross. Spirituality tends to be on the outskirts of Religious Studies. However, I agree with Roof in his analysis of modern American spirituality that any study of religion must include in its scope the spirituality element, especially in its “experiential” forms.²⁵⁴

In terms of De Michelis’s typology, spiritual yoga does not align as neatly as did religious yoga with her categories. The closest match would be with her category of Modern Meditational Yoga (MMY), which she groups with Modern Postural Yoga (MPY) as types of modern yoga that “stress the orthoperformative side of participation within a limited ‘classroom’ or ‘session’ type framework.” She

²⁵⁴ Roof, “Religion and Spirituality,” 137.

lists some expressions of Transcendental Meditation and certain Buddhist traditions as examples.²⁵⁵ In a later explanation of her typology, she also lists the Self Realization Fellowship of Swami Yogananda as an example of meditational yoga.²⁵⁶

While many of these forms of meditational yoga certainly fit within spiritual yoga, my category is less characterized by its style of practice and more by its place between set styles of practice. In this sense, forms of modern yoga that typically fall under De Michelis's Modern Postural Yoga (MPY), such as Iyengar Yoga or Ashtanga Yoga, can exist partially in the category of spiritual yoga. Stuart Sarbacker explains this hybridity by noting, "the principal proponents and formulators of modern yoga do not see the physicality of yoga as an impediment to spiritual development but rather believe that there is an inner practice of yoga that brings spiritual depth to its performance."²⁵⁷ Indeed B. K. S. Iyengar and K. Pattabhi Jois, founders of Iyengar Yoga and Ashtanga Yoga respectively, each wrote that practicing the *āsanas* without the non-physical elements (ethics and spirituality, for example) amounts to just physical fitness.²⁵⁸

Spiritual yoga is yoga with the "spiritual, but not religious" label. The phrase "spiritual, but not religious" has become a catchall term, but it does have some grounding. In *Spiritual, But Not Religious*, Robert Fuller describes this

²⁵⁵ De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, 187.

²⁵⁶ De Michelis, "A Preliminary Survey of Modern Yoga Studies," 7n31.

²⁵⁷ Stuart Ray Sarbacker, "Reclaiming the Spirit through the Body: The Nascent Spirituality of Modern Postural Yoga," *Entangled Religions* 1 (2014): 102.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 102-104. Sarbacker quotes B. K. S. Iyengar, *Light on Yoga: Yoga Dipika*, Reprint (New York: Schocken Books, [1977] 1994), 57 and Sri K. Pattabhi Jois, *Yoga Mala* (New York: North Point Press, 2002), 40.

group of “unchurched” people as “much more concerned with spiritual development than the vast majority of churchgoers. They view their lives as spiritual journeys, hoping to make new discoveries and gain new insights on an almost daily basis. Religion isn’t a fixed thing for them.”²⁵⁹ Fuller adds that there are two important distinctions between “spiritual, but not religious” people and those who are primarily “religious:” 1) the former are “dissatisfied with institutional religion,” and 2) they “show a greater interest in personal religious experience.”²⁶⁰ Of these people, those who engage in yoga practice often do so across the already thin boundaries of modern yoga traditions, ultimately creating a personalized yoga practice that appeals to the individual.

Spiritual yoga is typically described by one or more of four characteristics:

1) In contrast to religious yoga, it is not a tradition as such, meaning that it does not have a distinct characterization of itself, instead identifying at most as a loosely affiliated group, 2) it emphasizes personal experience over institutional doctrines, 3) it derives elements from multiple traditions, often religious traditions, and 4) it emphasizes body/mind integration, including integration with things and beings beyond ourselves.

Spiritual yoga, perhaps more so than other categories, describes individual practitioners within a group just as much as the group itself. Therefore spiritual yoga may come across as individualistic *at the expense of* the group, but one must recognize that “I feel this way about my practice” likely came at some

²⁵⁹ Fuller, *Spiritual, but Not Religious*, 4.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

point from “because my yoga teacher told me.” Nevertheless, an effective way to study spiritual yoga is to focus on the individual’s expression of their practice.

Legitimacy

The currency of legitimation for spiritual yoga is personal experience. With thin attachments to many traditions and strong ties to none, spiritual yoga has no clear cut lineage, nor does it have the grounding to spur claims of authenticity through written or oral texts. Instead it is built on the experiences of the individual. Therefore the teachers of spiritual yoga are diverse in terms of their own backgrounds and their approaches to yoga practice, and they earn their name within yoga circles based on their own stories and the stories they inspire in others.

Embodiment: The Spiritual Body

In spiritual yoga the mind-body dichotomy is far removed, and instead the bodymind is in an integral relationship with the spiritual realm, whatever that may mean for the practitioner, sometimes through the visual representation of the chakrabody. The body is a conduit for experiences that may be described in a variety of spirituality-laden terms: “oneness,” “connection,” “aura,” or even just “spiritual.”

Above, I quoted Fuller’s description of “spirituality,” and one line is relevant here: “An idea or practice is ‘spiritual’ when it reveals our personal desire to

establish a felt-relationship with the deepest meanings or powers governing life.”²⁶¹ This relationship, which could just as easily describe something “religious” in different contexts, is an expression of connectedness. And yet connectedness in spiritual yoga need not be so profound. I agree with Sarbacker’s argument that merely “feeling great” during or after practicing yoga is enough to suggest that the practice of yoga may elicit an embodied sense of heightened awareness of one’s whole bodymind state.²⁶² These aspects of spirituality are partial descriptions of the connectedness associated with spiritual yoga. Other aspects include the establishment of relationships not only with meanings, powers, or oneself, but also with others.

For example, in Ammerman’s study on religion and spirituality, one of the prominent meanings of “spirituality” given by just over half of the participants (48 of 95) falls under the taxonomy of “connection,” which Ammerman defines as “Transcendent sense of connection to others.”²⁶³ This category of “connection” aligns with the concept of connectedness I established in chapter 2. Going further than connectedness, it also points to an aspect of spirituality that sits outside the usual associations with religion, especially mainstream Western religious traditions: non-theistic or extra-theistic understandings of spiritual. Ammerman refers to this group of responses as part of an “Extra-Theistic package,” which refers to descriptions of spiritual experience that include

²⁶¹ Ibid., 8-9.

²⁶² Sarbacker, “Reclaiming the Spirit through the Body,” 102.

²⁶³ Ammerman, “Spiritual But Not Religious?” 264.

elements outside of oneself. She writes, “Here spirituality is located in the core of the self, in connection to community, in the sense of awe engendered by the natural world and various forms of beauty, and in the life philosophies crafted by an individual seeking life’s meaning.”²⁶⁴ Ammerman even goes on to note that these sorts of “Extra-Theistic” spiritualities can be common among people whose religious communities feature and encourage activities outside the traditional, such as “offering classes in meditation or yoga.”²⁶⁵

The specifically yogic idea of connectedness comes to life in spiritual yoga via its use of the chakrabody. The chakrabody is used more freely in spiritual yoga than in the other categories, and its use ranges from the purely symbolic to the literal. In spiritual yoga the subtle body may also be accompanied by elements from completely different traditions, especially those perceived as indigenous or “traditional” by practitioners. Bender writes that in many modern forms of spirituality and spiritual practices, the subtle body is a prominent means of expression of ideas of a non-physical body, which can be described as “energetic body” or “astral body.” In her interviews with modern spiritual practitioners, who she refers to as “metaphysicals,” Bender found that these practitioners often understood the subtle body as “a scientific reality, subject to the laws and rules of energy (as well as to some esoteric rules not yet proven by

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 268.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 271.

science).²⁶⁶ On the other end of the spiritual yoga spectrum are those who embrace the chakrbody in a more symbolic fashion, referring to the different chakras as representations of different aspects of the physical body or elements of personality and including components from non-South Asian traditions.

Overall, the use of the chakrbody in spiritual yoga is a decent descriptor of the whole category. The chakrbody has its origins in South Asian tantric traditions and became a feature of yoga practice after the medieval period. It made its way into Western intellectual spheres through groups such as the Theosophists, who appropriated the chakrbody concepts to mean a variety of things across several Indian intellectual traditions.²⁶⁷ Now it has come to be associated with modern spirituality generally, unmoored from any specific tradition, let alone a yoga tradition. In its journey from specific to general, the chakrbody in spiritual yoga, much like spiritual yoga itself, has hardly any boundaries and is loosely characterized by being loosely characterized with several traditions and practices simultaneously.

Comparing Religious Yoga and Spiritual Yoga

On the spectrum of my typology of modern yoga, religious yoga and spiritual yoga are distinguished more by degrees than anything concrete. It largely depends on which aspects one chooses to place in the foreground and

²⁶⁶ Bender, *The New Metaphysicals*, 95. Bender uses “metaphysicals” to describe spiritual practitioners in order to accentuate the linkage of the practitioners in her study to American religious history. *The New Metaphysicals*, 6-7.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 97-98.

background. Certainly religious yoga is distinguished from spiritual yoga by being more directly aligned with an established religious tradition, typically but not necessarily of South Asian origin. Religious yoga is also less likely than spiritual yoga to borrow from a variety of traditions to create its identity, though Neo-Vedānta provides a powerful counterexample. Spiritual yoga is also often less structured than religious yoga, and I characterize spiritual yoga and its practitioners as overtly opposed to the “religious” label. And yet as much as they distance themselves from “religion” as such, practitioners of spiritual yoga are very likely to pull from several established religious and/or spiritual traditions while fashioning their individual practice.

Aside from these distinctions, the categories share important parallels, such as featuring yoga practice as one part of a group of practices (which may include meditation and/or chanting). One important parallel in particular has to do with how in both religious yoga and spiritual yoga, yoga practice presents some alternative to the mainstream religious and/or spiritual practices in the United States, practices that yoga practitioners may abandon for a variety of reasons. These abandonments may be only partial. Aspects of American religious identity that may be hidden may remain in the yoga practice. On the one hand, Americans have a long history of identifying as overtly religious, usually Christian, and on the other hand there exists an American drive toward rebellion and independence, both literally and intellectually, even within Christianity. The latter often takes the form of expressing religiosity within an “other” tradition,

namely any tradition outside the mainstream. Religious yoga offers practitioners a way to maintain religiosity while being part of an “outside” tradition, and thus religious yoga is identified with the element of rebelliousness and independence in American culture by being outside the mainstream. Spiritual yoga is one of the strongest expressions of the “spiritual, but not religious” label in America, and it has particular resonance with the American focus on the individual or self. Thus it also embodies the American identities of rebellion and independence, but in a more inward-facing sense than religious yoga.

Intellectual Development of Religious Yoga and Spiritual Yoga

The interplay between religious yoga and spiritual yoga has roots in the intellectual history of yoga in America. As the nineteenth century turned to the twentieth, two notable intellectual events shaped the contemporary expressions of religious yoga and spiritual yoga: the influence of Vedānta and Neo-Vedānta and the debate over rāja yoga and haṭha yoga.

Vedānta and Neo-Vedānta

In both religious yoga and spiritual yoga, a practitioner’s leap to yoga practice from mainstream American intellectual traditions is not across as wide of a gulf as one may think, ideologically speaking, and often the emphases within these expressions of modern yoga practice are near the practitioner’s comfort zone, intentionally or not.

Wade Dazey argues that yoga practice caught on in America because of its focus on the self, but not the mundane self. He states, “the idea of the ‘self’ in Yoga...has deep affinities with certain strains in American forms of Christianity.”²⁶⁸ The Vedantic and Neo-Vedantic notion of self is very different than the self in classical yoga, yet modern yoga via Vivekananda picks up the Neo-Vedantic self, which is a universal self. This idea of self mingles with intellectual trends of the time to create a spiritual understanding of the self that can be experienced through practice.²⁶⁹ This modern conception of the self is commonly found in modern religious yoga and spiritual yoga practices. It is a concept that is an amalgam of classical yoga language, Neo-Vedānta concepts of the universal self, and ingrained American spirituality of experience. This form of American spirituality was embodied by Vivekananda in his presentation of yoga. His version of spirituality was an empowerment of the self, which was embraced by Americans of the time.²⁷⁰

This focus on the self is part of a larger trend in modern American culture of “subjectivization,” or an emphasis on the subjective experience of the world over and opposed to experience perceived as objective or universal.²⁷¹ A prominent and relevant example of subjectivization is the shift away from organized religion and toward individualized spiritualities. Paul Heelas and Linda

²⁶⁸ Wade Dazey, “Yoga in America: Some Reflections from the Heartland,” abstract, in *Theory and Practice of Yoga: Essays in Honour of Gerald James Larson*, ed. Knut A Jacobsen (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 409-414.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 415-419.

²⁷⁰ Van der Veer, “Spirituality in Modern Society,” 1108.

²⁷¹ Christopher Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West, Volume II: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture, and Occulture* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2005), 6-7.

Woodhead argue that the general trend in modernity toward the self and subjectivity will lead people who are looking toward “forms of the sacred” generally to choose individualized spiritualities over religions, because in the latter “individuals must conform at the expense of the cultivation of their unique subjective-lives.”²⁷²

The individualized spirituality, guided by a focus on the self, even if it does fall near the vague boundaries of an organized religious tradition (including those that would fall closer to the category of religious yoga) is more subjective and is characterized more by the descriptors of spirituality than by those typically associated with religion. On the far end of this spectrum would be practices that fall closer to spiritual yoga. These spiritualities can take a wide range of forms, from those practiced neatly within a mainstream tradition to those exhibited by people who pick and choose from a variety of mainstream and obscure traditions to create their own “ism.”

Haṭha Yoga vs. Rāja Yoga

Another case to consider is that of rāja yoga vs. haṭha yoga in late nineteenth/early twentieth century America. This ideological debate illustrates how a form of yoga practice that falls closely to religious yoga appealed particularly to American intellectuals. In the recent history of yoga in America, American interest in yoga has shifted from the supposedly higher-level rāja yoga,

²⁷² Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion Is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 6.

often translated as “royal yoga,” to the more physical practices of haṭha yoga, often translated as “forceful yoga.” In the early years of yoga’s presence in America, the focus on rāja yoga fit nicely with the intellectual climate of the time. The Transcendentalists and similar groups found great worth in the philosophical and spiritual teachings of the classic Indian texts, but thought very little of the day-to-day practices of popular Hinduism. Part of this derived from what Stephen Prothero calls the “Hinduphobia” of the time. Prothero refers to a split as between “literary Hinduism” and “lived Hinduism.” The former included the famous texts, such as the *Bhagavad Gita*, while the latter comprised of the holy people performing austerities or rituals.²⁷³ Popular depictions of Indian haṭha yoga practitioners in the late nineteenth century easily fit into the “lived Hinduism” category, and were thus not the central interest of influential intellectuals. Indeed, the images of haṭha yogis disseminated in verbal and visual forms were often used to dissuade Americans from practicing haṭha yoga with its focus on *āsana*.²⁷⁴

Helena Blavatsky, founder of the Theosophical Society, set the tone for Western distinction between haṭha yoga and rāja yoga. Though she showed interest and sympathy for the physical and reportedly magical elements famous in the haṭha yoga tradition, she referred to haṭha yoga as a “lower” type of yoga

²⁷³ Stephen Prothero, “Hinduphobia and Hinduphilia in U.S. Culture,” in *The Stranger’s Religion: Fascination and Fear*, ed. Anna Lännström (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 23.

²⁷⁴ Catherine Albanese, “Sacred (and Secular) Self-Fashioning: Esalen and the American Transformation of Yoga,” in *On the Edge of the Future: Esalen and the Evolution of American Culture*, ed. Jeffrey J. Kripal and Glenn W. Shuck (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 50.

that could not reach the esteemed levels of rāja yoga. English translations and interpretations of the *Yoga Sūtras* in this time period picked up on the split between haṭha yoga and rāja yoga made prominent by the Theosophists, and soon the distinction took a firm hold in American intellectual circles.²⁷⁵

Vivekananda appeared amid this intellectual context and carried the distinction further, emphasizing the benefits of a meditative type of yoga practice over a physical one.²⁷⁶ Jain notes that while rāja yoga-style practices were viewed suspiciously outside the intellectual milieu, the more physical yoga practices, even homegrown Americanized traditions like Craddock's, were perceived as much scarier.²⁷⁷

The distinction of rāja yoga and haṭha yoga is problematic for the categories of religious yoga and spiritual yoga, because on the surface both rāja yoga and haṭha yoga could be perceived as falling closer to the religious yoga category. Rāja yoga developed in the United States as a tradition as such that in its modern expression is tied to a particular figure, Vivekananda, and carries an intellectual soteriology. Haṭha yoga, too, is tied to particular physical practices that stem from an assortment of "legitimate" traditions and seek to sanctify the body toward a divine goal. Yet in both cases the practices are relatively new in the history of yoga and therefore may lack the perception of true "authenticity," and we know from their historical development that they pull from an assortment

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 50-52.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 55.

²⁷⁷ Jain, *Selling Yoga*, 24, 27.

of older traditions and take on the American glorification of the individual, resulting in practices that look more like spiritual yoga. Modern yoga, even in the seemingly straightforward rāja yoga vs. haṭha yoga distinction, muddies our perception as soon as we take a closer look.

The more contemporary version of the rāja yoga/haṭha yoga split blurs the already fuzzy line between the categories that one might want to apply to each. In her interviews with modern spiritual practitioners, Bender comes upon a friendly intellectual rift between spiritual practitioners who practice yoga and others who practice yoga for less spiritual reasons. She also notes that some overall themes of the yoga classes were “simplicity” and “turning people to their ‘natural’ and true selves.” One teacher interviewed by Bender correctly notes that in the *Yoga Sūtras*, Patañjali only refers to a seated position, nothing like the dozens of postures one finds in most modern yoga classes.²⁷⁸ However, this does not mean that the *āsanas* are not worth practicing. Instead, there is a reapplication of the classical yoga concept to the more modern forms of yoga practice. Therefore here we have an interesting mix of grounding in a textual tradition, but only selectively. The application is to a wider sense of spiritual awareness that pulls from classical yoga, medieval haṭha yoga, and modern yoga. Crossing multiple traditions, albeit all yoga traditions, and selectively applying concepts moves this form of predominantly meditational yoga toward the spiritual yoga category.

²⁷⁸ Bender, *The New Metaphysicals*, 103.

However, once again it is not so clear-cut. In an earlier part of her study, Bender writes about yoga classes that meet in churches. She notes, “Yoga teachers who teach in churches were less likely to emphasize health and fitness and more likely to include chanting, extended periods of meditation, and focus on the spiritual aspects of yoga.” She goes on to quote a particular yoga teacher, who states that teaching in a church created a “poetic” atmosphere that attracted students “who really were in it for their souls not just to reduce stress.”²⁷⁹ At first glance, this sort of yoga practice appears to fall mostly under the category of spiritual yoga because of its emphasis on individual intent and its mixing of traditions (yoga in a church). However, Bender notes that contemporary spiritual practitioners (including yoga practitioners) who meet together in groups on a regular basis tend to develop aspects of “congregational religion,” wherein the groups “orient themselves toward ‘congressional’ and ‘group’ projects, including worship, meditation, education, or discussion.” She adds that these groups “generally view themselves as pursuing similar philosophical, ritual, or communal ends (albeit without a shared theology.)”²⁸⁰ This takes what appears to be spiritual yoga closer to religious yoga based on the inclusion of elements that get closer to forming a clear tradition, at least in the prevailing American understanding of religious traditions, which is heavily influenced by Protestantism.²⁸¹ However, Bender notes the lack of a shared theology, which

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 34.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 35.

²⁸¹ Catherine Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion*, 2nd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wentworth Publishing Company, 1992), 396-431; Jain, *Selling Yoga*, 22.

may be enough to prevent this example from shifting entirely within the hue of religious yoga on the modern yoga color palette.

Further Blurring the Categories: Interpreting Attributed Characteristics

The examples above demonstrate that distinctions between religious yoga and spiritual yoga are not so simple. The two are relatively close on the color palette of modern yoga, and the two terms often complement one another in analysis. Consider one more contemporary expression of these two categories in an example of a focused study of modern yoga practitioners, their attribution of what they experience in their yoga practice, and a scholarly interpretation of these attributions.

Based on her case study of practitioners of Iyengar Yoga in Britain, Suzanne Hasselle-Newcombe argues that scholars should be “considering the role that a physical practice plays in contemporary spirituality and religiosity.”²⁸² In her article on a series of interviews with Iyengar Yoga practitioners in Britain, she provides a wealth of information on how modern yoga practice and the vague concept of spirituality are intertwined in this physical practice. Her study focused on Iyengar practitioners in Britain at a yoga conference. Hasselle-Newcombe admits that this is a small demographic and notes that her analysis should not be generalized to the larger category of modern yoga practitioners.²⁸³

²⁸² Suzanne Hasselle-Newcombe, “Spirituality and ‘Mystical Religion’ in Contemporary Society: A Case Study of British Practitioners of the Iyengar Method of Yoga,” abstract, *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 20, no. 3 (2005): 305.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 309.

However, her observations point to cultural trends that nonetheless do characterize the context of modern yoga.

In her study, the survey given to participants did not make any attempt to give definition or meaning to the word “spirituality,” allowing participants to interpret the term however they wished.²⁸⁴ The results point to a prominent place for spirituality among the practitioners of Iyengar Yoga, a school that may carry more of a fitness yoga or wellness yoga perception among a popular audience. While a majority of the respondents (60%) said that they began practice for physical reasons, 48% listed spiritual development as a reason for starting. A majority (85%) said that yoga practice provided an additional “sense of meaning to life.” Another important finding in her survey was that the interest in the spiritual component of yoga practice did not vary between short-term and long-term practitioners of Iyengar Yoga. Finally, she found that 83% of the practitioners said that they have a spiritual life compared to 45% of the UK population generally.²⁸⁵

While her survey was focused on spirituality, Hasselle-Newcombe analyzes her data via the idea of “mystical religion,” a concept developed by Ernst Troeltsch and expanded upon by sociologist Colin Campbell. “Mystical religion” in Troeltsch’s terms deals with everyday, but profound spiritual

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 310.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 311-312.

experiences for individuals.²⁸⁶ Hasselle-Newcombe writes that Campbell

expands this concept to include

1) an emphasis on direct, inward, and present religious experience; 2) an ultimate goal of union (or reunion) with God or the divine. (Related to this union is the idea of a progression of the soul's relationship to the divine); 3) an opposition to the materialism and 'selfishness' of 'the world'; 4) religious syncretism, especially the combination of religious and philosophical ideas and an acceptance of religious relativity.²⁸⁷

Hasselle-Newcombe uses her data to argue that at least this expression of modern yoga practice appears to fit all of Troeltsch's/Campbell's characteristics, which make it a "mystical religion."²⁸⁸

Hasselle-Newcombe concludes by offering "mystical religion" as an alternative to "spirituality" in describing practices like modern yoga.²⁸⁹ Thus "mystical religion" among Iyengar Yoga practitioners could be a category that involves elements from both the religious yoga and spiritual yoga parts of the palette, in addition to the elements from fitness yoga and wellness yoga, which are discussed in the next chapter.

Conclusion

The argument that modern spiritual yoga practitioners are drawn to ideals of the self found in Neo-Vedānta aligns with the sociological finding that claims of spirituality or spiritual experiences are rarely unaccompanied by some sort of religious tradition, be it Neo-Vedānta or Christianity. Ammerman writes,

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 316.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 317.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 318-319.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 320.

The dearth of actual practitioners of “spirituality” who are not also drawing on religious communities and traditions reinforces the empirical picture that has consistently emerged from surveys as well. People who choose one designation (spiritual) but not another (religious) do not necessarily represent a prevalent new form of religiosity, so much as a prevalent form of cultural rhetoric.²⁹⁰

Since, as Ammerman concludes, “spiritual, but not religious” is more “cultural rhetoric” than an actual category, and hardly anyone who identifies as “spiritual” does so without any ties to a religious tradition, it is to the benefit of Religious Studies to not dismiss spirituality as something separate from the more straightforward traditional categories of religion. Spirituality necessarily complicates understandings of religion that rely too heavily on set categories. The reality of the world, and especially the modern world, dictates that rigid categories are inadequate for proper engagement with religion and/or spirituality.²⁹¹

In the example I gave in the introduction to this chapter from Bender, the modern yoga teacher does self-identify as placing an emphasis on spirituality, which means that she may pick the category of spiritual yoga as her home.²⁹² However, in order to fulfill the objectives of a broad range of classes, a yoga teacher may engage in a form of code-switching to match the context, limitations, and allowances of their audience and physical setting. In other words, the language a teacher uses to describe a particular part of yoga practice in a health spa may differ from that used in a church setting, though perhaps more in

²⁹⁰ Ammerman, “Spiritual But Not Religious?” 275.

²⁹¹ Ibid., 275-276.

²⁹² Bender, *The New Metaphysicals*, 42-43.

emphasis than in semantics. Real life and real expressions of human practices rarely fit into set categories, but instead of throwing up one's hands, consider the opportunities for exploring aspects of dynamic categories in a much wider range of areas of inquiry. The next two chapters will explore three categories of modern yoga practice that are not so obviously relevant for Religious Studies. I will suggest that they offer more opportunities than one might think.

Chapter 4: Fitness Yoga and Wellness Yoga

Introduction

At first glance the categories of fitness yoga and wellness yoga are a sharp 180-degree turn from religious yoga and spiritual yoga. Whereas religious yoga and spiritual yoga fall within the realm of Religious Studies with relative ease, fitness yoga and wellness yoga seem to be different things altogether, linked only by the inclusion of yoga practice, which as I have shown is rather amorphous and inconsistent. Indeed some expressions that would feature the colors of fitness yoga and wellness yoga on the modern yoga palette are mostly lacking any overtly religious and/or spiritual elements, and these expressions are probably more familiar to American culture generally.

This chapter will explore these next two categories in my typology of modern yoga practice both in terms of their distinctness from the other categories and their more subtle similarities and overlaps. As with the previous chapter, I will first present each category individually in terms of legitimacy and embodiment, and then I will consider the categories together to discuss how they express aspects of American identity. For this project, legitimacy refers to how a particular yoga practice that falls close to one of these categories establishes itself as an authentic version of that type of yoga practice, and embodiment refers to how the category relates to the body and/or bodymind. I break up embodiment into two prominent aspects that help to illuminate the category, connectedness and the

chakrabody. Connectedness refers to how the practice affects an individual's sense of connection to their bodymind, to others, and to the outside world.

Chakrabody refers to how the practice acknowledges, if at all, the idea of the subtle body that originated in the medieval Indian tantra and yoga traditions.

The degree of presence, or lack thereof, of the chakrabody in these two categories is historically interesting given their focus on what we would normally consider the physical body. South Asian traditions that engaged with the subtle body often did so in terms of manipulation of the physical body to have some desired physiological effect. These effects were often steps toward some soteriological end, which may become more expressed in religious yoga.

However, the ability for intentional self-realization wherein one can improve one's state of existence has tremendous implications for yoga practice in terms of health and well-being. Thus I agree with Andrea Jain that these physiological effects could also be perceived as cultivating ends unto themselves, and in modern expressions of fitness yoga and wellness yoga, they are.²⁹³

Mark Singleton notes that some of the *āsanas* listed in the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā*, a prominent haṭha yoga text, “are credited with curative properties, such as destroying poisons.”²⁹⁴ Thus, medieval yoga practice can be interpreted as a therapeutic working toward various forms of bodily health. As yoga practice moved into the modern era, the subtle body remained a prominent

²⁹³ Andrea R. Jain, *Selling Yoga: From Counterculture to Pop Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 95-129.

²⁹⁴ Mark Singleton, *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 29.

feature of yoga practice. In the mid-nineteenth through early twentieth centuries, researchers in India such as N.C. Paul, Major D. Basu, Swami Kuvalayananda, and Sri Yogendra made the subtle body one of the early subjects of scientific investigation into yoga practice.²⁹⁵

As a reminder, the subtle body is the non-physical physiology interconnected with a series of channels referred to as *nāḍīs*. Subtle energy flows through these *nāḍīs*, connecting a series of *chakras*, which are located along the spinal column. One of the goals of haṭha yoga is to awaken and give rise to *kuṇḍalinī*, a dynamic and energy-filled element of the subtle body that naturally resides at the base of one's spine. As a practitioner cultivates their body through certain practices, they may gain the ability to raise their *kuṇḍalinī* through consecutive *chakras* from the base up through the highest *chakra*, said to exist right above the head.²⁹⁶ Though much of the technical nature of these pieces of the subtle anatomy is omitted in modern yoga—mostly an intentional effort by popularizers of yoga in the late nineteenth century to remove overly tantric elements—the general concept of the cultivating of the body remains to this day.²⁹⁷ Indeed, cultivating the body is the dominant characteristic of both fitness yoga and wellness yoga, just in different senses.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 32.

²⁹⁶ Harish Johari, *Chakras: Energy Centers of Transformation* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 2000), 21-69.

²⁹⁷ Geoffrey Samuel, "Endpiece," *Asian Medicine, Tradition and Modernity* 3, no. 1 (2007): 184.

Category: Fitness Yoga

Fitness yoga may be the most visible form of modern yoga practice in the United States, and it is certainly the form most associated with yoga in popular culture. This is the yoga of gyms and fitness studios; according to “The 2016 Yoga in America Study,” 48% of Americans have practiced yoga in a health club or gym, second only to home practice (65%).²⁹⁸ Fitness yoga is one of the most commercialized categories of yoga, and it is often to what people are referring when they say they practice yoga.

Fitness yoga as a standalone category is relatively new even in the short history of modern yoga. Though hints of fitness yoga certainly appeared in the early and mid-twentieth century in the form of Indian, European, and American expressions of physical culture, the forms more fitting to my category appeared within the last few decades, largely in response to larger trends in American fitness culture. In her history of modern yoga in the United States, Stefanie Syman argues that the form of practice that I would categorize as fitness yoga grew out of a response to the aerobics boom in the 1980s. Aerobics focused on strength while yoga practice at the time was perceived as slow and gentle. Thus yoga teachers such as Bikram Choudhury and Sri K. Pattabhi Jois presented

²⁹⁸ Yoga Journal and Yoga Alliance, “The 2016 Yoga in America Study” (Ipsos Public Affairs, 2016), <http://media.yogajournal.com/wp-content/uploads/2016-Yoga-in-America-Study-Comprehensive-RESULTS.pdf>, 28.

their yoga, Bikram Yoga and Ashtanga Yoga respectively, as more robust and powerful forms of practice.²⁹⁹

In terms of Elizabeth De Michelis's typology, fitness yoga falls squarely within her category of Modern Postural Yoga (MPY), which she describes as forms of yoga practice that "developed a stronger focus on the performance of *āsana* (yogic postures) and *prāṇāyāma* (yogic breathing)."³⁰⁰ As such, MPY is a broad category of modern yoga practice and could easily encompass all five of my categories, particularly the last three. De Michelis later refines her category of "postural" yoga, noting that "Their religio-philosophical teachings...are relatively unfocused and usually polyvalent and therefore mostly compatible with transnational trends tending towards secularisation and/or acculturation."³⁰¹ This narrows the category toward what I have in mind for fitness yoga and wellness yoga. To describe fitness yoga more specifically, I would narrow De Michelis's category of postural yoga even further to largely exclude any overtly religio-philosophical teachings. This more fully secularized form of yoga practice that focuses on posture and (to a lesser extent) breath is fitness yoga.

Finally, fitness yoga is a "gateway yoga"³⁰² in that it is often the means through which modern practitioners discover yoga at all and potentially move

²⁹⁹ Stefanie Syman, *The Subtle Body: The Story of Yoga in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), 264-276

³⁰⁰ Elizabeth De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga: Patañjali and Western Esotericism* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 187.

³⁰¹ Elizabeth De Michelis, "A Preliminary Survey of Modern Yoga Studies," *Asian Medicine, Tradition and Modernity* 3, no. 1 (2007) 6.

³⁰² While writing this dissertation, I independently came up with the term "gateway yoga." However, an Internet search revealed that the phrase was used in a 2016 article on "Rage Yoga."

their practice toward other areas on the modern yoga color palette. Because of this “gateway” nature of fitness yoga, elements of this type of yoga practice appear in a wide variety of yoga traditions, sometimes as a recruitment strategy for schools of yoga where the religious or spiritual elements become more dominant over time or with the degree of dedication. Examples of predominantly fitness yoga include generic haṭha yoga classes, Bikram Yoga, Ashtanga Yoga, and yoga hybrids that incorporate other types of physical fitness. Into this category I would also include the rather eccentric forms of modern yoga practice, such as Cat Yoga (Meowga).³⁰³

For the purposes of my typology, fitness yoga is typically described by one or more of four characteristics: 1) it is typically featured in a gym setting alongside other predominantly fitness-related practices, 2) it is commercialized specifically as a means for fitness, 3) it mostly lacks any reference to the religious and/or spiritual history of the practice, and 4) it promotes the popular imagery of a “yoga body.”

The teacher interviewed in the article uses the term to describe one type of yoga leading to another, which is also how I am using the term in this dissertation. Jeremy Simes, “Rage Yoga Brings Taboo to Calgary Yogi Scene,” *Metro*, January 11, 2016, accessed June 18, 2017, <http://www.metronews.ca/news/calgary/2016/01/11/rage-yoga-brings-taboo-to-calgary-yogi-scene.html>. The term “gateway” in relation to yoga practice also appears in Eleanor Freyhan Odenheimer’s Ph.D. dissertation, wherein she explores the theme of “gateway” among practitioners in a study on yoga and Christianity. Specifically, Odenheimer understands “gateway” as “how the majority of participants were first initiated into yoga,” which is roughly the same sense I mean when discussing the term “gateway yoga.” Eleanor Freyhan Odenheimer, “Adaptations of Yoga: Christian Interpretations” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Tennessee, 2012), http://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_graddiss/1453, 93.

³⁰³ Dana Meltzer Zepeda, “Cat Yoga: The Rise of Meowga,” *Yoga Journal*, August 3, 2016, accessed June 4, 2017, <http://www.yogajournal.com/practice-section/cat-yoga-meowga/>.

Legitimacy

The currency of legitimacy for fitness yoga is “results,” by which I mean the end goal of the “yoga body,” which can mean different things to different practitioners. In fitness yoga, the success of a particular class or teacher is often based on word of mouth from those who have gotten results, mostly purely physical results, from their practice. One can see the “yoga body” result as a means of legitimacy for fitness yoga simply by doing an online search for yoga or glancing at posters for a nearby gym yoga class.³⁰⁴ For fitness yoga, the images one will find are often very fit people, by popular culture standards, wearing very little, often colorful, clothing. For added legitimacy, the people in the images may even be at the beach or some other desirable location. In this way the legitimacy of “results” plays hand-in-hand with the contemporary commercialization of yoga, which is perhaps most prominent in fitness yoga. In other words, the goal of the “yoga body” is literally a selling point.

Embodiment: The Physical Body

Fitness yoga emphasizes the physical body. In a way fitness yoga shares similarities with religious yoga in its view of the physical body as the means

³⁰⁴ As an example, the custom design website PosterMyWall.com features templates for a wide variety of posters and/or flyers. Within their section of Fitness templates, the ones specifically for yoga classes feature imagery of the “yoga body.” The “yoga body” is in notable contrast to many bodies depicted on other types of fitness poster templates. The most obvious difference is that of muscle bulk. Whereas generic fitness poster templates feature images of people with large, overly defined musculature, the yoga images feature more lean practitioners. “Fitness Poster Templates,” *PosterMyWall.com*, accessed February 20, 2017, <https://www.postermywall.com/index.php/g/fitness-posters>.

toward some end. In the case of religious yoga, that end could be enlightenment or some divine union, and in the case of fitness yoga, that end is some ideal of the physically fit body, a “yoga body.” The image of the “yoga body,” which has taken center stage in popular presentations of yoga practice in various media, has become commonplace in contemporary American society, and it is quite a narrow view of a yoga practitioner. A recent analysis by Jennifer Webb, et al. of female cover models on three major yoga magazines (*Yoga Journal*, *Om Yoga & Lifestyle*, and *Yoga Magazine*) found that the majority “were rated as appearing younger than 40 years of age, White, and of low average weight possessing a thin, athletic body shape and small breasts.”³⁰⁵

While many forms of modern yoga are presented in terms of the physical body, particularly the physical benefits of practice, fitness yoga features the physical focus of practice right up front. This is most visible in popular media that specifically advertise yoga practice *in terms of physical fitness*. For example, one can buy a DVD that promotes yoga for runners³⁰⁶ or read an online article titled “5 Yoga Poses for Killer Abs.”³⁰⁷ In both cases the fitness aspects take up the majority of the foreground, and features prominent in other categories, such as soteriological ends, are largely or totally absent. While these examples may at first glance appear to lack the complexity of those in the other categories of

³⁰⁵ Jennifer B. Webb et al., “Is the Yoga Bod the New Skinny? A Comparative Content Analysis of Mainstream Yoga Lifestyle Magazine Covers,” *Body Image* 20 (2017): 93.

³⁰⁶ Gaiam, *Athletic Yoga: Yoga for Runners*, DVD (Gaiam, 2015).

³⁰⁷ K. Aleisha Fetters, “5 Yoga Poses for Killer Abs,” *Fitness Magazine*, accessed June 4, 2017, <http://www.fitnessmagazine.com/workout/yoga/poses/yoga-poses-for-abs/>.

modern yoga, fitness yoga practices are still bodily practices that may cultivate varieties of connectedness.

Connectedness within fitness yoga rarely operates on the idealistic level that one finds in spiritual yoga or religious yoga; the practitioner in fitness yoga is not usually connecting with something overtly religious. However, there are ways connectedness appears that are nonetheless real for the fitness yoga practitioner, particularly in terms of awareness of one's own physical body. This awareness comes in two forms. The first form is the literal awareness of the physical body. Aches and pains associated with yoga practice, like those associated with many other forms of physical fitness, may make one realize where previously unknown muscle groups reside. On a more subtle level, this form is also greater awareness of one's bodily processes and one's responsiveness to them.³⁰⁸ This may not appear to be a sophisticated sort of connectedness with oneself, but it is nonetheless real and is one of the prominent characteristics of embodiment in fitness yoga.

The second form is more abstract. Fitness yoga practitioners often develop an awareness of their own body image. The most potent and problematic example of this is the image of the "yoga body" noted above, but even in general terms practitioners may develop greater awareness of their bodies in ways that may affect their body image to different degrees. In a recent

³⁰⁸ Jennifer J. Daubenmier, "The Relationship of Yoga, Body Awareness, and Body Responsiveness to Self-Objectification and Disordered Eating," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (2005): 207–219.

study of Iyengar Yoga and Bikram Yoga practitioners in Australia, Leeann Mahlo and Marika Tiggemann suggest that those who engaged in yoga practice generally had a more positive body image than those who do not practice yoga. They write, “our study provides evidence that the embodying nature of yoga and the accompanying sense of embodiment may be protective against self-objectification, thus facilitating a more positive body image.”³⁰⁹ Both the physical pain and the development of one’s body image are forms of connectedness associated with fitness yoga practice that may compel practitioners into an awareness of their bodies that they may not have had before.

Another connectedness found in fitness yoga is connection with a community of fitness yoga practitioners. In chapter 1 I referenced Sarah Strauss’s idea of a “community of practice” for yoga practitioners,³¹⁰ an idea that applies to fitness yoga. Practitioners of fitness yoga are spread across the globe, yet they are of a similar community bonded by a particular form of yoga practice. A practitioner of fitness yoga can generally drop into any yoga class that also falls near the fitness yoga category and fit right in with the other practitioners, perhaps even sharing with others the small differences between that session and their regular one.

³⁰⁹ Leeann Mahlo and Marika Tiggemann, “Yoga and Positive Body Image: A Test of the Embodiment Model,” *Body Image* 18, no. 4 (2016): 141. Webb, et al. discuss the negative side of yoga’s effect on body image, mostly in terms of the presentation of the “yoga body” in various media. Webb et al., “Is the Yoga Bod the New Skinny?” 88.

³¹⁰ Sarah Strauss, “Adapt, Adjust, Accommodate’: The Production of Yoga in a Transnational World,” *History & Anthropology* 13, no. 3 (2002): 246-247.

In fitness yoga, the chakrabody is nearly invisible. It is not necessarily avoided as it is in biomedical yoga, but it is not a prominent feature. Singleton argues that one aspect in the reduction of the chakrabody in predominantly *āsana*-based yoga was due to the development of visual representation of the body in yoga practice. He writes that the shift from illustration to photography brought the “naturalistic (or anatomical) body to the fore” instead of the subtle body.³¹¹

However, I suggest that the chakrabody is largely invisible only in the sense of visibility of the distinct elements of the subtle body, such as the *chakras*. In the sense of principles and motivation, the essence of the chakrabody is indeed present in fitness yoga. Recall from chapter 1 that both medieval and modern interpretations of the subtle body in haṭha yoga involve manipulation of the physical body as a means to cultivate the subtle body toward some overall goal, often soteriological in nature. To a lesser degree, fitness yoga follows a similar path. The physical body is manipulated to cultivate the overall body toward some desired goal.

Category: Wellness Yoga

Wellness yoga is the yoga practice of holistic health. It is a form of yoga therapy, but with less structure and regulation than forms found in biomedical yoga. Wellness yoga often appears alongside other holistic health practices and

³¹¹ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 170.

accentuates the meditative aspects of yoga practice, but with less of the overtly spiritual elements found in spiritual yoga. Wellness yoga is often part of an intentional holistic lifestyle and is often shepherded by medical professionals, but often those who have left the clinical context. Like fitness yoga, wellness yoga is commercialized, but with a different audience in mind. Instead of a flyer for a weekly yoga class, it might be for a weekend retreat. Wellness yoga leans toward and sometimes falls within the field of Complementary and Alternative Medicine, but remains mostly outside of mainstream medicine.

In terms of De Michelis's typology, there is no direct equivalent, but wellness yoga probably fits within her broad category of Modern Postural Yoga. Like fitness yoga, wellness yoga can be understood as a "gateway yoga" through which yoga practitioners might begin their yoga experience. Examples of predominantly wellness yoga include some schools of yoga within the traditions of B. K. S. Iyengar, Ashtanga Yoga, yoga health retreats, yoga as promoted by Jon Kabat-Zinn and Deepak Chopra, and certain mindfulness programs.

For the purposes of my typology, wellness yoga is typically described by one or more of these characteristics: 1) it is featured as part of a "holistic" (or similar qualifier) lifestyle program that often pulls from a variety of traditions and practices, 2) it is accompanied by biomedical language, though not to the same degree as in biomedical yoga, and 3) it is presented as a means of healing the body *and* mind.

Legitimacy

More so than the other categories, wellness yoga muddies the color palette of modern yoga when it comes to legitimacy. There is no definitive currency of legitimacy, due in part to the fact that the domain of what is covered by “wellness” is such a mixture of elements from my other categories and beyond. Philip J. Cooke, et al. take on the even larger category of “well-being” by conducting a review of instruments of measurement in counseling psychology, and therein comment on the subcategory of “wellness,” noting that “Nearly all scholars in this area agree on a multifaceted conceptualization of wellness as a holistic lifestyle and include multiple areas of health and functioning.”³¹² “Wellness” may not have the territorial concerns of “religion” or the mystique of “spirituality,” but it is nonetheless a difficult concept to define or describe, and therefore it is difficult to definitively assign a currency of legitimacy. Yet this difficulty does not dissuade interested practitioners from wellness yoga. Instead, practitioners of wellness yoga seek legitimacy for their practice by means of several of the other categories’ currencies, just to a reduced degree.

Wellness yoga practitioners desire to ground their practice in medical knowledge, but not as rigorously as in biomedical yoga. Certain forms of wellness yoga are built around a particular teacher, such as Jon Kabat-Zinn, but this is not in the same sense of the spiritual lineages found in religious yoga. Like

³¹² Philip J. Cooke, Timothy P. Melchert, and Corey Connor, “Measuring Well-Being: A Review of Instruments,” *The Counseling Psychologist* 44, no. 5 (2016): 733. On the same page, Cooke et al. go on to comment that “wellness” often appears in the counseling, whereas “well-being” appears in psychology and sociology and “quality of life” appears in medicine.

fitness yoga, wellness yoga gains legitimacy from getting “results,” though the meaning is more a holistic sense of well-being than a “yoga body.” Finally, wellness yoga benefits from word of mouth of personal experience with the practice, though not typically as ungrounded as one might find in spiritual yoga.

Using the currencies of the other categories of my typology as lenses, one focuses on what legitimizes wellness yoga, even if only in terms of the negative space they create. The multiple angles represented here suggest that in an alternative depiction of these categories of modern yoga, wellness yoga could be presented as an amalgam at the center, pulling from the more delineated forms of modern yoga around it.

Embodiment: The Bodymind

The body in wellness yoga is similar to that in spiritual yoga in the sense that it fully expresses mind/body integration. For my typology, the distinction between the two categories is that for wellness yoga the mind/body integration, which I will refer to simply as bodymind, is more grounded in concepts of holistic health and awareness whereas the mind/body in spiritual yoga favors a higher (or other) plane of existence. In wellness yoga the bodymind is self-aware by being both the means and object of perception.

Picking up from chapter 2, the conceptual foundations of embodiment and perception set in the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty³¹³ and the contemporary theories of Thomas Csordas,³¹⁴ Michael Jackson,³¹⁵ and others merge in an interpretive model offered by Philip Zarrilli. Zarrilli's concept of the "aesthetic' inner bodymind" offers an interpretive lens through which I will analyze modern yoga. Zarrilli writes that yoga practice, among other activities, may address the "aesthetic' inner bodymind,"³¹⁶ and I suggest that wellness yoga in particular is the best fit among the categories of my typology.

The "aesthetic' inner bodymind" is part of Zarrilli's "Model of the Actor's Embodied Modes of Experience" that he sets up as a way to describe phenomenologically the performative dimensions of the body.³¹⁷ His project is in the lineage of Merleau-Ponty, who, in Zarrilli's words, "(re)claimed the centrality of the lived body (*Leib*) and embodied experience as the very means and medium through which the world comes into being and is experienced."³¹⁸ Embodiment is a process that operates in all situations in one's life, from the mundane, the occasional branching out, and the extreme situations one puts oneself through. In wellness yoga, the perception involved with the "aesthetic'

³¹³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (London: Routledge, [1945] 2012).

³¹⁴ Thomas J. Csordas, "Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology," *Ethos* 18, no. 1 (1990): 5–47.

³¹⁵ Michael Jackson, "Knowledge of the Body," in *Lifeworlds: Essays in Existential Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 51–71.

³¹⁶ Phillip B. Zarrilli, "Toward a Phenomenological Model of the Actor's Embodied Modes of Experience," *Theatre Journal* 56, no. 4 (December 1, 2004): 661.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 654.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 655.

inner bodymind” may bring about a distinct form of connectedness. Some intellectual context for Zarrilli’s model will be helpful.

Zarrilli builds his model partly on the philosophy of Drew Leder, who brings this form of connectedness to light. In *The Absent Body*, Leder presents the idea that the body, particularly one’s awareness and perception of the body, seems to be “absent” in everyday life. As an example, he cites a study in which 90% of participants were unable to identify their own hands in photographs.³¹⁹ Building on the work of Merleau-Ponty, Leder argues that the absence actually exists *due to* one’s embodied nature. The fact that the body *is* one’s source of perception is exactly why one does not necessarily notice it.³²⁰ To that extent, some level of absence is unavoidable. Leder writes, “insofar as I perceive through an organ, it necessarily recedes from the perceptual field it discloses. I do not smell my nasal tissue, hear my ear, or taste my taste buds but perceive with and through such organs.”³²¹ However, with specialized training, such as that provided by yoga practice generally and wellness yoga practice in particular, one may overcome some of the sense of absence and may heighten one’s sense of connectedness.

Leder proposes the “ecstatic body” and the “recessive body” as two modes of bodily experience with which one lives. The ecstatic body is probably the most familiar body: one’s surface level body. Leder writes, “The surface is

³¹⁹ Drew Leder, *The Absent Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 1.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 11-15, 115. See also Thomas J. Csordas, “Introduction: The Body as Representation and Being-in-the-World,” in *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self*, ed. Thomas J. Csordas (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 8.

³²¹ Leder, *The Absent Body*, 14-15.

where self meets what is other than self.”³²² It is the body that senses, the body that moves. It is “flesh.”³²³ The surface body contains the usual five senses and proprioception. One can “train” this body in various ways, both for everyday activities and the more occasional activities such as martial arts or yoga. As one trains one’s surface body in certain actions, “one’s bodymind ‘intuitively’ adjusts as one moves” and “the body disappears.”³²⁴

Leder’s second body, the recessive body, covers the “visceral” level.³²⁵ These are the internal organs and processes that usually run below the level of conscious awareness. This is the body of “depth,” both in terms of physiology and phenomenology. On the latter, though, Leder claims that the phenomenological tradition has only recently considered the recessive body as part of a theory of embodiment. Such “depth” was not found in the works of Merleau-Ponty.³²⁶ This is the body of “blood,” and it features interoception. Like the surface body, this body, too, seems absent for most of one’s existence.³²⁷

Zarrilli agrees with Leder that these two bodies fall into the sense of absence due in part to the Western tendency to elevate reason and cerebral pursuits at the expense of bodily ones. Zarrilli seeks to counter this with bodily pursuits that allow one to both perceive and analyze deeper levels of human

³²² Ibid., 11.

³²³ Zarrilli, “Toward a Phenomenological Model of the Actor’s Embodied Modes of Experience,” 657-658.

³²⁴ Ibid., 659.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Leder, *The Absent Body*, 36.

³²⁷ Zarrilli, “Toward a Phenomenological Model of the Actor’s Embodied Modes of Experience,” 660.

existence.³²⁸ Leder references the practice of yoga in similar terms. He writes, “As cultural variations show, a certain degree of visceral disappearance can be attributed to Western insensitivities and overcome by a systematic development of powers. The awareness of and control over the inner body exhibited by trained yogis has far surpassed what used to be thought possible in the West.”³²⁹

Leder’s model ends here, but Zarrilli’s continues, which brings me back to Zarrilli’s category of the “‘aesthetic’ inner bodymind.”³³⁰ The “‘aesthetic’ inner bodymind” can be understood as the “subtle” body, hidden and characterized by developing attention to one’s bodymind. Zarrilli describes this level as

that realm of extra-daily perception and experience associated with long-term, in-depth engagement in certain psychophysical practices or training regimes—yoga, the martial arts, acting/performing per se, or similar forms of embodied practice which engage the physical body and attention (mind) in cultivating and attuning both to subtle levels of experience and awareness.³³¹

In other words, he is describing the body that one both explores and uses to explore one’s self and one’s context. It is the body that reflects the dialectical process of embodied perception.

I chose to use the concept of the “‘aesthetic’ inner bodymind” as an interpretive lens to analyze wellness yoga because the concept bridges the conceptual gap between the more traditional religious/spiritual forms of yoga

³²⁸ Ibid., 660-661.

³²⁹ Leder, *The Absent Body*, 43.

³³⁰ Zarrilli’s model also includes one more level, the “aesthetic ‘outer’ body.” However, it applies more specifically to the context of acting, so I will not discuss it further in this project. Zarrilli, “Toward a Phenomenological Model of the Actor’s Embodied Modes of Experience,” 664-665.

³³¹ Zarrilli, “Toward a Phenomenological Model of the Actor’s Embodied Modes of Experience,” 661.

practice with the more secularized versions. It allows for the idea of reaching levels of awareness ranging from simple attention to pain to a full feeling of connectedness with the universe while at the same time recognizing that the techniques for developing this awareness are indeed mundane body movements and breath exercises that can be practiced by anyone. In this way it helps to clarify and distinguish the category of wellness yoga from the other categories.

Zarrilli's idea of the subtle body is generalized, but in the case of wellness yoga, the specific yogic subtle body as represented by the chakrabody is present. As in spiritual yoga, in wellness yoga the chakrabody appears in visuals associated with yoga practice, but a unique aspect of the use of the chakrabody in wellness yoga is that one finds an integration of the language of the chakrabody with the language of healthcare.

This integration of languages appears in the presentation of wellness yoga practice, and can come from a variety of sources. Yoga practitioners who have no formal medical training may mix the languages to appeal to the authority of both tradition and contemporary science. In the history of modern yoga, Vivekananda is famous for his merging of these languages, promoting rāja yoga as a scientific endeavor that features real correspondences between the subtle body and contemporary notions of physiology.³³²

³³² Jain, *Selling Yoga*, 33; De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, 163-168.

Iyengar used biomedical language to present yoga practice in *Light on Yoga*,³³³ and Sivananda also blended scientific language with terms and concepts of the subtle body. On the effectiveness of Sivananda's mixture of language, Joseph Alter writes, "Science enables a metonymic understanding of what might otherwise be read as an elaborate analogy. It forces the question of empirical correspondence into the domain of metaphor, producing multiple levels of mimesis within and across the divide between epistemology and ontology."³³⁴ Unpacking that statement, I understand Alter to mean that by incorporating the language of science, which in our culture is perceived as representative of truth, into discussions of subtle elements and practices that may on their own appear mystical in nature, those elements and practices may be given more credibility as aspects of reality. Grounding a form of yoga practice in medical terms is not just for the benefit of yoga in biomedical contexts.

In another example, Jain writes that in the Jain practice of preksha dhyana,³³⁵ the guru "suggested that the manipulation of subtle energies in the body brings about shifts in the release of chemicals and hormones in the body, which in turn positively affect both the mental and physical health."³³⁶ Though rāja yoga and preksha dhyana may fit more accurately under religious yoga or

³³³ B. K. S. Iyengar, *Light on Yoga: Yoga Dipika*, Revised Edition (New York: Schocken Books, [1966] 1979); Jain, *Selling Yoga*, 83.

³³⁴ Joseph S. Alter, *Yoga in Modern India: The Body Between Science and Philosophy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 64.

³³⁵ Preksha dhyana, taught by Acharya Shri Mahaprajna, means "concentration of perception," but is more commonly understood by practitioners as "insight meditation and yoga." Jain, *Selling Yoga*, ix.

³³⁶ Jain, *Selling Yoga*, 60.

spiritual yoga as whole traditions, this particular aspect of dual languages is a characteristic of wellness yoga. Modern yoga traditions that bring this aspect more to the foreground of their practice fall more completely under the wellness yoga category.

Within predominantly wellness yoga traditions, practitioners or popularizers with formal medical backgrounds do bring this aspect to the foreground, referring to parts of the subtle anatomy as explanatory tools for discussing concepts of yoga practice. As I will demonstrate in the following chapter, there is certainly a line that divides medical professionals who can freely use the language of the chakrbody and those who cannot. The latter fall under the category of biomedical yoga.

Comparing Fitness Yoga and Wellness Yoga

Fitness yoga and wellness yoga occupy similar areas on the spectrum of my typology, and arguably the majority of modern yoga practice in the United States falls within the permeable boundaries of fitness yoga and wellness yoga. Generally speaking, both express the American desire to be healthy and in shape and to put one's best image forward. Often these two categories are difficult to distinguish from the other categories, wherein elements of fitness yoga and wellness yoga are present, though perhaps not emphasized. Even distinguishing them from each other is a challenge.

One way to distinguish them is to examine the degree to which the physical body is placed in the forefront of the practice. If the practice keeps the physical body all the way in the foreground and the background is fairly transparent, then the practice is most likely fitness yoga. And if the physical body is in the foreground, but a holistic sense of bodymind health is alongside it or at least prominent in the background, the practice is most likely wellness yoga.

However, even this distinction is not so stable. For example, in Iyengar Yoga, one of the most visible forms of modern yoga practice and one that is typically presented in a way that falls under fitness yoga, Suzanne Hasselle-Newcombe notes that practitioners are “encouraged to develop an increasing awareness of the physical body, breath, and mind,” which begins to wander into the colors of the wellness yoga portion of the palette.³³⁷

Once again, categorical distinctions blur and accentuate that modern yoga in practice is often an “all-of-the-above” concept. Nevertheless, the categories of my typology facilitate analysis of modern yoga practice by forcing perception of the degrees to which aspects of a given practice are foregrounded. In this section I will discuss visibility of fitness yoga and wellness yoga in terms of two general aspects of American society, accessibility and commercialization, and then I will further blur the categories by placing these categories in the larger history of yoga practice.

³³⁷ Suzanne Hasselle-Newcombe, “Spirituality and ‘Mystical Religion’ in Contemporary Society: A Case Study of British Practitioners of the Iyengar Method of Yoga,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 20, no. 3 (2005): 308.

The Visibility of Fitness Yoga and Wellness Yoga

Compared to the esotericism of yoga practice in the United States in the late 1800s and first half of the 1900s,³³⁸ yoga today is ubiquitous in American society and largely considered to be a mainstream practice.³³⁹ Attending a yoga class is no longer something exotic, and while it is still predominantly a middle and upper class phenomenon, its accessibility is one of its hallmarks.³⁴⁰ The forms of yoga practice that have become so common and so accessible fall largely within the two categories of fitness yoga and wellness yoga. Here I will discuss two phenomena that partly explain the prominence of these categories of modern yoga practice.

*Gateway Yoga*³⁴¹

Something is referred to as a “gateway” when it is an easily accessible version of something that can lead to other versions. Probably the most recognizable use of this phrase is with drugs. A “gateway drug” is seen as a minor drug that, once used, could lead to using stronger drugs.³⁴² This may seem like an odd way to talk about modern yoga practice, but I suggest that there is a potential path from the practice of relatively accessible forms of yoga practice, such as fitness yoga and wellness yoga, that may lead to forms of yoga practice

³³⁸ Catherine Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 346-372.

³³⁹ Jain, *Selling Yoga*, 48-49.

³⁴⁰ De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, 250; Jain, *Selling Yoga*, 49, 66

³⁴¹ See note 302 in this dissertation.

³⁴² For a historical exploration on yoga and drugs, see Syman, *The Subtle Body*, 198-232.

that are not as visible in mainstream society, mostly under the umbrellas of religious yoga and spiritual yoga.

Fitness yoga and wellness yoga succeed as “gateway yogas” because they are accessible, but also because the practices respond to contemporary American interests. Strauss writes that one of the features of modernity is a focus on the stress of the modern world. In this context, people often see yoga as a method for reducing this general stress.³⁴³ Courtney Bender echoes this idea in her discussion of American spirituality, writing, “The yoga forms that develop in the United States can be viewed as a hybrid form of American desires for (and expressions of the power of) relaxation in an agitated world, translated through images of a mystical East and its ancient wisdom.”³⁴⁴ Here Bender is referring to yoga as a practice responding to a characteristically modern American situation, the need for relaxation.

Bender references another element of “gateway yoga,” the allure of the “mystical East and its ancient wisdom,” which applies to elements of fitness yoga or wellness yoga that may overlap with elements that would fall under religious yoga or spiritual yoga.³⁴⁵ Promoters in these latter traditions who seek to expand their practice to larger audiences realize that fitness yoga and wellness yoga are often the types of yoga practice that spark initial interest in the religious/spiritual elements. Therefore traditions within the fuzzy boundaries of religious yoga and

³⁴³ Sarah Strauss, *Positioning Yoga: Balancing Acts Across Cultures* (New York: Berg, 2005), 19.

³⁴⁴ Courtney Bender, *The New Metaphysicals: Spirituality and the American Religious Imagination* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 109.

³⁴⁵ Ibid. On “mythologizing” in postural yoga, see Jain, *Selling Yoga*, 114.

spiritual yoga may cater classes to those people who are not necessarily opposed to the more spiritual or meditative elements, but for whom general fitness is a more dominant concern. Jain describes health and fitness as central concerns of students in her description of the more catholic preksha dhyana classes, noting that as the students develop their practice, however, they might, in the words of one student, “achieve something spiritual.”³⁴⁶

Consumer Yoga

The visibility and accessibility of modern yoga practice, particularly fitness yoga and wellness yoga, is due in large part to the commercialization of yoga practice in the United States. According to “The 2016 Yoga in America Study,” Americans spent over \$16 billion on yoga within the last year.³⁴⁷ From designer yoga clothing to branded yoga mats to branded yoga practice itself,³⁴⁸ modern consumer culture and yoga are sharing a long embrace. This embrace has created a marketplace environment for modern yoga practice and commercialized a traditionally religious practice. These creations of modernity do not belittle the practice of fitness yoga and wellness yoga, however. As Jain argues, “popularized postural yoga systems are not mere ‘commodifications’ or ‘borrowings’ but idiosyncratic and complex creations all of which insiders call *yoga*.”³⁴⁹ She later suggests, “surrender to a guru and his or her spiritual wares is

³⁴⁶ Jain, *Selling Yoga*, 61-62.

³⁴⁷ Yoga Journal and Yoga Alliance, “The 2016 Yoga in America Study,” 4.

³⁴⁸ On brands of modern yoga practice, see Jain, *Selling Yoga*, 73-94.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, xviii. (emphasis original)

not necessarily quantitatively or qualitatively different than surrender to a brand, in part for its associations with a particular person, whether a self-proclaimed 'guru,' CEO, or simply a celebrity."³⁵⁰ It is therefore the duty of Religious Studies scholars to take these categories of yoga as seriously as they would categories that are more overtly religious.

In terms of the modern yoga marketplace in the United States, fitness yoga and wellness yoga demonstrate the American identity of individual choice, which gives it an intriguing parallel to the specific concept of American religious identity. In short, American religious identity is characterized, among many other things, by the concept of choice. Americans are largely free to choose their own religion and can make said choice more than once in their lifetimes.³⁵¹ Analyzing comparative American religion, Winnifred Sullivan writes, "The voluntary principle means that the individual calls the shots. She can always go and join up somewhere else."³⁵² In a similar sense, yoga practitioners can choose which yoga studio or gym they attend. This choice is not entirely context-free; it depends on location, style, who else is attending, schedules, and other factors, all of which are also in play in the choice of one's religious identity in America.

But how did the yoga marketplace emerge in the first place? The answer is complex, but I suggest that there are three central pieces. First, yoga became

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 93.

³⁵¹ Robert C. Fuller, *Spiritual, but Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 99-100; Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 53.

³⁵² Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, "American Religion Is Naturally Comparative," in *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age*, ed. Kimberley C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 124.

more visible in pop culture due to its practice by celebrities. Americans are known for idolization of celebrities, so when Gloria Swanson (in reality)³⁵³ and Elvis Presley (in the movies)³⁵⁴ were seen practicing yoga, yoga moved closer to the mainstream. Second, historical developments created fertile ground on which yoga practice could thrive. Jain notes three prominent developments in the mid-to-late twentieth century: the increased ability for people to travel back and forth to other parts of the world, the general “disillusionment with established religious institutions,” and the merging of yoga practice “with the emergent global consumer culture.”³⁵⁵ Third, yoga became more scrutinized by modern science and emerged with some positive results. I will save elaboration of this development for the following chapter on the category of biomedical yoga.

The combination of these three developments and others created a marketplace for yoga practice, and over the last few decades it has been greatly consumed, dialectically cementing its place in mainstream American culture in a variety of niches. Referencing the work of Frederic Jameson, Jain writes, “The masses produced pop culture through the act of consumption. Thus when a product, such as postural yoga, became widely consumed, it simultaneously became a part of pop culture.”³⁵⁶ Indeed yoga has become such a part of pop culture that it has expanded well beyond the practice. For example, yoga pants

³⁵³ Michelle Goldberg, *The Goddess Pose: The Audacious Life of Indra Devi, the Woman Who Helped Bring Yoga to the West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015), 169-170.

³⁵⁴ Syman, *The Subtle Body*, 236.

³⁵⁵ Jain, *Selling Yoga*, 43.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 45, referencing Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 4.

that were once meant for the practice itself have become popular as leisurewear and are even marketed as such.³⁵⁷

While both categories are heavily marketed, one way to distinguish fitness yoga from wellness yoga is to analyze how they are marketed and to what audiences. Marketing fitness yoga is relatively straightforward because marketing fitness generally is an easy sell in our cultural context. Strauss writes that a “Darwinian ideal that ‘fitness’ leads to success” has compelled American and European societies to promote fitness. Fitness, she argues, is a more definite concept than health, which is “perhaps too broad and utopian of a goal to achieve.”³⁵⁸ A more definite concept is easier to sell, particularly when the cultural demand for the concept is as ingrained as it is in the United States. It also helps fitness yoga’s marketability that it can be picked up by most people at any time without much hesitation about the cultural or conceptual baggage of yoga; fitness yoga is intentionally detached from grand philosophies or overtly religious/spiritual traditions.

However, wellness yoga is a harder sell, due both to the broad umbrella of “health” mentioned by Strauss and to its slightly but significantly less accessibility. Wellness yoga brings concepts such as mind/body integration and holistic health to the foreground, and Americans entrenched in Cartesian dualism, consciously or not, are likely going to resist. There is also a greater time commitment to wellness yoga in order to see long-term results whereas a fitness

³⁵⁷ Webb et al., “Is the Yoga Bod the New Skinny?” 88.

³⁵⁸ Strauss, *Positioning Yoga*, 127,

yoga class, while also offering long-term effects, brings a more immediate gratification.

Further Blurring the Categories: Old and New

Fitness yoga and wellness yoga are often the popular faces of modern yoga in the United States. They are simultaneously presented to consumers as fonts of ancient wisdom wrapped in muscle-toning practices and perceived as contemporary corruptions of “authentic yoga.” But these categories of modern yoga are neither. We know from recent scholarship from Singleton that the postural yoga practices at the center of these two categories are relatively new and are influenced by forms of European physical culture in addition to South Asian ones.³⁵⁹ We also know that there is no authentic yoga from which to deviate, even in its classical form. In the words of Gerard James Larson, “There simply is no primordial or pure Ur-Yoga.”³⁶⁰

However, this is not to say that fitness yoga and wellness yoga have no ideological lineage to traditional forms of yoga practice. At the center of each category is the concern for health, more purely physical health in the case of fitness yoga and more holistic notions of health in the case of wellness yoga. The idea of yoga practice as a means to health is by no means a recent historical development. In classical yoga, one way to interpret *samādhi* (the final of the

³⁵⁹ Singleton, *Yoga Body*.

³⁶⁰ Gerald James Larson, “Introduction to the Philosophy of Yoga,” in *Yoga: India’s Philosophy of Meditation*, ed. Gerald James Larson and Ram Shankar Bhattacharya, vol. XII, Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass Publishers, 2008), 36.

eight limbs; see chapter 1) is the overcoming of afflictions (*kleśas*), of which there are five: “ignorance” (*avidyā*), “egoism” (*asmitā*), “attachment” (*rāga*), “revulsion” (*dveṣa*), and “clinging to life” (*abhiniveśa*).³⁶¹ In addition to the *kleśas*, there are nine “disturbances” (*antarāya*), listed in *Yoga Sūtras* I.30 as “disease, idleness, doubt, carelessness, sloth, lack of detachment, misapprehension, failure to attain a case for concentration, and instability.”³⁶² Though perhaps not in such a formal list, these sorts of bodily and mental health concerns still operate in modern forms of yoga practice.

This sort of connection between what we might count as religious yoga and the two categories elaborated upon in this chapter are not limited to the past. Preksha dhyana, the contemporary Jain practice, is a particularly interesting example of a practice that could fall under religious yoga due to its approach to the body. Traditionally, Jainism pushes for an austere approach to practice, which typically disavows the body. One interpretation of such a system would be that it is “religious” due to its adherence to established doctrines. However, Jain notes that this modern form of yoga practice “included modern systems of diet and physical exercise in the form of postures aimed at worldly goals, namely health.”³⁶³ She continues that the guru’s development of the practice “demonstrated the phenomenon whereby postural yoga, by appropriating the physiological and anatomical discourse of biomedicine, somaticizes a system

³⁶¹ Christopher Key Chapple, *Yoga and the Luminous: Patañjali’s Spiritual Path to Freedom* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 89-90.

³⁶² Edwin Bryant, ed., *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali: A New Edition, Translation, and Commentary with Insights from the Traditional Commentators* (New York: North Point Press, 2009), 118.

³⁶³ Jain, *Selling Yoga*, 58.

that was traditionally a metaphysical practice oriented around the manipulation of subtle energies.”³⁶⁴ Once again, the blending of languages potentially leads to the blurring of boundaries.

Conclusion

Jain’s example is a common one; religious yoga or spiritual yoga traditions that have a lengthy history are using the language and concepts of modern healthcare in their practice. But this need not be entirely the story of old traditions embracing the new; the influence can go both ways. Think back to embodiment. Zarrilli’s concept of the “‘aesthetic’ inner bodymind” represents a state of experiencing one’s body that is not adequately addressed in the context of contemporary healthcare, a concern that Zarrilli shares.³⁶⁵ Zarrilli writes that yoga and similar acts optimize one’s engagement with one’s body and are just out-of-the-norm enough to “(re)negotiate” how one interacts with one’s bodymind.³⁶⁶ Over time this engagement may build on itself to the point of adjusting how one perceives and experiences the body and the world. Zarrilli concludes that long-term cultivation of the “‘aesthetic’ inner bodymind” leads to greater awareness and less absence of the surface and recessive bodies.³⁶⁷ In the context of health and medicine, the processes described here line up with those in the budding fields of integrative medicine. As modes of medical care shift in new directions, a

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 58-59.

³⁶⁵ Zarrilli, “Toward a Phenomenological Model of the Actor’s Embodied Modes of Experience,” 661 n43.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 661.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 664.

framework for understanding how one can engage with one's body for a deeper understanding of one's overall health will become more important. How this framework develops in the context of clinical biomedicine is the topic of the next chapter, which will present the final category in my typology of modern yoga: biomedical yoga.

Chapter 5: Biomedical Yoga

Introduction

In February 2017, the American College of Physicians published a guideline on “noninvasive treatments of low back pain.” Included among the recommended treatments was yoga practice.³⁶⁸ A contemporary observer of American culture might read this news and nod along, recognizing the seemingly obvious connection between the popular practice, which they likely think of in terms of fitness yoga or wellness yoga, and pain relief. Yet given the history of yoga practice, both in total and just in the recent past of the United States, this news makes an extraordinary statement. A practice steeped in religious traditions, maligned in popular perception for most of its existence in the United States, and immersed in the vague language of spirituality and wellness has somehow become a part of mainstream biomedicine. This chapter will explore this form of yoga practice by presenting the fifth category of my typology of modern yoga, biomedical yoga, and taking an in-depth look into the expressions of the category. Within the field of Religious Studies, the forms of yoga practice within this category receive the least attention among the categories of my typology. By the end of this chapter I hope to have demonstrated that biomedical yoga belongs just as much as the others.

³⁶⁸ Amir Qaseem et al., “Noninvasive Treatments for Acute, Subacute, and Chronic Low Back Pain: A Clinical Practice Guideline from the American College of Physicians,” *Annals of Internal Medicine* 166, no. 7 (April 2017), 1.

Following the structure of the previous two chapters, I will first present the category generally and then in terms of legitimacy and embodiment. By legitimacy I mean the ways in which a particular form of yoga practice is taken seriously by both practitioners and those looking in from the outside. By embodiment I mean how the practice involves the body and how the body is interpreted. Embodiment is broken down into two subtopics: connectedness and the chakrabody. Connectedness refers to ways in which the practitioner cultivates connection with their own bodymind, the bodyminds of others, and their environment. Chakrabody refers to how the practice relates to, if at all, the elements of the subtle physiology developed in the yoga traditions of South Asia. After presenting the category in these terms, I will discuss it further on its own terms and in comparative terms with the other categories of my typology, highlighting the aspects of American identity that the forms of yoga practice express.

Category: Biomedical Yoga

Biomedical yoga is the yoga practice found within the context of mainstream medicine. It is found where there is a direct and structured examination of the psychological and physiological effects of yoga practice. In the context of the last few decades, biomedical yoga appears within randomized controlled trials and similar studies conducted by medical professionals often working at research hospitals or institutions. Biomedical yoga is the most

secularized and structured form of modern yoga practice, though the structure is not consistent. It is often generalized in such a way that it is difficult to identify from which tradition it was derived. It is rarely practiced outside the context of a medical study, though what starts as biomedical yoga can transform into other categories of yoga once the practitioner concludes the study. In that way it is a “gateway yoga”³⁶⁹ in a manner similar to fitness yoga and wellness yoga. Biomedical yoga is firmly within the field of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM), and is making more inroads in mainstream medicine every year.

Though yoga scholars such as Joseph Alter³⁷⁰ and Elizabeth De Michelis³⁷¹ have discussed the general concept of biomedical yoga, it has not received as much attention as other forms of yoga practice within Religious Studies. For that reason I will go further in depth in my presentation and analysis of the history and intellectual development of biomedical yoga than I did for the other categories. For the purposes of my typology, biomedical yoga is typically described by one or more of three characteristics: 1) it takes place in a medical setting, which may include home practice prescribed by a medical professional; 2) it is practiced in the service of evaluating in a predominantly quantitative manner its effect on some psychological and/or physiological matter; and 3) it is

³⁶⁹ See note 302 in this dissertation.

³⁷⁰ Joseph S Alter, *Yoga in Modern India: The Body Between Science and Philosophy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 73-177; Joseph S. Alter, “Modern Medical Yoga: Struggling with a History of Magic, Alchemy, and Sex,” *Asian Medicine, Tradition and Modernity* 1, no. 1 (2005): 133-142.

³⁷¹ Elizabeth De Michelis, “A Preliminary Survey of Modern Yoga Studies,” *Asian Medicine, Tradition and Modernity* 3, no. 1 (2007): 10-16.

generic and nearly fully secularized, at least ostensibly (unless a study is explicitly looking at a form of yoga practice that typically has non-secular elements, such as Iyengar Yoga or Ashtanga Yoga³⁷²).

Legitimacy

The currency of legitimacy in biomedical yoga is the most straightforward of all the currencies in my typology: published peer-reviewed studies in medical journals. Yoga practice has appeared in the pages of popular books and articles since the nineteenth century, yet until it began to appear in peer-reviewed medical journals, the practice was not seen as legitimate in the eyes of the mainstream medical community. Yoga practice gains even greater legitimacy when the peer-reviewed study is in the form of a randomized controlled trial (RCT), which is generally accepted as the gold standard for medical knowledge. Yoga has made its way into mainstream RCTs in the United States only within the last few decades. The exclusion of yoga practice prior to recent decades is due partly to the relative obscurity of yoga practice *as a means of medical treatment*, and partly to the difficulty involved in fitting a practice like yoga into the

³⁷² For example, Beth C. Bock et al., "Testing the Efficacy of Yoga as a Complementary Therapy for Smoking Cessation: Design and Methods of the BreathEasy Trial," *Contemporary Clinical Trials* 38, no. 2 (July 2014): 321–332; Julianne E. Bower et al., "Yoga Reduces Inflammatory Signaling in Fatigued Breast Cancer Survivors: A Randomized Controlled Trial," *Psychoneuroendocrinology* 43 (May 2014): 20–29; Pamela E. Jeter et al., "Ashtanga-Based Yoga Therapy Increases the Sensory Contribution to Postural Stability in Visually-Impaired Persons at Risk for Falls as Measured by the Wii Balance Board: A Pilot Randomized Controlled Trial," *PLoS One* 10, no. 6 (2015); and Anne Tiedemann et al., "A 12-Week Iyengar Yoga Program Improved Balance and Mobility in Older Community-Dwelling People: A Pilot Randomized Controlled Trial," *The Journals of Gerontology. Series A, Biological Sciences and Medical Sciences* 68, no. 9 (September 2013): 1068–1075.

RCT structure. For example, unlike offering an unmarked pill, it is difficult to blind a participant to their involvement in yoga practice versus some other sort of physical activity or non-activity. Beyond the RCT structure, other attributes of peer-reviewed studies that help to build the legitimacy of biomedical yoga include quantitative results and reproducibility.

Embodiment: The Biological Body

The body emphasized in biomedical yoga is the body of biology textbooks, emphasizing its anatomical elements. However, it is not just the physical body, as it typically is with fitness yoga. The mental aspects of bodily existence are certainly present, just in accepted medical terms.

Connectedness in biomedical yoga is similar to connectedness in fitness yoga in that it appears in the form of a feeling of awareness of the physical and psychological features of one's body. In biomedical yoga, connectedness often appears in two forms: 1) a direct and specific awareness of an area of the body or mind that is affected by yoga practice, and 2) a sense of community between oneself and others who are practicing yoga. Laura Schmalzl, Chris C. Streeter, and Sat Bir Singh Khalsa offer a brief review of relevant scientific research that suggests yoga practice may cultivate these forms of connectedness, which they refer to as "body awareness."³⁷³

³⁷³ Laura Schmalzl, Chris C. Streeter, and Sat Bir Singh Khalsa, "Research on the Psychophysiology of Yoga," in *The Principles and Practice of Yoga in Health Care*, ed. Sat Bir Singh Khalsa et al. (Edinburgh: Handspring Publishing, 2016), 58-59.

Anatomy and physiology are more prominent in biomedical yoga than in the other categories. One work on the anatomy and physiology of yoga practice is H. David Coulter's *Anatomy of Hatha Yoga: A Manual for Students, Teachers, and Practitioners*. Coulter's manual is a heavily detailed (textually and graphically) presentation of the body's physical systems before, during, and after *āsana* and *prāṇāyāma* practice. In his introduction, Coulter explains how his book aims to link general knowledge of yoga practice with medical science *in terms of* medical science. He writes that his book focuses on

the musculoskeletal, nervous, respiratory, and cardiovascular systems—the musculoskeletal system because that is where all our actions are expressed, the nervous system because that is the residence of all the managerial functions of the musculoskeletal system, the respiratory system because breathing is of such paramount importance in yoga, and the cardiovascular system because inverted postures cannot be fully comprehended without understanding the dynamics of the circulation.³⁷⁴

Coulter's book does not discuss the chakrabody (which includes *chakras* and *nāḍīs*) in depth. This is intentional. Coulter remarks that such elements of the subtle physiology of yoga are not “presently testable in the scientific sense,” and thus not appropriate in discussions of medical science.³⁷⁵ Because of this, the chakrabody is nearly nonexistent in contemporary biomedical yoga. However, as with the other categories, the boundaries are fuzzy. Early explorations into the science of yoga did explore some elements of the subtle body, such as *prāṇa*,³⁷⁶

³⁷⁴ H. David Coulter, *Anatomy of Hatha Yoga: A Manual for Students, Teachers, and Practitioners* (Honesdale, PA: Body and Breath, 2001), 15.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁷⁶ Alter, *Yoga in Modern India*, 91.

and a 2016 medical textbook on yoga in health care discusses chakras³⁷⁷ and features prints of the chakra structure.³⁷⁸ Though these come in the background section of the textbook, I suggest that their inclusion at all is a statement on the significant connection of contemporary biomedical yoga to the non-biomedical aspects of yoga practice.

A Closer Look at Biomedical Yoga

Biomedical yoga has generally received less attention from Religious Studies scholars than the other categories, and so I will go a bit more in depth into its history, intellectual development, and contemporary expressions than I did with the other categories. First, I will show that the biomedical/scientific approach to yoga is not as new and as centered in the United States as one might think. South Asian scientists have been exploring yoga practice through a medical lens for a long period of time. Second, I will present and discuss the development of biomedical yoga in the United States in terms of the development of mind-body medicine. Finally, I will look at the more recent medicalization of yoga in terms of the rise of yoga therapy and clinical medical research on yoga.

³⁷⁷ Sat Bir Singh Khalsa et al., eds., *The Principles and Practice of Yoga in Health Care* (Edinburgh: Handspring Publishing, 2016), xxv; Rolf Sovik and Yogacharya Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani, "History, Philosophy, and Practice of Yoga," in *The Principles and Practice of Yoga in Health Care*, ed. Sat Bir Singh Khalsa et al. (Edinburgh: Handspring Publishing, 2016), 24; Timothy McCall, Latha Satish, and Subodh Tiwari, "History, Philosophy, and Practice of Yoga Therapy," in *The Principles and Practice of Yoga in Health Care*, ed. Sat Bir Singh Khalsa et al. (Edinburgh: Handspring Publishing, 2016), 41-43.

³⁷⁸ Khalsa et al., *The Principles and Practice of Yoga in Health Care*, xxix; McCall, Satish, and Tiwari, "History, Philosophy, and Practice of Yoga Therapy," 43.

Early Biomedical Yoga in India

South Asian scientists in the early twentieth century accomplished some of the foundational work in the scientific study of yoga. Though these scientists were certainly influenced by Western perceptions of science, their proximity to the intellectual and experiential center of yoga practice led to an intriguingly nuanced take on the science of yoga.

Works by Gregory P. Fields³⁷⁹ and Joseph S. Alter³⁸⁰ offer helpful introductions to the science of yoga in India. Fields aims to expand the typical associations with the term “therapeutics” to include ideas of religious and/or spiritual well-being in both an everyday and soteriological sense. He describes his “model of religious therapeutics” as “a heuristic or interpretive lens for identifying and understanding relations among healing and religiousness in Hindu and other world traditions.”³⁸¹ Inspired by Paul Tillich's view of Jesus as a “healer,” Fields analyzes the South Asian traditions in terms of their conceptions of health or well-being as equated with a sense of wholeness and spiritual liberation.³⁸²

On yoga specifically, Fields discusses the “psychophysical” aspects of health involved with yoga practice, a term he uses to distinguish the bodymind

³⁷⁹ Gregory P. Fields, *Religious Therapeutics: Body and Health in Yoga, Āyurveda, and Tantra* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001).

³⁸⁰ Alter, *Yoga in Modern India*

³⁸¹ Fields, *Religious Therapeutics*, 2.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 2-3.

from any absolute sense of “Self” present within the South Asian traditions.³⁸³

Influenced by the tantric aspects of haṭha yoga, Fields accentuates the need within yoga, which he does not differentiate into “traditional” and “modern,” to attain peak mind-body health for the greater goal of liberation.³⁸⁴ Given this foundational purpose, Fields presents two central themes on yoga. First, “Although body and psychophysical health are of instrumental and not ultimate value in classical Yoga, body and health have significant soteriological functions,” and second, “Liberation in Yoga is healing in an ultimate sense. It brings attainment of well-being with respect to the human being’s most fundamental nature and highest soteriological potential.”³⁸⁵ Here psychophysical health, a topic well within the realm of modern scientific inquiry, maintains a prominent place amid yoga practice even in its explicitly soteriological forms. Therefore a scientific study of yoga can be a study of empirical data that at the same time recognizes a religious and/or spiritual path.³⁸⁶

Alter's *Yoga in Modern India* offers an anthropological and theory-based presentation of the scientific study of yoga in India. Alter begins the book with a direct critique of Fields' *Religious Therapeutics*, followed by a more general critique of yoga literature. Alter claims that Fields' work lacks historical insight into the development of modern yoga as such, but Alter goes on to praise Field's

³⁸³ Ibid., 5.

³⁸⁴ Ibid., 6.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., 7.

³⁸⁶ Also see Andrea Jain's discussion of healing and salvation. *Selling Yoga: From Counterculture to Pop Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 105.

expansion of the meaning of “health.”³⁸⁷ However, Alter worries that too broad of an expansion into realms of spirituality includes so much that one becomes negligent of the materiality and grounded nature of embodied existence. Alter argues, “When health is expanded to encompass something as ephemeral as spirituality, it is much too easy to exoticize and mystify—in the mode of a latter-day Orientalist—the practical, pragmatic, and very down-to-earth features of Tantra, Āyurveda, and Yoga.”³⁸⁸ Alter’s observation appears true in some popular depictions of yoga in the contemporary United States, where the practice is still often taught alongside an assortment of esoteric objects and terms that are deployed for the purpose of presenting yoga practice as something “other.”

Alter aims to provide “an intellectual history of modern Yoga's embodied practice,” by which he means that yoga in the last hundred years or so has become increasingly centered on the body, especially in its outwardly visible forms.³⁸⁹ As I have demonstrated in this dissertation, just how a particular form of yoga practice is centered on the body varies greatly. In the end, Alter provides a significantly detailed analysis of modern yoga's transition into modern medicine and public healthcare in India, in addition to establishing that “although it has been constructed as a timeless icon of Indian civilization, Yoga is, in fact, a very modern phenomenon.”³⁹⁰

³⁸⁷ Alter, *Yoga in Modern India*, xiii.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, xiii-xiv.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, xx.

Fields and Alter offer robust depictions of the relationship between yoga and science as they existed and exist in India. It is in the intellectual context of both of these approaches to yoga and science that the first medical studies of yoga took place.

As physical culture and nationalism pervaded India in the early twentieth-century, figures such as Swami Kuvalayananda stepped forward to attune modern scientific practices with Indian contributions to global ideas of fitness and well-being. Referred to by Mark Singleton as “one of the most important figures in the modern ‘renaissance’ of yoga as therapeutics and physical culture,” Kuvalayananda made a concerted effort to apply modern scientific scrutiny to *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, and other aspects of modern yoga practice, observing their physiological effects and hypothesizing their use in prescriptive medical therapy.³⁹¹ His first experiments “focused on such things as changes in blood pressure, intra-esophageal air pressure, and heart rate during and after the performance of various *āsanas* and *prāṇāyāma* exercises.”³⁹² However, Kuvalayananda’s work was not just for the sake of academics. By the 1930s, he was, in Alter’s words, “‘mass producing’ Yoga instructors so as to transform the physical education curriculum of public education in India.”³⁹³ Indeed, at Kaivalyadhama, Kuvalayananda’s ashram and institute, teaching and training of

³⁹¹ Mark Singleton, *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 115.

³⁹² Alter, *Yoga in Modern India*, 34.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 9.

yoga was accessible to everyone.³⁹⁴ In many ways yoga as it is known today (i.e. studied as healthcare and practiced as fitness) is heavily due to Kuvalayananda's work and influence.³⁹⁵

Another Indian figure prominent in the modern development of yoga and science was Shri Yogendra, who initially emerged on the Indian physical culture scene as a bodybuilder. He built upon the work of Kuvalayananda by furthering the establishment of modern yoga as a “public health and fitness regimen.”³⁹⁶ Much like Vivekananda before him, Yogendra appeared to the Western world not as a mysterious ascetic, but as a person who had been educated in Western-style schools of British India.³⁹⁷ In contrast to the yoga perceived as secretive and privileged, the yoga of Yogendra was to be “benevolent, accessible, scientific, and safe,” suitable for everyday life.³⁹⁸ Yogendra was also a product of his time and was influenced by evolutionary thinking and eugenics. Singleton writes, “In Yogendra’s hands, the gymnastic practices of Yoga become a transgenerational insurance policy, and the yogic enterprise an expanded and revised version of the Lamarckian Eugenics promoted by the international physical culture movement.”³⁹⁹ Though Lamarck’s theory of evolution has faded, the influence of Yogendra’s push for scientifically grounded yoga practice on a

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 85.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 102-103.

³⁹⁶ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 116-117.

³⁹⁷ Catherine Albanese, “Sacred (and Secular) Self-Fashioning: Esalen and the American Transformation of Yoga,” in *On the Edge of the Future: Esalen and the Evolution of American Culture*, ed. Jeffrey J. Kripal and Glenn W. Shuck (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 66.

³⁹⁸ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 117.

³⁹⁹ Mark Singleton, “Yoga, Eugenics, and Spiritual Darwinism in the Early Twentieth Century,” *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 11, no. 2 (2007): 137.

wide scale remains. Yogendra strove to teach a “scientific” yoga that was both grounded in the tradition of the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā*, but also clothed in the contemporary concern for biological health.⁴⁰⁰

The work of both Kuvalayananda and Yogendra fits well with the legacy of Swami Vivekananda and his followers in that yoga under scientific scrutiny, which gave it perceived legitimacy in some Western circles, was being presented to the world as an Indian solution to the world’s ills. On the legacy of Kuvalayananda, Alter writes:

Kuvalayananda and his associates did not invent the kind of Yoga that has become a transnational phenomenon, but their research made it possible for this kind of Yoga to be invented. They had their sights—and their microscopes, X-ray machines, and blood pressure gauges—set on discovering new laws of universal nature. Their scientific focus on the human body enabled a translation of a branch of Indian philosophy into a form of practice that is, like Modern Science itself, putatively free of cultural baggage while clearly linked to the history of a particular part of the world.⁴⁰¹

However, this legacy appears to be only recently realized. It is not clear from my research whether or not there was significant interest in the work of Kuvalayananda and Yogendra from mainstream medical professionals in the United States during Kuvalayananda’s and Yogendra’s time of research. (One exception is a 1961 article in *Behavioral Health*.⁴⁰²) It seems that these two scientists were largely “discovered” in the last few decades, and that discovery has mostly been in the Yoga Studies literature.

⁴⁰⁰ Albanese, “Sacred (and Secular) Self-Fashioning,” 65.

⁴⁰¹ Alter, *Yoga in Modern India*, 77.

⁴⁰² M. A. Wenger and B. K. Bagchi, “Studies of Autonomic Functions in Practitioners of Yoga in India,” *Behavioral Science* 6 (October 1961).

The scientists' goals also aligned with Vivekananda's by aiming to promote the universality of yoga practice. Whereas some schools of yoga tended to only reach higher levels of society, Kuvalayananda promoted training public school teachers in India to spread yoga to the masses from a young age.⁴⁰³ We are seeing a similar trend in contemporary America where yoga practice, once the fashionable trend among elite classes in private settings, is now beginning to appear more prominently in public, from public school classrooms⁴⁰⁴ to the White House.⁴⁰⁵

Another important figure in the early days of the medicalization of yoga was S. C. Vasu, a scholar who translated several haṭha yoga texts around the turn of the twentieth century and greatly influenced scientists of the 1920s and beyond.⁴⁰⁶ Vasu translated these texts with the clear intention of presenting haṭha yoga as something legitimate for the modern era. Much of his interpretation in his translations aimed at reconciling the religious aspects of yoga

⁴⁰³ Sarah Strauss, "Adapt, Adjust, Accommodate': The Production of Yoga in a Transnational World," *History & Anthropology* 13, no. 3 (2002): 242; The work of Kuvalayananda lives on in the Kaivalyadharm Institute, which now has affiliates in the United States. One prominent affiliate among these is the SKY Foundation in Philadelphia, which manages the Yoga Research Society. Strauss, "Adapt, Adjust, Accommodate'," 243. The Yoga Research Society puts on an annual conference that highlights medical research on yoga practice. Yoga Research Society, "Yoga Research Society," *Yoga Research Society*, accessed May 30, 2017, <https://www.yogaresearchsociety.com>.

⁴⁰⁴ Ty Tagami, "More Schools Try Yoga despite Religious Controversy," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, May 26, 2017, accessed May 30, 2017, <http://www.myajc.com/news/local-education/more-schools-try-yoga-despite-religious-controversy/8v3dvXIXRDYMUW5OgbwAzH/>.

⁴⁰⁵ Yoga Alliance, "A Beautiful Day for Yoga at the White House," *Yoga Alliance*, April 10, 2015, accessed May 30, 2017, https://www.yogaalliance.org/Learn/Article_Archive/A_Beautiful_Day_for_Yoga_at_the_White_House.

⁴⁰⁶ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 7.

with science, particularly medical science.⁴⁰⁷ These appeals to medical science also served the nationalist cultural-historical goal of separating yoga from the negative associations with haṭha yogis (see chapter 1).⁴⁰⁸ Vasu's repackaging of haṭha yoga texts in medical science terminology, combined with the scientific efforts within the Indian physical culture movement of the early twentieth century, paved the way for yoga's entrance into mainstream medical conversations, and by the latter half of the twentieth century, yoga had become part of an emerging Complementary and Alternative Medicine field in India and beyond.

The Foundation for Biomedical Yoga in the United States

In the United States, biomedical yoga practice arose within the context of mind-body medicine. Like biomedical yoga, mind-body medicine in the United States was not generally perceived as a legitimate form of medicine in its early stages of development, but it did not rise as an alternative to mainstream medicine without some intellectual foundations already in place. Medical historian Anne Harrington writes, “the body is a genuinely mindful entity” and “its experiences are likely to change over time when the ‘rules’ of what counts as acceptable or possible experience change.”⁴⁰⁹ In *The Cure Within: A History of Mind-Body Medicine*, Harrington presents vivid examples of the progress of

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., 45.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., 49.

⁴⁰⁹ Anne Harrington, *The Cure Within: A History of Mind-Body Medicine* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2008), 24.

medical science occurring alongside methods of medical therapy that range from spirit possession to mindfulness meditation.

One intriguing theme among mind-body treatments that Harrington points out is that the treatment itself often takes a secondary role to the narrative that accompanies it. A prominent example is the case of Johann Joseph Gassner, an eighteenth century exorcist in Germany who gained fame for his abilities. Over time his fame faded as increased scientific scrutiny and a rising secularism cast doubt on the reality of demon possessions.⁴¹⁰ However, the scientific reality of the situation cannot overshadow the fact that often Gassner's methods worked to heal the sick. Harrington writes, "Gassner's problem was not that he had failed to help people, but rather that the narrative of exorcism he used to frame his therapeutic work no longer suited an increasingly secular, civic-minded age." The "narrative of exorcism" no longer worked, but something about the method did, and so the method evolved over time under the guise of other, more accepted narratives.⁴¹¹

Historian of medicine James Whorton stresses the importance of the "philosophical foundation" that motivates alternative systems of healing, that of a "holistic" view of healing.⁴¹² Alternative practitioners also allow "*vis medicatrix naturae*—the healing power of nature" to take prominence in their therapies. This

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 39.

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 42.

⁴¹² James C. Whorton, *Nature Cures: The History of Alternative Medicine in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), xii.

approach aims to assist one's natural self-healing abilities instead of replace them.⁴¹³

Whorton characterizes the worldview underlying most alternative medical systems with three fundamental tenets. First, proponents of alternative systems tend to think that mainstream medicine overemphasizes the disease or the injury at the expense of the person. Removing a disease, but leaving the person in worse condition is, in the view of alternative practitioners, not the optimal outcome. Focusing on the limited result of a drastic remedy removes focus on the quality of life left in the individual. Second, the alternative worldview grants more value to the experience of the practitioner and less on accumulated book knowledge. Medical textbooks and scientific knowledge generally are good things that have progressed humanity, but reliance on them at the expense of observing everyday nature creates a flawed healing environment. Third, alternative therapies tend to apply the holistic approach to any healing process. The particular disease or ailment may be local, but the entire bodymind is affected in some way, and for a medical practitioner to ignore that fact leaves the patient unsatisfied.⁴¹⁴

As I have demonstrated in this typology, the core methods of yoga practice have changed little in the last couple centuries, but the narratives that accompany the practice, like the various shades on a color palette, vary wildly and contribute to both the dismissal and acceptance of yoga. This is especially

⁴¹³ Ibid.,6.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 4-16.

true in the biomedical context. This section will take a look into that context in effort to further ground and illuminate the category of biomedical yoga.

Connections with Mind-Body Medicine

Mind-body medicine had a long and complex history before it ever arrived on American soil, and once it arrived, practitioners and advocates laid the foundation for several contemporary alternative forms of medical therapy. Mind-body medicine has some of its roots in religiously inspired practices, such as exorcism, and often played on themes of the spiritual, vaguely interpreted. The rise of scientific scrutiny and the general secularizing trends of American society largely removed these religious narratives, but they also removed something integral to the methods themselves: the mind. Many of these methods, though now framed in out-of-date narratives, did work in some cases. How they worked, though, was not within grasp of the scientific thinkers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and so too often the mental or psychological pieces that we know today to be a crucial part of healing were cast aside along with the religious and/or spiritual narratives.⁴¹⁵ This dismissal of the mind as part of “correcting” suspect healing practices likely played a part in the dominance of the idea of mind/body duality that still permeates popular medical thinking today.

Though advocates of mind-body medicine had to fight intellectually against the idea of mind/body duality in both Europe and the United States, the

⁴¹⁵ Harrington, *The Cure Within*, 47.

early psychosomatic supporters in the latter had the additional burden of facing a medical community focused on illness as something with “specificity,” meaning that sickness was caused by “*something*” that could be eradicated by something else.⁴¹⁶ This approach differed from that in Europe, where a more holistic approach gained prominence. This focus on the specific in the medical community of the United States shaped the way mind-body medicine developed there; instead of a holistic mind-body approach, American proponents of psychosomatic medicine aimed to find the specific connections between mind and body. This approach gained prominence with Flanders Dunbar and the 1935 publication of her *Emotions and Bodily Changes*, which presented “the mind-body connection” as something to be addressed and further studied by the medical community.⁴¹⁷

Mind-Body Medicine in the United States

As I have demonstrated throughout my typology, American identity is not a single ideal or even a coherent set of ideals. It is expressed in many forms, each one a mythos often at odds with equally valid alternatives. In the case of the development of mind-body medicine in the twentieth century, a prominent aspect of American identity is the emphasis on the individual, an aspect that also emerges in religious yoga and spiritual yoga. Paralleling the development of

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 88 (emphasis original)

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

individualism in American religion and spirituality, individualism in mind-body medicine arose with the various expressions of the power of positive thinking.

Around the beginning of the twentieth century, the merging of positive thinking with alternative medical therapies (and religion) created the “mind-cure” movement. Led by William James and other intellectuals of the time, this movement fed on American “individualism.” Harrington notes that this same era brought about a distinct movement toward individualistic versions of Protestantism set in contrast to older forms.⁴¹⁸ In the middle of the twentieth century, Norman Vincent Peale, author of *The Power of Positive Thinking*, helped move the mind-cure movement (along with New Thought) into the mainstream by removing the more esoteric elements and tying positive thinking in with contemporaneous therapeutic practices.⁴¹⁹ Mainstream medical acceptance of positive thinking took another leap in 1976 with Norman Cousins’ article in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, in which Cousins, a political analyst, told his own story of trying out the general methods of positive thinking and their ultimately positive effects on his health.⁴²⁰ In this instance, the appeal of individualistic narratives combined with an alternative approach to healing in an established and highly respected medical journal, laying the foundation for the coming legitimacy of other alternative therapies, such as biomedical yoga.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., 111.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 119-122, referencing Norman Vincent Peale, *The Power of Positive Thinking* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1952).

⁴²⁰ Harrington, *The Cure Within*, 122-125, referencing Norman Cousins, “Anatomy of an Illness (as Perceived by the Patient),” *New England Journal of Medicine* 295, no. 26 (December 23, 1976): 1458–1463.

However, the rise of the legitimacy of alternative therapies was not smooth. Medical research on alternative therapies such as meditation, which is featured in many forms of yoga practice, had to deal with the stigma of religion. Dr. Herbert Benson, author of the famous *The Relaxation Response*, was nervous about researching meditation. On Benson, Harrington writes,

For one thing, there was his professional position to think about: for a Harvard professor to commit himself to studying the health benefits of meditation struck many of Benson's colleagues as professional suicide. For another, there was the question of the religious implications of his work.

In an interview with Harrington, Benson said, "After seeing...how much this was [practiced] in a religious context, it hit me, this is prayer, this is one form of prayer. And I got frightened, really scared."⁴²¹ Harrington adds that Benson's *The Relaxation Response* and Jon Kabat-Zinn's *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness* featured significant efforts by the authors to separate meditation practice from any sort of religious foundation.⁴²²

A major step in the growing legitimacy of alternative therapies took place in 1991 when the United States Congress established the Office of Alternative Medicine (OAM) as part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). In 1998 OAM became a full NIH center and was renamed the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM), and in 2014 it was renamed

⁴²¹ Harrington, *The Cure Within*, 217.

⁴²² Ibid., 219-222, referencing Herbert Benson, *The Relaxation Response* (New York: Avon Books, [1975] 1976) and Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1990).

the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH).⁴²³

Though some in the medical community reacted negatively to the establishment of OAM, it represented a realistic recognition of public interest in alternative means of healing.⁴²⁴ According to a 2016 study of a 2012 national survey, Americans (age 4+) spend \$30.2 billion per year on complementary and alternative therapies.⁴²⁵ Today NCCIH recognizes this feature of American society and continues to provide federal funding to a wide array of studies on alternative therapies, including yoga.

This brief exploration of mind-body medicine serves to demonstrate that in the history of medicine in the United States there has been an active undercurrent of interest in alternative forms of therapy. Yoga was one of those forms of alternative therapy that rode these waves of interest in the late twentieth century toward increasing degrees of legitimacy. In particular, it was the work of a few interested physicians and research scientists, separated in different pockets of the globe, who would bridge the gap for yoga practice between its “traditional” and biomedical forms.

⁴²³ National Institutes of Health, “National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH),” *National Institutes of Health*, accessed May 30, 2017, <https://www.nih.gov/about-nih/what-we-do/nih-almanac/national-center-complementary-integrative-health-nccih>.

⁴²⁴ Whorton, *Nature Cures*, x.

⁴²⁵ Richard L. Nahin, Patricia M. Barnes, and Barbara J. Stussman, “Expenditures on Complementary Health Approaches: United States, 2012,” *National Health Statistics Reports*, no. 95 (June 22, 2016): 3.

The Medicalization of Yoga

A crucial transition in the intellectual history of yoga is what Elizabeth De Michelis calls the “medicalisation of yoga,”⁴²⁶ a process wherein yoga mingles with the established medical fields as a viable form of therapy and complementary practice alongside mainstream medicine. The results of the medicalization have created a new subfield in the ever expanding categorizing of modern yoga, one that Alter refers to as “modern medical yoga,”⁴²⁷ which generally appears on my color palette of modern yoga among the shades of biomedical yoga.

In terms of American identity, biomedical yoga expresses the intellectual desire for objectivity, particularly evidence-based scientific objectivity. This objectivity is often held as the standard for true knowledge in modernity, despite the difficulty in realistically holding one’s own gathering of knowledge to such a standard. In this way biomedical yoga acts as a means to join this particular facet of American identity with the supposedly less rational but more natural aspects of American identity discussed alongside the other categories of my typology. In other words, the development of biomedical yoga serves as an intellectual bridge between the apparent divide between the scientific and religious aspects of collective American identity.

⁴²⁶ De Michelis, “A Preliminary Survey of Modern Yoga Studies,” 12.

⁴²⁷ Alter, “Modern Medical Yoga”

Yoga Therapy: Yoga as a Contemporary Health Science

Suzanne Newcombe notes that yoga emerged as a therapeutic technique in the 1970s and 1980s as part of a growing trend toward integrated conceptions of health.⁴²⁸ In the decades since then, interest in yoga has grown exponentially, not only from the general public, but also from the healthcare industry. However, this interest is not only in the yoga tradition as a whole, but also in the highly medicalized versions of modern postural yoga. Sat Bir Singh Khalsa, et al. write that one “reason for yoga therapy’s increasing popularity is that its approach is consonant with many people’s values: it is a natural, mind-body treatment that is low-tech, relatively inexpensive, and generally very safe.”⁴²⁹

Even in modern India, the official recognition of yoga leans heavily toward its medical health benefits. In the 1990s India's Ministry of Health and Family Welfare founded what in 2014 would become the Ministry of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy (AYUSH), which aims “to ensure the optimal development and propagation of AYUSH systems of health care.”⁴³⁰ According to the AYUSH website, the eight limbs of yoga (see chapter 1) “are believed to have a potential for improvement of physical health by enhancing

⁴²⁸ Suzanne Newcombe, “The Development of Modern Yoga: A Survey of the Field,” *Religion Compass* 3, no. 6 (2009) 993.

⁴²⁹ Sat Bir Singh Khalsa et al., “Introduction to Yoga in Health Care,” in *The Principles and Practice of Yoga in Health Care*, ed. Sat Bir Singh Khalsa et al. (Edinburgh: Handspring Publishing, 2016), 7; It is worth noting that yoga practice is not 100% safe. See William J. Broad, *The Science of Yoga: The Risks and the Rewards* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012) and Timothy McCall et al., “Implementation of Yoga Therapy,” in *The Principles and Practice of Yoga in Health Care*, ed. Sat Bir Singh Khalsa et al. (Edinburgh: Handspring Publishing, 2016), 491-515.

⁴³⁰ Ministry of AYUSH, “About the Ministry,” *Ministry of AYUSH*, accessed May 30, 2017, <http://ayush.gov.in/about-us/about-the-ministry>.

circulation of oxygenated blood in the body, retraining the sense organs thereby inducing tranquility and serenity of mind.” The description continues, “The practice of Yoga prevents psychosomatic disorders and improves an individual’s resistance and ability to endure stressful situations.” It is worth noting that the AYUSH website also lists out the eight limbs and refers to “Maharishi Patanjali” as the compiler of the yoga systems.⁴³¹ Thus, AYUSH strikes a balance in its blended language between the traditional associations and the contemporary biomedical terminology.

In terms of clinical yoga research in the United States, one finds a greater distance between the religious and/or spiritual aspects of yoga and its purely health-centered use as evidenced by the description of yoga given by NCCIH:

Yoga is a mind and body practice with origins in ancient Indian philosophy. The various styles of yoga typically combine physical postures, breathing techniques, and meditation or relaxation. There are numerous schools of yoga. Hatha yoga, the most commonly practiced in the United States and Europe, emphasizes postures (*asanas*) and breathing exercises (*pranayama*). Some of the major styles of hatha yoga are Iyengar, Ashtanga, Vini, Kundalini, and Bikram yoga.⁴³²

This accurate, but generic description of yoga practice provides insight into how yoga is perceived and used within federally funded medical research on yoga practice. Though the NCCIH description does credit the origins of yoga, notice that the origins are in “philosophy,” not “religion.” Removing or shielding these elements while maintaining at least perceived authenticity of the practice is one

⁴³¹ Ministry of AYUSH, “Yoga,” *Ministry of AYUSH*, accessed May 30, 2017, <http://ayush.gov.in/about-the-systems/yoga>.

⁴³² National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH), “Yoga,” *National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH)*, accessed May 30, 2017, <https://nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga>.

of the hallmarks of biomedical yoga, especially as it appears within clinical research.

In the biomedical context, yoga therapy and yoga therapists are distinct from general yoga practice and yoga practitioners. Khalsa, et al. describe yoga therapists as “yoga teachers with additional training who work with individuals with a broad range of health conditions.”⁴³³ Timothy McCall, Latha Satish, and Subodh Tiwari add that general contemporary yoga classes are group-based, where “the same set of practices is given to each practitioner,” whereas yoga therapy sessions are ideally more customized to the needs of the individual.

They continue,

Holistically seen, no two people are identical, and thus in the clinical practice of yoga therapy, the prescribed practices vary, including among people with identical diagnoses. Even people with the same condition, say breast cancer, may vary in disease severity, their stage of treatment, and the amount of time they can devote to their yoga practice, as well as varying in comorbid conditions. People also have different strengths and weaknesses; different degrees of overall health, fitness, and psychological well-being; and different levels of experience in yoga. Each of these factors can affect which practices the therapist will recommend, and often more importantly, which ones they will *not* recommend.⁴³⁴

This distinction between yoga and yoga therapy is important for my typology because it distinguishes the category of biomedical yoga from the other categories by adding to biomedical yoga a certain kind of professionalization and

⁴³³ Khalsa et al., “Introduction to Yoga in Health Care,” 5.

⁴³⁴ McCall, Satish, and Tiwari, “History, Philosophy, and Practice of Yoga Therapy,” 38. (emphasis original)

accreditation.⁴³⁵ However, this professionalization and accreditation, while usually necessary in biomedical yoga, gets carried over into the other categories, sometimes adding a different degree of legitimacy than what is typically found in a given category.

Clinical Yoga Research

Clinical medical research on yoga in the United States is a relatively new field for mainstream health care professionals and research scientists, but one that has quickly risen in prominence. Though initial reception of yoga in the medical community leaned heavily toward skepticism, yoga has been legitimized in several ways, notably by publications on yoga research in established peer-reviewed medical journals and other publications.

In 2016, Handspring Press published what may be considered the “first professional-level medical textbook” on yoga therapy.⁴³⁶ *The Principles and Practice of Yoga in Health Care*.⁴³⁷ This comprehensive textbook offers an introduction to yoga practice that addresses the history and philosophy of yoga as well as the development of biomedical yoga research. It then breaks down the role of yoga practice in health care into six categories: “mental health

⁴³⁵ Sat Bir Singh Khalsa et al., “Future Directions in Research and Clinical Care,” in *The Principles and Practice of Yoga in Health Care*, ed. Sat Bir Singh Khalsa et al. (Edinburgh: Handspring Publishing, 2016), 525.

⁴³⁶ Susan Enfield, “The Doctor Will Om With You Now,” *Yoga Journal*, March 2016, 76.

⁴³⁷ Khalsa et al., *The Principles and Practice of Yoga in Health Care*.

conditions,” “musculoskeletal and neurological conditions,” “endocrine conditions,” “cardiorespiratory conditions,” “cancer,” and “special populations.”⁴³⁸

The initial skepticism toward yoga therapy should not come as a surprise given the history of yoga. McCall writes on the reception of yoga by those in the medical establishment:

To many of them perhaps, it seems like a mystical pursuit, a quasi-religion with little basis in the modern world of science. In a medical profession now itself dominated by near religious reverence for the randomized, controlled study, knowledge acquired through thousands of years of direct observation, introspection, and trial and error may seem quaint.⁴³⁹

Whorton notes that practitioners of alternative therapies generally have three arguments against the use of randomized controlled trials (RCTs) as the standard for legitimate medical work. First, several effective mainstream medical practices emerged before RCTs became the standard. Second, some populations of those who practice alternative therapies are generally not trained in the rigors of scientific research. They are therefore not fluent in research design, and they generally do not have the same access to research infrastructure as do mainstream medical practitioners. Third, and most relevant to modern yoga research, alternative therapies are simply not good fits for the structure of RCTs. RCTs by design focus on specific and limited elements of a healing process, which contradicts a holistic method.⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁸ Ibid., v-vi.

⁴³⁹ Timothy McCall, “Foreword,” in *Anatomy of Hatha Yoga*, by H. David Coulter (Honesdale, PA: Body and Breath, 2001), 11.

⁴⁴⁰ Whorton, *Nature Cures*, 292-294.

Discussing the limitations of the RCT, Khalsa, Shirley Telles, Lorenzo Cohen, and McCall write, “Because many of the outcomes assessed are subjective in nature, being unblinded to group assignment and the intent of the study can lead to participant bias.” They add, though, that there are solutions:

For example, when comparing yoga to an active control group such as exercise, participants can be informed that the purpose of the study is to compare different behavioral interventions intended to improve the condition or disease being studied. In this way, patients assigned to both the yoga and exercise groups believe they are getting the “real” treatment.⁴⁴¹

Proponents of clinical yoga research have adapted their own approach in recent years to compromise with the medical establishment. The result has been a fertile debate over how yoga can be used and/or studied in a clinical medical context.

The history of clinical yoga research in the United States spans only a few decades and is marked by a handful of important figures and studies. De Michelis upholds Benson, who not only elevated the use of such terms as “stress” and “relaxation,” but also laid the foundation in the United States for legitimately perceived research on alternative therapies, including yoga.⁴⁴²

McCall praises Marian Garfinkel and her team for work in the 1990s on yoga and carpal tunnel syndrome, and Dean Ornish, whose 1990 article on lifestyle changes and the reversal of artery blockage, something that previously had been

⁴⁴¹ Khalsa et al., “Future Directions in Research and Clinical Care,” 523.

⁴⁴² De Michelis, “A Preliminary Survey of Modern Yoga Studies,” 12-13.

thought unachievable, was revolutionary for the growing CAM-related fields.⁴⁴³ Ornish studied yoga with Sri Swami Satchidananda,⁴⁴⁴ and yoga was part of Ornish's lifestyle program, which included other physical, mental, dietary, and social elements. However, when first preparing his study, Ornish was advised not to name yoga as an influence so as to not frighten away financial support or risk being perceived as a peddler of pseudo-science. In the years since the publication, though, Ornish and others have been able to discuss more openly the use of yoga.⁴⁴⁵

These few figures were certainly influential in the rising prominence and acceptability of biomedical yoga. However, they were hardly alone. In recent decades, researchers of medical yoga have taken stock of the significant amount of scientific research done on yoga practice and the themes of that research.

Bibliometric analyses and research reviews

Khalsa's 2004 "Yoga as a Therapeutic Intervention: A Bibliometric Analysis of Published Research Studies," published in the *Indian Journal of Physiology and Pharmacology*, provides a useful presentation of the early state of the yoga research field. In particular, he notes that in these relatively early days of medical yoga research, the criteria as to which yoga postures and/or

⁴⁴³ McCall, "Foreword," 11, referencing Marian S. Garfinkel et al., "Yoga-Based Intervention for Carpal Tunnel Syndrome: A Randomized Trial," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 280, no. 18 (November 11, 1998): 1601–3 and Dean Ornish et al., "Can Lifestyle Changes Reverse Coronary Heart Disease?" *The Lancet* 336, no. 8708 (July 1990): 129–33.

⁴⁴⁴ McCall, "Foreword," 11.

⁴⁴⁵ De Michelis, "A Preliminary Survey of Modern Yoga Studies," 13-14.

techniques were used were “rather arbitrary” and that the yoga methods used in these studies were quite varied. He writes, “There is no single standardized yoga practice format, nor is this likely or necessarily desirable in the future.”⁴⁴⁶ The latter portion of this sentence is particularly thought-provoking and addresses one of the key tensions with attempting to force a practice as varied and colorful as yoga into a framework as necessarily structured as biomedical research. In their 2014 bibliometric analysis, Holger Cramer, Romy Lauche, and Gustav Dobos agree with Khalsa’s point, writing “Yoga is not a standardized intervention, nor is it likely (or arguably desirable) that it should become one.”⁴⁴⁷ However, this lack of standardization poses a concern for research funding; McCall, Satish, and Tiwari write, “Indeed, governmental and private funders generally refuse to fund anything other than studies of standardized yoga protocols.”⁴⁴⁸

This limitation of medical research on yoga could easily be perceived as a general critique of modern biomedicine. In a 2015 bibliometric analysis of yoga research, Pamela Jeter et al. (including Khalsa) write:

Good study design dictates the use of a standardized yoga protocol for the treatment arm in an RCT to determine efficacy/effectiveness and in most cases is applied to a homogeneous study population, limiting generalizability to the population at large. However, in clinical practice,

⁴⁴⁶ Sat Bir S. Khalsa, “Yoga as a Therapeutic Intervention: A Bibliometric Analysis of Published Research Studies,” *Indian Journal of Physiology and Pharmacology* 48, no. 3 (2004) 275.

⁴⁴⁷ Holger Cramer, Romy Lauche, and Gustav Dobos, “Characteristics of Randomized Controlled Trials of Yoga: A Bibliometric Analysis,” *BMC Complementary and Alternative Medicine* 14, no. 328 (September 2, 2014): 8.

⁴⁴⁸ McCall, Satish, and Tiwari, “History, Philosophy, and Practice of Yoga Therapy,” 39.

yoga “therapy” is tailored to the individual need as determined by the heterogeneous presentation of symptoms and severity of disease.”⁴⁴⁹

Here the authors address the often problematic relationship between the (necessary) limitations of biomedical research and the application of therapeutic elements in clinical practice. Yoga practice in particular, like other holistic health practices, accentuates the potential distance in this relationship.

In recent years, clinical medical research that involves yoga has grown exponentially both in simple volume and in the variety of biomedical conditions addressed.⁴⁵⁰ Tiffany Field has compiled two yoga research review articles in *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice* that each provides a high level overview of the scope of yoga research in the last few decades. Her 2011 review begins with a brief overview of yoga, which notably does not mention any religious or spiritual connection, describing Patañjali as “a Sanskrit Scholar and an Indian physician.” She describes the range of her review, which includes research “on psychological, pain, autoimmune and immune conditions and on physiological and physical measures as well as potential underlying mechanisms for yoga effects,” and she sets the boundaries of her review, including that it focuses on studies on the yoga postures, not the breathing or meditative aspects

⁴⁴⁹ Pamela E. Jeter et al., “Yoga as a Therapeutic Intervention: A Bibliometric Analysis of Published Research Studies from 1967 to 2013,” *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* 21, no. 10 (October 2015): 591.

⁴⁵⁰ Cramer, Lauche, and Dobos, “Characteristics of Randomized Controlled Trials of Yoga: A Bibliometric Analysis,” 6-7.

of yoga practice. However, she does note, “because yoga classes often include all 3 elements, the effects of the physical postures are often confounded.”⁴⁵¹

After a systematic review of dozens of studies on the wide variety of topics (including anxiety, hypertension, lymphoma, and weight loss), Field concludes her review with a suggestion for the underlying mechanisms for the measurable effects of yoga and some limitations of existing yoga research. Field considers yoga practice a form of “self-massage,” and thus suggests that underlying mechanisms at play in massage also apply to yoga.⁴⁵² Specifically, she proposes that “the stimulation of pressure receptors leading to enhanced vagal activity and reduced cortisol” may be part of the underlying mechanisms of the effects of yoga practice, though she notes that more research is needed.⁴⁵³

Field notes several limitations of yoga research in her review:

1) lack of randomization...; 2) self-selection of samples that probably result from the compliance that is needed for people to participate in intensive yoga protocols over prolonged periods; 3) significant variability in the samples across studies including sample selection and sample size variables; 4) lack of good physical activity/attention control or comparison groups...; 5) dosage variability across studies in the length of classes..., frequency...and duration...; 6) significant variability in the measures...; 7) often the gold standard measures for a condition have not been included...; and 8) physical effects...are rarely measured, physiological effects...are rarely measured, biochemical changes are even more rarely assessed,...and immune effects have almost never been studied...⁴⁵⁴

Two elements of this list stand out for my discussion of biomedical yoga. First, it addresses what is perceived as necessary to become accepted into mainstream

⁴⁵¹ Tiffany Field, “Yoga Clinical Research Review,” *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice* 17 (February 2011) 1.

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid..

medicine. Limitations 1 through 5 are about fundamental study design in terms of what counts as a legitimate RCT, and limitations 6 through 8 are about standardization of measurement, i.e. what forms of measurement are acceptable to mainstream medical researchers. Second, the list indirectly addresses perhaps the greatest limitation of yoga practice as such: yoga practice is not and never has been one thing, and thus an environment such as biomedicine, which demands controls and consistency, is ill-suited for yoga practice, no matter how simplified. I am not suggesting that yoga practice should not be studied in the medical context, but instead that biomedical yoga practice, even more so than the other categories, is an ideal that does not and cannot exist. Yoga practice must be manipulated to fit within certain parameters for standards of scientific knowledge, but as a holistic practice it cannot be forced into boundaries for which the practice itself does not allow.⁴⁵⁵

Reflections on yoga clinical research

Before returning to my typology, I want to discuss some reflections on clinical medical yoga research published by Karen Sherman and Khalsa, two prominent figures in the yoga research community. These reflections are valuable to the discussion of biomedical yoga because they point toward one way of bridging the apparent gap between biomedical yoga practice and

⁴⁵⁵ In 2016, Field published a more comprehensive review of yoga research conducted in the years since those featured in her 2011 review. Her conclusions regarding the limitations of yoga research remain largely the same. Tiffany Field, "Yoga Research Review," *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice* 24 (August 2016): 145–61.

Religious Studies, and they provide a broader context than those typically found in an assessment of clinical medical research.

In a 2006 article, Sherman poses some questions that a researcher should consider before beginning a yoga study that are continually relevant for current and future expressions of biomedical yoga:

Does it matter how many and which Yogic practices are included in an intervention? Does it depend on the medical condition or population being studied? Or is the essence of Yoga more about the way the practice is approached, regardless of which specific elements of the eight-limbed path are included? For a Yoga intervention to be successful, must participants apply insights from the Yoga practices to daily life?⁴⁵⁶

These are large questions, but they are also practical questions. Sherman suggests that given the limited opportunities for funding, yoga research must be thought through carefully. For example, the NIH, she claims, needs to hear about the “mechanisms of action (in biomedical and/or psychological terms) of Yoga.” However, she adds that instead of being a barrier, this is an opportunity for conversation between yoga practitioners and biomedical researchers.⁴⁵⁷ I would expand this opportunity for conversation to include Religious Studies scholars who engage with the history of ideas, especially those related to South Asian traditions. Perhaps a more nuanced understanding of the full history and intellectual context of yoga practice could lead biomedical researchers toward better study design, even within the boundaries of established protocols.

⁴⁵⁶ Karen Sherman, “Reflections on Researching Yoga,” *International Journal of Yoga Therapy* 16 (2006): 9.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

Sherman suggests that medical researchers should clearly think through the qualitative elements of yoga practice. She writes,

There is also the question of how to measure the full range of benefits from Yoga. We are in need of rigorous outcome measures that will capture these benefits in quantitative form. But, before that time, it might be prudent to do some qualitative, semi-structured interviews to better understand how people are benefiting (or not) from their Yoga practice.⁴⁵⁸

Sherman's final point here is where there is another potential opportunity for Religious Studies scholars to engage with biomedical yoga practice.

Researchers may narrow their presentation of yoga practice to eliminate elements more common in religious yoga and spiritual yoga, and many participants in these studies may perceive the practice as something more akin to fitness yoga in a medical context. However, the history of yoga practice and its various expressions of embodied connectedness suggest that some participants may perceive the practice to be doing more than addressing joint pain, for example, even if they do not consider it overtly religious.

According to Khalsa, some in the yoga research community feel they are engaging in contortion by presenting a version of yoga that is parsed for the purposes of legitimacy within mainstream medicine. This version of yoga “(sometimes purposefully) avoids any incorporation of *prânâyâma*, meditation, psychology, or philosophical components.” Khalsa calls this type of yoga “limited Yoga,” within which I would include biomedical yoga practices.⁴⁵⁹ This view aligns with those among general modern yoga practitioners who believe that an

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., 10.

⁴⁵⁹ Sat Bir S. Khalsa, “A Perennial Debate,” *International Journal of Yoga Therapy* 16 (2006): 5.

overly Westernized, secularized, and/or commoditized yoga is not “authentic.” However, Khalsa is aware of the history of modern yoga and knows that claims of authenticity are often misguided. He writes, “There is little in the writings of Patanjali to suggest the existence of the physical *âsanas* so important to modern Yoga, which may owe much of their development to the past 200 years, in an India under the domination and influence of British rule.”⁴⁶⁰

Khalsa does not seem overly concerned with these worries of authenticity within yoga practice in the clinical research context. Even without ideas of tradition influencing a participant’s perceptions, the use of isolated yoga postures may have far-reaching potential for a participant. He writes, “Once learned, an *âsana* or breathing exercise can serve as a tool that is with them forever,” adding that even a “single, isolated technique for a specific purpose may engender experiences and benefits that will inspire a quest to delve deeper into all that Yoga has to offer.”⁴⁶¹ In this sense, biomedical yoga, like fitness yoga and wellness yoga, can also be a “gateway yoga” for participants who may decide to take their practice further than the highly controlled versions they experience in a biomedical context.

Conclusion: The Limitations of Boundaries

This chapter has discussed how to characterize a particular yoga practice as biomedical yoga. Inversely, the way a particular yoga practice relates to

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., 6. Singleton makes a similar claim throughout *Yoga Body*.

⁴⁶¹ Khalsa, “A Perennial Debate,” 6.

biomedical yoga significantly determines where on the color palette that practice falls in my typology. Religious yoga is often characterized by its distance from, and its lack of reliance on biomedical authorities. Spiritual yoga keeps a similar distance from mainstream medicine, though there are perhaps some nods toward mindfulness studies. Fitness yoga appeals to a certain type of medical thinking, namely fitness and sports science. Wellness yoga is closer to biomedical yoga than the other categories, and wellness yoga often features medical professionals who are no longer in a clinical setting, such as Deepak Chopra.

As noted in the introduction to my typology of modern yoga practice, I do not intend the order of the categories to be seen as progressive or cumulative, working from lesser forms of yoga practice toward some ideal. I hope by now I have demonstrated that any category can be seen as “highest” or “lowest” depending on what particular aspect is most important to the perceiver, and that none of the categories are as distinct or exclusive as they initially seem. One reason I chose to end my typology with biomedical yoga was its unique relationship to the other categories in terms of the general perceived legitimacy of yoga practice; as biomedical yoga practice gains legitimacy, so do the other categories, whether the practitioners within or near those other categories care about it or not.

Indeed, B. K. S. Iyengar's *Light on Yoga* became popular in large part because it was written with nods toward biomedical language and concepts.⁴⁶² Andrea Jain notes that even today, "The immense market for books on yoga anatomy and physiology...testifies to the dominance of biomedical discourse for explaining the benefits of postural yoga."⁴⁶³ These explanations of benefits disseminate through the wide variety of literature on yoga practice, showing up in expressions of yoga practice beyond those of biomedical yoga, particularly popular articles in print and online. For example, an article on Time.com titled "You Asked: Is Yoga Good Exercise?" cites three medical journal articles⁴⁶⁴ in support of its general suggestion that yoga is good for you.⁴⁶⁵ These popular articles pervade American culture in ways that medical journal articles do not, and so the information about biomedical yoga spreads to other forms of yoga practice, giving each a greater perception of legitimacy in terms of perceived objectivity.

The direction of influence can also go in the other direction. The holistic nature of yoga practice could also have an impact on the practice of mainstream medicine. Discussing the effects of holistic treatments generally, Harrington

⁴⁶² Jain, *Selling Yoga*, 83.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁴⁶⁴ Marshall Hagins et al., "Effectiveness of Yoga for Hypertension: Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine* 2013 (2013): Article ID 649836; Alan R. Kristal et al., "Yoga Practice Is Associated with Attenuated Weight Gain in Healthy, Middle-Aged Men and Women," *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine* 11, no. 4 (August 2005): 28–33; and Field, "Yoga Clinical Research Review."

⁴⁶⁵ Markham Heid, "You Asked: Is Yoga Good Exercise?" *Time*, January 20, 2016, accessed May 30, 2017, <http://time.com/4185626/yoga-exercise-workout/>.

notes that they address a current limitation of mainstream medicine: personal connection with a healthcare provider. She writes,

in a time dominated by managed care and fifteen-minute appointments with clinicians who barely know us, more and more of us are nostalgic for a time when primary care physicians had long-term personal relationships with their patients, knew their names, and took a pastoral interest in their well-being.⁴⁶⁶

I suggest that this sentiment may feed increased interest in yoga not only as a physical fitness, but also as an approach to overall health. The classes may become a community and the teacher may connect personally with the students over time.

Within these blurred boundaries between biomedical yoga and the other categories of my typology are fertile opportunities for Religious Studies scholars to further the religion and science dialogue. In chapter 2 I suggested that a phenomenological approach to the study of yoga in medical contexts could help address the question, “how can one study yoga objectively?” This question seems to be implicit in the limitations of biomedical yoga studies discussed above. However, the reflective biomedical yoga literature discussed above and qualitative biomedical yoga studies⁴⁶⁷ seem to suggest that there may be value in

⁴⁶⁶ Harrington, *The Cure Within*, 138.

⁴⁶⁷ For example, K. A. Dittmann and M. R. Freedman, “Body Awareness, Eating Attitudes, and Spiritual Beliefs of Women Practicing Yoga,” *Eating Disorders* 17, no. 4 (September 2009): 273–292; Subhadra Evans et al., “‘Now I See a Brighter Day’: Expectations and Perceived Benefits of an Iyengar Yoga Intervention for Young Patients with Rheumatoid Arthritis,” *Journal of Yoga & Physical Therapy* 1, no. 101 (June 11, 2011); Farah A. Jindani and G. F. S. Khalsa, “A Yoga Intervention Program for Patients Suffering from Symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Qualitative Descriptive Study,” *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* 21, no. 7 (July 2015): 401–408; and Julia E. Keosaian et al., “‘We’re All in This Together’: A Qualitative Study of Predominantly Low Income Minority Participants in a Yoga Trial for Chronic Low Back Pain,” *Complementary Therapies in Medicine* 24 (February 2016): 34–39.

allowing the more human elements to emerge from the research. Given the historical context of the development of modern yoga practice, parts of these human elements may be expressions of religiosity and/or spirituality. Therefore, a study, designed within the established parameters of a clinical trial, has the potential to feature a form of yoga practice that is both religious yoga and biomedical yoga. Perception defines the category as much as context, and the biomedical researcher and the scholar of religion have opportunities to add value to their respective fields from the same data.

Conclusion

Religion, Science, and a Final Blurring

One of the reasons I presented the categories of my typology in this particular order was to create the appearance of two ends of a spectrum, beginning with “traditional” yoga practice as a representative of “religion” and ending with yoga in biomedical contexts as a representative of “science.” As I stated in my introduction, this dissertation resides within the religion and science discourse, and I set out with a goal to exemplify Ian Barbour’s “dialogue” approach.⁴⁶⁸ Some of the most valuable outcomes of this ongoing discourse generally, and the “dialogue” approach specifically, are the realizations that categories, including “religion” and “science” themselves, are contingent simulations of how things really are. In that spirit, I will conclude this dissertation with a final exploration of the blurry boundaries of my categories and how yoga practice diffuses across the color palette.

The two ends of the typology (religious yoga and biomedical yoga) offer fairly standard representations of “religion” and “science.” However, resting too heavily on the spectrum metaphor implies more difference between these two categories than really exists. Certainly there are attempts to draw a hard line between the two; researchers of biomedical yoga, for example, may have reasons to exclude religion. Yet modern yoga evades simple bracketing. Writing

⁴⁶⁸ Ian G. Barbour, *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 90-98.

specifically on the scientific study of yoga in India, Joseph Alter succinctly captures the complexity of the engagement between yoga and science:

Laboratory experimentation and “field research” on Yoga were meant to provide an increasingly refined, empirical understanding of the material manifestation of a cosmic principle, as this cosmic principle was understood as a “theory” of absolute freedom. In this regard one might say that whereas religion holds science at arm’s length...the underlying materialism of Yoga, its *praktic* structure, seductively draws science in. In its own way Yoga is based on a Cosmic Principle that is comparable to the Natural Law of physics. But whereas this makes Yoga and science analogous...Yoga takes control of science, as science is understood as knowledge that must be transcended.⁴⁶⁹

In this description, Alter is suggesting that at first glance, yoga is a physical practice that can be observed to have concrete measurable effects. This approach is at the heart of contemporary clinical medical research on yoga and can function quite well as is. However, yoga practiced more thoroughly may become an epistemic practice from within, which turns the scientific observation back onto itself. The yoga practice that was at once being observed by another for the purposes of expanding scientific knowledge may simultaneously become an observation of oneself by the practitioner, which may lead to observation of one’s relationship to others and/or one’s environment. This inwardness may spark words like “connectedness” or other language that may resemble that of religious experience. This is just one potential example of where the boundaries between yoga practice as a secular medical phenomenon and yoga practice as a religious and/or spiritual experience can blur.

⁴⁶⁹ Joseph S. Alter, *Yoga in Modern India: The Body Between Science and Philosophy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 30.

This blurring is not limited to contemporary expressions of yoga; the mingling of yoga practice and health, broadly construed, goes back to early forms of yoga. In his critical studies of classical yoga texts, Philipp Maas works with the established notion that Patañjali was knowledgeable of medical teachings of his time, and that he expected the audience of yoga teachings to be similarly well versed.⁴⁷⁰ Maas furthers this reading by discussing a distinct split between the goals of classical yoga and medicine. Whereas medicine was aimed toward well-being of the bodymind, something important for yoga practice, it was limited in that well-being could be reversed. In contrast, the goal state brought about by yoga practice is “spiritual perfection,” which is “final and unconditioned.”⁴⁷¹

Whereas classical yoga made gestures toward health and medicine, yoga practice in the medieval haṭha yoga traditions was much more explicit in its connections to bodily health. Indeed, a central feature of haṭha yoga in many of its formative texts is the method toward perfection of one’s body in order to gain immortality. Ellen Goldberg suggests that haṭha yoga not only connects with health, but also offers a “bio-therapeutic paradigm.” She argues that traditions of haṭha yoga “frame their goal of cognitive non-duality (*advaita*) within a *deeply embodied and profoundly natural* (inner) science (*vidyā*) that promises long life

⁴⁷⁰ Philipp Maas, “The Concepts of the Human Body and Disease in Classical Yoga and Āyurveda,” *Wiener Zeitschrift Für Die Kunde Südasiens* 51 (2007-2008): 127, 130-131, citing Albrecht Wezler, “On the Quadruple Division of the Yogaśāstra, the Caturvyūhatva of the Cikitsāśāstra and the ‘Four Noble Truths’ of the Buddha,” *Indologica-Taurinensia* 12 (1984): 304f.

⁴⁷¹ Maas, “The Concepts of the Human Body and Disease in Classical Yoga and Āyurveda,” 129.

and the attainment of divine body (*divya deha*).⁴⁷² She further argues that the traditions of haṭha yoga do more than just present their emancipatory goal in terms of bodily health and hygiene. The bodily practices are extensively built on medieval theories of health and the body and rigorously built into the haṭha yoga system such that they become a component of liberation. In other words, the health concerns of the core haṭha yoga traditions are not just complementary to the soteriological project; they are part its operation.⁴⁷³

Goldberg suggests that by shifting the bodily aspect of yoga practice from being just one of many steps to a more fundamental place, haṭha yoga takes the Indian metaphysical ideas of non-duality and puts them into a bodily practice. The ultimate union does not occur in the abstract; it takes place within one's body.⁴⁷⁴ Recall from chapter 1 that this focus on the body merges with yoga from the tantric traditions and creates a platform for the bodily health not often seen before in Indian traditions.⁴⁷⁵ Goldberg notes that the medieval haṭha yoga texts, unlike most yoga texts from earlier eras, directly describe the medical benefits of yoga practice. Specifically, she notes that in the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā*, the descriptions of *āsanas*, beginning with the eighth, include elaboration on how the posture acts on the body in terms of health.⁴⁷⁶ This trend, rooted in religiously soteriological purposes, survives in modern yoga texts, most influentially in B. K.

⁴⁷² Ellen Goldberg, "Medieval Haṭhayoga Sādhana: An Indigenous South Asian Bio-Therapeutic Model for Health, Healing and Longevity," *Acta Orientalia* 70 (2009): 94. (emphasis added)

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 96-97.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 100.

S. Iyengar's *Light on Yoga*, and contributes to the development of fitness yoga, wellness yoga, and biomedical yoga.

However, the emergence of these categories is not part of a linear progression from less concern with health to more. In Iyengar's reflective *The Tree of Yoga*, he writes, "Health is religious. Ill-health is irreligious."⁴⁷⁷ With this loaded phrase, Iyengar intertwines the ideal of attaining good health with religious and spiritual ideals. The word "health" tends to have connotations with more secular and medical images, but in a broader sense the word reflects a goal common in religious and spiritual traditions in which one cultivates the well-being of oneself or one's community to attain some sort of end goal, be it salvation, enlightenment, or liberation.

Wouter J. Hanegraaf argues that this type of understanding of health and healing is prominent in New Age traditions. He writes that "religious salvation" in New Age traditions can appear as "personal growth," which brings about "deliverance from human suffering and weakness...by developing our human potential."⁴⁷⁸ In this way, he argues that "religious salvation in fact amounts to a radical form of 'healing'."⁴⁷⁹ Since several forms of modern yoga practice may fall within or near the boundaries of New Age traditions, this other dimension of

⁴⁷⁷ B. K. S. Iyengar, *The Tree of Yoga* (Boston: Shambhala, [1988] 2002), 11.

⁴⁷⁸ Wouter J. Hanegraaf, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 46, quoted in Andrea R. Jain, *Selling Yoga: From Counterculture to Pop Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 105.

⁴⁷⁹ Hanegraaf, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 46, quoted in Jain, *Selling Yoga*, 105.

health is worth acknowledging, especially in discussions of biomedical yoga, and serves as just one example of how seemingly antipodal categories overlap.

Implications for Religious Studies

If there is an underlying current to the preceding chapters and to the study of modern yoga generally, it is that modern yoga is difficult to categorize. This characteristic has made it at times an academic orphan, studied to varying degrees in a number of fields, yet fully at home in none. However, I hope that my typology has demonstrated that modern yoga should not be investigated in just one or two fields. It is a rich and multifaceted phenomenon that both integrates and distinguishes diverse fields of study. Since this dissertation is a comparative religion project, my focus here is on the implications of the categories of modern yoga for Religious Studies.

The usefulness of religious yoga for Religious Studies is straightforward, especially regarding those modern yoga practices that exist firmly within Hindu, Buddhist or Jain traditions. Yet even in this category, there are opportunities for expanded inquiry. In one view, religious yoga is the most "traditional" form of modern yoga practice, but it also has expressions that are ultra-modern. For example, consider yoga as an interreligious phenomenon in groups such as YogaFaith,⁴⁸⁰ PraiseMoves (which is marketed as a "Christian ALTERNATIVE" to

⁴⁸⁰ YogaFaith, "YogaFaith," *YogaFaith*, accessed June 11, 2017, <https://yogafaith.org>.

yoga),⁴⁸¹ and the Jewish Yoga Network,⁴⁸² where practitioners within non-South Asian religious traditions practice yoga *as a part of* their religious practices.⁴⁸³ In these cases and others, the "religious" part of religious yoga goes beyond the usual associations with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. These cases are, in the words of Stephen Prothero, "instances of interreligious contact" that demonstrate that "Religions in practice do not respect the tidy boundaries we often assign to them in our books and courses."⁴⁸⁴ Therefore even in the obvious category of religious yoga, there are ample opportunities for further Religious Studies inquiries.

The usefulness of spiritual yoga for Religious Studies is more ambiguous, but aligns with existing discussions within the field on the meaning of "spirituality" and its relationship with "religion." In her work on unpacking the popular phrase, "spiritual, but not religious," Nancy Ammerman writes, "The research reported here suggests that 'religion' must be understood to *include* a spiritual domain."⁴⁸⁵ Rather than bracketing off the ambiguity of the spiritual aspects of a given practice, Religious Studies scholars should recognize and engage with those

⁴⁸¹ PraiseMoves, "PraiseMoves - The Christian ALTERNATIVE to Yoga," accessed June 11, 2017, <https://praisemoves.com>. (emphasis original)

⁴⁸² Jain, *Selling Yoga*, 125.

⁴⁸³ For more on interreligious expressions of yoga, see Candy Gunther Brown, *The Healing Gods: Complementary and Alternative Medicine in Christian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 45-66; Jain, *Selling Yoga*, 124-126; and Eleanor Freyhan Odenheimer, "Adaptations of Yoga: Christian Interpretations" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Tennessee, 2012), http://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_graddiss/1453.

⁴⁸⁴ Stephen Prothero, "Hinduphobia and Hinduphilia in U.S. Culture," in *The Stranger's Religion: Fascination and Fear*, ed. Anna Lännström (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 18.

⁴⁸⁵ Nancy T. Ammerman, "Spiritual But Not Religious? Beyond Binary Choices in the Study of Religion," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 52, no. 2 (2013): 276. (emphasis original)

aspects, even if the categorical boundaries are uncomfortably blurred.

Ammerman continues, "Understanding religion requires that we take spiritualities as seriously as we have always taken belief and belonging."⁴⁸⁶

On the other hand, spiritual yoga also offers an opportunity to study "spirituality" in a less amorphous way. While discussing its appeal to contemporary audiences, Sarah Strauss writes that yoga provides "an active set of practices which, if followed, promise tangible results—spiritual 'progress' made visible because embodied."⁴⁸⁷ Because spiritual yoga, like all types, is an embodied practice, these "tangible results" could present opportunities for more concrete discussions in the study of spiritualities.

Religious yoga and spiritual yoga are relatively easy cases for Religious Studies, but the relevance of fitness yoga is less obvious. Where are the opportunities for Religious Studies at the gym? Jain offers an answer. She considers

postural yoga as a body of practice that is profoundly religious. I use *body of religious practice* here to refer to a set of behaviors characterized by the following: They are treated as sacred, set apart from the ordinary or mundane; they are grounded in a shared ontology or worldview...; they are grounded in a shared axiology or set of values or goals concerned with resolving weakness, suffering, or death; and the above qualities are reinforced through narrative and ritual.⁴⁸⁸

Though certain terms, such as "sacred," require a broad interpretation, here Jain uses familiar Religious Studies terminology to describe accurately

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., 276.

⁴⁸⁷ Sarah Strauss, "'Adapt, Adjust, Accommodate': The Production of Yoga in a Transnational World," *History & Anthropology* 13, no. 3 (2002): 249.

⁴⁸⁸ Jain, *Selling Yoga*, 98. (emphasis original)

modern yoga practice, including those expressions that I would categorize as fitness yoga. One critique of this view would be to argue that in a fitness yoga class, the focus is on the physical body, not lofty metaphysical goals. Jain responds,

the assumption that one should reject something as a body of religious practice because it emphasizes some aspect of the mundane world would require most of what makes up the history of religions to be disqualified from the category *religion*. In short, the coexistence of sacred and mundane qualities is threaded throughout the history of religions.⁴⁸⁹

The duty of Religious Studies scholars is not to focus on objects of study that fit within established categories, but to develop those categories in such a way that engages more real-world phenomena. Recall Kimberly C. Patton's argument for the need to "rethink how we understand 'religion.'"⁴⁹⁰

The usefulness of wellness yoga, like that of spiritual yoga, is difficult to delineate directly. As discussed in chapter 4, wellness yoga lacks a definitive currency of legitimacy, instead pulling in degrees of the currencies of other categories. Therefore, in the case of wellness yoga, Religious Studies scholars should both consider the broader understandings of "health" and "well-being"⁴⁹¹ and take seriously the self-described experience of practitioners.⁴⁹² Mark Singleton and Jean Byrne write, "To confine the academic within the realm of the purely intellectual (in contradistinction to the experiential) is to ignore the range of

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., 103. (emphasis original)

⁴⁹⁰ Kimberley C. Patton, *Religion of the Gods: Ritual, Paradox, and Reflexivity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 15. See pp. 76-77 of this dissertation.

⁴⁹¹ Jain, *Selling Yoga*, 105.

⁴⁹² For more on "attributional" methods, see Ann Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 88-102.

possibilities open to academic inquirers.”⁴⁹³ Wade Clark Roof makes a similar point. He writes, “Without some consideration of this broadened scope of experiential concerns, we cannot fully grasp how the American religious landscape is evolving as we move into the new century.”⁴⁹⁴ In other words, Religious Studies scholars should embrace the ambiguity of categories such as wellness yoga since therein lies enormous potential for further inquiry, particularly into the lived experience of on-the-ground religious expression that evades clear categories.

The usefulness of biomedical yoga for Religious Studies also partially derives from the broadened understanding of "health" described in chapter 5 and in the previous section, and it also arises in discussions of disciplinary boundaries and opportunities for interdisciplinary inquiry. Despite significant efforts, intentional and otherwise, to secularize yoga practice, any form of yoga practice is linked by varying degrees to a religious practice, even if only in name. Anne Harrington applies this kind of approach and the broader understanding of health to medical practices. She writes,

what we learn from tracking the translation of religious ideas about mind-body healing into the secular idiom of mind-body medicine is this: a belief or practice that is a secularized version of an older religious tradition is not the same as a belief or practice that never had any kind of prior moral or

⁴⁹³ Mark Singleton and Jean Byrne, “Introduction,” in *Yoga in the Modern World: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Mark Singleton and Jean Byrne (New York: Routledge, 2008), 4.

⁴⁹⁴ Wade Clark Roof, “Religion and Spirituality: Toward an Integrated Analysis,” in *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Michele Dillon (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 137.

religious meaning. This is because we can almost always discern an echo of the original religious message in the new secular story.⁴⁹⁵

This is not to say that Religious Studies scholars should force the interpretation of aspects of religion in yoga practice where there are none, but they should recognize those links that do exist, no matter how seemingly insignificant, and engage with them to further Religious Studies inquiries.

Harrington adds that the "echo" may provide more opportunities for Religious Studies inquiry than just an intellectual link. She continues,

sometimes that echo...can sound more loudly and insistently than the original from which it has derived. A student of mine, who had spent part of his childhood in India, told me that he had been struck by the fact that millions of people in India practice yoga on a regular basis, and do so in a very matter-of-fact way. In the United States, in contrast, where yoga is secularized and widely seen as a health practice, people seem to feel that it can't be effective unless they burn incense and light candles.⁴⁹⁶

In other words, Harrington is saying that in contrast to removing the religious aspects from yoga practice, sometimes people add "religious" aspects to yoga practice where they did not previously exist, which is itself a fertile garden for Religious Studies inquiry.

Finally, I will mention three more general areas of inquiry that are ripe with potential. First, this typology could be more thoroughly deconstructed in ways that would produce fruitful commentary on the phenomenon of modern yoga. More specifically, there are several layers of power dynamics that are still at play in categorizing yoga even though I have intentionally set up my categories to be

⁴⁹⁵ Anne Harrington, *The Cure Within: A History of Mind-Body Medicine* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2008), 246.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 246.

fluid. For example, what are the political and economic implications or assumptions involved in this type of presentation of modern yoga practice? Terms such as “Hinduism” and “Americanization” carry multiple interpretations depending on the context. What are the implications or assumptions about race and gender? As noted in chapter 3, there is a certain image popularly associated with modern yoga practice.⁴⁹⁷ Explorations into these and related questions would further highlight the necessary interdisciplinary approach to the study of modern yoga.

Second, there is the dynamic of yoga teacher and student in terms of the intentions, conscious or not, behind their yoga practice. Wendy Cadge and Courtney Bender comment on this dynamic in terms of degrees of religiosity. They write, “many, if not most, yoga teachers train at explicitly Hindu or devotional yoga centers,” but teachers “consider the setting when deciding whether to include chanting, meditation or reading from classic yoga texts such as Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*.” Cadge and Bender note how this “shows how practices considered religious by teachers may not be considered so by students.”⁴⁹⁸ One potential inquiry into this dynamic could address the nature of yoga teacher training and the changes it has undergone in just the past couple decades in terms of religiosity. For example, in the years since 2004, how

⁴⁹⁷ See p. 124 of this dissertation.

⁴⁹⁸ Wendy Cadge and Courtney Bender, “Yoga and Rebirth in America: Asian Religions Are Here to Stay,” *Contexts* 3, no. 1 (February 1, 2004): 48.

accurate is Cadge and Bender's comment about where yoga teachers train, and what are the implications of any shift?

Third, there is a new element to the Theology/Religious Studies debate around practicing scholars. Unlike in the early scholarship of yoga,⁴⁹⁹ Suzanne Newcombe points out that a significant number of the contemporary scholars who write on modern yoga also practice it. She writes, "Rigorous academic reflection by 'Western' scholar-practitioners is an interesting development for both the future of Modern Yoga Studies and the interdisciplinary development of Religious Studies."⁵⁰⁰ Each of these areas of inquiry could benefit from my typology, particularly its ability to help frame potential discussions.

Yoga Beyond the Categories

The categories are just frames, however; modern yoga occupies the spaces away from the boundaries. The history of yoga generally and modern yoga in particular demonstrates clearly that yoga is and always has been a multifaceted phenomenon that evades single definition in theory and in practice. The absence of a single definition has not hindered the spread or development of yoga; indeed, modern yoga has proliferated into an enormous number of varieties. While a simple reading could interpret this proliferation as a dissipation of some "authentic" practice, in this typology I have attempted to demonstrate

⁴⁹⁹ Mark Singleton and Jean Byrne, "Introduction," in *Yoga in the Modern World: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Mark Singleton and Jean Byrne (New York: Routledge, 2008), 3.

⁵⁰⁰ Suzanne Newcombe, "The Development of Modern Yoga: A Survey of the Field," *Religion Compass* 3, no. 6 (2009): 986.

that each of these forms can be legitimate because there are multiple forms of legitimacy at play that allow for a variety of ways for a particular form of yoga practice to be considered “authentic.”

Yoga is and always has been a flexible phenomenon that is expressed differently according to its context. Singleton expresses this aspect of yoga by comparing modern yoga practice and prior types, arguing that the connection “is not the outcome of a direct and unbroken lineage,” but instead “is the result of adaptation to new discourses of the body that resulted from India’s encounter with modernity.”⁵⁰¹

I also agree with Jain, who writes that “popularized systems of modern yoga...reflect modern consumer cultural ideas and values,”⁵⁰² and that the volume and rapidity of modern yoga development in recent decades goes hand-in-hand with the character of contemporary consumerism.⁵⁰³ In this way, yoga practice acts as a cultural mirror. When studying types of modern yoga practice, whether they are hyper-commercialized types in fitness contexts, apparently secularized types in biomedical contexts, or any others from the various shades on the color palette of modern yoga, it would be wise for Religious Studies scholars to engage with the idea of yoga as an all-of-the-above phenomenon characterized by the reflective nature described by Jain.

⁵⁰¹ Mark Singleton, *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 33; Jain makes a similar point, drawing a parallel to other topics of study within religious studies. *Selling Yoga*, 71-72.

⁵⁰² Jain, *Selling Yoga*, 3.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, 80.

In doing so, one does not have to be a specialist in Modern Yoga Studies to gain value from my typology; the varieties of yoga practice themselves do not necessarily need to be the foci of Religious Studies inquiries. Instead, one could use the varieties of yoga practice as lenses through which one studies the embodied expressions of the varieties of religious identities and experiences in the United States and beyond.

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