

Master's Thesis:

Yoga Communities in Aotearoa/New Zealand

*Examining Spirituality, Secularism, and Consumerism
in the Wellington Yoga Industry*

By

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Abstract

This ethnographic study looks at the Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) yoga industry, examining the ways that spirituality, secularism, and consumerism influence modern yoga practices. This study argues that people in New Zealand choose yoga practices for different ethical, physical, and social reasons, reflecting their diverse sociocultural values. More specifically, data gathered during fieldwork shows that the Wellington yoga industry contains at least three community subcultures, which I refer to as: 1) moral communities, 2) corporate communities, and 3) brand communities. This means that at the level of local culture, the NZ yoga industry represents a wide range of yoga practices, which in turn reflect the diverse needs, consumer expectations, and imagined ideals of resident populations. Interdisciplinary literature from Religious Studies, Sociology, and Consumer Marketing Research help analyze the complex connections between spirituality as a set of embodied practices, secularisation of yoga as a reflection of corporate culture, and consumerism as a set of desired customer experiences. Yoga in NZ is currently under-researched, making this study a starting point for further inquiry.

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Chapter One

Introduction

‘Modern yoga’ speaks volumes about local culture. That is, we can learn about local peoples’ worldviews by looking at their preferred modern yoga practices.¹ This thesis presents an ethnography of modern yoga practices in Wellington, New Zealand (NZ). I aim to demonstrate the ways that a variety of yoga practices and settings reflect social and cultural diversity in the capital city, Wellington. Specifically, I set out a typology of three distinctive contexts of yoga – moral, secular and brand communities – reflecting local constituents’ diverse teaching approaches and consumer expectations. I examine several themes, most importantly, spirituality, secularism, and consumerism, in each of these community settings. I argue that each community setting is distinctive in emphasising particular themes, and in ignoring others, leading me to conclude that modern yoga in Wellington is not a single, homogenous set of practices, but incorporates a variety of ideals, aesthetics, and aspirations.

In the context of this ethnographic study, when I refer to modern yoga practices, I not only mean physical practices such as postures (*āsana*), breath-work (*prāṇāyāma*), and relaxation techniques (*śavāsana*, or Yoga Nidra), but also spiritual practices such as observing moral codes, seated meditation, and chanting *Om*.² In addition to physical and spiritual practices, many yoga-goers also participate in consumer practices, such as interacting with and shopping for yoga products/services (including classes, merchandise, and teacher-training courses), which are largely advertised through websites and social media pages. Moreover, when practitioners participate in yoga-related activities not centred on physical practice they are still in effect ‘doing’ yoga. Consequently, people’s involvement in yoga can extend in varied ways beyond physical practice. This ethnographic study looks at people’s yoga practices and participations in the NZ yoga

¹ Elizabeth De Michelis was the first scholar to use the term ‘modern yoga’. See Elizabeth De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga, Patanjali and Western Esotericism* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 19-20.

² Singleton explores yoga relaxation practices, such as Yoga Nidra and suggests they are of secular origin, developed by twentieth-century therapists. See Mark Singleton, “Salvation through Relaxation: Proprioceptive Therapy and its Relationship to Yoga,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 20:3 (2005): 291-3.

industry.³ I ask, in what ways do local participants' personal needs, social values, and identities influence their yoga choices?

Online presentations of modern yoga most often show young, middle-class Pākehā (of white/European descent) women doing physically active postures.⁴ However, this study has found that a broad demographic of local people in NZ (in terms of age, ethnicity, gender, and income) support a range of yoga practices and products/services. I claim that local people choose yoga for complex physical, spiritual, and psychological reasons, expressing their sociocultural values and consumer expectations. More specifically, in the case of the Wellington yoga industry, I located three community subcultures. Each yoga subculture tries to cater to local people's diverse needs, wants, and ideals: 1) Moral community 'koha' (donation-based) classes are often held in suburban community centres, making yoga accessible to culturally diverse, low and middle income people; 2) corporate yoga teachers run secularised practices for middle-class, white-collar workers in central city offices, gyms and health centres; and 3) branded yoga studios promote a range of products and services to younger, upwardly-mobile people in central business districts (CBD), and retail locations.⁵ This argument therefore challenges the commonly held notion that there is one unified 'yoga community' in NZ.⁶ The range of yoga practices represented by local constituents also

³ I use the term 'yoga industry' in reference to any yoga products or services that earn money, sell subscriptions, or are sponsored by local businesses or government organisations. I suggest that the yoga industry consists of four sectors: 1) *service providers*, such as yoga studios, teachers and teaching organisations; 2) *yoga manufacturers*, who sell products such as yoga mats, clothes, and apps; 3) *yoga publicists* or *events managers*, who provide yoga conferences, festivals, community events, and magazines; 4) *teacher registration bodies*, selling network registrations and accreditation systems for yoga teachers. Waylon Lewis, of the *Elephant Journal*, feels that the term 'yoga industry' represents commercial enterprises rather than the "real yoga" of a united American yoga community. However, I claim that there is no one cohesive yoga community in New Zealand. See "The Yoga Industry is not Yoga," accessed June 28, 2016, <http://www.elephantjournal.com/2015/06/the-yoga-industry-is-not-yoga/>

⁴ For example, a survey in America shows that 84.2% of yoga practitioners are women, of which, 89.2% regard themselves as being "white." See Sarina Smith and Matthew Atencio, "Yoga is yoga. Yoga is everywhere. You either practice or you don't": a qualitative examination of yoga social dynamics," *Sport in Society* (2017): 1-17. <http://www.dx.doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2016.1269082> (accessed March 16, 2017).

⁵ I use the term subculture to describe three distinct yoga subgroups, which I also refer to as 'communities', operating independently of each other. The demarcations for these community subgroups seem to follow geographical contours, and are class and income dependant. Williams defines subculture as "the culture of a distinguishable smaller group." See Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Oxford University Press, 1983), 92. Also see Suzanne Newcombe, "Magic and Yoga: The Role of Subcultures in Transcultural Exchange," in *Yoga Travelling: Bodily Practice in Transcultural Perspective*, ed. Beatrix Hauser (Heidelberg: Springer, 2013), 63.

⁶ For example, Baily's ethnographic study of yoga practices in Dunedin states that there is only one 'yoga community'. See Hannah Baily, "Embodied Transcendence: An Exploration of Yoga in Dunedin," *Sites: New Series* 11:2 (2014): 63. National websites such as The Yoga Connection also claim to represent the NZ 'yoga community.' "Yoga Connection home page," accessed March 1, 2016, <http://www.theyogaconnection.co.nz>

challenges scholarship based on the assertion that modern yoga is homogenous, particularly in relation to individuals performing postural practices for health and fitness benefits.⁷

Using Wellington, New Zealand's capital city, as a site for ethnographic research, I examined the local character of modern yoga practices by asking yoga studio owners, teachers, and student-practitioners about their practices, values, and viewpoints. As fieldwork data accumulated and divergent subcultural patterns started to appear, I charted boundaries and mergers between each community subgroup. I then cross-examined participants about their yoga practices and where they saw themselves within each community setting. This method of investigation allowed me to determine 'insider-outsider' viewpoints.⁸ The findings of this study also strengthened my claim that yoga in NZ is not monolithic, but rather, the varied interests of yoga-goers are reflected in different contexts and diverse yoga styles.

Findings from this study show that yoga participants tend to choose classes that offer a range of customer experiences, which can vary from teacher to teacher, and between suburb and city.⁹ By inviting local participants to engage in this study, I learned that people who attend 'moral community' classes in suburban community centres represent a broad demographic of ages ranges (18-75), ethnicities (Pākehā, Māori, Asian, Latin American), and social status (students, part-time and full-time workers, beneficiaries and retirees). Rather than being motivated by the results of physical practices, some participants in moral yoga communities claim to value social interactions and spiritual practices, which reinforce shared ethical values. Conversely, participants in corporate settings such as inner city gyms, workplaces, and health studios claim to desire physically active yoga practices that provide fitness benefits, such as flexibility and strength. Corporate yoga classes tend to attract white-collar Pākehā workers who prefer yoga practices to be secular, meaning that

⁷ These studies suggest that modern practitioners do yoga mainly for health and fitness benefits. See Jeremy Carrette and Richard King, *Selling Spirituality, The Silent Takeover of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 118; Ian Whicher, *Yoga: The Indian Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2003), 1; Suzanne Newcombe, "Stretching for Health and Well-Being: Yoga and Women in Britain, 1960-1980," *Asian Medicine: Tradition and Modernity* 3:1 (2007): 44; Mark Singleton, *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 6; Elisabeth De Michelis, "A Preliminary Survey of Modern Yoga Studies," *Asian Medicine* 3 (2007): 6.

⁸ See Kim Knott, "Insider/Outsider Perspectives," in *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. John Hinnells (London: Routledge, 2nd Edition, 2006), 246.

⁹ Marketing theorists have shown that service providers create value by offering customers unique experiences. The term 'customer experience' describes six distinct elements: physical, intellectual, emotional, sensory, social, and pragmatic benefits. By applying this concept to yoga industry practices, I found that local yoga-goers tend to expect a range of experiential factors, including: 1) physical health and fitness benefits; 2) intellectual or technical input; 3) emotional value; 4) sensory and aesthetic enjoyment; 5) meaningful social interactions, and; 6) pragmatic lifestyle benefits. Some participants also want to feel spiritually connected during yoga classes, making spirituality the seventh experiential factor of customer experience. See Reza Ashari Nasution, Agung Sembada, Lani Miliyani, Novia Dwi Resti, Desi Ambar Prawono, "The Customer Experience Framework as Baseline for Strategy and Implementation in Services Marketing Procedia," *Social and Behavioural Sciences* 148 (2014): 259.

classes focus on physical practices and are almost entirely free of religious or spiritual references. In branded yoga studios, yoga-goers tend to be upwardly mobile younger women (25-35 years) with expendable incomes. Brand supporters gain emotional and sensory enjoyment from aesthetic features of yoga studios, such as architecturally designed interiors, or heated rooms. In addition, it is common in brand settings for teachers to guide students on 'soft' spiritual practices, such as dedicating the practice, feeling gratitude, or sharing philosophical insights. My research shows that local yoga-goers' pragmatic needs, imagined desires, and value-based preferences vary across community subgroups. In this way, local peoples' collective yoga experiences reveal the "messy realities" of city life, acting as a blueprint to navigate the complexities of local culture within national frameworks.¹⁰

Original hypothesis and outline of findings

Prior to starting interviews, I hypothesised that the cultural values of most New Zealanders (Kiwis) were highly secularised, sports-orientated, and emotionally reserved. I proposed that because spiritual practices threatened NZ society's largely secular values they were not popular with a majority of yoga students. Therefore, I anticipated finding that as long as spiritual practices were kept private, made physically active, or rebranded as something innovative they could be successfully deployed into mainstream yoga settings. My opinions were informed by lived and scholarly sources. On the one hand, my experiences as a studio owner and yoga teacher in Wellington over a ten-year period (teaching over 5000 classes) put me in touch with many hundreds of students. It seemed to me that very few students enthusiastically engaged in spiritual practices from Indian yoga traditions, such as chanting the names of gods or gurus, or offering service to the teacher (*seva*). Notable scholars have also suggested that yoga has undergone a secularisation process where disciplined technologies of the body have replaced the quest for spiritual advancement.¹¹ Thus, I expected to find spiritual yoga practices being limited to specific times, places, and performances, such as annual yoga festivals, or rural retreat settings.

I was surprised to find, however, a buoyant spiritual subculture functioning outside the Indian community or guru-based yoga centres (such as the Bhakti Lounge run by ISKCON devotees). For example, a number of people in suburban community 'koha' classes readily admit participating in

¹⁰ See Lisa Smith, "Being on the Mat: Quasi-Sacred Spaces, 'Exotic' Other Places, and Yoga Studios in the West," in *Constructions of Self and Other in Yoga, Travel, and Tourism*, eds., L.G. Beaman and S. Sikka (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 93.

¹¹ See Joseph Alter, *Yoga in Modern India: the Body between Science and Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 13.

spiritual and moral practices.¹² Using morality as a guideline for industry practices, community-based teachers and students question the ethical behaviours of yoga industry providers. For example, some participants challenged the integrity of commercial yoga studios by extending Patanjali's moral codes of non-harming and truthfulness through social activist forums. Therefore, one of the main reasons why I reconsidered my original hypothesis is that spirituality and morality seems to be growing in popularity in the community-based yoga classes of Wellington. In NZ society, this finding represents a shift away from secularisation towards multicultural spirituality and community responsibility.¹³ Now, in suburban community classes, a broad demographic of people from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds claim they feel spirituality connected and socially responsible for the wellbeing of the wider community. These findings confirm what some scholars have claimed – NZ people are becoming increasingly de-secularised, more spiritual, less affiliated with organised Christianity, and more accepting of religious pluralism.¹⁴

On the other hand, as predicted, I did find evidence of secularised yoga classes where spiritual practices are almost entirely absent. For example, yoga teachers who run classes in gyms and corporate work places often tend to avoid using religious references or spiritual practices. Likewise, corporate marketing literature may describe yoga in terms of mind-body-spirit, but marketers rarely expand on the concept of spirit. The people I interviewed claimed that corporate culture in NZ tends to be quite masculinised (competitive, hierarchical and results-based), leaving little place for yoga practices that are deemed spiritual, feminine, or 'out-there'. Consequently, corporate participants seem to prefer physical yoga practices that are body-focused, with a short relaxation at the end of class for stress relief and mental calming.

In terms of brand yoga settings, I found that yoga teachers present spirituality in moral, secular, and consumer contexts. For example, some teachers in hot yoga traditions refer to postural sequences as a 'moving meditation', directing students to focus inwards without religious

¹² The word 'koha' is an indigenous Māori term, traditionally referring to a gift presented by visitors to the tangata whenua (people of the land). The value of the gift indicates the social or tribal status of the giver. "Koha," accessed January 6, 2017, <http://www.maori.org.nz/tikanga/default.php?pid=sp60&parent=39>

¹³ For example, senior yoga teachers such as Eric Doornekamp and Jennie Fellows, who have taught yoga for decades, claimed that yoga in NZ during the 60s, 70s, and 80s used to be highly secularised. However, NZ peoples' spiritual participation is currently on the rise.

¹⁴ See Franco Vaccarino, Heather Kavan and Phillip Gendall, "Spirituality and Religion in the Lives of New Zealanders," *The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality* 1:2 (2011): 87; Nigel Smith, "No Longer More Educated: Changes amongst those of No Religion," *New Zealand Sociology* 28:2 (2013): 64; William Hoverd, "No longer a Christian Country? Religious Demographic Change in New Zealand 1966-2006," *New Zealand Sociology* 23:1 (2008): 41; Kevin Ward, "Is New Zealand's Future Churchless?" *Stimulus* 12:2 (2004): 2; Douglas Pratt, "Secular New Zealand and Religious Diversity: From Cultural Evolution to Societal Affirmation," *Social Inclusion* 4:2 (2016): 56.

inferences.¹⁵ Moreover, a number of branded yoga studios use spiritual images, such as mandalas, as interior design, allowing customers to interpret symbolic meanings of design features. One yoga studio combines Māori spiritual motifs and moral themes from Patanjali's yoga sutras, reinforcing the brand's unique image.¹⁶ Teachers in branded yoga studios also introduce spirituality and philosophy through workshops. Some charge members a premium for these specialised services. Although I could not canvas all the yoga studios in Wellington, or talk with all brand representatives, it is evident from looking at Wellington yoga websites that brand providers rarely promote spiritual practices as part of their standard class timetable. Rather, brand providers emphasise the physical, mental, aesthetic, and social benefits of yoga practice.

With yoga consumerism in brand settings, I also found a recurring paradox. People I interviewed were often highly critical of brands' commercial activities, and they openly disapproved of transnational consumer trends within the yoga industry, even though they themselves had taken part in it. Participants also claimed that the high visibility of yoga on social media and through celebrity culture has made yoga popular; however, the constant pressure of having to dress, look, and act a certain way creates feelings of in-group anxiety, and out-group rivalry. Russell Belk explains that brand marketing creates consumer expectations, fuelling unconscious desire.¹⁷ Similarly, when yoga-goers do not have their expectations met (by a yoga class, teacher, studio, or chosen product), they often look around for idealised yoga experiences perhaps only existing in individuals' imaginations. This consumer quest makes many participants feel disillusioned, contradicting the tranquil marketing images of yoga in the media.

The three key topics of this study – spirituality, secularisation, and consumerism – are common threads that, to a greater or lesser extent, run through the subcultures I have described. Hence, this continuity shows that each community subgroup is not entirely distinct; and, as people move from class to class trying different teachers or settings, the boundaries between subgroups become somewhat blurred. Although I claim that, each yoga subculture has a distinctive character and demographic, sometimes there are contradictions. For example, some moral community classes may be quite secularised. Some gym yoga classes can incorporate moral themes, and some

¹⁵ Interview with Anika Speedy, May 17, 2016; Interview with Tyrone Russell, June 8, 2016.

¹⁶ However, scholars such as White give are critical of "modern interpreters" who use the Yoga Sutras to gain spiritual capital. See David Gordon White, *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali: A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 16-17.

¹⁷ Russell Belk claims that when consumers do not have their emotional needs and imaginations fulfilled during the brand experience they keep searching for renewed fulfilment of their desires. Russell Belk, Guliz Ger, and Soren Askgaard, "Fire of Desire: A Multisited Inquiry Consumer Passion," *Journal of Consumer Research* 30 (2003): 328-329.

brand communities form around shared social values.¹⁸ Yoga adapts to meet local audiences' needs, wants, and imagined desires. In whatever setting, yoga providers inevitably fine-tune their services to reflect the ideals and expectations of their target client base.

Historical perspectives

New Zealand's small multicultural population (currently estimated at 4,500,000) offers a favourable testing ground to examine yoga practices as a reflection of people's sociocultural values and consumer expectations, which change over time. To gain a clearer view of how yoga adapts to local settings, I supplemented ethnographic data with historical press accounts from the National Archives. By looking at NZ colonists' first encounters with yoga, I was able to see which social trends of the past still resonate with practitioners today. Despite the fact that this study offers limited space and time to present a comprehensive account of local history, the key themes of this study – spirituality, secularisation, and consumerism – seemed to be as relevant to colonial people a hundred years ago as they are today. Moreover, the historical timeline of yoga in NZ differs from what scholars such as Elisabeth De Michelis and Suzanne Newcombe have reported for America and Britain. Local press clippings show that yoga practices in NZ have adapted to local culture, and continue adapt today.

Articles in NZ newspapers from the late nineteenth to early mid-twentieth centuries contain numerous references to yoga. Glancing back at local records shows us that yoga captured the imaginations of colonial people in NZ, as it still does in contemporary settings. For example, Theosophical Society members presented Hatha Yoga as a means to spiritual advancement, and this 'yoking' of physical postures with spiritual transformation still resonates with people in moral community settings. At the same time, Protestant clergy's hostilities to the 'eastern' spirituality of Theosophists seem to have contributed to the secularisation we see in corporate yoga. Perhaps it was the case that yoga proponents started focusing on the health and wellbeing benefits of yoga, avoiding discussions on spirituality, as a way of circumventing Christian hostilities towards 'eastern' religions. Furthermore, yoga advertisements from the early twentieth century show that NZ people have been consuming yoga products/services for over a century. This historical overview traces how local peoples' sociocultural values and consumer expectations can relate to people's yoga preferences today. We start this historical review by looking at the Theosophical Society's proselytization of 'eastern' spirituality to NZ audiences from as early as 1893.

¹⁸ See Albert Muniz, and Thomas O'Guinn, "Brand community," *Journal of Consumer Research* 27:4 (2001): 413.

Despite the fact that (for Pākehā) nineteenth century NZ was a remote settler outpost, allegedly filled with “wild, godless colonial boys,” the local intelligentsia adopted yoga slightly earlier than people in other western countries did.¹⁹ Contemporary scholars have proposed that Vivekānanda (1863-1902) was most likely the primary progenitor of modern yoga in the west.²⁰ However, press clippings from the *Colonialist* (1898) show that Vivekānanda was not directly involved with bringing yoga to NZ.²¹ Rather, in May 1893, British Theosophist Isabel Cooper-Oakley was sent to NZ by Annie Besant (president of the Theosophical Society) to promote Indian religious philosophy to local audiences.²² It is noteworthy that Oakley’s public discussion on the subject of yoga (5 June, 1893) took place three months before Vivekananda’s inaugural address at The Parliament of the World’s Religions, on 11 September 1893, and three months before NZ women were first in the world to vote in Parliamentary elections, on 19 September 1893.²³ Press clippings show that 1893 was a year when promoters of modernity, such as Oakley, were pushing for radical new ways of thinking.

Oakley framed yoga in two ways. She defined Hatha Yoga as a physical practice leading to “spiritual self-development,” whereas she described Raja Yoga, a higher-level practice, as meditative “union with the Divine.”²⁴ Theosophists’ aims to advance modern society, by yoking east-west esoteric practices, corresponded with Vivekānanda’s presentations on Raja and Hatha Yoga.²⁵ Similarities between Vivekānanda and Theosophists indicate that both parties were fluent in the philosophical discourses emerging out of India in the late nineteenth century. Nonetheless, Oakley’s accounts of yoga were attacked by Baptist minister Rev. Blaikie as bearing the “stamp of hell,” leading to a war of words in the NZ press.²⁶ As yoga became publicly scrutinised, early

¹⁹ John Stenhouse, “God’s Own Silence: Secular Nationalism, Christianity and the Writing of New Zealand History,” *New Zealand Journal of History* 38 (2004): 56.

²⁰ See Sarah Strauss, “Adapt, Adjust, Accommodate: The Production of Yoga in the Transnational World,” *History and Anthropology* 13:3 (2002): 231- 51; De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga, Patanjali and Western Esotericism*, 149-180; Mark Singleton, “Yoga Eugenics and Spiritual Darwinism in the Early Twentieth Century,” *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 11:2 (2007): 132; Patricia Vertinsky, “Building the Body Beautiful in The Women’s League of Health and Beauty: Yoga and female agency in 1930s Britain,” *Rethinking History* 16:4 (2012): 529.

²¹ New Zealand newspapers such as *The Colonialist* (1898), mentioned Vivekananda’s presentations of Hinduism as a universal religion, however, these reports were reposts from London and Chicago press editions, rather than being first-hand reports by NZ journalists.

²² See “Auckland Notes,” *Thames Star*, Volume XXIV, Issue 7456, 25 March, 1893; *New Zealand Herald* (NZH), Vol. XXX, Issues 9195, 9 May, 1893, and 9202, 17 May, 1893; *NZH*, Vol. XXXIV, Issue 10531, 26 August, 1897; *Thames Star*, Vol XXIX, Issue 8778, 30 September, 1897; *NZH*, Vol XLIX, Issue 14956, 1 April, 1912; also see Anne Taylor, *Annie Besant, A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 212-219.

²³ See “Mrs Isobel Cooper-Oakley in reply to Mr Richardson,” *NZH*, Issue 9218, 5 June, 1893.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ See Swami Vivekānanda, *Raja Yoga: or, Conquering the Internal Nature* (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1896), 18-19.

²⁶ See “Mrs Cooper-Oakley at the Choral Hall,” *Oamaru Mail*, 15 May, 1893.

apologists tried to show its similarities with Christian Gnosticism, encouraging local Christians to accept corresponding concepts of gaining mystical union with the one divine.²⁷

As Theosophists continued to uphold Raja Yoga as a means to hasten personal evolution some NZ Protestants likened it to self-hypnotism, clairvoyance, and black magic.²⁸ Consequently, a fiery debate between Theosophists and Christian objectors played out in the editorial columns over two decades, with both sides making claims on truth and salvation. Then, a sex scandal involving prominent Theosophist Charles W. Leadbeater made headlines in the NZ press.²⁹ Subsequently, the notoriety of “Masturbating Mahatmas,” who allegedly taught “lower level” Hatha Yoga practices to teenage boys in India, brought the Theosophical Society and Hatha Yoga into disrepute. As the scandal continued, both Theosophists and their metaphysical ideals lost traction in NZ society. The growing popularity of the ‘physical culture’ movement sanitised and integrated Hatha Yoga practices. However, NZ practitioners tended to keep the philosophical Raja Yoga practices private. In this regard, it is possible that sustained Protestant hostilities towards Theosophical spirituality contributed to the eventual secularisation of yoga practices in NZ.

Figure 1: Wynne Foote: Auckland-based Teacher of Dancing and Physical Culture (1915)³⁰



²⁷ David Burn compared the works of Patanjali and early Christian mystic Ignatius of Loyola to show religious compatibilities between east-west traditions. See *Otago Daily Times*, Issues 15169, 28 April, 1913; and 15751, 30 April, 1913. “Mrs Isobel Cooper-Oakley in reply to the Rev G. Mac Murray,” *NZH*, Vol. XXX, Issue 9197, 11 May, 1893. “Theosophical Society,” *Evening Star*, Issue 12714, 18 January, 1906.

²⁸ See “Mrs. Cooper-Oakley in reply to Mr Richardson,” *NZH*, Vol XXX, Issue 9218, 5 June, 1893; “Theosophical Society,” *Evening Star*, Issue 12714, 18 January, 1906; “The Occult in Life,” *NZH*, 8 July, 1911 (Allied Press Ltd.); “Lecture on Occult,” *Dominion*, 6 July, 1911.

²⁹ The Madras High Court prosecuted Leadbeater for teaching ‘onenism’ (masturbation) to young boys. Leadbeater claimed this practice alleviated boys from the karmic consequences of sexual obsessions. See “Monstrous Mahatmas,” *NZ Truth*, Issue 187, January 16, 1909; “Facts and Fiction,” *Otago Daily Times*, Issue 15983, 28 January, 1914; ‘Theosophic Facts and Fictions,’ *Otago Daily Times*, Issue 15991, 6 February, 1914.

³⁰ Photo Crown Studios, *New Zealand Observer*, Volume XXXV, Issue 40, 12 June, 1915.

Although yoga was still a contested subject, NZ audiences could regularly read articles about the special powers of Indian yogis and the possibility of gaining mind control, self-cure, and extraordinary yogic powers through prescriptive practices.³¹ At the same time, local advertisers took advantage of yoga's supernatural reputation to sell products on the open market. For example, in 1921, Boa Liniment of Palmerston North likened their ointment to the curative power of "Indian Yoga doctor herbs."³² Similarly, in 1922 Madame Ranee, who specialised in Indian mysticism, advertised her unique talents through a 'Special Yoga Circle' in Dunedin.³³ From as early as 1916, the NZ press advertised popular books on yoga.³⁴ Subsequently, for sixpence, a person could buy a copy of Ramacharaka's *Hatha Yoga* and learn how to gain "Mastery over Matter, Energy, and Mind" in the privacy of their homes.³⁵ Yoga, as a complete health-care system (which combined simple diet, breathing and stretches), was also promoted to New Zealanders through books written by ex-military men as a way of overcoming the problems of sedentary life.³⁶ Historical advertisements show that New Zealanders have been buying balms, specialist workshops, and yoga books for just over a century.

Figure 2: Physical culture classes for Auckland students (1926).³⁷



³¹ See "Yoga," *Dunstan Times*, 10 October, 1921; "Mrs Besant's New Christ," *Otago Daily Times*, Issue 19868, 14 August, 1926; "The Elixir Of Life In India," *Evening Post*, 23 April, 1938

³² These newspaper articles discussed Indian Yoga doctors' uses of magical elixirs to heal pain and reverse aging effects. *Manawatu Standard*, Vol XLIII, Issue 369, 9 July, 1921; W.H. Lofts, "The Elixir or Life in India," *Evening Post*, 23 April, 1938.

³³ See *Otago Daily Times*, Issue 18431, 17 December, 1921; *Otago Daily Times*, Issue 18447, 7 January, 1922

³⁴ Ramacharaka's books were on sale in the *Dominion Post*, Volume 10, Issue 2908, 21 October, 1916; *Otago Daily Times*, Issue 19910, 2 October, 1926.

³⁵ See Yogi Ramacharaka, *Raja Yoga* (London: L.N. Fowler, 1904), 74.

³⁶ See "Those Who Lead Sedentary Lives," *New Zealand Herald*, Vol. 74, 20 March, 1937; F Yeats-Brown, "Yoga for You," *Auckland Star*, 24 December, 1937; *The Press*, Vol. LXXIV, Issue 22313, 29 January, 1938.

³⁷ See *Auckland Star*, Volume LVII, Issue 106, 6 May, 1926.

In parallel cultural movements, women's organisations such as the YWCA started promoting physical fitness, spirituality, and temperance to young women in NZ from as early as 1883.³⁸ Moreover, with Hatha Yoga successfully integrated into the physical culture movement, local commentators started relating physical fitness programmes to women's increased presence in the workforce in the belief that "strong women meant a strong nation."³⁹ Women's physical culture displays took place all over NZ in an attempt to abolish class divisions, building camaraderie between young factory workers, office workers, and affluent young women. As war started brewing in Europe during the 1930s, YWCA world president Charlotte Niven was in NZ promoting "inter-feminine relations," aiming to resolve racial divisions between "East" (China, Malaysia, India,) and "West" (British colonies, America and Scandinavia).⁴⁰ Niven's global agenda not only attempted to strengthen women's solidarity movements worldwide, it also aimed to confront the "one-sidedness of the preponderantly masculine League of Nations."⁴¹ Accordingly, young antipodean women took part in YWCA programmes, displaying NZ women's fitness, efficiency, and self-governance as a way of building national and international camaraderie.⁴²

After WWII, pioneering teacher Ruth Ericson reintroduced Hatha Yoga to female audiences in the late 1950s. A student of Sir Paul Dukes, Ericson was quoted in 1959 as saying that "New Zealand women, especially mothers, work very hard and need little stimulation and encouragement," and so yoga (breathing, stretching, and relaxation) help them "overcome the strain and fatigue of modern life."⁴³ Although Ericson was a member of the Theosophical Society, the local climate of secularisation in NZ during the late 1950s and 60s meant that yoga teachers like Ericson still avoided references to spirituality.⁴⁴ Similarly, long-standing NZ yoga teacher, Jenny Fellows, a former student of Ruth Ericson, claimed that although many people thought of yoga as

³⁸ See Sandra Coney, *Every Girl, A Social History of Women and the YWCA in Auckland 1885-1985* (Auckland: YWCA, 1986), 22. Also see "For Ladies," *Woodville Examiner*, 21 November, 1890; "Women in Education and Industry," *Otago Daily Times*, Issue 13982, 15 August, 1907; *ESD*, 11 July, 1917; *Epsom Post*, 29 July, 1919; "Demonstration at YWCA," *New Zealand Herald*, 23 June, 1921.

³⁹ See *Otago Daily Times*, 13 May, 1915; *Christchurch Post*, 13 January, 1917; *New Zealand Tribune*, 16 August, 1919; *New Zealand Herald*, 23 June, 1921; *Otago Daily Times*, 23 October, 1927; *Epsom Post*, 17 March, 1938.

⁴⁰ See Atlanta, "Women the World Over," *The Press*, Vol. LXIX, Issue 20920, 29 July, 1933.

⁴¹ See Grant Rodwell, "The Eugenic and Political Dynamics in the Early History of Physical Education in Australia, 1900-50," *Melbourne Studies in Education* 40:1(1999): 102.

⁴² See *Otago Daily Times*, 13 May, 1915; *Christchurch Post*, 13 January 1917; "Physical Culture Display," *Otago Daily Times*, 23 November, 1927; *Epsom Post*, Issue 154, 17 March, 1938.

⁴³ See Kay Walshaw, "Yoga Pioneer in NZ," *New Zealand Women's Weekly*, Issue 21 September, 1959.

⁴⁴ Eric Doornekamp said that Ruth Ericson taught non-spiritual Hatha Yoga at the YMCA Willis Street, Wellington. Allegedly, Ericson, a member of the Theosophical Society, was frowned upon by Society members for teaching solely physical classes. Ericson also trained numerous yoga teachers from her Wellington base. Interview with Eric Doornekamp, July 9, 2016.

“alternative,” yoga teachers found it difficult to bring spirituality into their classes because they did not want to offend students with Christian beliefs.⁴⁵ Yoga teacher Eric Doornekamp reiterated Jenny’s narrative of secularisation, claiming that he attended secularised yoga classes during the 1960s with teacher Taffy Hawkins who was apparently “very anti-religion.”⁴⁶ Therefore, as teachers reintroduced Hatha Yoga to NZ society, they tended to conform to popular ideals of physical improvement and emotional self-control.

Figure 3: Article on Ruth Erikson from the New Zealand Women’s Weekly (1959)

ABOVE: The Plough and (right) The Head Stand.

A NEW DESIGN FOR LIVING . . .

HATHA YOGA

By KAY WALSHAW

A NEW design for living—real living—has been brought to Wellington by Mrs. Ruth Erikson, a student of Sir Paul Dukas, K.B.E.

This method, Yoga, has been studied by Sir Paul over a period of 40 years, in which time he has elaborated and perfected it to suit western peoples.

The word “Yoga,” from the original Sanskrit, means bond of union, the union of perfect harmony of body, mind and spirit.

This new adventure is a system of training planned to suit the anatomical and physiological needs of Western people and to help them overcome the strain and fatigue of modern life.

Mrs. Erikson, a tall, slim mother of three, radiates the freshness of glowing health combined with the linessomeness of perfect muscle control.

Ex-school teacher

An ex-school teacher, she taught in war-time London, was also an Air Raid Warden, and lectured for the Central Council for Health Education to women and girls in London and the home counties.

Always interested in health, her attention was captivated by a series of 12 Yoga demonstrations given by Sir Paul Dukas and Diana Fitzgerald on the B.B.C., London Television.

As she was then expecting her second baby, her chances of learning seemed very remote, but she was greatly impressed by the common sense and practical adaptation of Yoga, one of the oldest philosophies in the world.

It was not until some three years later that she was surprised and delighted to find that Sir Paul Dukas had opened a studio near her home in Johannesburg, where she was then living.

The answer

She joined the classes, and followed his teachings, never doubting, never questioning, and rarely speaking to him but feeling more than confident in herself that Yoga was the answer for a tired and highly-strung world.

Now she feels she must pass on what she found so beneficial. New Zealand women, especially mothers, work very hard and need a little stimulation and encouragement.

Her classes are more than a health and beauty course. Pupils are taught to breathe deeply, correctly, and so fully they are filled with amazing energy.

Simple stretching exercises and relaxation help make the body firm and supple. Nerves grow steady and increased poise and physical improvement will be noted in the mental makeup. As the course extends, more advanced work is done.

This unique yet practical approach to Yoga brings increased efficiency in daily tasks, wider powers of emotional control in times of stress and greater concentration for coping with the problems of life.

Mrs. Erikson stands out as a pioneer for men and women who wish to enjoy life to the full, and who wish to be able to live at peace with themselves.

The Stretch.

—Pictures by DES O'DONOGHUE.

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THE N.Z. WOMAN'S WEEKLY — September 21, 1959

This abridged local history of yoga shows that some of the trends we see today are rooted in New Zealand’s colonial past. Pākehā women continue to play an active role in promoting physical

⁴⁵ Interview with Jenny Fellows, 5 July, 2016.

⁴⁶ Interview with Eric Doornekamp, 9 July, 2016.

yoga practices to local audiences. Although Raja Yoga fell out of favour around a hundred years ago, this study shows that philosophical discussions are now becoming more popular at community level, particularly amongst people frustrated with commercial aspects of the yoga industry. Although we may think of yoga consumerism as a relatively new phenomenon, historical accounts show that local people have been consuming yoga products from as early as 1906. Consequently, this historical summary of yoga in NZ allows us to see how spirituality, secularism, and consumerism have shaped and influenced local peoples' worldviews for well over a century.

Review of scholarly sources

In contrast to the limited academic data on yoga in New Zealand, sources on modern yoga as a transnational movement are plentiful. Academic sources help us survey the movement of modern yoga from its origins – as part of India's anti-colonial nationalist program – to its rebranding and dissemination to western audiences. Elizabeth De Michelis and Mark Singleton, for example, have convincingly shown that modern yoga is a relatively recent phenomenon that has cultural roots in the Brāhmanical systems of pre-Independence India.⁴⁷ Joseph Alter has linked Hatha Yoga to the first-wave of physical culture sweeping the world in the early twentieth century, allowing newly masculinised Hindu men to stand up against the “muscular Christianity” of British colonialists.⁴⁸ Furthermore, Singleton's analysis of Krishnamacharya's *āsana* system shows that ‘physical culture’ and postural ‘*yogāsana*’ were interchangeable terminologies.⁴⁹ While both Alter and Singleton focus on the YMCA's involvement in promoting *yogāsana* as part of physical culture for men, these scholars give little sustained analysis of the YWCA's role in promoting physical culture to young women.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, we have seen that YWCA centres were active proponents of physical culture for women in pre-war NZ. In her timeline of modern yoga in Britain, Suzanne Newcombe shows that there are only a few corresponding influences between Britain and NZ, these being the Theosophical Society lectures, William Walter Atkinson's (Yogi Ramacharaka) publications, and Sir Paul Duke's teaching systems.⁵¹ The social and cultural isolation of colonial NZ calls into the

⁴⁷ See De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga, Patanjali and Western Esotericism*, 187; Mark Singleton, *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice*, 185-186.

⁴⁸ See Joseph Alter, “Yoga at the Fin de Siècle: Muscular Christianity with a ‘Hindu’ Twist,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 5 (2006): 760-764.

⁴⁹ See Mark Singleton, *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice*, 18.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 178-179.

⁵¹ Suzanne Newcombe, “The Developments of Modern Yoga: A Survey of the Field,” *Religion Compass* 3:6, (2009): 988-992.

question the applicability of transnational scholarship as a means of accurately assessing NZ yoga movements.

Singleton has linked the fluid hatha sequences of contemporary American teachers such as Shiva Rae to the “harmonial” dance teachers of the early twentieth century, such as Genevieve Stebbins and Mollie Stack of the Women’s League of Health and Beauty.⁵² However, in terms of gender divisions, Singleton offers a relatively one-sided depiction of middle-class women in 1930s America and Britain as participating mostly in gentle stretching exercises, with middle-class men practicing yoga postures for strength and vitality.⁵³ Patricia Vertinsky offers a significantly more nuanced view of British women’s complex roles as physical culture teachers. Vertinsky argues that Mollie Stack taught rhythmic movement and breathing exercises in the 1930s in order to build women’s morale, while financially supporting her family after her husband’s death in WWI.⁵⁴ Likewise, if we look at the works of influential women such as Charlotte Niven (YWCA world president), who promoted physical culture to women in NZ, we see that they delivered physical, spiritual and work-skills practices in an idealised vision of building women’s strength and solidarity around the world. This means that we can link rhythmic movement and hatha yoga to women’s agency as workers, moral citizens, and political peacekeepers, supplementing their roles as ‘future mothers of men’. I think that historical women, such as Niven, laid the groundwork for contemporary yoga teachers in Wellington who demonstrate a variety of yoga practices to people of different incomes and viewpoints. My findings show that Wellington yoga teachers’ styles and methods are far more wide-ranging than Singleton or other scholars have presented.

On the topic of yoga spirituality, we can find interdisciplinary threads linking Religious Studies and Sociology to Consumer Marketing research. For example, Jesse Graham and Jonathan Haidt have built on Durkheim’s theories, suggesting that synchronised movements (such as yoga sequences), and spiritual practices (such as chanting), can bind moral communities, helping participants feel interconnected.⁵⁵ Graham and Haidt also suggest that when moral community members feel unified they are more likely to give their time, money, and energy to uphold

⁵² Ibid, 147.

⁵³ Ibid, 160.

⁵⁴ Vertinsky, “Building the Body Beautiful in The Women’s League of Health and Beauty: Yoga and Female Agency in 1930s Britain,” *Rethinking History*, 527; Andrea Jain, “The Dual-Ideal of the Ascetic and Healthy Body: Jain Terāpath and Modern Yoga in the Context of Late Capitalism,” *Nova Religion: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 15:3 (2012): 35.

⁵⁵ Jesse Graham and Jonathan Haidt, “Beyond Beliefs: Religions Bind Individuals into Moral Communities,” *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 14:1 (2010): 142.

community wellbeing.⁵⁶ Similarly, my fieldwork put me in touch with yoga-goers who seem more willing to contribute to their local communities because they feel spiritually interconnected to people and social causes through yoga classes. Moreover, sociologist Hurbert Knoblauch claims that media marketing has popularised the concept of spirituality, building a robust 'spiritual economy' for businesses such as yoga studios.⁵⁷ Likewise, marketing theorists Kozinets and Sherry have suggested that people's quests for transcendent experiences have moved from religious sites, such as churches and temples, to festival events and yoga retreats.⁵⁸ Across academic disciplines, scholars make similar points about the way yoga-goers seek spiritual experiences, which combine secular rituals, physical practices, and consumer behaviours. Certainly, for some participants in this study, yoga retreats and festivals, such as Wanderlust, provide them with the opportunity to suspend their busy routines, practice yoga, and find meaning in shared spiritual experiences, even if some many consumers base their experiences on commercial transactions.⁵⁹

Exploring spirituality as system of consumer culture, Peter van der Veer suggests that spirituality is a construct of global consumerism, and brands offer clients symbolic rewards to compensate marketplace promotions.⁶⁰ This may partially explains why a number of yoga studios in Wellington use spiritual images to promote introductory offers, capturing consumers' imaginations while supplying them with symbolic meaning. Stuart Ray Sarbaker also claims that the commodification of yoga has contributed to an "exoticised environment," where practitioners pay to feel purified and uplifted within designer settings.⁶¹ More generally, Jeremy Carrette and Richard King have explored the way market mentality influences the cultural expression of spirituality in capitalist societies.⁶² The authors describe consumerism as "the promotion of unrestrained desire-fulfilment as the key to happiness", and assert that spirituality has spread alongside globalisation.⁶³ Andrea Jain, author of "Selling Yoga," has pointed out that transnational yoga is 'context-sensitive'. Rather than yoga being 'monolithic', Jain challenges essentialist definitions of modern yoga by

⁵⁶ Ibid, 146.

⁵⁷ Hurbert Knoblauch, "Popular Spirituality," *Anthropological Journal of European Culture* 19:1 (2010): 37.

⁵⁸ Robert Kozinets and John Sherry, "The Autothemataludicization Challenge: Spiritualizing Consumer Culture through Playful Communal Co-Creation," in *Spiritual and Sacred Consumption*, eds. Diego Rinallo and Linda Scott (London: Routledge, 2012), 243.

⁵⁹ Tickets for the 4-day Wanderlust Festival cost \$500. See <http://www.wanderlust.com> (accessed November 15, 2016).

⁶⁰ Peter van der Veer, "Spirituality in Modern Society," *Social Research* 76:4 (2009): 1102.

⁶¹ Stuart Ray Sarbaker, "The Numinous and Cessative in Modern Yoga" in *Yoga in the Modern World*, ed. Mark Singleton and Jean Byrne (New York: Routledge 2008), 177.

⁶² See Carrette and King, *Selling Spirituality, the Silent Takeover of Religion*, 46.

⁶³ Ibid, 21.

suggesting that all types of yoga, including ‘pop-yoga’, have legitimacy for the people who partake in it.⁶⁴ In contrast to Jain’s views, some people in this study were critical of brands and teachers that use spirituality to seduce and pacify unwitting consumers. Many yoga-goers in fact claimed that they feel disheartened by the celebrity hype surrounding recognised teachers and branded products. Therefore, I aim to further explore participants’ critiques in the section on brand paradox.

Vaccarino, Kavan and Gendall claim that NZ may be undergoing a “spiritual revolution,” with a growing interest in ‘eastern’ and indigenous Māori spirituality.⁶⁵ My thesis supports this position, finding that some yoga-goers unreservedly use spiritual practices to help construct moral identities, and build caring communities. However, scholars such as Kathryn Pavlovich and Patricia Doyle Corner argue that although ethical practices, such as non-harming and truthfulness, consciously shape eco-consciousness yoga enterprises, “not all profit is equal.”⁶⁶ As each yoga business markets its unique services, they often bind spirituality and consumption together.⁶⁷ Consequently, people in NZ assign different meaning to spirituality according to what they find valuable and ethical. At the same time, more people are speaking out about the need to challenge duplicity within the local yoga industry, and this is where my study adds to scholarly discussions on the complexity of contemporary spirituality in NZ.

In terms of articles specific to yoga practices in NZ, I have only been able to locate two locally situated studies. The first was by Mike Lloyd (1997) who echoed themes of secularisation, claiming that yoga in NZ twenty years ago tended to focus on a quiet, “cool” methods of body maintenance, and less on the spiritual aspects of yoga practice.⁶⁸ Lloyd’s study shows that in 1997 yoga studios used little or no glossy advertising, and that social gatherings were virtually non-existent. His study shows how much the yoga industry has changed, with studios now promoting social activities through a variety of marketing media. The second work by Hannah Bailly (2014) is a qualitative and autoethnographic study of six yoga students practicing in contemporary Dunedin studios.⁶⁹ Bailly examined similarities in practitioner’s experiences, explaining outcomes through grounded theory.

⁶⁴ See Andrea Jain, *Selling Yoga: from Counterculture to Pop Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 95.

⁶⁵ See Vaccarino et al., “Spirituality and Religion in the Lives of New Zealanders,” (2011): 95.

⁶⁶ The authors use the case study of NZ yoga entrepreneur Jyoti Morningstar of the We’ar clothing brand. Kathryn Pavlovich and Patricia Doyle Corner, “Conscious Enterprise Emergence: Shared Value Creation through Expanded Conscious Awareness,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 121 (2014): 341.

⁶⁷ See Chiara Gentile, Nicola Spiller, Giuliano Noci, “How to Sustain the Customer Experience: An Overview of Experience Components that Co-create Value with the Customer,” *European Management Journal* 25:5 (2007): 398.

⁶⁸ See Mike Lloyd, “The Quiet Politics of Yoga: Ethnographic Reflections on a Traveling Body Project,” *Sites: Journal for South Pacific Cultural Studies* 34 (1997):20.

⁶⁹ See Bailly, “Embodied Transcendence: An Exploration of Yoga in Dunedin,” *Sites: New Series*, 60.

Nonetheless, by only surveying people in branded yoga studios and excluding community and corporate settings, it is possible that Baily missed locating some of the socio-cultural factors that shape people's diverse experiences in different yoga settings. The current lack of modern yoga scholarship in NZ gives even more relevance to my study. Therefore, I see this ethnography providing a point of reference for scholars to investigate yoga practices as a reflection of local culture in years to come. Research outcomes of this study could contribute to current scholarly conversations on modern yoga by presenting new data on the varied subcultural expressions of yoga among NZ residents. This thesis will also be of interest to yoga industry participants who follow local and transcultural yoga trends.

Throughout this investigation, I draw on scholars whose accounts relate to the three main themes of this study. My central argument is that the NZ yoga industry supports a range of practices that each seek to satisfy local people's values and expectations in different subcultural settings. Situating research within the greater Wellington region, I have been able to examine the ways in which local peoples' attitudes and behaviours find expression through spirituality, secularisation, and consumerism. I further suggest that this multifaceted character of yoga, and its ability to speak to the needs of diverse constituencies, contributes to its popularity in NZ.

Methodology

To test the idea of yoga as a reflection of local community subcultures, I conducted in-depth interviews with a representative sample of studio owners, teachers, and student-practitioners within the greater Wellington area (N = 28). I also distributed an anonymous questionnaire to three community yoga groups within Wellington's neighbouring districts of Kilbirnie and Miramar (N = 54). My aim was to create a comprehensive study by engaging participants from four industry sectors: 1) Krishnamacharya lineages (Ashtanga and Iyengar Yoga studios); 2) religious guru lineages (such as Yoga in Daily Life); 3) hot yoga traditions (such as Yoga for the People, and Power Living), and; 4) independent yoga centres (such as corporate locations, and community centres). Although the sample size was relatively small, findings were surprisingly rich.

Two main factors determined how I selected respondents for interview. First, I posted an open invitation in three Facebook groups – NZ Yoga, Wellington Yoga, and Wellington Teachers Unite – appealing for participants. Second, I contacted studio owners directly through website email addresses. Peoples' willingness to participate determined the interview schedule (See Appendix). In terms of sample representations, there was more interest from yoga teachers (N = 11), and less from studio owners/managers (N = 5). Perhaps some studio owners were too busy to

engage in the study, while some may have been reticent to discuss industry topics in an academic forum. Nonetheless, this discrepancy between teachers and studio owners did not seem to be an issue as many of the teachers I interviewed worked across a range of yoga sectors, and were very well informed on local industry practices. Another discrepancy was that few yoga students initially came forward for interview. Perhaps students' lack of familiarity with the research topic influenced this initial lack of response. Conceivably, too, my self-imposed restriction on not interviewing students I knew personally was likely to have excluded hundreds of potential candidates. Still, I corrected this shortfall in student participation in the second round of interviews by taking a more randomised approach to student recruitment (details to follow). The overall selection process was effective for a study of this size, and owners, teachers, and students from all four industry sectors were successfully recruited.

Figure 4: Demographics of interview participants – Round One

	ROLE	CULTURAL BACKGROUND	AGE BRACKET	ETHNICITY	GENDER	INTERVIEW TIME
1.	Owner	New Zealand	55-60	Pākehā	Female	1h:17 mins
2.	Owner	New Zealand	35-40	Māori	Male	1h:26 mins
3.	Owner	New Zealand	55-60	Māori	Male	1h:34 mins
4.	Manager	European	35-40	Pākehā	Female	1h:02 mins
5.	Teacher	New Zealand	30-35	Pākehā	Female	1h:02 mins
6.	Teacher	New Zealand	65-70	Pākehā	Female	1h:10 mins
7.	Teacher	New Zealand	25-30	Pākehā	Female	1h:02 mins
8.	Teacher	Canadian	35-40	Pākehā	Female	1h:11 mins
9.	Teacher	South American	35-40	Latino	Female	1h:28 mins
10.	Teacher	European	25-30	Pākehā	Female	1h:02 mins
11.	Teacher	British	30-35	Pākehā	Female	1h:18 mins
12.	Teacher	North American	45-50	African-American	Male	1h:07 mins
13.	Student	North American	25-30	Pākehā	Female	1h:28 mins
14.	Student	North American	35-40	Pākehā	Female	0h:45 mins
15.	Student	New Zealand	55-60	Pākehā	Male	1h:39 mins
16.	Student	New Zealand	60-65	Pākehā	Male	0h:52 mins

During the first round of fieldwork data collection (May-June 2016), I conducted sixteen in-depth, face-to-face interviews with Wellington studio owners, yoga teachers and students (see demographic outlines in *Figure 4*). Most interviews averaged 80 minutes, with the shortest being 45 minutes and the longest lasting 99 minutes. I recorded interview with a digital voice recorder, using a combination of semi-structured questions and informal conversation. Open questions such as “What are your thoughts on yoga consumerism in New Zealand,” allowed participants to

elaborate on key topics. Closed questions such as “Do you think people in NZ practice yoga for spiritual outcomes” allowed me to prompt more detailed responses. In general, participants were very forthcoming, expressing their personal experiences as yoga industry insiders.

In the second round of interviews (July to early August 2016), more yoga students were recruited, as well as teachers from the greater Wellington regions of Lower Hutt and Kapiti Coast. My intention to recruit teachers from outside central Wellington aimed to test my original hypothesis, proposing that peoples’ perceptions of spirituality would be different in outlying districts from the inner city. Moreover, as I interviewed participants from as far afield as Paraparaumu on the Kapiti Coast, they enriched data sets in unexpected ways.⁷⁰ Because I had a shortfall in student participation, I took a more randomised recruitment approach. In some instances, I used teachers’ recommendations and at other times, I talked about the study with members of the public. This approach proved successful and I recruited eight more students in Round Two of the study. In the second round, I conducted twelve in-depth, face-to-face interviews. In total, twenty-eight participants took part in this study, with a good ratio of students (N = 12) to industry professionals (N = 16). In total, I recorded over thirty-three hours of raw data.

Figure 5: Demographics of interview participants – Round Two

	ROLE	CULTURAL BACKGROUND	AGE BRACKET	ETHNICITY	GENDER	INTERVIEW TIME
17.	Teacher	New Zealand	70-75	Pākehā	Female	0h:33 mins
18.	Teacher	New Zealand	20-25	Pākehā	Female	1h:33 mins
19.	Teacher	Malaysian Indian	35-40	Indian	Female	1h:00mins
20.	Founder	European	75-80	Pākehā	Male	1h:28mins
21.	Student	New Zealand	20-25	Pākehā	Female	1h:09 mins
22.	Student	New Zealand	30-35	Pākehā	Female	1h:40 mins
23.	Student	New Zealand	55-60	Pākehā	Female	0h:55mins
24.	Student	Fiji-Indian	70-75	Indian	Male	0h:35 mins
25.	Student	Korean	45-50	Korean	Female	1h:42mins
26.	Student	New Zealand	40-45	Pākehā	Female	1h:30 mins
27.	Student	New Zealand	55-60	Māori	Female	1h:09 mins
28.	Student	New Zealand	35-40	Pākehā	Female	0h:58 mins

In addition to qualitative data, I also conducted quantitative surveys using an anonymous questionnaire (N = 54). This approach allowed me to collect basic statistical information on community yoga groups to supplement qualitative data. Surveys also allowed me to engage with

⁷⁰ For example, I was fortunate enough to interview octogenarian Eric Doornekamp who gave excellent insights into yoga in Wellington from the 1960s to mid-1980s. Interview with Eric Doornekamp, July 9, 2016.

ethnic groups that were under-represented during face-to-face interviews. For example, I had very little initial response from members of the Indian community during my initial enlistment process. To bridge this gap, I approached representatives from various Indian communities in Wellington to see if I could conduct surveys using the anonymous questionnaire. Wellington has a number of well-established Indian communities, with many members who practice yoga. Furthermore, the Indian High Commission, who was hosting the International Day of Yoga at the Indian Cultural Centre (Kilbirnie) on Sunday 19th June 2016, granted me permission to set up a table so participants could fill out the questionnaire. I also distributed the questionnaire at two other community yoga groups where I was working as a yoga teacher. In all cases, participation was voluntary and individuals deposited completed forms in a box, guarantying anonymity. I manually coded data from surveys and compared test findings against national statistics.

This study's figures were mostly consistent with NZ Government Census statistics with most cultural and ethnic groups represented. For example, figures from the 2013 Census show that 74% of people in NZ ethnically identified as being of European descent (Pākehā), 15% of people Māori, 12% Asian (including Chinese, Indian, Korean), 7% Pacific people (including Tongan, Samoan, Niuean), 1% Middle Eastern, Latin America and African descent (MELAA).⁷¹ In this study, 71% of people ethnically identified as Pākehā, 11% of people Māori, 11% Asian, 0% Pacific people, and 7% MELAA. This study can partially explain Pacific people's lack of representation by recognising the higher percentage of Pacific people who practice Christianity in NZ.⁷² Thus, some people of Pacific origins may have felt morally disconnected from yoga because of its links to Indian religious traditions. Equally, this study can explain the higher percentage of people of MELAA descent because there are a number of yoga teachers who have immigrated to NZ from North and South America. In comparing Census statistics and ethnicities of people this study, we see that the local yoga-going population of Wellington is largely representative of New Zealand's diverse ethnic population.

Kevin Ward's analysis of religious and ethnic diversity claims that the NZ population is not only the most ethnically diverse country in the world, it also has "the highest percentage of its population born overseas."⁷³ Populations of people who identify as Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim or

⁷¹ See "Major ethnic groups in New Zealand," Census (2013), accessed May 1, 2016, <http://www.stats.govt.nz/census>

⁷² Statistics from the 2006 NZ Census state that 83% of Pacific people affiliate with being Christian or religious.

⁷³ Kevin Ward, "Religion in New Zealand since the 1960s: some Sociological Perspectives," *New Zealand Sociology* 31: 3 (2016): 195.

Sikh have increased due to immigration.⁷⁴ NZ Census figures (2013) also estimate that the amount of people residing in NZ, born overseas, are just over 25% of the population.⁷⁵ Nonetheless, 50% of teachers interviewed in this study were born overseas. One contributing factor for the high proportion of international teachers in Wellington may be the fact that the NZ yoga industry is relatively unregulated, and global accreditation bodies such as Yoga Alliance recognise yoga teachers' international qualifications. On the other hand, a large percentage of the foreign teachers interviewed in this study have lived in NZ for over six years and many are now NZ residents. Transcripts show that teachers born overseas not only have an excellent appreciation of NZ culture; they also offer multicultural perspectives in relation to local industry practices. Therefore, rather than swaying datasets towards transnational yoga trends, I believe that foreign-born participants offered well-considered insights, providing a range of perspectives that enhanced this study.

My overall aim for this study was to faithfully represent participants' voices by drawing together common themes and looking for points of divergence. Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics guidelines, including the confidentiality agreement and use of pseudonym where requested, were useful when engaging participants on critical accounts of the yoga industry. Scholarly sources on ethnographic research techniques were also useful guidelines.⁷⁶ For example, O'Donoghue suggests that qualitative interviews gather knowledge by "mutual negotiation."⁷⁷ Accordingly, interviews acted as a space in time where participants cooperated with the shared objectives by creating meaningful dialogue for further analysis. In each case, however, interview dynamics differed. Sometimes, I ad-libbed and responded freely to participants' comments, especially when they provided new perspectives, or confirmed existing ones. Sometimes I sat back and listened closely, taking notes as participants shared detailed viewpoints. Almost all interviews provided interesting data. In many cases, people told me at the end of the interview how much they enjoyed the discussion process, particularly when they gained a deeper understanding their own thought processes.

⁷⁴ Arvind Zoggekar, "The Changing Face of New Zealand's Populations and National Identity," in *New Zealand Identities: Departures and Destinations*, eds. James Hou-fu liu, Tim McCreanor, Tracey McIntosh, and Teresa Teaiwa (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2005), 142-43.

⁷⁵ "Census (2013)," Statistics New Zealand, accessed May 1, 2016, <http://www.stats.govt.nz/census>

⁷⁶ Bruce Curtis and Cate Curtis, "In Depth Interviewing – The Interactive Base," in *Social Research: A Practical Introduction* (London: Sage Publications, 2011), 27-52; Martin Brett Davies, "There is more to Qualitative Research than Interviewing," in *Doing a Successful Research Project: Using Qualitative or Quantitative Methods* ed. Martin Brett Davies (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 168-180.

⁷⁷ Tom O'Donoghue, *Planning Your Qualitative Research Project: An Introduction to Interpretivist Research in Education* (London: Routledge, 2007), 10.

For me too, interviews offered numerous self-reflexive encounters. My 'emic' (insider) experience as a studio owner and yoga teacher (from 2006 to present day) gave me a keen understanding of industry trends. My insider status also meant I was able to find common ground with participants and engage them on industry experiences. However, listening back to interviews gave me critical reflection of my own exuberant interview style, which in turn prompted me to improve my skills through more active listening. Furthermore, by listening to recordings retrospectively, I noticed shifts in my viewpoints as gaps in my knowledge were filled by participants' expertise. For example, I had no idea that 'koha' classes could be financially lucrative for teachers, and that local community members who could not afford to pay full price for classes gained numerous social and spiritual benefits. Equally, fieldwork proved therapeutic as I gained insights into my role as an industry provider. Thus, interviews were not simply a data gathering method. Rather, participants were vital sources of insider knowledge, as well as sounding boards for my own considerations.

Chapter Outline

To support my claim that yoga in NZ is represented within three distinct community subgroups this study is outlined as follows. Chapter One looks at moral yoga communities in the context of suburban community centres where koha yoga classes have become a hub of social activity. Yoga classes take place in large unadorned community halls, occupying the same space as craft markets, Narcotics Anonymous meetings, and Zumba classes. Teachers and students get to know each other and make acquaintances with groups occupying the space before or after class. One teacher claimed that student-practitioner act as a 'real family'.⁷⁸ People who attend mid-morning yoga classes are generally of different ages (25-75), ethnicities (Pākehā, Māori, Asian, Latin American), and social status (retirees, beneficiaries, students and part-time workers). Classes during the evening tend to attract full-time workers heading home to nearby suburbs, as well as people living nearby. Teachers run koha classes by donations systems, making yoga accessible to people regardless of their income. This culture of inclusivity, particularly in multicultural suburbs such as Newtown and Kilbirnie, means that participants in community yoga groups are more accepting of Indian spirituality. For example, a number of yoga teachers and students suggested that chanting *Om* creates a sense of interconnectedness that helps them embody 'community spirit'. Moreover, spiritual practices such as upholding the moral code of non-harming (*ahimsa*), allow people to

⁷⁸ Interview with Sarrah Jayne, June 1, 2016.

develop communitarian attitudes. Community open-mindedness also gives yoga teachers the freedom to teach what they want, which means they often present spiritual practices with a ‘take-it-or-leave-it’ attitude. Accordingly, spiritual yoga practices are not so much part of a counter-cultural movement, as they are sites where local peoples’ collective sense of social conscience finds expression through a combination of spiritual practice and social responsibility.

Chapter Two looks at secularised notions of yoga where participants attend yoga classes in gyms, corporate work places, and urban health clubs primarily for fitness and health benefits.⁷⁹ Yoga teachers in gym settings often promote the physical benefits of yoga as complimentary to fitness activities.⁸⁰ Similarly, corporate yoga teachers claim that breathing and relaxation exercises help yoga-goers combat health risks, such as mental stress and nervous fatigue. Although scholars, such as De Michelis, describe the pursuit of a healthy body as a type of privatised religion, secular participants in this study strongly reject the idea of yoga being spiritual or religious.⁸¹ Rather, corporate people in secularised yoga classes often conform to the values of Pākehā culture, seeking visible fitness improvements over spiritual self-development. Some view spirituality through a bicultural lens of the individual’s relationship with the natural environment of Aotearoa.⁸² For others, spirituality is strictly a personal concern. Thus, for participants in secular settings, yoga is part of a pragmatic impulse to stay fit, healthy, and productive, and to achieve work-life balance.

Chapter Three examines what it means to part of a brand community. Branded yoga studios are usually located in and around the CBD, and advertise a unique point of difference to help them stand out in an overcrowded marketplace. In addition to selling a range of products and services, yoga brands enhance their reputations by running free community classes, giving away free trials, or offering introductory specials. We can think of yoga brands sitting along a continuum, with more established yoga studios upholding teachings of a specific yoga lineage (such as Ashtanga or Bikram Yoga), and newer studios attracting younger upwardly mobile participants by advertising more fashion-conscious images. Most brands gain their followings through online marketing (such as websites, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter), and media advertising (flyers, posters, and feature articles). Moreover, yoga brands also tend to use marketing images featuring young Pākehā women wearing fashionable yoga attire, often meditating in natural or designer settings. Idyllic

⁷⁹ NZ Government literature describes the term secular as meaning “not religious, sacred, spiritual, or superstitious.” Carl Walrond, “Atheism and secularism - A Christian legacy,” accessed October 14, 2016, <http://www.teAra.govt.nz/en/atheism-and-secularism/page-1>.

⁸⁰ See Empower Studio, <http://www.empowerstudio.co.nz>; Exodus Gym, <http://www.exodusclub.co.nz/yoga>

⁸¹ De Michelis, *History of Modern Yoga: Patanjali and Western Esotericism*, 183.

⁸² One participant framed spirituality in relation to the Māori concept of having a strong standing place, tūrangawaewae, as people of the land, tangata whenua.

images reflect NZ people's love of nature, as well as the notion of yoga women as being emotionally composed. Brands supply customers with a complex array of symbols, helping deepen customers' emotional connections to brand values, which enhance their social identities.⁸³

Although I was able to draw clear distinctions between community subgroups, the three foci of the thesis, moral, the secular and brands communities, do not always remain entirely separate. Sometimes, as students move between yoga communities for preferential reasons, such as economic incentives, or seeking a new teacher, divisions become convoluted. Some studios, too, represent all three subcultural groups at once. For example, the Yoga Lounge situated in the Wellington CBD states on its website "Escape the office and reclaim your wellness. Welcome to our homely little studio."⁸⁴ Therefore, by trading in the CBD, having corporate clientele, and offering similar communitarian activities to moral communities, some brands, like Yoga Lounge, span subcultural divisions. While I do not claim that yoga in NZ is radically different to the rest of the world, evidence from this study shows that some aspects of yoga in NZ have adapted to the values of local culture in ways that may be thought of as distinctly 'Kiwi'. This thesis explores distinctive characteristics of Wellington subcultures in relation to transcultural yoga trends.

⁸³ Richard Elliot and Kritsadarat Wattanasuwan, "Brands as Symbolic Resources for the Construction of Identity," *International Journal of Advertising* 17:2 (1998): 137.

⁸⁴ See "Homepage," accessed July 5, 2016, <http://www.theyogalounge.co.nz>

Chapter Two

Moral communities

Introduction

In the context of yoga in Wellington, being part of a moral community is not only about participating in physical yoga practices at a local community centre.¹ Rather, moral community yoga-goers share a type of interconnectedness which extends beyond individual self-concern to the wider community and, more abstractly, to the landscape, humanity, and universal energy. At the level of local culture, moral community yoga-goers build social relationships and participate in systems of ethical exchange. This means that people of different social backgrounds, ages, and incomes access yoga by offering a 'koha' (donation/gift), usually a small monetary sum of around \$5-\$10. In addition, some participants also freely give their time and energy to set up and promote yoga classes. The fact that financially disadvantaged members of society, such as the unemployed or elderly, can participate in low-cost yoga classes adds to a culture of inclusivity and 'engaged' spirituality.² Some moral community yoga-goers also engage in communitarian activities (such as community gardens), social activism (human rights advocacy), political ecology (environmental and social responsibility), and conservation projects (such as cleaning up local beaches). Yoga practices in this subcultural setting are different to secular and brand yoga settings, in the sense that teachers freely improvise with little concern for preserving secular attitudes, or adhering to the set sequences of brand founders.

This chapter discusses trends and tensions within the moral communities of the NZ yoga industry. I argue that many moral community yoga-goers participate in donation-based and low-cost classes where empathetic exchanges and engaged spiritual practices are commonly accepted. This communitarian approach makes moral communities distinct from other yoga subcultures,

¹ See Graham and Haidt, "Beyond Beliefs: Religions bind Individuals into Moral Communities," *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 146. Similarly, a recent study on yoga in America shows that 46% of practitioners claim to give their free time to the local community, which is 20% higher than non-practitioners. See Ipsos Public Affairs, "2016 Yoga in America Study," accessed January 4, 2017, <http://www.media@yogaalliance.org/> page 16.

² I use the term 'engaged' spirituality to create a distinction between community members who actively engage in spiritual practices such as chanting, and secular practices, such as Yoga Nidra, where spirituality is kept private. Steven Jacobs uses the term "engaged spirituality" to describe collective actions and humanitarian outreach programs of global brand Art of Living. See Stephen Jacobs, "Inner Peace and Global Harmony: Individual Wellbeing and Global Solutions in the Art of Living," *Culture Unbound* 6 (2014): 880.

which often focus on gains for the individual. Moral community members regularly prioritise emotional, social, and spiritual connections over physical, mental, and sensory benefits. For example, some people in moral communities set up the yoga space together, chant *Om*, and drink free chai together after class. By contrast, yoga-goers in secularised corporate classes largely avoid overtly spiritual and social practices. Moreover, members of brand communities may engage in social practices, however, yoga has become a self-affirming process, giving practitioners an uplifting personal experience.

Although these examples show that distinctions exist between yoga subcultures, the concept of belonging to a moral community can be complicated. For instance, as consumers move across yoga subcultures seeking what Leslie Skliar refers to as a “quest for the good life,” some participants attend community koha classes without contributing more than a gold coin donation.³ This means that some yoga consumers get the economic benefit of attending a koha class without being actively involved in systems of ethical exchange. In social psychology, scholars refer to this behaviour as “free-riding.”⁴ Instead of seeing yoga consumers in a critical light, however, a number of moral community members claimed that koha classes can have a transformative effect on yoga consumers, making them more self-aware and socially responsible over time. Consequently, moral participants feel there is a type of evolution of conscience or moral conversion that takes place when people practice yoga in community settings.

In the first part of this chapter, I explore the social values and practices of yoga-goers who attend moral community koha classes. The primary objective for many community-based yoga teachers is to make yoga available to people who cannot afford to pay mainstream studio prices. The moral capital of community classes generates a culture of goodwill, with members socialising with one another as if they are family members. Participants describe the relaxed informality of koha classes as being compatible with grass-roots values, of being down-to-earth, and socially responsible. While not every person who attends community yoga classes forms emotional and social bonds with class members, or with the local neighbourhood, participants claim they are accepting of all kinds of people. This is because they believe that social and spiritual inclusiveness helps to transform people’s selfish instincts, contributing to social change.

³ Skliar differentiates between corporate people who seek to follow global consumer trends and community-minded people who seek to make a better society. Leslie Skliar, *Globalization, Capitalism and its Alternatives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 277.

⁴ See Graham and Haidt, “Beyond Beliefs: Religions Bind Individuals into Moral Communities,” *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 143.

In the second part of this chapter, on spiritual transformation, I explore the concept of yoga as a journey of self-discovery. Informants claim that people may begin yoga as a purely physical practice and then over time their perceptions and intentions change as they start to access deeper dimensions of the practice. This theme of spiritual self-transformation is one shared with participants in brand settings. However, in moral community settings, teachers claim that they have more freedom to explore a range of spiritual practices without feeling as if they are giving into participants' personal beliefs. Although the cultural threads of Christianity and secularism are still at play in community yoga, there has been a social shift in the last few years towards non-institutionalized, free expressions of spirituality.

In the third part of this chapter, on growing social activism, two interviewees discuss some of the sociopolitical issues affecting the yoga industry 'off the mat'.⁵ Yoga activists who seek to raise social awareness about issues affecting the yoga industry and the world at large use the term 'off the mat'. In relation to yoga activism in Wellington, informants have used the moral principal of non-harming (*ahimsa*) to address the matter of local yoga businesses running retreats and teacher training in Bali, Indonesia. Informants feel that it is hypocritical to teach and promote moral practices, such as non-harming and truthfulness, particularly in Bali when the Indonesian government is harmfully oppressing indigenous people in neighbouring West Papua. Instead of practicing what they preach, yoga activists feel that yoga industry providers ignore oppressive systems in order to make profit. By engaging in yoga activism 'off the mat' (through protests, marches, and public awareness campaigns) moral community members actively participate in humanitarian practices that aim to stimulate social change. Moral community members share in the belief that yoga practices, particularly engaged spiritual practices, can bring about positive change in the world.

Building moral communities

Community 'koha' yoga classes are a relatively recent development in Wellington and teachers often hold classes in suburban community centre halls. People who practice yoga in community centre settings benefit from local council initiatives to make local communities and neighbourhood groups "healthy, vibrant, affordable, and resilient".⁶ The word 'koha' derives from Māori traditions

⁵ 'Off the mat into the world' is a non-profit activist organisation that seeks to use yoga, meditation, and self-awareness to bring about positive change in the world. See <http://www.offthemat.co.nz> (accessed October 12, 2016).

⁶ See "Social and Recreation Fund," accessed March 2, 2017, <http://www.wellington.govt.nz/services/community/funding/council-funds/social-and-recreation>

of visitors offering gifts or monetary contributions to the head of a marae (traditional meeting place).⁷ In the context of yoga, the word 'koha' generally means that students give teachers a small monetary contribution of around \$5-\$10 per class. However, community members can also be involved in complex levels of empathetic exchange within koha class settings. For example, Newtown Community Centre employees give yoga teachers subsidised room hire for running koha classes. This discount allows teachers to charge students a nominal fee. Moreover, some yoga students volunteer to help set up mats and prepare the room before class. After class, community centre workers serve free chai and members socialise together, sharing in open discussion. There are also social exchanges between diverse group members entering and exiting communal spaces. Because of communitarian behaviour, Sarrah Jayne (yoga activist/ community koha teacher) feels that community centres are more emotionally rewarding than other places she teaches, primarily because members actively participate in meaningful exchanges:

The community holds it, the community centre holds it, the chai afterwards, and the regulars that come and set up the mats for me before I even arrive, that make posters for us for free just because, the community centre prints out these posters and distributes them for us for free because they appreciate what we're doing. I think there is a generosity of spirit that is happening in the koha [classes] that is bringing people together. So you feel part of something. And it's not like you just walk away. You are seeing the same people week in and week out. They don't just leave the class. They come and say 'Thank you that was a beautiful class'.⁸

Sarrah's comment shows that community centre koha yoga classes are sites where participants actively join in communitarian behaviour. As people freely give their time and energy, they help cultivate community spirit. This example shows that koha classes are sites where multiple people contribute time and energy to benefit the community as a whole.

The geographic locations of community yoga classes are significant in that many community centre koha classes take place in lower income neighbourhoods, adjacent to the city centre. Because social problems such as poor housing, environmental pollution, and low decile schooling directly affect low-income communities, such as Newtown and Kilbirnie, community centres aim to improve local environments by making respected services affordable and accessible.⁹ Informants also explain that the relaxed atmosphere of suburban community centres means that

⁷ See footnote 10.

⁸ Interview with Sarrah Jayne, June 1, 2016.

⁹ See <http://www.newtowncommunity.org.nz/about-us.html> (May 13, 2016).

people of all shapes, sizes, and abilities and ages can dress casually without having to put on any “airs and graces.”¹⁰ Amber (student and yoga event co-ordinator) explains further:

When I go to a community koha type class there is not so much consumer culture in terms of what people wearing. Rather, someone might be in their track pants and someone else might be in their old T-shirts or leggings.¹¹

Similarly, Monique (a new student, 45 years) suggests that the down-to-earth friendliness of community yoga classes helps create a feeling of interconnectedness, which extends beyond individual self-interest:

I just think it’s nice when you’re with a [likeminded] group of people, you kind of feel connected, and I do see it as being about the world, and community, and connecting.¹²

Figure 6: Community yoga at Parua Bay Hall (photo: Susan Prior NZ Yoga Scene Magazine)



Regardless of age, ethnicity, and social status, suburban koha yoga classes are socially inclusive spaces which actively endorse cultural diversity and prosociality.¹³ Perhaps the popularity of koha classes has recently increased because people are becoming more aware of the economic disparity

¹⁰ Interviews with Sarrah Jayne, June 1, 2016, Milo Haigh, June 11, 2016, and Amber Sturtz, May 13, 2016, suggest that suburban koha classes have a casual non-judgemental atmosphere.

¹¹ Interview with Amber Sturtz, May 13, 2016.

¹² Interview with Monique Rolland, July 15, 2016.

¹³ Wilson et al., use the word ‘prosocial’ to describe people’s behaviour that focuses on making the “community a better place.” Altruism, on the other hand, can be costly in terms of self-sacrificing time and emotional energy without reciprocal benefits. See David Sloan Wilson, Daniel Tumminelli O'Briena, and Artura Sesmac, “Human Prosociality from an Evolutionary Perspective: Variations and Correlations at a City-Wide Scale,” *Evolution and Human Behaviour* 30 (2009): 190-194.

between an affluent minority and the underprivileged majority. In view of social issues, community centres are once again becoming the social hub of community life.

However, not all moral community members actively participate in communitarian behaviour, with some participants suggesting that community koha classes attract two types of yoga-goers. First, community-spirited members are often time-rich and cash-poor, living on unemployment benefits, seniors' pensions, or part-time incomes. For example, community yoga teacher Francesca claims that koha classes offer a level of dignity and social engagement to disadvantaged people who are not part of the working middle-classes.¹⁴ Likewise, Sarrah claims cash-poor participants attend koha yoga classes not just because lessons are inexpensive, but because yoga becomes a social outing where everyone gets to know one other and become part of a "real family."¹⁵ The emotional support systems embedded in the ethos of community centres seems to build moral capital within communities of need. Kevin Ward examines the idea of religious communities being 'thick' communities that meet regularly and share rituals, practices, and moral accountability.¹⁶ In this sense, community yoga groups act in a similar way to cohesive religious communities in that regular yoga-goers have a meeting place where they can share in social activities, supplying moral frameworks for community involvement.

Koha yoga classes also attract people who want personal benefits, such as convenient locations, preferred teachers, or reduced class rates. Although many yoga consumers can afford to pay studio prices (\$15-\$20 per class), community koha classes can represent time out from an otherwise fast-paced world where individuals find deeper connections to themselves without feeling judged by their peers. Hariata (a seasoned yoga student), who speaks from her previous experiences in the corporate sector, claims that working in a male-dominated corporate world, which is rooted in Presbyterian values, means that Kiwi people develop "tough edges" in order to survive.¹⁷ Hariata sees that koha yoga classes offer busy people temporary respite from life's pressures, which she sees as a positive outcome. Similarly, Ramon, a senior yoga student who regularly helps at community classes, accepts that even though not everyone comes to koha yoga classes seeking communal involvement, "yoga is the right place for them."¹⁸ As a devout Hindu, Ramon sees that yoga is ultimately about divine love and spiritual transformation. He feels that the

¹⁴ Interview with Francesca Haylock, May 20, 2016.

¹⁵ Interview with Sarrah Jayne, June 1, 2016.

¹⁶ Ward, "Religion in New Zealand since the 1960s: Some Sociological Perspectives," 204.

¹⁷ Hariata suggests that the colloquial use of Kiwi sayings such as "get over it," and "harden up" reflects local peoples' toughness. Interview with Hariata Hema, July 28, 2016.

¹⁸ Interview with Ramon Laal, July 22, 2016.

subtle vibrations of spiritual activities, such as chanting *Om*, work on everyone who opens up to it. This means that consumers may initially attend koha yoga classes for self-interested reasons, and then, over time, their ‘tough edges’ soften as they are slowly transformed by the warmth and generosity of moral community members.

However, some theorists claim the evolutionary costs of supporting self-serving individuals only works as a behavioural strategy when collective benefits for the community can recompense individuals who sacrifice their personal time and emotional energy.¹⁹ When I asked participants why community yoga classes were so unconditionally inclusive of people who contribute in some cases so little, a number of participants suggested that yoga practices, particularly spiritual practices, help individuals gradually transform and increase social awareness. For example, Hariata feels that chanting and meditation helps individuals move from the “gross” outer world to the “subtle” inner world, re-entering back into the gross world more aware of selfish impulses.²⁰ At the same time, Hariata suggests that Indian spiritual yoga practices such as *karma yoga* (selfless action) and *krīyas* (cleansing exercises) inspire participants to act ethically both on and off the mat, prompting a narrative of self-inquiry: “When I am not on my mat how I am behaving?” “What is the spirit with which I am interacting with others?”²¹ Therefore, by giving their time and emotional energy to various yoga-related activities, participants’ collective efforts help effect positive change within individuals and local communities. Participants’ conceptions of community-based yoga reflect the contours of a morally and spiritually connected subgroup. These behaviours are different from people in corporate and brand communities, where teachers omit spirituality or promote it as part of positive self-development, rather than social development.

Next, we will take an look at spirituality in moral community settings, to see how people in Wellington are becoming more willing to explore spirituality as part of interpersonal and social development.

Spiritual transformations

Interviews with students and teachers in community classes have shown that participants are often more accepting of spiritual practices, such as moral codes and chanting, which originate from Indian religious traditions. People’s willingness to participate in Indian spiritual practices is a clear

¹⁹ Wilson et al., “Human Prosociality from an Evolutionary Perspective: Variations and Correlations at a City-Wide Scale,” (2009): 192.

²⁰ Interview with Hariata Hema, July 28, 2016.

²¹ Ibid.

point of departure from corporate and brand communities, where secular and soft spiritual practices are more prevalent. Although the cultural impact of Christianity and secularism are still at play in some moral community classes, many teachers are willing to put aside their reservations and employ a range of spiritual practices – from silent contemplation to active devotional practices.

Community yoga teacher Francesca sees that a subtle evolution of conscience occurs when individuals make time to breathe, and reconnect with themselves. Although some people may initially come to yoga for physical reasons, after time they find out that yoga can lead to a process of self-discovery. As Francesca explains:

The evolution is that they learn more about self-awareness and observing themselves and coming back to themselves, rather than being up in the head all the time. And then it evolves into something very different, into self-enquiry, and takes you off on a whole new branch. It is not just putting your foot behind your head... I think when people initially come they think it is just physical, and a lot my students who have never done yoga before that is all they know of really, is that image of someone doing a forward bend. It is all physical, physical, and then they discover that there's a lot more to it.²²

Teachers' and students' narratives challenge scholarly ideas that modern yoga is mainly focused on physical practices.²³ Here, community teachers and students suggest that a subtle evolution takes place, where people begin yoga in search of pragmatic physical benefits, and then over time, their perceptions change and they become more open to ethical and spiritual concerns. Although the idea of yoga as subtle evolution is not limited to community koha classes, they seem particularly pronounced in the community yoga practices that I focus on here.

Census figures show that over 40% of New Zealanders affiliate with 'no religion', however, this figure does not accurately represent the spiritual identities of yoga-goers I interviewed.²⁴ Out of the fifty-four community yoga-goers surveyed in my study using a questionnaire, 46% said they see yoga as a spiritual practice that involves active/engaged practices such as chanting, devotional activities, moral codes, or yoga activism. Forty-four per cent said they see yoga as a spiritual practice that involves more absorbed activities such as *prāṇāyāma*, silent contemplation, or meditation. Only 5% of people surveyed stated that they did not see yoga as a spiritual practice,

²² Interview with Francesca Haylock, May 20, 2016.

²³ See De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga, Patanjali and Western Esotericism*, 187; and Mark Singleton (2010), 174.

²⁴ "Census Figures," (2013), accessed November 1, 2016, <http://www.stats.govt.nz/Census/2013-census/profile-and-summary-reports/infographic-culture-identity.aspx>; <file:///C:/Users/tilleyal/Downloads/quickstats-culture-identity.pdf>

with 4% of people not commenting. This indicates that a significant proportion of yoga-goers in suburban community yoga classes accept yoga as a type of non-institutionalised religiosity, expressed through diverse spiritual practices, both actively engaged and quietly introspective.²⁵

In terms of ethnographic interviews, moral community members claim that engaged spiritual practices such as *seva* (selfless service), *kirtan* (chanting the names of deities), and morality discourse, blur the lines between personal expression and social unity.²⁶ This means that some participants are prepared to engage in spiritual practices in social contexts, contributing to a shared sense of interconnectedness. For Amber Sturtz, group spiritual practices such as *kirtan* (chanting the names of Indian gods) help reduce ego-identification:

Yoga *kirtan* meditation practice for example ... is more of a shared spirituality than a spirituality that makes you think about you.²⁷

Likewise, some koha yoga teachers feel that because students are accepting of Indian spiritual practices they have more freedom to explore spiritual practices, which might in other settings alienate secularised clients. For example, Sarrah states:

I really think that there's something about community centres, and the hub that they hold in that it's a hub for other things, and other events and people are familiar with it, and it's a casual-ity about it ... and so you, as a teacher, have an incredible amount of freedom as well. I have so much more freedom to chant, to meditate, to use my chimes, to use my music, to do whatever it is I want to do in those classes. And people are accepting of it. They are lapping it up. They are like 'This is your class, your space. You can do whatever you want. We are just here to take the wisdom.'²⁸

Sarrah's account shows that community yoga focuses more on the community than on the individual. Furthermore, in the subsequent two styles of yoga – corporate and brand yoga – standards and sequences set in place by brand founders can strongly limit teachers' freedom to improvise. While teachers such as Sarrah feel free to explore spiritual practices in koha class

²⁵ Because of time and access constraints, I was not able to use the questionnaire to survey groups in corporate and brand communities. However, conducting a broad-scale survey of yoga-goers' spiritual affiliations would make an excellent extension to this study.

²⁶ We can trace some of these spiritual practices to Indian textual traditions where chanting divine utterances, selfless service and self-inquiry are intended to merge the individual with transcendence (Brahman). For example, religious texts such as the *Bhagavadgītā*, and the *Yoga Upanishads*, and *Hatha Yoga Pradīpikā*, offer prescriptions aimed to free practitioners from worldly bonds, rather than offer worldly freedoms.

²⁷ Interview with Amber Sturtz, May 13, 2016.

²⁸ Interview with Sarrah Jayne, June 1, 2016.

settings, Milo (community yoga teacher and student) suggests that it is not just community settings giving teachers a sense of freedom. Rather, in terms of gendered constructs, Milo suggests that for her freedom of expression means being part of a new generation of women who are leading this exploration of spirituality at the level of local community:

Particularly in Wellington at the moment I think that yoga philosophy and spirituality is on the rise... and I think that is a really positive thing, and I am really interested to see where it goes. But I also think that the people who are leading that, that I know, are really powerful women, who I really respect, it is mainly women that I know are part of it.²⁹

In community centre settings, a younger generation of woman teachers feel they have the social freedom to explore shared spiritual practices, without feeling that they are exploiting traditional knowledge previously preserved within male-led teaching lineages.³⁰ By working collaboratively with one another, moral community teachers like Sarrah and Milo are able to form social networks that operate independently of yoga studios and established teaching lineages. Consequently, the growing popularity of yoga spirituality in moral communities has allowed a new generation of Pākehā women to feel empowered to lead a range of spiritual practices within the shared space of yoga classes. Women's interest in yoga philosophy and spirituality is vaguely reminiscent of endeavours of early Theosophical women, such as Oakley, who sought to transform society through new and traditional forms of spiritual teaching.

Nonetheless, some critics have suggested that white women are culturally appropriating Indian religious teachings when they chant mantras and lead kirtan practices.³¹ Addressing the subject of cultural appropriation, Sarrah claims that her Indian-born Hindu yoga teacher encouraged her to share Indian religious practices, such as chanting mantras. The reassurance Sarrah got from her teacher gave her confidence to share mantras such as the *Gāyātri Mantra* with her students:

²⁹ Interview with Milo Haigh, June 11, 2016.

³⁰ Allison Fish claims that, following Intellectual Property Right lawsuits by Bikram Choudhury, the Indian government, and the Art of Living (AOL) Foundation both think that yogic knowledge "should remain, in all its forms, subject to open access." See Allison Fish, "The Commodification, and Exchange of Knowledge in the Case of Transnational Commercial Yoga," *International Journal of Cultural Property* 13 (2006): 198. See Aseem Shukla, "The Theft of Yoga," *Newsweek*, accessed December 12, 2016, http://www.newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/aseem_shukla/2010/04/nearly_twenty_million_people_in.html

³¹ Josh Logue, "Disenchanted," accessed December 13, 2016, <http://www.insidehighered.com>; Susanna Barkataki "How to decolonize your yoga practice," accessed December 13, 2016, <http://www.decolonizingyoga.com>

Puja was hugely into chanting. And she was just like, people love it, you love it, we love it, we are just going to do it. And her ethos was really just take it out into the world and just do it, don't worry that you're pronouncing that wrong, don't worry that you were not born into this culture, this is yours, I'm giving it to you, it's a gift, go and share it.³²

Fijian-born Indian Ramon, an attendee of Sarrah's classes, feels completely at home when Sarrah and the group chant *Om* or recite mantras. Moreover, Ramon seemed more concerned with Indian teachers at the International Day of Yoga (run by the High Commission of India) not chanting *Om* at the beginning and end of the public yoga session.³³ Although the debate on cultural appropriation causes controversy in America, in Wellington the multicultural population tends to value and celebrate shared expressions of cultural diversity. Therefore, the issues of cultural appropriation do not seem as challenging for NZ yoga industry providers as it does abroad.

At the same time, for an older generation of teachers schooled in secular institutions, such as International Yoga Teachers Association (I.Y.T.A), presenting spiritual yoga practices can still be challenging. Part of this challenge comes from persistent notions of secular culture, where teachers have avoided overt references to religiosity or spirituality to prevent incurring sectarian or religious bias. For example, Jenny Fellows (veteran teacher), a long-standing representative of the I.Y.T.A., has previously found it difficult to broach the subject of spirituality in yoga classes because she does not want to offend students with Christian beliefs:

When I first started [teaching yoga] I had hang-ups using the word God because for me at that time there were huge limitations to it. And now I will very often talk about 'universal spirit', 'life energy' occasionally use 'God' and no one has thrown their hands up in horror and walked out. So it is finding that middle road, I think, when you are teaching you don't want to offend people but you've got to be true to what you believe and what you want to share and teach.³⁴

Jenny sees that spirituality involves shifting one's worldly focus to the intuitive realm of the inner-self:

³² Interview with Sarrah Jayne, June 1, 2016.

³³ Interview with Ramon Laal, July 22, 2016.

³⁴ Interview with Jenny Fellows, July 5, 2016.

Ultimately, everybody has to use their own inner wisdom, and as a teacher that is our role is to help them become aware of that inner wisdom. Just forget about the rest of the world while you are in yoga, it is there for you to focus inwardly.³⁵

Similarly, to prevent alienating students who may feel uncomfortable participating in Indian religious practices, Shirley Hunt (veteran teacher), who has taught community yoga classes for years, is still cautious about relating *Om* to any form of spirituality:

Well, I wouldn't have wanted to do *Oms* in the beginning as I didn't want it to be a religious class. I didn't want to take it into the religious side, but when I realised that the students themselves loved the feelings of the vibrations of the *Oms* I thought it was only fair of them to try. And I don't know why we are so reticent. I think it is definitely cultural. The old English and Scots [reticence] coming out I think. It's certainly not Irish. It is definitely in a cultural background I think. But a lot of people don't sing and don't have confidence in their voice, so they are not confident to make a sound.³⁶

Shirley's initial reluctance to lead Indian religious chants highlights an intergenerational shift between teachers who have been involved in the yoga industry for decades and contemporary teachers such as Sarrah and Milo who belong to new generation of teachers, enthusiastically and openly engaging with spiritual practices in public settings.

It seems that some people in NZ are becoming increasingly interested in spirituality as part of their participation in communitarian activities. We can see community gardens springing up over Wellington as part of a push by local council to create sustainable neighbourhoods.³⁷ Likewise, local volunteer groups regularly gather to clean up the beaches and rocky coastlines of Wellington as part of environmental and conservation projects.³⁸ We also find teachers like Milo who question the ethical approaches of yoga clothing producers, who perpetuate unethical standards of production and body image. Scholars such as Kevin Ward suggest that the NZ population has grown increasingly accepting of spirituality because "the radical individualism of high modernity" has left people disillusioned and searching to create ethical frameworks within local communities.³⁹ Yoga

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Interview with Shirley Hunt, May 16, 2016.

³⁷ "Community Gardens", accessed March 6 2017, <http://www.wellington.govt.nz>

³⁸ See www.facebook.com/Wellington-South-Coast-Clean-up; and www.facebook.com/Volunteerfitness (both accessed March 6 2017).

³⁹ See Ward, "Christianity and Churches in New Zealand since 1960: Sociological Perspectives," 184.

commentators too are calling for yoga-goers to be less focused on their physical appearances and more pro-actively involved in ethical matters that affect the yoga industry standards.⁴⁰

However, whilst conducting this study, I noticed clear divides between communities within the yoga industry, particularly in the ways teachers present spirituality. For example, a teacher (name withheld) interviewed for a teaching role at a commercial yoga studio in Wellington suggested that, in contrast to the spiritual practices of moral communities, branded yoga studios tend to promote consumer forms of spirituality:

These bigger schools are able to create an image that somebody else might want to live, and it speaks to our lack as opposed to our capacity. Like, 'oh you're missing something.' And that's where I feel that yoga is still filling gaps, people are still looking to yoga for some spirituality, but it has almost become pseudo-spirituality. It's like 'let's be positive', instead of 'let's sit and look'. And nature abhors a vacuum, and they've figured out that that's what we naturally want to do as human beings. We will fill the gaps, and we fill it with pop psychology. But it's not actually yoga philosophy, it's pop psychology. So instead of going, we'll look at the *Hatha Yoga Pradīpikā* and going 'what is the practice?' ... [it is about] making the ego a better ego. That is what I mean by the pop psychology, versus philosophy.⁴¹

This teacher's observations show that spirituality manifests differently across the spectrum of yoga practices within the industry. On the one hand, some teachers of community koha classes promote philosophical ideas and moral practices (non-harming, non-stealing, and truthfulness), which have their roots in the moral traditions of South Asian religions. On the other hand, in some branded yoga schools, teachers promote spirituality as positive psychology, which helps individuals alleviate their personal feelings of lack and insecurity. Spirituality may be increasing in NZ; however, it is not a homogenous practice throughout the yoga industry.

Yoga in NZ has a changing history and teachers who have been running community yoga classes for decades feel that spiritual yoga practices are only now starting to become more widely accepted. This move towards spirituality confirms that even though NZ people may claim to have 'no religion' this certainly does not mean that they have no spiritual involvement. In the context of the wider yoga industry, spirituality is a broad and complex concept. This means that engaged spirituality in moral communities is quite different from the soft spirituality of branded yoga

⁴⁰ Brigid Delany, "Time to Roll up the Yoga Mats and Man the Barricades," accessed November 28, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentsisfree/2016/nov/23>.

⁴¹ Name withheld, interview July 2016.

studios. Moreover, we have seen that spiritual yoga practices not only change across industry subcultures, they also change across generations. Intergenerational changes are likely to continue as the yoga industry expands and adapts to the new social values of New Zealand's increasingly multicultural society.

Next, we will look at examples of how practitioners use moral codes to address social issues directly affecting yoga industry providers.⁴² This shift towards a politicized morality shows that a younger generation of yoga teachers and students are using moral codes, such as *ahimsa*, as a call to action, directly linking the communitarian principles of yoga to social activism.

Growing Social Activism

In this section, we look at a new generation of tertiary-educated activists who apply yoga's moral codes, such as non-harming (*ahimsa*), truthfulness (*satya*), and non-stealing (*asteya*) to sociopolitical issues. This means that moral community members are joining discussion groups to address the need for the NZ yoga industry to take an ethical stance in challenging hypocritical behaviours. For example, Sarrah Jayne, who is involved with yoga activist organisation 'Off the Mat into the World', discusses the social responsibilities of NZ yoga industry providers who run teacher training courses and retreats in Bali (Indonesia). She thinks it is hypocritical to promote the moral code of *ahimsa* (non-harming) as a moral principle in teacher training without teachers and trainers putting it into practice. Sarrah has been campaigning with Free West Papua/ Aotearoa activists to raise awareness about the ethical implications of supporting the yoga economy in Bali, while Indonesian troops aggressively occupy West Papua:

We [yoga teachers] are going there and making a pact to support the local Balinese community. Okay. So how do we go there and also raise awareness for West Papua? How do we go there, and, within the realms of keeping ourselves safe, fly the Morning Star, which is the West Papuan flag, and raise awareness? Because it's not talked about there and it's illegal to talk about it. We have freedom of speech here, and so how do we use that? ... The media doesn't get involved, and in terms of the public nobody's talking about it and people don't know, and how can you make conscious decision about where you're putting money? And I think the thing is with yogis, teachers and practitioners, they have an

⁴² For one the modern glosses on the yamas and niyamas see Sri Swami Chidananda, "The Philosophy, Psychology and Practice of Yoga," accessed December 12, 2016, <http://www.rsl.ukans.edu/pkanagar/divine/>

immense capacity to care. We do, as a community, we care. We just don't talk about them enough.⁴³

Activists have reached out to NZ yoga providers who run yoga programmes in Bali, with the aim of discussing ethical implications of being involved in the Indonesian economy. However, activists feel that there has been little support from yoga industry professionals for their efforts to date.⁴⁴ For Sarrah, this is an on-going issue that will not disappear just because yoga providers choose to ignore it.

I followed up on this conversation about West Papua with Renée Gerlich (a yoga student and social activist), who thinks that there is no such thing as a “de-politicised spirituality.”⁴⁵ Renée does not think that you can separate personal spiritual engagement from socio-political engagement. Yet, she does not see any real engagement from the NZ yoga community, particularly in relation to yoga studios that use the principles of *ahimsa* and *satya* (truth), while running teaching programmes in Bali. By not directly addressing human rights abuses by Indonesian Forces in West Papua, Renée believes that the abstract notion of yoga as peace practice is a bourgeois response, sold by yoga industry providers to consumers as a form of pacification. Moreover, Renée also sees a “real disconnect” between the types of spirituality depicted in yoga advertisements, such as people meditating peacefully, and the social responsibility of yoga-goers’ who believe that yoga is synonymous with non-violence. Renée suggests:

If we started a conversation within the yoga community, where there was much more general awareness of what was going on in West Papua, and what Indonesia was doing, and the fact that we are implicated to some degree because we go there routinely. If people still decided to go, it is not a peace practice it is a pacification practice. I would rather be unfit, I think, and politically engaged, than flexible and [uninformed].⁴⁶

Renée feels that a lack of mainstream press coverage in NZ has contributed to yoga-goers’ general complacency in relation to the human rights issues in West Papua. However, she also thinks yoga needs to become more of a “grassroots peace practice” where groups and communities take an active stance, rather than being complacent.

⁴³ Interview with Sarrah Jayne, June 1, 2016.

⁴⁴ Free Papua Movement website states that the US government has accused them of human rights abuses, such as hostage taking, and yet the violence by Indonesian Special Forces and environmental abuses by US mining companies, such as Freeport MaMoRan remain unresolved. See <http://www.fas.org> (accessed June 2, 2016).

⁴⁵ Interview with Renée Gerlich, June 1, 2016.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Figure 7: West Papua activists partaking in Morning Star yoga outside the Indonesian Embassy



(Permission granted by ni-Vanuatu West Papua activist and academic Pala Molisa blackstone.net)

The fact that some yoga practitioners are emotionally involved with socio-political issues, while some remain disconnected, highlights tensions facing the NZ yoga industry. Informants have asked how can the NZ yoga industry act as a cohesive professional body if professionals continue overlook ethical issues. On the one hand, we find activists like Renée and Sarrah who think that yoga industry providers should act responsibly, confronting systems of oppression at home and abroad. As we will see later, commercial yoga websites and media presentations promote privatised spirituality and wellbeing as part of an idealised lifestyle. Consumer depictions allow many self-proclaimed yogis to distance themselves emotionally from taking social and political responsibility. Some scholars suggest that “feel-good spiritualities” are carefully constructed by marketing tacticians to seduce consumers into privatised forms of spiritual identity.⁴⁷ Likewise, Sarrah and Renée see that even though yoga-goers are supposedly morally connected, emotional complacency and spiritual consumption is prevalent across yoga communities. As Sarrah suggests:

⁴⁷ Paul Morris, “Who are we? New Zealand Identity and Spirituality,” in *New Zealand Identities: Departures and Destinations*, eds. James Liu, Tim McCreanor, Tracey McIntosh and Teresa Teaiwa (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2005), 251.

Do the spiritual work because then you know that we are all connected, and you know at the end of the day this person's suffering is me suffering, is my guru's suffering. It's all the same suffering. And so be awake to it. Be aware of it. Speak about it. And I think we have become quiet, and we have become complacent, and we have become consuming.⁴⁸

As suggested, not all people who support community koha classes, or who profess to be engaged in spirituality, are socially committed. For social activists, such as Sarrah and Renée, complacency is part of middle-class privilege. However, as more people face social challenges it is likely that yoga activism will find traction with new audiences. Findings show that a small group of yoga-activists are holding yoga industry providers to task, asking them to act ethically and responsibly. Scholars Carrette and King explain that when people personally experience social inequality, financial hardship, and political oppression they are more likely to become socially aware of issues.⁴⁹ This explanation may partially explain why koha yoga classes and social activist meetings are mostly in lower socio-economic neighbourhoods where people personally experience privation, poor housing, and discrimination related issues. The ideals expressed here by yoga activists, which take them off the mat and onto the street, contrast strongly with the types of individualism that we will see in later chapters.

Conclusion

In sum, I have shown that moral communities are places where yoga-goers readily exchange their emotional energy, time, and attention to support an ideology of community spirit and social accountability. Community yoga teachers typically run classes in low-income neighbourhoods, putting them in direct contact with pressing social issues such as poverty, poor housing, racial and gender discrimination. At the same time, the socially inclusivity of community centres has brought vibrant energy back into economically challenged neighbourhoods. Although scholars such as Taylor and Segal suggest that community members who fail to find meaning in material consumption may be thought of as 'poor' consumers, there seems to be a correlation between "having less," in terms of material consumption, and grassroots spirituality, where people use moral capital, rather than fiscal spending, to build resilient communities.⁵⁰ The engaged spirituality of koha classes can create shifts in participants' psyches, from inner consciousness to social

⁴⁸ Interview with Sarrah Jayne, June 1, 2016.

⁴⁹ See Carrette and King, *Selling Spirituality, The Silent Takeover of Religion*, 46.

⁵⁰ Duncan Taylor and David Segal, "Healing Ourselves and Healing the World: Consumerism and the Culture of Addiction," *Journal of Future Studies* 19:3 (2015): 83.

conscience. This means that as long as moral community members work cooperatively together, and find common ground in their intrinsic values, they can channel this moral currency towards positive sociopolitical change.

Nonetheless, some people in moral communities believe that yoga industry providers are not doing enough to be ethically responsible in their business choices. As one teacher suggested, the role of yoga teachers is not just to teach physical practices but to press up against the hard edges, shaping moral community practices by confronting hypocrisy and complacency. In the case of West Papua, informants criticized yoga professionals who use Bali as a yoga destination while ignoring human rights violations of indigenous people. In this regard, social activists use moral codes such as non-harming (*ahimsa*) and truth (*satya*) to address humanitarian causes. Activists also suggest that yoga-goers can connect to pressing social issues by speaking up and talking about problems such as economic disparity and hegemonic inequities. This culture of social responsibility helps people bind together, providing the basis for poverty reduction and community support.

Next, we explore yoga in corporate settings to see why white-collar yoga-goers tend to reject both spiritual practices and consumer spirituality. Although corporate workers may value workplace health and mental resilience, yoga providers keep practices within secular parameters of body and mind, minus the spirit. Moreover, the underlying power structures that limit spirituality seem to relate to New Zealand's settler past. This move into corporate communities allows us to explore how ingrained ideas of masculinity and Christian values make some people shy away from public displays of 'eastern' spirituality.

Chapter Three

Corporate Communities

Introduction

The previous chapter looked at the spiritual practices and moral viewpoints of people attending community classes in suburban locations. As we move into the city centre, moral community classes tend to become rarer. Moral community yoga classes do sometimes appear in urban spaces, such as inner city missions and Theosophical Society headquarters. However, people who attend secularised yoga classes in corporate settings, such as inner city health clubs, gyms, and office meeting rooms, seem to have different values and aspirations to moral community members.¹ Rather than sharing in spiritual practices and community spirit, yoga participants in corporate settings often display secularised attitudes and behaviours. Corporate yoga-goers mostly want secular yoga practices, focusing on physical fitness and biomedical health benefits, and omitting spiritual practices, particularly those associated with Indian religious traditions.² Consequently, yoga teachers in corporate settings usually limit their use of Sanskrit terms and rarely present spiritual practices such as chanting *Om* or seated meditation.³ In addition, in corporate settings, there is little inference by teachers of soft spirituality, such as dedicating the yoga class to a higher principle, which we see in branded studios.

This chapter looks at how yoga in corporate settings (such as office meeting rooms, gym environments, and urban health clubs) reflects the masculine ideals of Pākehā Kiwi culture. That is, corporate participants seem to value physical strength, sport-specific fitness, and emotional reserve over interconnectedness, social responsibility, and spiritual expression. In the first part of

¹ I use the term 'corporate' to describe settings that are not community centres, where spirituality is normalised, or brand settings, which specialise in teaching yoga. Rather, corporate providers present yoga as a complimentary workout to activities as Pilates and fitness training.

² In Wellington, centres and gyms such as Calligraphy Yoga, Exodus Health and Fitness Gym, Tiaki Pilates Yoga and Physiotherapist, and Empower Studio offer corporate yoga classes. A number of independent yoga teachers also specialise in teaching corporate yoga classes.

³ In corporate settings, it is more common to see de-spiritualised meditation practices that are re-branded as 'mindfulness' or presented in workshop settings away from corporate settings. For example, an introduction to a Mindfulness course in Wellington claims that there is "no religion, no dogma, and no funny positions. This course is practical, fun with no religious elements at all. We sit in chairs, the language is clear and modern." See <http://www.mindfulnessworks.co.nz>. Also see "Vitality Workshops," <http://www.wellnessretreatsnz.co.nz> (accessed March 10, 2017).

this chapter, I will analyse some of the tensions between spirituality and the secularisation of yoga in corporate settings. I claim that because NZ corporate culture is often organisationally hierarchical, performance-driven, and results-focused, yoga classes in corporate settings tend to be highly secularised, leaving little room for spirituality. Moreover, I argue that the secularisation of yoga allows participants to retain their workplace personas, tacitly reinforcing racial, gendered, and hegemonic standards of corporate culture. In corporate settings, yoga teachers are more likely to restrict yoga practices deemed too spiritual or feminine. For example, teachers tend to exclude religious references, such as chakras, or inner temples, or the Sanskrit names of yoga postures.⁴ Also, participants state that some Pākehā Kiwi men dismiss yoga altogether because they view it as a 'girly sport.' Consequently, corporate yoga teachers present physical practices that offer pragmatic results such as increased stamina, energy, and mental focus.

By keeping yoga secularised, corporate teachers meet the requirements of white-collar men and women who do yoga to improve their personal wellbeing and workplace performance.⁵ Although industry providers may advertise yoga in the context of balancing body, mind, and spirit, the concept of spirit is usually absent or privately interpreted by the individual. In pluralistic terms, corporate yoga-goers may respect indigenous Māori spirituality (wairua) as a workplace custom, or pursue personal religiosity outside of work.⁶ However, apart from symbolic gestures such as saying *namaste* at the end of class, corporate yoga-goers seldom openly express any yoga spirituality.⁷

In the second part of this chapter, I examine correlations between the secularisation of yoga in corporate settings and ingrained cultural stereotypes of Pākehā Kiwi men's and women's social positions. Historically speaking, gendered notions of men being physically active and largely uninterested in church going, and church-going women being more involved in raising their families at home, have permeated Pākehā Kiwi culture.⁸ Correspondingly, in terms of contemporary media marketing, national advertising messages still shape social attitudes, representing Pākehā men as

⁴ For example, Exodus Gym website material states that yoga will improve lung capacity, suppleness of muscles, massage and stimulate internal organs, boost the lymphatic system. See "Exodus Gym literature," accessed November 1, 2016, <http://www.exodusclub.co.nz/yoga>

⁵ See "Corporate Yoga," accessed February 15, 2017, <http://www.bodymindyoga.net>

⁶ Even though Māori health models emphasise spirituality as part of wellbeing (hauora) and are part of NZ government policy, few NZ government institutions outside the Ministries of Health and Education endorse spirituality as a workplace concept. See <http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/populations/maori-health/maori-health-models> (accessed November 1, 2016).

⁷ See Richard Egan, Rod MacLeod, Crystal Jaye, Rob McGee, Joanne Baxter and Peter Herbison, "What is spirituality? Evidence from a New Zealand hospice study," *Mortality*, 16:4 (2011): 308.

⁸ Stenhouse, "God's Own Silence: Secular Nationalism, Christianity and the Writing of New Zealand History," (2004): 56-57.

corporate professionals, or as physically tough and sporty. In contrast, media often portrays Pākehā women as homemakers, more interested in health and beauty products, even today.⁹ Therefore, I claim that gendered stereotypes of Pākehā Kiwi men (physically active and spiritually reticent) and Pākehā Kiwi women (implicitly spiritual and interested in health and fitness), may underpin secularised behaviours in more masculine settings such as gyms and corporate workplaces.¹⁰ Consequently, in corporate yoga classes, teachers are more likely to emphasise masculine ideals such as strength and physical performance, limiting spiritual practices regarded as feminine or culturally 'other'. For example, one yoga teacher describes yoga for corporate workers as being useful to "combat fatigue," "strengthen muscles," and "fight stress."¹¹ Likewise, we see gender stereotypes perpetuated in yoga classes, which target male customers. For instance, one yoga teacher who specialises in Broga classes (yoga classes specifically for 'bros'/men) states that male-only classes focus on "movement and strength" with "less emphasis on the spiritual."¹² Equally, Alex Rodger who runs male-only yoga classes in New Plymouth claims that there is "stigma attached to yoga, people think of pink lycra and females wrapping legs around the back of their heads."¹³ Therefore, I argue that yoga practices may become secularised to uphold socio-cultural values tacitly associated with Kiwi masculinity.

This chapter addresses the question: Is there a connection between the secularisation of yoga practices in corporate settings and gendered norms of Pākehā NZ culture? My findings show that Kiwi men and women who conform to gendered stereotypes within NZ society are likely to avoid activities deemed too feminine or spiritually expressive because it threatens mainstream 'Kiwi' values. However, marketing theorists tell us that when advertisers acknowledge men's masculine identities they feel less threatened taking part in activities usually associated with feminine stereotypes.¹⁴ Therefore, as new ideas on corporate sustainability and workplace health

⁹ Carolyn Michelle, "Co-construction of Gender and Ethnicity in New Zealand Television Advertising," *Sex Roles* 66 (2012): 21; and Fabrice Desmarais, "Advertising as Tourism Space: 'Learning' Masculinity and Femininity from New Zealand Television," in *Tourism and Gender: Embodiment, sensuality and experience*, eds. A. Pritchard, N. Morgan, I. Ateljeic, and C. Harris, accessed January 15, 2017, <http://www.cabi.org>

¹⁰ Ward reports that the percentage of New Zealanders affiliated with Christianity dropped from 90% in 1961 to 49% in 2013. See Kevin Ward, "Christianity and Churches in New Zealand since 1960: Sociological Perspectives," in *Sacred Histories in Secular New Zealand*, eds. Geoffrey Troughton and Stuart Lange (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2016), 184.

¹¹ Shirley McLeod, "Do yoga with Shirley," accessed December 1, 2016, <http://www.yogawithe.co.nz/do-yoga-with-shirley/>

¹² Dorene Internicola and Aileen Nakhle, "Broga yoga, more macho, less mantra," accessed November 23, 2016, <http://www.stuff.co.nz>

¹³ David Burroughs, "Moga: yoga you can do with a moustache," accessed March 12, 2017, *Taranaki Daily News*

¹⁴ See Aaron Brough, James Wilkie, Jingjing Ma, Mathew Isaac and David Gal, "Is Eco-Friendly Unmanly? The Green-Feminine Stereotype and Its Effect on Sustainable Consumption," *Journal of Consumer Research* 43:4, (2016): 568-569.

provide benefits for both men and women, the wholesale exclusion of spirituality from NZ corporate settings may begin to change.¹⁵

Secularised yoga in corporate settings

Managers in corporate settings often schedule yoga classes in and around peoples' 9-5 office jobs, and sessions usually last for between 30-60 minutes. Corporate yoga classes appear in three main settings: office meeting rooms, corporate gyms, and urban health studios. Yoga classes in office meeting rooms maintain white-collar aesthetics. Even when participants push office furniture to one side, workplace décor still reflects corporate pragmatism with fluorescent lighting, durable carpet, and partition walls. Corporate participants usually want physically active yoga practices, counteracting sedentary office work, with a brief relaxation session at the end of class to induce mental calm. Likewise, corporate fitness literature often recommends yoga as a complementary workout to other activities, such as weight training and sports rehabilitation. Corporate teachers often conduct yoga classes in a separate room away from weights and cardiovascular machines, allowing corporate clients to escape from the "hustle and bustle" of city life.¹⁶ Some urban health studios offer yoga in addition to services such as Pilates, physiotherapy and nutritional advice.¹⁷ Although health studios may, in some cases, resemble branded yoga studios (with spiritual symbols and subtle lighting), yoga practices remain largely non-spiritual, focusing on biomedical benefits such as reducing high blood pressure, anxiety, and depression.¹⁸

Corporate NZ has adopted mainstream yoga practices. This means that yoga has branched out of suburban and semi-rural community centres, ashrams, and hippy communes, into inner-city corporate locations. By moving into the corporate sector, yoga teachers have eliminated much of the spiritual symbolism associated with hippies, or Indian religious traditions. Instead, yoga practices emphasise physicality and stress relief, appealing to yoga clients who work for private companies (such as banks and technology firms), and public sector institutions (such as government departments). Amber (yoga student and yoga event organiser) suggests that

¹⁵ Gabriel Eweje, "A shift in Corporate Practice? Facilitating Sustainability in Companies," *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management* 18 (2011): 129; Blair Stirling, Leola Dyrud Furman, Perry Benson, Edward Canda, and Cordelia Grimwood, "A Comparative Survey of Aotearoa New Zealand and UK Social Workers on the Role of Religion and Spirituality in Practice," *British Journal of Social Work* (2009): 13.

¹⁶ Exodus Gym offers yoga in their fitness facility. Their website claims "Yoga is a great complimentary workout and just a bit of a break from the hustle and bustle of daily life." <http://www.exodusclub.co.nz/yoga>

¹⁷ See <http://www.empowerstudio.co.nz> (accessed October 11, 2016).

¹⁸ Taiki Pilates, Yoga and Physio, <http://www.taiki.net.nz> (accessed October 11, 2016).

conceptual distinctions between yoga as a hippy practice and yoga in corporate settings can be related to geographical and temporal shifts from ‘out there’ to ‘mainstream’:

Yoga has become the mainstream. It’s not that hippy activity any more. It is much more common. Thirty years ago you would never have seen those corporate people doing yoga, because it would have been too ‘out there’.¹⁹

Similarly, Hariata, who used to work in the corporate sector and now mainly does community-based yoga classes, notices that yoga “most down the Indian path” are the least patronised classes in Wellington city. Hence, Amber’s depiction of ‘out there’ and Hariata’s explanation of ‘down the Indian path’ represent cultural and intergenerational shifts from people who used to, and perhaps still do, follow alternative lifestyles outside urban centres, and people involved in mainstream culture within urban landscapes. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that yoga-goers in corporate yoga classes will chant *Om*, wear loose hemp clothing, or wear prayer beads (*mala*).²⁰

Unlike yoga brands that use spiritual symbols such as mandalas and lotuses in their marketing, corporate providers rarely use spiritual symbols to promote yoga classes. Rather, corporate yoga teachers and advertisers tend to promote yoga classes using realistic pictures of Pākehā men and women doing physically active postures, such as Warrior pose, or basic occupational health exercises. Corporate marketing images appeal to a target audience of middle-class, sporty Pākehā men, and women. Instead of alluding to the spiritual and philosophical dimensions of yoga practice, corporate marketing focuses on benefits for the individual, and so participants are able to retain, rather than transform, their workplace identities.

In view of that, corporate yoga classes are not just transactions between yoga teachers and clients; rather, managers and company directors also tacitly influence the types of practices taking place in many corporate settings. Because corporate institutions often place a low priority on recognising religious diversity within workplaces, managers are less likely to value yoga spirituality when it is associated with religious traditions.²¹ This means that if a manager at an office, gym, or corporate yoga studio perceives that a yoga teacher’s practices are too spiritual, or religious, they may ask teachers to change class content to fit their notions of corporate conduct. For example, a study by Doria (et. al) claims:

¹⁹ Interview with Amber Sturtz, May 13, 2016.

²⁰ Interview with Guadalupe May 21, 2016; Interview with Tyrone Russell, June 8, 2016.

²¹ Edwina Pio’s examination of religious diversity in New Zealand workplaces shows that respondents from the NZ Work Research institute place low priority on religion and faith at work. See Edwina Pio, “Religious Diversity in New Zealand Workplaces,” accessed March 11, 2017, <http://www.aut.ac.nz>

Yoga is perceived by many managers and decision takers in the corporate and institutional world as unpractical, philosophical, esoteric, religious, and anyway as something that concerns personal life and personal choices. To overcome such preconceptions, the yoga teachers need to develop the skill to present yoga and conduct yoga classes with a secular language, introducing scientific evidences of the benefits of yoga.²²

Clearly, in this case, corporate managers favour enlightenment values of scientific rationalism over individuals' personal spirituality or religiosity. Similarly, a Wellington-based yoga teacher (name withheld) claims that she has been asked by a female manager in a yoga studio with a predominantly corporate client-base to modify spiritual practices even though it compromises her teaching style:

I've gone to interviews for classes here in Wellington, and one of the things I'm very clear about is, because I do not want to teach an exclusively postural practice ... I always have a dharma talk. I always have a *śavāsana*. I always have some kind of meditative focus even if it is a gratitude practice at the beginning and the end, because for me that's where the yoking takes place. It is the yoga. The physical movement is wound together with these other elements, which makes yoga 'yoga', as opposed to a gym class. But so frequently you will be told, 'we are a *very* spiritual studio but we don't *Om*' ... this isn't even a gym. I respect that there are places that you would teach where you will have to somewhat temper the way you teach, and you will respect the environment. But when it's a yoga studio coming up and saying we don't incorporate this into our practice of yoga it makes me feel that that wouldn't be where I want to position myself as a teacher.

In this case, the teacher refers to two yoga subcultures, yoga in gym settings and yoga in corporatized brand settings. The teacher wanted to explore spirituality within the context of her yoga class; however, secularised viewpoints of management have affected the types of yoga practices permitted. Consequently, as yoga teachers adapt their teaching styles to suit the rules of corporate culture, they are less likely to focus on spiritual practices, such as meditation and philosophical discussion, and more likely to focus on practices that offer scientific results.

²² S. Doria, F. Irtelli, R. Sanlorenzo and F. Durbano, "Yoga for Anxiety Management in the Workplace," "Yoga for Anxiety Management in the Workplace," in *A Fresh Look at Anxiety Management*, ed. F. Durbano (Vienna: Intech, 2015), 286.

Figure 8: Corporate Yoga Class (photo: Ella-Francesca Donalson for NZ Yoga Scene Magazine)



One teacher who instructs yoga at a corporate gym suggests people mainly come to yoga to “get fit and look better.”²³ Moreover, her clients not only seek physical fitness from corporate yoga, they also act in ways that are competitive, comparing themselves to other classmates, and pushing for visible improvements. For example, Anita (pseudonym) states:

I teach [yoga] at a gym and people are there for exercise. That’s at least their initial motivation. People for instance have asked ‘can I lose weight doing this?’ The pushing, the ego, pushing beyond what they ought to its not healthy but they’re forcing because it looks better, ‘that’s obviously clearly an advanced pose so I must take it’. It’s competitive isn’t it? It’s ‘I need to be better’ and see what the other person is doing even though I’m saying ‘you don’t have to go there; there is no need to go there.’ I see comparison all the time. It’s real push when your body is not ready for it. It is just so clear you know. It’s not kind, it is just that ‘I have to shape and force myself into it’. It is really ego-based.²⁴

In this case, the teacher is dissuading her clients from engaging in competitive behaviour by telling her clients ‘there is no need to go there.’ However, the corporate environment of inner-city gyms and fitness studios seems to reinforce clients’ competitive, sports-orientated behaviours.

²³ Interview with Anita Hammond (pseudonym), May 2016.

²⁴ Ibid.

Subsequently, some corporate yoga-goers push themselves because corporate culture, like fitness culture, is highly competitive. Participants measure their success by looking for measurable improvements. Conversely, in community yoga contexts, the urge to compare is almost entirely absent and participants readily express how comfortable and relaxed they feel in non-corporate settings.

Performative differences between subcultures also extend into linguistic modifications. Teachers who conduct yoga classes in corporate settings tend to use plain language when describing postural practices. Some yoga teachers also claim that they change their linguistic styles when clients are mostly men. For example, Sarah who teaches both community and corporate classes sees a “massive difference” between community and corporate cultures, due in part to higher attendances by male participants:

I do less chanting, and I am a bit more direct in what I’m saying, and how I am describing physical poses. I don’t tend to use a lot of Sanskrit. I do find that I am languaging myself differently and I don’t know if it is because a) it is mostly men, and I know that they process slightly differently sometimes, and b) that they are web developers I know that their brains are on, so I have to engage them at that level, at almost quite a technical level before I can take them down into a relaxed mindfulness level.²⁵

In a corporate setting, Sarrah’s use of plain language and clear technical instructions appeals to workers who seem to process information differently. Sarrah’s restrictions on spiritual language, in this instance Sanskrit naming of postures, speaks to the mind-set of male participants who are probably more comfortable writing programming language (such as JavaScript) than hearing postures named after Hindu religious characters, such as Virabhādra and Matsyāsana.

People in corporate yoga settings also wear different styles of clothing to people in moral communities, or brand communities. Student-practitioners such as Kate Bevin prefer to wear functional “down-to-earth” NZ brands such as Icebreaker or Kathmandu, which are popular amongst outdoor and sports enthusiasts, and are available through retail outlets in the CBD.²⁶ This means that people who attend yoga classes in corporate environments do not need to leave the corporate world entirely. Rather, they bring their corporate behaviours with them to yoga, and their conduct plays out through their choices, linguistic preferences, and dress codes.

²⁵ Interview with Sarrah Jayne, June 1, 2016.

²⁶ Interview with Kate Bevan, August 6, 2016.

Although it is clear that workplace culture permeates yoga classes held in corporate settings, many people find the competitive demands of corporate workplaces highly stressful. Teaching in different gyms and workplace settings, Anita observes that the constant pressure of corporate life puts people on edge. Some corporate people seek stress-relief through physical exertion. Others experience stress-reduction during the breathing and relaxation phases of yoga classes. Increasingly, Anita has observed that corporate clients are seeking relaxation as a way of coping with increased workplace demands:

On a basic level people are stressed. I see it all the time, at gyms, I work in corporate environments. People are really stressed and fed up with their jobs. So I see that all the time ... They are wound tight you know. They talk to me about how fed up they are about it. They don't want to be at their jobs more often than not. And that's when I'm seeing them. I am seeing them for an hour at lunch, in between, around their work. I see it all the time. They're looking for stress relief, for sure. I do see that, because they are really responsive to *śavāsana* that I offer.²⁷

During relaxation, corporate yoga teachers offer techniques that relax different parts of the body. For example, Anita guides participants through a practice known as Yoga Nidra, a body-focused practice that leads people to a place of stillness. When I asked Anita what types of workplace pressures people want relief from, Anita explained that though employees may get rewards, such as free yoga classes and business lunches, the corporate world is an increasingly uncertain place:

Constant pressure, I see more and more now, there is this constant restructuring about the corporate world. And they are always under the gun. "Am I going to lose my job here or not?" The uncertainty, they don't feel safe, and that's part of it, a lot... and lack of freedom. We are more and more under economic difficulty, and that pressure, you know that constant pressure. There's more traffic. There's more everything, there is more of all of it. More demands because it been so many cutbacks, and so their roles that they've been in for years have become more intense.²⁸

However, when I asked Anita if she thought that Yoga Nidra is a type of spiritual practice, she firmly disagreed. She explained that her intention behind teaching Yoga Nidra is strictly secular. She prefers to use secular language so that people can learn relaxation tools, which help with psychological and neurological issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder and insomnia. Yoga

²⁷ Interview with Anita Hammond (pseudonym), May 2016.

²⁸ Ibid.

teachers like Anita, who lead guided relaxation exercises do not intentionally promote spirituality to corporate practitioners during relaxation, rather they see yoga relaxation as an effective stress-management technique.

Although many yoga teachers do not openly endorse spirituality in secularised yoga classes, they may describe postures using natural imagery (mountain, tree, eagle, crow, and dog). Teachers' descriptions of the natural environment allow some students to interpret them as spiritual, even though they are part of a private experience. For example, Kate Bevan, who participates in workplace yoga classes at the Wellington Regional Council, claims that teacher's descriptions can infer a kind of secular spirituality. When Kate's teachers instruct her to reach and touch the earth or sky, as opposed to touching the floor or ceiling, she privately experiences a sense of spirituality. Kate prefers it when teachers leave it up to her to interpret what postural names mean, without feeling as if she has to "buy into" in a particular religious or spiritual ideology.²⁹ Respectively, Shirley Hunt, who teaches a secularised style of yoga in locations, such as schools and scout halls, abstains from teaching spiritually or using any religious images, preferring instead to use "natural" representations:

I don't teach spirituality in yoga. Purposely, because I teach for each person's self being, and for their own health and well-being. So, if I say smile into your heart, smile into your lungs, I'm doing it for their body, not for a spirituality, but for their own sense of being and their own health.³⁰

When I asked Shirley to further explain what she meant by subjective spirituality, she said:

There is spirituality with the person's spirit, and feeling that they share with the earth and the breath. But not in the religious sense ... I had somebody who wouldn't come to me for yoga. She had injuries or pain. I said, 'why don't you come to yoga', and she said, 'what do you do', I said 'we have relaxation where you just lie and close your eyes and breathe', she said 'oh no the Devil could get into my head in that situation'. So, that is why I think I prefer to keep my whole Yoga Nidra as non-religious, but spiritual within the person, within a natural sense.'³¹

²⁹ Interview with Kate Bevan, August 6, 2016.

³⁰ Interview with Shirley Hunt, May 16, 2016.

³¹ Ibid.

Consequently, teachers such as Anita and Shirley who abstain from bringing spirituality in yoga and relaxation practices, allow secular students such as Kate to interpret what it means to be spiritual, without religious connotations.

Nonetheless, because teachers and students do not usually openly discuss spirituality in corporate settings, some find it hard to describe spiritual concepts. As Kate observes:

We all co-exist in this universe and we all impact on each other's lives, whether it's direct or indirect. When I think about spirituality I think of the universe, and it sounds really waffle-y to a lot of people, but I find it really hard to describe. Because I know what it is in myself.³²

Kate's thoughts on connecting the universe are similar to what people in moral communities have stated. Conversely, Kate's sense of uncertainty and self-consciousness in relation to how others might view what she says indicates that she is not comfortable openly discussing spiritual themes. Kate's reticence is a point of departure between corporate participants who keep spirituality private, and moral community members who are open to exploring spirituality in group contexts.

In sum, secularised yoga classes now take place in corporate settings all across Wellington, and yoga teachers often promote them as a complimentary practice to fitness and wellbeing activities. These teachers often define yoga as a set of physical practices that help yoga-goers improve flexibility, physical strength, and postural alignment. Corporate yoga teachers also offer clients a short guided relaxation at the end of class, encouraging stress relief and bringing about mental calm. While the formula of physical postures, breath focus, and relaxation are common across most forms of modern yoga, in corporate yoga classes teachers tend to shorten relaxation practices to less than five minutes, fitting participants' demanding work schedules. Corporate yoga teachers mostly avoid open references to spirituality as a way of meeting secular codes of corporate conduct.

Corporate yoga-goers who attend classes never entirely leave the corporate world behind. Evidence of students' competitive behaviours, sporty clothing, and teachers' simplifications of language, indicate that corporate culture infiltrates yoga teachers' practices. Consequently, although the corporate world may briefly disappear when participants close their eyes and retreat into the private space of guided relaxation, it is still there surrounding them when they open their eyes. It may be the case that corporate NZ will gradually become more accepting of yoga spirituality as society becomes more de-secularised. However, in the interim, it is likely that corporate culture

³² Interview with Kate Bevan, August 6, 2016.

will continue to develop along secular lines, free from religious directives, philosophy, or anything that is deemed to 'girly' or 'out there' (culturally foreign).

Next, we will look at how gendered representations of Pākehā Kiwi culture may contribute to the secularisation of yoga in corporate contexts.

The gendered spirit of Pākehā Kiwi culture

I have claimed that yoga practices in corporate settings are far more secularised than yoga practices in moral community classes, or, for that matter, in branded yoga classes. To meet the expectations of corporate customers, we have seen that yoga teachers primarily use secular language and limit spiritual practices. Teachers also present yoga practices in ways that are fitness-orientated, with some focus on stress management. In this section, I investigate gendered notions of spirituality in Pākehā Kiwi culture and how ingrained stereotypes may be influencing people's preferences for secularised yoga practices in corporate yoga contexts. I argue that there are correlations between the tacit limitations placed on spirituality in corporate yoga practices and gendered notions of spirituality as a private 'feminine' pursuit. Media advertising reinforces cultural stereotypes of men and women's social roles, shaping local people's behaviours and social outlooks.³³ Media marketing stereotypically depicts Pākehā Kiwi men as professional white-collar workers who hold positions of power, or as hyper-masculine tough men who play sports and participate in risky outdoor pursuits.³⁴ In contrast, media images stereotypically represent Pākehā Kiwi women as homemakers, or interested in health and beauty products.³⁵ These images reinforce Pākehā men's social dominance in corporate workplaces. National advertising campaigns send the message that Pākehā men have little time or inclination to be involved in stereotypically feminine pursuits. Therefore, I claim that there is little place for spirituality in corporate yoga classes because spirituality is a trait that, in NZ, tends to be historically and culturally more strongly associated with women and minority groups than with Pākehā men.

Scholars have claimed that Pākehā settler culture was highly gendered, contributing to social divisions in the ways colonial men were characterised by physical aptitude and colonial women by religiosity and spirituality. For example, Shona Thompson has commented that men in colonial NZ were more concerned with clearing the land and playing rugby than attending church with women

³³ Michelle, "Co-construction of Gender and Ethnicity in New Zealand Television Advertising," *Sex Roles*, 21-23.

³⁴ Ibid, 23-24.

³⁵ Ibid, 35.

and children.³⁶ Likewise, a study on NZ spirituality by Vaccarino et al claims that New Zealand's pioneering history created a "hyper-masculine" secularised culture, where Pākehā men were reluctant to pursue personal spirituality because it was widely thought of as a 'feminine' pursuit.³⁷ John Stenhouse has examined religious behaviour amongst NZ settler society and concludes that women's participation in religiosity and spirituality was the "social cement" that held the young nation together.³⁸ Even today, studies show that NZ women are seemingly more religious than NZ men.³⁹ It is likely, therefore, that as Pākehā settler men helped build the foundations of New Zealand's corporate institutions, they embedded masculine ideals of pragmatic rationalism into codes of corporate conduct. Equally, it is possible that corporate leaders have relegated spirituality into the private practices of churchgoers and religious adherents, making workplace spirituality only applicable to women, or people viewed as ethnically 'other'.

Historical perceptions of the stereotypical Kiwi bloke as the sporty, irreligious, hard man still permeate many areas of NZ society today. Television sports coverage, and media advertising of iconic Kiwi products, such as beer and adventure tourism, reinforces these cultural stereotypes. Furthermore, in contrast to Kiwi men's tough guy image, media images of women often show women involved in personal grooming and beauty maintenance. Likewise, media images of women practicing yoga often show the female body as young, flexible and meditatively serene. Gendered divisions in media marketing play a crucial role in influencing peoples' perceptions of yoga. Consequently, it is likely that many Pākehā Kiwi men avoid yoga classes altogether because advertising images frequently show yoga as a female-dominated activity. For example, Kate (student, 36) explains that sporty men like her husband avoid yoga because he thinks it is "not a manly thing to do."⁴⁰ Likewise, Jenny Fellows thinks that many Pākehā men avoid yoga because it challenges social norms of men's physical capabilities:

I think they feel that it's a Kiwi male psyche that they are the pioneers, the big strong men, the settlers, they don't want to do anything that might even *hint* of feminine, or make

³⁶ Shona Thompson, "Women and Sport in New Zealand," in *Sport and Women: Social Issues in International Perspectives*, eds. I. Hartmann-Tews and G. Pfister (London: Routledge, 2002), 252.

³⁷ Vaccarino et al., "Spirituality and Religion in the Lives of New Zealanders," (2011): 94.

³⁸ Stenhouse, "God's Own Silence: Secular Nationalism, Christianity and the Writing of New Zealand History," (2004): 67.

³⁹ William Hoverd and Chris Sibley, "Religious and Denominational Diversity in New Zealand 2009," *New Zealand Sociology* 25 (2010): 67.

⁴⁰ Interview with Kate Bevan, August 6, 2016.

them look embarrassed, or not be able to do it ... he can do all the physical things, but maybe he can't hold a pose.⁴¹

While popular sports activities such as rugby can increase men's (and women's) sports-specific strength, it can also increase muscular stiffness and joint immobility, which hinders movement quality during yoga postures. In contrast, people who practice yoga regularly (3-5 times a week) gain stamina and strength in addition to flexibility. Therefore, sporty men who try yoga for the first time may feel embarrassed by their own comparative lack of physical ability, and so by avoiding yoga classes, particularly those patronised by a female majority, men can keep their masculine identities intact.

In terms of yoga spirituality, some teachers claim that they are hesitant to lead shared spiritual performances in corporate classes, because to do so transgresses the implicit social codes Kiwis' emotional reserve. For example, Anita feels hesitant promoting meditation to Kiwi clients because she feels there is an innate cultural reticence toward shared spiritual practices. Anita states:

Kiwis are so reserved and so closed to anything that is emotional. It's like 'let's not go there.' She'll be right.' So in terms of marketing meditation it's really difficult.⁴²

The term 'she'll be right', which is associated with a NZ folksong, tells of the inherent genderedness of traditional Kiwi culture.⁴³ Another yoga teacher (name withheld) admits that he is generally too shy to lead group chants of a customary yoga mantra, highlighting his social discomfort with being openly spiritual in group contexts:

I chant it before class, but I don't teach it to people. So if they come in at the beginning of class, they chant it with us. Some people come in and chant. Myself I'm too shy. I always chant, but I do quietly because I'm shy about chanting out aloud.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Interview with Jenny Fellows, July 5, 2016.

⁴² Interview with Anita Hammond, May 2016.

⁴³ A NZ folksong from the 1950s featured the term 'she'll be right', which Kiwi men apparently sung during secular rituals of pig hunting and rugby matches. The lyrics say, "Now you've slipped out on the missus, and you've gone to watch the race, and you've spent her shoppin' money, and you didn't get a place, and you're coming home flat stoney, and she sees it on your face. Well don't worry mate, she'll be right. She'll be right mate." See Peter Cape, "She'll be right," accessed March 9, 2017, <http://www.folksong.org.nz>

⁴⁴ Name and date withheld to protect the confidentiality of the participant.

The respondent also believes that new students may also be reticent chanting aloud in groups because it might cause them social embarrassment. Therefore, he gives participants the option of joining in or not:

In the last week the beginners courses, the sixth week, I say 'you are going to come into the open classes and if you come in early enough we're going to do this chant, just so that you're not shocked by that or embarrassed by it, I'm going to chant this now, so you get used to the idea. It starts with *Om* and finishes with *Om* you can join in on those if you want to.'⁴⁵

Although the NZ yoga industry is multicultural, group spiritual activities that originate from Indian religious traditions are often unpopular in urban corporate settings, primarily amongst people who self-identify as being Pākehā or Kiwi. Therefore, yoga teachers tend to focus practices on physical results, such as strength, power, and fitness-specificity. These examples show that the masculine spirit of Pākehā culture most likely stems from social norms of New Zealand's colonial past. Nonetheless, Janet Holmes has claimed that in NZ workplaces "sexist attitudes often lie hidden beneath an egalitarian veneer", which happens primarily when old boys' networks form the infrastructures of corporate workplaces.⁴⁶ Similarly, Carolyn Michelle claims that national advertising campaigns, which portray men as corporate leaders and women as homemakers, perpetuate power imbalances in the corporate domain.⁴⁷ Therefore, yoga teachers may be reluctant to present spiritual practices in corporate settings because such performances confront gendered and ethnic stereotypes embedded in NZ society.

Although we have seen that teachers and students are reluctant to explore spirituality in corporate yoga classes, NZ is a pluralistic society that is becoming increasingly religiously diverse. A percentage of Kiwis are open to exploring the notion of spirituality, albeit in the context of private practice. For example, a study by Egan (et al) shows that 30.5% of people who do not follow a religion still hold some spiritual views.⁴⁸ In addition, around 46% of people in NZ still hold Christian beliefs.⁴⁹ On the other hand, Nigel Smith claims that around 42% of people who identify with 'no

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Janet Holmes, "The Glass Ceiling – Does Talk Contribute: Gendered discourse in the New Zealand Workplace," Conference Paper, *The Annual Meeting of the Australian and New Zealand Communication Association* (2005): 3.

⁴⁷ Michelle, "Co-construction of Gender and Ethnicity in New Zealand Television Advertising," *Sex Roles*, 22.

⁴⁸ Richard Egan, Rod MacLeod, Crystal Jaye, Rob McGee, Joanne Baxter and Peter Herbison, "What is spirituality: Evidence from a New Zealand hospice study," *Mortality* 16:4 (2011): 314.

⁴⁹ It is likely that corporate yoga-goers with Christocentric beliefs may feel uncomfortable participating in spiritual yoga practices that originate from Indian religious traditions. See William Hoverd, Joseph Bulbulia, Negar Partow,

religion' are often young single employed men, and, to a lesser extent, young single employed women.⁵⁰ Therefore, for yoga teachers, the secularisation of yoga practices circumvents the need to address New Zealand's religious plurality, particularly in corporate yoga classes where people's faiths are mostly their private concerns. Moreover, yoga teachers who limit spiritual conduct in corporate settings are more likely to attract participants who want dogma-free yoga classes, focusing instead on health and fitness benefits. Subsequently, corporate yoga teachers keep yoga practices secularised to comply with the socially encoded attitudes and behaviours of Pākehā men and women.

Conclusion

In sum, yoga practices in corporate settings have, to date, remained largely secularised, leaving little room for spiritual expression. This means that most yoga teachers working in the corporate sector of Wellington exclude references to religious symbolism, religious language, and typically avoid spiritual practices. Instead, teachers tend to emphasise physical and stress-relieving benefits of yoga. In some cases, teachers lead guided relaxation practices, keeping descriptions focused on specific areas of the body. Moreover, practitioners accept features of the natural landscape, such as earth and sky, as long as they are able to interpret encoded meanings. Secular participants are not so interested in building community spirit as they are in building work-related networks to support them through the sometimes-unpredictable course of corporate life.

I have argued that limitations on yoga spirituality in corporate settings are quite likely rooted in the historical and social influences of Pākehā culture. Some participants have claimed that Kiwi men who conform to Eurocentric ideals of masculinity – as rational, pragmatic and non-spiritual – are more likely to disregard yoga spirituality because it is deemed feminine, or religious. However, one male participant claimed that he feels socially shy and embarrassed practicing spirituality in group settings, which complicates the notion of Kiwi men's tough, no-nonsense image. Although it appears that some female teachers are also hesitant to engage Pākehā clients in spiritual practices, it is likely that they too are conforming to secular and gendered norms of corporate culture. Consequently, some yoga teachers avoid the subject of spirituality all together as a way of aligning themselves with local people's secular beliefs.

and Chris Sibley, "Forecasting Religious Change: A Bayesian model predicting proportional Christian Change in New Zealand," *Religion, Brain and Behaviour* 5:1 (2015): 19.

⁵⁰ Smith, "No Longer More Educated: Changes amongst those of No Religion," (2013): 70.

In the previous chapter on moral communities, we saw that some corporate people also attend suburban koha yoga classes where spiritual practices and philosophical values are commonplace. However, because many moral community teachers and class participants do not conform to the social and gender stereotypes of Pākehā culture, spiritual participation is more readily accepted than in corporate settings. In corporate settings, or in settings mainly patronised by Pākehā men and women, gendered notions of masculinity and femininity, which have been reinforced through media advertising, seem more rigidly represented through people's competitive, or fitness-orientated behaviours. Still, as corporate and government organisations start to recognise and promote religious and spiritual diversity in the workplace, forward-looking managers may encourage yoga teachers to present spiritual practices in ways that help corporate clients achieve work-life balance. Then, if more members of the corporate world become familiar with shared spiritual practices, it is possible that people will begin to feel more socially interconnected as part of a culturally and religiously diverse population.⁵¹

Next, we look at branded yoga studios that are different from corporate yoga classes in that owners and head teachers liberally use spiritual images in marketing to build brand community identity. The gender stereotypes of masculinity and femininity do not disappear when we enter branded yoga settings. Rather they become unique selling points that differentiate the sweaty virility of one hot yoga brand from the prenatal stretch of another.

⁵¹ Anabelle Ahuriri-Driscoll, Lecturer on Māori Health and Wellbeing, also suggests that the 'wellbeing dimensions' of Māori spirituality (wairua) correspond with peoples' total "physical, environmental, social, mental/cognitive/emotional" wellbeing (waiora). Ahuriri-Driscoll also claims that indigenous spirituality is centred on three aspects: "interconnectedness" (knowledge of self in the relation to the world), "holism" (integration intuitive knowledge of the self within worldly experience), and "balance" (integrating mind-body-spirit).⁵¹ Annabel Ahuriri-Driscoll, "He Korero Wairua: Indigenous Spiritual Enquiry in Rongoa Research," *Mai Journal* 3:1 (2013): 37.

Chapter Four

Brand communities

Introduction

Moving out of corporate yoga settings, where yoga compliments fitness and workplace practices, we find that most branded yoga studios distinguish themselves from gyms and health centres by making yoga classes a central feature of their facilities. Yoga teachers create brands by forming a company (or charity), having a well-appointed studio facility, promoting a particular style of yoga, and designing an appealing website and brand image. Yoga brands are mostly in the business of selling specialised yoga products/services, which have unique points of difference. Moreover, as customers gain value and meaning from “symbol-rich” brand environments, they enhance their self-identities as brand community members.¹ Bagozzi and Dholakia claim, “Brand communities are venues where intense brand loyalty is expressed and fostered, and emotional connections with the brand forged in customers.”² Equally, many Wellington yoga-goers patronise a specific yoga brand because they have formed emotional connections with a particular teacher, guru, teaching style, or facility. Therefore, when yoga-goers find a branded yoga studio that satisfies their needs for meaningful experiences, they are able to extend their physical practices through social and consumer involvement.

Branded yoga studios not only advertise yoga classes, they also market distinctive aesthetic, sensory, and social aspects of their services. For example, some studios have interior designs with polished wood floors and natural lighting, while others have hot rooms, bringing temperatures to above 40°C. Some branded studios run teacher-training courses and have teachers with social media followings. By launching popular images and ideologies into the cultural imagination, yoga studios attract networks of followers. Aesthetic, sensory, and social features enhance consumers’

¹ Elliot and Wattanasuwan claim, “Brands can be used by the consumer as resources for the symbolic construction of the self.” See Elliot and Wattanasuwan, “Brands as Symbolic Resources for the Construction of Identity,” *International Journal of Advertising*, 139. A number of branded yoga studios market their interior decor features through their websites. See <http://www.hotyogawellington.co.nz/>;

<http://www.powerliving.com.au/wellington-studio/>;

<http://www.pauseyoga.co.nz/http://www.beginneryogi.com/>; <http://www.wellingtonyoga.co.nz/#section-2>;

² Richard Bagozzi and Utpal M. Dholakia, “Antecedents and purchase consequences of customer participation in small Group brand communities,” *International Journal of Research in Marketing* 23, 45–61 (2006): 45.

perceptions of what they think yoga is, blurring the lines between physical, spiritual and consumer practices.³ The target demographic for most Wellington yoga brands are upwardly mobile Pākehā women (and men), and to a lesser Asian women, who want uplifting experiences in a retreat-like atmosphere. However, each yoga brand attracts its target audience through different marketing designs features.

Figure 9: Power Living Yoga, Wellington⁴



Figure 10: Iyengar Yoga Studio, Wellington⁵



³ For example, Russell Belk (et al) suggests that consumers project their imaginations and ideals onto particular products, by “window-shopping, daydreaming, television viewing, magazine reading, Internet surfing, word-of-mouth conversing, and often not-so-casual observing of others’ consumption.” Belk et al, “Fire of Desire: A Multisited Inquiry Consumer Passion,” *Journal of Consumer Research*, 248.

⁴ See <https://www.powerliving.com.au/wellington-studio/> (accessed October 11, 2016).

⁵ See <http://www.wellingtonyoga.co.nz> (accessed October 11, 2016).

I argue that when yoga clients search through online marketing images of yoga practices, they not only look for a particular style of yoga, or even a suitable location, they also chose a yoga studio that offers them a particular imagined experience. Sometimes brands' distinctive selling points are their retreat-like setting where prospective customers feel valued and on-trend. Sometimes yoga-goers follow a particular guru lineage, or a well-known teacher, who offers specialist workshops, and immersion packages. Drawing on definitions by Dobni and Zinkhan, Andrea Jain states that yoga consumers subjectively recognise and interpret desirable aspects of a brand, forming emotional connections based on what they perceive to be valuable and unique.⁶ Jain also claims that branding allows yoga entrepreneurs and teachers to 'mythologize' their styles and services, supplying student-practitioners with physical and psychological self-transformation.⁷ Therefore, according to Jain, by looking at marketing images of people doing mat-based yoga practices, prospective clients are able to choose a yoga studio or style that best represents their idealised yoga experience. While I agree with Jain's analysis, in that clients make emotional connections to brands through what they desire and value, my argument builds on her statement. I claim that people who choose a specific brand of yoga tend to expect more from their yoga experience than mainly 'self-development'. Brand yoga-goers also want to find meaning in aesthetic, sensory, social, and retail experiences in order to add value their personal identities and practice commitments.

This chapter on yoga brands seeks to contribute to the overall argument of this thesis by showing that although yoga brands seek to provide customers with custom-built settings, popular styles, and desired experiences, the sociocultural values and aspirations of local people are not at all homogenous.⁸ Neither, for that matter, are yoga brands. One interviewee talked about yoga brands being on a "consumer continuum."⁹ This concept is useful because it locates yoga brands across a range of typologies, between yoga brands that resemble corporate health centres, to brands that specialise in high-end boutique services.¹⁰ Therefore, yoga consumers shop around to find ideal experiences that best meet their sociocultural values and consumer expectations.

⁶ Andrea Jain, "Branding Yoga: The cases of Iyengar Yoga, Siddha Yoga and Anusara Yoga," *Approaching Religion*, 2:2 (2012): 7.

⁷ Ibid, 6.

⁸ Elliot and Wattanasuwan describe the personal 'brandscape' which consumers used through symbolic and lived experiences provided by brands. See Elliot and Wattanasuwan, "Brands as Symbolic Resources for the Construction of Identity," *International Journal of Advertising*, 135.

⁹ Interview with Tyrone Russell, June 8, 2016.

¹⁰ Scholar Andrea Jain sees that yoga brands, such as Bikram Yoga, promote health and self-development to its members, while simultaneously reinforcing brand image. See Andrea R. Jain, The Malleability of Yoga: A Response to Christian and Hindu Opponents of the Popularization of Yoga," *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* 25: 4 (2012): 7; <http://dx.doi.org/10.7825/2164-6279.1510> (accessed December 1 2016).

In Wellington city, there are approximately thirty-five branded yoga studios, which indicate that local people want to choose from a range of yoga styles and services.¹¹ I have grouped Wellington yoga schools into four broad categories, showing how each brand differs from one another. The first category, the Krishnamacharya lineage, represents Krishnamacharya's two famous students, Pattabhi Jois and B.K.S. Iyengar, who respectively developed Ashtanga and Iyengar yoga centres. Krishnamacharya-based brands focus on physical practices as part of practitioners' personal journeys. The second category, Guru-based brands, include centres such as Bhakti Lounge, run by ISKCON devotees, and Yoga in Daily Life, run by disciples of Swami Maheshwarananda. Guru-based brands incorporate physical, philosophical, and devotional practices. The third category, hot yoga studios, include centres such as Yoga for the People, Power Living, and Hot Yoga Wellington, and are loosely associated with the lineage of Bengali yogi Bishnu Ghosh (and his protégé Bikram Choudhury). Hot yoga studios focus dually on physical practices and consumer products, such as teacher training courses and branded goods. The fourth category are independent yoga centres, including the Wellington Yoga Centre, Urban Yoga, and The Yoga Lounge. Independent yoga centres are usually unaffiliated with a specific teaching lineage, and most teachers qualify through recognised teacher training programmes, drawing on diverse teaching styles.¹² The term 'style' (or type) refers to each schools or teachers' connection to a particular teaching method, guru lineage, or teacher training facility. While we can see that there are style differences, what most yoga brands have in common with each other, and what makes them different from both corporate and moral communities, is that they specialise in teaching yoga classes – as opposed to also providing non-yogic services, such as Pilates or Zumba.

As indicated by some of the brand features outlined above, yoga practitioners ideally want yoga brands to provide them with meaningful emotional, sensory, spiritual, and sociocultural experiences. However, my argument also posits a type of paradox. That is, yoga practitioners may *expect* yoga brands to offer a comprehensive range of experiences, and yet, I found that yoga clients do not always feel they *get* what they desire or imagine when window-shopping online. For example, one prospective student, who likes having plenty of open space in community yoga classes, did not enjoy the over-crowdedness of a popular hot yoga class.¹³ This resulted in him

¹¹ Mike Lloyd claims that there were ten or so yoga studios in Wellington in 1997. See Lloyd, "The Quiet Politics of Yoga: Ethnographic Reflections on a Traveling Body Project," *Sites: Journal for South Pacific Cultural Studies*, 30.

¹² In my interview with Anika Speedy, from Yoga for the People, she said that Bishnu Ghosh inspired famous second-generation teachers such as Bikram Choudhury and Baron Baptise, who in turn trained third generation teachers like herself. Interview with Anika Speedy, May 17, 2016.

¹³ Interview with Brian Robinson, May 25, 2016.

feeling uncomfortable and mistrustful of the brand's marketing intentions. Other informants claimed they changed studios when postural practices were too vigorous, too repetitive, or too focused on spiritual conversion. These examples show customers' expectations of branded yoga products/services can sometimes prove problematic. Moreover, owners and clients can also feel disappointed when clients' consumerist behaviours undermine their service provisions. At the same time, I found little evidence of customer dissatisfaction in moral and corporate yoga communities. This localised dissatisfaction indicates that when consumers attend brand yoga classes they often have preconceived (and perhaps unconscious) notions of what they desire from yoga. Consequently, because yoga brands are more likely to market their products/services in ways that capture consumers' imaginations, customers' actual experiences can sometimes fall short of their preconceived ideas.

In this first section, I focus on brands that specialise in a particular yoga style. I present three case studies of yoga students who associate their spiritual yoga experiences with specialist practices taught by teachers in the Krishnamacharya lineage. So, for some yoga-goers, a type of spiritual conversion can occur when they take on the brand's aura, or the yoga teacher's *mana*. Marketing theorists tell us that when customers associate their heightened spiritual experiences with a brand setting, they are more likely to feel loyalty and develop long-lasting relationships with the brand as a whole.¹⁴ In addition to physical and spiritual practices, students can buy books, teacher training sessions, and retreat immersions, which give students the intellectual and emotional support to continue their practices. In this regard, the founding guru's or head teacher's public images are a big part of the brands' overall marketing appeal and teaching methods.

In the second part of this chapter, I look at how brands build their community of followers by marketing distinctive features of their facilities. Although being part of a brand community provides many people with a sense of belonging, the market economy is constantly driving customers to want new, more desirable yoga experiences. In response to this market impulse, brands offer new members free trials or discounted yoga classes. Nonetheless, there seems to be a fine line between satisfying consumers' desires and managing consumers' expectations. Consequently, some interviewees offer critical viewpoints of how they feel dissatisfied when brands are too commercial, or seem disingenuous in their marketing strategies. This means that

¹⁴ For example, Schouten claims, "transcendent customer experiences can enhance people's relationship with other people, with objects, with activities, with values, and with symbols." J. H. Schouten, J. W. Mc Alexander, and H. W. Koenig, "Transcendent Customer Experience and Brand Community," in *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 35 (2007): 359.

when yoga customers do not have their needs and desires met by yoga providers they can feel strong disenchantment. During interviews, many participants openly expressed their objections towards consumer trends in the yoga industry. At the same time, because of word count restrictions, I can only represent a few voices and perspectives.

Ethnographic evidence presented in this study is a small sample of a bigger narrative of how yoga practices provide complex meaning and add value to local people's lives. However, sometimes people's imagined ideals of what yoga is come into conflict with the reality of owners and head teachers who need to run their yoga studio as a commercial enterprise. Therefore, the voices I have chosen to illustrate the notion of brand paradox show both the popular face and shadow side of the yoga industry. In this regard, a yoga brand may sometimes seem like a chimera, with the popular face of the brand not always representing the pragmatic business end.

Branding the Guru

Having a famous guru as the face of the brand is one way that yoga studios can stand out in the marketplace. Some yoga studios openly publicise that their teachers are connected to a particular guru lineage (*paramparā*), suggesting that their style of yoga is rooted in South Asian traditions.¹⁵ Philosophical lessons and images of Indian gurus are made credible when head teachers repeat the guru's teaching styles during class practices.¹⁶ Other yoga brands are less open about publicising their allegiances to Indian gurus past or present.¹⁷ Nonetheless, many NZ yoga schools use terminologies, teaching styles, and material objects linking them to teaching institutes founded by Indian gurus.¹⁸ Affiliations with a specific guru lineage give yoga studios a clear point of difference, allowing customers to identify with a particular teaching style. For example, yoga studios that follow the Krishnamacharya lineage use images, quotes, and techniques specific to Krishnamacharya's famous students Pattabhi Jois and B.K.S. Iyengar.¹⁹ Ashtanga yoga practices, taught by descendants of Pattabhi Jois, incorporate flowing movements (*vinyasa*), allowing

¹⁵ See <http://www.astanga.co.nz/about/>; <http://www.yogaindailylife.org.nz/about-us/swamiji-the-founder>; <http://www.wellingtonyoga.co.nz/#section-8> (accessed October 1, 2016).

¹⁶ Stuart Ray Sarbacker suggests that spiritual development happens as a side-effect of physical practice, and is related to the physical-spiritual 'science' of *haṭhayoga*, where teachings are often conveyed from guru to student. Stuart Ray Sarbacker, "Reclaiming the Spirit through the Body: The Nascent Spirituality of Modern Postural Practices," *Entangled Religions* 1 (2014): 102.

¹⁷ See <http://www.bhaktiounge.org.nz/> (accessed October 1 2016).

¹⁸ See <http://www.hotyogawellington.co.nz/about.html>; <http://www.urbyyoga.co.nz/teachers/> (accessed October 1, 2016).

¹⁹ See Iyengar Yoga Centre Wellington, <http://www.wellingtonyoga.co.nz/#section-8>; and Te Aro Astanga <http://www.astanga.co.nz/about/> (accessed October 1, 2016).

practitioners to replicate Ashtanga practices in schools around the world. Although both Jois and Iyengar shared the same guru, Iyengar Yoga practices are quite different from Ashtanga practices, and have different communities of practitioners. Instead, of dynamic sequences, Iyengar teachers use props such as ropes and bolsters, helping students to achieve more precise, static postural alignments. While both the Ashtanga and Iyengar teaching styles focus on physical practices, they also incorporate spiritual and consumer aspects. In this section, I will show that brands' reputations and students' spiritual expectations can be influenced by different gurus' and head teachers' behaviours.

Being part of a guru lineage can give head teachers a quiet authority, which students interpret as a sense of composure, integrity, and trust. However, successfully branding a guru takes place over time, usually facilitated by the sale of books, teacher training courses, magazine articles, public appearances, and material objects attributed to the guru's celebrity. Consequently, yoga guru lineages supply head teachers with charismatic influence, providing students with emotional connections and self-identification as brand followers. Some yoga brands also draw on South Asian ritual traditions, which can add to the aura of sacredness. For example, Ashtanga yoga students take their shoes off before entering the *shala* (practice space) and chant a Sanskrit mantra before starting class. These familiar rituals create separation between the outside world and teacher-led practices, overseen by the head teacher's charismatic authority.

One such teaching lineage that inspires fierce loyalty amongst its followers is that of modern yoga guru T. Krishnamacharya (1888-1989). Krishnamacharya based his yoga school at Jaganmohan Palace in Mysore India, during the 1930s to the 1950s, training young boys in a dynamic form of postural yoga.²⁰ Krishnamacharya's *yogaśālā* was also the site of one of the first modern yoga lineages. Krishnamacharya's famous students, Jois and Iyengar, went on to teach thousands of second-generation yoga students, who set up yoga schools around the world. These teachers developed dynamic postural forms at a time when Commonwealth nations such as India were strengthening their human resources through the 'physical culture' movement.²¹ It is safe to claim,

²⁰ Mark Singleton (2010), 176.

²¹ Physical culture was part of a global eugenics programme, where citizens around the world participated in health and fitness drills, with the dual aim of building strong and healthy national bodies. In India, nationalists and Independence campaigners used physical culture system strengthen the physical bodies of Indian nationals with the aim of gaining independence from British rule.

therefore, that Krishnamacharya's teaching style and lineage is nearly as old as modern yoga itself, which is around 90 year or so.²²

Mike Berghan is a second-generation yoga teacher who trained under Pattabhi Jois. Mike set up Te Aro Ashtanga in the year 2000 and continues training third-generation yoga students under his teacher's trademark practices.²³ Mike's loyalty to his teacher's practices gives him a distinctive teaching style, known as Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga (the eight-limbed path). Mike's Ashtanga lineage adds credibility to his teaching reputation. His students therefore inherit the dynamic postural sequences taught by Pattabhi Jois, taught to him by Krishnamacharya.

Ashtanga students can show their loyalty and commitment to the founding guru's teaching lineage by buying additional products/services, such as books and training immersions. As previously indicated, gurus strengthen their brands by selling specialist classes and yoga literature, marketing their knowledge and skills through specific teaching workshops. For example, Guadalupe (yoga teacher and teaching assistant) went to Mysore (India) for two months and trained in the Ashtanga Yoga system under Jois's daughter Saraswati. Guadalupe's two-month yoga immersion in Mysore gave her the credit to become a teaching assistant at Mike's Ashtanga School in Wellington. Consequently, dedicated Ashtanga Yoga followers, such as Guadalupe, who buy specialist classes, are able to extend their personal practice into professional skills.

Practitioners often describe yoga as a path that leads them through a process of subtle self-transformation. The charismatic influence of head teachers facilitate the idea that yoga is a personal journey strengthened through mat-based practices. For example, Guadalupe, who also practices with Mike Berghan, finds that her teachers inspire her spiritual journey:

I will say that Ashtanga yoga led me to a spiritual path, which I wouldn't say it is going to happen to everyone, probably not, but when you see teachers as Mike of Te Aro or Peter Sanson, a really well known Ashtanga yoga teacher in New Zealand, you can see they have got an aura. They are spiritual people, western, living in a spiritual way. And it's really amazing. And of course as practitioners we all seek to get to that point, where there is no ego. They are amazing. I wouldn't say enlightened, but they are close... Some people develop the spirituality by not even going on the mat. Like vipassana, meditation, chanting, or whatever. But there is a spiritual path that you go through on the mat.²⁴

²² Krishnamacharya started developing his trademark style and teaching students such as Jois and Iyengar during the 1930's. See Mark Singleton and Tara Fisher, "T. Krishnamacharya, Father of Modern Yoga," in *Gurus of Modern Yoga*, eds., Mark Singleton and Ellen Goldberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 86.

²³ Interview with Mike Berghan, May 26, 2016.

²⁴ Interview with Guadalupe Salinas, May 21, 2016.

Consequently, as yoga-goers such as Guadalupe follow in the path of a head teacher or guru, they form strong emotional relationships with symbols and ideals of the brand. For Guadalupe, yoga is a process of detaching from the ego, signified by her teachers' aura and Ashtanga teaching philosophy.

Sometimes the combination of dedicated practice and the teacher's charismatic expertise can contribute to students having peak spiritual experiences, which often take place *on* the mat. For example, teaching assistant Olivia Richardson shares some of her insights and experiences as a practitioner of Ashtanga Yoga under Mike's tutelage:

When I first started coming to Mike, I was still new to Ashtanga and I wanted to nurture some sort of spiritual-ness. I was looking to some guidance and wanting some insight that I thought there was. So, I was creating this need for more that maybe didn't even exist. And with Mike, he was always just like "practice, practice all is coming." You know, "99% practice 1% theory" is a saying from Shree K. Pattabhi Jois, which is beautiful. He says those things, and now after practising I get it. When you do practice you can answer, and it is [about] trusting yourself, trusting your body, trusting letting go, and seeing where it all ends up ... I think people want an end result always... that's where the spiritual-ness lies. It is like you build this relationship in the background, that is happening, and you don't even realise it. Then all of a sudden, one day you're like 'ah, I think I found it,' like a lightbulb goes off. And the spiritual-ness is you and your body and your mind all just sort of connecting.²⁵

Olivia's testimony shows that students build relationships with yoga teachers, with brands, and with teaching lineages. Moreover, spiritual experiences seem to be deeply personal. Yet, at the same time, practitioners are looking for something that marketing images and people in the guru lineage have promised them. For Olivia, the Ashtanga lineage offers her a rich symbolic environment to explore narratives of self-identity and epistemic value through practice.²⁶ Her need for guidance and insight finds validity through continued practice, which is reliant on class subscriptions or workplace exchanges. The relationship that Olivia builds with the guru, as founding figure, the teaching lineage, her own teacher, and herself, contributes to her spiritual insights and continued meaningfulness.

²⁵ Interview with Olivia Richardson, May 18, 2016.

²⁶ Smith and Colgate claim that epistemic value is one aspect of consumer value, where utilising a service satisfies consumers' desire for a particular skill or piece of knowledge. See J. Brock Smith and Mark Colgate, "Customer Value Creation: A Practical Framework," *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice* 15:1(2007): 8-9.

Dedicated students who go to the Ashtanga Yoga studio in Wellington are able to, over time, find balance between the ordinary world and deeper spiritual experiences. They do this by practicing a particular style of yoga, which is laden with spiritual terminology and symbols associated with head teachers and guru lineages. Moreover, the Ashtanga Yoga brands' signature motto, "practice, practice all is coming," builds loyalty and creates a continuity of a particular teaching style. This means that spirituality is not distinct from the Ashtanga yoga brand, but rather is an underlying part of participants' conversion as loyal members.

However, Guadalupe also expresses reservations about where Ashtanga Yoga is heading, particularly in terms of the rampant consumerism surrounding the Ashtanga Yoga Institute in Mysore:

So, in the Ashtanga Yoga that I learnt, the tradition tries to keep the yoga as it was ... However, when yoga starts smelling of profiting it makes me nuts... This is especially hurtful for Ashtanga practitioners because we all have seen all those guys getting rich, which makes me really sad, because people who follow the lineage have to respect Sharath [Pattabhi Jois's grandson and Institute Director]. You follow the lineage because of Krishnamacharya, and Pattabhi Jois. But I hope it doesn't mean we are agreeing with what Sharath is doing in India, which is, he is just lolling himself in money. It is a shame... I don't know what he is doing, but it is terrifying. I saw him driving an Audi [car] in Mysore, I don't want to judge, but it blew my mind. He has a big mansion beside the shala. So it is scary and terrible... I blame the western people who started consuming Ashtanga. Lots of people can go to Mysore and learn Ashtanga, that's fair enough. However, it's got to the point which is a kind of madness, so everyone goes there and started having this greedy thing, because everyone has to go to Mysore. So of course there is more, more, more, more money. And I think he [Sharath] is sailing this big boat and he doesn't know when to stop.²⁷

The yoga industry, as I have mentioned, is full of paradoxes. What many yoga lineages have in common is that they are all in the business of offering paying customers a complex experiential journey of self-transformation. Sometimes students deepen their experiences by buying yoga classes. Sometimes students gain deeper knowledge by buying yoga books, or by purchasing immersion experiences. Students seek to develop trusting relationships with teachers who lead simple, non-materialistic lives. Nonetheless, part of the paradox of the brand experience is that students want to buy an authentic yoga experience, without teachers or services appearing too

²⁷ Interview with Guadalupe Salinas, May 21, 2016.

overly commercial, or money-orientated. If yoga teachers appear too caught up in the trappings of consumer culture, they can appear disingenuous. Some lose favour with yoga-goers, and in some cases, teachers' fall from grace can damage the brand's image.²⁸

Along with other brands in Krishnamacharya teaching lineages, Ashtanga Yoga centres use distinctive branding methods such as website images, logos, and terminologies. Although they may share a common lineage, each brand has a distinctive teaching style and philosophy. Then, as students pay their subscriptions and partake in the brand's characteristics teaching style, they too adopt methods and ideologies specific to the brand. For example, Iyengar teachers' styles are distinct in that they use ropes, blocks, and specific postural alignments to create a distinctive style of yoga. Moreover, each Iyengar teacher will convey their personal set of values and style within their class setting, making their practices distinct from other Iyengar teachers. Interviewee Isabella Cameron (student), who attends Iyengar yoga classes in Wellington city, explains:

I've seen quite a lot of different styles of teaching ... There is Bikram, there is Ashtanga ... I'm too old for Ashtanga, I might have liked it when I was younger. But, I just got to a place where Iyengar suits me. It is also about finding a teacher who suits you too. A teacher is part of the process... I think yoga teachers all express it differently don't they. The essence of every yoga class, no matter what school you go to, is to focus on what you're doing yourself, not to compare yourself with people around you, to focus on your own journey, your own path.²⁹

For Isabella, the value of the Iyengar brand lies in its essential differences, and in the ability to help students like her find a sense of self-fulfilment while on the yogic path. An important part of developing a deeper customer experience is the purchase of specialist products. In this regard, Isabella feels that she has enhanced her yoga journey by buying and reading the published works of B.K.S. Iyengar, as well as by going on an a retreat in Bali with her Iyengar yoga teacher:

I have bought his [Iyengar's] book *Light on Life*. His teaching is much deeper and broader than what can ever be communicated in a [class], and I think that's fine. It is a journey of discovery isn't it...

I went last year for a retreat in Bali for the first time. Six hours a day doing yoga which was just fantastic. It was near Tejakula, up in the hills. It was a place set up for retreat, and she

²⁸ In recent years, many gurus and famous yoga teachers have been the subject of public controversy and lawsuits.

²⁹ Interview with Isabella Cameron, July 1, 2016.

hired it. So they provided accommodation, all your meals, mostly organic food– beautiful food. The day with start at 6 a.m. and we would start doing pranayama and meditation and you would just hear the day coming to life. It was stunning. And that would be 6 to 7.30 am. Then, we would have breakfast from 7.30 to 9 am. Then, quite an active class from 9 till 12, and then the afternoon free, and then a restorative class from 5-6... It was a really nice sense of retreat from the world, good people, nice setting.³⁰

A combination of experiences gives yoga customers, like Isabella, complex emotional, spiritual, and social benefits. Isabella's statements suggest that yoga students are able to transcend the ordinary world by participating in yoga classes in exotic locations. However, customer's experiences are also reliant on extending physical and spiritual practices to consumer practices. This shows that the guru may be the enduring face and name of the brand, but the head teacher is often the person who has to step off the mat at the end of the day to manage the business end.

Although associating with a guru lineage give some yoga brands an air of authenticity, most yoga brands in NZ need to operate as commercial enterprises, which is a point of contention for many yoga-goers and scholars.³¹ My study shows that although few contemporary yoga-goers self-identify as yoga consumers, most yoga providers rely on commercial transactions and promotional systems to make a name and sustain their trade in the busy marketplace. Even Krishnamacharya had to use propaganda methods to popularise his style of yoga to mass audiences in India.³² Nonetheless, because modern yoga retains a type of sacred appeal, which may be thought of as a type of 'romantic orientalism', people's imagined ideals of yoga as a timeless, 'authentic' practice can come into conflict with the reality of yoga brands that have to function as commercial enterprises.³³

In the next section, I will explore some of the tensions that occur when people who think that yoga should remain free from commodification criticize yoga providers' community-building and promotional activities. As we will see, yoga brand owners and managers are in the business of supplying customers with enjoyable yoga experiences. However, when obvious commercialism overshadows the intrinsic philosophy of yoga, as a practice that reduces egoist behaviour, customers tend to have suboptimal experiences and become suspicious of the brand's intentions.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ See Kenneth Liberman, "The Reflexivity of the Authenticity of Haṭha Yoga," In *Yoga in the Modern World: Contemporary Perspectives*, eds. Mark Singleton and Jean Byrne (New York: Routledge Hindu Studies Series, 2008), 111.

³² Norman Sjoman, *The Yoga Tradition of Mysore Palace* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1996), 50.

³³ Veronique Altglas, *From Yoga to Kabbalah: Religious Exoticism and the Logics of Bricolage* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2014), 26-27.

Building brand communities and exploring brand paradox

Yoga-goers often shop around online searching for a style or brand of yoga that best represents their personal values, self-identities, and consumer expectations. As mentioned, consumers often look for a brand that can supply them with an idealised yoga experience. Moreover, complex sociocultural factors, such as social class, disposable income, and celebrity culture, shape consumers' buying behaviours. Therefore, many customers attend branded yoga classes with a preconceived (yet subliminal) notion of what they ideally expect to take place. At the same time, I claim that few brand yoga-goers fully recognise that buying yoga classes is essentially a consumer practice. Although each yoga brand aims to meet clients' expectations by offering quality products/services, business owners need to manage being both the face of the brand and running a successful company without appearing to be too profit-driven. Consequently, when business owners, loyal members and bargain hunters all try to find value and ethical meaning in the complex world of branded yoga, there is sometimes a clash of values. When paying customers feel that brand providers are too consumer focused, they may feel a sense of disingenuousness. I think that part of the problem is that yoga-goers imagine that yoga is a transformative practice that allows them to escape the superficiality of consumer culture. They also think that yoga studios are empowering spaces, and that yoga teachers should be above worldly materialism. This section explores some of the paradoxes of brand owners who are in the business of providing desirable yoga experiences, and people who feel conflicted about buying into the commercial aspects of branded studios.

The intention of most studio owners and teachers is to create high quality products/services, which allow members to feel emotionally connected to the overall brand image, as well as to fellow participants.³⁴ Brands aim to meet their customers' expectations by supplying a unique blend of physical, emotional, sensory, and social experiences that continue over time. For example, Jase Te Patu, co-owner of Power Living Wellington, claims his business philosophy was to create a social space within the Power Living studio where people feel that they belong:

My first thing about opening this studio was to make it a community, so that people have a place to stay afterwards. So, it is not through what I saw in my experience in [the big cities

³⁴ Nasution explains, "Customer involvement accrues as the accumulation of knowledge, value, and perceived quality in every stage of the experience process resulting in the increased likelihood of customers establishing an emotional bond with the offering." See R. A. Nasution et al., "The Customer Experience Framework as Baseline for Strategy and Implementation in Services Marketing Procedia," *Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 259; R.W. Belk et al. "Fire of Desire: A Multisited Inquiry Consumer Passion," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 346.

of] Australia ... I saw how fast everyone lives there, way faster than New Zealand. And so it's like 'get in and get a quick fix of yoga', it's almost like a shot of yoga, [get] your shot of yoga and then leave. Whereas coming here, I wanted to make sure we have, Justine and I, wanted to create a community feel so you stay afterwards, so you have tea, so you sit and chat. And that's why we got the comfy seats, the beanbags in that area there. People can stay, because I wanted to create that sense of community... our focus for the first quarter here of business, because we have only been open four months, but for the first three months, was about community, and getting everyone feeling like they belong.³⁵

For Jase, the idea of building a brand community means supplying members with a relaxed environment where they can socialise after class, drink tea, and feel as if they belong to the Power Living tribe. Accordingly, he and his business colleagues have designed a beautiful yoga studio, allowing class spaces to flow into social spaces, which in turn flow into retail areas selling branded merchandise. Consequently, for brands, such as Power Living, building a strong brand community is about creating a seamless flow between physical, spiritual, and consumer practices, which then attract customers who want to gain value by having meaningful experiences in brand settings. Power Living's Wellington branch now has a strong community of dedicated followers.

While many people I interviewed expressed positive viewpoints in regards to branded yoga, some participants also claimed they are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with what they see is the growing commercialism of some yoga brand enterprises. It seems that customers' love-hate relationships with yoga consumerism, leads them to have paradoxical experiences, which can be hard to resolve. Marketing theorists Janice Denegri-Knott and Mike Molesworth explain that the "material actualisation" of customer experience (in our case, 'doing yoga' in a brand setting) limits consumers' imagined ideals of what they ultimately desire.³⁶ This means that when real-life yoga experiences fall short of what people imagine yoga to be, individuals can feel disappointed.

Moreover, it is not just the case that customers feel discontentment with yoga brands' commercial aspects activities; teachers can also feel dissatisfied by consumerist behaviours within the industry, particularly when brand marketing interferes with their personal sense of integrity and morality.³⁷ For example, Cendrine (who had, at the time of interview, recently completed her

³⁵ Interview with Jase Te Patu, May 30, 2016.

³⁶ Janice Denegri-Knott and Mike Molesworth, "Concepts and Practices of Digital Virtual Consumption," *Consumption Markets and Culture* 13:2 (2010): 115.

³⁷ In their exposé on capitalist spirituality, Carrette and King claim that brands sell spirituality as something "radical, trendy and transformative," enhancing consumers' sense of self-confidence while simultaneously reinforcing market growth. Carrette and King, *Selling Spirituality, The Silent Takeover of Religion*, (2005): 5.

200 hour teacher training course), claims that she loved the spiritual philosophy of the branded studio she was attending, and yet she was put off by its commercial approach. During the interview, Cendrine claimed that she did not want to pass critical judgement and yet she had clear dislikes, particularly towards overt consumer practices within the brand environment. Cendrine describes both the positive and negatives aspects of one of her brand experiences:

It is very commercial and fancy. It's Lululemon [clothing], hot [temperature], styley shopfront, very very physical, but they do bring a lot of philosophy, so it often comes across as being only gym-like, but it is not at all. You have got to go to a class to realise there is a lot more. Now, what I dislike about it is the commercialism around it, they have ten schools, they are the biggest school in Australasia, so it's a big big business.³⁸

In other words, Cendrine's complex experience allowed her to enjoy physical, sensory, and philosophical aspects of the branded yoga studio, while feeling uneasy with consumer aspects of the brand's business alliances. Therefore, for participants such as Cendrine, being a member of a brand community means being able to enjoy positive features of the brand environment, while having to negotiate around unappealing aspects of the brand's business endeavours.

The clothing brand that Cendrine refers to, Lululemon Athletica, has a store in the Wellington CBD and also has retail outlets in upmarket yoga studios, such as the one described. While Lululemon is a very popular clothing brand, it is also the target of much public criticism. Cendrine has expressed that she personally does not endorse Lululemon because she feels that they do not use organic materials and reportedly have ecologically unsound manufacturing processes.³⁹ Contrary to Cendrine's less favourable viewpoint, Lululemon's New Zealand Facebook page states that it provides followers with positive tools for change: "yoga and meditation are powerful tools to unlock real change in the communities around us."⁴⁰ However, on Lululemon's website, advertising images seem to contradict its Facebook branding by featuring sexually provocative women wearing fetishized items, such as the 'namastey thong'.⁴¹ Christine Lavrence and Kristen Lozanski claim that Lululemon branding combines western of ideals of individualised performance with orientalist notions of eastern spirituality, while also using altruistic notions of building brand community through free community classes.⁴² In the Lululemon Wellington branch, teachers from

³⁸ Interview with Cendrine Sauvenier, May 19, 2016.

³⁹ Lululemon's publicity material claims that they use high-tech synthetic 'sweat wicking' fabrics, manufactured by a subsidiary company in Sri Lanka.

⁴⁰ See <http://www.facebook.com/lululemonNewZealand/> (accessed October 1, 2016).

⁴¹ See Women's Wear, <http://www.lululemon.co.nz> (accessed March 3, 2016).

⁴² See Lavrence and Lozanski (2014): 88.

different studios run free classes on the shop floor, drawing a wide range of people, most of whom wear Lululemon clothing. Unfortunately, there is not enough space in this study to expand on other informants' critiques of Lululemon; however, the brand caused much dissension amongst this study's informants.

Similar ethical conflicts can occur when studio managers advertise gold-coin donation classes, as charitable fundraisers, and yet they do not make clear that they are dually promoting brand membership. Consequently, customers who are uninformed of brand marketing strategies can find branded koha classes a disorientating experience. For example, Brian (57, yoga student) found himself feeling compromised when he attended a gold coin donation class, which overlapped with a yoga brand promotion in the Wellington CBD:

It was really interesting going to it because obviously they want to recruit people to their membership and they had people packed in. And it reminded me of the way that these mats were laid down, instead of going in and staking your territory with your mat with a zone of comfort around you, these were laid out which reminded me of these diagrams of how to get as many slaves onto a slave ship. So "this is your space" and we've packed you in and you are going to have to work out how not to slip forward while doing downward dog with your hands sweating because it's 30 plus degrees, with sweat running down your arms, and you got someone's feet or arse in your face. You are thinking *what's* going on?⁴³

Brian also found the overt friendliness of female employees intimidating, adding to his feelings of emotional discomfort:

And so I arrived, and as a middle-aged male I get concerned when attractive young woman are outwardly friendly to me, who don't know, or I don't recognise. When they are overly friendly that rings alarm bells that makes me think she must be odd she must be really strange if she is being friendly to me ... Someone of a similar age is fine. When someone is the age of your daughter, that is scary ... here I am a middle-aged hairy guy. So when someone is outwardly friendly like that. To be more honest it seems disingenuous, if you know what I mean, it's that corporatized [behaviour].⁴⁴

Brian claims that he felt more at home in his suburban church hall class, where people wore baggy clothes and were of a similar age. In contrast to his usual yoga practice, Brian felt that branded

⁴³ Interview with Brian Robinson, May 25, 2016.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

yoga class was more of a fitness activity, where younger people wore stylish athletic-wear and enjoyed showing off their bodies. However, like Cendrine, Brian did express positive benefits from his brand experience. In this instance, studio assistants went around and gave hands-on postural adjustments, which Brian enjoyed. Nonetheless, clear distinctions between the age, gender, and visual appearance of younger, more athletic classmates made Brian's experience an uncomfortable one.

Interestingly, customers and teachers are not the only people who express negative opinions towards yoga consumerism. Studio owners also have had negative experiences of some yoga consumers' behaviours. For example, Anika Speedy, owner of the Tory Street branch of Yoga for the People (YFTP, formerly Bikram Yoga) explains that, until recently, her inner city studio ran a regular koha class over a ten-year period, generating over \$50,000 contributions for various charities. Originally, for Anika's team, the aim of the koha classes was to make yoga accessible to people and families who could not afford it. We should note that this is the same motivation of teachers in moral community groups. However, recently Anika relabelled her koha class a 'tight arse' Friday because the social climate changed from dedicated customers being actively involved in giving to charity to more bargain-hunters taking advantage of cheap yoga classes:

We have just changed it now, and partly because it has lost its meaning for us as a studio. We have been doing it for so long. It is interesting actually, because we used to do it just by donation only and people would donate quite a lot of money. And then we found that people would just start donating \$2 or \$1, so we sort of made it gold coin, and then we got less money when it was gold coin because people no longer gave bigger donations. Now we changed it to a 'tight arse' Friday. But then again what we were finding was that students would shop around and that is all they would do... it was just something different to do on a Friday night.⁴⁵

Rather than attracting people who find value in giving to charity, koha classes at YFTP started attracting people looking for a cheap night out. Pine and Gilmore claim that when customers experience an activity as a form of cheap entertainment they will usually participate more passively.⁴⁶ In this case, Anika felt that some participants were not so much interested in the charitable side of the koha class, or in developing a dedicated practice. Rather, more people started attending koha classes because they were cheap priced. Anika's experience shows that some

⁴⁵ Interview with Anika Speedy, May 17, 2016.

⁴⁶ Joseph Pine and James Gilmore, "Welcome to the Experience Economy," *Harvard Business Review* 98407, 97-105 (1998): 102.

customers' motivations and reasons for attending koha classes do not always match the integrity of teachers and fellow community members.

Moreover, Anika believes that because social media promotion sites, such as Grab-one (which advertises cheap deals), have created a bargain-hunting culture, consumer expectations within the yoga industry have changed. Consequently, brands such as YFTP have had to adapt their marketing strategies to avoid self-interested consumers exploiting their koha services. Russel Belk claims that consumer desire can compel people to abandon ethical behaviour and rationalise acts of selfishness because they feel deserving of reward.⁴⁷ Hence, when yoga consumers use koha classes to satisfy the desire for personal gain, their behaviours overshadow providers' dual objectives of raising money for charity and building community. The burden of the responsibility therefore falls on yoga industry providers, to either change the name of the class to satirise consumer's tight-fisted behaviour, or to educate users in the ethics of good business practices.

In sum, we have seen that brands use marketing strategies to build membership followings. Brands also use advertising promotions, such as free yoga classes, to enhance their reputations. Customers who participate in branded yoga classes can potentially gain value and meaning from participating a variety of consumer-based activities. Yet, we have seen that when it comes to branded yoga, morality is a contested concept. The paradox is not that yoga brands promote their businesses through marketing methods, but rather, that many customers place a high moral premium on not being able to see the business end behind the smiling face of the brand.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that yoga brands use various marketing strategies to promote their facilities and services. Newer upmarket brands tend to promote material and aesthetic features of their studio's architecture or interiors, inspiring customers' desires and imaginations. Such brands tend to attract younger urban-dwelling Pākehā women, who want to feel physically, socially, aesthetically and spiritually revitalized after class. Older, more established yoga brands, such as Mike Berghan's Te Aro Ashtanga studio often publicise that they belong to a well-known teaching lineage, and use images of famous gurus, which inspires a sense of tradition or authority.⁴⁸ Most yoga brands use website and online images to define their unique point of difference and

⁴⁷ Russell Belk et al., "Fire of Desire: A Multisited Inquiry Consumer Passion," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 248.

⁴⁸ For example, Te Aro Astanga yoga has a picture of famous yoga guru Pattabhi Jois. See <http://www.astanga.co.nz/about/>. Likewise, Iyengar yoga centre has images of B.K.S. Iyengar. See <http://www.wellingtonyoga.co.nz/#section-8> (accessed October 1 2016).

distinguish themselves in the crowded marketplace. When yoga-goers find meaning and value in the brand experience, they are more likely to become a brand follower.

However, the more visually appealing a brand's website or Facebook promotions appear, and the more it promises in ways of experiences, the more customers tend to expect. As brand supporters attribute value to products/services, they tacitly reinforce their own social ideals. Therefore, for some unwitting customers, branded yoga classes can be a disorientating experience as they try to negotiate the norms of their expectations in relation to in-group behaviour. Becoming part of a yoga brand community becomes even more complex when yoga brands merge into larger franchise networks, or collaborate with transnational brands such as Lululemon. Because few yoga-goers self-identify as yoga consumers, a paradoxical situation can occur when yoga-goers expect brands to maintain a high level of 'authenticity', while overlooking the fact that the fulfilment of customer desire is inevitably reliant on sustained business transactions between owners, teachers, and customers.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ See Cara McDonald, "Once reserved for the "weird hippies", yoga has become mainstream in the West," accessed January 4 2017, <http://www.elephantjournal.com/2015/04/in-defense-of-the-skinnyrichwhite-yogis/>. Also see, Kim Bhasin, "Shunning Plus-Size Shoppers Is Key to Lululemon's Strategy, Insiders Say," accessed January 4, 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/07/31/lululemon-plus-size_n_3675605.html

Conclusion

Based on interviews with Wellington yoga students, teachers, and studio owners, this ethnographic study has explored how local yoga practices reflect people's ideals, desires, and expectations. I have argued that yoga communities in Wellington can be divided into three subgroups, each attracting people of different age groups, earning potentials, ethnicities, and gender identities. Each community sets itself apart, either because it emphasises or ignores certain aspects of physical, spiritual, or consumer practices. These findings challenge the widely accepted notion that yoga is a largely homogenous set of postural practices, or that yoga-goers are one unified community. This study shows that yoga-goers in moral communities gather around community centres in low-income suburbs; secular yoga-goers often attend inner city corporate locations; and brand communities centre on yoga personalities who have their own studios in and around the CBD. As practitioners move between different yoga classes or teachers, subcultural distinctions become somewhat blurred. However, yoga communities in Wellington tend to adhere to the contours of class and status divisions in NZ society.

I have shown that in moral communities, people join yoga classes as a way of being involved with sustainable local communities. In these settings, self-employed yoga teachers freely draw from a variety of physical, spiritual, and socio-political practices. Moreover, class participants' 'green' attitudes represent a shift in NZ society towards environmentalism, political ecology, and ethical consumption. Some participants extend yoga practices into social activism, raising awareness of social inequalities and the need for organizational responsibility. In contrast, people who attend yoga classes in corporate settings often conform to Pākehā middle-class values, with physical health and emotional restraint prioritised over spiritual and moral practices. In corporate settings, yoga classes reflect peoples' secularised behaviours. Corporate classes also, to some extent, reinforce hegemonic structures within Pākehā society. Finally, brands are distinct from moral and corporate communities because well-known teachers, who attract communities of devoted followers, often represent them. Yoga brands are sites where yoga consumers' expectations typify the shared values of capitalist society. However, what brand yoga-goers desire and what they actually experience can lead to client dissatisfaction and studio defections. This thesis has argued that local people's diverse ideals and values shaped yoga communities in NZ, resulting in a wide range of yoga practices. In the figure below, I provide a summary of these findings.

Figure 11: Community Typologies

Contexts: Behavioural Traits:	Moral Communities	Corporate Communities	Brand Communities
Spiritual practices	Strong	Weak	Moderate
Secularity	Weak	Strong	Moderate
Consumer practices	Weak	Moderate	Strong
Physical practices	Moderate	Strong	Strong
Health/ Wellbeing	Moderate	Strong	Moderate
Competitiveness	Weak	Strong	Moderate
Communitarianism	Strong	Weak	Moderate
Individuality	Weak	Strong	Strong
Aesthetic appearance	Weak	Moderate	Strong
Cult of celebrity	Weak	Weak	Strong

Most importantly, I have traced variations in the ways that different yoga contexts have expressed spirituality, secularism, and consumerism. I have treated spirituality as a broad term, encompassing a range of practices and principles. I have shown that local participants across community subcultures experience spirituality as a type of interconnectedness, incorporating community spirit, peoples' affinity with the natural environment, and their desire for equitable co-existence. However, in moral communities, participants' experiences of spirituality go beyond shared appreciation of New Zealand's natural landscape, and some try to make the world a better place by being actively involved in communitarian and humanitarian projects. Although secular attitudes have historically shaped NZ society, some yoga teachers are now starting to explore spirituality and philosophy in class settings. In corporate contexts, most yoga teachers still limit overtly religious references and spiritual practices. In corporate contexts, teachers emphasise participants' physical health and wellbeing because these outcomes boost corporate productivity. Yoga brands, on the other hand, liberally use spiritual motifs in marketing and interior design, which inspire an aesthetic sense of 'eastern' traditions. Some yoga brands endorse spiritual practices passed on by gurus, teachers, and inspirational speakers, however participation is discretionary. This means that spirituality, as a concept, is both context-sensitive and variable. It appears as community spirit and social justice for working-class people in low-income neighbourhoods, as holistic health and wellbeing for people in secularised yoga communities, and, for people in branded yoga settings as aesthetic enjoyment and self-development. Although scholars have stated that yoga in the west is largely physical and de-traditionalised, this study has shown that spirituality as a societal value is important, and takes on varied expressions in diverse contexts.

At the same time, the secularisation of yoga in historical, corporate and some brand contexts means that teachers and students often prioritise biomedical health and physical practices, avoiding overt spiritual expressions. I have claimed that because cultural ideals of physical power, mental resilience, and emotional reserve have a bearing on NZ people's workplace and social attitudes, many yoga-goers prefer yoga classes that produce measurable results, such as increased flexibility. Similarly, when yoga teachers present practices in masculine environments, such as gyms, fitness centres, and office boardrooms, participants tend to be more competitive and focused on individual achievements. Individuals do not usually desire spiritual practices in these settings. Nonetheless, scholars have argued that the notion of NZ as a secular country is no longer accurate, especially since NZ is one of the most multicultural and religiously diverse countries in the world. Therefore, if corporate managers and government organisations seek to integrate the concept of spirituality into notions of corporate wellbeing, spiritual yoga practices may become more widely sought after in post-secular NZ society.

I have also argued that modern people enhance their yoga identities by borrowing from marketing images, wearing branded products, and following celebrity yoga trends. In this regard, consumerism has shaped the NZ yoga industry and yoga-goers' behaviours in important ways. In this light, we can think of yoga as a modern consumer phenomenon, one that is comprised of symbolic meanings, aesthetic forms, and imagined possibilities of self-transformation. People consume yoga through the purchase of numerous products, including: yoga classes, branded yoga mats, designer leggings, spiritual jewellery, and tickets to Wanderlust festival, teacher training courses, yoga apps, magazines, and yoga retreats. Yoga consumers ('modern yogis') share their experiences and gain prestige through social media, Instagram posts, and by attending public yoga events. In this regard, yoga acts as an antidote for post-modern individualism, supplying consumers with emotional value, aesthetic enjoyment, routine stability, social status, as well as positive self-image. Yoga consumers who seek desirable experiences in brand settings often have different socio-political values than moral practitioners who seek yoga as an expression of divine love or social transformation. However, I have hypothesised that a type of paradox occurs when people desire and expect a special yoga experience from commercial product/services, and then feel disappointed when services seem too superficial or profit-focused. Yoga in NZ promises its customers a lot including physical health, self-mastery, sensual enjoyment, spiritual participation, and ethical consumption. Therefore, each yoga community delineates itself by its members' consumption (or anti-consumption) performances, which reflect peoples' needs for social status and material security within extended social networks.

Findings from this study on yoga in NZ confirm that western yoga, which scholars often describe as a health and fitness practice is not a single, homogenous entity. Here my study provides an important contribution to scholarship on modern yoga. Yoga has proven remarkably adaptive and successful as it takes root in new environments. Perhaps because NZ is an ethnically diverse country, people in metropolitan areas such as Wellington tend, overall, to participate in a wide range of physical, spiritual and consumer practices. At the same time, my study has argued that cultural divisions across yoga subcultures in Wellington are indicative of social class and income divisions in NZ society. For example, moral community yoga classes, which promote spiritual practices and koha donations, tend to flourish in low-income multicultural neighbourhoods where more people work part-time, or receive some type of social benefit. Secular yoga classes, which focus on physical and stress-relieving practices, often take place in locations where people tend to be older middle-class Pākehā homeowners. Brand communities tend to offer upmarket yoga experiences, mainly attracting young women who have access to expendable incomes. These cultural patterns indicate that yoga can take on different meanings according to social values of local community members. If we seek to define yoga in terms of local culture, we can point to its potential to serve as a basis for contradictory discourses, not only within a specific region such as Wellington, but also around the globe.

The three themes of this study – spirituality, secularisation, and consumerism – show that each community shares resemblances and distinctions. In terms of resemblances, most contemporary yoga teachers have gone through teacher training systems offered by branded systems; therefore, the physical elements of instructors' teaching styles (such as postural techniques and cueing methods) are likely to be similar across subcultural settings. In contrast, the ways local constituents participate in spiritual and consumer practices create clear subcultural distinctions. Participants' shared conceptions of what yoga is all about are reflected in the contours of each style and setting I have presented in this thesis.

There are a number of avenues for further study, which would expand on the concepts explored here. Firstly, it seems likely that the YWCA's promotion of physical culture to women in NZ, and around the world, has provided a social template that shapes women's participation in yoga industry today. Therefore, exploring the correlations between the YWCA's promotions of female leadership and women's prevalence as yoga industry supporters would make an interesting topic for further research. Secondly, mapping a comprehensive history of yoga in NZ would make a worthwhile contribution to the historiography of NZ people's spiritual practices. Thirdly, since I was unable to gather broad-scale data on local people's spiritual experiences within contemporary

secular and brand settings, conducting a survey of yoga-goers' spiritual affiliations, self-identities, and critical perspectives across social divisions would extend my study's findings. Similarly, in terms of interdisciplinary studies, researchers can continue examining the ways NZ brands promote yoga spirituality, assessing the impact of spiritual marketing on New Zealanders' changing religious and national identities.

Speculating about challenges facing the yoga industry, I see themes such as spirituality, community building, brand marketing, and consumerism spilling over into areas of new technology. Perhaps in the near future elite yoga enthusiasts will be able to browse for, buy, and sell augmented reality yoga experiences, which they can download and stream live through touch-sensitive, photo-optic mats, allowing yoga-goers to step into the cloud with hyperreal yoga celebrities from around the world. Nevertheless, where will that leave the down-to-earth eco-conscious yoga-goers – off the mat? Yoga proponents are currently selling a hybridised concept of yoga as an ancient practice that helps individuals reach their true potential so they can become catalysts for social change. At the same time, yoga has been westernised and shaped to meet the desires of yoga-goers who want to make personal connections to an 'authentic' practice, as part of a cohesive yoga community. This thesis has identified that there is not one ideal type of yoga practice, nor one unified yoga community. Rather, yoga is a collective expression of people in a particular time, place, and social climate. Therefore, since yoga reflects the cultural knowledge of teachers, and adapts to students' imagined ideals, it will undoubtedly be subject to continued change within diverse communities of practice.

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Appendix

Figure 12: Interview Schedule

DATE	NAME	YOGA CATAGORY
May 13, 2016	Amber Sturtz	Event organiser & student
May 13, 2016	Una Hubbard	Freelance teacher
May 16, 2016	Shirley Hunt	Freelance teacher & I.Y.T.A. member
May 17, 2016	Anika Speedy	Bikram Yoga teacher/Studio owner
May 18, 2016	Olivia Richardson	Ashtanga teaching assistant
May 19, 2016	Cendrine Sauvenier	Independent studio owner
May 19, 2016	David Jenkins	Guru-based yoga student
May 19, 2016	Katarina Severiniova	Guru-based yoga teacher
May 20, 2016	Francesca Haylock	Independent teacher
May 21, 2016	Guadalupe Salinas	Ashtanga teaching assistant
May 25, 2016	Brian Robinson	Community yoga student
May 26, 2016	Mike Berghan	Ashtanga teacher & Studio owner
May 27, 2016	Helen Williams	Independent teacher
May 30, 2016	Jase Te Patu	Power Living teacher & Studio owner
June 1, 2016	Sarrah Jayne	Community yoga teacher
June 1, 2016	Renée Gerlich	Activist & Community yoga student
June 8, 2016	Tyrone Russell	Bikram Yoga teacher
June 11, 2016	Milo Haigh	Community yoga teacher
July 5, 2016	Jenny Fellows	Freelance teacher & I.Y.T.A. member
July 7, 2016	Caitlin Sanderson	Corporate yoga student
July 8, 2016	MaNithya DevaVedantananda	Guru-based yoga student
July 9, 2016	Eric Doornekamp	Senior yoga teacher & Centre owner
July 14, 2016	Younghae Cho	Corporate & Community yoga student
July 14, 2016	Isabella Cameron	Iyengar yoga student
July 15, 2016	Monique Rolland	Community yoga student
July 22, 2016	Ramon Laal	Community yoga student
July 28, 2016	Hariata Hema	Brand & Community yoga student
August 4, 2016	Bevin, Kate	Corporate yoga student



Thank you once again to everyone who participated in this study