

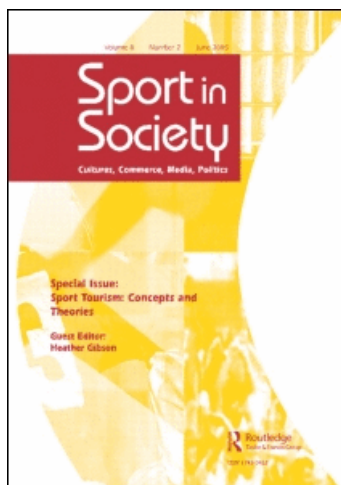
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Life chances and wellness: meaning and motivation in the ‘yoga market’¹

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In the interest of gaining an insider’s understanding of personal exercise habits, this study analyses the meanings and motivations brought by individuals to their Vinyasa yoga practice in the setting of a private, urban studio. Through an analysis of spatial and ideological evidence garnered through in-depth topical interviews and participant observation, this case study argues that social integration, economic privilege, childhood experience with sport and cultural values instigate and sustain this particular exercise and wellness habit. These findings complicate the common sense belief that lifestyle choices are solely a reflection of individual character and responsibility. Further, this study demonstrates that social capital, when understood as nested within broader structural and economic contexts, becomes an essential analytical tool for understanding individual exercise habits and underscores the need for future research exploring the connection between life chances and wellness.

Introduction

At some point you just dive off the cliff and decide it’s something to build your life around. Yoga is transformative. (Yogi #7)

I found a good yoga class already, which helps me to feel at home. I’m going to go twice a week in order to progress more rapidly toward enlightenment (and to build stomach muscles). (Yogi #8)

Exercise programmes that dualistically tackle aspects of mental and physical well-being have been identified as one of the fastest growing fitness trends. In the interest of better understanding the impact and effectiveness of meditation and yoga, a number of recent and current clinical trials are testing the application of these practices to specific and general medical and psychological conditions. Studies have attempted to measure everything from yoga’s usefulness in curing back pain to reforming juvenile sex offenders. Despite the remarkable number of traditionally structured clinical trials, the link between perceived health and fitness benefits and a yoga practice has proven to be less than obvious.

These studies reductively define yoga as a discrete series of movements and postures. Systematically reproduced and formalized in medical discourse, this limited definition allows yoga to be treated as a mode of physical therapy. The language here is telling. Research subjects are described as ‘using’ yoga in the interest of curing a specific ailment. This framework ignores the tremendous ontological gap between practicing yoga and receiving western medical treatment. Each system has a distinct, arguably incompatible, definition of health. As Francesca Bray, a medical anthropologist, argues, ‘health is a very slippery notion... if different conceptions of health coexist, then we need to ask who seeks or may seek which form’.² The recognition that health and fitness are relative and socially constructed suggests that yoga

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should be located within specific social and cultural contexts that allow practitioners and students to offer their own motivations and definitions of what yoga means within their daily lives. As the epigraphs suggest, each yoga student understands yoga in different terms. For the first, yoga is a transformative lifestyle. The second satirically references yoga's enlightening potential and strives towards physical attainments, while simultaneously celebrating the home-like familiarity of her yoga class. These coupled statements highlight a degree of fluidity and flexibility between different individual investments in yoga. More subtly, they also begin to gesture at a shared set of life experiences and values.

Adopting Bray's position encourages a methodological strategy aimed at complementing the existing body of research on yoga. In emphasizing the role of social factors in shaping exercise habits, this case study draws on the social capital approach to answer the question: why do people choose to practice yoga?³ In more specific terms, what are the underlying meanings and motivations people ascribe to their yoga practice? Reviewing existing research on the social capital approach to public health, Hawe and Shiell argue, 'social capital research so far has inadequately captured the underlying constructs, in particular the qualitative difference between the macro/context level and the micro/individual level'.⁴ The current discussion seeks to address this existing gap by working closely with a discrete case study of individuals who attend the same yoga studio. Working with a similar approach, Crossley's analysis of the moral careers of gym goers argues that relatively little empirical work explores the meanings and motivations individuals accord their mundane, everyday fitness practices.⁵ This study follows Crossley's organizational trajectory, from original impetus to motives for continuation, but arrives at significantly different conclusions. Where Crossley emphasizes internal motivators, or sense of self, as the primary reason for starting a gym membership, this study affirms the centrality of social relationships in fostering positive health practices. Building off of quantitative evidence that reflects the political economy of exercise and fitness habits in the United States, I argue that the explanatory capability of the social capital approach hinges on a recognition of how social determinants are structurally, culturally and economically embedded.⁶

The yoga market: a demographic sketch

Imagining the potential for yoga's market in the United States, *Yoga Journal* commissioned a statistical report in 2003 that identified 15 million currently practising yogis, and many more interested individuals.⁷ Demographic research conducted in 1998 demonstrates that the majority of yogis in the United States were urban-dwelling, college-educated, baby-boomer, non-Christian women.⁸ This same trend was also observed again in 2002 by *American Demographics*, who concluded 'today's physically active women are more affluent and more educated than the average American woman'.⁹ *Broker Magazine* reported similar findings: 'More than 80% of female business executives participated in organized sports during their youth... of those who are currently active, just over half say that women who participate are more respected by their co-worker'.¹⁰ A separate study found that new yoga students reported higher rates of self-efficacy than the surrounding population.¹¹

Partially paralleling the 'yoga market', white, college-educated males under the age of 65 are the most likely population to meet the Center for Disease Control's recommended level of leisure-time physical activity.¹² Within this population, 50.7% meet the recommended activity levels, compared to only 33% of the population as a whole. Analysing the connection between social support and women's physical activity involvement, Ainsworth and Henderson argue, 'being sedentary decreased for individuals as socioeconomic income went up, but socioeconomic income level alone did not eliminate racial differences'.¹³ These statistics point

to the complex relationship between privilege and exercise habits and highlight the need to better understand the active 33%.

Working with this existing political economy, I am primarily interested in analysing the underlying motivational factors and insider meanings valued by individuals in their own practice. This qualitative methodological approach has been successfully applied to the study of consumer exercise culture, gym going, indigenous and cross-cultural health, racial dimensions of patient-doctor relationships, and to how patients perceive treatment and use new technology.¹⁴ The meanings and motivations analysed in this case study highlight the connection between interpersonal relationships, definitions of self and specific values, and beliefs and norms in initiating and sustaining a yoga practice. Despite yoga's popular media presence, insiders ground their own yoga autobiographies in interpersonal, rather than cultural, explanations. The narratives presented below underscore the significant role of human relationships and obligations in determining exercise and wellness practices and reveal the underlying connection between different facets of social capital.

Method

This study analyses data collected during nine topical in-depth interviews and three months of participant observation at 'Studio S'.¹⁵ I selected Studio S, a private Vinyasa yoga studio located in Washington DC, for two reasons. Firstly, the studio attracted a largely professional, white, young adult membership representing the mainstream of American exercisers described above. Secondly, I was a student at this studio for two years before deciding to initiate the formal research. As a studio regular, I had access to a number of interview partners with whom I already shared a common vocabulary and experience. My participant status allowed me to observe the studio space and keep a journal. The interviews were loosely structured around each individual's own autobiography of their yoga practice. As particular themes came into focus, I iteratively eased and adapted my original interview questions. I encouraged each participant to speak of their initial exposure to yoga, the reasons behind their decision to attend their first class, and their motivation for continuing and deepening their practice.¹⁶ I also solicited detailed descriptions of perceived benefits and looked at both continuity in thinking and change over time.¹⁷

Glocalization, gentrification and sensory experience: notes from observant participation

Before delving into the individual narratives' themes, this section introduces the reader to the studio through the same entryways first experienced by most new students: the internet and the city street. The studio promotes itself actively online and on the sidewalk. Recent scholarship on the spatial materiality of sport suggests that the experiences of individuals should be framed within an aesthetic and architectural analysis of norms and expectations.¹⁸ For the yoga community, norms and expectations are expressed within physical and cyber environments. The studio's location, physical space, promotional self-image and class schedule are mechanisms of self selection and community formation that directly welcome individuals with prior experience with sport, new age aesthetic sensibilities, and a daily routine that is organized around professional, as opposed to family, obligations.

The presence of the yoga studio on an urban street otherwise cluttered with nightclubs and ethnic food takeaways physically marks the studio as part of a larger process of gentrification. Looking into the studio from across the street feels like peering into an oasis of glocalized calm: Buddha statues and blossoming lotuses peer out, borrowed from an unspecified eastern fantasy. Once inside, the studio's carefully designed environment is interrupted by sounds and smells from the street's many businesses and visitors. The restrained illumination of candles mingles

with equally dim florescent streetlights, the scent of eucalyptus oil and incense fuse with the less energizing aroma of Subway Sandwich bread and the hum of traffic joins new age 'world' music. These sensory examples illustrate the permeability of the studio walls that, much like American yogis, are capable of assimilating elements borrowed from global traditions and local settings. Whether the Buddha statue is understood in explicitly religious or exclusively aesthetic terms, its graceful slippage of meanings underscores the ease of gentrification and glocalization for their purveyors and beneficiaries. Both intentional and unintentional features of the studio space highlight the mediating role of the body in defining gentrification.

Beyond its strategically hip location, the studio's publicity further invites a self-selecting group. By offering a particular kind of yoga experience and marketing that experience primarily online, as opposed to on locally hung flyers or print media advertisements, the studio recruits professional, athletic students. This marketing strategy presupposes a degree of technological savvy and assumes that potential students will be basing their first impressions of the studio on its visual and auditory online presence. The website explicitly and implicitly presents the studio's basic expectations and aesthetics. The website plays much of the music heard during classes and works with the same muted, 'natural' colour scheme. In a section on attending your first class, the site suggests arriving early, bringing plenty of water and wearing comfortable clothes. These direct pieces of advice welcome beginners, but the site also promises a vigorous, strengthening workout that appeals to potential students' pre-existing athleticism. The images of yogis on the website further reinforce the studio's physically challenging class structure. All of the yogis pictured on the website look strong and content, holding advanced postures – no extra flab or tight hamstrings are included in this promotional environment.

The studio's class schedule, which offers classes at 6:30 and 9.00 pm during the week and weekend mornings, caters to students who are coming from work and are free of other family obligations. As classes are scheduled during traditional family times, the studio projects a sense of communal familiarity. Simple details, such as the bathroom's cotton hand towels and publicly shared collection of hair ties and sanitary pads, invite students to think about each other as part of a community. This same emphasis on interpersonal relationships and community was repeated as the primary motivational factor leading to the initiation of a new yoga practice.

Yoga autobiographies: exposure and initiation

In crafting a narrative of their initial exposure to yoga and the decision to begin their own practice, respondents focused almost exclusively on interpersonal relationships, life changes and health-related concerns. Despite yoga's significant mass media presence, respondents focused on aspects of their practice that are seemingly divorced from consumption, consumerism and fashion. My research partners' decision to omit the mass media from their personal narratives may speak to the diminished significance of popular culture in relation to friends and family, or it may highlight the performative nature of the interview itself; my respondents may have been performing the identity of a 'good yogi' during the interviews.

Respondents who began their yogi autobiographies with an interpersonal relationship described close, respected friends, relatives and employers: several respondents explained that college friends and roommates dragged them to their first yoga class; one respondent explained that a respected boss encouraged her to begin exercising around her 30th birthday and a cousin, whose individualism and spunk she admired, had practiced yoga for years; one respondent tagged along with a friend who had been extolling the pleasures of Power yoga to her for several months; one respondent had grown up watching her father practice yoga at home and remembered playing with him and the family dog on his yoga mat.

Underscoring the interconnected nature of life change and interpersonal relationships, one respondent began her yoga practice during her Peace Corps training. Anticipating the isolation and solitude she was going to experience, she bought several books on meditation and yoga. She took her first classes with her fellow volunteers at the end of each day's training. A close Peace Corps friend, who had lived at a Buddhist Zen Do, provided the knowledge and support she needed to sustain her own individual practise after training.

All of these narratives speak to the role of family and friends in inspiring and encouraging healthy life habits. As with previous experience with sport, interpersonal relationships can act as a bridge making particular modes of exercise seem appealing and valuable to individuals. Despite extensive popular representations of yoga, insiders chose to emphasize the interpersonal and social over the cultural. Collectively, these narratives raise questions about the role of social networks versus the mass media, in addition to individual gumption, in determining exercise and wellness habits.

Other respondents chose to focus on the relationship between initiating their yoga practices and specific life changes. More than half of the younger yogis interviewed were inspired to seek out yoga after moving to the city. Most of the respondents went on to explain that they had moved to pursue new, more professional careers or begin graduate programmes. In the context of relocation, the yoga studio served as 'a constant amidst seemingly endless change' (Yogi #5), offered the possibility for 'connecting with a community outside of work' (Yogi #2), and helped the yogi 'feel at home' (Yogi #8). These motivations for initiating a public yoga practise in a new location speak to the yoga studio's perceived ability to serve as an alternative community space.

The preceding narratives focus on interpersonal motivations and connections. Turning to health and fitness carries these same themes over into a discussion of how individuals perceive yoga as a space for connecting with themselves. Discoveries of an illness or the desire to proactively treat a specific injury are two examples of negative life change that can motivate a new yoga practice. One student located his decision to begin taking yoga classes in two chronologically coinciding physical changes. He was training for his first Iron Man competition and was diagnosed with Type-1 Diabetes. He decided to try yoga after doing Internet research. Another respondent took her first yoga class after it was recommended to her by a chiropractor. As an avid snowboarder, she hoped that yoga would ameliorate her chronic back pain and allow her to continue her winter sports. Other respondents cited the following health concerns as motivating factors: insomnia, poor circulation, low energy, constipation, irregular menstruation, lack of flexibility and sports-related injury.¹⁹

In these narratives, individual initiative is aided by access to information about health. Yoga is repeatedly perceived as playing a supporting role in professional development and educational attainment. Ainsworth and Henderson suggest that for African American and Native American women in the United States social networks have the potential to facilitate and the ability to discourage physical activity. This study's sample group reported no similar social constraints – all of their interpersonal relationships were located within an overarching narrative of empowerment and support. These respondents' professional and educational goals moved them away from the family obligations that Ainsworth and Henderson's respondents cited as superseding their commitment to physical activity. While these autobiographies speak to the connection between initiating a new yoga practice and the desire to improve health and wellness, specific kinds of educational and economic capital play an equally significant role. Put differently, these narratives reveal the confluence of disparate resources and privileges that recommend yoga to an individual and demonstrate the bridges and bonds necessary for successful integration into a new community and a new bodily discipline.

Continuation, deepening and perceived benefits

The social support and empowerment that bolster the decision to initiate a new Vinyasa yoga practice are often prefaced by an extensive personal history with sport. Experiences garnered in elementary and high school combine to foster a sense of self contingent on athleticism. All of the yogis interviewed for this case study described themselves as 'active'. Many shared an interest in outdoor activities, such as biking and rock climbing. Others mentioned taking dance and gymnastics classes as children and playing competitive sports at high school level. For this group, Vinyasa yoga's physicality opened the door into meditation, stress release and relaxation. One respondent explained that she needs 'the flow, the workout, to be in a meditative state and enjoy the poses' (Yogi # 7). Another explained that she has a 'hard time slowing down to the point of meditation' (Yogi #3). This repeated emphasis on movement and physical challenge is probably not true for the majority of yogis who choose to practise more meditative styles of Hatha yoga, such as Kripalu. Students attracted to newly prominent power and hot yoga styles, such as Vinyasa and Bikram, approach their practice with a unique set of expectations that are radically shifting the demographic and spiritual profile of yoga in America. Conclusions about budding Vinyasa yogi's previous relationships to sport cannot be used to understand the increasingly heterogeneous yoga community as a whole.

In describing their decision to continue taking yoga classes and deepening their own home practices, this group of yoga students described enmeshed social, psychological, physical and spiritual meanings and motivations. As Crossley's research demonstrates, narratives of motivation are adaptive social instruments that occasion change overtime.²⁰ Depending largely on their self-definition along the spectrum from yogi to someone who likes to take yoga classes, these respondents acknowledged both physical and mental benefits, but tended to highlight the relative significance of one over the other.

Focusing first on the physical, respondents perceived these benefits and cited these health related motivations for continuing and deepening their yoga practice: improved digestion, immunity boost, improved posture, more rejuvenating sleep, hip opening, reduced lower back pain, increased desire to eat well and consume less alcohol, improved overall fitness and flexibility, and one respondent explained that yoga helps her counter the effects of wearing high heels everyday. The desire to exercise and actively improve their own physical health was one of the most commonly cited reasons for initiating and deepening a yoga practice. One yogi explained, 'I was struggling with aspects of the body that weren't working normally, with yoga they cleared up' (Yogi #7).

Less medically, several respondents described the physical sensation, or afterglow, they experienced at the end of their practices as a meaningful motivational force:

My whole body was glowing, and I didn't know it could feel this way. I left the class feeling high and buzzed. (Yogi #7)

I liked the way yoga made me feel, the aftermath... like sex, but different and better. (Yogi #3)

These two descriptive explanations parallel yoga to intercourse and drug use. The selection of these particular metaphors suggests that yoga is understood as providing a means of safely altering consciousness and allowing the individual to produce feelings of intimate physical pleasure within themselves. The idea of self-generating feelings of contentment, joy and elation speaks to another respondent's description of her yoga practice. While working in a different state from her husband and dogs, yoga helps her to create feelings of familial comfort. While these examples are primarily personal, the same theme of contentment within an unaltered present characterizes the application of yoga to professional life, which will be discussed below.

In describing their motivation for continuing and deepening their practices, respondents repeated several loaded phrases: 'clarity of mind', 'heart opening', 'internal expansion', 'centring', 'peace' and 'stress release'. These phrases come directly from existing yoga literature and are repeated by instructors during yoga classes. When asked to explain how these perceived benefits affect everyday life, the yogis translated these insider meanings into specific improvements in their functioning at work and at home.

Yoga is understood as a means of coping with workplace stress and the physical discomfort of sitting in an office. Here are two representative statements that speak to the perceived dichotomy between the yoga studio and the workplace and the application of yoga to workplace efficiency and competency:

If something at work is stressful, I do breathing exercises from class and relax. (Yogi #6)

I really enjoy after work or at the end of the week getting relaxed and centered. I found that I work generally 10-hour days, I am in the office from 9-8. It's hard for me at that time of night, when I haven't eaten dinner, to go run. Yoga is something I look forward to after work. (Yogi #4)

These statements suggest that 'stress release' and 'centring' can be understood, in part, as means of functioning more efficiently in the context of a busy, professional life.

Another respondent described similarly heightened competency and efficiency at school:

Now that I am in graduate school, my main motivation for practicing yoga is focus and clarity of mind. I am more efficient, I sit down and finish tasks without getting overwhelmed. I've never been busier, yet I feel more present and capable. (Yogi #3)

The preceding explanations point to the ways in which yoga is understood and deployed as a coping mechanism in the work place and classroom. The successful application of yoga to professional efficiency reflects the massive rift between the traditional yoga community's interest in sparking spiritual, social and cultural change and current practitioners' interest in capitalizing on the potential of the yoga market.²¹ Yoga can be understood as a dynamic growth industry. But its relationship to capitalism is fruitful and fraught. Despite having its own celebrity entrepreneurs, fashion lines and online dating services, yoga transcends traditional theoretical assumptions about the difference between consumer culture and subculture. Yoga practitioners and students experience their practice as authentic and meaningful, even while sporting 'hip tranquil chick' attire and drinking artesian water imported from Fuji.

'Heart opening' and 'decompression' also have concrete social and work-related applications. As one yogi explained, 'heart opening' translated into increased patience with her intern. She went on to attribute her increased self-confidence and ability to speak publicly at work-related events to her yoga practise. One young woman, who recently began teaching yoga classes, explained that the 'heart opening' she experienced as a result of deepening her yoga practise had bolstered close friendships and increased the intimacy and trust in her new marriage. Another yoga student explained that her husband described her as being 'less bitchy' after yoga class. From these examples, heart opening can be understood as a set of postures that focus on the upper body that yoga students perceive as a means of improving their ability to sustain professional, familial and romantic relationships. The physical, mental and social are inseparable; the yoga mat is understood as a space to grapple with and dispel insecurities, practice patience and non-judgment, and release difficult emotions. Several respondents expanded this understanding of the yoga mat out into a cultural distinction between yoga studios and gyms.

Yoga culture versus the gym

In describing their continued interest in yoga, many respondents chose to emphasize the differences they perceived between themselves and gym members. Even though this was not

part of my initial research design, I have included excerpts from these findings below because they reveal how a sense of membership within this specific exercise environment is prefigured by an act of identity-based distinction:

The gym never appealed. People seemed to be in competition with their bodies. I didn't like feeling sore after working out and didn't like the way the muscles were bulking up. It wasn't me. (Yogi #1)

Yoga is a nice contrast to the gym. In the gym environment you see people beating themselves up, they look tortured and yoga is a place where people take care of themselves. In yoga classes people are practicing self-acceptance. The gym is more work after work. (Yogi #4)

It's hard to be around people in that setting, the mirrors, it's so competitive and for silly reasons, like who can lift more and appearance. People flaunt and are inconsiderate. The atmosphere is rushed. I would lift weights, but I never liked it. (Yogi #5)

The above explanations highlight the relationship between sense of self and exercise habits, the perceived difference between competition and self-acceptance and, more subtly, the type of physical change that yoga facilitates. These negative descriptions of gym culture further underscore the kinds of social and physical norms that certain exercise spaces self-select. The idea that the gym 'isn't me' suggests that yoga attracts a different subset of people than public basketball courts or corporate weight rooms. This evocation of identity highlights the significance of values, beliefs and community norms in initiating and sustaining particular exercise habits.

The set of contrasts excerpted above also illustrates the paradoxical relationship between yoga and competition. Yoga is valued in the studio for its explicit renunciation of competition and then equally praised outside of the studio by the same practitioners for granting them a competitive advantage in the workplace and in the classroom. As the gym is described as 'more work after work', the yoga studio's non-competitive environment may be perceived as sating a desire to escape from professional competition, without actually changing professions. The sound of yoga students exhaling in unison symbolizes the ethos of community, connection and self-acceptance of the studio. This ritual can be interpreted as countering the isolation and stressful competition of work and gym environments while simultaneously focusing professional effort and renewing academic ambition.

While many of the women interviewed cited increased strength as a motivating factor in sustaining their yoga practise, the above-stated aversion to 'bulking up' reflects the perceived difference between gaining muscle mass and increasing muscle tone. None of my respondents mentioned the desire to achieve a 'yoga body'. But their interest in a particular kind of lean strength is solicited and reinforced almost universally in how yoga and yogis are represented in mass media. The same slim, spandex clad female body perched in tree posture on the cover of *Yoga Journal* sells everything from hair relaxers to cell phones. Articles in *Yoga Journal* that offer tips on using yoga to control appetite and lose weight further deploy yoga as a means of conforming to rigid norms of female beauty and offer an artificially limited representation what a yogi should look like.

Discussion

The question remains: what can a small, relatively homogenous case study offer in terms of theoretical insight or generalizable assertions? It is tantalizing to suggest that these results might be reproduced in similar studies at different studios that serve different populations. However, only doing the research would affirm such confidence. More research of this kind would certainly have predictive potential. But a study of this size is of modest value. By dwelling on extended conversations and everyday observations, this study gives voice to one community

within a broader historically specific social phenomenon. Giving voice to a non-marginalized population may seem odd, or superfluous. In a traditional sense, the people interviewed for this study are already heard. So why attend to the narratives of an empowered community? As a methodology, focusing on the motivation behind positive health and fitness practices opens a space for understanding how and why certain groups of people arrive at a sense of self eager to care for the self. While we know from statistical data that health and fitness are gendered, racialized and classed, the internal mechanisms of this nexus of privilege are not quantifiable. Analysed as a coherent whole, these interviews demonstrate a pattern of motivation that was nourished by pre-existing, mutually reinforcing capitals.

The yoga students interviewed for this case study chose to locate their yoga autobiographies within the overarching context of their own successful transition to middle-class adulthood. Practising Vinyasa yoga at the studio was understood as a means of being a better employee, boss and girlfriend. This case study suggests that yoga's role in professional performance, social functioning and self-definition are part of an ongoing process of creative, psychologically rewarding conformity during which mechanisms of privilege and obedience coincide with a meaningful sense of social integration and wellness. The specific physical, emotional and social needs that mainstream yoga publications choose to address are bound to the pressures and ergonomics of professional office life and reinforce hegemonic norms of feminine beauty. Reflecting these same social patternings and stratifications, an individual's sense of belonging and comfort within the studio space is often prefaced and bolstered by her ability to access information about health and a pre-existing definition of self as 'active' and 'athletic'. Despite the media and the studio's 'silent expectations', this case study suggests that the single most significant motivating and sustaining factor in determining an individual's sense of their own relationship to yoga is encouraging, concerned family and friends.

This discussion highlights the relationship between social and other more materially-based capitals and undermines common sense beliefs about individual exercise habits. On an individual level, actively striving for wellness embodies self-efficacy and initiative. But these winning character attributes offer meagre insight into why patterns of public health and wellness consistently reflect existing social, racial and economic stratifications. Understanding why some groups and communities are more likely to exercise than others demands a recognition of the social factors that motivate and give meaning to individual actions. These findings underscore the utility of applying medical sociology's social capital approach to micro level analysis of exercise habits. The meanings and motivations analysed in this case study highlight the potential utility of future research exploring the interconnectivity of individual life chances, collective efficacy, media representations, emergent capitalist endeavours and habits of the body.

Notes

- ¹ I am borrowing the term 'yoga market' from a *Yoga Journal* report published in June 2003. In publicizing self-commissioned statistics on the number of yogis, and potential yogis, in the United States, *Yoga Journal* chose to describe the growing number of yoga practitioners as 'the yoga market'. In this study, I use the term 'yoga market' as a sensitizing concept that reflects one dimension of how the yoga community imagines and defines its own growing popularity. The choice of the word 'market' speaks to underlying financial ramifications and objectives, opposed to human meanings.
- ² Bray, 'Response to Alter's Heaps of Health', 66.
- ³ For more on the social capital approach see Hawe and Shiell, 'Social Capital and Health Promotion', and Browning and Cagney, 'Neighborhood Structural Disadvantage'.
- ⁴ Hawe and Shiell, 'Social Capital and Health Promotion', 871.
- ⁵ Crossley, 'In The Gym', 24.
- ⁶ Crossley argues that ethnographic research is ill equipped to grapple with complex histories of class and gender: 'of course ethnography has no way of making representative claims about class and gender'

(ibid., 32). This presupposition shifts his analysis away from a Bourdieuan engagement with the relationship between self-cultivation and the history of middle-class formation. This restricted interest in class is rooted to an inaccurately modern date for the birth of gym culture. Crossley describes gyms as a feature of late-modern society; however new histories of exercise go back to the turn of the nineteenth century (Peña, *The Body Electric*). Further, national survey data is available that reveals the kinds of ‘clear trends’ necessary for making tentative arguments about the relationship between class, fitness habits and other kinds of physical, cultural and social capital.

⁷ Survey conducted by Harris Interactive Services Bureau for *Yoga Journal* in 2003, unpublished.

⁸ Saper *et al.*, ‘Prevalence and Patterns of Adult Yoga Use’.

⁹ Yin, ‘Athletic Goddesses’.

¹⁰ ‘Women+ Sport = Top Businesswomen’, *Broker* magazine.

¹¹ Wellbery, ‘Impact of Community-Based Yoga’.

¹² The Center for Disease Control recommends that adults spend half an hour daily engaged in moderate physical activity, such as walking. For more detailed information on national exercise patterns and the CDC’s recommendations see www.cdc.gov.

¹³ Ainsworth and Henderson, ‘The Connection Between Social Support’, 27.

¹⁴ See Crossley, ‘In The Gym’; Phillips, ‘Working Out’; Ziebland, ‘How the Internet Affects Patients’ Experience of Cancer’; Murray *et al.*, ‘Dying from Cancer’; Walsh *et al.*, ‘Spiritual Beliefs’; Griffiths *et al.*, ‘Influences on Hospital Admission’; Wiltshire *et al.*, ‘They’re Doing People a Service’; Langton, ‘Obstetricians’ Resistance to Independent, Private Practice’; Lester *et al.*, ‘Learning from e-patients’.

¹⁵ I have chosen to call the studio ‘Studio S’ to further shelter the anonymity of my research partners.

¹⁶ I have chosen to use the insider’s term ‘deepening’ to describe the gradual expansion of yoga from the mat out into daily life. The term encompasses different meanings, but is generally used to describe an increased interest in yoga philosophy and Buddhist spirituality, and an increased dedication to yoga.

¹⁷ Many yoga studios and disciplines publish ‘yoga testimonials’ on their websites that similarly address questions of meaning and motivation. I read a number of these testimonials to gain a better understanding of how the yoga community chooses to understand its function in everyday life. Published yoga testimonials offer an almost universal understanding of how motivation changes: with time, yoga students originally drawn to the mat to achieve the perfect ‘yoga body’ will come to realize the deeper significance of their practice and their motivation will become mental and spiritual. This assumption, while grounded in personal experiences of yoga teachers and leaders, fails to acknowledge how rapid expansion undermines any unified sense of political, social or cultural engagement. New students’ motivations are not inherently bound to the original tenants of social and cultural change that sparked yoga’s move west. Within a broader discussion of social and cultural change, yoga offers an intriguing example of change sparked by specific individual actions and decisions that, once enlivened, transcended their directional control.

¹⁸ Tangen, “‘Making the Space’”.

¹⁹ Stress could be included in this list of health-related concerns. But, considering its slippery, socially constructed nature, stress will be addressed in the later discussion of reasons for deepening an existing practice that encompass psychological, social, physical and spiritual meanings.

²⁰ Crossley, ‘In The Gym’.

²¹ For more on the debate over how yoga, nationalism and capitalism should, and do, interface see Phillips, ‘Working Out’; Cushman, ‘The New Yoga’; Strauss, “‘Adapt, Adjust, Accommodate’”.

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