

Adaptations of Yoga: Christian Interpretations

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Abstract

The yogic phenomenon in the West is multi-dimensional and threads through areas of history (DeMichelis, 2008), market trends, fitness and exercise, medicine (Guarracino, Lazo, Savino, & Edelstein, 2006); religion and spirituality (DeMichelis, 2008); and health and wellness (Iyengar, 1989). Coakley (2004) called for “more information about the connections among various religious beliefs around the world, ideas of the body, and participation in physical activities and sports” (p. 543). A dearth of literature exists concerning the connections between how Christian beliefs, the dominant religion in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2008), related to the body and physical activity participation inform other cultures’ fitness modalities. Pertinent to this study, is the debate over who should practice yoga. The purpose of this project was to explore Christian-centered yoga and specifically how teachers who ascribe to this method create meaning of their own yoga experiences and operationalize it in their classes. Purposeful sampling as well as snowball sampling methods were employed to select 10 CCY teachers. Participant observations and instructors’ archival data, websites, marketing material, training manuals, and class descriptions were used for triangulation. Based on thematic analysis, the researcher produced four major themes: (a) *Gateway*; (b) *Dueling Dualities*; (c) *Embodied Spirituality*; and (d) *Operationalization*. Ritual appropriation theory and Bourdieu’s sociological concepts were used to interpret the findings and position Christian-centered yoga inside the larger discourse on sociology, sport, recreation, yoga, spirituality, and religion. This study adds knowledge to the fields of religious studies, recreation, sport sociology and psychology, and health promotion. For

those in the fields of spiritual and religious studies, the results of this text offer opportunities for readers to find yogic experiences within a Christian context. The excerpts from the data offered in each theme help to explore the spiritual marketplace, spaces where religion and spirituality are packaged, outwardly marketed, and consumed; in this case, the spiritual marketplace happens to be group-fitness settings. My work continues to develop typologies related to religious studies, physical activity, and modern yoga studies and augments existing scholarship by exploring how religiously affiliated corporal beliefs may influence physical activity.

Keywords: Bourdieu, Christian, ritual appropriation, yoga

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Chapter I: Introduction

¹A friend of mine, Sarah, once told me about her experience with yoga. While in a doctor's sterile waiting room, she picked up a yoga magazine. On the cover was a blonde, lithe woman knotted up like a pretzel. The White woman wore a tight, salmon colored tank top and complimentary yoga pants. Sarah noticed the brand on the model as one that marketed itself as a "green", socially responsible clothing company, which to Sarah meant fair trade, made of hemp, and organically dyed. Headlines surrounded the yoga model:

"Yoga Cures: Can the practice transform American medicine?"

"Twists for a healthy core and spine"

"Happy inside: Simple practices that can truly change your mind"²

"Religion and yoga"

"Heal your back with yoga"

The nurse called her into the examination room. During her annual visit, the doctor recommended adding yoga to Sarah's health regiment and extolled its numerous health benefits, including relaxation. The physician noted her slightly elevated blood pressure. Sarah thought back to the magazine, and asked herself, "How 'relaxing' is it to twist your organs into an unimaginable shape? Or how is bending yourself into a pretzel a spiritual experience?"

She left the cold doctor's office and stepped out into the oppressive summer heat. The bank's digital thermometer screamed 100 degrees and Sarah thought the humidity

¹ This is a narrative device to help introduce the study.

² Actual headlines from *Yoga Journal*, May 2010

had to be at least 100 percent. On the way to her car, she passed a yoga studio. Through one of the studio's windows, Sarah saw yoga paraphernalia for sale, which included brightly colored mats, books, wooden blocks, and clothes, similar to what she thought was the yoga outfit she had seen on the magazine cover.

Through a second set of voyeur-friendly windows, Sarah watched people sitting, lifeless, hands folded in prayer, as an instructor read something that did not sound like English. Nine people were in the room, mostly women in their mid-40s. Some of the women wore outfits similar to the yoga model's on the magazine cover, but two wore cotton pants, resembling pajamas, with looser workout tops. She also noticed two men, one younger with a shaved head, who looked to be the youngest in the room. The other gentleman, who looked to be in his late 50s, wore an old t-shirt with the sleeves cut off and a pair of black basketball shorts.

She thought, "What exactly is this yoga? Is it exercise? Is it religious? Are they praying? Or are they just staring into space?" She also wondered what those people did for a living that allowed them to take a yoga class at 3:00 on a Wednesday afternoon. Sarah's inner thoughts are quite similar to many others' in the quest to define yoga (Feuerstein, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

The yogic phenomenon in the West is multi-dimensional and threads through areas of history (DeMichelis, 2008; Feuerstein, 2008; Liberman, 2008; Morely, 2008), market trends, fitness and exercise, medicine (Guarracino, Lazo, Savino, & Edelstein, 2006; Harvard Health Publications, 2009; Khalsa, Shorter, Cope, Wyshak, & Sklar, 2009;

Kuei-Min & Wei-Shyuan, 2008; Ravindran et al., 2009; Van Puymbroeck, Payne, & Hsieh, 2007); religion and spirituality (DeMichelis, 2008; Feuerstein, 2008; Lieberman, 2008; Morley, 2008; Ratzinger, 1989); and health and wellness (Iyengar, 1989).

Yoga has meant different things to different people (Alter, 2006; Baptiste, 2003; Desikachar 1995; Feuerstein 2008; Iyengar, 1979; Jois, 2002; Strauss, 2005). It has a long history rooted in ancient Eastern religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism (DeMichelis, 2008; Feuerstein, 2008; Lieberman, 2008; Morley, 2008); but the yoga practiced in the West has a different emphasis for some. For example, the health industry has promoted yoga as an ameliorating salve for lifestyle indulgences such as obesity (Barth, Wilcox, Liken, Bobb, & Saunders, 2008; Yan, 2010) and hypertension (Cowen & Adams, 2005; Kim, 2005). The following discussion provides a brief context aimed at more fully explaining how yoga is positioned in Western culture.

Scholars have tracked yoga's long journey back to 4500 BC; its influential texts such as Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*; and its journey West originating from the Indus Valley, known today as India (DeMichelis, 2008; Desikachar, 1995; Feuerstein, 2008; Ingro, 2009; Hammond, 2009; Morley, 2008). Health clinicians looking for new ways to treat mental and emotional challenges, such as depression and addiction, have looked eastward toward India to bring yoga into their programs with favorable results, supporting claims that the modality can be used as a positive intervention in treating certain grades of mood disorders (Harvard Mental Health Letter, 2009; Khalsa, Shorter, Cope, Wyshak, & Solar, 2009; Ravindran et al., 2009). The medical literature supports yoga as a healthy option, offering various degrees of physical and mental-health benefits with low risk of negative

side effects. Research has found that yoga's psychosomatic nature claims to support a mind-body-spirit balance (Barth et al., 2008; Guarracino et al., 2006; Kuei-Min & Wei-Shyuan, 2008; Van Puymbroeck et al., 2007). The latter part of this triad, i.e., spirit, is central to my investigation of yoga in the United States.

The word *spirit* causes pause for some, as it is a contested concept in United States (U.S.) culture and at times is associated with religion. Coakley (2004) called for “more information about the connections among various religious beliefs around the world, ideas of the body, and participation in physical activities and sports” (p. 543). A dearth of literature exists concerning the connections between how Christian beliefs—the dominant religion in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2008)—related to the body and physical activity participation inform other cultures' fitness modalities.

Pertinent to this study is the debate over who should practice yoga (Hindu-American Foundation; 2011; Mohler, 2010; Ratzinger, 1989). In 1989, Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI of the Roman Catholic Church, published an official letter to Catholic bishops stating that Catholics should be cautious in practicing yoga. The Vatican's warning came from the stance that yoga and yogic meditation might lead the practitioner to concentrate only on himself, instead of God or Jesus, who is the only path to salvation. Rome advised Catholics against incorrect forms of prayer and any physical practice that could “degenerate into a cult of the body” (Ratzinger, 1989, p. 10). According to Albert Mohler (2010), president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Christians who practice yoga do not recognize the contradictions between their faith and doing yoga, which he stated is a Hindu practice. Christian theologians are not

the only people concerned with yoga's historical connection to Hinduism. The Hindu-American Foundation (2010) launched "Take Back Yoga," a campaign aimed at informing Westerners that the Hindu tradition undergirds all forms of yoga. Some yoga teachers have attempted to combine the spiritual dimension of yoga with its physical benefits while keeping these practices in line with Christian faith (Ryan, 1995). Yoga instructors teaching from a Christian perspective often acknowledge that yoga developed within the Hindu religion and culture, but feel it "was intended as a universal human practice" (Russell, 2011, para. 1).

Christian yoga is a form of hatha yoga that often connects Christian theology to yoga theory (Hughes, 2011; Ryan 1995). The physical practice of contemporary yoga is taught from a Christian perspective. Instructors who ascribe to this method frame the class with Christian principles. As there is no one organization governing Christian-based yoga, there are a number of ways in which a class could be taught. For example, Thomas Ryan (1986, 1995), a Catholic priest, has written books on the topic. In one text he pairs phrases from the Lord's Prayer with yoga poses. Ryan's perspective on CCY is not the only way a teacher might connection Christianity to yoga, but rather the point is exemplify on method. Because there is not a large body of scholarly work on Christian-based yoga, I also make inferences based on anecdotal evidence from popular culture. There are videos and books on how to practice Christian yoga. In addition, there are CCY teacher-training programs for future instructors (Russell, 2011).

In light of this debate and tensions surrounding the question of who should practice yoga and how it should be taught, systematic research should be undertaken in

order to understand how dominant Christian values influence the practice of yoga in the West. One way to conduct such an investigation is to focus on the phenomenon of Christ-centered yoga (CCY), also labeled Christian-based yoga, and on the gatekeepers of yoga, the teachers.

Purpose of the Study

Acknowledging that yoga has traditionally been seen as a Hindu or Buddhist practice, the purpose of this project was to explore Christian-centered yoga and specifically how teachers who ascribe to this method create meaning of their own yoga experiences and operationalize it in their classes.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What experiences do CCY instructors perceive as significant in their journey to become CCY teachers?
- 2a. How do issues of faith surrounding yoga's assimilation into Western culture influence CCY instructors' teaching?
- 2b. How do issues of culture surrounding yoga's assimilation into Western culture influence CCY instructors' teaching?
- 2c. How do tensions surrounding yoga's assimilation into Western culture influence CCY instructors' teaching?
3. How do CCY teachers construct meaning in relation to their Christian-based yoga teaching experiences?
4. How is this meaning operationalized in an instructor's teachings in their yoga

classes?

Key Terms

The key terms that were used in this study include the following:

Astanga yoga. Astanga is a vigorous form of yoga, but also refers to the eight limbs of Classical yoga, that include a personal and social code of ethics, physical exercises, and steps for meditation to obtain a higher consciousness. Some people refer to this higher state as enlightenment (Desikachar, 1995).

Bellur Krishnamachar Sundararaja Iyengar. Iyengar, a prominent figure in modern yoga, established Iyengar yoga, which focuses on alignment and precision of yoga, postures, and breath work (Iyengar, 1979). This method and its derivatives are taught in many yoga studios and gymnasia across the West (Patel, Akkihebbalu, Espinoza, & Chiodo, 2011).

Christian yoga. Christian yoga is a form of hatha yoga that often connects Christian theology to yoga theory (Hughes, 2011; Ryan 1995). The physical practice of contemporary yoga is taught from a Christian perspective.

Cultural capital. Bourdieu (1984) expanded Weber's reference to how people stylize their life and termed the concept cultural capital, the disposition and representation of one's self compared with other representation styles. Cultural capital refers to a wide range of social practices, including home décor, sport participation, musical and marital selections, spiritual attitudes, and educational qualifications. In addition, cultural capital refers to how individuals use these outward representations to leverage their social positions in society (Bourdieu, 1986). This form of capital describes

consumption, not what people accumulate through purchases, but the accumulation of their thoughts and beliefs and their relationships with other people and organizations. People can trade cultural capital for economic and/or social capital.

Desikachar. Desikachar, son of Krishnamacharya, taught extensively outside of his home country of India. His books are used frequently in yoga teacher training. He explored yoga as therapy for ailments and emphasized tailoring each yoga pose to the individual's needs (Desikachar, 1995).

Economic capital. One of three forms of capital Bourdieu explores, economic capital refers to monetary assets and income. Socio-economic position partly determines a person's economic capital (Bourdieu, 1984). People use their economic capital to accumulate other forms of capital, namely social and cultural.

Exchangeability. Exchangeability refers to the idea that the various forms of capital that Bourdieu conceptualized (economic, social, and cultural) can be traded for each other (Bourdieu, 1986).

Field. Field is a sociological concept referring to the relationship between agents (that is, people and organizations) that hold "certain forms of power" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 16). It refers to the network of agents, people, institutions, organizations, and stakeholders in the defining the boundaries of a cultural practice or network (Bourdieu, 1993a). There are many fields because there is a myriad of possible cultural practices and networks. The conversion of capital (economic, social, and cultural) into its various forms happens within a field. In addition, Bourdieu theorized

that a habitus is located inside a particular field; and like a habitus, a field is not static; it can change (Bourdieu, 1988a; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Habitus. Habitus refers to socially constructed learned habits, behavior patterns, and expectations. Referring to the strategic moves agents take in opposition to another agent or group, habitus can be learned, internalized, and outwardly practiced. These movements or decisions can be objectively implicit or unconsciously imposed (Bourdieu, 1977) and can be used to distinguish one group from another. Calhoun (2007) describes habitus as the “embodied sensibility that makes possible structured improvisation” (p. 32). A habitus and people within that habitus have an interdependent relationship. Although people’s behavior patterns are governed by a habitus, their actions can also change it (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Hatha yoga. Hatha yoga is a non-dogmatic philosophy encompassing a form of physical human movement that dates back several thousand years. In Western culture, the most influential and important yoga practices consist of asana or prescribed physical movements and postures. Because of the privatization of religion, transmutation, secularization, commodification, and medicalization of yoga, the practice differs from its classical roots. Today it is not a centralized entity with one authoritarian voice (Birdee et al, 2008; DeMichelis, 2008; Desikachar, 1999; Morely, 2008; Singleton & Byrne, 2008).

Indra Devi. Often referred to as the first lady of yoga, Devi, who was of privileged Russian descent, is credited with helping to spread yoga around the world. In the 1930s, she became the first woman and Westerner accepted to study at an Indian ashram, a secluded hermitage, with the influential yoga teacher, Krishnamacharya

(Burger, 2006).

Patanjali. Known by only one name, Patanjali was a philosopher who wrote *Yoga Sutras*, 195 short verses on “truth” (DeMichelis, 2008; Desikachar, 1995; Feuerstein, 2008; Ingro, 2009; Hammond, 2009; Morely, 2008).

Pattahbi Jois. An influential yoga teacher born in India, Pattahbi Jois taught extensively in America. He is credited with establishing a vigorous method called Astanga yoga.

Physical capital. Physical capital, also referred to as embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), has been categorized by some as a very influential subsection of cultural capital (Shilling, 1992; Swanson, 2003). This form of capital refers to the “commodification of the body,” whereby the social identity and value of an individual is outwardly expressed through his or her appearance (Shilling, 2003, p. 14). This form is specifically tied to the investment of the agent or individual. A person has to invest time, money, and/or energy to cultivate physical capital. According to Bourdieu (1986), this cultivation cannot be done by someone else. While physical capital is usually traded for economic capital, social capital can also be amassed in exchange for physical capital (Shilling, 1993).

Religion. Religion can encompass a search for the sacred and/or a quest for non-sacred goals like community, identity, importance, significance, or well-being. Alternatively, religion can also refer to “the means and methods (e.g., rituals or prescribed behaviors) of the search that receive validation and support from within an identified group of people” (Hill et al., 2000, p. 66).

Social capital. Social capital is one of the three forms of capital Bourdieu conceptualized in his sociological understanding of culture. In simplest terms, social capital refers to one's social network or social relationships, formal or informal, with other people, groups, or organizations (Bourdieu, 1984).

Spirituality. Spirituality is the culmination of the experiences, behaviors, emotions, and ideas coming from a person's quest to determine what is sacred. To further clarify, the word *sacred* refers to what an individual deems to be divine, which could be a being, spirit, object, "Ultimate reality, or Ultimate Truth"; and *quest* refers to a search or an endeavor to recognize, understand, or explain what is sacred (Hill et al., 2000).

Tirumalai Krishnamacharya. Many credit Krishnamacharya with bringing yoga to large groups of people. Under his pupilage, several students (e.g., Iyengar, Devi, Jois, Desikachar) went on to diffuse his version of yoga throughout Western Europe and the United States.

Vinyasa. Vinyasa yoga is a moderate to vigorous form of yoga combining dynamic movement with the practitioner's inhale and exhale.

Wellness. Powers and Dodd (2009) discuss a wellness model comprised of six components: mental health, physical health, spiritual health, environmental influences, social health, and intellectual health. Each of these components affects one's wellness, defined as "an optimal soundness of body and mind" (Hopson, Donatelle, & Littoral, 2009, p. 2) in which a healthy state is obtainable by exercising, eating a balanced diet, avoiding unhealthy behaviors, and "maintaining good emotional and spiritual health" (Powers & Dodd, 2009, p. 3).

Delimitations and Limitations

This investigation was delimited to interviewing Christian-based yoga teachers and observing their yoga classes. Delimitations of this study also include a small sample of participants from different geographic regions of the United States. This study was not intended to represent all Christian-based yoga teachers. Qualitative research, can depending on the project, sacrifice breadth for depth and is at times unable to generalize findings to a larger population, posing another limitation. This study explored how individual teachers infuse their classes with a Christian perspective. Another limitation of the study was that I only took Lily's class on four occasions. All other participants lived a great distance away, which inhibited my ability to attend their classes

Significance of the Study

Understanding how CCY operates within recreational and spiritual discourses has cultural and political consequences. This study's topic is important for various audiences, such as, sport sociologist, scholars, the fitness industry's business leaders, and yoga teachers because of the value in understanding how Christian-dominant ideologies influence yoga teachers and how CCY operates within Western culture. This study's findings have implications for mind-body fitness and marketing trends. As stakeholders, yoga studio owners could benefit from such an investigation with regard to understanding what their clients may be seeking in classes as well as what type of teacher training the studio may want to offer, which could impact marketing strategies. From a health-promotion perspective, probing incidences of CCY may illuminate future market trends

by providing yoga studio owners information on new ways of teaching yoga and offering a Christian-centered fitness class that may attract additional clientele.

In relation to scholarship, this investigation's closes the gap in literature and adds knowledge to the fields of religious studies, recreation, sport sociology, and health promotion. Concerning religious studies, the narratives from this study serve as comparative material to mainstream yoga and yoga methods with strong Hindu associations. This study addressed Klassen's (2005) call for further exploring various narratives within the spiritual marketplace. Furthermore, this study explored where Christian yoga departs from other forms of modern yoga, thus contributing to existing literature by continuing to develop typologies related to religious studies, physical activity, and modern yoga studies.

Furthermore, more research is needed regarding the relationship between faith-based ideas about the body and how those ideas influence physical activity (Coakley, 2004). Such research has implications for wellness practitioners and sport psychology consultants. How CCY teachers negotiate this relationship allows further insight into the spirituality- religion-physical activity connection. This association is particularly salient with regard to extending Power and Dodd's (2009) wellness model in reference to physical and spiritual health. The investigation of teaching yoga from a Christian perspective illustrates what individuals do to enhance others' physical and spiritual well-being. In addition, studying the spirituality-sport achievement connection has implications for the field of sport psychology. Spirituality plays an important role when

working with athletes (Ravizza, 2002); therefore, deeper awareness and understanding of CCY could enhance athlete performance.

From the perspective of socio-cultural studies in sport and recreation, how dominant discourses are maintained is an important area of research. Extending the concepts of religious privilege (Schlosser, 2003; Watt, 2009) and ritual appropriation (Klassen, 2005) could help to illuminate how teachers use CCY for religious witnessing (Baker, 2007; Coakley, 2009). Expanding the application of ritual appropriation theory (Klassen, 2005) and sociological concepts developed by Bourdieu (1977, 1984, 1986, 1988 1993a; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) is significant to scholarly research and literature because it helps to understand participants' lived experiences and how people are able to reproduce dominant ideologies. Employing ritual appropriation theory (Klassen, 2005), or using ritual from another culture for one's own purpose, I illustrate how teachers operationalize CCY in their classes to illuminate more explicitly who has the power and privilege to define physical activity, recreation, and, more specifically, yoga.

Bourdieu (1988) argued that not just the wealthy are the social powerbrokers in a society. Rather, in addition to money, it is access to cultural and social resources that allows agents to recreate their ideologies in a culture. Sport and recreation are the same. Extending Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and capital, particularly cultural capital, helps explore Christian-centered yoga and specifically how teachers ascribing to this method create meaning of their own yoga experiences and operationalize it in their classes. Applying these three sociological concepts highlight how issues of faith, culture,

and tensions surrounding yoga's assimilation into Western culture influence CCY instructors' teaching. This influence is discussed in further detail in the literature review.

Yoga's collective identity in America and in the West has been in a state of flux (Desikachar, 1995). Tensions and questions surround which traditions own yoga, as affirmed in popular culture by a recent article entitled "Yoga and Religion: Can you practice both?" (Yoga Journal, 2011, p. 1). Published in an influential yoga magazine, the article recounts a round table discussion of leading yoga instructors that teach from different spiritual and religious perspectives. In the headlining article, the teachers explore these different various perspectives associated with yoga taught in the United States (Yoga Journal, 2011). One translation of the word *yoga* is union (Iyengar, 1979); however, Christian-based yoga teachers are caught in the middle of two disconnected worlds. While yoga is a popular form of fitness, some theologians purport that yoga is antithetical to Christianity and that true Christians should not practice yoga because of its Hindu association (Mohler, 2010). In response, the Hindu American Foundation has mounted "a campaign to acquaint Westerners with the faith that it says underlies every single yoga style followed in gyms, ashrams and spas: Hinduism" (Vitello, 2010, p. 1). This study explores how CCY teachers navigate the world of mainstream yoga and expand the layered debate encircling who "owns" yoga.

Organization of the Dissertation

This chapter has outlined the intended study. Chapter II provides a review of literature relevant to this investigation and further discusses the relationship between spirituality, religion, and physical activity and the study's theoretical foundation. Chapter

III discusses the methods and methodology, while Chapter IV presents the study's findings. I will conclude with a discussion of the study and its implications, conclusions, and recommendations in Chapter V.

Chapter II: Review of Literature

Acknowledging that yoga has traditionally been seen as a Hindu or Buddhist practice, the purpose of this project was to explore Christian-centered yoga and specifically how teachers who ascribe to this method create meaning of their own yoga experiences and operationalize it in their classes. To develop a context, I begin my review of literature by briefly discussing the history of yoga with an emphasis on religious and spiritual moments. Summarized medical literature focusing on yoga is included as well as motivational factors for participating in physical activity. Intersections of physical activity, religion and spirituality is provided, as well as I also review literature concerning yoga's connection to sport sociology; more specifically, I engage in the discourse surrounding religious privatization and Christian-based yoga. The chapter is concluded with an overview of the theoretical framework informing my study, which incorporates ritual appropriation theory and work from Bourdieu.

Religious and Spiritual Moments in Yoga's History

Yoga has been taken up in different identities, forms, methods, meanings, and intensities (Atler, 2006; Baptiste, 2003; Desikachar 1995; Feuerstein 2008; Iyengar, 1979; Jois, 2002; Strauss, 2005). The intersectionality of various historical, political, and social influences on yoga practitioners leads me to ponder if there is one authentic yoga. To illustrate this point further, Jones and Wells (2001) use the analogy of a tree (see Figure 1 in Appendix A). The "Hatha Yoga Family Tree," provides a pictorial representation of hatha yoga's growth. Imagine the base of the tree rising from the Indus Valley's fertile soil before the 4000 BC Pre-Vedic Shamans' ritualistic practices

established a strong foundation for Hinduism and eventually yoga. As we climb the tree, we encounter sacred texts formalized practices, which later became associated with yoga. From a solid trunk, large branches emerged representing various yoga lineages. Over time, smaller off shoots and leaves sprouted forth, creating the verdant and varied canopy of modern yoga.

Supplementing this pictorial timeline, I provide a brief history of yoga to suggest that how yoga is defined and operationalized is dependent upon those who practice and teach it. Liberman (2008) argues that there has never been one lineage or one pure form of yoga, hence the varied foci in yoga on spirituality and religion. With that variation in mind, the following timeframe provides one historical path yoga has taken. To locate Christian-centered yoga within the larger discourse on yoga, spirituality, and religion, the following section focuses on a selective set of influential developments that relate to yoga's religious and spiritual history. A definition of religion and spirituality is included in the section entitled "Key Terms" in the first chapter.

Vedic period (ca. 4500-2500 BC)

The Indian subcontinent generated four of the major world religions: Jainism, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. The dominant faith in India is Hinduism. At times, the word *Hinduism* is used as a generic term applied to a culture or to all who live in India; but more accurately, it is used to refer to diverse "traditions that are historically and ideologically connected with the ancient Vedic culture" that dates back to 4000 BC (Feuerstein, 2008, p. 60).

Before 4000 BC, shamanistic practices eventually gave rise to the Vedic period (Jones & Wells, 2001). Records of the *Vedas*, a holy Brahmanism scripture, are associated with the Vedic Period in the Indus Valley, which is now present-day India. Some scholars (Feuerstein, 2008) date the text to 3000 BC, while others estimate the hymns developed more recently in 1500 BC. The scriptures are said to contain eternal truths about life on earth and after death (Lundskow, 2008). The Vedic Era provided the roots and culture for modern-day Hinduism (Feuerstein, 2008). During this time, rituals, such as meditation, practiced by Brahmins, holy priests, marked the first practices of yoga (Morely, 2008).

Pre-classical Period, Upanishadic Era, and Tantra (ca. 1500-100 BC)

Sacred writings such as the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad-Gita* are speculated to have been composed during the Pre-classical period and the Upanishadic Era (Feuerstein, 2008). The *Upanishads*, a poetic compilation questioning knowledge and existence, date back to this period. These poems are considered foundational scripture for Hinduism and were written to guide the reader in ritual and belief in order to obtain enlightenment (Lundskow, 2008). Around that time, the *Upanishads* were written by priests, called Brahmin priests, who increasingly formalized ritualistic practices that later become associated with yoga. *Gurus*, or teachers, handed down these practices, which encouraged various lineages that developed over time (Jones & Wells, 2001). The differentiated lineages are clear today as there is no central authority in Hinduism “rather [Hinduism] consists of numerous *gurus*, which of whom may or may not subscribe to an established school of thought” (Lundskow, 2008, p. 254) and the same can be said for yoga.

The *Bhagavad-Gita*, or Lord's Song, does not specifically mark modern yoga's beginning per se, but is often referred to as the oldest yogic text. Composed around 300 BC, this text refers to three different types of yoga that offer potential paths to enlightenment: karmayoga, selfless acts; bahktiyoga, devotion to a deity; and jnanayoga, pursuit of wisdom and knowledge (Feuerstein, 2008; Jones & Well, 2001). In relation to the Hindu faith, the *Bhagavad-Gita* "has enjoyed enormous popularity among Hindus for countless generations" (Feuerstein, 2008, p. 188). During this time, a philosophical movement called Tantra began to influence Buddhism and Hinduism. Tantra purported that the body was not evil and could be used as a means to gain enlightenment, a concept that later became hatha yoga's foundational tenant (Jones & Wells, 2001).

Classical Period and Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* (ca. 200 BC-200 AD)

The *Yoga Sutras*, 195 succinct verses on truth by philosopher and poet Patanjali, marks the beginning of yoga history's Classical Period. According to Morely (2008), "It was not until Patanjali that yoga received a formal written statutes as a discipline in its own right" (p. 147). The *Yoga Sutras*, sometimes referred to solely as the *Sutras*, codified the classic eight-limbed yogic philosophy that provided the foundation for yoga today. In Sanskrit, the eight limbs are *yama*, *niyama*, *asana*, *pranayama*, *pratyahra*, *dharana*, *dhyana*, and *samdhi*.

The *yamas*, translated as disciplines, is often referred to as a code of universal ethics. These moral obligations contain five principles: greedlessness, chastity (more liberally interpreted as moderation), nonstealing, truthfulness, and nonharming. The *niyamas* refer to self-restraining practices: purity or cleanliness; contentment; austerity or

self-denying practices such as fasting; study; and devotion to the Lord. Feuerstein (2008) also notes that lord does not refer to an Absolute creator as in the Jewish or Christian traditions. I group the *yamas* and *niyamas* together, separate from the other six limbs, in explaining the eight-limbed system because they refer to a set of recommended behaviors.

The third limb, *asana*, simply translated means “seat.” Patanjali was referring to sitting in a static position and stilling the body, allowing the practitioner to meditate. For the body to endure sitting for long periods, Classical yoga “takes as one of its primary goals the maintenance of physical fitness of the body, which is a preliminary requirement for eventual spiritual enlightenment” (Strauss, 2005, p. 2). However, the litany of physical postures today is a modern development (Feuerstein, 2008). *Pranayama* refers to breath control or the inner life force. *Pratyahara* refers to a withdrawal of the sense. Like a turtle retreating inside its shell, a practitioner purposefully closes himself/herself off to outside stimulation. Continuing this process, *dharana* or concentration begins by focusing one’s attention on one thing, perhaps a deity or even a part of the body. *Dhyana* or meditation is the point where this focus “fills the entire space of the consciousness,” which is to allow the yogin to enter a state of peace and calm (Feuerstein, 2008, p. 251). *Samadhi*, the final limb, is often interpreted as “dependent on the school of thought, perfect isolation or union with the Absolute” (Strauss, 2005, p. 2). This eight-limbed system comes from the *Yoga Sutras*.

AD Adaptations of Yoga (900 AD-present)

To briefly review, the Vedic Period was marked by ritualistic practices and meditation. By the Classical Period, those continuing the tradition had added layers to the practice that included formalized philosophical tenants, including a non-dualistic understanding of the body, and to a lesser extent outlined a few physical postures. Liberman (2008) argues that Hatha yoga and its emphasis on physical postures was a medieval occurrence with its roots dating back to the 10th to 12th centuries; and those that practiced these early forms of yoga had Sufi, Buddhist, Islamic, Tantric, and Jainism influences. This time period marked asana's expansion with yogis studying the body and adding poses to the *asana* repertoire. Practitioners were not only sitting still as Patanjali advised; they began to study the body in a way that allowed them to sit in meditation for long periods of time more easily. During the first part of the second millennium, monastic lineages developed, spread, and emphasized various limbs. Yoga and its derivative forms continued to morph and change through a dialectical process of competing philosophies. "These tensions within yoga [and] between traditions that were themselves amalgams of different traditions make it very difficult to locate a yoga that is definitively authentic" (p. 106). In the following centuries, yoga practitioners continued to adapt the practice to fit their religious, spiritual, and physical needs.

As India moved into the final half of the second millennium, yoga's transmission and adaptation was no longer an indigenous phenomenon. Social, economic, and political developments opened the doors for yoga to be carried west toward Britain and eventually America (DeMichelis, 2008). In the early 1700s, the Mughal Empire, India's ruling force,

collapsed in the face of socio-political upheavals and colonialism. From the mid-eighteenth century onward, colonial agendas and Western interests piqued in South Asia. Most of those involved were usually from Britain's cultural elite: diplomats, scholars, scientists, and commerce officers. Colonialism forced open an exchange between East and West, and yoga was part of that exchange. For example, Queen Victoria, eventually the Empress of India, visited with yogis (Feuerstein, 2008).

Foreigners (or Westerners) began to view Indian practices differently. Native cultural practices indigenous to India were no longer seen as areas of academic inquiry to be studied from a distance. Rather, these customs, including religious practices, were considered "possible forms of practice in places other than Asia" (DeMichelis, 2008, p. 20-21). People outside of the region began to practice Indian yoga and religions. For example, Thoreau (1968) wrote introspectively about his yoga practice: "I would fain practice the yoga faithfully... To some extent, and at rare intervals, even I am a yogi" (p. 175). Although it has been argued that Western imperialism grated Indian spiritual traditions, this did not occur submissively. Hindu insights, through the channel of yoga, influenced Europeans and Americans (Feuerstein, 2008; Jung 1978). In writing about imperialist agendas, Jung wrote "we [colonial agents] have never yet hit upon the thought that while we are overpowering the Orient from without, it may be fastening its hold on us from within" (p. 57).

The 1890s marked a climatic openness to South Asian religions and practices. For example, De Michelis (2008) cites the coming together of Western esoterics and leaders wanting to modernize religions from South Asia at the Parliament of World Religions.

Representatives from both religious movements met at the 1893 Chicago Parliament of Religions. The summit held in Chicago was an attempt at establishing an interfaith dialogue among religions from around the world. A high point of the Parliament was an address by a yogi named Swami Vivekananda. His speech was so well received that he was seen as a spiritual icon in not only the U.S., but also Europe and Asia. Three years later, still riding on his success at the Parliament of Religions, Vivekananda published the influential book *Raja Yoga*, which was decisive in modern yoga's formation. At the turn of the twentieth century, the transmission of ideas and philosophies continued between New Age religions and modern forms of Asian religions, planting the seeds for some schools and types of modern, hatha yoga. DeMichelis refers to some of these schools as postural forms of modern yoga, which became more established in the 1920s and exist today. These schools, or methods, of yoga focused on physical postures and promoted complicated theories and proscriptions for these postures (Sjoman, 1999; Singleton, 2007). Their quasi-religious tenants were "relatively unfocussed and usually polyvalent" and, thus, congruent with globalization and movements "toward secularization and acculturation" (DeMichelis, 2008, p. 22) and religion's privatization (DeMichelis, 2008; Klassen, 2005). Today, the same is true.

Religious Privatization and Christian-based Yoga

In my research, the first book to be published on yoga from a Christian perspective was by a French monk named Jean-Marie Dechanet (1960) entitled "Christian Yoga", originally printed in French as "La Voie de Silence". This does not mark the beginning of Christian yoga, but it does mark the first documented discussion, I

found, of the practice. This attempt to combine a Hindu practice and a Christian orientation may speak to the concept of religious privatization. Religions' privatization is the most germane topic (DeMichelis, 2008) to come from secularization theories (Berger, 1998; Inglehart & Norris, 2004; Luckmann, 1990). To define this further, the concept refers to when individuals take on religious power and authority themselves versus finding that authority in sociologically constructed structures (DeMichelis, 2008), such as churches. Luckmann (1990) explains that with religious privatization an individual chooses "certain religious themes from the available assortment and builds them into a somewhat precarious private system of 'ultimate' significance. Individual religiosity is no longer a replica or approximation of an 'official model'" (p. 134). It becomes a personalized system of faith.

Individual religiosity may illuminate how instructors teach CCY. Privatization of religion could explain how a teacher imparts Christian themes into a yoga class without needing to replicate a certain denomination's teaching or to be aligned with official Christian doctrine. Alternatively, instructors may align themselves with Christianity, but see no tension with Hinduism when they teach CCY. In addition, individual religiosity could illuminate why some CCY teachers detach yoga from any Hindu associations and infuse the practice with a Christian perspective. If instructors find religious authority within themselves, do not seek outside religious approval, and teach a form of yoga that emphasizes posture over spirituality, they may be able to insert their religious perspective into teaching yoga. At this point, such a claim is speculative; however, further research

into how CCY teachers both operationalize the practice and teach from a Christian perspective could shed light on this matter.

Yoga and Health

The following section provides a brief account of medical evidence supporting the yoga's healthful benefits (Khalsa, Shorter, Cope, Wyshak, & Sklar, 2009; Ravindran et al., 2009; Harvard Health Publications, 2009; Kuei-Min & Wei-Shyuan, 2008; Guarracino et al., 2006; Van Puymbroeck et al., 2007). Raub's (2002) research explains it is beneficial to practice the physical postures of yoga and associated breath work and states that

they cause a beneficial influence on the four major systems of the human body: for locomotion, through the musculoskeletal system; for oxygen delivery, through the cardiopulmonary system and for the nervous and endocrine control systems. Thus the body, mind and breath control forms a natural basis for the psycho-physiological effects of Hatha Yoga. (p. 798)

Several studies have focused on yoga as an intervention tool to prevent elderly falls and bone fractures (Kuei-Min & Wei-Shyuan, 2008). Exploration into yoga's influence on enhanced physical well-being, such as decreasing obesity, has also been well documented. For example, one study assessed the "effects of hatha and relaxation yoga on obesity, blood pressure, and quality of life" (Guarracino et al., 2006, p. 108). In that study, seventy adults, men and women that practiced yoga were surveyed. One group of participants had practiced for less than a year while the second group had been practicing for one to four years. Lower systolic blood pressure was reported in the 1- to 4-year yoga

group when compared to the group who had practiced yoga for less than a year ($P < .023$). In addition, researchers found that hatha yoga and associated relaxation techniques “had a statistically significant role in controlling weight, hypertension, and mood” (Guarracino et al., 2006, p. 108). Other studies have evaluated yoga as intervention for mood disorders (Khalsa, Shorter, Cope, Wyshak, & Sklar, 2009; Ravindran et al., 2009; Harvard Health Publication, 2009).

Clinicians looking for new ways to treat depression have looked eastward to bring yoga into their programs with some beneficial results (Khalsa et al., 2009; Ravindran et al., 2009; Harvard Health Publication, 2009). Researchers recommend using yoga as a depression intervention for both specific populations and larger groups. For example, Khalsa, Shorter, Cope, Wyshak, and Sklar (2009) found that an eight-week yoga intervention with professional musicians resulted in decreased depression and anxiety. Based on a comprehensive literature review, The Canadian Network for Mood and Anxiety Treatments stated that some empirical evidence supports that yoga can decrease mild to moderate depression (Ravindran et al., 2009).

To better understand how yoga has been used in mental health research, the following discussion explores a meta-analysis centering on depression (Uebelacker, Epstein-Lubow, Guadiano, Tremont, Battle, & Miller, 2010). The researchers reviewed literature to synthesize empirical research on yoga as an intervention for depression. This research project’s goal was “to review the evidence for the efficacy of hatha yoga for depression and possible mechanisms by which yoga may have an impact on depression, and to outline directions for the future” (Uebelacker et al., 2010, p.22). Uebelacker and

her research team found eight clinical trials in which yoga was used as a tool to combat depression. No clinical trials were uncovered testing individuals with mild depression, but three trials where researchers used yoga with people with heightened symptoms of depression and five trials which involved individuals with clinical depression, a more severe form, were pulled from the literature. After analyzing those eight trials, the authors found shortcomings in many of the studies, stating that “as a group [the trials] suffered from substantial methodological limitations” (Uebelacker et al., 2010, p. 30). As a result, the research team suggested meticulous consideration must be undertaken in research design when studying yoga for depression. For example, trials finding yoga helpful for depression have to take into account the possible effects of physical activity and exercise.

As noted, investigators have worked with an array of populations, from musicians to the general public, in order to explore yoga’s effects. Some populations and research may be more likely than others. One not so likely place to conduct physical activity research is at a church because the environment is usually is more geared to addressing the spiritual needs of its congregation. However, there is increasing evidence that churches are offering more programs promoting health and wellness initiatives. These programs may include youth basketball leagues, chair yoga, stress reduction courses, walking programs, behavior modification courses, nutrition classes, senior exercise classes, hiking groups, and aerobics classes. Often churches have health directors charged with ministering to and serving the congregation’s wellness. Barth, Wilcox, Laken, Bobb, and Saunders (2008) conducted a study exploring churches physical activity programs. Nineteen church health directors participated in retrospective evaluations of their

congregation's physical activity initiatives. Seventy-nine percent of the time, directors used bulletin boards to disseminate information about nutrition and physical activity. More direct interventions included walking programs, praise aerobics, and chair exercises. "Churches who had ...implemented the 8-Steps to Fitness program had significant increases in the percentage of church members meeting physical activity recommendations at the one year follow-up" (Barth et al., 2008, p. 311). This study was summarized due to the scholar's using churches as a health and wellness site to collect data. In addition, to examining churches as health and wellness sites, it is appropriate to explore why people participate in yoga and physical activity and also the intersection of religion and spirituality with health, wellness, and physical activity that may take place outside of churches.

Motivation for Physical Activity

Very little research has been done on why people may start practicing yoga. In order to understand possible motivating factors, I review several studies that have focused on why people get involved in other forms of physical activity such as sport and exercise. Since many in the West see yoga as a form of physical activity, versus solely as a meditative practice, I extend the findings of these studies to infer possible reasons as to why people may take up yoga. There is a wide range of reasons people may be motivated to participate in sport and physical activity (Brustad, 1988; Cooky, 2009; Ebbeck, Gibbons, & Loken-Dahle, 1995; Henry, Sanborn, Senne, & Nichols, 2011; Tischer, Hartmann-Tews, & Combrink, 2011). I focus on research that may reflect one or more similar demographics components as to those who participated in my study.

In a longitudinal, cross-sectional study focusing on sport participation amongst the elderly, defined as 45 or older, Tischer, Hartmann-Tews, & Combrink's (2011), made several arguments about the connections between sport participation, gender, age, and socio-economic status (SES). In terms of age, the researchers found that the growth of older people being involved in sport has been larger when compared to other age groups. There has been an increase in female participation rates when compared to males, which is relevant to this study since the majority of participants were women. There was an inverse relationship between age demographics and sport participation rates. The authors found there was

a general effect of social stratification on participation rates. This general effect is stronger with respect to elderly women than with respect to men, i.e., elderly women of lower social classes are the least physically active group in this age group and elderly women of higher social classes are the most active ones. (p. 89)

In addition there was a positive relationship between education and continuous physical activity over the life-course of the participant's life. Consequently the researchers suggested that economic capital was less important than cultural capital. As people age, health maintenance seemed to be the motivational factor influencing older adults in staying active.

Henry, Sanbron, Senne, & Nicholas (2011) focused on why female students exercise or engage in physical activity. The quantitative study utilized an on-line questionnaire asking about "why they did or did not engage in sports and physical activity, and on Female Athlete Triad" (p. 8). The participants reported that wanting to

look and feel good were the main reasons why they exercised or took part in physical activity, while constraints on leisure time and just not feeling motivated were reasons the collegiate females reported as to why they did not work out or were inactive.

In taking a more qualitative approach in his research design, Cooky (2009), relevant to this study, looked at why girls, involved in a recreational sports program in major Southwestern city, may be interested in sports and physical activity. His research design focused on Coakley's (2009) description of power and performance and pleasure and participation sports models. He suggested that the female participants in his study might be motivated to engage in physical activity for reasons that connect to Coakley's pleasure and participation sports model: working with opponents to compete, connecting with others, enjoyment, participation, and inclusivity. This study connects to mine because, for most practitioners, yoga is seen as a recreational physical activity and not a competitive sport. Therefore it may be argued that yogis might take up yoga because of reasons that are aligned with the pleasure and participation sports model Coakley describes.

Intersection of Physical Activity, Religion, and Spirituality

Understanding the relationship between physical activity and spirituality is important under the assumptions of my positionality as well as the social construction of my knowledge. I do not assume that I can bracket out what I judge as good. I discuss the importance of the spiritual-physical activity relationship based on my assumption that it is beneficial to deeply understand how an individual can have a spiritual experience through being active. Exploring this relationship aids in understanding a wellness model,

ultimately possibly leading to a healthier person. From a sport-performance perspective, spirituality adds another layer to an athlete's training regimen. Physical activity can lead to a person's spiritual education as well and how this is achieved is discussed in this section. In certain spaces, spirituality and religion overlap. Thus, from a social justice perspective, unpacking the backpack of religious privilege (McIntosh, 1998) is important for understanding this connection. In addition, scholars have called for further exploration of how spiritual, recreational, and sport experiences influence each other (Coakley, 2009; Klassen, 2005). There is a lack of research about these intersections and they influence spheres of everyday life for some people and thus their lived experiences. Considering these points contributes to peeling back the layers of human experience and understanding the social construction of individual knowledge, which ultimately synthesizes into popular consciousness. In this section, I bring together relevant literature concerning physical activity's intersection with religion and spirituality.

Philosophical Understanding

The relationship between physical activity and spirituality is significant and has important implications for the sport and recreation studies field. To begin this discussion, I briefly explore humanistic thoughts on the relationship between the mind and body. Bandy (1986) provides two interpretations of humanistic views of the mind-body concept: the materialistic approach to the mind-body problem privileges the body over the mind, whereas, the spiritual interpretation favors the mind over the body. Both surmise the mental and physical as twofold and "independent substances" (p. 25). According to Bandy, the humanistic approach offers the best solution to the mind body

chasm by preserving “the intrinsic character and identity of mind and body and reveals the harmonious, unified relation between them” (p. 25). Stemming from Descartes’ (2007) philosophies and furthered by Hegel (1977), the rationalistic humanistic explanation is based upon experience and objective knowledge. Bandy (1986) purports that this view has not progressed to the conscious and self-conscious levels of thought, reason or idea” (p. 27). That is, the rational humanistic view of the body and mind is limited, shortsighted, and needs to move beyond objective knowledge and be open to subjective experiences. In yoga, an objective view of the body would limit the practitioner to analyzing a posture for perfection and not allow the yogi to “just be” in the posture.

The other side of the mind-body, humanistic concept is the vitalistic perspective (Bandy, 1986). This idea came about at a time when subjective epistemologies, associated with phenomenology and existentialism, were being explored. Merleau-Ponty (1962), Heidegger (1962), Sartre (1985) and others developed the concepts of phenomenology and existentialism during the twentieth century. More specifically, the view explored the corporal as experienced “first prior to reflection” (Bandy, 1986, p. 27). In sport or physical activity, movement should be an expression of a person fully realizing himself or herself. The body is a doorway to that possibility and thus a potential spiritual experience. Yoga provides one path for this to be accomplished.

Historically, there has been an evolution of positivistic philosophy in science, as we can only truly study what we can test, according to this type of inquiry. These theories tie in together with Comte’s (1896) notion of social evolutionism and that science will be

the ultimate promoter of progress in reaching ultimate human potential. According to Sperry (1981), it is only when science allows for new interpretations and recognizes the inner consciousness and subjective experience that science itself will change (Harman, 1986). Contemporary views of the body are changing and it involves a movement toward integrating the body and mind (Mechikoff, 2010). This movement is part of a larger cultural development that is witness to a change in how and why science is used to understand the full human potential. Researchers (Barnett & Weber, 2009; Klassen, 2005; Ryan, 1986) in sport and physical activity are studying the subjective experience and mind-body integration. Some of these studies will be outlined in the following section, but first I explore a general model of wellness.

Wellness

One model of wellness comprises of six components: mental health, physical health, spiritual health, social health, intellectual health, and environmental influences (Hopson et al., 2009; Powers & Dodd, 2009). Each of these qualities affects one's wellness, defined as "an optimal soundness of body and mind" (Hopson et al., 2009, p. 2) in which a healthy state of "living [is] achieved by the practice of a healthy lifestyle which includes regular physical activity, proper nutrition, eliminating unhealthy behaviors, and maintaining good emotional and spiritual health" (Powers & Dodd, 2009, p. 3). Clinicians looking for new ways to treat mental and emotional challenges, such as depression and addiction, have looked to the East to bring yoga into their programs with favorable results supporting claims that the modality can be used as a positive intervention in treating certain grades of mood disorders (Barth et al., 2008; Harvard

Health Publications, 2009; Khalsa et al., 2009; Ravindran et al., 2009; Ross & Thomas, 2010). It is noted that the psychosomatic nature of yoga claims to support a mind-body-spirit balance (Barth et al., 2008; Guarracino et al., 2006; Kuei-Min & Wei-Shyuan, 2008; Van Puymbroeck et al., 2007).

Part of yoga's popularity is due to its medical benefits, increasing both physical and mental well-being, which connects back to the modality's known integration of mind, body, and spirit. It has a long history rooted in ancient, Eastern religions, but since its arrival on Western shores, the fitness industry has marketed it more as a preventative measure to many Western lifestyle ailments such as obesity (Barth et al., 2008, 2010; Yan, 2010) and hypertension (Cowen & Adams, 2005; Kim, 2005). Studies have also focused on yoga as an intervention tool to prevent the elderly from falls and bone fractures (Hakim, Kontron, Cour, Teel & Leininger, 2010; Kuei-Min & Wei-Shyuan, 2008). The medical literature supports yoga as a healthy option, as it offers varying degrees of benefits for a person's physical and mental health with low risk of negative side effects.

Sport-Spirituality Relationship

One of the leading sport psychologist Ken Ravizza (2002) has noted that spirituality is the keystone in his work with elite athletes. Research on spirituality's reconciliation "into the athlete-centered model; the integration of spirituality and religious observances into mental skills training (MST); the relationship between spirituality and positive psychological states such as flow; and peak experiences; and the role of spirituality in counseling" supports the importance of the sport-spirituality

relationship (Watson & Nesti, 2005, p. 228). Specific to yoga, research has acknowledged the parallels between yoga and athletes ability to concentrate and be fully present in their performance, which can enhance athletic achievement and performance (Ravizza, 2002).

There have been studies investigating the intersection of sport and spirituality with particular attention paid to athletic performance (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Dillon and Tait, 2000). The expression “being in the zone” or “flow” is often referred to as a point when an athlete is performing at his or her best or when the athlete can deliver exactly what is required in order to succeed. Dillon and Tait (2000) examined if there was a relationship between spirituality and being in the zone and the positive qualities associated with flow. The researchers defined spiritual as an experience of being “in the presence of a power, a force, and energy, or a God close to you” (p. 93). They utilized the Spirituality in Sports Test and the Zone Test to study this phenomenon and asked participants to indicate if they had a spiritual experience in various team sport situations. Sixty-two male and female student-athletes completed a questionnaire. The team sports represented were basketball, volleyball, hockey, and soccer. One finding from the study confirmed that the relationship between spirituality and being in a state of flow was statistically significant ($p < .001$) (Dillon & Tait, 2000). Csikszentmihalyi (1975) noted that,

In the flow state, action follows upon action according to an internal logic that seems to need no conscious intervention by the actor. He experiences it as a unified flowing from one moment to the next, in which he is in control of his

actions, and in which there is little distinction between self and environment, between stimulus and response, or between past, present, and future. (p. 36)

Keeping this correlation in mind and connecting this finding to the similarities between yoga and being in the zone (Ravizza, 2002), it could be argued that yoga may be used to enhance both an athlete's spirituality and athletic performance.

Religious Privilege

The concept of religious privilege is relevant to this study, because of post-critical influences on this research design. Protestant Christian beliefs have promoted the view that sport participation can be used as a form of religious witnessing (Coakley, 2009; Ladd & Mathisen, 1999). Tim Tebow and Tony Dungy are contemporary exemplars of this view. During his stellar football career at University of Florida, Tim Tebow regularly had Biblical verses written in his eye black (Dungy & Whitaker, 2007; Epstein, 2011). Tony Dungy worked with Fellowship of Christian Athletes. Both men actively connect their evangelical Christian faith with sport (Epstein, 2011). Historically, Christians and Christian organizations, such as the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), have used and continue to use physical activity to promote spirituality, to enlist new members, and to encourage evangelical orientations (Putney, 2001; YMCA, 2011). Associated sporting programs promote religious views and use sport and physical activity as a way of outreach. There are umbrella organizations such as Sports Outreach America, Athletes in Action, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and Upward Bound, as well as sport-specific groups such as Cowboys for Christ and the Tennis Ministry (Coakley, 2009; Ladd &

Mathisen, 1999). These organizations often operate in a privileged capacity, as they are part of the dominant religions in the West.

Similar to McIntosh's (1998) thoughts on White privilege, where Whites are socialized to not think about their privileged status, Schlosser (2003) suggests that Christians are also socialized to not think about religious privilege. This religious privilege occurs when a culture's prevailing religious views go unquestioned and unvetted as the standard to which all other belief systems are measured against. Within this system, other belief systems are marginalized (Watt, 2009). For example, within U.S. culture someone on television or in print makes reference to God, they most often are referring to a Christian perspective on God (Goodman & Seifert, 2010). Christian and religious privilege may allow Christ-centered yoga teachers the opportunity to teach from this orientation with little tension or without significant resistance.

(Some) Religious and Spiritual Perspectives in Sport and Physical Activity

Not only have Christians (Klassen, 2005) and Jews (Rothenberg, 2006) appropriated yoga, but Muslims (Wallet & Fasting, 2003), Mormons (Nichols, 2005), and even the elderly (Guinn & Vincent, 2002) and youth (Barnett & Weber, 2009) have faith-based physical activities. In the following discussion, I highlight a variety of studies that examine the intersection of religion, spirituality, physical activity, and when possible yoga, and begin by focusing on the Abrahamic traditions: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. The current study investigates these intersections; therefore, it is important to contextualize my work within the larger body of knowledge that exists on religion, spirituality, physical activity, and yoga.

In reference to Mormonism, Nichols (2005) studied 492 middle-aged, Mormon women to explore the connections between spiritual experiences and their exercise habits. The 66 women were 45-65 years of age and randomly selected from various congregations throughout Utah. Each participant completed the Spiritual and Physical Health Questionnaire (SPHQ). The instrument was used to collect demographic data and information about the participants' spiritual experiences, religious practices, exercise behaviors, and nutritional in-take. One finding suggested that spiritual well-being had a positive relationship to the frequency and amount of time the women participated in physical activities. In other words, women that scored high on spiritual components of the questionnaire were more likely to be physically active and engage in light to moderate exercise. The researcher concluded her paper by calling upon other researchers to explore spiritual well-being with respects to exercise habits, which I explore in my study.

Regarding Christianity and yoga, Thomas Ryan's work bridging yoga and Christianity is relevant (1986, 1995, 2004). Father Ryan is a Paulist priest in the Roman Catholic Church and has worked extensively to present yoga to Christians in an ecumenical format. He positions Christianity as limited in its openness to intuitive thought, which he associates with yoga, because of Christianity's roots in Greco-Roman philosophies, focusing on rational logic. Christians who are open to yoga could further their relationship with God through yoga and meditation, he suggests. Based on Christian, biblical teachings, which can be referred to as applied theology, Ryan explains how, through yoga, the body can be used as a form of prayer. For example in *Prayer of Heart & Body: Meditation and Yoga as Christian Spiritual Practice*, Ryan (1995)

illustrates a sun salutation, which is a foundational series in yoga of 12 postures done in succession, and pairs the movements with the words of the “Our Father,” a foundational Christian prayer.

Salient to my work, Klassen (2005) employs the concept of ritual appropriation to explore how liberal Christians use Asian religious rituals, including yoga, for Christian healing purposes. In order to avoid being repetitive, I discuss this study and its associated theoretical framework in the Theory section of this chapter. The appropriation of yoga is not limited to Christian use. Rothenberg (2006) explores three different forms of Jewish yoga “each... an evolving system of mental, spiritual, and physical experiences based both on yogic practices and on a variety of Jewish teachings as interpreted by” the teacher (Rothenberg, 2006, p. 57). Scholars have also studied Islamic influence on physical activity (Wallet & Fasting, 2003).

In the Koran, Mohammed tells parents that it is good to teach their children archery and horseback riding (2nd Caliphate). Often Muslims point to these writings as proof that exercise and physical activity are part of practicing their faith. Research on most studies on Islam and sport can be divided into two categories, although not mutually exclusive: studies exploring the positive attitudes toward female participation in sport and those exploring the low participation rates amongst these women themselves. Wallet and Fasting (2003), for example, expanded on Islamic-sport research and asked two main research questions in this study: “What kind of views do Egyptian women have on the relationship between Islam and physical activity/sport?” and second, “What consequences do different interpretations of Islam have for Egyptian women’s

involvement in physical activity and sport?” (p. 45). Qualitative interviews were conducted with 27 Egyptian women, ages 18-26, who were enrolled at a university. The researchers interviewed women who varied in their interpretation of Islamic law from secular to fundamental. Wallet and Fasting found that the participants’ different interpretations of Islam supported women in sport. Despite varying adherences to Sharia law, many thought it was their religious duty to participate in physical activity in order to comply with the Koran, while others supported women’s participation in sport for secular reasons. Studies that focus on the intersection of religion or spirituality and physical activity are not limited to specific denominations and religions. Other studies take a more general approach to studying spirituality and physical activity.

In an auto-ethnographic approach, Garrett (2001) explored three Eastern, spiritual practices as a means for self-transformation, a spiritual quality identified by Smith (2007). Garrett weaved her own experience with literature to contextualize her experiences and claimed that yoga “may be adopted as magical ways of achieving personal aims, but they also have the potential to take practitioners beyond the ego towards the sacred understanding or otherness” (p. 329). Garrett’s discussion permits a broader understanding of why people may be attracted to yoga for sacred benefits. It has been argued in popular discourse that yogic philosophy must be stripped away from its Hindu/Buddhist roots and separated from the physical practice in order for Westerners to partake in the discipline (Desikachar, 1995). However, Garrett’s experiences provide another perspective, that is, people can take up yoga, even from a secular orientation, for sacred purpose. People have the agency to mold the practice and make meaning out of it

for themselves. Her discussion of embodied practices contributes to post-structural literature exploring issues of realities, agency, and discursive practices in physical activity.

Physical activity is not limited exclusively to traditional forms of exercise like running or lifting weights and is not just exercise, but includes cultural dance, tai chi, and extreme sports, such as snowboarding. I argue that yoga is an example of a physical activity that may be considered on the margins of physical activity-spirituality research. Like yoga, scholars have also recognized cultural dance as another form of movement that serves a spiritual function (Jain & Brown, 2001). Additionally, the connection between spirituality and sport is evident in the wide spectrum of physical activity, from Tai Chi to extreme sports. Kochetkova (2007) purported that “many of the extreme sports characteristics were conducive of spiritual experiences... In terms of extreme sports, spirituality was considered as the spirituality of seeking” (p. 303). Themes of extreme sport athletes experiencing a connection to a higher power, personal growth, and an enhanced state of being were also identified.

There is evidence that people who participate in physical activity may experience spiritual fulfillment (McDonald, Guldin, & Westhergill, 1998; Marsh, 2008; Unruh, Smith, & Scammell, 2000). Empirical research has also suggested that physical activity can lead to increased spirituality. McDonald, Guldin, and Westhergill (1988) found that through outdoor adventure-activities and challenges, participants experience spiritual growth defined as an “increasing awareness of community or of the interrelationships

among increasingly larger systems” (p. 210). I would argue that just in creating that awareness, physical activity increases spirituality.

Heintzman (2010) conducted an extensive review of literature to analyze the complex relationship between spirituality and nature-based recreation, which can include activities from gardening to backcountry skiing (Marsh, 2008). Based on empirical evidence, Heintzman determined that recreation that takes place in nature may foster spiritual well-being, be a catalyst for “spiritual leisure experiences...and a way for New Paradigm Christians to connect with God and experience God’s creation” (p. 72).

Various studies have found that a person can have a transcendent experience depending on what they are doing. For example, Fredrickson and Anderson (1999) found that some women connected to their spirituality because canoeing and hiking activities tested them. Marsh (2008) interviewed 63 backcountry snowboarders, cross-country skiers, and skiers in the Teton Pass to explore the spiritual side of physical activity in the backcountry of Wyoming. Some participants felt that they experience spiritual development, specifically, 63% of participants identified a transcendental experience. Almost half of the winter trekkers experienced an increased spiritual awareness and over one-fourth experienced enhanced spiritual fulfillment (Marsh, 2008).

Scholars have also focused their research on specific populations, like the elderly and youth. Guinn and Vincent (2002) suggest that physical activity programs for the elderly should include exercise and include aspects of spiritual wellness. There are many faith-based recreational activities for youth as well. Barnett and Weber (2009) set out to determine perceived beneficial outcomes, if any, of faith-based recreational programs

involving children. Nearly six hundred K-5 parents from eight Midwestern cities completed questionnaires and 74 were interviewed and “the findings revealed the unique nature of faith-based recreational activities in promoting children's religious and spiritual development” (p. 147). Parry (2009) interviewed 11 breast cancer survivors who participated in dragon boat racing and found that the event fostered spiritual outcomes for the women. The themes from the interviews “help explain the roles of leisure in the development and maintenance of spiritual well-being in the face of stressful life events” (p. 317).

I believe that if recreation and sporting practices can enrich a person’s physical and spiritual wellness, that it is a positive and advantageous outcome. Part of this socially constructed view comes from my privileged economic and leisure backgrounds where I have had the opportunity to explore spiritual practices and take part in sport and physical activity. The importance of the spiritual-physical activity relationship is based upon my assumption that it is beneficial to have a deep appreciation of how an individual can have a spiritual experience through being active. Further exploration of this connection may lead one to experience enhanced well-being and wellness.

Based on the synthesis of research above, I argue that there is a strong connection between physical activity and spirituality. In many cases, physical activity can lead to increased spiritual development and fulfillment. Concerning yoga, I have also outlined the practice’s connection to religion and spirituality. In order to position the present study within the field of sport sociology and socio-cultural studies next I discuss the theoretical context of the investigation into exploring Christian-centered yoga and specifically how

teachers who ascribe to this method create meaning of their own yoga experiences and operationalize it in their classes.

Theoretical Framework

Sport sociologist Jay Coakley has noted the need to research the relationships “among various religious beliefs around the world, ideas of the body and participation in physical activities and sports” (2009, p. 543). This is important because in an age of globalization understanding ideas from other cultures influences people’s lives. Western culture does not live in a vacuum. Value systems and religious beliefs from other cultures penetrate Western ideologies. How other religions view the body and view the purpose for which physical activity is used may impact how Westerns view their own body and how they define the meaning of sports and physical activity. Identifying how Western, Judeo-Christian values may influence yoga teachers could fill the dearth in the literature. In order to construct an interdisciplinary theoretical framework, I draw from Bourdieu in sociology and ritual appropriation in anthropology. Central to my proposed study is how CCY yoga teachers re-present their dispositions and ideologies through yoga.

Introduction to Bourdieu

Bourdieu’s (1977, 1984, 1986, 1988 1993a; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) sociological research on power and culture has enjoyed international influence (Wacquant, 1992) particularly in sport sociology (Booth & Loy, 2000) amongst other fields. This research was far-reaching and drew from multiple disciplines, such as art, literature, anthropology, tourism, sociology, and education (Calhoun, 2007). Some consider him one of the most influential social theorists today (Calhoun, 2007; Lemert,

1993). His work attempted to transcend formative debates such as the structure-agency dichotomy (Booth & Loy, 2000).

One of Bourdieu's (1988b) greatest efforts was to move beyond what he saw as artificial dichotomies in sociology. At one end of the spectrum, objectivists in sociology explain that external forces determine individual action. An individual's course of action is controlled by cultural norms and rules outside of that person. On the other end of the spectrum are subjective sociologists that view the social world and reality as entirely created by the agent (Calhoun, 2007). Critiquing the subjectivist view, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) wrote,

If it is good to recall, against certain mechanistic visions of action, that social agents construct social reality, individually and also collectively, we must be careful not to forget, as the interactionists and ethnomethodologists often do, that they have not constructed the categories they put to work in this work of construction. (p. 10)

How we act in the world is not totally of our own fruition, rather our social reality is constructed through individual actions that are shaped by our experiences and our already and always existing and unfolding culture, as culture is always changing because of these individual actions.

Regarding class and lifestyles, Tomlinson (2004) writes that Bourdieu's pivotal work, *Distinction* (1984), employs a methodology and develops a model based on the "relationship between the universe of economic and social conditions and the universe of lifestyle" (p. 162). Social class is pivotal and central to Bourdieu's writings (Tomlinson,

2004). Bourdieu (1988b) theorized that it is not just access to economic assets that allows groups to gain and maintain power, rather it is access to culture and social resources, including economic that allows individuals to reproduce their tastes and ideologies in society. He recognized sport and recreational practices as a specific sphere of society where agents recreate their ideologies (1978, 1988a, 1993b, 1998).

Bourdieu (1988a) described sport as a microcosm of society and suggested that sports illustrate a connection to the recursive production of sociological differentiation. That is, sport is a place where classes can reproduce their dominant ideologies. More specifically, Bourdieu used concepts of field, habitus, and capital to explain the social world. Scholars and other (sport) sociologists have employed these concepts in order to understand better sporting practices (Bailey & Pickard, 2010; Bourdieu, 1984, 1988a; Ceron-Anaya, 2010; DeFrance, 1995; Fitzgerald & Kirk, 2009; Sirna, Tinning, & Rossi, 2010; Skille, 2005; Stempel, 2005; Warde, 2006). Scholars have maintained that Bourdieu's concepts should be employed and are relevant in the study of sport and physical activity (Booth & Loy 2000; Calhoun 2007; DeFrance, 1995). In addition and relevant to my proposed study, Bourdieu has influenced the discourse on spirituality and religion (Baker & Miles-Watson, 2008; Clarke, 2009; Rey, 2005; Swartz, 1997; Urban, 2005; Winchester, 2008; Wood & Bunn 2009). The following sections include a discussion about Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital, field, and how they relate to each other.

Habitus. In order to understand our social world, Bourdieu (1977, 1984) explained that in large part, our actions and behaviors are learned through our habitus,

which “consists of a set of historical relations ‘deposited’ within individual bodies” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 16) and creates a “system of durable, transposable dispositions” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72). Individuals and groups work within a habitus that already exists, is already there and historically positioned. Although a habitus can have its own history, it is not static; a habitus can change (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Calhoun (2007) describes habitus as the “embodied sensibility that makes possible structured improvisation” (p. 32). A habitus can be learned, internalized, and outwardly practiced and it refers to the strategic moves agents take in opposition to another agent or group. These movements can be objectively implicit or unconsciously imposed (Bourdieu, 1977). Each socio-economic group and agent has a specific habitus where agents use these strategic movements to reproduce its unique dispositions and tastes (Bourdieu, 1984). These strategic moves help to differentiate the agent and their class from other groups. Agents often use and exchange different forms of capital in order to make these strategic moves.

Capital. Bourdieu theorized that three main forms of capital exist: economic, social, and cultural. He uses these forms of capital to explain the social world. The way in which the various forms of capital are allocated correspond to the construction of society, “the set of constraints, inscribed in the very reality of that world, which govern its functioning in a durable way, determining the chances of success for practices” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 242). In the sections that follow, I briefly highlight the different forms of capital, but focus on cultural capital, as it is this form of capital that pertains most centrally to the present study.

Economic capital refers to money, assets, income, or in some cases, land (Bourdieu, 1986). For example, a yoga teacher would accumulate economic capital by being paid for teaching a yoga class. According to Bourdieu (1984), a person's socio-economic position in society is in part determined by their economic capital. All forms of capital are derived from economic capital and in order to convert it into cultural and social capital, it requires a "specific labor, i.e., an apparently gratuitous expenditure of time, attention, care, [and] concern" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 253). For example, economic capital can be exchanged for yoga teacher training which is a form of cultural capital. While attending the yoga teacher training, a person can create social capital by forming relationships and connections with others in the class. Economic capital can be used or exchange for other forms of capital social or cultural capital, which will be explained briefly below.

Social capital is the second form. In the simplest terms, social capital refers to one's social network, or an individual's social relationships, formal or informal, with other people, groups, or organizations (Bourdieu, 1984). It is the accumulation of resources derived from a network that is recognized by its members. For example, when I went through my yoga teacher training, I accumulated social capital by building a network of other teachers and yoga studio owners. These people helped me to find yoga teaching opportunities. This form of capital can be exchanged for economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

Bourdieu (1984) referenced Weber's term "stylization of life" referring to a methodical process that governs different cultural customs which one is born into and

learns, which asserts “one’s power to legitimate his or her position over another’s taste” (p. 54). Cultural capital is the disposition and representation of oneself in comparison to other styles, dispositions, and tastes and refers to widest range of social practices from home décor to sport participation, from musical to marital selection, from spiritual attitudes to educational qualifications. In addition, cultural capital also refers to how an individual uses these outward representations to leverage their social position in society (Bourdieu, 1986). A university degree or a yoga teaching certification is an example of this form of capital, which can be traded for economic capital. Bourdieu identifies three types of cultural capital: objectified, institutionalized, and embodied being the most relevant of the three to the current study.

Pertinent to my investigation, embodied capital, also called physical capital, has been categorized by some as a very influential subsection of cultural capital (Shilling, 1992; Swanson, 2003). This form of capital refers to the ideas about the mind and body (Bourdieu, 1986) and the “commodification of the body” where an individual’s social identity and value is outwardly expressed through his or her appearance (Shilling, 2003, p. 14). Appearance could refer to a person’s weight, height, how one sits, or the amount of personal space one takes up in proximity to others. Physical capital also takes an investment on the part of the agent. Just as a bodybuilder works on his or her physique (Bourdieu, 1986) a yogini takes time and energy to perfect and practice yoga poses. Someone else cannot do it. Physical capital that is performed, such as a yoga competition, could be exchanged for economic capital. People may pay to watch people perform poses. By developing physical capital along side other agents one could also accumulate

social capital. People practicing yoga in a studio may expand their social network and thus social capital with other people who practice at that studio.

The concept of physical capital is beneficial to my study in that it helps me analyze Christian based yoga within the larger context of the yoga community.

According to Shilling (1993),

The production of physical capital refers to the development of bodies in ways that are recognized as possessing value in social fields, while the conversion of physical capital refers to the translation of bodily participation in work, leisure, and other fields into different forms of capital. Physical capital is most usually converted into economic capital (money, goods and services), cultural capital (for example, education) and social capital (social networks which enable reciprocal calls to be made on the goods and services of its members). (pp. 111-112)

Regarding this particular study, dependent on participant narratives, putting their stories under the lens of physical capital may illuminate how instructors convert their bodies, thus physical capital, into cultural and/or economic capital gains. The latter may be explicitly understood. However, how physical capital is valued in cultural capital terms may not be as straight forward.

I offer a brief example of how this concept applies to CCY based on a pilot study I conducted of two CCY teachers using interviews, participant observations, and document analysis (Odenheimer, 2010). One participant, Allison (pseudonym), exemplified how physical capital can be embodied and exchanged. In her yoga classes for

children, she develops a structure that centered the class on movement with connections to biblical stories and values. In her interview, she explained,

In December, we did tree³ in the beginning like the Christmas tree and then at the end, we did happy baby pose⁴ for Jesus Christ the true reason for Christmas...and we pray at the end. (Interview, 2010)

She embodies actual ideas by molding her body into shapes that have an ideological basis and has value within the social, CCY community. This value is marketed and monetized by the exchange of this physical capital for economic capital when parents pay for their child to attend Allison's yoga class. The physical or embodied capital is exchanged for cultural capital in the form of education as Allison teaches her young students.

Pertaining to the current study, the embodied rituals that a CCY teacher manifests or practices may promote the dominant discourse surrounding Christianity in leisure and sport, but may be at odds with dominant narratives within the mainstream yoga community. If Christianity is considered the dominant religion in Western culture, teaching yoga from a Christian perspective may reproduce the status quo. Synthesizing a Christian orientation with yoga may allow instructors to reconcile debates and tensions surrounding who should practice yoga. However, it is not so simple. This position is complicated by the fact that people in the mainstream yoga community may see yoga as historically tied to Hinduism; therefore, the explicit Christian viewpoint may not be

³ Posture requires balancing on one foot with the opposite foot resting on the supporting leg.

⁴ Posture requires lying on back, knees are bent placed along the rib cage with feet facing toward ceiling.

welcomed. In this study, I investigated how physical capital is embodied and relates to the Christian perspective in yoga. To carry this idea forward, in this example Bourdieu would refer to yoga as a field.

Field. The habitus and exchanges of capital take place in the field. This concept refers to a group or collection of social relationships steeped in “certain forms of power” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 16). The field refers to the network of potential agents, people, institutions, organizations, and those who have a stake in defining the boundaries of a social practice (Bourdieu, 1993a). In writing about the concept of field Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) described three points:

First, one must analyze the position of the field vis-à-vis the field of power ...

Second, one must map out the objective structure of the relations between the positions occupied by the agents or institutions who compete for the legitimate form of specific authority of which this field is the site. Third, one must analyze the habitus of agents, the different systems of dispositions they have acquired by internalizing a determinate type of social and economic condition, and which find in a definite trajectory within the field under consideration a more or less favorable opportunity to become actualized. (p. 104-105)

There is not one field in a social world, there are many, and power is an influential force in each one. Agents in a field can exert force in a field in order to change its dynamic. According to Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992), “One is capable of producing effects in [the field] (if only to elicit reactions of exclusions on the part of those who occupy its dominant positions” (p. 99); therefore, a field can change; it is not static

because definitions and powers are often competing within a field.

Stakeholders within a field have an interest in maintaining its boundaries and have an interest in how the field develops and is defined (Bourdieu, 1988a). For example, agents within the field of yoga bring different meanings to the practice. Some use yoga for exercise and some of spiritual enhancement and yet others for both. Stakeholders within the yoga community have an interest in how the field is defined and agents in the dominant class use their power to prescribe their meaning onto the practice thereby controlling the field of yoga. For instance, some practitioners believe that the practice is tied to Hinduism (Hindu American Foundation, 2011) and that may influence who will take a yoga class. Those that are in positions of power to define any field, sport or otherwise, have an interest in the “preservation of the distribution of capital and toward the subversion of this distribution” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 109) and the distribution, as mentioned before, often is used to reproduce an agent’s habitus; therefore linking habitus and field.

Ritual Appropriation

Within the concept of field, each stakeholder has interests linked to maintaining, controlling, and defining the field. Tension can mount when a new stakeholder enters the field (Sisjord, 2009). There are several agents influencing the field of yoga that were pertinent to the study: mainstream yoga teachers, CCY instructors, and those who believe yoga is antithetical to Christianity. As mentioned before, some theologians and religious leaders have advised their followers to be cautious when undertaking ritualistic practices rooted in other faiths (Ratzinger, 1989). Others Christians believe devout followers

should not practice yoga (Mohler, 2010; Willis, 2011). However, some yoga teachers struggle against this position and may create their version of yoga that they believe is compatible with Christianity (Odenheimer, 2010). In order to understand how CCY instructors navigate these waters, ritual appropriation (RA) theory could also offer further insight into how CCY instructors integrate their spiritual, religious, and fitness beliefs through teaching yoga.

In an attempt to construct an interdisciplinary theoretical framework, I draw upon the concept of ritual, from the field of anthropology and sociology (Flanagan, 1992). Within ritual studies, there is no one accepted definition of ritual and for some scholars there are competing definitions of ritual. Some scholars associate ritual with sacred practices and separate from the profane or material world. Rook (1985) has argued that rituals encompass a myriad of practices; therefore, it would be undesirable to have only one definition.

However, for the purposes of this study and to provide boundaries for certain social practices, ritual is defined as the fusion of action and thought whereby ritual becomes the actual means by which “thought and action are integrated” in a structured and patterned way (Bell, 1992, p. 22). In order to expand this definition further ritual “represent[s] a unique means of formalizing significant cultural transactions” (Flanagan, 1992, p. 744). Goulding and Shankar (2011) explain that there are different types of rituals, for example, social exchanges in how people greet each other, performance based ritual connected to sacred or religious event, and rites of passage. Often these rites and

formalized transactions are a space for synthesizing competing socio-cultural influences (Bell, 1992; Flanagan, 1992), which may be the case for CCY teachers.

Many academic fields, such as anthropology, sociology, history, and philosophy, have deemed ritual important in analyzing cultural practices. Researchers employing this theory explore how agents take up symbols, actions, and rituals from one cultural or religious practice for their own purpose (Bell, 1992; Hill, 1995; Johnson, 1995; Klassen, 2005; Tavárez, 2006; Tinson & Nutall, 2010). At times, it is the case that privileged agents legitimate these rituals for their own means (Klassen, 2005; Johnson, 1995; Tavárez, 2006). Through the lens of RA, I conducted an exploration of how teachers could operationalize Christ centered yoga.

In addition to the definitions provided above, ritual could be described as a prescribed ceremony. The ceremony can be codified or an unwritten custom. Symbols and actions are practiced both in public and private spheres of life. Rituals can be rites of passage in secular life like partaking in a high school graduation ceremony and can involve pomp and circumstance. Ceremonial action can be a private, religious, or spiritual gesture—like making the sign of the cross upon entering a church, as is customary with some practicing Catholics. The process associated with rituals often goes unquestioned. In ritual and through ritual, people intertwine behaviors with signs, observances, and reproductions of control (Flanagan, 1992).

Klassen's (2005) work on ritual appropriation is particularly relevant to my intended study of Christ-centered yoga teachers. In summary, through observations and interviews, she explored the concept of ritual appropriation and proximity amongst three

North American Anglicans and their co-opting of Asian religions and healing from a Christian orientation. She argued “that these liberal Christians use ‘ritual proximity’ to bring together symbols, acts and memories from various times and cultures, thus constructing new lineages of religious inheritance within webs of Christian ritual” (Klassen, 2005, p. 377). Ritual appropriation theory may illuminate if new lineages of yoga are being created through Christian-based yoga. It could be the case that people practicing the dominant religion within a culture can assimilate other rituals into their own practice with little resistance from other faiths. Scholsser (2003) suggests that those practicing a dominant religion may have “little fear about ignoring the perspectives and powers of people of other religions” (p. 48). If individuals choose to practice yoga from a Christian perspective, they may have the privilege to do so coming from the mainline faith.

Christians in North America borrow non-Christian practices for their own religious and spiritual use and legitimate this use by embedding other, non-Christian practices “within webs of Christian ritual” (p. 378). For example, Klassen (2005) explained that one participant in her study taught yoga in a church’s sanctuary thereby mixing a “Hindu practice in Christian space” (p. 384). People’s syncretism and ability to navigate the differences between Christianity and other religions is not done subconsciously, “nor is it entirely hegemonic... Christians’ syncretism, expressed not in texts but through bodily gestures and oral narratives of lineage, places this cultural and religious exchange in the messiness and luminosity of fallible human lives” (pp. 387-388). Some Christians use ritual to reconcile different ideas about God and practicing

their religion. Ritual often involves the integration and synthesis of often competing ideas. This work provides a lens for exploring how yoga teachers facilitate “Christianized” yoga and how they may “bring together symbols, acts and memories from various times and cultures...[and] construct new lineages of religious inheritance within webs of Christian ritual” (p. 377).

Christians have made use of non-Christian rituals and propagated them for their own means (Klassen, 2005). I provide a brief example of how ritual appropriation may be used to understand how CCY is operationalized in a yoga class based on my pilot study mentioned previously. To orient this example, I offer excerpts from the data from an article that Allison wrote and then the theory of ritual appropriation is applied to those passages. Allison’s mission was to help Christians and “non-Christians realize that Christ is the peace that they seek through their yoga practice.” She wrote an article, posted on her website in response to the question of how yoga and Christianity can be combined. Based on this knowledge, she teaches CCY.

Allison’s explanation of Christian yoga is based on the Bible and Patanjali’s’ eight-part system. She refers below to *asana*, physical postures, and *pranayama*, breath work.

Two of these limbs, specifically the poses and the breathing, are brought to our Christian yoga class. These are the aspects that you hear and read about being so medically and physically beneficial, having the potential for stress reduction, better sleep, disease prevention, weight loss, and many more. You will see that

these portions of yoga brought to our Christian yoga classes do **not** in any way compromise your Judeo-Christian beliefs. (Allison)

Allison ensures her potential students that as long as God, recognized as the Christian God, is the focus of the yoga practice a Christian can benefit from the ancient discipline.

Asana, in traditional yoga settings, focuses on the student working on postures or poses. This Christian centered yoga teacher specifically links the body, breath work, and its physiology directly to God's creation and purpose. Accordingly, she writes,

The apostle Paul says, "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" (1Corinthians 3:16, NIV). These yoga postures build overall muscle, stability, and flexibility, facilitating our bodies to function the way the Lord intended. By becoming more fit and eating healthier, we are hindering many temptations from gluttonous addictions and creating a cleaner temple for the Holy Spirit...God made our bodies to use oxygen...[t]his also has a calming effect, which is used in the psychiatric field to help with emotional disorders, such as anger management. (Written document, 2010)

In order to connect these examples to ritual appropriation we return to Bell's (1992) definition of ritual. Part one is the combining of action and idea, the *asana* is the action and the biblical verse is the thought, which becomes fused together and manifested in the ritual of the yoga practice. To further Bell's definition, part two is based on structure and pattern, Allison systematically teaches her classes in this way, connecting movement to Christian theology, basing physical movement on the New Testament.

Flanagan's (1992) definition of ritual is also satisfied in this example. Teaching CCY becomes a cultural exchange or transaction, whereby a synthesis emerges from two socio-cultural influences, that being Christian and yogic philosophies. Just as other research indicates agents take up rituals from one culture for their own purposes (Bell, 1992; Hill, 1995; Johnson, 1995; Klassen, 2005; Tavárez, 2006; Tinson & Nutall, 2010), Allison, a participant in both the pilot and current study, uses the ritual of yoga for her own purposes of helping Christians and "non-Christians realize that Christ is the peace that they seek through their yoga practice" (words of participant).

The theoretical framework guiding this study incorporates analyzing the data from a sociological perspective while employing ritual appropriation theory. Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, and capital also inform how the data are analyzed.

Chapter Summary

Pre-vedic shamanism were the seedlings planted in the Indus Valley, which eventually took root and provided fertile ground for the Vedic Era where holy priests practiced rituals, such as meditation, that later become connected with yoga. Sacred scriptures, associated with yoga and Hindu religion and culture, such as the *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad-Gita* were passed down from sage to pupil establishing a tradition of knowledge diffusion. Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* mark the Classical Era of yoga, where the poet formalized the practice of yoga by outline the eight elements needed to attain enlightenment.

Later yogis emphasized and thus expanded the postural exercises of Patanjali's eight-limbed system during the Middle Ages. Later Imperialism permitted the British elite to insert themselves into Indian traditions, one of them being yoga. These new practitioners took back with them some of yoga's philosophies. The transmission and transmutation of which continued throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s. Part of the transmutation was an emphasis on the postural forms that are popular in Western yoga methods today. In modern yoga the religious overtones were not focused which often permitted yogi to mold the practice to fit their worldview. This pliability aligns with trends toward secularization and religious privatization, the latter of which may help account for the phenomenon of Christian yoga.

Part of modern yoga's popularity is due to the medicalization of the practice. Western medicine has studied the vast benefits of yoga that Indian practitioners have known for thousands of years. In addition, the rise in popularity is due to a cultural transformative need or desire to unify the mind and body. There is an openness to educate through the physical, not to educate mind and body separately, but to edify only in integration (Ross, 1986). Yoga as a form of exercise, relaxation, meditation, and perhaps even as a spiritual discipline, allows a person to more fully develop a sense of holistic health and wellness. The spiritual focus of physical activity also has an impact on athletes; appreciating the integration of spirituality into mental skill training could influence performance.

An array of research has been conducted on the relationship between physical activity and spirituality and has shown physical activity may lead to spiritual fulfillment.

The actual activities studied vary widely from running to dragon boat racing. Yoga has not been left out of the spiritual experience physical activity equation. To move one step beyond spirituality, various religions have used faith-based programs including yoga to meet people's physical and religious needs. At times, it is the case that these programs operate in a privilege position. Because Christianity is the dominant religion in the United States, CCY instructors may be able operationalize their form of yoga with little conflict.

From a theoretical perspective, I employ Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and capital and ritual appropriation theory in order to explore Christian-centered yoga and specifically how teachers who ascribe to this method create meaning of their own yoga experiences and operationalize it in their classes. These theoretical frameworks inform how the data is interpreted and how it relates to the sociology of sport and physical activity. The framework acts as a lens through which the instructors' experiences were interpreted. The next chapter provides a discussion of the methodology and methods for this study.

Chapter III: Methodology

Chapter Introduction

Acknowledging that yoga traditionally has been seen as a Hindu or Buddhist practice, the purpose of this study was to explore Christian-centered yoga and specifically how teachers who ascribe to this method create meaning of their own yoga experiences and operationalize it in their classes. More specifically, the following questions guide this study:

1. What experiences do CCY instructors perceive as significant in their journey to become CCY teachers?
 - 2a. How do issues of faith surrounding yoga's assimilation into Western culture influence CCY instructors' teaching?
 - 2b. How do issues of culture surrounding yoga's assimilation into Western culture influence CCY instructors' teaching?
 - 2c. How do tensions surrounding yoga's assimilation into Western culture influence CCY instructors' teaching?
3. How do CCY teachers construct meaning in relation to their Christian-based yoga teaching experiences?
4. How is this meaning operationalized in an instructor's teachings in their yoga classes?

In this chapter, I explain the study's methods and procedures.

Qualitative Research

I use a qualitative approach for this study for several reasons. One relates pragmatically to teaching and the other connects to the influence of constructivist epistemological orientation. I acknowledge that one motivation was for my own benefit. I can easily transfer qualitative research into my classroom. Just as Mottart, Vanhorren, Rutten, and Soetaert (2009) use fictional narratives to invite “imaginative engagement, perhaps even empathy” amongst their students (p. 493), I hope my students and readers of this study may connect with someone else’s personal narrative found in qualitative research. More specifically, a qualitative approach best supports the exploration of my research questions. I engage this form of inquiry as a way to support “research that honors an inductive style, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of rendering the complexity of [a] situation” (Creswell, 2009, p. 4). In this study, I explored Christian-centered yoga and specifically how teachers who ascribe to this method create meaning of their own yoga experiences and operationalize it in their classes. More specifically, I explored how issues of faith, culture, and tensions surrounding yoga’s assimilation into Western culture influence CCY instructors’ teaching.

These experiences are subjective, multiple, and differ relative to the individual (Creswell, 2009), which is why I align with post-positivist and social constructivists’ paradigms. As I examine my assumptions, it is important to note that qualities of the critical paradigm resonate with me, particularly with regard to methodology and how forms of knowledge are produced. While research questions are important to inquiry, Hatch (2002) states, “they ought not be the starting point” because he encourages

researchers to unpack their assumptions about the essence of reality and about the acquisition of knowledge (p.12).

In order to do this, Hatch (2002) discusses five major paradigms in research and organizes this discussion around questions pertaining to ontology, epistemology, and methodological assumptions. He also “outlines what form knowledge takes when produced within the assumption of each paradigm” and calls this “product of knowledge” (p. 12). Based on his framework, I explore ontology, epistemology, methodological assumptions, and products of knowledge in relation to my research and woven into this discussion are reflections on my positionality. In qualitative research, a scholar’s experiences influence the way in which she analyzes data (Grbich, 2007) and presents that data. To provide further insight into how my life experiences influence this research, I touch upon my religious and yoga experience.

Orientation and Positionality

Introduction. This orientation outlines my positionality regarding ontology, epistemology, methodology, and products of knowledge. I explain how the tensions of my post-positivist and constructivist orientations press against my understanding of post-critical notions of power (Hatch, 2002; Noblit, Flores, Murillo, 2004). These struggles are particularly salient in what Hatch (2002) terms product of knowledge and to a lesser extent my methodological assumptions.

On the paradigm spectrum, I locate myself somewhere between a post-positivist and constructivist. This relates to my chosen theoretical framework of Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), who may have aligned with more of a constructivist and

critical orientations. He claimed that while agents have the power to construct their own reality, which speaks to the constructivist approach, they do so within the constraints of a dominant reality that precedes them, which speaks more to a critical orientation. Reality in the post-positivist paradigm is said to be never fully understood and a researcher can only approximate the experiences of others. Researchers aligning with this orientation often use well-defined qualitative methods and use their findings to make generalizations about behavioral patterns. Multi-faceted realities and knowledge as a human construction are qualities associated with a constructivist approach. Those who fall into this paradigm employ naturalistic methods of qualitative research and often use narrative analysis and case study design amongst other methods (Hatch, 2002). I also recognize that I am influenced by a post-critical orientation (Noblit et al., 2004), which recognizes knowledge as politically situated and is influenced by those that are in positions of power. Next, I explain in more detail how these various paradigms influence my role as a researcher.

Ontology. Various research paradigms answer the ontological question “What is the nature of reality?” differently (Hatch, 2002, p. 11). I understand the world to be a space where multiple realities exist and those realities are relative to the individual experiencing and creating them. I may share qualities with someone else’s reality, but my perspective, your perspective, is unique. We may both look at the same painting, but its meaning and our understanding of the same painting differs because we come to the painting from different vantage points (Hatch, 2002). I believe the way in which CCY teachers experience and interact with the modality of yoga vary because of their unique

perspectives on faith, culture, and physical movement. In the same vein, I can only approximate an understanding of another's experiences (Hatch, 2002), which leads me to identify somewhat with a post-positivist paradigm. In addition, my knowledge and appreciation of reality is not static; it is being constructed because I am always layering more experiences to my life. Due to these reasons, on the ontology spectrum I locate myself in between a constructivist and a post-positivist.

Epistemology. Epistemological inquiry attempts to answer “What can be known and what is the relationship of the knower to what is to be known?” (Hatch, 2002, p. 11). I believe that depending on the person I interview, I heard differentiated narratives because multiple realities exist. It follows that a participant and I explore the phenomena together, we come to that space from different perspectives and thus may create a new reality; thereby, we become co-constructors of knowledge and reality (Hatch, 2002). By working with participants, although not with the intensity as many constructivist researchers, I do not claim objectivity on the topic. I acknowledge my biases, but was open to being changed by the research journey. The process of recursive reflexivity (Noblit, et al., 2004) allowed me to be open to changing my biases on the topic of CCY, which I discuss in my sections on positionality. I acknowledge that the re-presentation of participant conversations are just that, they were exchanges between two people. I heard what the participants said and then re-presented the dialogue in my analysis, but this happened only because the exchange between participant and myself synthesized a new form of knowledge and the exchange impacted me thus creating a new reality for myself. Elements of contingency, time, and co-construction of knowledge are claims about

knowledge also lead me to identify with constructivism. Even constructivism does not sufficiently acknowledge the societal structures that produce reality (Gbrich, 2007), which is why I am also guided by a post-critical orientation (Noblit et al., 2004), which only differs slightly from critical theory. The latter more readily positions the researcher in a position of power to critique; therefore, analysis of the researcher's objectivity, recursive reflexivity, and critique of the representation of data is encouraged.

A part of that orientation encourages recursive reflexivity so that a researcher understands his or her position of power in research. I choose to center my research on yoga. In line with post-critical concepts and my theoretical framework, Bourdieu (1986) encouraged sociologists to turn the mirror on themselves and to make themselves aware of their assumptions influencing their research. As a yoga practitioner and teacher, I have my own assumptions and biases, which I detail in this chapter. To begin, I acknowledge that there is a space of power occupied as I teach. When I teach any class especially yoga, I promote certain philosophies and principles. For example, I teach from a more ecumenical, inclusive, standpoint and believe that students can have a spiritual experience in yoga independent of their religious beliefs. In addition, I feel that it is important to try to pass along information that is not just about the physical practice and I include Sanskrit, yogic philosophy and history in my class; however, I accept that yoga students that may take my class with purely physical goals in mind, like becoming more flexible. CCY instructors are also in a place of power when they teach Christ-centered yoga, especially identifying with the dominant religion in the West, as they promote their own philosophies and principles associated with their faith.

I consider myself a liberal Christian and a yoga teacher, but I see these two identities as singular within me, but outside of me, they are distinct. Unpacking my religious identity is not straightforward. I self-identify this way because and I try to remain open. This religious orientation, I feel, allows me to be open to the wisdoms of other faith- and non faith-based traditions that I could learn from and enrich my connection to humanity. Anglican theologian, Brian Mountford (2003), explains that liberal Christians “read the Bible creatively and critically” and believe that Jesus modeled “the most selflessly loving actions” and taught people how “to be compassionate and humane in moral matters” (p. 6). Lundskow’s (2008) outline of liberal Christian practices resonate with me, when he states that it is up to each person to search her consciousness to “decide on a course of moral action” (p. 195).

With regard to yoga, I “do” yoga as a spiritual practice, but I still struggle to find words to describe how I interact with yoga on this level. In doing yoga, I find a seat within and throughout something that is Greater than I. Even though I assign this experience to God with a capital G, I struggle in doing so, as my Judaic-Christian understanding of this experience may be at odds with yogic, Hindu roots. However, as I study the paths of these spiritual practices, I find that they all lead to the same summit atop of the proverbial mountain.

As mentioned earlier, I am also a Hatha yoga teacher, but it had never crossed my mind to merge the two roles and teach Christianized yoga. For me, it is too specific, too exclusionary; people interested in yoga may be put off by the idea. I teach my interpretation of yoga because, I hope, it can appeal to different people, people of

different faiths or non-faith, and of different physical capabilities. When I began reading about Christian yoga, I thought that to tie in Christian philosophy would be presumptuous on my part by disregarding some yogic philosophical tenants. Meditation instructor, Shari Goodhartz stated that yoga is a non-dogmatic philosophy that can be applied to any faith- or non-faith based system (personal communication, 2008). I believe to explicitly tie yogic teachings to Christian tenants seems like an exclusionary practice and not one in which I care to participate. Upon initially hearing of Christ-centered yoga it caused feelings of frustration, irritation, resentment, and pride (researcher journal, 2010).

To be explicit, my initial sentiments were somewhat based on ego. I did not necessarily think that my way was the only way to teach or the “right” method, but Christian yoga did not seem to fit either. I felt that the infusion of Christian principles seemed non-historical, that the method ignored yoga’s heritage. These swirling thoughts were all based on perception and not experience. I had only read about CCY; my knowledge and experience with the method was limited. In order to explore this phenomenon further, I conducted a pilot study utilizing interviews, participant observations, and document analysis (Odenheimer, 2010). In addition, I maintained a researcher journal during the pilot and current study, which I discuss further in Chapter IV.

To obtain a better understanding of Christian yoga, I took two CCY classes as a participant observer. Afterwards, I thought, “This Christ-centered yoga thing doesn’t seem so terrible.” The teacher read a verse from Psalms at the beginning and end of class with a mix of Christian, ambient, and instrumental background music. Aside from the

verses and the Christian music, in large part the class resembled mainstream yoga practice. My ideas of “raping and pillaging” an authentic practice lessened; however, Christ-based yoga’s normalization is still unsettling to me. During the pilot study, I interviewed another CCY teacher, whose goal was to “to help non-Christians realize that Christ is the answer for the peace they are seeking through their yoga practice” (Odenheimer, 2010). Not coming from an evangelical background, I did not understand the use of yoga to witness to people.

As I continue to locate my feelings toward CCY, I find that they often shift; therefore, to track these feelings, I have kept a researcher’s journal. At a gut level, I find the method unnerving, yet rationally, I do not know if CCY is very different from other chapters in yoga’s history. I have briefly outlined my concerns about Christianized yoga as a segregating practice. The next section provides a description of my methodological assumptions. Then I explore my assumptions and why CCY may be another branch of yoga, similar to Astanga or Iyengar yoga.

Methodological assumptions. Each research paradigm has specific methodological assumptions (Hatch, 2002). I employed a heuristic approach in my study, inquiry into participants’ experiences, and align my research with a constructivist approach (Hatch 2002; Grbich, 2007). To study the phenomenon of Christian-centered yoga, I interviewed participants “in an effort to reconstruct the constructions participants use to make sense of their worlds” (Hatch, 2002, p. 15) and more specifically their yoga world. Another assumption was that yoga has been taken up in different identities (Alter, 2006), forms, methods, meanings, and intensities (Baptiste, 2003; Desikachar, 1995; Feuerstein 2008; Iyengar, 1979; Jois, 2002;

Strauss, 2005). The section entitled “Religious and Spiritual Moments in Yoga’s History” in my literature review clarifies the intersectionality of varying historical, political, and social influences on yoga. I provide examples to argue the point that how yoga is defined and operationalized depends upon those who practice and teach it and to indicate the changing nature of the discipline, dependent upon whom took it up and for what purposes.

Products of knowledge. Orienting the researcher’s role, Hatch (2002) uses a term called product/(s) of knowledge to refer to a research project’s result. For this study, themes are the products that were created based on my investigation, which are re-presentations and reconstruction of the reality that my participants experience. It is the result of my conversations with participants and my interpretation of their stories. Framing the research in the constructivist paradigm, I provide descriptive narratives and details illustrating “the interpretations constructed as part of the research process” (p. 16) and include adequate representation of the participant’s voice so that the reader can walk in their shoes. This is troubled by the fact that my mere re-presentation of any one narrative is located within my power to produce it (Noblit et al., 2004). In qualitative research, the investigator is the main instrument for data interpretation and analysis (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Being the interpretive tool, I decide what stands out, what is important, and which stories are told. In addition, because I am coming to this investigation with my own reality and judgments, the form of knowledge produced is inherently value laden.

Although I approached this project explicitly with the intention of taking up a constructivist approach, I have been troubled by this decision, in part, due to the

influence of post-critical thought (Noblit et al., 2004). I began feeling as if embodying a constructivist lens would preclude me from discussing power issues. This reflection brought me to Griffin and Genasci's (1990) discussion on homophobia as the glue that keeps physical educators silenced and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered LGBT community invisible in sport. This may be an audacious claim to relate to my work. I do not believe that Christ-centered yoga teachers are oppressive in the same way homophobia oppresses the LGBT community, but I think the principle remains the same. Those in the mainstream often have the privilege of behaving in a manner that often goes unchecked and unquestioned. In the current study, one could specifically look at religious privilege (Schlosser, 2003). It could be argued that CCY instructors have a privileged place in society because they practice and are part of Christianity, a dominant religious group, as such they may be able to adapt yoga to fit their faith easily. Practicing qualitative research, and taking up constructivism, I felt that I could not critique potential dominance issues that may arise from a further understanding of Christianized yoga (research journal, April, 2010). If choosing critical ethnography is meant to raise my "voice to speak to an audience on behalf of ...[my participants] as a means of empowering them by giving more authority to the [participant's] voice" (Noblit, 2004, p. 4), then even to do a project on Christian yoga could be seen as perpetuating and privileging voices that are already mainstreamed (Odenheimer researcher journal, April, 2010). Due to this, I cannot claim that this work is a post-critical piece, as this orientation targets marginalized groups and Christians are not a targeted group in the West, but I am influenced by post-critical thought in terms of recursive reflexivity and subjectivity of my

claims. My constructivist and post-critical influences colored the way I interpreted the data. Next, I outline my theoretical orientation, which also guided me on how I made meaning of the data. As I reflect on my study, I appreciate how my positionality also influenced my design and the research process. In the following section, I explore my role as a researcher.

Positionality in Research

Influenced by the constructivist paradigm, I see my world in large part as a creation of my own reality; yet I cannot deny that the intersectionality of my identities privilege me in some spaces while potentially marginalize me in others. I am not a blank canvas. Post-critical scholars urge researchers to interrogate their feelings and biases because we are all raced, gendered, classed people and must locate ourselves within our research (Noblit et al., 2004). I see myself as a learner, sister, daughter, mother, woman, godmother, student, life partner, teacher, investigator, yogini, spirit, body, and much more. Within our context, I locate myself first as a questioner.

Yoga has been many things to me. I first came to it as a physical activity. However, as time went on, I came to the mat with the intention of mental well-being. Doing yoga helps me find reprieve from daily life's stresses and allows me to be a more calm and present person. To go one step beyond mental health, yoga is part of my spiritual practice.

As I contemplate my appreciation for religious and spiritual plurality, the attraction could be in my family history. My devout Catholic grandmother married my Jewish grandfather in New Orleans in 1949, when the city was predominately Catholic.

He also had a daughter, Carol, from his first wife. He raised her Jewish and my grandmother raised my father Catholic. Interestingly, my family cannot recall any tensions externally or within the family concerning religious matters. My mother, a practicing Catholic, married my father, an agnostic. I married a man who identifies himself as culturally Jewish and who has little sympathy for religious dogma. I am presenting this background to reveal that my eventual interest in religious pluralism may predate my existence and be as much a part of me as my maternal history.

Writing about positionality, Noblit et al. (2004) explain that no researcher is a blank slate when conducting research. Through practicing recursive reflexivity, scholars must explain their concerns and emotions. Consequently, I am explicit about my roots, though complicated, in religious pluralism. Being transparent about my past is only part of this practice. Next, I explain how my understanding of these roots may influence my intended study.

Positionality in Yoga

In continually critiquing myself and my involvement in this project, I would like to think of myself as an open-minded person; however, when I first heard Christ-centered yoga, I thought, “weird.” As I read more about this type of yoga, I was beginning to see it as just another yoga method. Yet, my initial reluctance to accept Christian yoga as a “legitimate” method has not yet retreated from my prejudices completely. This is important to acknowledge so that I am aware of these biases, particularly during interviews and the analysis process of the research. I do not believe I can bracket out such bias. They sit with me; however, I do believe remaining vigilantly

cognizant of how such thoughts could influence me throughout the research process may give hope to neutralize my bias somewhat, at most. At least, recognizing my positionality helped me to clarify and claim my bias in my interpretations and analysis.

By coming from a middle class and privileged economic background, I have access to yoga in ways others do not. I am able to spend considerable amounts of money for workshops and teacher trainings, not to mention the on-going expense of bi-monthly classes. The economic power I have grants me access to many Westernized yogic gates. For example, consider the two cities where I currently practice yoga most often, one yoga class at most studios might cost as low as \$12 in Knoxville, Tennessee or as much as \$25 in Los Angeles, California.

In varying spaces within Western culture identifying as a female may take on certain privileges and exploits. In a yogic space, that is dominated by women, being a woman myself, I feel like I am normative, in the mainstream when I am in a yoga classroom. As a yoga teacher of five years I do not take particular note if a woman comes into my class; however, when a man enters, I find him to be a bit of a novelty. Yet when I come to learn of his story that has brought him to my class it is often the same stories I hear from women, desires to heal injury, find balance, achieve flexibility.

In terms of ethnicity, I find myself in the mainstream in the West. It appears that in each yoga class that I have taken over the past 14 years there are predominately White, Western European descendants. Coming from a similar heritage, I am not very cognizant of how someone may feel who is not of a similar origin. So I wonder, in a yoga community, how is one's comfort level affected by race, ethnicity, and culture? If a

person is attached to Indian heritage, how do they see yoga evolving in America? Some Hindi Americans may feel offended by the “sanitization” of Western yoga. A manifestation of this sentiment has resulted in the Hindu American Foundation mounting “a campaign to acquaint Westerners with the faith that it says underlies every single yoga style followed in gyms, ashrams and spas: Hinduism” (Vitello, 2010, p. 1). Next I detail the procedures I employed for the study.

Participant Selection and Data Collection Procedures

Introduction. Discussing the procedures, I explain how participants were selected utilizing stratified, purposeful sampling and snowball sampling. Following a discussion of data collection, other strategies are provided. Specifically, I outline interviewing strategies while highlighting risks and benefits to participants.

Participant selection. Following department and university IRB approval, I initiated contact with potential participants, generated from a list of Christian-centered yoga teachers from the Internet. I intentionally omit the name of the website as a measure to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Although I am a yoga teacher myself, I am not well connected with the CCY community. I have completed one pilot study where I had discussions with two yoga teachers in the Southeast. In my conversations with these two women, they mentioned other CCY teachers. Initially, I drew upon these two networks to invite other teachers to take part in my investigation. Next, I discuss sampling techniques in more detail.

Data collection.

Sampling techniques. Patton (2002) identifies 16 techniques for purposeful sampling. For the study, I utilized a multi-step sampling process: purposeful sampling and snowball

sampling. The former gave me the opportunity to explore qualities within a group of instructors while allowing for comparison within the group, which reinforces purposeful sampling; the latter allowed me to draw upon the connections of CCY teachers to find potential participants. Following IRB approval (see Appendix E), participants were contacted via email and/or phone to request their voluntary participation in this study. Prior to agreeing to participate, if interviews were conducted face-to-face with participants, were requested to read and sign the informed consent form (see Appendix B), which I also signed, then they received a copy. If interviews were conducted over the phone, I read the same informed consent form to the participant and he or she had the choice to verbally agree to the interview or decline. Interviews were conducted in a place comfortable and convenient for the participants and digitally recorded. Interviews were conducted until the point of saturation, that point at which I am hearing similar things in the interviews. Table 1 offers a participant profile of the interviewees.

Table 1

Participant Profile

Name	Sex	Region	Occupation
Adrianna	Female	Southeastern U.S.	Yoga teacher & self-employed construction company
Alana	Female	New England	Yoga teacher & writer
Andrew	Male	New England	Clergy member
Diane	Female	Southeastern U.S.	Yoga teacher
Hannah	Female	Southwestern U.S.	Yoga teacher
Jamison	Female	New England	Yoga teacher
Kai	Male	Eastern Canada	Clergy member & professor
Lily	Female	Southeastern U.S.	Yoga teacher
Madeline	Female	New England	N/A
Olivia	Female	Southeastern U.S.	Yoga teacher & Mother

Interview process and guide. The primary method of gathering data was based on three in-person and seven phone interviews. Using open-ended questions and inviting CCY teachers to share their unique perspectives, I explored Christian-centered yoga and specifically how teachers who ascribe to this method, create meaning of their own yoga experiences and operationalize it in their classes. I used a semi-structured interview guide approach and prepared a general interview outline so that I intentionally delimited the topics discussed during my conversations with participants (Patton, 2002) (Appendix C). In the outline, I created examples of specific ways to word a question only as a prompt and suggestion to myself. More specifically, in the interviews, issues of faith, culture, and how meaning is constructed were explored. In this approach, the interviewer determines the order and wording of questions asked, thus, it is possible that a question, about the same topic, may be asked in different ways. Allowing for fluidity in the wording and order of my questions, I provided space for my participants to share more in-depth responses (Patton, 2002). In doing so, I created dialogue that was systematic, comprehensive, “conversational and situational” (Patton, 2002, p. 349). This approach also allowed me to probe participants and develop a conversation with them (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007; Glesne, 1999; Patton, 2002) and to make the best use of the time with my participants (Patton, 2002). The lack of predetermined questions and order inherent in this approach might cause the omission of important topics (Patton, 2002). According to Patton (2002), researcher “flexibility in sequencing and wording questions can result in substantially different perspectives, thus reducing the comparability of responses” (p. 288). In addition, follow-up e-mail correspondences were used to make clarifications and seek additional demographic information.

Confidentiality, risks, and benefits. There were no physical risks to participants; however, participants may have felt uncomfortable as a result of answering interview questions about Christian based yoga and questions pertaining to issues of faith. At the end of each interview, I asked the participant if he or she had any concerns about what I had asked. In response to that question, only one participant asked me about confidentiality, I then re-read the informed consent section on confidentiality and she appeared to be satisfied with the measures taken to protect her. In addition, I e-mailed the whole dissertation to each participant and asked him or her to review Chapter IV. I explained that in that chapter I had taken quotes from our conversations and potentially from their websites and other publications in order to better understand yoga from a Christian focus. In order to protect their identity I had assigned them a pseudonym, even if they had said I could use their real name. This was done to be in compliance with federal and university policy. I asked that if they felt in anyway that their identity had been compromised, then I could take further measures to protect their identity, such as changing their occupation listed or where they live or paraphrase published material. Only four participants responded saying that they were satisfied with the original measures taken to protect their identity.

All data remained confidential. In addition, participants had the opportunity to choose a pseudonym. As a researcher I felt compelled to honor those participants who chose to use their own name, but in order to comply with IRB guidelines, I have chosen a pseudonym for such interviewees. Participants are not classified in a way that might identify them and participant responses were kept confidential. For example, the names of websites, class names, titles of

publications, and names of classes were changed or omitted to protect the identity of participants. In addition, publications I used were not listed in my references. Although none of the participants chose to do so, if they had directly expressed the desire to withdraw from participation in this research project their data would have been immediately destroyed.

Involvement in the research project was voluntary. Data was stored in two places. All informed consent forms were placed in an envelope and stored in the locked office of the principal investigator. Information from the research project was kept in password protected electronic files only on my computer and any paper files were kept in my locked office. I was the only individual who has access to the computer with electronic files. A transcriptionist (see Appendix D) and myself were the only individuals with access to digitally recorded interviews. Any data or correspondence between us was password protected. The data will be kept on file for three years and then destroyed.

In terms of benefits, participants may have gained a better understanding of how issues of faith, culture, and tensions surrounding yoga's assimilation into Western culture influence their teaching. This could heighten their awareness about how these factors influence how meaning is constructed around their yoga experience.

Data Analysis

In this section I discuss the analysis of the data, transcribing, and types of coding methods are detailed. I describe my techniques for thematic analysis of the data and a brief outline of the constant comparative method is also provided.

Transcribing and coding. As I mentioned, I digitally recorded the interviews and a transcriptionist, who signed a pledge of confidentiality (Appendix D), transcribed them.

The pledge stated that as a transcribing typist of this research project, he or she understands that he or she heard audio of confidential interviews. Research participants who participated in this project do so on good faith that the information revealed during their interviews would remain strictly confidential. The transcriptionist has a responsibility to honor this confidentially agreement and not to share any information with anyone except the primary researcher of this project. Participant follow-up correspondences followed suit. After the interviews were transcribed, I then read and coded them to determine what themes I produced. My primary intention in coding was to obtain the most important pieces of information (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996) from the transcripts and participant observations. My coding process was informed by a Straussian approach to grounded theory through in-vivo, value, and sociologically constructed coding techniques (Grbich, 2007). Materials from my journals are cited in parentheses with the corresponding date. Below, I provide a brief summary of the aforementioned coding techniques.

In-vivo coding. During my initial cycle of coding, I looked for thoughts, actions, ideas, and values crucial to my participants and used their own words to capture those sentiments. In-vivo coding uses the actual words from participants and may help me better understand the subculture (Saldaña, 2009) of CCY teachers. (For an example of in-vivo coding, see excerpts of passages offer in Chapter IV.) Although, I wanted to remain close to my participants' voices, I understand that filtering the material and determining what was salient at the time of coding was a subjective process.

Value coding. I believe that CCY instructors navigate tensions of faith, history, and public perception when teaching their version of yoga. This was based on my previous experiences and reflections as a yoga practitioner and my initial review of the literature, all prior to engaging in the interviews for this project. Value coding allowed me to filter through the transcripts to specifically highlight quotes, words, and passages that I perceived as salient to interviewees' perspective of yoga in relation to its history and religious orientation. For example, Adrianna used the word PO, meaning “piss off”, when she spoke about her interpretation of the chakra system in relation to Christianity and views of the mainstream yoga community. Value coding was particularly appropriate for my study, which explored cultural perspectives, and how those orientations manifest into action and analyze the complex relationship between ideology and action (Saldaña, 2009).

Sociological constructed codes. Sociologically constructed (SC) codes were those words and phrases I “put on” my participants’ words. Prior to my second and third coding cycle, I reviewed my research questions; I then coded the data with the sociologically constructed codes woven into my questions. I used SC codes to make a connection between what a participant was saying and ideas from my academic field or when I choose to summarize an idea in my own language (Saldaña, 2009). For example, the SC code of “operationalization” was informed by my fourth research question.

Thematic analysis. I used thematic analysis of narrative, employed in-vivo codes and value coding in my initial cycle of coding, followed by sociologically constructed codes, which were informed by my research questions, in order to segment and cluster

the data corpus (Grbich, 2007). This helped me to focus on what was being said and to look for patterns both within each interview and across interviews. Applying this approach, allowed me to look for common themes and outliers in order to develop a fuller understanding of how teachers infuse Christian principles into their classes. While some scholars argue that this approach aligns with objectivist views, I understand that my positionality constantly influences how I frame the data (Noblit et al., 2004; Riessman, 2005).

Constant comparative method.

The constant comparative method, as outlined by Glaser (1978), also guided the analysis. I do not want to preclude myself from expanding the concepts of field, habitus, and ritual appropriation or potentially uncovering an emergent theory to understand more fully the phenomena of Christian yoga. In addition to using Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus, and capital to understand CCY, it may be argued that this study also contributes to scholars' understanding of those concepts and contributes to the refinement of Bourdieu's sociological concepts. This is facilitated by concurrently collecting data and analyzing it (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Glaser (1978) recounted the steps in the constant comparative method. They include collecting the data then searching for important issues, reoccurring incidents, or data points that can be categorized. Following the categorization of data, a researcher should gather information and data points that provide a pattern of focused categories, while being aware of variation within categories. After completing these steps, I wrote about these patterns, trying to detail all incidences while simultaneously looking for

additional patterns and analyze these data points and patterns in order to ascertain social relationships. In short, patterns both within and across participants' experiences are compared. The final step involved coding data points and analyzing principle themes and patterns. Next, I will outline validation strategies.

Validation strategies

While interview studies were my primary strategy for collecting data (Hatch, 2002), I followed many of Glesne's (1999) suggested techniques to ensure validity. In order to understand more fully the phenomena of CCY, triangulation was used by analyzing multiple data points and sources (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). When possible, teachers' archival data, websites, marketing materials, training manuals and class descriptions were used to develop a more in-depth understanding for the subject matter. For example, much of the data collected about the experiences of Adrianna came from her website. My interview with Father Andrew was supplemented with a published book he co-authored. Respecting his confidentiality, I do not cite his published work in my reference section. Peer review or the "process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytical sessions and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308) was utilized to ensure that the qualitative results are credible. The peer reviewer was an individual trained in qualitative research. I also enlisted the assistance of an external auditor to evaluate "whether or not the findings, interpretations and conclusions [that I found] are supported by the data" (Cohen &

Crabtree, 2008, p. 334). The individual read my findings and discussion and noted points that need further clarification in my analysis. For example, my external auditor suggested that I elaborate on 1.) my idea that this study connected to research dealing with the scholastic field of physical activity and spirituality and 2.) that my study had marketing applications. I followed her advice. The auditor has several years of experience in conducting qualitative research. Analyzing negative cases illuminated those moments that do not fit into emerging patterns and themes (Patton, 2002) and revealed the complexity and layered nature of the phenomena (Creswell, 2007). I discuss these outliers (for an example see the “Outlier” section of Theme 1). Glesne (1999) also discusses the clarification of the researcher’s biases, whereby I recognize how my positionality could affect my research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). To clarify my biases, I participated in a bracketing interview and maintained a researcher’s journal. A colleague, trained in qualitative research, conducted the 40 minute bracketing interview, where she asked many of the same questions as I asked my participants. This helped me to explore my experience with yoga and my perception of how issues of faith and culture influence yoga’s assimilation into Western culture. The results of this interview are explored in the section “Return to Positionality”.

All of these strategies were implemented in order to increase the trustworthiness of my findings (Glesne, 1999). I e-mailed participants the interview transcripts and they were invited to add any comments or thoughts to the interview; however, only three of the participants returned the transcripts indicating typographical errors in the transcription. The six others did not respond and one indicated everything appeared to be

in order. In addition, utilizing the process of intercoder agreement checks during a peer review session enhanced reliability. A researcher trained in qualitative research methods acted as the peer reviewer. In order to validate my interpretations, the associate confirmed that I provided rich, thick descriptions whereby the reader is placed close to the participants' experiences and I attempted to evoke within the reader a vicarious experience (Creswell, 2007).

I had intended to take field notes in the form of participant observations (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Hatch, 2002) in order "to account for the behaviors of ...[teachers] by describing what is it that they know" (McDermott, 1976, p. 159). However, I was only able to take Lily's class on four occasions. All other participants lived a great distance away, which inhibited my ability to attend their classes. As Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggest the amount of participation in the field should be calculated. While a couple of classes did not illicit copious amounts of field notes, my intention in participating in the classes was only to get a flavor or a sample of how a teacher operationalized Christian principles in her or her class. This decision was partial based on convenience (see section on sampling), as I was not in any one place or city long enough to take multiple classes or participants lived to far away. The field research I did conduct provided another data point for triangulation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

I perceive my participants as privileged in the yoga field, as they come from the dominant religion in U.S. culture. I also acknowledge that they may not be privileged in other cases and classifications. I found in my pilot study that my participants might not share these sentiments about privilege. In a previous interview, one informant felt that it

is a taboo to be an outspoken Christian in our country (researcher notes, 2010). While I would have liked to create a good rapport with participants, I did not think it appropriate for me to build too personal of a relationship. I felt like if I revealed too much of my thoughts on Christ centered yoga to participants they may not want to disclose their story.

Commentary on Narrative

Re-presenting these stories, which I detail in the next chapter, may be elevating voices that are already part of the dominant discourse. However, some CCY teachers may not feel as though they are part of that dominant discourse (Odenheimer, 2010).

Understanding how privilege is used to reproduce ideologies, we may more fully capture the layered, multi-dimensional voices within the CCY community and capture how yoga is positioned in Western culture. Perhaps Christian-based yoga is one branch of the Hatha yoga family tree. Rather than being one tree, yoga's history could be like a forest. Trees are plentiful. Some give life to new growth, some die, but leave behind fertile soil (Wells & Jones, 2001) says my constructivist orientation. Yet, I cannot deny the intentionality of "blending and mixing" or something akin to genetically modify a practice in order to create a nearly new species of tree (Wells & Jones, 2001, p. 106). I do not claim that this study answers questions about who owns yoga or has the authoritative voice to define it; rather, I illuminate the layered implicit and explicit actions of how yoga is currently evolving. This attempt is manifested and its associated discussion is found in the next chapter.

Chapter IV: Findings and Discussion

Chapter Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore Christian-centered yoga and specifically how teachers who ascribe to this method create meaning from of their own yoga experiences and operationalize it in their classes. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What experiences do CCY instructors perceive as significant in their journey to become CCY teachers?
- 2a. How do issues of faith surrounding yoga's assimilation into American culture influence CCY instructors' teaching?
- 2b. How do issues of culture surrounding yoga's assimilation into American culture influence CCY instructors' teaching?
- 2c. How do tensions surrounding yoga's assimilation into American culture influence CCY instructors' teaching?
3. How do CCY teachers construct meaning in relation to their Christian-based yoga teaching experiences?
4. How is this meaning operationalized in an instructor's teachings in their yoga classes?

In this chapter, I briefly outline my coding and analysis, which were detailed in Chapter III and then discuss themes that became salient to me from the coding process. Alongside the themes is a discussion of my findings as they relate to the larger body of

literature. This chapter concludes with a return to my positionality explaining how this research process influenced me.

Data was compiled based on 10 interviews with yoga instructors who teach yoga from a Christian perspective. In addition, document analysis using instructors' archival data, websites, marketing materials, training manuals and/or class descriptions were used for triangulation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Due to convenience and the close geographic proximity of Lily's classes, I was able to collect data in the form of participant observations as a student in her class. Based on thematic analysis, I produced four themes from the data: *Gateway*, *Dueling Dualities*, *Embodied Spirituality*, and *Operationalization*, which are detailed in this chapter.

Re-presentation of the data. To begin, I have been asked by colleagues why I write *re-presentation* versus *representation* when referring to data analysis. If I use the word *representation*, I am claiming the ability to estimate other people's experiences too closely (Hatch, 2002). In the American political system, citizens elect representatives to speak on our behalf. However, I do not claim that I am a proxy for my participants, nor do I speak for them. Rather, through thematic analysis I break apart their stories to find common themes and outliers (Grbich, 2007). Aligning closely with a constructivist approach, I attempt to "reconstruct the constructions participants use to make sense of their worlds" (Hatch, 2002, p. 15). By labeling my work a *re-presentation* of the data, I take more responsibility for any interpretations and even misrepresentations that my participants may find if they were to read my work.

Introduction of thematic analysis. Based on my exploration of CCY with 10 teachers, I constructed four major themes from the data. Table 2 provides a reference point for the labeling of the themes and subthemes. The themes I detail in this chapter reflect similar experiences across participants with nuanced differences. Outliers and variations in experiences also provided unique insight into divergent participant narratives.

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme
Gateway	
Embodied Spirituality	
Dueling Dualities	Universality & Connections Departures, Co-optations & Adaptations
Operationalization	

Based on thematic analysis, I produced four major themes and associated sub-themes from the data: (a) *Gateway*; (b) *Embodied Spirituality*; (c) *Dueling Dualities: Universality and Connections* and *Dueling Dualities: Departures, Co-optations, and Adaptations*; and (d) *Operationalization*. The themes illustrate similar experiences across participants with nuanced differences, but also outliers when applicable. The *Gateway* theme offered short passages about how participants first were introduced to yoga. These introductions were categorized based on whether they took a yoga class or pursued yoga on their own through books or videos. *Embodied Spirituality* dealt with experiences in which participants felt a body-faith connection. The third theme, *Dueling Dualities*, was broken into two subthemes: *Dueling Dualities: Universality and Connections* and *Dueling Dualities: Departures, Co-optations, and Adaptations*. The former identified patterns of philosophical connections made between Christianity and yoga. The latter theme provided excerpts from the data characterizing the process a teacher may go through in reconciling divergent points between their faith and mainstream yoga philosophy. Finally, in the *Operationalization* theme, I approximated how all of these layers come together to manifest themselves in what may occur in the participants' classes.

The next section synthesizes my thematic analysis with the literature review detailed in Chapter II. My aim is not to discuss all the research presented in my literature review, but to contextualize this study within the larger discourse on wellness, sport performance, religious and spiritual perspectives in sport and physical activity, religious privatization, adaptations of yoga, ritual appropriation theory, and Bourdieu's

sociological concepts. In terms of organization, I first present my thematic analysis and then explore how each theme connects to the research. Concluding this section is a more holistic approach when discussing how sociological theory informed the analysis and instead of relating each individual theme to the theoretical framework, the sum of my findings is theoretically interpreted.

Thematic Analysis and Discussion

Theme 1: Gateway. This theme is reflective of how the majority of participants were first initiated into yoga. Most of the information that contributed to naming the first theme *Gateway* came from stories shared from participants being asked, “Tell me about how you became interested in participating in yoga.” My initial round of coding involved in-vivo coding (Saldaña, 2009), while keeping in mind my first research question: What experiences do CCY instructors perceive as significant in their journey to becoming CCY teachers? After drawing out specific quotes pertaining to what experiences the participants perceived as significant in their journey, I coded the data again with sociologically constructed codes (Saldaña, 2009). In culling the data for these significant experiences, I produced the gateway theme, which references participants’ point of entry into yoga or their “gateway” to the practice. My selecting the label “Gateway” for this theme was relatively simple. For me, *Gateway* was also about my introduction to the participants. Asking the teachers “how you became interested in participating in yoga?”, was my first question in the interview guide. This first question both asked about their entry point into yoga and was also my point of entry, or gateway, through which I was exposed to their story. I support this theme by offering excerpts from the data from our

conversations and my understanding of these experiences. Seven out of 10 of those interviewed recalled going to their first yoga class in a group-fitness setting. In keeping with the constant comparative method, outlying cases were also explored when possible. In these cases, the other three participants' experiences became salient through their references to books and videos through which they were introduced to yoga.

A common pattern across seven of the participants' experiences was recalling starting yoga by going to classes. Jamison "started yoga ... through [her] work place" to reduce stress. Recalling a similar reason, Hannah stated that she first started taking yoga at a community center, after graduate school to alleviate the stress of her transition into the workforce. In answering the first question, Hannah said,

I first started taking yoga when ...I got my first real job in a corporate setting. It was stressful. I was interested in yoga to relieve stress. It was purely a stressful life, moving from college to work[ing] a lot of hours. ... And I started going to a class once a week with mom at a community center. I had danced...growing up and in college. ...When you move out of that, I missed it. ...I wanted something different than going a gym going on a treadmill...[that was my] initial interest [in yoga. ...[It was something for my] mom and me to do to together. It was a gentle class.... it was not physical challenging.... it was a mental releases.... [a] mental change.

Diane, Father Andrew, Alana, Madeline, and Olivia also were introduced to yoga in a group-fitness setting. For example, Diane said,

I'd heard about yoga for several years and was curious about it, then I found a gym that was conveniently located to my workplace that offered a yoga class, so I signed up. Loved it immediately. Started going regularly.

In recounting how he first started practicing yoga, Father Andrew stated, I became interested in yoga about sixteen years ago after going to a health club primarily for swimming and then getting bored with swimming and peeking my nose into a yoga class and seeing that this could be something new. I then went and joined that class and it was at a time that was convenient with my schedule and I began to go on a weekly basis. That's how it began; I basically just wanted to change from swimming to another form of physical activity.

Olivia said,

Well, I went to a class at my gym. It wasn't necessarily a straight yoga class. It was called body flow and it is a program that has tai chi yoga and Pilates in it. It is all timed to music. The music is pretty contemporary so it was very accessible. The first time I tried it, I knew I would be teaching it someday and I was just a gym rat; I had never taught a class or anything. That was back in 2002.

Of the seven participants that cited going to a class as their induction into yoga, only one participant described the class as taught from a Christian perspective. Alana "saw an announcement for a yoga class from a Christian perspective that was being taught by a woman Episcopal Priest." When Alana attended the class, she had a "wonderful experience and felt that [it] was something that really spoke to her." She recognized the class as a moment that changed her life. Other CCY instructors were

introduced to yoga under different sets of circumstances.

Outliers. Participants were asked how they became interested in yoga. Three of the 10 yogis cited media as being their gateway into yoga. These were outliers, as the majority of the participants took up the practice in the form of yoga classes with a group, not an individual practice. Adrianna began her yoga journey through videos that explored the physical part of yoga but that were not Christian oriented. Kai “first came to yoga through books,” one specifically about “Christian yoga by Jean Marie Dechant,” a French Benedictine monk. Lily told the story of her introduction to yoga:

Mom did yoga when I was a kid. ...So, there was that initial intro. How I started practicing was....we were in Tokyo and she didn't have room in her suitcase for her video tape, VHS, so she gave me that and I started practicing with that every night before I went to bed; so, really it was a fluke.

While these are outliers in this study, it is possible that a pattern could be found, but more interviews would be needed.

Discussion of Gateway as it relates to literature. In the following a section I discuss the major theme of *Gateway* as it relates to the literature on yoga and health and why people start doing yoga.

Yoga and Health. This first theme, *Gateway*, and its associated outliers, is about getting involved in yoga and it relates to the literature on yoga and health. Christ-centered yoga may offer an individual a fitness choice that they may have not otherwise considered. Participants in this study may have been able to take advantage of yoga's positive, healthy outcomes, which is explored in the *Embodied Spirituality* theme. The

theme of *Gateway* may resonate with readers of this study, as a result may consider starting yoga themselves, and thus too could benefit from the discipline. As I explored in Chapter II, medical research has found that yoga is a healthy physical activity (Khalsa, Shorter, Cope, Wyshak, & Sklar, 2009; Ravindran et al., 2009; Harvard Health Publications, 2009; Kuei-Min & Wei-Shyuan, 2008; Guarracino et al., 2006; Van Puymbroeck et al., 2007). The practice benefits bodily functions, including movement in the musculoskeletal system, oxygen transportation in the cardiopulmonary system, and the nervous and endocrine systems. As a result, “the body, mind and breath control forms a natural basis for the psycho-physiological effects of Hatha Yoga” (Raub, 2002 p. 798). These medical-based results support the fitness industry’s marketing of yoga as a way to *ameliorate* lifestyle issues, such as being overweight (Barth et al., 2008, 2010; Yan, 2010) and having high blood pressure (Cowen & Adams, 2005; Kim, 2005). Yoga offers people an exercise option with physical and mental health benefits and with low risk of negative side effects.

The paraphrased and reinterpreted stories offered in this theme illustrate how participants first began to practice yoga. Based on descriptions of participant experiences, readers may have the chance to engage in transferability. Readers may find that the descriptions resonate with them and they can transfer the information to other situations with comparable qualities (Buchanan, 2011; Creswell, 2007). For example, people who are considering doing yoga, but have not yet started, may begin to see yoga as a viable fitness option because other like-minded Christians have taken up the practice. This point of entry, through CCY, may offer a person an exercise option that they may have not

otherwise been open to. By taking up the practice, participants and other potential students may be able to take advantage of yoga's positive healthy outcomes.

Motivation for Physical Activity. As mentioned before there is a dearth with the literature as to why people start practicing yoga. While not an objective of this study, a latent effect of this research is that these participant experiences begin to touch upon motivational factors for starting yoga. For example, as I mentioned Jamison and Hannah started doing yoga to reduce stress. This experience is support by research that has stated some people take part in physical activity in order to feel good (Henry, Sanbron, Senne, & Nicholas, 2011). It could be argued that culturally, yoga is seen as an women's activity, done by mostly females (Tischer, Hartmann-Tews, & Combrink's, 2011). This may speak to why the majority of participants in this study were female. This also could be reflective of a trend where there has been an increase in older adult, female participation rates when compared to males.

I also found it interesting that most of the participants who started doing yoga were introduced to the practice in a group fitness setting, where they were practicing yoga along side other people. A point for further research could be to extend Cooky's (2009) findings to female yoga participants. As mentioned in Chapter II, he found that females who partook in a recreational sports program may have done so because of qualities aligned with a pleasure and participation model of physical activity. This would include characteristics such as the working with opponent to compete, connecting with others, enjoyment, participation, and inclusivity. It may be inferred that people in the present study, doing yoga in a class type setting, may do so because of enjoyment,

inclusivity, and the motivation to participate in physical activity. However, in order to solidify this argument further research would need to be done interrogating the motivational factors of why people practice yoga.

After discussing how the participants were first introduced to yoga, I asked them about their experience with Christian-based yoga. That question launched a rich discussion of stories filled with doubt, faith, embodiment, contradictions and fulfillment. Many of those excerpts reflecting those narratives, as well as those that other questions prompted, are re-presented in the next two themes: *Embodied Spirituality* and *Dueling Dualities*.

Theme 2: Embodied Spirituality. The term *Embodied Spirituality* emerged from my conversations with seven participants when they spoke about the connection between their faith and their bodies. I offer excerpts from those conversations as a way to explore this connection. Most examples provided are more general in nature based on how the connection through yoga was experienced. I also provide examples of specific times when a participant experienced the connection while practicing a posture or pranayama. Discussing the last theme, I focus on how instructors operationalize CCY through their instruction.

Madeline felt that yoga was “an approach that really resonated with [her], which was that God was really in your body ...and felt far more real to me than what [she] had learned in churches.” Similarly, in retelling her experience, Jamison said what she

found when, I started yoga, was that Christianity on its own had not really ever completely given me a physical outlet for my faith and ...that I had been

marginally cut out for that even though I had done liturgical dance...There was always a part of me that was really pulling me toward the body but it really wasn't there in my Christian faith.... I felt that I had plumbed the Christian faith about as far as I could go and... found yoga. To me, it was a gift from God and it expanded my understanding of who God is and who I am in God when I began to practice yoga...I found a real reconnection to my body as I had said as an expression of my Christian faith and, for me, it was a very unifying experience where it became a little less about my head and my ideas and more about integrating really who I was with my Christian beliefs.

Jamison felt that there was something missing in her Christian experiences in relation to the body. Yoga allowed her to move beyond what she had been taught as possible expressions of her Christian faith and by adapting yoga to fit her belief system she found unification in mind, body, and spirit (or her Christian understanding of spirit) through yoga.

It is my interpretation that based on her following statement Olivia seemingly found a similar experience as significant in her journey to becoming a CCY teacher, she said

If I think that I am going to be spiritual in just my head, it's just wrong. It really has to flush through the whole body... Yoga helped me to see through the eyes of Jesus; not to just see but to feel the love that I had and it was so unconditional and what I felt was compassion rising up and I just felt love for everybody and everything, the earth, and everything was alive.

When Olivia said, “If I think that I am going to be spiritual in just my head, it’s just wrong”, my interpretation is that yoga pushed her to think past religion, beyond Christian dogma, to feel more. This connects to the idea of searching for something sacred and yoga may be one of the methods she uses in that quest. As a researcher and as a yoga teacher, this is one outcome of yoga, to move beyond thinking, to feel, and be present.

Olivia explained how “everything was alive” in her body when practicing:

I will give you one and I can’t even remember exactly what the scripture is but I believe it is in Matthew; “the lamp of the body is the eye and if thine eye be single then your whole body should be filled with light” or something like that. You know, at first, it’s like “huh....what the heck does that mean?” Traditionally, maybe not traditionally, but I have heard like my mind being single and so forth and it’s like ‘how do I bring this into practice to help me understand it better?’ It just hit me one day that if the lamp of the body is the eye that is like the eye is the perceiver trying to make the whole body perceive; my whole body be the eye and my whole body be the lamp. So, if I bring in something like that into a physical practice and start to really perceive with the whole body then it’s like the whole body does become light and that is pretty exciting, to bring something like that to life within a physical practice and just makes that scripture more alive for me.

Before actually ever teaching CCY, Olivia personally linked Christian scripture to her yoga experience, which provided a foundation from which she could teach CCY. This excerpt begins to illuminate how yoga can be co-opted or adapted for a Christian belief system, which becomes operationalized in a yoga classes.

After I analyzed my conversation with Kai, several significant points came to light regarding the theme *Embodied Spirituality*. I credit him with coining this term. He also offered insight into why yogis may be surprised by experiencing a faith-body connection during their practice. In reflecting on his experience with yoga, Kai said, yoga ...is a way that I can have an embodied spiritual practice. Because so much Christian practice tends to be rather disincarnate, which is ironic given that it is a religion that affirms the goodness of creation and the incarnation of the word of God in human flesh. In fact, we often act as if we are just brains on sticks. So, when people discover that here is something where I can....whatever the motive was whether ‘I can do something for my sore back’ or ‘I want to lose weight’ or ‘I want to feel less stress’; they feel that here is actually a comprehensive practice that takes the body seriously and I can integrate all of that into a life of Christian discipleship.

Kai’s passage is insightful particularly when he spoke about the “Christian practice tends to be rather disincarnate.” I argue that, through yoga, Kai encounters his body in a more positive light, and therefore challenges some Christian assumptions of the body, such as the flesh is potentially sinful, and this affirmation seems to counter how Kai was socialized to perceive his body. Originating from personal experience, Kai deconstructs old “truths” he has been taught in order to reconstruct a new reality and perception of himself.

The disregard of body resonated with Alana as well:

You know, I think that for me, no matter what the church says, there is a way in which the teaching of the church has led to a very negative view of human embodiment generally and I think I felt that very particularly. When I do yoga, all of that goes away and I know that my body is something that has been created by God and I can experience a sense of deep personal connection that God's Spirit is tangibly within me and I am a part of this thing called God that is deeper and bigger and more mysterious and miraculous than anything that I could imagine and I am living in that flow...Yoga is really my way into that kind of experience...Yeh. I mean, you know, I think it certainly depends on to some extent the denomination and certainly to a large extent it will depend on the individual person who is doing any teaching but I think, for myself, the doctrine of original sin have been blown out of proportion in a way that I don't think it was ever really intended to be. I think there is a way in which we have lost a sense of the goodness of human embodiment and the essential sacredness of the human embodiment. There is a sense of the body as being negative and the body as something that needs to be overcome and subdued and that the body is, in some basic way, dangerous. For me, that is a complete upside-down view of Christianity and that's not my experience of what Jesus is talking about in scripture.

Similar to Kai, through practicing yoga, Alana was confronted with her understanding of the some Christian teachings that there is a "negative view of human embodiment." As a

researcher, I feel that these types of experiences begin to answer the question about how beliefs from other cultures, about the body, influence participation in physical activities as they have the potential to challenge the negative religious beliefs about the body, which participants mentioned.

Yoga brought Diane “in tune with the Holy Spirit” so that she recognized her “body, breath, and mind...[are] connected to [her] spirit.” This excerpt speaks to Diane’s ability to move beyond doing yoga solely as a physical exercise. She uses the modality to connect to more subtle aspects of the body that are usually taken for granted, like the breath, and to engage a metaphysical element that she identifies as the Holy Spirit. This experience aligns with a spiritual aspect of yoga and Diane’s quest to encounter something sacred. The word *sacred* refers to what an individual deems to be divine, this could be a being, spirit, object, “Ultimate reality, or Ultimate Truth”, but Diane interprets the divine as the Christian idea of God, and her *quest* refers to a search or an endeavor to recognize, understand, or explain what is sacred (Hill et al., 2000). Although Diane did not mention the word sacred specifically, it is my interpretation that she views God as something holy because she talked about how when you follow God and Jesus’ teachings, one’s life opens. She talked about having faith in God as well. More specific to this example, is Diane’s ability to recognize, in her own experience, what she perceives as the Holy Spirit. Similarly to Diane, others, who participate in physical activity, have experienced spiritual fulfillment. This assertion is supported by the larger body of literature relating to the topic (McDonald, Guldin, & Westhergill, 1998; Marsh, 2008; Unruh, Smith, & Scammell, 2000).

Echoing this connection, Andrew called his experience *body spirituality*. Further detailing his understanding, he explained,

[F]or me, as a Catholic Priest, my hope is always in that whatever I do is going to integrate into spirituality and that I am going to be able to draw it in and complement life as a Priest on my Christian journey and that it would be a part of just who I am. So, I began to see that; that yoga did have body spirituality and that there were elements within my own physical body that were changing because of a consistent discipline practice. Therefore, I began to do the research and began to go on a journey looking at different forms of yoga, reading different material in yoga and talking to teachers and went on this very exquisite journey in the yoga world. I began to see that this could indeed have a Christian basis. Although I know that it is not of the Christian faith, per se, there are many themes in yoga that connect with things in Christianity; one of the major themes being compassion. I began to hear words by yoga teachers, particularly when it came to values that are basically like the values that we practice as Christians. So, this could be a form of practicing to be a better Christian and my yoga practice did indeed help me to be a better Christian. ... First of all, the whole sense of humility. When you are in a yoga practice and you are going through all different poses and what you can and cannot do with that kind of awareness in the body it is a matter of humility and a matter of being grounded. I began to see that yoga teaches one to be humble more; to get out of the ego and into the body. It also teaches that silence. I always, in the beginning and still to this day, revel in the

savasana, revel in the time for meditation particularly after a good vigorous practice. [In] savasana and the meditation ... everything has been opened up and there is greater access to body awareness and to soul awareness, more importantly through the body to the soul. So, that's how I see it; **through** the body **to**⁵ the soul.

Based on this excerpt, it seems that because of yoga Father Andrew is able to express himself more fully and he sees this as a positive influence in his life and in his work. He is able to move, both on and off his mat, in a way that makes him a better person. His experience and yoga itself challenges ideals in Western culture that promote sports and physical activities glorifying power, speed, and elite performance (Buchanan, 2010; Coakley, 2009). Through this study, supported by Father Andrew's reflections on yoga, highlight a more subjective experience of inner consciousness, which offsets historically positivistic studies (Harman, 1986; Sperry, 1981).

Father Andrew also expressed his hope for others to experience an embodied spirituality through yoga.

I feel like, into the future as people become more aware of the benefits of their yoga as a practice of a spirituality of body and heart, as Father Ryan calls it, that they will be able to see that they can indeed enter more deeply their prayer life publicly and communally, that they will be able to live out the beatitudes when it comes to particularly "blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God." In all of this, I think it is important. I don't expect people to

⁵ The bold text is to indicate an inflection and emphasis on these words during the interview.

agree with it but it has worked for me. It has worked for me to minister in a community to people and to practice compassion; with my own weakness is to practice compassion.

In my experience, yoga is often taught and practiced from a non-competitive perspective, in addition participants did not indicate they did competitive yoga. Often yogis are guided to be compassionate with themselves, to listen to their bodies, and find what level of intensity is best for them to practice. It is my interpretation that Father Andrew does not see yoga as a “bigger, stronger, faster” type of exercise. From this perspective, the clergy member may be able to practice compassion with himself during his yoga practice, then he is able to take that lesson “off of his mat” and bring it out into the world.

Discussion of Embodied Spirituality as it relates to literature. In the next section, I discuss this theme as it relates to research concerning: (a) yoga and health; (b) religious, spiritual, and philosophical perspectives in sport and physical activity; (c) and sport psychology.

Yoga and health. Regarding the mental side of wellness, Jamison and Hannah both cited the stress-reducing qualities of yoga, which drew them to the practice. People working in the mental-health field have used yoga in their treatment of emotional challenges, such as depression (Barth et al., 2008; Harvard Health Publications, 2009; Khalsa et al., 2009; Ravindran et al., 2009; Ross & Thomas, 2010). Yoga taught from a Christian perspective may give these clinicians another option in their treatment-plan repertoire and support a wellness model that also supports a mind-body-spirit balance

(Barth et al., 2008; Guarracino et al., 2006; Kuei-Min & Wei-Shyuan, 2008; Van Puymbroeck et al., 2007). For these Christians, both clinician and clients, concerned about practicing yoga, CCY may be their gateway, their point of entry into yoga. CCY may offer a yoga option to people who may not otherwise see it as a valid one. A yoga class framed with the Christian perspective may allow potential students a comfortable way to take up the practice, tap into yoga's healthful benefits, and enhance their wellness. However, it is appropriate to note that a person who identifies with another faith or non-faith based belief systems and finds themselves in a CCY class may experience increased stress due to hearing about God in a yoga class. To these yogis I would advise two potential courses of actions: (a) the person could quietly roll up their mat and leave the class or, the more challenging of the two, (b) if the practitioner can try to move into a more relaxed state, take a few deep breaths, observe what they are feeling, and see if they can find some other element of the class to focus on that is not Christ-centric, such as the physical practice.

Each of the themes discussed in this chapter relate to the concept of wellness, but the theme of *Embodied Spirituality* is one the most germane to this concept. The model of wellness that relates to this study consists of mental health, physical health, spiritual health, social health, intellectual health, and environmental influences (Hopson et al., 2009; Powers & Dodd, 2009). In reference to wellness, Madeline, Olivia, Kai, Diane, and Andrew told stories, in my interpretation, about total-body experiences. I recognize that the accounts re-presented within this theme may not include all the elements of wellness, but they emphasize physical and spiritual health and for some emotional health. For

example, in terms of emotional health, Father Andrew mentioned exploring compassion and being grounded during his yoga practice, experiences he was able to take with him off the matt and into the world.

Religious, spiritual, and philosophical perspectives in sport and physical activity.

In the following section, I discuss how this study also contributes to the discourse on religion, spirituality, and physical activity (Barnett & Weber, 2009; Guinn & Vincent, 2002; Nichols, 2005; Wallet & Fasting, 2003). Whereas Nichols' (2005) work on physical activity, spirituality and religion was quantitatively designed, the present study offers a more in-depth understanding of how spirituality and religion can be combined with physical activity. Griffin's (2003) study on outdoor-adventure activities found that participants grew spiritually when spiritual principles were taught in conjunction with the activities. The theme of *Embodied Spirituality* offers excerpts from the data re-presenting similar reflections on some participants' experiences. For example, the stories that I attempt to recount in the theme of *Embodied Spirituality* offer glimpses into participants' religious and spiritual growth through physical activity. Along with other studies (Garrett, 2001; Kochetkova, 2007; Rothenberg, 2006; Wallet & Fasting, 2003) this one enriches the scholastic fields of physical activity and spirituality by adding conceptual depth and has practical, marketing applications, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

As previously mentioned, some participants experienced a strong connection between yoga and their religious beliefs and see their yoga teaching as an opportunity to enhance their students' spirituality. These experiences are supported by a larger body of

research indicating that people who participate in physical activity may experience spiritual fulfillment (McDonald, Guldin, & Westhergill, 1998; Marsh, 2008; Unruh, Smith, & Scammell, 2000). Earlier in this section, I recounted my impressions of Madeline's story telling me about her teaching and describing a sense of community her classes. McDonald, Guldin, and Westhergill (1988) found in their research about spirituality and physical activity that participants experienced spiritual growth, which was defined as an "increasing awareness of community or of the interrelationships among increasingly larger systems" (p. 210). I would argue that Madeline's description evokes a sense of community for her and her students, who may experience spiritual growth as a result.

A strong connection exists between physical activity and spirituality. In many cases, physical activity can lead to increased spiritual development and fulfillment (Barnett and Weber, 2009; Fredrickson and Anderson, 1999; Guinn and Vincent, 2002; Heintzman, 2010; Marsh, 2008; Parry, 2009). From a qualitative perspective, this study contributes to the fields of physical activity and spirituality by participants sharing insight into their spiritual growth through yoga, how they construct meaning in relation to their Christian-based yoga teaching, and how this meaning is operationalized in their classes.

From a philosophical perspective, specifically the philosophy of the body, the *Embodied Spirituality* theme opens a small window into understanding how participants may view the body in relationship to the mind. In the literature review, I explored the relationship between physical activity and spirituality based on my assumption that an appreciation of that relationship is positive because it can lead to understanding the social

construction of individual knowledge and popular consciousness. Chapter II briefly introduced humanistic reflections on the mind-body relationship, specifically the vitalistic perspective, which starts with the body's experience then proceeds to reflections on that experience (Bandy, 1986). Moments re-presented within *Embodied Spirituality* may resonate with this perspective, but only to a limited extent. In my interpretation, most participants experienced total-body integration. For the CCY instructors in this study, this physical modality seemingly allowed them a fuller self-expression. Father Andrew specifically reflected on the integration of mind-body-spirit. For example according to his yoga is an experience “**through** the body **to** the soul.” Such reflections depart from the humanistic perspective, as this worldview focuses on the mind, logic, and reason, not on the supernatural or divine (Harman, 1986; Sperry, 1981). This study's findings serve as material for new interpretations privileging subjective experiences and inner consciousness and potentially augments science, a historically positivistic area of inquiry (Harman, 1986; Sperry, 1981). Limited research designs, including the current study's design, that have often studied the body “objectively” might have disregarded such experiences; however, these findings move beyond objective knowledge and are reflective of subjective experiences, although this study is not the first to do so. Allowing for such new interpretations and recognition of an inner conscious furthers the argument for analysis of the subjective experience in sport and physical activity. This is part of a larger cultural development that is witness to a change in how and why science is used to understand the full human potential. My findings are relevant to current trends in physical education and culture, which in some spaces privilege the integration of the mind and

body (Barnett & Weber, 2009; Klassen, 2005; Ryan, 1986) and at times the mind, body, and spirit (Ravizza, 2002).

Sport performance and psychology. Embodied Spirituality provides insight into experiences participants perceive as significant in their journey to becoming CCY teachers and into how these experiences helped them to construct meaning in relation to their Christian-based yoga teaching experiences. Their stories could have an impact on the field of sport performance and wellness. Regarding the former, some sport psychology consultants support the integration of spirituality, including religious observances, into working with their clients (Ravizza, 2002; Watson & Nesti, 2005). Athletes could use yoga in their mental training, potentially increasing concentration and enhancing performance. The accounts provided in this study offer insight into the spirituality, sport, and achievement connection and lead to a deeper appreciation for how CCY could develop athletic performance.

Through coding the data, I produced the theme of *Embodied Spirituality*. I identified situations instructors described regarding their classes that could have been interpreted as fleshing out their Christian beliefs. However, I encapsulated those situations and named them *Operationalization* in order to capture cases in classrooms or in texts (books, training manuals, or web content) aimed at teaching yoga from an explicitly Christian perspective. This approach differentiated the themes of *Embodied Spirituality*, *Dueling Dualities*, and *Operationalization*. Next, I re-present parts of my conversations that were salient to me when I asked participants such questions as the following: a) What is your interpretation of religion in relation to yoga?, b) What is your

interpretation of your faith in relation to yoga?, or c) What is your interpretation of yoga?, which address my second and third research questions.

Theme 3: Dueling Dualities. In the data, I found patterns indicating that CCY instructors in this study, at times, connect yogic philosophy to Christian principles, theology, and ideas. Some instructors in this study name yoga as a universal technology that can be applied to any faith-based system. Others see Christianity and yoga as two parallel paths, yet diverging at times, thus making yoga and Christianity incompatible with each other. In these moments of divergence, some teachers depart from what they see as incongruent yoga teachings and insert a Christian focus, thus experimenting with yoga and changing it to fit their needs and those of their students. *Dueling Dualities* have two subthemes: *Universality and Connections* and *Departures, Co-optation and Adaptation*. The subthemes could arguably be discussed as separate, distinct themes versus falling under the overarching theme of *Dueling Dualities*. The reason that I have organized the themes and associated subthemes the way I have is to emphasize the complicated and nuanced nature of Christian-centered yoga.

The term *Dueling Dualities* came from the more conservative notion that yoga is antithetical to Christianity; according to some, therefore, yoga and Christianity become two distinct practices that should not overlap (Mohler, 2010). In addition, my own positionality was very salient to me in naming this theme; I further discuss this later in this chapter. CCY instructors travel a path between these two practices and in doing so encounter both smooth terrain and, at times, challenges that have to be avoided or forged through. In actively naming yoga “universal” or in explicitly departing from what they

see as traditional yogic philosophy, these instructors are continuing yoga's "adaptation, experimentation, synthesis and change" (Kai).

Dueling Dualities: Universality and Connections. As the theme implies and as I suggested earlier, the subtheme of *Dueling Dualities: Universality and Connections* recognizes that some CCY instructors view yoga as a tool transcending religion, a view that can eliminate tension for a Christian choosing to practice yoga. Seven of the participants expressed this view. Father Andrew stated that he does not see yoga as a religion, but as

a non-sectarian practice that can complement any religious practice. So, a person who is Jewish or Buddhist can bring their religious faith [to] a yoga practice because it is non-sectarian and there is no religion that can claim yoga...It can enhance one's religious faith.

Kai echoed this sentiment stating that yoga "is a set of techniques as a philosophy and all that sort of thing, but it's kind of non-sectarian technology that is yes used by Christians, but also obviously Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, and people of no particular faith."

Hannah described yoga as a tool, which can place any practitioner in a "quiet, worshipful, and introspective" state of being. Alana expanded on this state by saying yoga transcends religion and "is about finding wholeness ...and to prepare the body and the mind and be able to know God."

The term *kinesthetic worship* came up in my conversation with Lily, who defined it as positioning the body in a certain way that is aimed at placing a person in a prayerful state. She interprets the asana of yoga or the physical postures as "just a series of prayer

postures” and identifies that “there are prayer postures in Judaism and prayer postures in Christianity,” exemplified by a person kneeling in prayer. Her understanding of yoga is that it is a continuation of kinesthetic worship, which is practiced in many religions and cultures. By interpreting yoga as another form of worshipful movement practitioners open a cultural space, which allows them to deconstruct yoga’s ties to Eastern religions and construct a new reality within their yoga practice that is Christian centered.

This extracting and connecting of various religions and cultures came up in my interview with Madeline, who “like[s] to compare the Bible with yoga scriptures and see where the parallels are and then pray about it.” She described her religious and cultural interests:

I am very interested in Judaism as well; very interested. I have read a lot of Judaism because to me that seems like what Jesus was practicing so I feel closer to Jesus when I study Jewish teachings. I have also studied a lot of Celtic spirituality because I think it they have done a lot of fascinating things with Christianity in Ireland. Again, I am of Irish descent and Irish, in general, have a very deep connection to the land and so I feel like they have sort of combined their earth-based spirituality with their Christian beliefs in a very unique way.

In the in-vivo coding (Saldaña, 2009) of the excerpt presented above, the words “parallels,” “combined,” and “have done fascinating this with” stood out to me. In applying sociologically constructed codes to the text (Saldaña, 2009), I wrote “connections” and “other adaptations.” It is my interpretation that Madeline is interested in how other religious and spiritual traditions have been combined; she specifically cites the example

of “earth-based spirituality [and]...Christian beliefs” in Ireland. This awareness of how others have synthesized different practices may speak to her openness to do the same, which is supported by the fact that she combines Christian principles and applies them to yoga.

During my interview with Olivia she spoke to how she connected Christian scripture to her yoga experience.

[I]t is in Matthew; ‘the lamp of the body is the eye and if thine eye be single then your whole body should be filled with light’ or something like that...It just hit me one day that if the lamp of the body is the eye that is like the eye is the perceiver trying to make the whole body perceive; my whole body be the eye and my whole body be the lamp. So, if I bring in something like that into a physical practice and start to really perceive with the whole body then it’s like the whole body does become light and that is pretty exciting, to bring something like that to life within a physical practice and just makes that scripture more alive for me.

Olivia moves beyond yoga as merely an exercise and is able to practice yoga as way to connect to her religious beliefs and Christian scripture.

In her teacher training manual, Madeline made more explicit connections between Christianity and yoga, noting that guidelines for ethical living are present throughout every culture. Noting that in yoga there are the yamas and niyamas, she added, “In Christianity we have both the Ten Commandments and Christ’s Golden Rule of ‘love God and thy neighbor as yourself.’” Hannah also identified the connections between the

Christian Ten Commandments and yoga's yamas and niyamas. Lily recognized a similar relationship, specifically with the niyama of sauca, or cleanliness, with Christian baptism.

The participants mentioned above extend these connections and experiences into their classes. Making explicit connections, identifying parallels, and building bridges between fundamental yoga and Christian teachings is essential in the reproduction of Christian ideology within a yogic context because without these connections these instructors could not teach Christian based yoga. Consequentially, a newer form of yoga emerges on the physical fitness front, along with socio-cultural implications. Coming from a dominant position, religiously speaking, the phenomenon of CCY has the potential to push up against more mainstream methods of yoga. I do not wish to see CCY white wash yoga in the West and diminish or cut off other versions that are practiced, which may privilege other spiritualities or secular experiences.

Through follow-up e-mail correspondences, I asked Adrianna to reflect on the idea of connections between yogic philosophy and Christian scripture. She responded, "I absolutely think there is a connection. I think that all of the Eight Limbs of yoga are fulfilled through Christ and Scripture.... I started with the Eight Limbs of yoga and showed how each are fulfilled through Scripture" (personal communication). She further explained these connections: "1. To help ease Christian's fear of yoga and 2. To help non-Christians realize that Christ is the answer for the peace they are seeking through their yoga practice" (personal communication). To understand how she views these connections, I was directed to her website, where she discussed combining Christianity and yoga.

Adrianna wrote that,

The ... 6 limbs are focused on becoming a better person and are all principles of the gospel. ... With the LORD [sic] as the specific focus and the understanding that it is Him that is helping us to grow in them, not ourselves. It is our goal to help others realize that each limb is made easier through Christ. By focusing on Him and allowing God to work in our hearts, we are better able to achieve all eight.

The first limb, the *yamas*, encompasses a social code of ethics. Adrianna related this limb to the golden rule: do unto others as you would have them do unto you, “...which is of course found in Matthew 7:12, ‘So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.’ (NIV⁶)” (written document-website, 2012). The Christian yogini acknowledges that “other religions have similar viewpoints, but it is interesting that our Savior [Jesus] explains it in a positive format; what you should do, not what you shouldn't” (written document, 2010). In this website posting, she integrates the five *yamas* into a Christian framework, labeling them as “foundational principles of the bible” [that] are gifts from God, given in His grace and attained through the Holy Spirit” (written document, 2010). Throughout her discussion, Adrianna draws upon Christian scripture and her own opinion to explicitly connect yogic and Christian philosophies. The participant ensures her potential students that as long as God, recognized as the Christian, “right” God, is the focus of the yoga practice a Christian can benefit from the ancient discipline and will not be led astray by its Hindu

⁶ The NIV abbreviation refers to the New International Version.

associations, but if yoga is sanitized of its religious and thus socio-cultural affiliations, then a space is opened for a practitioner to adapt it. When CCY is taught, repackaged and outwardly manifested, a type of plagiarism is propagated and crediting an influential source in yoga's history, Hinduism, is lost.

The explicit nature of connecting yoga's philosophies to a Christ-centered perspective is one qualifier of this subtheme. In terms of outliers, during my interview with Kai, he stated, "What makes [yoga] Christian is the practitioner." I found this statement of particular interest because other instructors made general connections between yogic philosophies and Christian concepts. Even though his understanding of yoga is of a universal and transcendent nature, Kai qualified the practice from the practitioner's perspective. Instead of explicitly connecting the two practices, his interpretation was implicit, personal, and individualistic. When CCY instructors take this individual approach, identify tension between their understanding of yogic and Christian philosophies, adapt yoga for their own intentions, and put that new interpretation out into the world by teaching Christian-based yoga, they "pioneer a new dimension of yoga" (Diane). The individual focus and personal intentionality of Kai's perspective touches on the concept of religious privatization, which I discuss at the end of this theme.

Dueling Dualities: Departures, Co-optation and Adaptation. Kai sees yoga as a "living tradition... that has an amazing elastic quality." Even though he recognizes "it as a philosophical spiritual system that comes from the Indian subcontinent and is practiced by people of many different religions or none," he sees yoga's "development in North America [as] yet another chapter in a long saga of adaptation, experimentation, synthesis,

and change.” I feel that not seeing yoga as a practice unique to a specific culture or religion allows practitioners to appropriate yoga for their own intents.

Seven interviewees spoke about having an open understanding or interpretation of yoga’s history, which permits them to modify the practice. Lily’s historical positioning of yoga as existing “many, many, many, many years before it was adopted by Hinduism” echoes this openness to interpreting the practice’s legacy. To extend my analysis further, from an instructor’s perspective, if yoga has been transmuted by other faiths, including Hinduism, then teaching yoga from a Christian perspective could be seen as merely continuing this legacy of appropriation. If instructors perceive yoga as having no religious home—in other words no one faith has an authoritative voice in yoga’s teaching—then, at most, the modality is modified based on the practitioner’s needs or, at least, more easily. The participants adapting yoga to fit their Christian worldview support this interpretation. In a culture where Hinduism and Buddhism are in the minority, those practicing the dominant faith in the West may be able to bend yogic tradition for their own means. If the opposite were the case, if Hinduism and Buddhism were a majority religion, Christians might experience more push back for teaching CCY. Those who are in positions of power, as Christians are in the West, I argue have a greater ability to define certain cultural practices and modalities such as yoga.

I illustrate this continued legacy of co-optation by describing a time when yoga brought Olivia closer to God and how initially this experience was confusing for her. Then I detail how other teachers might adapt yoga to reconcile it with their faith. When Olivia was in yoga teacher training, which was a mainstream course located in New

England, her experience was “harsh” and initially left her “confused.” While attending the course, she felt her experience “was a huge process.” She did not understand how a non-Christian practice could bring her closer to God. She would pray to God to “let [her] world crumble” so that she “could see the truth.” My impression of Olivia’s experience was that it was raw and confusing. She did not specifically articulate how she reconciled this experience other than to say through prayer her experience was valid and truthful for her. Other instructors described more specifically how they may have moved from seeing yoga as incongruent with their faith to processing their experiences in such a way that allows them to practice both yoga and their religion.

Adrianna explained that the chakra system connected with yoga is not so much about energy centers, as she had learned, but is part of an overall system created by God. She explicitly expresses that connection in her teachings. It is my interpretation that Adrianna does not deny that there is a connection in the way yoga can change how a practitioner feels, but to her it only makes sense when it is put in the perspective where that system is created by God. Alana noted a similar Christian- centric focus when encountering Hindu chants in other yoga classes:

[I]t is not to deny that there is a spirituality that is associated with yoga from India that is a very different spirituality than Christianity. Sometimes I will have students say “I really want to take a yoga class, but when I go they are chanting Hindu chants and I don’t feel comfortable and don’t know what to do.” I think that discomfort is important to listen to. It’s not to say that a Christian can never do a Hindu chant, but I think there is something to be mindful about and to realize

that when you move into a chant of another tradition, you are opening a door that is a very different door than what you may be used to...I have always advised people ...to just say a prayer, a prayer that is comfortable before entering whatever yoga class...[as] a way of anchoring in one's own tradition...[and] staying grounded.

From a critical perspective, the same could be said for someone of no faith or one outside of Christianity taking a CCY class. That yogi hearing a Christian prayer or song may experience discomfort or uneasiness about being in the class.

When Jamison encounters a similar situation, she internally adapts the practice through a process, which she calls *discernment*, which begins by asking herself, “Did I feel that there was anything in what I was doing in studying yoga and practicing yoga [that troubled me], was I feeling troubled in my spirit?” She elaborated on the discernment process, asking herself these questions is,

how I would express it. There have been times when I felt that the religious practice was not one that I understood. It was in another language. I didn't know what the chanting was saying and that would sometimes trouble me. But what I have found is very rarely was I troubled in my spirit in gatherings where yoga was being practiced and when I was, I would just perhaps stop saying the words and invoke images and my own understanding of God, the name of God for instance, but I would become much less worried about that and I guess it really comes mostly from my own understanding of Jesus' teachings and the fact that, if we as

Christians really believe that God is who God says He is...you know, that we do not need to be afraid.

In coding the excerpt above, I applied two sociologically constructed codes to the text “reconciling tensions” and “outsider.” The former speaks to the process Jamison underwent when she encountered tensions between her faith and her yoga practice. She internalized those tensions, prayed about them, and reconciled them based on her connection to her faith. The second code, “outsider,” held two meanings for me. The first meaning reflected my interpretation that Jamison felt like an outsider in situations where she did not understand what occurred during a yoga class. To reiterate, Jamison mentioned that, “There have been times when I felt that the religious practice was not one that I understood. It was in another language. I didn’t know what the chanting was saying and that would sometimes trouble me.” The second meaning the code, “outsider,” held for me was about outsiders in Christian yoga class. Reflecting upon this passage, as researcher, I had to ask what if the tables were turned? What if a Hindu person or an atheist attended a Christian based yoga class, what discomfort would they encounter? Someone in this situation may go through a similar process as Jamison did. A person may internalize those tensions, reflect upon them, and reconcile those tensions based upon deeply held beliefs and principles.

When Olivia, Adrianna, Alana, and Jamison ground themselves in their Christian ideas, they internalize their yoga experiences and reconcile struggles in a way that allows them to practice yoga with little friction against their religious beliefs. Some participants noted that when they are confronted with ideas that they deem at odds with their faith

they depart from yogic tradition; more actively ground themselves in Christian teachings, and/or outwardly reject notions that they understand as contradictory to their religion, which connects to my third research question about making meaning through experience.

Diane expressed that she understood “why some Christians would think yoga is evil...and pulls you into a ...universal place, like all gods are the same God.” To address this issue, she conducts yoga teacher trainings “for *Christians* who want to teach (or practice) *Yoga* from a *Christian* perspective” (Diane’s teacher training manual, p. 3). In her interview, she expressed that yoga is about religion, that “it does not all match up with the Bible,” and that the God yoga philosophy refers to isn’t “the true God.” In her manual, she outlines “five steps for acquiring biblical discernment and wisdom for yoga from a Christian perspective.” I discuss how these five steps are manifested in a class when I discuss the theme of operationalization.

Madeline teaches a similar in-depth course on Christian centric yoga. In her manual, she rejects the notion of karma and reincarnation and notes,

Where this training dismounts from the traditional yogic path is the yogic notion that we are already God. The Christian perspective is that we are a reflection of the Divine, that God lives in us, but we are not, nor do we claim to be God, but rather God’s representatives here on earth.

Based on this excerpt, Madeline appears to be more up front about identifying discrepancies between yogic philosophy and her religious beliefs; however, when analyzing the text and comparing various parts of her transcript, I argue that Madeline engages yoga in a nuanced and complicated way. In her training manual, the participant

is direct and to the point concerning matters that she deems incompatible with Christian teachings and does not evade concepts such as karma and reincarnation, yet, at other times, she is more appreciative of combining different spiritual traditions, such as “earth-based spirituality [and]...Christian beliefs” and other aspects of yoga and Christianity. Comparing these two excerpts provides an explicit example of how Madeline strips off some elements of yogic tradition and replaces them with her religious preferences. This example illustrates the concept of religious privatization, where Madeline chooses from an array of available religious and spiritual principles and combines them in a manner that suites her particular quest for what she determines to be sacred.

Adrianna reflected upon yoga teacher training and how it translates into what she believes and practices:

I see my traditional teacher training as a bridge to Christian yoga. You get different things out of [teacher trainings]. From my teacher training I learned about sequencing, movement, anatomy, chakras. This will PO [piss off] the [traditional] yoga community, but [chakras are based on how God made us]. Chakras are based on awareness, based on the how God made our bodies. Chakras correspond with different parts of the body. [Yogis] start[ed] doing these movements, postures, and figure out 'oh, if I do these [postures], my digestive system works better.' [Based on my teacher training] if people aren't Christian, I can answer questions about chakras.

When coding this part of Adrianna's transcript the acronym “PO”, piss off, was salient to me because she was the most vocal participant and used the strongest language in

acknowledging that her views of yogic tradition and how she teaches, specifically dealing with the chakra system in this example, could truly upset people in the mainstream yoga community. It is my interpretation that she understands that teaching from a Christian perspective violates some of yoga's heritage and tradition and this brazen awareness illustrates her firm belief that her way of teaching yoga, CCY, is the right way.

Discussion of Dueling Dualities as it relates to the literature. To summarize, *Dueling Dualities* has two faces to it; it is a theme about how some participants see yoga and Christianity as complementary to each other. The theme is also about where some participants move away from mainstream yoga and adapt the practice to fit their own belief system because they may see the two practices as incongruent. In this section, I discuss this theme as it relates to current adaptations of yoga and religious privatization.

Current adaptations of yoga. This study supplements research on the sociology of physical activity and the socio-cultural issues surrounding yoga's assimilation into Western culture by focusing on the phenomenon of CCY and teachers who ascribe to this method. In Chapter II, I briefly outlined yoga's history and discussed more recent adaptations of the practice (DeMichelis, 2008; Liberman, 2008; Sjoman, 1999; Singleton, 2007). Christian based yoga is one of these current adaptations. I argue that participants begin to develop this current adaptation through either seeing yoga as a universal modality or changing it to fit into their religious beliefs. Through the excerpts from the data offered in theme of *Dueling Dualities*, the process of mentally adapting the ancient discipline for a Christian centric purpose is illustrated.

It has been my experience that many yoga classes taught in the West are secular in nature, based on this research CCY differs from this trend. Those who see yoga coming from an eastern spirituality may argue that participants are co-opting yoga by naming it as a transcendent technology with no religious ownership. In the same vein, by noting tensions and gaps between yogic philosophy and Christian values, and bridging those gaps, participants begin to manifest a new lineage of yoga. Thus CCY becomes a current adaptation of the practice. Yoga has been adapted in varying forms (Atler, 2006; Baptiste, 2003; Desikachar 1995; Feuerstein 2008; Iyengar, 1979; Jois, 2002; Strauss, 2005). Some historians argue that there has never been one authentic yoga (Jones and Wells, 2001; Liberman, 2008). This research extends this idea to current developments. *Dueling Dualities* begins to illustrate how participants put a Christian frame over yoga, thus exploring a newer iteration of yoga.

Religious privatization. Like the theme of *Operationalization*, I discuss the concept of religious privatization to understand *Dueling Dualities* and more specifically how participants connect their faith to yoga and how they may reconcile perceived tensions between two. Within secularization theories (Berger, 1998; Inglehart & Norris, 2004; Luckmann, 1990) is the concept of religious privatization (DeMichelis, 2008), an idea that is also evident within the participants' experiences. Religious privatization is defined as when a person builds their own religious system based on available religious themes and in doing so it is argued that an official religious model is no longer replicated (Luckmann, 1990). An example of religious privatization is when people make the choice to act as their own voice of authority in religious matters versus seeking that voice

outside of themselves within sociologically constructed structures. Examples of these thoughts and choices are evident in this theme. Participants take their own understanding of religion and yogic studies to actively combine the two. Most participants seem to operate on their own accord in teaching yoga through a Christian perspective, which is an example of religious privatization.

In my interviews no one mentioned that they answered to a religious authority figure. Kai and Andrew, who identified themselves as Episcopalian and Catholic clergy members, respectively, did not talk about religious dogma as it related to yoga. *Dueling Dualities* illustrated how participants make the choice to act as their own voice of authority in religious matters versus seeking that voice outside of themselves within sociologically constructed structures. Based on my findings, this happens on two levels. The excerpts re-presented in the subtheme *Dueling Dualities: Universality and Connections* explore how participants name yoga as a physical and spiritual discipline that can be applied to all faith based systems and are reflective of where participants made philosophical connections made between yoga and Christianity. There is an element of independent action in this perspective, as it casts aside the naysayers that argue yoga is not compatible with Christianity. On another level, if the teachers perceive yoga as incongruent with their faith, they adapt the former to fit into their belief system. Participants choose to co-opt yoga and mold it within the sociologically constructed structure of religion. I describe these actions in the subtheme *Dueling Dualities: Departures, Co-optation and Adaptation*.

Speaking about those discrepancies, Hannah declared that she has “chosen to strip things off [of traditional yoga] and put elements that focus on a Christian God,” which segues into the last theme of *Operationalization*. In the theme of *Dueling Dualities*, I focused on patterns in the data that I interpreted as representative of experiences detailing how instructors named yoga as a universal practice or at the least saw it as a practice that had over-arching philosophical connections to Christianity, like guidelines on how to treat other people and live in right relationship to others. In this theme, I also coupled notions that teachers deemed incongruent with their religious faith. In the next theme of *Operationalization*, I consider more tangibly how instructors manifest these thoughts exploring the process from constructing meaning in relation to their Christian-based yoga teaching experiences to how this meaning is operationalized in participants’ yoga classes, which is related to my final research question. I acknowledge that these two themes may have overlapping points; however, my intention with this last theme is to begin to describe what may happen in a CCY instructor’s class.

Theme 4: Operationalization. Through the theme of *Operationalization*, I attempt to illustrate how instructors actually teach yoga from a Christian perspective. I move from the previous three themes, which explore more abstractly the experiences of CCY instructors, to describing what happens in the yoga sessions using my interpretation of their words, most of which were shared when I asked them to describe their best class. During my initial thematic patterning of the interviews this theme was broken into three subthemes that I named: (a) *Posture and Breath*; (b) *Prayer and Meditation*; (c) and *Language*. As I reviewed the transcripts a third time, however, I found that these patterns

overlapped more often than not; therefore, I combined them into one overarching theme that reflects elements that instructors use in their classes, posture, breath, mediation, prayer, and language. Examples of this theme in terms of what occurs in participants' classes, workshops, and retreats are provided.

In this section, my aim is to provide examples of the words the participants say they use while teaching. Four of the instructors gave specific examples of actively choosing specific language that they felt resonated with their students. Adrianna talked about how she closes her classes with a particular interpretation of what some would claim to be the tradition Sanskrit salutation of Namaste: "I close class instead of with Namaste the divine in me salutes the divine in you. I say the Christ in me sees the Christ in you... Namaste is about the divine and I just name it Christ."

By specifically choosing to use the English translation of yoga poses and omitting some Sanskrit terms altogether, Hannah believes she is making yoga more comfortable for her Christian students:

I talk in English not Sanskrit....for example I say chair or mountain instead of Utkasana or Tadasana. We don't chant in Sanskrit...I don't say Namaste, maybe

I say peace be with you to signify class is over, but is comfortable for them.

It is outward actions like these that prompt concern from those who fear that yoga religious history will be lost. Part of that concern is a disregard for words. While language is a living tradition and changes over time, it can be a fundamental element of a culture.

Lily also recognizes that some of her clients may find certain language offensive: you take your mantra, or we call it a sacred word because mantra has negative connotations... well, when you go into a group of, let's say, Southern Baptist women and you say let's choose our mantra, they're like, oh, devil worship. So I choose sacred word... Mine is shalom, and you can use peace or love or Jesus or Christ or God... or whatever you want to use, but just—just saying sacred word instead of mantra, they think mantra immediately goes into [something dark].

It is my interpretation that Lily's employs a gentler approach in her use of language with her students. She uses both English and Sanskrit words in her yoga classes and does not change Sanskrit translations completely, instead she occasionally substitutes words in English that may resonate with her students.

While the previous examples indicated that the teacher was actively catering to a Christian audience or perspective, Jamison explained that her word choice was meant to be more neutral,

I try to keep it as neutral as I can and look at the scriptures, the Christian scriptures, as well as other scriptures as poetry and as imagery and then the things that I feel do speak kind of universally to people are the things I tend to use in my classes.

As I mentioned in the introduction to this theme, common characteristics exist among participants in terms of how they imbue a Christian schema into mainstream yoga as it is practiced in the West. To support this theme, I offer the participants' words drawn from interviews, teacher-training manuals, and published books. Some of the excerpts

from the data may seem repetitive, but they are used to demonstrate similarities across the participants' teaching styles.

Diane offers a class outline in her yoga teacher training manual. She opens class with a reading from Christian scripture, after which the students set their own intention, allowing them to “personalize the opening scripture and/or them of the class” (Diane’s teacher training manual). The majority of class time is allocated to working in the physical postures. In my conversation with Diane, she explained how a spiritual theme was woven into her classes:

I do have a particular structure I follow and um I start off my class with some centering which is where you bring your students and the teacher into the same place, mentally. So I talk to my students about the theme of the class and I usually have a physical theme and a spiritual theme... And we sit still and we get quiet and we try to let go of everything we did and then we get focused on what we’re about to do, be in the present moment. And then go through some very, um, specific physical postures that have a definite theme, because I do think the body component needs a lot of work, most people’s bodies need a lot of work to get into balance. So spend a good 45 minutes on that...So now that’s pretty typical for any yoga class, whether they’re Christian or not. What makes it Christian and what’s real important is the theme, the spiritual theme that I pick. And so the spiritual theme, say it’s about creating boundaries so that you can open up into your fullest freedom. That might be a theme and then the way I would use that to enhance the Christian faith is the boundary that we choose is we choose to bind

ourselves to Christ and his teachings and when we do that then the freedom opens up. So only when we make that connection to Him that the full freedom in life comes. So and then I would talk about that theme throughout the class so it kind of related to every posture so if we're doing something with the posture I would keep talking about this whole thing about binding and freedom and it would just kind of take that theme deeper into, hopefully, deeper into the embodied experience of the student.

My second review of the transcripts involved applying sociologically constructed codes to the text. Part of this process was informed by my last research question and I utilized a deductive approach when analyzing this passages where participants spoke or wrote about how they taught CCY. It is my interpretation that Diane's structure of a CCY class might look very similar to other yoga classes that do not have a Christian focus, minus the very obvious difference of a religious orientation.

Diane also provides a list of thirty "asana with corresponding scripture" in her teacher-training in hopes of "capturing the essence of the pose's energy or structure or meaning". For example, in mountain pose, where a person is standing upright, hands at the side, Diane connects to Isaiah 52: 7: "How beautiful on the mountains are my feet for I proclaim, Our God reigns!". For headstand, she draws from 2 Timothy 1:7: "God gives me spirit of power, love, and sound mind". She also provides an "asana sequence emphasizing respect, wisdom, and confidence" and outlines a series of poses conducted to a reading of Ruth 3:7-11.

Toward the end of class, Diane moves her students from physical practice into a

contemplative space with breath work, mediation, and prayer. She explained what she does after asana:

I kind of do a couple things. I either do some breath work, which calms the body back down and prepares it for savasana, or I'll do some chanting which is in English and it's Christian truths, or I'll do a centering prayer which is a form of prayer that does not use words, um, it uses a sacred word that you think in your mind, you don't say out loud. So, so far a meditation. So I'll do one of those 3 things: the breath, the chant, or the meditation for about 5 minutes and then move into savasana to just let the body and the mind and the emotions soak up everything they just experienced.

In her teacher-training manual, Diane gives examples of breath-work, chanting, and meditation. For example, in writing about "pranayama technique with scripture" she instructs the reader on how to connect breathing with passages from the Christian Bible. In her manual, she also explains the purpose of using scripture-based meditations and provides several examples. The aim of this instruction is for the CCY students "to get out of their heads and into their bodies, to experience rest and the peace of the Lord in their very flesh and bones" (p. 37).

When asked to describe her best class, Olivia answered, "My favorite type of class has a theme that we can visit and a metaphor that we can really look at throughout the whole practice and realize how life is such a metaphor and so forth." Sometimes Olivia pulls her themes from poetry or Christian scripture. Elaborating on those sources, she said,

Here is a classic one that I absolutely love and it happens in warrior 1 a lot (because warrior 1 is a very basic posture)...when you get a chance to look at my website you will see that my logo actually has this person, this stick figure, in warrior 1. It's a posture that I really didn't care for at one time; I don't know what it was but it didn't do anything for me until I felt this lift in my heart and I named my practice [after it]. The logo has the little warrior 1 person in it and so, often times, from warrior 1 because it is such a great position to move into other postures with hips squared up, I like to start with warrior 1 and then move to all these other postures that can be derived from it and then come back to warrior 1 and really point out that this is like the prodigal child and we go off and we journey and then we come back home. With arms up, it's like 'father' like when the prodigal child came home and there was a celebration; things like that.

Connecting her teachings to scripture, Olivia is able to bring yoga into a Christian perspective and perhaps make it more relevant to her students.

Adrianna also reflected on how she connects prayer, scripture, and physical postures in her yoga classes: "In class we ... pray in mountain pose. Then we talk about any prayers students in the class would like to offer up. And then we talk about the Fruits of the Spirit" from Galatians 5:22. The fruits that she refers to are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. She instructs students to choose one of these spiritual fruits to focus on during class. Then these prayers and intentions are revisited throughout class. In her yoga classes for children, she develops a similar structure and centers the class on movement with the purpose of

connecting to biblical stories and values. “In December we did tree⁷ in the beginning like the Christmas tree and then at the end we did happy baby pose⁸ for Jesus Christ the true reason for Christmas...and we pray at the end.” In reference to meditation and Christian prayer, Adrianna teaches that students should “become uninvolved in our communication with God. The Holy Spirit in you is speaking directly to the Lord without the involvement of your mind. Similar to speaking in tongues, but accomplished in complete silence” (written document-website).

Adrianna intentionally seeks to minister to her studio’s patrons as evidenced by the philosophical principles from which she teaches. Even though she had “traditional” yoga teacher’s training, she consciously orients her studies within a Christian perspective. Perhaps because of Christian and religious privilege, she is able to teach from this orientation without significant resistance or tension.

In Christianity, sport participation can be used as a form of religious witnessing (Coakley, 2009; Ladd & Mathisen, 1999). Christian beliefs support the idea that fitness participation can be used as a form of religious witnessing. Historically, Christians and Christian organizations, such as the YMCA, have used and continue to use sports to promote spiritual growth, to recruit new members, and to promote fundamentalist beliefs and evangelical orientations (Coakley, 2009). Just as Whites are socialized not to think about White privilege (McIntosh, 1998), I argue that Christians are socialized not to think about religious privilege. Not recognizing one’s privileged position may allow Adrianna

⁷ This posture requires a person to balance on one foot.

⁸ This posture requires a person to lie on the back, knees into chest, feet toward ceiling.

to market her studio in such a way as to accomplish these goals without much tension because her work perpetuates the dominant discourse.

However, it should be noted that my participants do not share my interpretation. While I place my participants in a position of privilege within the dominant discourse of Christian privilege, Adrianna, a Christian yogini, expressed her frustration: “It is taboo to be an outspoken Christian. Outlets are needed” for outspoken Christians. Recognizing that her geographic position is more open to Christ-centered yoga, Adrianna acknowledged that the region she lives in the United States is part of the Bible Belt and that she teaches Christian yoga for “people who are questioning.” She is delighted that “generally once they [take a class] they love it”.

Much of the data collected about the experiences of Adrianna came from her website. My interview with Father Andrew was supplemented with a published book he co-authored. Respecting his confidentiality, I do not cite his published work in my reference section. In talking about his book, he said, “We put this practice together and it is all founded on Christ’s primary teaching of the beatitudes.” In his book about Christian scripture and yoga, Father Andrew pairs Biblical verses with specific yoga postures and breath work. In reference to the latter, the priest instructs the reader to inhale and pray, “Blessed are the poor in spirit” and then exhale and pray, “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3 NIV).

In his classes, Kai

would always include a component simply on seated meditation. So, some aspects of that would include postures can be means to help one sit more comfortably;

alert and at ease with your body talking back to you. So, the asanas has a prelude to a preparation for seated meditation but also experiences of the seated meditation has developing people's capacity to be meditating or in that kind of state of focused attention when they are doing asana or when they are just walking down the street or just doing whatever they are doing. So, let me just think of all that I have said....there is pranayama, meditation, body; those would probably be the main sort of categories that I hit. I would also do asana. So, that might be just something good as an end in itself. It's got all of its benefits and so forth but I would probably trying to make, from time to time, some verbal connection between the practice and some of those other things I was speaking about.

The language Kai uses to describe his classes and workshops do not contain much of the Christian rhetoric as some of my interviews. He uses more general terms, like asana and seated meditation, that are not specific to his religion and if someone did not know he taught CCY, then they may interpreted this excerpt as someone describing what occurs in a traditional yoga class. This speaks to Kai's outlook on CCY as personal, implicit, and individualistic. The absence of referencing Christ or the Bible does not mean that Kai does not utilize such elements when teaching, but in this description it would seem he is more open to his students choosing what they focus on during a session with him.

I draw upon my interview with Madeline to understand her teachings:

I usually open with a prayer for everybody in the class. We devote our class to Jesus and sing to Him. There is always a theme based either on a scripture or if I sense that somebody is dealing with something I feel like the Holy Spirit comes in

and we end up...somehow the theme gets woven into our breath, our warm-up, our poses, our relaxation and our meditation. It's a deeper experience than your average yoga class these days and you definitely feel the presence of God in space. It feels very set apart and sanctified in a way. That's been my experience and even when I don't teach a Christ-inspired class because I am already kind of walking in that energy all of the time, things come to me pretty easily around people like what they are struggling with or how it can kind of shift the energy in the class to help them. I just think that's the way of the Holy Spirit coming through. That's a pretty typical class. Sometimes we will have discussion as well at the end of class or sometimes at the beginning we will just need to talk about things they are wrestling with in their own beliefs. It comes from different angles...[S]ometimes I will just turn that over to God too as part of our prayer and our practice.... I always tell my students that the body is so honest and it is about listening in to the body. [A]nd when you do, something happens and to me the body is the vehicle of God. So if you have been stuck in a part of your body for a long time, you might be holding back some part of yourself or not allowing God to work in your life in some specific way. That's parallel to some aspect of your life; like if somebody is causing problems I might look at it from a spiritual aspect like "is there an area of your life where you are just holding back and not taking a step forward". Sometimes I lay hands on students and pray for them during class time for their healing as well. I tend to pick things that are very esoteric and I try to bring in a lot from yoga stories, yoga philosophy, from the Bible, from other

sources like scientific sources and things like that and let us explore how all these things might have some parallels. Mostly it is about being in your body because for me that is my journey; not to go in my head but to be in my body and find God in my body and to find the sacred in my day-to-day living. Those are my themes, in general.

I attended three of Lily's class three times. In class, Lily included discussion, which led to a theme in my analysis. Reflecting upon and comparing how other CCY teachers lead their classes, she said,

I know that there are some people who try to weave scripture in throughout the practice or try to continually pull your focus back to God or Christ or whatever they are trying to focus on for the day. For me, I just start with an idea; "here is our thought for the day and if you want to hold onto it that is great but if you don't want to hold onto it then that is fine too". I end with repetition of the idea. So, lately we have been looking at different versions of the Aramaic translations of The Lord's Prayer; just the different ways that it has been translated. That has been fun. I just say it at the beginning, say it during the end and hope for the best.

In one class I attended, Lily opened class with a discussion question about baptism. She had gone to church the Sunday before, and the pastor talked about one of the Gospels where John the Baptist baptized Jesus. After the baptism, Jesus told John that this is how it will be for now. As we moved through the yoga class, I saw two other connections to Christianity. When we would move from *uttanasana* to *tadasana*, Lily would say "angel wings inhale up" to cue us from touching our toes and inhaling to standing up, spreading

our arms wide like angle wings. While I understand that angels are not exclusively a Christian phenomenon, this interpretation is reflective of my positionality and history of my Christian upbringing. That is, I understand that angels and associated lore may be a part of other faith traditions, but my understanding of them are in a Christian context and the lore surrounding them dealt with angels as messengers from God. In another instance, when we were doing Baragavada, a seated twist, Lily spoke about placing the feet where they look “like a cross for Jesus.” Interestingly, her comment had a slight hint of sarcasm in her voice.

By asking participants to describe their best class or to describe what they like to share with their students, I gained insight into how participants operationalize yoga from a Christian perspective. Framing the topic “what happens in their class” made me feel as though I were almost in the class. Although I was able to observe only one interviewee, I still was able to get a sense of what taking a class with these yoga teachers would be like. In the theme of *Operationalization*, I used the words of the interviewees to typify the expressions they may use in a yoga session. From participant responses, I inferred how the teachers framed the yogic postures, breathing exercises, meditations, and prayers to place Jesus and Christian ideology at the center.

Discussion of Operationalization as it relates to the literature. In this section, I locate the theme of *Operationalization* within the research on current adaptations of yoga and religious privatization.

Current adaptations of yoga. This study adds to the current body of literature on the sociology of physical activity, as it investigates the socio-cultural issues surrounding

yoga's assimilation into Western culture by focusing on the phenomenon of CCY and teachers who ascribe to this method. This study's results extend Chapter 2's section on yoga history by exploring current developments in yoga. In that section, I tracked yoga's history through the Vedic period in the Indus Valley, which was marked by ritual. The Classical Period was characterized by formalizing tenants of philosophy. Physical postures were added to the practice during the Medieval Era. In the following centuries, yoga practitioners continued to adapt the practice to fit their religious, spiritual, and physical needs (Lieberman, 2008). As India moved into the final half of the second millennium, agents' transmission and adaptation of yoga was no longer an indigenous phenomenon. Social, economic, and political developments opened the doors for yoga to be carried west toward Britain and eventually to North America. At the turn of the twentieth century, the transmission of ideas and philosophies continued, paving the way for some modern yoga methods that emphasize posture over meditation (DeMichelis, 2008; Sjoman, 1999; Singleton, 2007). These philosophies and quasi-religious tenants were "relatively unfocussed and usually polyvalent" and, thus, congruent with globalization and movements "toward secularization and acculturation" (DeMichelis, 2008, p. 22) and religion's privatization (DeMichelis, 2008; Klassen, 2005).

Some yoga methods taught in the West continue this secular orientation; however, the current study's findings differ from this trend. Here, I continue the conversation, which began in Chapter 2, concerning individuals as well as social and political forces shaping yoga today. In my conversation with Diane and Kai they explained how Christianized yoga is a new adaptation of the practice. Diane mentioned that CCY

teachers are “pioneer[ing] a new dimension of yoga” and Kia explained that CCY is a continuation of yoga’s “adaptation, experimentation, synthesis, and change.” Thus, these teachers in this study are writing a new chapter in yoga’s history. I argue that the experimental form of CCY is legitimized, in part, by the fact that the method is supported by the dominant faith in the West, which locates CCY in a privileged cultural position. CCY, an emergent perspective in yoga, is another iteration of the modality’s growth and popularity in the West. What is of interest, which is to be determined and outside the scope of this study, is how will CCY influence other yoga methods? I provide a brief reflection regarding this question in Chapter V.

As discussed in Chapter II, the ancient practice of yoga has been adapted in varying forms (Atler, 2006; Baptiste, 2003; Desikachar 1995; Feuerstein 2008; Iyengar, 1979; Jois, 2002; Strauss, 2005). This study explored some of the political and social forces influencing the participants’ teachings. Some historians argue that there will never be one authentic yoga has never existed (Jones and Wells, 2001; Liberman, 2008), thus begging the question of who has the power to define *yoga*. By teaching yoga classes with varying foci perpetuates varying identities within the larger community. Returning to the analogy of the “Hatha Yoga Family Tree” (See Appendix A) yoga grew out of pre-vedic shamans’ rituals. The branches of the tree represent different forms of yoga that have more recently developed. In addition to cultivating a new branch of yoga, the way these instructors describe their classes is material to compare with other studies that have investigated how other groups (Rothenberg, 2006), as well as other Christians (Klassen, 2005), have appropriated yoga. From a socio-cultural perspective, this research explores

yoga's variations taught from a Christian perspective. Just as there is no one authentic yoga, this study attempts to illustrate that there is no one authentic CCY. Varying iterations of this method exist, even though some participants may have similar influences. These details add to the literature on Christian yoga (Ryan, 1986, 1995, 2004) outlined in Chapter 2.

Religious privatization. As a whole, this study explores issues of faith and tension within yoga and specifically yoga taught from a Christian perspective. More specifically, the themes of *Dueling Dualities and Operationalization* delve into how participants potentially negotiate those tensions, process them, and teach based on that process, which is related to the second set of research questions. Interrogating these findings through the conceptual perspective of religious privatization may deepen the understanding of CCY. Within secularization theories (Berger, 1998; Inglehart & Norris, 2004; Luckmann, 1990) is the concept of religious privatization (DeMichelis, 2008), an idea that is also evident within the participants' experiences. An example of religious privatization is when people make the choice to act as their own voice of authority in religious matters versus seeking that voice outside of themselves within sociologically constructed structures. The study's participants rely on their understanding of theology and yoga and join the two. While some of the teachers mentioned the same resources influencing their teachings, no one governing agency overseeing CCY was mentioned during the interviews, as there are with some other forms of yoga.

As noted in Chapter 2, Luckmann (1990) explains that with religious privatization an individual chooses "certain religious themes from the available assortment and builds

them into a somewhat precarious private system of ‘ultimate’ significance. Individual religiosity is no longer a replica or approximation of an ‘official model’” (p. 134).

Participants that consider yoga a universal technology owned by no one religion and see its connections to Christian dogma are actively participating in creating their own religious model, at most. At minimum, they are pushing against conservative Christian notions that name yoga as Hindu and that advise against Christians practicing it and potentially resisting those who claim yoga as a uniquely Hindu practice.

Thus far, I have combined most of my literature review from Chapter 2 with my thematic analysis. Through this synthesis, I have contributed to closing a gap in the literature by discussing how other cultures’ religious beliefs influences physical activity in the West (Coakley, 2009), more specifically some of the socio-cultural issues shaping yoga. Coming from the field of sport sociology, I have privileged the literature on sport and physical activity over religious studies, but have attempted to include spiritual and religious perspectives connected to Christ-centered yoga. Next, I explore the theoretical framework informing my findings.

Theoretical Framework. During my dissertation’s proposal phase, I had thought that Bourdieu’s sociological concepts would inform my analysis. Having submersed myself in the data, I find that the lineages between my findings and Bourdieuan concepts are exploratory. The connections are present, but are exploratory in nature. Instead of trying to alter my proposal and not use Bourdieu in my analysis at all, I begin to explore how his theoretical framework can begin to be applied as a form of analysis of Christian-based yoga.

Bourdieu's (1977, 1984, 1986, 1988 1993a; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) ideas on social behavior have been employed by scholars hailing from the fields of sociology, anthropology, education, music, and literature (Calhoun, 2007). His influential theories went beyond sociological arguments that historically dichotomized human behavior, namely the structure-agency debate (Booth & Loy, 2000). Instead, Bourdieu (1988b) argued that this false dichotomy failed to explain the nuanced nature of social interaction. Some scholars argue that an individual has complete authority, power, and control to determine his or her own reality. Others claim that people are molded by societal norms (Calhoun, 2007). Attempting to overcome this perceived false dichotomy, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) claimed that while agents have the power to construct their own reality they do so within the constraints of a reality that precedes them.

Agency-Structure Dynamic. The Bourdieuan (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) agency-structure perspective also speaks to the sociologist's view on the construction of reality. He theorized that people internalize structures, which influence the actions they take, but these structures only constrain improvisation, they do not determine action. Bourdieu advised that agents construct reality, both from an individual perspective as well as a collective one. However, agents do not construct "the categories they put to work in this work of construction" (p. 10). Another way to think about this is, "how we think about reality does shape what it is for us, but how we think about it is a result of what we have learned from our culture and experience, not simply a matter of free will" (Calhoun, 2007, p. 28). This view on reality is aligned with my constructivist and post-critical orientations. While I believe realities and knowledge are human constructions, I

understand that people do not create their reality in a vacuum; rather structures of power are internalized within an agent. These internalized structures are a filter through which a person lives and acts.

Regarding the present study's participants, Bourdieu's (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) acknowledgement of both structure and agency lends insight into these teachers' experiences. That is, a more nuanced appreciation of individual power and culture, with its potential to enable and constraint, illuminates how the instructors may construct their own reality within the confines of yoga, a socio-historically positioned practice that may have otherwise been at odds with their religious beliefs. All of the participants acknowledged yoga's connection to Eastern religions, the cultural constraint within which they are operating. In this case, culture and associated structure can also enable participants to adapt yoga. For example, the structure of the Christian religion in the West may enable the adaptation of yoga. In addition, these instructors actively engage in their own agency by co-opting the practice and operationalizing it from a Christian perspective. A quick side note on word choice, I use the words co-opt and adapt throughout my discussion. Although I recognize there is a slight difference in their meaning, I argue that participants engage in both actions. They adapt and change yoga to be in harmony with their religious views, while simultaneously co-opting, or assimilating, the practice into a Christian framework.

The question becomes, who has the power to adapt yoga to fit their purposes? As already mentioned, the concept of religious privilege begins to explain that these instructors are in a privileged position by self-identifying with Christianity, the dominant

faith practiced in the West. By being part of a dominant class, these instructors are able, with relative ease, to re-present their ideologies through yoga. While social class, which is heavily tied to economic access, is pivotal in applying a Bourdieuan lens (Tomlinson, 2004) and while identifying as Christian is not economically based, participants are still within a culturally and religiously dominant class. Therefore, applicable to this study is Bourdieu's (1988b) claim that access to social and cultural resources, not just money, allow people to reproduce their ideologies in society. It could be argued that participants recursively produce sociological differentiation, as Bourdieu (1988a) has found in other areas of sport and recreation. By actively engaging yoga in a Christian perspective, participants take part in the social reproduction of Christianity through CCY. In effect, this method also becomes a means of social differentiation from mainstream yoga.

This analysis, along with other scholars' studies, extends this theoretical framework within the field of sport and recreation (Bailey & Pickard, 2010; Bourdieu, 1984, 1988a; Ceron-Anaya, 2010; Defrance, 1995; Fitzgerald & Kirk, 2009; Sirna, Tinning, & Rossi, 2010; Skille, 2005; Stempel, 2005; Warde, 2006) as well as within spirituality and religion (Baker & Miles-Watson, 2008; Clarke, 2009; Rey, 2005; Swartz, 1997; Urban, 2005; Winchester, 2008; Wood & Bunn 2009). To establish more specifically how Bourdieu's concepts inform my analysis, I interrogate the data at its intersection with habitus, capital, and field.

Habitus. Habitus refers to socially constructed learned habits, behavior patterns, and expectations (Bourdieu, 1977). A habitus could refer to something as seemingly superficial as to how some dresses. For example, each time I took classes taught by Lily,

the students and teacher wore similar types of workout clothes: body hugging tops, fitted pants, and no one wore shoes while practicing. Other behavior patterns that participants spoke of in conversation were how they structured class. In Diane and Kai's case, they both mentioned having a time for centering and sitting still at the beginning of a class, next they go through physical postures, and then concluded class with more quiet time for prayer and meditation. Lily's classes followed a similar pattern.

Habitus also refers to agents' strategic moves against another agent or group, habitus can be learned, internalized, and outwardly practiced. These movements can be objectively implicit or unconsciously imposed (Bourdieu, 1977), and can be used to distinguish one group from another. Calhoun (2007) describes habitus as the "embodied sensibility that makes possible structured improvisation" (p. 32). A habitus and people within that habitus have an interdependent relationship. Although a habitus governs behavior patterns, people's actions can also change it (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). The concept of habitus informs my interpretation in two ways. First, the idea that habitus is concerned with being connected to historical patterns lends to a deeper understanding of the cultural norms constraining yoga's adaptations. Secondly, habitus enriches my understanding of the experiences of those participants that prior to practicing yoga disregarded the body, but through yoga experienced a deeper awareness and arguably a healthier perspective of the mind-body-spirit relationship.

Regarding cultural constraints, participants teaching yoga from a Christian perspective do so under the auspices of yoga's historical connection to Hinduism. However, because a person's habitus can change (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), how the

interviewees operationalize CCY influences their habitus and, thus, yoga's trajectory in the West. These cultural constraints also connect to the structure-agency debate discussed previously. CCY instructors teach a specific form of yoga; manifest a strategic move that differentiates their classes from other mainstream yoga classes; and as a result, consciously or unconsciously, could create a sense of cultural otherness within the yoga community. For example, the language that some participants used in their classes may be different than a mainstream yoga class. Hannah believes she is making yoga more comfortable for her Christian students saying,

I talk in English not Sanskrit....for example I say chair or mountain instead of Utkasana or Tadasana. We don't chant in Sanskrit...I don't say Namaste, maybe I say peace be with you to signify class is over, but is comfortable for them.

In my participant observations of Lily's classes, she used Christian background music during our practice. None of the participants, including Lily, mentioned that they were directly taught to use Christian music in class. Rather I think this was a way in which Lily internalized what CCY means in her community and one way she outwardly expressed that is through her choice of Christian background music. In my 14 years of attending yoga classes, I have never heard Christian music played. Depending on one's perspective, this may or may not be desirable. For example, some teachers may want to use yoga, as Adrianna does, as a way to witness to people and through yoga bring people to Jesus and ultimate salvation. Teachers claiming CCY as a preferable alternative to mainstream forms may feel justified in separating themselves from typical yoga classes. However, those taking a more homogenous approach to teaching yoga may see this otherness as

divisive. Either perspective cannot deny that the present study's participants are changing yoga's landscape and the associated habitus.

Another point that I discussed in my literature review regarding habitus is the idea of an embodied sensibility (Calhoun, 2007) or a set of historical relations “‘deposited’ within individual bodies” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 16). What is relevant is how a person perceives their body and experiences their body based upon that perception. This embodied sensibility connects with moments re-presented within the theme of *Embodied Spirituality*. In my thematic analysis, I provided excerpts from the data and paraphrased conversations addressing the connection between the faith of participants and their bodies. That connection relates to habitus and notions deposited within a person's body (Bourdieu, 1977). What became more salient to me were those experiences in which yoga changed their bodily ideas. To reiterate, Kai said that yoga is “embodied spiritual practice,” ironically “because so much Christian practice tends to be rather disincarnate.” From my perspective, other interviewees had similar experiences. For example, Alana stated, “No matter what the church says, there is a way in which the teaching of the church has led to a very negative view of human embodiment ...and when I do yoga, all of that goes away.”

The way in which these participants experience, practice, and teach yoga pushes against this disregard for the body and, thus, challenges the habitus in which they interact. This is an example of how a habitus can change and why a habitus is not static. Concepts and yogic philosophy are brought into the teachers' Christian habitus. As the individuals engage in yoga, they create new, positive ideas about their body and, as a

result, actively alter their habitus. In doing so, these yogis confront certain notions deposited within their bodies, the Christian ideologies they were brought up with or socialized to believe. The excerpts provided are reflective of ways in which ideas about the body, outside of Christianity, influence physical activity and perception of the body.

In terms of implications, a more positive appreciation of the physical body could press against the negative corporal connotations a Christian may experience as a result of his or her learned and internalized habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). If a person is looking for an integrative kinetic practice of mind-body-spirit that emphasizes positive corporal experiences, then CCY may be his or her entry point. Regarding transferability (Creswell, 2007), people reading this study may connect with the positive changes in how Kai and Alana perceive the body and eventually affirm their own bodies. Other audiences that have also been brought up in a habitus with low regard for the body may see themselves in my participants and consider taking up yoga as a way to alter their physical body's psychology, thus also changing embodied sensibility. According to Bourdieu (1977, 1984), the concept of habitus explains how people outwardly display their habitus to differentiate themselves from other groups. It could also be the case that participants teach from a faith-based perspective that honors the body. In doing so, consciously or subconsciously, they become part of a different habitus than those who interact negatively with the body. By teaching principles that affirm the physical, participants reproduce the ideologies. In order to make these strategic moves happen, agents exchange forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1984).

Capital. Three forms of capital—economic, social, and cultural—are distributed according to society’s construction (Bourdieu, 1986). People use and trade these different forms of capital and in doing so establish social patterns. In this section, I discuss how Bourdieu’s concept of capital helps to interpret my findings. Certain forms of capital inform these interpretations more than others. To begin this discussion, I start with economic capital.

Economic capital, in the simplest terms, is money. People’s status in society is partially determined by their amassed economic capital and how they go about allocating that capital (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986). The concept of economic capital, however, is only tangentially related to this study. In my interviews with participants, the topic of money was not salient to me. This was somewhat surprising to me because many of the teachers listed “yoga teacher” as their only occupation, but this does not necessarily mean full-time. Further investigation would be needed to assert if teaching yoga from a Christian perspective is their main or only source of income. Money may not be significant to participants because most participants identified themselves as middle class or higher. If they are financial secure, then perhaps money is not a central concern that would influence their yogic participation. In e-mail correspondences with participants, where I had asked for general demographic information. I requested the participants’ age, ethnicity, traditional education level attained, yoga training attained, residence and socio-economic status. Some of the CCY teachers indicated their socio-economic status, with me offering lower, middle, and upper classes as choices. Seven participants responded to the demographic information requested. Alana identified as upper class; Jamison and

Hannah identified as upper middle class; and Olivia, Diane, and Kia identified as middle class. Adrianna responded to my request for demographic information, but did not indicate her socio-economic status. Three participants did not reply to my request.

Based on this limited information, I can make only a few inferences. I may infer that participants exchanged their economic capital in order to pursue their yogic studies, as all participants had taken some form of formalized yoga teacher training. Based on the occupations of some teachers, it might be suggested that some make part of their living by being a CCY teacher. Three participants, Hannah, Jamison, and Diane, indicated that their only occupation was that of a yoga teacher, with Diane owning her own studio. Other participants identified other jobs if they did not teach yoga full-time. Adrianna works in construction, Alana a writer, Kia a priest and professor, and Olivia a mom. Thus it can be argued that part of the participants earn their economic capital through teaching yoga, no one indicated they taught only on a volunteer basis.

All forms of capital are derived from economic capital; and converting it into cultural and social capital requires a “specific labor, i.e., an apparently gratuitous expenditure of time, attention, care, [and] concern” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 253). How these teachers may use their economic capital in exchange for social and/or cultural capital is more relevant to this study’s findings. Social capital refers to a person’s or agent’s social network consisting of a formal or informal relationship with other agents (Bourdieu, 1984). These relationships can be formalized business relationships or informal connections through Facebook®, for example.

Based on my interviews, I can discuss three such relationships. One is the student-teacher relationship between Lily and Diane. The former did her yoga teacher training under Diane's guidance. As mentioned before, Diane designed a course "for *Christians* who want to teach (or practice) *Yoga* from a *Christian* perspective" (Diane's teacher training manual, p. 3). The second relationship is a network centering around Father Thomas Ryan, mentioned by four participants during the interviews. The relationship between finding these networks may be a result of the snowball sampling technique employed in this study.

Father Ryan is a Paulist priest in the Roman Catholic Church and has worked extensively in bringing yoga to Christians in an ecumenical format and in a way that is accessible to Christians from different denominations, not just Catholic. Father Ryan (1986, 1995, 2004) has written books on sport, spirituality and Christian-focused yoga and has a DVD on CCY as well. In addition, he is a leader in a CCY retreat held every three to four years. Indicating that Father Ryan has influenced his CCY teachings, Kai also referred to the retreats, suggesting I investigate "the network associated with Tom Ryan" and this summer's week-long retreat. If time and money had permitted, this retreat would have provided an excellent data-collection opportunity. Working for Father Ryan, Alana described his influence, "...he'd really helped make Christian yoga, not quite mainstream, but really helped open the floodgates. His work and ministry has just been extraordinary. He really is a wonderful, wonderful man and a wonderful teacher."

Also finding Ryan's teaching accessible and influential, Jamison said,

You know that I attended or at least was associated with Father Thomas Ryan and

the Retreats. I only went to one actually but have stayed connected via email and I really did very closely identify with Father Ryan's approach to yoga.

Seeming to have a close relationship with Father Ryan, Father Andrew referred to him "as dear friend."

Finally, the third relationship is another network, a website, which is not as intimate as Lily and Diane's student-teacher relationship or the relational web involving Thomas Ryan. Aside from Diane, Lily, and Adrianna, all of my participants came from a website listing CCY teachers. I initiated contact with potential participants, generated from a list of Christian-centered yoga teachers. The other seven participants responded and were subsequently interviewed. I practiced yoga at a studio where Lily taught. Through snowball sampling (Patton, 2002), I met Diane. I had known Adrianna from a previous pilot study (Odenheimer, 2010). Information gleaned from the interviews allowed me to map out three social relationships among the participants, thus illustrating some of the social capital accumulated and revealing the social reproduction of Christian-centric yoga. The connected web of relationships cultivates a CCY community from which participants draw support and learn from and then move outward in their own teaching, fostering CCY's growth. Agents often use their social capital in exchange for economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). However, based on this study's findings, if or how the participants may leverage their social capital for economic and cultural gain is inconclusive.

The last type of capital to discuss is cultural capital. Bourdieu (1984) expanded Weber's reference to how people stylize their life and termed the concept *cultural*

capital, the disposition and representation of one's self compared with other representation styles. Cultural capital refers to a wide range of social practices, including home décor, sport participation, musical and marital selections, spiritual attitudes, and educational qualifications, like having a PhD or being a clergyperson. This study's findings illustrate how teachers leverage their cultural capital. As mentioned before, the teachers were able to convert their economic capital into cultural capital by taking specific yoga teacher training courses. In terms of social practices, by teaching about Christianity through yoga, they attempt to reproduce certain spiritual and religious principles. Their cultural capital, in the form of spiritual and religious teachings, is particularly salient within the theme of *Operationalization*, and how teachers who ascribe to this method actually describe what happens in their classes. Excerpts from the data offered in the theme of *Operationalization* speak to how teachers use these outward representations to leverage their social positions in society (Bourdieu, 1986). The product of a CCY class is an outward expression of the teacher's religious positionality within the context of physical activity. This form of capital describes consumption, not what people accumulate through purchases, but the consumption of their thoughts and beliefs. People trade cultural capital for economic and/or social capital.

A type of cultural capital is physical capital and the term refers to ideas about the mind and body (Bourdieu, 1986) and the “commodification of the body” where an individual's social identity and value is outwardly expressed through his or her appearance (Shilling, 2003, p. 14). I had thought that this form of cultural capital would have been more relevant in data analysis; however, as I reviewed interview transcripts, I

determined that there was not a solid connection between the concept of physical capital and my participants' experiences. Some teachers spoke about their own yoga practice, which connects to their own investment in the practice, an individual investment that no one else can make on their behalf (Bourdieu, 1986); however, the instructors did not express how this investment was translated to their social identity. Participants explored deeper experiences about how they felt more connected to their bodies through doing yoga, but they did not share stories about how these moments might be outwardly reflected (Shilling, 2003). If, for example, a CCY teacher had said, "I do yoga so that people know that I am Christian" or "so that others perceive my body as a reflection of God's creation", such stories may connect to the concept of embodied or physical capital. To connect my data to physical capital, then participants would have had to discuss how changes in ideas about the body, due to yoga, were reflected in their social identity. The fact that participants did not speak about forms of physical capital does not mean that physical capital does not exist within CCY. I would argue that it is less important in yoga than physical capital is in more competitive physical activities. CCY practitioners may be more impressed with how well someone can do a yoga pose, but through my participant observations and interviews I infer that the practice of yoga with a Christian focus is more about connecting the body with the breath, becoming calm, and opening up to prayer. In Chapter V, I discuss how this finding could influence future research in extending Bourdieu's concept of physical capital to yoga. The expression, accumulation, and exchange of capital all happen within a given field. In the following section, I discuss Bourdieu's sociological concept of field as it pertains to the present study.

Field. Field is a sociological concept referring to the relationship between agents (that is, people and organizations) that hold “certain forms of power” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 16). It refers to the network of agents, people, institutions, organizations, and stakeholders in defining the boundaries of a cultural practice or network (Bourdieu, 1993a). Many fields exist because of a myriad of possible cultural practices and networks. The exchange of economic, social and cultural capital occurs within a field. Bourdieu theorized that a habitus is located inside a particular field; and like a habitus, a field is not static; it can change (Bourdieu, 1988a; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In this study, the field is defined as Christian-based yoga within the larger context of the yoga community.

Interrogating CCY’s position within the field of yoga as it is practiced in the West is outside this study’s scope. To do so accurately, I would need to also need be able to define the field over yoga as a whole, however this study only focuses on ten CCY instructors and their experiences. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) argue that to understand the concept of field “one must analyze the position of the field vis-à-vis the field of power” (p. 104). Initially, considering the field of yoga as a socio-political space where agents leverage their position to maintain power is a possibility, even if this consideration is contrary to the often-presumed notion that yoga is always a tranquil, calm, and all-inclusive environment. Yet, in my experience, yoga can include all those qualities at times.

According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992),

To move further into this analysis one must map out the objective structure of the

relations between the positions occupied by the agents or institutions who compete for the legitimate form of specific authority of which this field is the site. (pp. 104-105)

To map out the relationships between power holding agents within the entire field of yoga is outside the scope of the current study, whose purpose was to explore Christian-centered yoga and specifically how teachers who ascribe to this method create meaning of their own yoga experiences and operationalize that meaning in their classes. This purpose is much more focused on the participants' experiences versus trying to ascertain all structured relationships of power within CCY, much less the whole field of yoga. I also understand that that this study of a limited number of CCY teachers allows readers to glean insights into the broader field of CCY. Based on my findings, I may be able to name some influential stakeholders, such as Father Thomas Ryan, in the CCY community. Identifying the power relationships among key players within the field of yoga as a whole and analyzing the Christian-focused community as a power broker are areas for further research.

At this point, what can be said about the concept of field is that my findings begin to map out how teachers navigate the larger field of yoga, particularly at the intersection of their religious beliefs. These participants are stakeholders within the CCY and the yoga community; ten interviews substantiate some evidence to discuss how their legacy will influence all of yoga because not enough data is available to understand how other stakeholders are reacting to these participants. Field informs the themes discussed previously, in that my participants have an interest in maintaining CCY boundaries and in

knowing how interest in that small niche develops and is defined with yoga as practiced in the West. From a sociological theory perspective, field is too large of an over-arching concept to apply to this study only focusing on 10 participants. My findings speak to only a small segment of agents within the given field of yoga.

Ritual Appropriation. This section begins by briefly outlining the debate that CCY finds itself in the midst of and by providing the working definition of *ritual* under which this study operated. Next, I apply ritual appropriation theory to this study's findings. Within the field of CCY, agents have a stake in controlling it. When a new agent enters the field and tries to carve out a niche, friction or conflict may occur (Sisjord, 2009). In this study, the field has been defined as yoga as practiced in the West; in this field are stakeholders, such as mainstream yoga teachers as well as CCY instructors, including the ones in the present study. It could also be argued that other people not part of the yoga community have an influence on how the field is defined. This includes people who express more conservative Christian interpretations of yoga, which operate under the framework that the practice is antithetical to Christianity (Mohler, 2010; Willis, 2011). For example, the present leader of the Roman Catholic Church, Pope Benedict advised that followers should be wary of ritualistic practices connected to other faiths (Ratzinger, 1989).

This study's participants are navigating these different and sometimes conflicting agents and their attempts to define *yoga* and who should have access to the discipline (Odenheimer, 2010). Employing the theoretical framework of ritual appropriation may help to critically interrogate these findings at the intersection of spirituality, religion, and

fitness. While material from this study may be used in religious studies, coming from the field of sport sociology, my interpretations privilege aspects of health, wellness, sport and physical activity. These interpretations are also in light of a working definition of *ritual*. I say “working definition” because scholars have not settled on one all-encompassing understanding of the word, and perhaps because it refers to a wide range of practices, one definition may be unfavorable (Rook, 1985). It could be argued that ritual is something that is sacred and differentiated from the everyday, mundane, and material world.

To provide parameters within which I explore participants’ experiences, *ritual* is defined as the fusion of action and thought, whereby ritual becomes the actual means by which “thought and action are integrated” in a structured and patterned way (Bell, 1992, p. 22), and “represent[s] a unique means of formalizing significant cultural transactions” (Flanagan, 1992, p. 744). These formalized transactions are at times a space for integrating conflicting socio-cultural influences (Bell, 1992; Flanagan, 1992), which is the case for these CCY teachers. Flanagan (1992) explained that during these exchanges agents weave action with signs, observances, and reproductions of control. I recognize that such elements may be found in a typical yoga class where students may mimic what a teacher models for them in class. However, these movements are not necessarily tied to religious ideologies, whereas in the participants’ CCY classes these elements are explicitly influenced by Christian teachings. For the purposes of this discussion, I focused on formalized, social exchanges with religious connections versus rites of passage, which may be associated with milestones that do not have religious overtones (Goulding & Shankar, 2011).

Based upon the findings and the themes re-presented in Chapter 4, particularly within the theme of *Operationization*, I attempted to approximate the moments that instructors shared with me that embody these moments. To extend Bell's definition (1992), a teacher fuses action and thought by directing students through movements, the action, which are connected to religious principles, the thought, in a systematic way. Leading a class is not arbitrary. For example, in his book, Father Andrew illustrates yoga poses and connects them with the Beatitudes. In one section, he suggests for the practitioner to take the child's pose, beginning by sitting on the knees, then sliding out the arms until the head comes near or on the floor while the belly rests on the thighs. To the right of the illustration are these instructions for the pose:

Blessed are you who are poor for yours is the kingdom of God (Lk 6:20). Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Mt 5:3). How does your body react to "poor?" Can we tell who is "poor" just by a quick glance? Who is rich and poor before God. (published book)

The act of teaching becomes a formalized transaction, and the classes are not arbitrary. The participants who ascribe to this method have trained, studied, and prayed on how to teach from a Christian perspective. For example, Diane offers a course aimed at training future Christian-centered yoga instructors. Her training manual offers an outline that she too follows when teaching a general CCY class. In these formalized transactions between teacher and student, the teacher synthesized socio-cultural influences of religion, spirituality, language, physical activity, and the body. The exchange in a CCY classroom, studio, or space is a ritual. Lily's class may typify such

socio-cultural synthesis. As previously mentioned, Lily sometimes opens her class by discussing a Christian topic or theme that she repeats throughout class, like the theme of baptism. In engaging a class in such a way, she can combine the Christian theme with movements that have been traditionally associated with another faith.

The last point I made about defining *ritual* is that through this social practice agents can connect action and behavior to observances, signs and control (Flanagan, 1992). Based on my 14 years of experience as a yoga student and five years as a teacher, many mainstream yoga teachers end class by placing their palms together near the heart; bow their head; and say “Namaste,” translated as “The light in me salutes the light in you.” To extend Flanagan’s point to this study, Adrianna, who does not close her classes with the traditional Sanskrit salutation of “Namaste,” explained, “I close class instead of with Namaste the divine in me salutes the divine in you. I say the Christ in me sees the Christ in you... Namaste is about the divine and I just name it Christ.” Adrianna concludes her yoga classes in a way that many teachers use, but she combines the gesture and sign with an element of control over language, thus reproducing her Christian ideology.

To briefly summarize, yoga has been perceived as a Hindu-associated practice (Mohler, 1995). I argue that a CCY class can be considered a ritual because it (a) fuses action and thought; (b) is a formalized transaction; (c) integrates socio-cultural influences; and (d) combines signs, observances and control. I have provided an example for each of these reasons, and more examples can be found throughout the thematic analysis. These examples and those found within the other themes illustrate how the

participants are taking a ritual from one culture and using it for their own purpose. This process is the definition of *ritual appropriation*, which researchers have used to understand ritual as a cultural practice (Bell, 1992; Hill, 1995; Johnson, 1995; Klassen, 2005; Tavárez, 2006; Tinson & Nutall, 2010). Moreover, privileged agents legitimize these rituals for their own means (Klassen, 2005; Johnson, 1995; Tavárez, 2006).

Klassen (2005) found that some liberal Christians use “‘ritual proximity’ [which she also refers to as ritual appropriation] to bring together symbols, acts and memories from various times and cultures, thus constructing new lineages of religious inheritance within webs of Christian ritual” (2005, p. 377). The same may be said for this study’s participants. By teaching yoga from a Christian perspective, by naming yoga as universal or departing from its perceived Hindu associations, these instructors are continuing yoga’s adaptation and transmutation. Through the lens of ritual appropriation, it can be argued that these CCY instructors are not just teaching any other group-fitness class, but are creating new yoga lineages within the yoga community and Christian inheritance. The question then becomes who has the power to create new lineages? While agents who claim that yoga is indebted to the Hindu faith may be marginalized by CCY, I argue that those who teach from a Christian perspective and yogis who use this method as a way to witness to others benefit from the legitimization of a CCY lineage.

In Chapter II’s literature review, I discussed how some agents practicing a culture’s dominant religion could assimilate other rituals into their own set of practices with little resistance from other faiths (Scholsser, 2003), which can be extended to inform the present study. I argue that Christians might be able to alter rituals, outside of their

own faith's, with relative ease. I also acknowledge that this argument is not entirely new or unique to my study. Primarily because the participants in the current study identify with the dominant faith in the West, they are unencumbered and able to co-opt the practice. Those in power positions are often able to control the meaning of sport and recreation (Coakley, 2009). The passages previously provided in the thematic analysis support this claim. For example, the theme of *Dueling Dualities* elucidates this notion of power, privilege, and adaptation. From the data, I analyzed patterns and excerpts from the data commenting on how participants connect their faith-based ideas to yoga. Labeling yoga as a practice belonging to no one person or culture permits people to insert their own faith into the practice. When CCY teachers perceive yoga as discrepant with their religion, they alter it. It may be argued that because people teaching yoga from a Christian perspective are in a dominant class they have privileged access to institutionalized forms of culture, like religion, which allows them to more easily to promote their religious principles.

The concept of religious privilege helps to interrogate further the critical question of who has the power to appropriate cultural practices. Religious privilege occurs when a culture's prevailing religious views go unquestioned as the standard against which all other belief systems are measured. As a result, other belief systems are marginalized (Watt, 2009). That is, teaching yoga within a Christian framework reproduces some dominant ideologies, but also presses against other cultural norms. For example, Father Andrew, as a priest teaching yoga, may marginalize some Hindus who may claim to have developed the practice. In the same space, the clerics and laypeople push against the

Vatican's cautionary proscription (Ratzinger, 1989). Contextualizing these experiences within the concept of individual religiosity and ritual-appropriation theory helps to clarify why some instructors depart from Hindu ties and imbue their philosophical frameworks and their classes with their personal religious perspective. Individual religiosity and finding religious authority within one's self and their experiences may explain how the participants rationalize any tensions they perceive to exist between their own faith and that of mainstream yoga. Participants seem to locate within themselves the power to make religious decisions, directed by their own experience and knowledge, and do not seek other religious structures' approval. According to Klassen (2005), people's syncretism and ability to navigate the differences between Christianity and other religions are not subconscious, "nor is it entirely hegemonic. ...Christians' syncretism, expressed not in texts but through bodily gestures and oral narratives of lineage, places this cultural and religious exchange in the messiness and luminosity of fallible human lives" (pp. 387-388).

While I argue that religious privilege is a dominant identity manifested in Christian based yoga, it may not be the only privileged identity that allows teachers to adapt the ancient practice. Ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic status may all play a part in how an instructor's class is taught and received. These identities were not discussed in my interviews with participants; rather they provided the information in a brief demographic survey. It should be noted that I am naming these classifications as privileged and the participants may not necessarily claim their status as such.

In terms of race and ethnicity, all but one participant described themselves as White, Caucasian, or of European decent. This ethnic group places participants in a dominant social position and may allow them to teach from a similar vantage point. That is, coming from a White culture, a privileged group in the West, may contribute to their classes being perceived as more accessible. While gender may be seen as a marginalized group, in the yoga community, I argue that this may not be the case. The majority of yoga students in the West are women and this is reflected in my participant sample. Eight were female and two men. The female teachers are in the majority and they share that identity with the larger yoga community, including the CCY community. Students may more easily identify with the instructor and perhaps be more receptive to the Christian perspective they teach from. Socio-economic status (SES) may also position the participants in a way that permits them to teach yoga from a Christian perspective. All participants that responded concerning their SES classified themselves as either middle or upper middle class. Coming from a dominant group, teachers may have the economic resources to further their own religious and yogic education, which in turn may be used to foster CCY's growth through their instruction.

Theoretical Summary

The participants in this study attempt to reconcile or unify potentially conflicting practices by explicitly departing from what is perceived as incongruent beliefs and/or by implicitly naming yoga as a universal practice. The way in which these attempts are manifested in participant teaching is messy and nuanced; but through the lens of ritual appropriation (Klassen, 2005) and the use of Bourdieu's (1977, 1984, 1986, 1988 1993a;

Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) concepts, this study begins to peel back those layers to provide a deeper appreciation of Christian-centered yoga and of how teachers ascribing to this method create meaning of their own yoga experiences and operationalize it in their classes.

A Return to Positionality

Introduction. Returning to my positionality, I would have liked to engage my data more directly by inserting my voice with my findings, rather than having a separate section on positionality in this chapter. In doing so, I feel that I am bracketing myself out of my research, which I do not believe a researcher can do. However for readability's sake, this chapter is organized as follows: my positionality as it relates to research paradigms, epistemology, and identities.

Paradigms, Epistemology, and Identities. After going through this research process, I still position myself between a post-positivist and a constructivist. I do not claim to fully comprehend the experiences of the participants in this study. Instead, I represent an approximation of elements of multi-faceted realities that the participants construct in their lives (Hatch, 2002). Locating myself on the paradigm spectrum is complicated by a post-critical orientation (Noblit et al., 2004). This complexity is evident in some analytical points that contextualize CCY within the debate on who has the power to define its meaning and purpose. Epistemological inquiry attempts to answer this question: "What can be known and what is the relationship of the knower to what is to be known?" (Hatch, 2002, p. 11). The aim of this study was to know more about yoga taught through the filter of Christianity, more specifically about the experiences of teachers

ascribing to this method. Through this journey, I heard various stories that moved me to change my outlook on the phenomenon.

My journey throughout the dissertation process was influenced by the post-critical work of Noblit et al. (2004). To encourage recursive reflexivity, I kept a researcher's journal, albeit a thin one. I am not a journaler by nature; instead, I talk ideas out, so to speak. Most of my reflections through the research process happened in dialogue with others. Discussing my evolving ideas about my research helped me to process reflections that were often contradictory. I had multiple conversations with my friends, family, dissertation committee members, fellow yoga students and teachers, and even my chiropractor; but only occasionally would I put these conversations down on paper. Sometimes several weeks would lapse between journal entries. However, I would have been able to better track my changing positionality if I had recorded each of these conversations sooner after they occurred. Next, I highlight some of my reflections based on my research journal.

Meghan, a practicing Catholic and yoga teacher, was one of my sounding boards. My dear friend since we were thirteen, she was my confirmation sponsor. The only thing that could have made her more fitting for this role would be if she were a qualitative researcher, simply because initially I had to explain my research design to her. We would speak on average once a month in person or by phone about how my research was going. She would ask, "So what's your stance?" I did not want to answer because I was uncomfortable taking a stand, physically uncomfortable such that I would actually squirm a bit, as I sat cross-legged talking. However, I knew I would eventually have to answer (researcher journal, 2012).

As I mentioned in Chapter 3 (Methodology), initially hearing of Christ-centered yoga caused frustration, irritation, resentment, and pride to percolate (researcher journal, 2010). I felt that teachers who ascribed to this method were excluding students who may otherwise be interested. Critiquing my own initial response to CCY, I asked myself, “Is the way you teach the **right** way?” (researcher journal, 2010). After I took a CCY class in 2010, my judgments eased somewhat. After I left the class, I felt balanced, strong, and calm; but I was still uncomfortable with the phenomenon of teaching yoga from a Christian perspective. I spent the next eighteen months unpacking the discomfort and contradictions. Dealing with these inconsistencies is most evident in the thematic name *Dueling Dualities*. A label I created, *Dueling Dualities* connotes the tension and friction the participants and I felt. The naming of that theme is most reflective of my positionality, not so much from a researcher’s identity, but my identity as a yogini; liberal Christian; and surprisingly to me: as a parent. I will expand on these identities in the following narrative.

Focusing on my identity as a yoga teacher, at a gut level, I find the CCY unnerving; yet rationally, I do not know if CCY is very different from other chapters in yoga’s history (researcher journal, 2011). Much of this perspective came after working on a comprehensive-exam question that led me to explore yoga’s multi-identity history (Baptiste, 2003; Desikachar, 1995; Feuerstein 2008; Iyengar, 1979; Jois, 2002; Strauss, 2005). Even in light of these facts and as I have reflected on them recently, I have concerns about Christianized yoga as a segregating practice versus an inclusive one.

This orientation toward CCY has influenced my socialization as a yoga teacher and the fact that I want more people to be physically active. Socialization involves individuals actively internalizing what they learn through social development (Coakley, 2009). Regarding my own socialization as a yoga teacher, during my teacher training the senior director Carl Dawson discussed one of his teaching methods. He said he did not get too deeply into yoga philosophy and history with his students; but he emphasized, “I do give them a little history and Sanskrit” to keep them connected to yoga’s roots. I have held to his approach in my teaching. Not making any reference to yoga’s history, such as talking about the yamas or niyamas, or only using English translations for the poses’ names is a-historical; it strips the practice, from my perspective, of its heritage, even if that heritage comes from a rich and deep faith that is not my own.

I fear that this CCY may turn people away; however, just as someone may avoid a CCY class, another person may only feel comfortable attending a Christian-based session. Expectations are key. I would hope a yogi knowingly enters a class aware of the teacher’s orientation to the class, Christian, secular, or otherwise. Even more serious is the potential violation of expectations. For example, when I began my pilot study on CCY in 2010, Lily’s classes were labeled as such on the studio’s schedule. However, about six months later when I went back to the same studio’s website, the name had been changed to Yoga Connect.⁹ The only way a student would know what the class was about was to go to a separate link to read the course description. When I asked Lily what prompted the name change, she implied marketing and a management decision. As a

⁹ Yoga Connect is a pseudonym. To ensure the participants’ confidentiality, real names are not provided.

student and a teacher, I feel this marketing move was misleading and unethical, especially since the class name was initially Christian centric.

Considering the name change, the concept of religious privilege may help to explain the lack of consideration (Schlosser, 2003). I speak to how much thought studio management took in making this decision; but when the dominant religion in a culture, Christianity in this case, goes unquestioned, other belief systems are marginalized (Watt, 2009). If the studio owner did not consider how non-believers in God or Jesus might be affected if they were unsuspectingly took the newly named Yoga Connect class, perhaps the reason was religious privilege. In the literature review, I stated that Christian and religious privilege may allow Christ-centered yoga teachers the opportunity to teach from this orientation with little tension or without relative objection. This statement could also apply to with behind-the-scenes people like marketers or studio owners. To interrogate Christian privilege further, studio management may make the name change “without being fully conscious of how it may impact those who do not” share the same faith (Goodman & Seifert, 2010, p. 1).

This research and the concepts of ritual appropriation (Klassen, 2005) and Christian privilege (Goodman & Seifert, 2010; Schlosser, 2003) have informed me as a yoga teacher. Although I claim to teach yoga from an ecumenical perspective, as I mentioned in my positionality in Chapter 3 (Methodology), I am more cognizant of the language, words, and expressions I use in class. For example, in the past, I used the phrase “hands in prayer.” I still may use that phrase; or, alternatively, I may say “Place your palms together at the base of the heart” (researcher journal, 2012). By using the

former expression, I may make students feel uneasy if they do not believe in prayer; however, by using both phrases, I am intentionally using language to foster inclusivity. Words have power and help to define our world. When teaching yoga, the words I choose construct the reality of that session. I may not control how students connect with the words that I say, but I have power to choose language that is supportive and inclusive.

One of the most surprising developments for me in this dissertation process was how the research affected me as a parent. Identifying myself as a liberal Christian (Mountford, 2003; Lundskow, 2008), I like to think that I am very open to all faiths or none; however, if such acceptance were truly my nature at my core, I would be more open to allowing my daughter to find her own path. However, allowing that openness to penetrate the very sanctum of my family troubles me. In fact, my husband, who identifies himself as a cultural Jew, and I have struggled with such openness since learning we were expecting. Bringing up my daughter in a similar manner as I was, within Catholic ritual, is important to me, but so is respecting my family's blended faiths. Even to include this matter in this discussion causes me discomfort, to the point that I have procrastinated writing this section because I must confront in a very real and raw way how I will raise my daughter. Thus, the ritual appropriation within my own family places this "cultural and religious exchange in the messiness and luminosity of fallible human lives" (Klassen, 2005, pp. 387-388).

Summary

In trying to approximate what happens in my participants' classes and "reconstruct the constructions [they] use to make sense of their worlds," I was able to

construct for myself a new reality manifested as a deeper understanding of CCY's multi-dimensionality (Hatch, 2002, p. 15). At the onset of this research, I viewed the method as monolithic, whose aim was to impose Christianity both on an ancient practice, not of its own, and on individuals that may not be open to Christian perspectives. My participants, however, challenged these notions. I still believe being part of a dominant privileged group in the West allows these participants to appropriate yoga for a Christian purpose; in doing so, other groups, like Hindus, are marginalized. This is a layered and nuanced debate that, for me, does not have one answer. The narratives recounted here promoted a dialogue within me that has made me realize CCY's iterations are as complex and numerous as the teachers who ascribe to this method. I must remember that as in any yoga class, much can be learned by taking pause to breathe and consider each individual angle that my mind, body and spirit encounters.

Chapter V: Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

In this chapter, I offer some concluding thoughts, associated implications, and recommendations for future research. In reference to the phrase “some concluding thoughts”, I use the word “some” to recognize that the claims I make in this dissertation are not static statements that endure for all time. I acknowledge that the product I have created in my writing builds new knowledge in the world that is temporarily situated (Hatch, 2002; Noblit et al., 2004). Each participant’s story is unique onto himself or herself and while there may be common patterns or themes across participant stories, I cannot generalize the findings to all yoga instructors who teach from a Christian perspective.

Some Concluding Thoughts

The purpose of this project was to explore Christian-centered yoga and specifically how teachers who ascribe to this method create meaning from their own yoga experiences and operationalize it in their classes. I was interested in how people who teach from a Christian perspective, negotiate what I perceive as tensions, between mainstream yoga and those that argue Christian devotees should not practice yoga. Utilizing qualitative research methods, ten self-identified CCY teachers were interviewed. When available, instructors’ archival data, websites, marketing materials, training manuals and/or class descriptions were used as additional data points. Participant observations were employed with one teacher. Based on thematic analysis, I produced four themes from the data, named: *Gateway*, *Dueling Dualities*, *Embodied Spirituality*, and *Operationalization*, which were detailed in Chapter IV. Bourdieu’s (1977, 1984,

1986, 1988 1993a; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) concepts of field, habitus and capital and ritual appropriation theory were employed in order to explore Christian-centered yoga and specifically how teachers who ascribe to this method create meaning of their own yoga experiences and operationalize it in their classes. To summarize and conclude this study, next I discuss how these themes and theoretical frameworks helped to answer the research questions.

Research question 1. The first research question was: What experiences do CCY instructors perceive as significant in their journey to become CCY teachers? Participants talked about what was important to them. The excerpts from the data offered in the themes of *Gateway*, *Dueling Dualities*, and *Embodied Spirituality* begin to answer the first research question. In summary, in the first theme, participants told stories about how they first started to practice yoga. Most of these stories came from when I asked participants to tell me how they started practicing yoga. Although group fitness classes and workout media may seem mundane, these marked participants baptism into yoga. These points of entry, as described in the *Gateway* theme, started to illuminate what experiences CCY instructors perceived as significant in their journey to become CCY teachers.

The theme of *Embodied Spirituality* also allowed insight into what experiences participants may have perceived as significant in their journey to become CCY teachers. The teachers spoke about how they felt a connection between their body and faith while practicing yoga. The instructors' stories were particularly salient to me as they talked about what they took away from yoga, with reference to their bodies and Christian

beliefs. I argue that these experiences answer the first research question because each participant underwent a transformative process through being a practitioner of yoga prior to teaching. They did not just wake up one morning and say I am going to teach yoga from a Christian perspective without first experiencing yoga as a physical and spiritual practice. It is my impression that this backdrop proved pivotal in participants' journey to becoming yoga teachers.

As detailed in the *Dueling Dualities*, the internal and reflective process participants went through to connect their faith to yoga was also significant in participants' journeys to becoming instructors. In order to teach yoga from a faith-based orientation, participants connected their knowledge of yoga to their religious understanding of Christianity. Some instructors saw yoga as a complementary philosophical system that could easily be applied to their Christian faith, while others, at times, perceived conflict between yoga and their faith. In these instances yoga was altered in order to be aligned with the participant's faith.

Research question 2 a-c. The following was the second research question that guided the study and it is broken down into three separate questions all designed to investigate similar issues.

2a. How do issues of faith surrounding yoga's assimilation into American culture influence CCY instructors' teaching?

2b. How do issues of culture surrounding yoga's assimilation into American culture influence CCY instructors' teaching?

2c. How do tensions surrounding yoga's assimilation into American culture influence CCY instructors' teaching?

In answering these research questions, I combine them because within the lived experience issues of cultural and faith and tensions surrounding who should practice yoga are intermeshed. The experiences re-presented in the theme of *Dueling Dualities* and *Embodied Spirituality* helped to answer the study's research questions listed above. On faith and culture, with the lens of religious privatization, readers can understand better how participants relate yogic philosophy to their own perspective on faith and in doing so the instructors may not see it necessary to reproduce dogma associated with any one Christian denomination. For example, as mentioned in *Embodied Spirituality*, Madeline saw yoga as way to experience God in her body and that experience was, to her, more authentic than "than what [she] had learned in churches." Her faith was not being challenged by yoga; therefore, she may not experience any tension between yoga's historical roots and her religious beliefs.

With regard specifically to culture, participants may not see any tension in between how they teach and yoga's historical association with other religions. I explore this finding in-depth through the theme of *Dueling Dualities: Universality & Connections*. In summary, participant perspectives were re-presented, in this theme I interpreted my participants' thoughts as they perceived yoga to be a universal technology that may be applied to the body, which transcends religious boundaries and ownership. Seven participants, Father Andrew, Kai, Hannah, Alana, Lily, Madeline, and Adrianna viewed yoga as a universal technology, with no faith having ownership over it, take on

the privilege of adapting yoga to fit into their worldview. It is my interpretation that this enables participants to teach CCY without experiencing any tension between the ancient practice and their religion. On the other hand, if participants encountered tension between their faith and yoga's historic Hindu and Buddhist underpinnings, the theme *Dueling Dualities: Departures, Co-optation and Adaptation* began to answer how tensions surrounding yoga's assimilation into American culture may influence CCY instructors' teaching. Moments and reflections re-presented in *Dueling Dualities: Departures, Co-optation and Adaptation* addressed times that participants did see discrepancies between yoga and Christianity. At those times, participants disengaged from mainstream yoga and created a space that allowed them to reconcile aspects of yoga that they may see as antithetical to them. Concepts such as religious privatization (Luckmann, 1990) helped to answer further the second set of research questions. Creating a private belief system from available ideas within the Christian perspective may allow teachers to act as their personal source of religious authority. Individual religiosity exposes ways in which participants moved away from the perception of yoga being a Hindu practice and infused the practice with their interpretation of Christianity. This move may explain how participants reconcile any tensions they perceive to exist between their own faith and that of mainstream yoga. For a more detailed analysis of this rationalization processes, revisit Chapter IV.

Research question 3. The third research question was: How do CCY teachers construct meaning in relation to their Christian-based yoga teaching experiences? Each of the four themes I produced from the data may illuminate how CCY teachers construct

meaning in relation to their Christian-based yoga teaching experiences, which pertains to the third research question guiding this study. Through each participant experience told the CCY teacher accumulated knowledge that created their own reality in relation to what yoga means to them (Hatch, 2002). More specifically, the re-presented experiences explored in this theme *Embodied Spirituality* may shed light on how these experiences helped participants to construct meaning in relation to teaching Christian-centric yoga. When participants were asked about their involvement with yoga, they shared deep, rich accounts of how they encountered their faith through their body. By processing these experiences through reflection and, at times, prayers they were able to construct meaning in relation to their Christian-based yoga teaching experiences. As discussed in the section *Dueling Dualities: Departures, Co-optation and Adaptation* in moments of perceived tension, between yoga and Christian beliefs, participants may create a new reality by framing yoga within their own religious context. By internalizing and reconciling these tensions the teachers produce a new reality in relation to their experiences.

Research question 4. The last research question was: How is this meaning operationalized in an instructor's teachings in their yoga classes? The sociologically constructed code and eventually theme of *Operationalization* came from this question. In that theme, I attempt to describe how participants might actually teach a CCY class. Post-positivism informed the development of this question and finding, as I claim to actually be able to capture what happens in participants' classes (Hatch, 2002). I attempt to approximate how teachers use yoga postures and breathing exercises, language, Christian prayer, and meditation in their classes. In addition, within this theme, I explore the words

and language the teacher use to frame their yoga classes in Christian-centric approach. For more specific examples, please revisit the section entitled *Operationalization* in Chapter IV.

In this section I offered concluding thoughts in relation to this study by discussing how my findings and data analysis answered the research questions. Next, I discuss the study's implications for the fields of health and wellness, physical activity, sport, recreation, yoga, and spirituality and religious studies. I acknowledge that I privilege the former field over that of the latter.

Implications

This study helps to locate Christian-centered yoga inside the larger discourse on sport, recreation, yoga, spirituality, and religion by contextualizing it within the theoretical frameworks of Bourdieu (1977, 1984, 1986, 1988 1993a; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) and ritual appropriation theory (Klassen, 2005). The results of this study and understanding the phenomenon of CCY have cultural and political consequences, which I discuss in this section. Readers of this study may draw information that can benefit fitness managers, yoga teachers, Christian church leaders, and scholars in the fields of sport sociology and psychology.

This study contributes to closing the gap in literature and adds knowledge to the fields of religious studies, recreation, sport sociology and psychology, and health promotion. For those in the fields of spiritual and religious studies, the results of this text offer opportunities for readers to find yogic experiences within a Christian context. These experiences offer comparative material for those studying yoga and more specifically

spaces where CCY and mainstream yoga diverge. The excerpts from the data offered in each theme help to explore the spiritual marketplace, spaces where religion and spirituality are packaged, outwardly marketed, and consumed; in this case, the spiritual marketplace happens to be group-fitness settings. My work continues to develop typologies related to religious studies, physical activity, and modern yoga studies and augments existing scholarship by exploring how religiously affiliated corporal beliefs may influence physical activity.

Sport psychology consultants and wellness consultants may find additional tools to use in working with clients. More specifically, the theme entitled *Embodied Spirituality*, offers insight into how yogis combine spirituality and religious beliefs into physical movement. Sport psychology consultants working with concepts of peak performance and flow may be able to use this study as a starting point in further understanding alignment between faith and the body. Those practitioners who focus more on overall wellness versus sport performance may use this material to extend Power and Dodd's (2009) wellness model in reference to physical and spiritual health. Some participants described how they used the physical modality of yoga to enhance their spiritual well-being. Based on the thick and rich descriptions of participant experiences, readers and practitioners have the chance to engage in transferability. Readers may find that the descriptions resonate with them and they can transfer the information to other situations with comparable qualities (Buchanan, 2011; Creswell, 2007). Moving from the field of sport psychology, next I discuss the study's implications for the field of sport management.

Practitioners and scholars hailing from the fields of fitness and sport management can benefit from recommendations based upon the current research. Specifically for those in marketing and management focusing on mind-body fitness modalities, managers reading this study may have a better understanding of what CCY looks like and be able to leverage that understanding in their specific marketplace. For example, marketing strategists working in gyms and yoga studios may use this study to help with group fitness classes. They could increase enrollment by understanding that there are alternate forms of yoga. Based on this information decision makers could reach out to potential yoga students who may be concerned with the kinetic practice conflicting with their Christian beliefs, thus offering a new demographic a place where they can practice yoga in a setting comfortable to them. Owners of yoga studios may decide whether or not a CCY type of class could be a fit for their students. If the studio offers yoga teacher-training courses, educators could determine, based upon the study's findings, if a Christian focus is appropriate for the demographic the studio serves; this will impact studios' marketing strategies.

I would recommend that any studio or manager to be explicit when advertising a yoga class or course with a Christian focus. As I wrote previously, through my research, I found one incident where the Christian focus of a yoga class was not evident based on its name. In fact, the class was originally named Christ-centered yoga, but later management changed the name of that class. I would suggest that even in the naming of a yoga class managers should indicate its Christian perspective. This allows potential students to enter into a class with clearer expectations of what the yoga class will be about and from a

marketing perspective it targets potential students in a direct way. In addition, advertising a yoga class in a clear and direct way may attract additional clientele that may otherwise be wary of taking a mainstream class. In the theme of *Operationalization* I describe how participants operationalized CCY in their classes and this provides those working in the field of yoga and fitness management potential tools to incorporate into their own classes and business strategies.

Some Christian organizations and churches use organized sport in order to serve the physical and spiritual needs of their congregation as well as recruit new members. For example, programs like Upward Sports, one of the largest Christian based sport organizations in North America, partners with churches and other Christian organizations to bring sports like basketball and cheerleading to offer church members family-centered programs. Others groups have used sport participation to witness to others and promote Protestant Christian beliefs (Coakley, 2009; Ladd & Mathisen, 1999). Christian churches could use yoga taught from a Christian perspective to attend to their laity's needs and recruit new members. Churches and organizations such as Fellowship for Christian Athletes may offer CCY as part of their community outreach efforts. Yoga taught from a Christian perspective may offer a physical activity option accessible to a wide age range of potential practitioners. Where as, some of the previously mentioned organizations offer forms of physical activity that may be considered vigorous by some, yoga could be an alternative that offers varying levels of physical intensity within one class. While physical needs are met by offering modifications, CCY could provide opportunities for spiritual growth as well.

The study's implications, which I have noted thus far, have a neutral tone to them; however, my research has cultural and political consequences, which connects the study to socio-cultural discourse in sport and physical activity. Part of my socialization as a researcher has been through the filter of critical thought in exploring organized physical movement (University of Tennessee, 2012). Acknowledging this socialization as a researcher, I recognize that (a) the works that I produce, what Hatch (2002) terms products of knowledge, have consequences beyond just the existence of a neutral text and (b) I position others through the stories I tell (Anders, 2007; Ellensworth, 1997). From this critical orientation, I understand that my work underscores voices that are already in positions of power and privilege (Noblit et al, 2004), my participants identified as Christian, that make them part of the religious dominant group in the West. The current study highlights how individuals holding those cultural positions of power are able to reproduce their religious ideologies. As I outlined in my discussion in Chapter IV, concepts of ritual appropriation (Klassen, 2005) and religious privilege (Schlosser, 2003; Watt, 2009) help to illustrate how teachers use the physical discipline of yoga to foster their own spirituality and potentially that of their students while maintaining a Christian focus. Coming from a position of power and privilege, participants are more easily able to marginalize yoga's historic legacy and teach from a dominant religious orientation. As a result, yoga is positioned as a "living tradition" and CCY is part of yoga's "development in North America [and] yet another chapter in a long saga of adaptation, experimentation, synthesis, and change" (Kai, participant).

From a theoretical perspective, I have begun to extend Bourdieu's (1977, 1984, 1986, 1988 1993a; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) sociological concepts and ritual appropriation theory (Klassen, 2005) to the phenomenon of Christian-based yoga, which has not been done before, and as a result I have added depth to the body of research focusing on religion, spirituality, and physical activity. Some stakeholders within the field of yoga perceive the practice as having strong ties to Hinduism and Buddhism, while others, not denying the association entirely, do not share that opinion so vehemently. It can be argued that Christ-center yoga is an example of a group using rituals from another culture for their own purpose (Klassen, 2005). By framing yoga in a Christian light, the participants in my study are in a position of power to define physical activity, recreation, and, more specifically, yoga. While the theory of ritual appropriation (Klassen, 2005) had a strong influence on my interpretation and re-presentation of the data, Bourdieu's sociological concepts of capital, habitus and field informing my work were exploratory in nature. Both theoretical frameworks help to position this study and CCY within critical discourses on religion, spirituality, and physical activity. Applying these theoretical lenses illuminate how issues of faith, culture, and tensions surrounding yoga's assimilation into Western culture influence CCY instructors' teaching and specifically how the participants in my study, who ascribe to this method, create meaning of their own yoga experiences and operationalize it in their classes. I now turn from the study's implications to recommendations for future research.

Recommendations

This section is a conglomerate of passages, notes, and researcher memos from my researcher's journal that I have kept over the past two years. Some of these notes were hand written, typed into the comments section of dissertation drafts, and audio recorded reflection. They all provide the "data points", I use that term loosely here, that I synthesized in this section and make recommendations for future research. Reviewing these data points lead to suggestions about how the current study could have been enhanced. My recommendations consider elements of fieldwork, theory, population choice, level of analysis, and interview protocols.

I believe this study and others like it could be served well by conducting fieldwork as an observer or a participant observer (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Hatch, 2002). I understand that time and travel are a luxury that not every researcher can afford, but I felt that I had a better understanding of Lily's classes, as I was able to actually experience them first hand. This offered deeper and richer data points for me to consider in my analysis. Also along the lines of participant observations and expanding into experiential ethnographic methods, attending an annual CCY retreat, that several participants mentioned in their interviews, would have helped me have a more in-depth appreciation of CCY. To be present at such an event would provide additional data points for analysis. In addition, it may be determined that what were outliers from this study could materialize as patterns or even themes when interviewing more instructors.

Form a theoretical standpoint, a larger population set may have permitted me to extend Bourdieu's (1993a; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) concept of field in a more informed way. While there is not one field, there are many, and power is an influential force in each one. In this study, the field under investigation is CCY within the larger context of the yoga community located in the West. The concept of field refers to the stakeholders and networks of social relationships connected in forms of power (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). People, groups, and organizations have an interest in how the boundaries (Bourdieu, 1993a) of yoga are defined. My participants may exert force in the field if yoga in order to change its dynamic and relationship between other agents in the field. Attending the retreat, with many CCY instructors, would allow a researcher to interact, converse, and observe some of the more influential people, as perceived by some interviewees, within the CCY community. For example, one influential person mentioned repeatedly was Father Thomas Ryan, who is also a retreat attendee and organizer.

Stakeholders in a given field have an interest in maintaining its boundaries and have an interest in how the field develops and is defined (Bourdieu, 1988a). I argue that in order to extend Bourdieu's concept of field appropriately to Christian-based yoga, it would be prudent to interview some of the more dynamic players within the Christ-centered yoga community. In addition, though outside the scope of my study, I would recommend interviewing other stakeholders, who are not part of the CCY community, but who have an interest in how yoga's boundaries are defined. Such agents would include mainstream yogis and people involved in the Hindu American Foundation, who argue that yoga's rich heritage is indebted to Hinduism (Hindu American Foundation,

2011). From a critical theory perspective, such an investigation is relevant due to Hinduism's minority status within the West. Another minority religion in the West is also stakeholder within the field of yoga. Some yoga teachers from the Jewish tradition have actively adapted yoga to fit their own spiritual and religious needs. Yoga taught from a Jewish perspective is the next population I intend to study using many of the same methods I have employed here.

One choice that may be different with studying Jewish based yoga is at the level of analysis. Due to time constraints during the current study, I was unable to analyze the data at the level of narrative, as originally intended. I would like to return to the CCY data set and see if I could re-present participant stories in narrative form and do the same for Jewish yoga teachers. This would be an evocative way to present findings, which practitioners may find more accessible than thematic analysis. Extending narrative analysis would also allow for a more holistic approach to studying yoga's assimilation in the West.

For example, revisiting the present study's second research question, it was broken apart into three separate parts. It read,

2a. How do issues of faith surrounding yoga's assimilation into Western culture influence CCY instructors' teaching?

2b. How do issues of culture surrounding yoga's assimilation into Western culture influence CCY instructors' teaching?

2c. How do tensions surrounding yoga's assimilation into Western culture influence CCY instructors' teaching?

Through narrative analysis that question could be addressed holistically: How do issues of culture, faith, and tensions surrounding yoga's assimilation into Western culture influence CCY instructors' teaching? This is a more realistic approach considering all of these forces influence one another. Breaking them apart and analyzing each one separately implies, falsely, that within CCY these elements are distinctly different. Culture, faith, and the debate over how yoga is practiced have a fluidity to them; there is slippage from one force to the next. With narrative analysis, each person's experience would not be broken apart, as it was in my research design. By teasing out elements of faith, culture, and tension and discussing them separately, a degree of complexity is lost surrounding yoga's assimilation into Western culture.

In addition to choosing a different analytical tool, future researchers studying yoga, not just CCY teachers, could design an interview protocol specifically addressing different topics such as flow and teacher motivation. Flow refers to instances when a person "experiences [an action] as a unified flowing from one moment to the next, in which he is in control of his actions, and in which there is little distinction between self and environment" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, p. 36). I could have steered my conversations with instructors toward this subject, but I felt it would have been forced and did not want to stray too far from my interview guide. Another area of literature that could use further investigation is that of CCY teacher motivation. In researching the topic of why people become yoga teachers, I found a gap in the literature. Little to no research has been conducted on this topic.

Concluding thoughts and future conversations. My next recommendation does not specifically have to do with future research as much as it is a call for future discussions based on my findings and to foster further discussion on yoga's collective identity, which is in a state of flux (Desikachar, 1995; Yoga Journal, 2011). While yoga is a popular form of fitness, some theologians purport that yoga is antithetical to Christianity and that true Christians should not practice yoga because of its Hindu association (Mohler, 2010). In response, the Hindu American Foundation mounted a campaign in 2010 "to acquaint Westerners with the faith that it says underlies every single yoga style followed in gyms, ashrams and spas: Hinduism" (Vitello, 2010, p. 1). This study explores how CCY teachers navigate the world of mainstream yoga and the opponents of Christians practicing yoga and expand the layered debate encircling who "owns" yoga, if anyone at all. While there may not be a unified definition of yoga, as the word's translation may imply, it is my hope that readers of this study will have a more nuanced appreciation for how yoga is operationalized in the West and based on this appreciation, bring to their own circles, further dialogue on how yoga is defined and who has the privilege to do so. Often the silence surrounding privilege, unquestioning of the status quo, lends to the reproduction of that status quo, even if unintentionally. I encourage those who do teach from a Christian orientation to do so with respect and sensitivity for the practice's past and an acknowledgement of how CCY may be perceived by Hindus and Buddhist who strongly identify yoga with their religions and cultural heritage. The discussion on how yoga is practiced in the West needs to involve

the multitude of voices, privileged and marginalized, who have a stake in how the modality is defined. Yoga's future depends upon it.

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Appendices

Appendix A

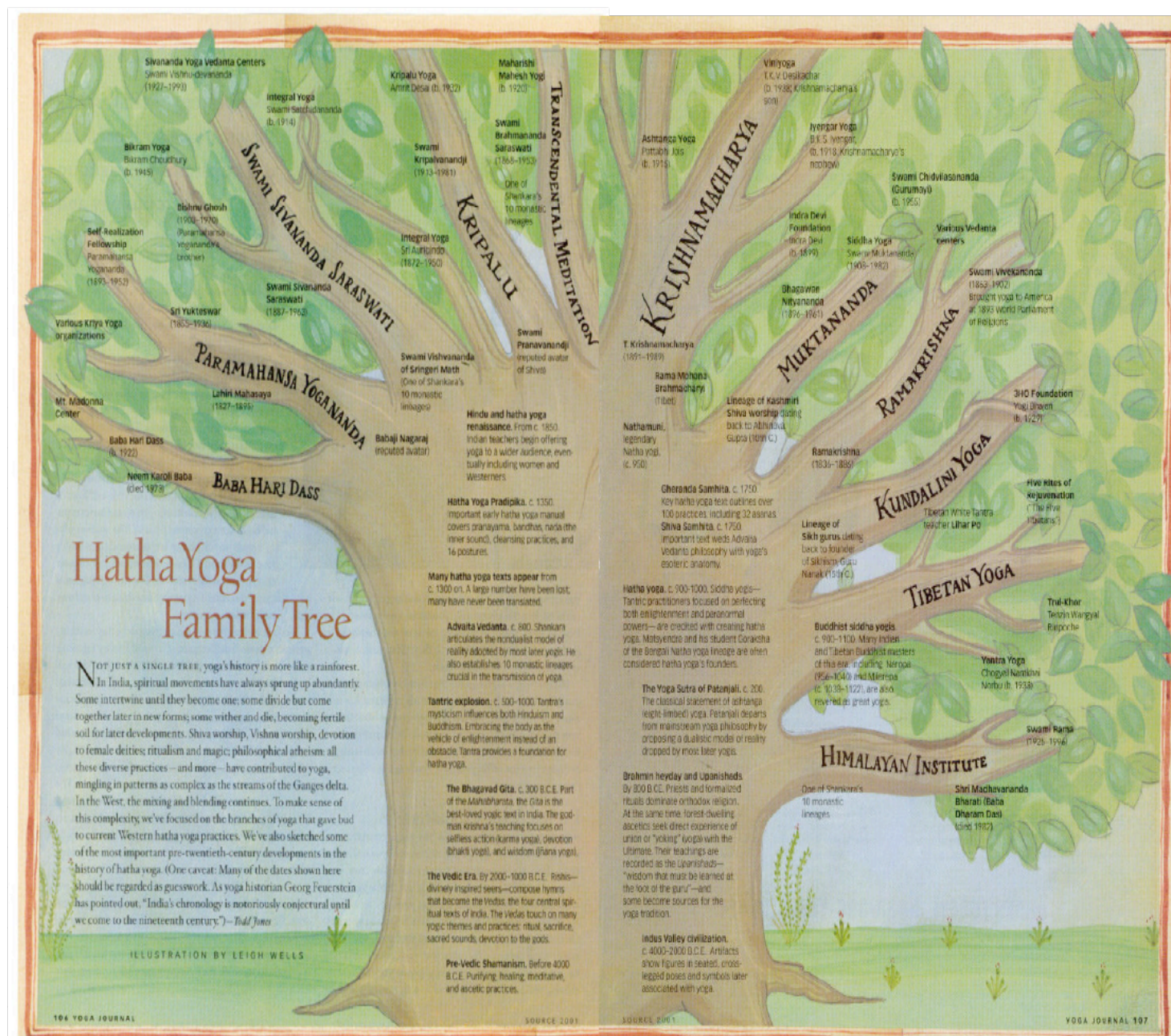


Figure 1. Hatha Family Yoga Tree (Jones & Wells 2001)

Appendix B

Constructing Christian-based Yoga Informed Consent Form

INTRODUCTION

Please read this agreement carefully before you decide whether to participate in this research study.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to explore Christian-centered yoga (CCY) and specifically how teachers who ascribe to this method create meaning of their own yoga experiences and operationalize it in their classes.

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

The procedures for the study are as follows:

1. Prior to agreeing to participate in this study, you are requested to read the information included in this informed consent. After reading this information closely and entirely, if you would like to participate, please sign this form at the bottom of the page.
2. The procedure used in this study involves an audio recorded interview, which will take approximately 45-90 minutes. **Your responses to the interview questions will be transcribed and analyzed by the interviewer.**
3. With your permission, I would like to attend one or several of your classes as an observer.

RISKS

There are no physical risks to participants in this study. All data will remain confidential. Pseudonyms will replace all names and any other identifiable information. Participation in the Christian-based yoga research project is voluntary. You may choose to withdraw from participation in this research project at any time without penalty and all interview tapes and transcripts will be immediately destroyed.

BENEFITS

Individual benefits are incidental. As you reflect on your experiences, you may gain a better understanding of your teachings.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Information in the study records will be kept confidential and participants will be given pseudonyms to protect their identity. Data, including informed consent forms, audio files, and paper files, will be stored securely and will be made available only to the investigator conducting the study unless you specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study.

COMPENSATION

There is no compensation for your participation in this study.

MEDICAL CLAIMS

The University of Tennessee does not "automatically" reimburse subjects for medical claims or other compensation. For more information, please call the investigators below:

Ellie Odenheimer (865) 974-3295

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study, you may contact the researcher:

Ellie Odenheimer
College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences
Kinesiology, Recreation, and Sport Studies Department
1914 Andy Holt Avenue-HPER 233
Knoxville, TN 37996-2700
Phone: 865-974-3295
Email: eodenhei@utk.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the UT Office of Research Compliance Officer at (865) 974-3466.

CONSENT

I have read the above information. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

Appendix C

Interview Guide

Topic: Experience

1. Tell me about how you became interested in participating in yoga.

Possible follow-up question:

- 1a. What has been your experience with Christian-based yoga?

Topic: Yoga general

Lead off-question:

2. What is your interpretation of yoga?

Possible follow-up question:

- 2a. What is your take on the tradition and history of yoga?

Topic: Best class and differences

Lead-off question:

3. When you teach, what is your best class like?

Possible follow-up question:

- 3a. What elements of the class do you want to share with your students?

- 3b. What do you want in a good class?

- 3c. Are there differences in your yoga practice and when you teach Christian based yoga?

Topic: Religion and yoga

Lead-off question:

4. What is your interpretation of religion in relation to yoga?

Possible follow-up questions:

4a. What is your interpretation of your faith in relation to yoga?

Topic: Teaching influences

Lead-off question:

5. Who or what influences your teaching?

Topic: Power and privilege to define yoga

6. Present participant with *NY Times* article and ask for response.

Topic Domain: Summary / Debriefing

Lead-off question:

7. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Possible follow-up questions:

7a. How do you feel about the questions I have asked you?

7b. Do you have any questions or concerns about the interview?

Appendix D
TRANSCRIBER'S PLEDGE OF CONFIDENTIALITY

As a transcribing typist of this research project, I understand that I will be hearing audio of confidential interviews. The information on these tapes has been revealed by research participants who participated in this project on good faith that their interviews would remain strictly confidential. I understand that I have a responsibility to honor this confidentiality agreement. I hereby agree not to share any information on these tapes with anyone except the primary researcher of this project. Any violation of this agreement would constitute a serious breach of ethical standards, and I pledge not to do so.

Transcribing Typist (Print Name)

Transcribing Typist (Signature)

Date

Appendix E
THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE

Application for Review of Research Involving Human Subjects

I. IDENTIFICATION OF PROJECT

Principal Investigator:

Ellie Odenheimer, Doctoral Student
Department of Kinesiology, Recreation, and Sport Studies
1914 Andy Holt Avenue-HPER 233
Knoxville, TN 37996-2700
Phone: 865-974-3295
Email: eodenhei@utk.edu

Faculty Advisor:

Dr. Joy T. DeSensi, Professor
Department of Kinesiology, Recreation, and Sport Studies
HPER 332
Phone: 974-1282
Email: desensi@utk.edu

2. Project Classification: **Research Dissertation**
3. Title of Project: **Constructing Christian-based Yoga**
4. Starting Date: **Upon IRB Approval**
5. Estimated Completion Date: **August 2012**
6. External Funding (*if any*): N/A

II. PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this project is to explore Christian-centered yoga (CCY) and specifically how teachers who ascribe to this method create meaning of their own yoga experiences and operationalize it in their classes. The following research questions will guide this study:

1. What experiences do CCY instructors' perceive as significant in their journey to become CCY teachers?
- 2a. How do issues of faith surrounding yoga's assimilation into American culture influence CCY instructors' teaching?
- 2b. How do issues of culture surrounding yoga's assimilation into American culture influence CCY instructors' teaching?
- 2c. How do tensions surrounding yoga's assimilation into American culture influence CCY instructors' teaching?
3. How do CCY teachers construct meaning in relation to his or her Christian-based yoga teaching experience?
4. How is this meaning operationalized in an instructor's teachings in their yoga classes?

III. DESCRIPTION AND SOURCE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

A minimum of six yoga teachers, at least 18 years of age, who teach Christian-based yoga classes will be invited to participate in an interview. Stratified, purposeful sampling as well as snowball sampling will be used in this study in order to obtain the names of yoga teachers and their contact information. Contacts will also be made through Christian-based yoga websites, such as http://www.christianyoga.us/classes_sem.htm.

IV. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Following IRB approval, participants will be contacted via email and/or phone to request their voluntary participation in this study (Appendix A). Prior to agreeing to participate, participants will be requested to read and sign the informed consent (Appendix B). The researcher will also sign the form and retain a copy and provide one for the participant. Interviews will be conducted in a comfortable, convenient place for the participants. Questions from an interview guide (Appendix C) will be used to gather qualitative data from participants to explore Christian-centered yoga and specifically how teachers who ascribe to this method create meaning of their own yoga experiences and operationalize it in their classes. More specifically, the study will explore issues of faith and how meaning is constructed. Follow-up questions will be based on gentle probing (Glense, 2006). The interview will take approximately 45-90 minutes and will be audio recorded. Each interview will be digitally recorded and transcribed. Transcriptions will be completed by the investigator and a professional transcription service.

When possible, the researcher will also attend the participants' classes and take field notes as a participant observer (Glense, 2006).

After collecting data, the investigator will conduct thematic and narrative analysis (Reissman, 1993; Saldana, 2009).

V. SPECIFIC RISKS AND PROTECTION MEASURES

There is no physical risk to the participants.

Participants will not be referred to in a way that might identify them, their responses will be kept confidential, and participants will have the opportunity to choose their own pseudonym. Participants will be free to terminate participation for any reason at any time without penalty. If they directly express a desire not to continue participation, then they may do so and their data will be immediately destroyed.

Data will be stored in two places. All Informed Consent Forms will be placed in an envelope and stored in the locked office of the Principal Investigator in HPER 233. Interview transcripts, audio recordings, and observation notes from the study will be kept in password protected electronic files on the Principal Investigator's computer, and any paper files will be kept in a locked office of the Principal Investigator, in room 233 HPER Building. Any transcriptionist hired to transcribe the data, will sign the Transcriber's Pledge of Confidentiality (Appendix D). The Principal Investigator, her advisor, and transcriber will be the only individuals who have access to the transcripts and audio-recordings. The Principal Investigator, her advisor, and transcriber will be the only people who will have access to all other electronic files on the computer. The records will be kept on file for three years following the completion of the study and then will be destroyed.

VI. BENEFITS

As individuals reflect on their experiences, they may gain a better understanding of the impact of their Christian yoga teachings.

VII. METHODS FOR OBTAINING "INFORMED CONSENT" FROM PARTICIPANTS

Before each interview, participants will receive, read, and sign the attached Informed Consent Form in order to participate in this study. Interviews will begin only after participants have reviewed and signed the Consent Form and received the answers to any questions they may have for the researcher. Participation in this study is voluntary. Participants will be provided with a copy of the Informed Consent Form.

VIII. QUALIFICATIONS OF THE INVESTIGATOR(S) TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Ellie Odenheimer is a PhD student in sport studies at the University of Tennessee and has been teaching wellness activities throughout the course of her career. She has taken three graduate level, qualitative research courses at the University of Tennessee, these include Introduction to Qualitative Research, Advance Qualitative Research, and Existential-Phenomenological Psychology.

Dr. DeSensi has advised numerous Ph.D. dissertations utilizing qualitative methodology and has presented and published qualitative research.

IX. FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT TO BE USED IN THE RESEARCH

During this study, the researcher will use an audio recorder, hand written notes, and a computer for word-processed notes.

X. RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PRINCIPAL/CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR(S)

By compliance with the policies established by the Institutional Review Board of The University of Tennessee the principal investigator(s) subscribe to the principles stated in "The Belmont Report" and standards of professional ethics in all research, development, and related activities involving human subjects under the auspices of The University of Tennessee. The principal investigator(s) further agree that:

1. Approval will be obtained from the Institutional Review Board prior to instituting any change in this research project.
2. Development of any unexpected risks will be immediately reported to Research Compliance Services.
3. An annual review and progress report (Form R) will be completed and submitted when requested by the Institutional Review Board.
4. Signed informed consent documents will be kept for the duration of the project and for at least three years thereafter at a location approved by the Institutional Review Board.

XI. SIGNATURES

ALL SIGNATURES MUST BE ORIGINAL. The Principal Investigator should keep the original copy of the Form B and submit a copy with original signatures for review. Type the name of each individual above the appropriate signature line. Add signature lines for all Co-Principal Investigators, collaborating and student investigators, faculty advisor(s), department head of the Principal Investigator, and the Chair of the Departmental Review Committee. The following information should be typed verbatim, with added categories where needed:

Principal Investigator: Ellie Odenheimer

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Student Advisor (if any): Dr. Joy T. DeSensi

Signature: _____ Date: _____

XII. DEPARTMENT REVIEW AND APPROVAL

The application described above has been reviewed by the IRB departmental review committee and has been approved. The DRC further recommends that this application be reviewed as:

☒ Expedited Review -- Category(s): _____7_____

OR

☐ Full IRB Review

Chair, DRC:

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Department Head:

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Protocol sent to Research Compliance Services for final approval on (Date) :

Approved:

Research Compliance Services

Office of Research

1534 White Avenue

Signature: _____ Date: _____

For additional information on Form B, contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer or by phone at (865) 974-3466

Participation request via e-mail or telephone

Hello, this is Ellie Odenheimer from the Kinesiology, Recreation, and Sport Studies Department at the University of Tennessee. I am a doctoral student doing a dissertation on Christian-centered yoga instructors and how those who ascribe to this method create meaning of their own yoga experiences and transfer this to their classes.

I would like to invite you to take part in the study. If you are interested in participating or have any questions, please contact me at 865-974-3295 or on my cell at 415-336-7643. Thank you for your time.

Constructing Christian-based Yoga Informed Consent Form

INTRODUCTION

Please read this agreement carefully before you decide to participate in this research study.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to explore Christian-centered yoga and specifically how teachers who ascribe to this method create meaning of their own yoga experiences and operationalize it in their classes.

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

The procedures for the study are as follows:

1. Prior to agreeing to participate in this study, you are requested to read the information included in this informed consent. After reading this information closely and entirely, if you would like to participate, please sign this form at the bottom of the page.
2. The procedure used in this study involves an audio recorded interview, which will take approximately 45-90 minutes. **Your responses to the interview questions will be transcribed by the interviewer or a transcriber and analyzed by the interviewer.**
3. You will have the opportunity to review the transcripts of your interview and add any clarifications.
4. With your permission, I would like to attend one or several of your classes as a participant observer.

RISKS

There are no physical risks to participants in this study. All data will remain confidential. Participation in the Christian-based yoga research project is voluntary. You may choose to withdraw from participation in this research project at any time without penalty and all interview recordings and transcripts will be immediately destroyed.

BENEFITS

As you reflect on your experiences, you may gain a better understanding of your teachings.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Information in the study records will be kept confidential and you may choose a pseudonym to protect your identity. Pseudonyms will replace any other identifiable information.

Data will be stored and locked in the investigator's office and password protected computer and will be made available only to the investigator, her advisor, and the transcriber conducting the study unless you specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that would link you to the study.

**Initial _____
COMPENSATION**

There is no compensation for your participation in this study.

MEDICAL CLAIMS

The University of Tennessee does not "automatically" reimburse subjects for medical claims or other compensation. For more information, please call the investigator: Ellie Odenheimer (865) 974-3295.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study, you may contact the researcher:

Ellie Odenheimer, Doctoral Student
Department Kinesiology, Recreation, and Sport Studies Department
University of Tennessee
1914 Andy Holt Avenue-HPER 233
Knoxville, TN 37996-2700
Phone: 865-974-3295 or Email: eodenhei@utk.edu

Faculty Advisor:
Dr. Joy T. DeSensi, Professor
Department of Kinesiology, Recreation, and Sport Studies
University of Tennessee
HPER 332
Knoxville, TN 37996
Phone: 974-1282 or Email: desensi@utk.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the UT Office of Research Compliance Officer at (865) 974-3466.

CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date

Investigator's signature _____ Date

Interview Protocol

Interview Guide

Topic: Experience

1. Tell me about how you became interested in participating in yoga.

Possible follow-up question:

- 1a.* What has been your experience with Christian-based yoga?

Topic: Yoga general

Lead off question:

2. What is your interpretation of yoga?

Possible follow-up question:

- 2a.* What is your take on the tradition and history of yoga?

- 2b.* What is your interpretation of Christian-based yoga?

Topic: Best class and differences

Lead off question:

3. When you teach, what is your best class like?

Possible follow-up question:

- 3a.* What elements of the class do you want to share with your students?

- 3b.* What do you want in a good class?

- 3c.* Are there differences in your yoga practice and when you teach Christian based yoga?

Topic: Religion and yoga

Lead off question:

4. What is your interpretation of religion in relation to yoga?

Possible follow-up questions:

4a. What is your interpretation of your faith in relation to yoga?

Topic: Teaching influences

Lead off question:

5. Who or what influences your teaching?

Topic: Power and privilege to define yoga

6. Present participant with NY Times article and ask for response (Vitello, 2010)

(See Appendix E)

Topic Domain: Summary / Debriefing

Lead off question:

7. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Possible follow-up questions:

7a. How do you feel about the questions I have asked you?

7b. Do you have any questions or concerns about the interview?

TRANSCRIBER'S PLEDGE OF CONFIDENTIALITY

As a transcribing typist of this research project, I understand that I will be hearing audio of confidential interviews. The information on these tapes has been revealed by research participants who participated in this project on good faith that their interviews would remain strictly confidential. I understand that I have a responsibility to honor this confidentially agreement. I hereby agree not to share any information on these tapes with anyone except the primary researcher of this project. Any violation of this agreement would constitute a serious breach of ethical standards, and I pledge not to do so.

Transcribing Typist (Print Name)

Transcribing Typist (Signature)

Date

New York Times

“Hindu Group Stirs a Debate Over Yoga’s Soul”

By PAUL VITELLO

Published: November 27, 2010

Yoga is practiced by about 15 million people in the United States, for reasons almost as numerous — from the physical benefits mapped in brain scans to the less tangible rewards that New Age journals call spiritual centering. Religion, for the most part, has nothing to do with it.

But a group of Indian-Americans has ignited a surprisingly fierce debate in the gentle world of yoga by mounting a campaign to acquaint Westerners with the faith that it says underlies every single yoga style followed in gyms, ashrams and spas: Hinduism.

The campaign, labeled “Take Back Yoga,” does not ask yoga devotees to become Hindu, or instructors to teach more about Hinduism. The small but increasingly influential group behind it, the Hindu American Foundation, suggests only that people become more aware of yoga’s debt to the faith’s ancient traditions.

That suggestion, modest though it may seem, has drawn a flurry of strong reactions from figures far apart on the religious spectrum. Dr. Deepak Chopra, the New Age writer, has dismissed the campaign as a jumble of faulty history and Hindu nationalism. R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, has said he agrees that yoga is Hindu — and cited that as evidence that the practice imperiled the souls of Christians who engage in it.

The question at the core of the debate — who owns yoga? — has become an enduring topic of chatter in yoga Web forums, Hindu American newspapers and journals catering to the many consumers of what is now a multibillion-dollar yoga industry.

In June, it even prompted the Indian government to begin making digital copies of ancient drawings showing the provenance of more than 4,000 yoga poses, to discourage further claims by entrepreneurs like Bikram Choudhury, an Indian-born yoga instructor to the stars who is based in Los Angeles. Mr. Choudhury nettled Indian officials in 2007 when he copyrighted his personal style of 26 yoga poses as “Bikram Yoga.”

Organizers of the Take Back Yoga effort point out that the philosophy of yoga was first described in Hinduism’s seminal texts and remains at the core of Hindu teaching. Yet, because the religion has been stereotyped in the West as a polytheistic faith of “castes, cows and curry,” they say, most Americans prefer to see yoga as the legacy of a more timeless, spiritual “Indian wisdom.”

“In a way,” said Dr. Aseem Shukla, the foundation’s co-founder, “our issue is that yoga has thrived, but Hinduism has lost control of the brand.”

For many practitioners, including Debbie Desmond, 27, a yoga instructor in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, the talk of branding and ownership is bewildering.

“Nobody owns yoga,” she said, sitting cross-legged in her studio, Namaste Yoga, and tilting her head as if the notion sketched an impossible yoga position she had never seen.

“Yoga is not a religion. It is a way of life, a method of becoming. We were taught that the roots of yoga go back further than Hinduism itself.”

Like Dr. Chopra and some religious historians, Ms. Desmond believes that yoga originated in the Vedic culture of Indo-Europeans who settled in India in the third millennium B.C., long before the tradition now called Hinduism emerged. Other historians trace the first written description of yoga to the Bhagavad Gita, the sacred Hindu scripture believed to have been written between the fifth and second centuries B.C. The effort to “take back” yoga began quietly enough, with a scholarly essay posted in January on the Web site of the Hindu American Foundation, a Minneapolis-based group that promotes human rights for Hindu minorities worldwide. The essay lamented a perceived snub in modern yoga culture, saying that yoga magazines and studios had assiduously decoupled the practice “from the Hinduism that gave forth this immense contribution to humanity.”

Dr. Shukla put a sharper point on his case a few months later in a column on the On Faith blog of The Washington Post. Hinduism, he wrote, had become a victim of “overt intellectual property theft,” made possible by generations of Hindu yoga teachers who had “offered up a religion’s spiritual wealth at the altar of crass commercialism.”

That drew the attention of Dr. Chopra, an Indian-American who has done much to popularize Indian traditions like alternative medicine and yoga. He posted a reply saying that Hinduism was too “tribal” and “self-enclosed” to claim ownership of yoga.

The fight went viral — or as viral as things can get in a narrow Web corridor frequented by yoga enthusiasts, Hindu Americans and religion scholars.

Loriliai Biernacki, a professor of Indian religions at the University of Colorado, said the debate had raised important issues about a spectrum of Hindu concepts permeating

American culture, including meditation, belief in karma and reincarnation, and even cremation.

All these ideas are Hindu in origin, and they are spreading,” she said. “But they are doing it in a way that leaves behind the proper name, the box that classifies them as ‘Hinduism.’

The debate has also secured the standing of the Hindu American Foundation as the pre-eminent voice for the country’s two million Hindus, said Diana L. Eck, a professor of comparative religion and Indian studies at Harvard. Other groups represent Indian-Americans’ interests in business and politics, but the foundation has emerged as “the first major national advocacy group looking at Hindu identity,” she said.

Dr. Shukla said reaction to the yoga campaign had far exceeded his expectations.

“We started this, really, for our kids,” said Dr. Shukla, a urologist and a second-generation Indian-American. “When our kids go to school and say they are Hindu, nobody says, ‘Oh, yeah, Hindus gave the world yoga.’ They say, ‘What caste are you?’ Or ‘Do you pray to a monkey god?’ Because that’s all Americans know about Hinduism.”

With its tiny budget, the foundation has pressed its campaign largely by generating buzz through letters and Web postings to academic journals and yoga magazines. The September issue of Yoga Journal, which has the largest circulation in the field, alluded to the campaign, if fleetingly, in an article calling yoga’s “true history a mystery.”

The effort has been received most favorably by Indian-American community leaders like Dr. Uma V. Mysorekar, the president of the Hindu Temple Society of North America, in Flushing, Queens, which helps groups across the country build temples.

A naturalized immigrant, she said Take Back Yoga represented a coming-of-age for Indians in the United States. “My generation was too busy establishing itself in business and the professions,” she said. “Now, the second and third generation is looking around and finding its voice, saying, ‘Our civilization has made contributions to the world, and these should be acknowledged.’ ”

In the basement of the society’s Ganesha Temple, an hourlong yoga class ended one recent Sunday morning with a long exhalation of the sacred syllable “om.” Via the lung power of 60 students, it sounded as deeply as a blast from the organ at St. Patrick’s Cathedral.

After the session, which began and concluded with Hindu prayers, many students said they were practicing Hindus and in complete sympathy with the yoga campaign.

Not all were, though. Shweta Parmar, 35, a community organizer and project director for a health and meditation group, said she had grown up in a Hindu household. “Yoga is part of the tradition I come from,” she said.

But is yoga specifically Hindu? She paused to ponder. “My parents are Hindu,” she said. But in matters of yoga, “I don’t use that term.”

VITA

Ellie Odenheimer is originally from New Orleans, Louisiana. She double majored in International Finance and Economics while attending Louisianan State University. Then she earned a Master's degree in Sport Management from the University of San Francisco, where she worked in the Recreational Sports Department. In 2006, she taught English and physical education in Honduras then returned to the United States taking a position in Athletic Compliance at California State University-Northridge. She will graduate with a PhD in Kinesiology and Sport Studies at the University of Tennessee and dissertation explores yoga in North American culture.