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## Investigation of the "Cultural Appropriation" of Yoga

Olivia Bartholomew  
obartho@bgsu.edu

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## Introduction

This research investigates whether Western yoga is cultural appropriation of traditional yoga. This research project is entirely interdisciplinary, because it is seen through an International Studies lens, which is an interdisciplinary field by nature, by examining the relations between Western societies and India through the topic of yoga. It also integrates other disciplines such as History, through evaluating the history of yoga to gain a better understanding of contemporary yoga, and Sociology, since the cultural impacts of yoga are evaluated. Other disciplines are briefly considered as needed, like Hindu Theology and Anthropology.

### Statement of the Problem

As our communities become more globalized and influenced by cultures across the world, this brings along serious ethical considerations. According to Smith, cosmopolitanism, contemporarily thought of as global citizenship, is argued to allow people to have “an identity that is a hybrid of different cultures and practices” (22). Another aspect of cosmopolitanism is to prioritize moral obligations to all of humanity above allegiances to our “more particular communities” (22). Examining both of these ideas harmoniously is challenging when confronted by the issue of cultural appropriation. In the case of yoga, a practice that comes from ancient India, people are presently seen practicing some version of it all across the world, demonstrating the hybridization of cultures. However, are these different versions of yoga disgracing the ancient practice and thus deemphasizing a moral obligation to all of humanity? Questions similar to this challenge and occupy the minds of many cosmopolitan yoga instructors across the globe. Therefore, this investigation works to uncover what yoga instructors think about whether Western yoga is cultural appropriation of traditional yoga.

### Research Question

Is Western yoga cultural appropriation of traditional yoga?

### Research Method

Participants were recruited through mostly convenience sampling and some snowball sampling. Variation between participants was a driving factor in the selection process. Participants were interviewed with semi-structured interview questions found in Appendix C that allowed the researcher to gain insight about the participants' background, experience, and breadth of knowledge in terms of yoga, and then receive their opinions on the research question and advice. The interviews were recorded and transcribed to find main themes throughout.

### Definition of Key Terms

The most important term in this research that requires clarification is “yoga.” Yoga can be found to have two definitions in the Merriam-Webster dictionary:

- 1** *capitalized*: a Hindu theistic philosophy teaching the suppression of all activity of body, mind, and will in order that the self may realize its distinction from them and attain liberation
- 2**: a system of physical postures, breathing techniques, and sometimes meditation derived from Yoga but often practiced independently especially in Western cultures to promote physical and emotional well-being

By having at least two definitions in most dictionaries, this further confuses the meaning of the word as it is used in this research. For the purposes of this investigation, yoga is defined to be an internationally recognized practice that emphasizes physical and emotional well-being and is derived from ancient Indian philosophy. “Traditional yoga,” as used in the research question, aligns more closely with definition 1, or Yoga. Swami Jnaneshvara Bharati argues that although there is no conclusive way to define Yoga, “The goal or destination of Yoga is Yoga itself, union itself, of the little self and the True Self, a process of awakening to the preexisting union that is called Yoga.” He emphasizes that the physical practice is only a small part of the Hatha Yoga, Hatha Yoga is only a part of the whole Yoga, and that “Yoga is one of six schools of Indian philosophy” (Bharati). For the purposes of this research, “traditional yoga” is simplified to be defined as the ancient Indian practice that focuses on body, mind, and spirit relations to attain Samadhi (enlightenment).

As is part of the research question, “cultural appropriation” is another term with several meanings. For the purposes of this research, cultural appropriation is given the following definition: the process of a dominant culture manipulating aspects of a marginalized culture for its benefit. This is a definition created by compounding other definitions and was used by the researcher to explain the term to interviewees. The Literature Review provides more context for this definition.

Since the practice of yoga is seen through a cosmopolitan view, further defining of the term “cosmopolitanism” is necessary. The researcher defines cosmopolitanism as the value for global citizenship, emphasizing moral obligations to all of humanity regardless of social groups and classifications.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because it is one of the first studies to use qualitative interviews as a method for researching cultural appropriation and yoga. This is an issue that many yoga instructors are interested in as it pertains to how they should and might want to teach yoga. There is not much formal research that has analyzed this issue, so this research is creating a space for further research and conversations on this topic.

## Literature Review

Guiding the research question about whether yoga practiced in Western society is cultural appropriation of traditional yoga are the following categories of literature: (1) resources rich in the historical context of yoga and its movement to Western societies; (2) resources that evaluate the effects of yoga in terms of cultural appropriation. Additionally, research conducted during the author's General Studies Writing 1120H course informed this project and is partially compiled here.

### History of Yoga coming to the West

In order to understand how yoga is considered to be culturally appropriated, it is important to consider how yoga became a Western commodity. Shreena Gandhi explains that yoga, which is referred to as "discipline," dates back to the *Bhagavad Gita*, from between the second century BCE and the second century CE. This text describes that through yoga, "one is able to act with detachment, which leads to liberation" (49). Similarly, after years of teaching yoga in the West, Yoga Journal author Mark Singleton began exploring the roots of yoga, to find that yoga is a lifestyle derived from the Hindu Vedas, which are religious texts that are thousands of years old. Yoga originally did not have a dominant focus on the asanas, or postures, but rather on the "practices like pranayama (expansion of the vital energy by means of breath), dharana (focus, or placement of the mental faculty), and nada (sounds)" (Singleton). Arianne Traverso expands upon this history in her article, "Eastern vs. Western Yoga: What's the Difference?," where she describes how the eight limbs of yoga were derived from Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, which describe the path towards attainment of the superconscious and enlightenment. These written texts, or padas, are some of the first documentations that organize the discipline of yoga (Traverso).

Yoga was practiced for thousands of years in Eastern traditions before expanding towards the West. The first wave of yoga coming to the West can be attributed to Swami Vivekananda at the turn of the twentieth century, where he introduced it during the Parliament of the World's Religions in 1893 to an audience in Chicago (Antony 287). He did not originally focus on asanas, or hatha yoga, due to his own high-caste prejudice towards "low-caste mendicants who performed severe and rigorous postures for money" (Singleton). In "Tailoring Nirvana: Appropriating Yoga, Resignification and Instructional Challenges," Antony further sheds light on the introduction of yoga to the West: "Vivekananda rearticulated yoga within modernistic frameworks that underplayed its Hindu foundations, and instead reframed it as 'a way to reconnect with the spiritual world, reduce stress, and regain health and freedom – all without having to lose the productive capitalist base upon which Americans and Europeans had staked their futures'" (Antony 287). Thus, in order to appeal to members of Western society, the origins of Western yoga were practically arranged for people to neglect the roots and context of the ancient practice.

The 1920's further shifted the focus of Western yoga to asanas over its spiritual aspects (Singleton). According to Johnson and Ahuja, this most likely occurred because, "Many of the yogic teachings that were brought to the West were done so with this continual colonial coercion,

with a need to appease and appeal to the Western mind by making connections of yoga to Christianity and/or defining it as a physical activity” (Johnson and Ahuja). There were several yoga gurus who were bringing a softened version of yoga to the West, like Kuvalayananda and his student Krishnamacharya (Singleton), who had formed a yoga system combining practices from hatha yoga with gymnastics, wrestling, and British military techniques (Antony 287). Thus, the expansion of yoga intermingled with the desire for fitness created an incomplete understanding of the practice by many Westerners.

Isabel Hulkower, from Oberlin College, claims that the booming commercialization of yoga began around the 1970s, especially in the United States. Popularization of the industrious yoga materials and expensive classes ignored the “holistic lifestyle on which the exercise was founded” (Hulkower). Over the next decades, yoga was transforming into countless of fitness routines—Hot Yoga, Yogalates, and Yoga X—that were pleas to make profit, rarely focusing on the spiritual aspects of the practice (Antony 288; Hulkower). Nowadays, Westerners who have access to yoga studios can attend classes that combine several fitness techniques with yoga.

### **Defining Cultural Appropriation and Yoga**

Traditional yoga in Eastern society is practiced differently than the Western rendition of yoga. As an Indian immigrant to Seattle, Washington, Arundhati Baitmangalkar describes some of the differences she has encountered between Western and Eastern yoga. She discusses how the teacher-student dynamic is quite different. In India, teachers, or gurus, are highly respected individuals who bring their students from “ignorance to light” (Baitmangalkar). Antony expands upon how gurus are viewed in a very godly light, in which they facilitate “yogic practitioner’s spiritual awakening and the liberation of the soul” (288). However, among Western society, the relationship students have with their yoga teachers is much more casual and less rigid. Baitmangalkar also describes how the language of gurus in India is very plain and simple for each instruction and guideline, whereas in the U.S., teachers take several different routes when giving similar directions. She notices that yoga is extremely available and popular in the United States compared to her experiences in India. It is also important to realize the commercialization of yoga apparel in the West that does not exist in India (Baitmangalkar). Western yoga has become a twenty-seven billion dollar industry since its popularization in the twentieth century (Hulkower), which Hulkower argues neglects the internal and genuine goals of traditionally practiced yoga. Several of these differences between the two schools of yoga on either hemisphere may be seen as causes to its appropriation.

The article, “8 Signs Your Yoga Practice Is Culturally Appropriated – And Why It Matters,” which is featured in the *Everyday Feminism* magazine, describes cultural appropriation as “a process that takes a traditional practice from a marginalized group and turns it into something that benefits the dominant group – ultimately erasing its origins and meaning” (Johnson and Ahuja). The journal article, “Tailoring Nirvana: Appropriating Yoga, Resignification and Instructional Challenges,” expands upon this definition: “Cultural appropriation involves ‘the use of a culture’s symbols, artifacts, genres, rituals, or technologies by members of another culture.’ This process involves an active ‘taking’ and ‘making one’s

own' of another culture's elements, through various modes that include cultural exchange, imperialism and hybridity" (Antony 285). Coskuner-Balli and Ertimur offer the definition that appropriation is "a cultural pattern that is taken from its social context and applied to a new one in a different physical space" and that yoga is a cultural hybrid product that resulted from the fusion of Western and Eastern cultures as produced by globalization. These definitions shaped the definition used throughout this research (i.e., the process of a dominant culture manipulating aspects of a marginalized culture for its benefit). These academic definitions of cultural appropriation also inform the need for this research, because Western yoga stems from a traditional practice or ritual within a marginalized culture. It has been taken out of its original context to benefit a more dominant culture that has made the practice its own commodity, and sometimes neglecting its original roots and meanings. Thus, this research sets out to draw the line of where Western yoga is seen as cultural appropriation of traditional yoga.

Johnson and Ahuja argue that a large contributing factor to the cultural appropriation of yoga is when Westerners decide to focus singularly on the asanas, overlooking any spiritually or intellectually relevant aspects. They contend that by choosing to advertise yoga as a mostly physical practice, those that have been oppressed for practicing it spiritually under British rule are continuing to be shackled by oppression because the spiritual practice is being invalidated presently. Johnson and Ahuja claim that this physically focused view of yoga can undermine the original meanings of the practice (Johnson and Ahuja). Bharati suggests replacing "Yoga" with "Asana," "Postures," or "Fitness," when describing a modern class, studio, teacher, or magazine.

Other signs of the cultural appropriation of yoga include treating yoga like a commodity. As brought to attention by Baitmangalkar, yoga is not even a commodity to all people in India (Baitmangalkar). There is a dominant culture that is gaining from the industry of yoga due to its availability and desirability to wealthier populations in the West. Johnson and Ahuja notes that when yoga spaces are friendlier towards thin, white, wealthy women, and become less accessible to any other population, this is a red flag that yoga is leading to further oppression of people. Not only does this industrious trend lead to oppression of those who are unable to afford or access these materials and practices, it also strips away the sanctity behind the meaning of yoga, feeding into Westerners' materialistic obsessions. Another critique of Western yoga is its "fetishization of another culture" (Hulkower). This can be demonstrated by misusing sacred objects in a yoga studio as unsymbolic décor (Johnson and Ahuja), such as a seated Buddha model that has little to do with yoga. If the objects have no meaning to those using them, then the studios are thought to be disrespecting the cultures they are representing. While there are examples of how Western yoga is considered as cultural appropriation, this research further investigates the boundary.

## **Research Methodology**

In order to answer the research question, the researcher has had BGSU's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to conduct this investigation involving human subjects in the form of interviews from February 2018 until January 2021 on the question of whether Western yoga is cultural appropriation of traditional yoga. Yoga instructors from different backgrounds that teach in Western societies were interviewed and five interviews were conducted in Spain between March and May 2018. Four interviews were conducted in the United States between May 2018 and January 2020. The semi-structured interview responses were recorded and transcribed for qualitative analysis.

## **Research Design**

Interviews were conducted until the researcher was unable to access more yoga instructors due to limitations such as location, interest, and time constraints. Once all interviews were completed, the process of synthesizing findings through qualitative analysis to draw a conclusion in regards to the research question began. Brief summaries of each interview and the interviewees' relationships to yoga, although using pseudonyms to protect their identities, were extracted. Common themes between the interviews were codified manually by the researcher. Important quotes and concepts are incorporated in the conclusion. While the interviews are the primary resource for drawing a conclusion in combination with the resources included in the literature review, the evidence must be interpreted by the researcher. Biases are sought to be eliminated.

## **Sample**

The only requirements for being an interview subject were that the candidates be adults that are certified yoga instructors in a location that was accessible to the researcher. Convenience sampling to find instructors based on location was used as well as snowball sampling to become connected to reliable contacts. Random sampling was not deemed necessary, so long as to have a broad range of samples, such as instructors with various yogic backgrounds who teach different styles of yoga in mostly Western societies (although where they teach was not a requirement). Instructors who taught in the following various styles were prioritized to gain a diverse sample: Ashtanga, Sivananda, Hot Yoga, Iyengar, Vinyasa, Hatha, and Kundalini.

## **Recruitment**

A variety of methods were used to recruit participants. One such method was using the Internet to search yoga studios near the researcher's location (i.e., unspecified city in Ohio and Spain) that meet the different styles of yoga mentioned previously. Emails were sent to studios meeting these requirements as shown in Appendix A, with added components based on the location.

The researcher also attended yoga classes at the specific yoga studios that were of interest due to location and style taught and then provided information about the research to the yoga instructor(s) before or after class or to the desk clerk to see whether one of the instructors would be interested in participating in this research. Notes explaining the research, were left to connect interested yoga instructors with the researcher.

Another method of recruitment used was word of mouth, meaning that the yoga instructors connected with the researcher or friends and acquaintances of the researcher could provide the name of other yoga instructors who may be interested in this research. When provided with these people's contact information, the researcher sent a message explaining this research and asking whether they would like to be interviewed, similar to the resources in Appendix A. Further follow-up questions were answered by the researcher as necessary and scheduling for the interviews was coordinated.

### **Setting**

All interviews were conducted in-person and recorded in a neutral location of the interviewee's preference so as to avoid the participants from feeling at-risk, including coffee shops, homes, offices, and libraries. Five interviews were conducted in Spain (Catalonia, Madrid, and Navarre) and four were conducted in the United States (Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania).

### **Interview Instrument and Protocol**

All instructors who scheduled an interview with the researcher were provided an IRB approved informed consent form, as shown in Appendix B, and signed the form upon receiving elaboration from the interviewer. There was an emphasis on providing the definition of cultural appropriation as shown in the Purpose section of the consent form. The interviewees received a copy of the consent form to keep for their own reference and the signed copy was filed by the researcher. After signing, permission was obtained to record an audio file of the interview. Then, interviews followed the questions listed in Appendix C. The interviews were semi-standardized, because although they mostly followed these questions, some questions were added due to the nature of the interviewees' responses. Each interview generally took between fifty minutes to one hour, with one interview lasting about ten minutes. Upon successful recording of the interviews, the recording files were transferred to the researcher's computer. After completion of all interviews, the recordings were transcribed to be analyzed.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The risk of participating in this study was no greater than that in everyday life. However, if there is a breach of confidentiality and the participants said something that may put them at risk for retribution in their place of employment (i.e., yoga studio), then workplace consequences or job loss could be rare risks. To minimize these risks, each participant received a pseudonym, and the subject's identifiers are only accessible to the researcher.



## **Findings**

Nine semi-structured interviews were conducted between March 2018 and January 2020. Five of these interviews took place in Spain, in three different regions, and four took place in the United States, in three different states. Of the interviewees, seven have been to India at least once to study yoga. One interviewee is culturally Punjabi. Instructor perspectives vary on the type of yoga, including: Satyananda, Kundalini, Sivananda, Ashtanga, Vinyasa, Hot Yoga, Naad (also known as Nada Yoga), Hatha, and other unspecified and unnamed styles. Yoga instructors vary in terms of their means to teaching yoga: some own or co-own yoga studios, some teach at yoga studios, some offer freelance yoga instruction, some have instructed at festivals and retreats, some teach online, and one teaches at gyms and country clubs. One of the instructors has been certified to teach yoga for about a year, four were certified between six and nine years ago, and the other four have been certified for at least ten years. All of the instructors had practiced yoga for at least one year before seeking a training program to become an instructor.

## **Participants**

Below you will find some brief summaries about the research participants' relation to yoga using their pseudonyms:

- Demario: A Spanish yoga instructor that teaches yoga that comes from the Satyananda lineage. Swami Satyandanda was a student of Sri Swami Sivanada. Demario trained to teach yoga about twelve years ago, after three years of practice, and has been to India to study yoga.
- Thomas: An Englishman living in Spain that mostly teaches Kundalini yoga from Yogi Bhajan. He started practicing yoga eighteen years ago and trained to become an instructor around fourteen years ago. He has been to India at least three times.
- Hans: A German native that lives and teaches hatha yoga in Spain. He has been to India at least three times and trained at a Sivananda school in 2008 after several years of practice.
- Oroitz: A Spanish instructor that started studying yoga from the KaivalyaDhama school in 2009. He trained in India in 2011 to become certified to teach and has been to India and/or Indonesia annually. He teaches Mysore Ashtanga Vinyasa yoga.
- Violet: An instructor raised in Australia that began Bikram yoga in 2010. She became certified to teach in 2012 and co-founded a hot yoga studio in Spain. She has not been to India.
- Miles: An American who started practicing yoga in 2010 and trained through Happy Buddha Yoga in 2013 to become Yoga Alliance certified. He has been studying philosophical aspects of yoga under a swami since then and has gone to India. He is part of the Krishna Bhakti tradition.
- Ajeet: A Sikh Punjabi instructor who lives in Great Britain and teaches Naad yoga around the world. She received a master's degree under Professor Surinder Singh studying Naad yoga for over seventeen years.

- Scott: An American who teaches yoga internationally. He began practicing yoga over eight years ago and received his 200 hour and 500 hour teacher trainings at Moksha Yoga Center. He has studied Ayurveda with Vasant Lad and in India.
- Julie: An American instructor who mostly teaches yoga as an exercise at gyms, with no expressed lineage or style. She underwent a 200 hour training a year ago after practicing yoga for eight years. She has not been to India.

### **Data Analysis Strategy**

Observable and stated demographics of the interviewees and their yoga experience were documented to see if there was a correlation between responses and experiences. After transcribing the interviews, each interview was analyzed for overlapping themes and ideas. These overlapping themes were documented and used to extract important ideas from the interviews in relation to these themes. Once the themes and data about the instructors were analyzed, a conclusion to the research question was drawn.

### **Main Themes**

Due to the nature of the interview questions and topic, there were several major themes apparent throughout the data. Five themes are expanded upon using direct quotes and paraphrasing of the interviewees responses: the traditional aspects of yoga, how yoga is taught in the West, how yoga is taught in India presently, opinions regarding yoga teacher training and certification, and recommendations for future yoga teachers.

#### **The Traditional Aspects of Yoga**

Interviewees differed in the amount of knowledge they had about traditional yoga. Scott says that yoga dates back to over 10,000 years ago and is one of the oldest sciences humans have. Demario discusses how traditional yoga incorporates five dimensions: physical, energy, mental, psychic, and spiritual. He examines how there are many different types of yoga for the mind: Karma (the yoga of action), Jnana (the yoga of wisdom or knowledge), Prana (the yoga for breathing), and Bhakti (the yoga of consciousness). He reviews that techniques such as mantra (meditative sounds and words), mudra (meditative finger and hand positions), pranayama (breathwork), and bandhas (energetic locks that clean the internal body) are all components of traditional yoga. Hans notes that traditional yoga is about “unifying the body, mind, and spirit” and that it integrates asanas, breathing, meditation, relaxation, mantras, and literature. Miles states that asanas were mentioned only three times in the entire *Yoga Sutras*, only to discuss how they prepare you for the actual yoga. He says that the *Yoga Sutras* describe yoga as an eight limbed path, in which the first limb is yama, and this has five parts. In traditional yoga, Miles asserts that the first yama comes first, and the structure builds upon itself accordingly. Ajeet states that the eight limbs are how “the Eastern technology is being interpreted in the West.”

Demario and Thomas testify that yoga is a lifestyle for people in India and Oroitz says that “yoga is twenty-four hours.” Similarly, according to Ajeet, “Yoga isn’t something that you do, it’s something that you become, that you are.” Ajeet states how people who practiced yoga were able to be the same person in any space and that the clothing did not matter. She says that the traditional purpose was to find and explore one’s consciousness.

Ajeet states that the traditional package of yoga that comes from the heart of ancient India incorporated Naad, Ayurveda, and any kind of yoga that helped strengthen the physical body to prepare it to meditate for extended periods of time. Oroitz talks about how, although everyone knew about yoga culturally, yoga was not very popular in India before the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was a practice only for certain people, such as monks, and people who abandoned their material lives to live in the streets and meditate all day.

Lastly, Ajeet describes how in Sanskrit and other Eastern languages, there was never an “a” at the end of “yoga.” She says that the meaning of “yog” is capability. In spiritual terms, “yog” means “to be capable of better” and that this meaning gets lost in translation. (She states that her Western friends say yoga means “union.”)

### **How Yoga is Taught in the West**

All interviewees state or imply that yoga in the West focuses much more heavily on the asanas (postures) and physical aspects than in traditional yoga. They agree to varying degrees that yoga in the West is taught and sold as a mostly or entirely a physical practice, with little acknowledgement to the spiritual aspects of the practice. Two of the interviewed instructors teach yoga in this way. One believes that it is cultural appropriation and the other does not. It seems the other instructors try to incorporate Eastern technologies, such as Ayurveda, yogic philosophy, and the different limbs of yoga aside from asana in their teaching to varying extents. Some of these instructors note that it is difficult to appeal to Westerners if there are no asanas in the practice. They feel that they must appeal to their students through the physical practice to then work the philosophy and other limbs into their teaching. For example, Oroitz describes that he tried to teach pranayama and meditation from the beginning and people were not interested. So, he starts with the asanas and has noticed that over time, people are more willing to explore pranayama: “Asana practice is very attractive for people in Western countries. With time, you can try something different. You cannot force people. People will look for something more with the opportunity to have the physical practice.” Additionally, Miles says, “A ton of people come to our studio only for the physical aspect but realize that there is a lot more to it.”

Most of the yoga that is practiced in the West is hatha yoga, which is relatively new, and focuses on the physical aspects with meditation and breathwork, according to Scott. However, several instructors mention that there are various styles and types of yoga that are being taught in Western society, so it is hard to generalize all of Western yoga as part of the same category. For example, Thomas articulates that Kundalini yoga, as practiced in Spain, focuses on spiritual growth with not as much emphasis on the physical side. From working through the asanas and pranayama, Kundalini facilitates meditative attitudes that lead to connection with the divine. Violet states that Western yoga instructors each have their own way of teaching – whether it is the “full package” (body, mind, and spirit), incorporating meditation, or chakras. She works with the body only because that allows her to not cross spiritual boundaries as a Christian.

Hans remarks that in the West, about half of the yoga that is taught does not honor the traditional aspects of yoga, where it is a trendy, gymnastics-like program that focuses on flexibility rather than the inner being. Thomas expands upon this idea, stating that yoga in the

West can be “cool and fashionable” and that some people do it as part of their “ego trip.” Oroitz states that “Most of the people doing yoga in Western countries aren’t looking for anything more, just to stretch, relax, and have something to do.” Miles states that yoga is taught in a vast spectrum of ways in the West, but that “yoga taught in gyms is the most whitewashed version of the practice. Anything that is culturally, spiritually, and philosophically significant about the practice has been stripped from it and it is being used as a purely physical vehicle for stretching.” He provides the example that instructors at gyms are not allowed to chant Om in their classes. Julie speaks on the fact that yoga in gyms and country clubs – areas where she teaches – are focused more on fitness-styled yoga, whereas in studios, teachers can be more spiritual and hands-on, like correcting postures and offering massages for their students.

Thomas further explains that instead of having a guru in the West, people have multiple forms of stimuli and influences to find and practice yoga. He attributes part of this to the way yoga was introduced to the West: “Yogi Bhajan brought Kundalini teachings to the West and transformed the practice to fit into the culture of the West, because we don’t live in a monastic society where we can practice all day.” Demario offers a variation of this idea: “People in Western culture do not want a guru. They think they are enough without it.”

Hans notes that yoga instructors who are not practicing healthy personal habits, like smoking among other issues, are more likely to not teach the essence of yoga. He believes that yoga teacher trainings in the West that do not incorporate the traditional knowledge are part of the culprit for this unawareness, remarking that this is sad to him. Ajeet develops this, stating that yoga in the West promotes a “Jekyll and Hyde” mentality, because people are told that “they can pretend to be spiritual, holy, centered in this space but when you leave this space, you don’t have to do that.” She observes more of this happening in North American than in Europe.

According to Ajeet, yoga in the West has been rebranded and Westerners have made it their own, as seen through practices such as goat yoga, beer yoga, business yoga, and weed yoga. Ajeet believes that these practices are formed through holes in the market and the gullibility of consumers. By doing this, Westerners are capitalizing by “hitting on the sentiments of something that was a sacred practice,” which she finds to belittle the people who practice traditional yoga. She suggests that people can participate in those “yogas” if they help them feel good, but to not call it yoga. Miles argues that yoga in the West is sold to women, observing how about 10% of the students that attend classes at his studio are male.

### **How Yoga is taught in the India Presently**

Some interviewees correlate traditional yoga as being the way that yoga in India is taught currently. Hans came to yoga when he was in India for the first time and describes his practice as being from the traditional hatha practice. Ajeet discusses that there are many masters in India who have been teaching and serving yoga their entire lives. She articulates that “yogi” is a sacred word: “It is a title only given to those who have earned it from devoting their lives to that practice, from being that, not just to say it.” Similarly, Demario has studied with his guru in India every year and notes that in India, a guru is “not just a teacher, like me. I can teach you yoga, but a guru is another person who can teach you more.” These three interviewees who are informed

about yoga in both the West and the East do not specify any differences between traditional yoga and how yoga is presently taught in India.

Other interviewees suggest that the yoga taught presently in India does not exactly follow what traditional yoga is. Some interviewees argue that traditional yoga is being lost even in India. Miles explains that “yoga is a part of the everyday culture [in India], but they are losing aspects of it due to Westerners.” Thomas discusses from personal experience that he has seen the essence of yoga not being taught both in Spain and in India. “There are a lot of people getting on the bandwagon in India and trying to become teachers because they know that Westerners are coming to study there,” he adds. Oroitz also observes that nowadays “in every corner of India, you find a teacher trainer for Westerners.”

Oroitz remarks that in India, yoga was introduced to the general public in the 20<sup>th</sup> century because of the physical and health benefits. Swami Sivananda was part of this change. According to Oroitz, people in India practice hatha yoga as both a therapeutic and spiritual practice, incorporating breathwork, meditation, control of thoughts, and diet. For example, the school he trained at in India is the oldest hatha yoga school and was established in the 1920s. He also describes how the 20<sup>th</sup> century yoga was influenced by Western gymnastics systems in the 1920s and several asanas are not actually rooted in traditional yoga. Scott expands upon this, stating that the physical practice has a lot of Western influences, and that it is “co-created by Western society itself.” Furthermore, Scott declares: “It is a combination of the Western gymnastics along with the Western understanding of the body and the Eastern understanding of the energetic body and Ayurvedic traditions to co-create” the modern system of yoga.

### **Opinions Regarding Yoga Teacher Training and Certification**

Under the current systems, it seems that especially the American yoga instructors would value increased standards for how yoga teachers are trained. Scott says that the nonprofit that manages yoga teacher standards in the United States, Yoga Alliance, is known for the 200 hour and 500 hour teacher training standards. He believes that instructors working at gyms should only need a 200-500 hour certification, while anyone else should receive more training. He says that having a 1500 hour certificate would be desirable for instructors who work with students who are dealing with trauma. He also poses increasing other Yoga Alliance standards, such as requiring yoga instructors to have a mentor. Violet says that her Bikram training lacked in several areas and believes that it can be improved. She was looking forwards to learning how to work with people who are differently abled and offer other modifications, and did not feel that this information was covered. Her training was nine weeks long and she said that although there was a busy schedule, this information could have easily been added to the program.

Miles holds a more radical stance: “Teacher trainings are whitewashed and generic. Yoga Alliance is a fraud; they just want people’s money. They create a code of conduct and give yoga teachers discounts on leggings. There needs to be more rigor around teacher training.” The most problematic parts to him are that trainings may not be connected to any lineage and the asanas are not taught as part of a larger system. He says that these trainings do “a massive disservice” to the students who then do “a massive disservice” to their students as teachers. He also asks

whether anyone has ever failed yoga teacher training, implying that there would be fewer misinformed yoga instructors if they could fail training programs. On the other hand, Julie enjoyed her 200 hour training and thought that it provided her with yoga history, information on keeping students safe, and how to correct people politely.

The other instructors did not mention a standardized training system in Europe or elsewhere, but that each school has its own training or requirements for instructors. Thomas articulates the importance of finding a certification program through the specific school from which a prospective instructor wants to teach. He believes that the schools should set the minimum number of hours needed for teacher trainings. Hans suggests that people train at a school connected to India that “integrates and really [sheds light on] the yoga capacity.”

Similar to Miles, Ajeet and Oroitz believe that certifications are not valuable. Ajeet questions whether yoga instructors should even be certified. She says, “The masters never had certificates. Now our ego needs a piece of paper, and that’s not yoga.” Likewise, Oroitz speaks on the popularity of being a certified yoga instructor:

Everyone now has a certificate. You can have a certificate and not have any idea of yoga. You can go to a training without any experience and get a certificate in one month. So now, the certificate has no value to me. There are good programs, but in general to have a certificate has no value for me... Ethically, for me you do not need a certificate, but legally you do.

On the contrary, Scott claims that there is a need for more yoga instructors because the demand for yoga is increasing. He thinks that when classes are overpopulated, cases of discomfort, injury, and resurfaced trauma are more likely to occur. Thus, the larger the class size, the greater the need to have more yoga instructors present and instructors that have higher degrees of training, according to Scott.

Many of the interviewees believe that experience is the most important requirement for preparing yoga teachers. “Yoga is about experience,” Thomas expresses. Demario argues that it is problematic that “there are a lot of people teaching yoga that have only studied one month, two weeks, one weekend.” Julie went through a nine-month training program and thinks that the longer trainings provide instructors with a more complete and in-depth view than ones that can be finished in a weekend or a couple of weeks. Relatedly, Miles questions how “people will go to Bali for two weeks. How do you get 200 hours in two weeks?” The length of the training is not the only factor included in recognizing experience. Oroitz declares that yoga teachers need years of practice before teaching and then years of experience to properly learn how to teach: “When you start teaching, you start knowing what you need to learn and then you start doing research and talking with other teachers and becoming a better teacher throughout years.” Scott adds that people who take a few yoga classes and decide that they want to teach are not aligning with the way the practice of yoga is designed due to their inexperience and lack of knowledge.

### **Recommendations for Future Yoga Teachers**

Below are key quotes of advice taken from each interview mostly in response to the last interview question (see Appendix C).

Demario says that there is no true order to how one can become an instructor, but “the most important thing is to practice yoga for you first. When your heart is pure, then you will find people around you who can share knowledge with you and then you will be ready to teach.” He recommends training with a guru. Correspondingly, Oroitz states that one must

Practice, practice with a good teacher, gain experience on what you want to teach. Then, look for a good teacher training, and this is not easy. Most of them are not good quality, and are a business. If you have a good teacher that inspires you, follow their advice and train with them. Just learning yoga through the certification program is not good. Also, learning many things with different styles is not good, you need to follow one teacher.

In terms of personal practice, Scott affirms:

Anyone can be a yoga instructor with enough practice and experience. Start with the most basic of training – taking classes for yourself – for two years. Have a steady practice for yourself. Do a teacher training, and then ask yourself, ‘Do you have enough training to teach people?’ Then train more if the answer is no. That’s what I did. I still feel sometimes that I am not well trained enough to give most people the benefit of the practice... Experience and understanding the practice is how you can bestow the benefits of the practice.

Similarly, Hans suggests that anyone can be a yoga instructor as long as they feel connected to yoga through their practice; “Evaluate whether you really want to teach. Practice on your own and take care of yourself. Once you know yourself better, then the teaching becomes intrinsic.”

He also recommends visiting India for more than a few weeks to see ashrams personally.

Thomas explains that yoga instructors need students who are connected and inspired by their teacher. He advises that those interested in teaching yoga ask themselves why they are interested.

He proposes to “try other styles and see which one you most identify with. You grow in your practice as a teacher, you learn so much. Each person has to go and try.”

Julie recommends that “if it’s something you can get joy out of,” then to pursue becoming a yoga instructor. Violet believes that selflessness is an important trait in yoga instructors:

They have to really like helping people and to learn to not be selfish. To try to help their students where they’re at and put yourself in their shoes. It should be someone who really cares about all types of people, not just the people you would normally be friends with. You’ll get all walks of life that will walk through the door and you have to be patient with them. Have patience, humility, and be kind, and love the practice, and share what it has done for you physically.

Miles and Ajeet both state the importance in doing research before becoming an instructor. Miles states:

You better intend to follow to the best of your ability the path of yoga. The first step is acknowledging that there’s more than just the physical practice... Do some research. Are you learning from some direct path? What is the tradition? Is it consistent? Is there reason and philosophy?

As an individual from an Eastern culture, Ajeet recommends the following to Westerners interested in teaching yoga:

I want to say follow your heart and do what calls you and works for you, but always check your sources. Know where the information is coming from and if you're okay where it is coming from, that's fine. If you are looking for authenticity and more substance, then you need to go back to the roots, and reap the benefits of those: why it was created, what can it do for you, and how was it practiced. I don't want to discourage people from walking towards consciousness. Know the source of the teachings, whether they are created by the particular teacher in the room or whether they come from a deeper, more significant heritage.



## **Discussion**

### **Responses to the Research Question**

Since the interviewees were asked the research question during their interviews, summaries of their responses have been generated and organized into five different categories. In summary, three interviewed yoga instructors believe that Western yoga is definitively cultural appropriation of traditional yoga. Two of these are under the opinion that Western yoga is cultural appropriation because it has been rebranded and sold under different names. Four instructors have less definitive beliefs, but still see that Western yoga might be cultural appropriation of traditional yoga or that it is in certain cases, but not all the time. One of these states that it cannot be cultural appropriation because people are not actually practicing “true” yoga; therefore, based on the definition of cultural appropriation outlined earlier, this opinion is included with the other indeterminate viewpoints. Two yoga instructors do not believe that Western yoga is cultural appropriation of traditional yoga because they see it as a practice that is undeniably helping the people who are able to practice it.

#### **Western Yoga is Cultural Appropriation of Traditional Yoga**

Ajeet is very connected to Eastern society because of her identity and the field of yoga she studies, Naad (sound) yoga. Her yoga practice stems through her Sikh faith. She articulates that Western yoga, especially in the United States and less so in Europe, is cultural appropriation of traditional yoga because it capitalizes on and rebrands yoga. She believes that this results in the dilution of the originally sacred practice. An easy solution she recommends is that people not call these rebranded versions ‘yoga,’ because they are not yoga. She says that some of the Indian yoga instructors that dedicate their lives to the practice are starving and suffering, while the “West is profiting and benefitting.” She wishes that credit be given where it is due and that Western societies find a balance between paying heed to Indian instructors, supporting their teachings, and increasing the quality of how yoga is taught in the West. Another aspect of Western yoga that bothers her is that Indian instructors are underrepresented:

We don’t have enough yoga teachers from India teaching yoga in the West. I know that most yoga classes have non-brown people teaching and that highlights the major part of the problem. Color isn’t the problem, but if this is something that comes from the East, why aren’t there more brown, Indian teachers teaching this? That’s who you should see sitting at the head of the classroom.

Oroitz believes Western yoga is offered in a capitalistic way that enables more people to practice yoga in the world than ever before. Although he views it as cultural appropriation, he thinks that it can be a pathway for people to find true yoga and become better people overall: “I cannot say that I don’t agree with a simpler Western version of yoga, because people have to start with something. We have to start from somewhere. If you want to deepen it more, you will find other ways.” He describes this is being a natural process when something is taught to someone else; they will teach it in their own way. He also refers to how Western gymnastics systems informed much of the asanas we see in contemporary yoga, describing Western and Eastern yoga as an exchange that can be culturally appropriative on both ends.

Julie is immersed in the American fitness yoga field of work. She states that Western yoga, thus including her own practice, could definitely be considered cultural appropriation because instructors, like herself, do not incorporate any of the ancient teachings in their practice. She notes that yoga in the United States is seen as a workout and is being separated from its roots. She does not disagree with this, however, implying that evolution is inevitable.

### **Western Yoga might be Cultural Appropriation of Traditional Yoga**

Miles teaches yoga in the United States and is very knowledgeable about yogic philosophy and uses it in his practice. He believes that American society is diseased, because people are looking for spiritual growth, but do not know how to find it without looking through a consumeristic and commodifying lens. He thinks that the progress that anyone makes in this lifetime towards spiritual growth can continue as people reincarnate. Thus, Miles thinks that Western yoga has a net positive benefit to everyone, including where it originates, because he states that it does not necessarily diminish the practice in India and helps practitioners grow to varying degrees. Conversely, Western yoga might be cultural appropriation in cases where positive benefits are not happening. He elaborates:

If a person goes to a yoga class and then becomes more inclined to look into the philosophical side, then I don't have a moral objection. Meanwhile, if they are only practicing for physical reasons or they are prevented from investigating the philosophy, then I don't agree with that. People come to yoga because they want to be free of those symptoms and see it as an opportunity to get out of those. If it can be used as a tool to get there, then I am for that.

Scott is an American instructor who recently returned from studying and traveling throughout India. He argues that yoga is evolving and although it is becoming distanced from its traditional form, it is going in the direction that it is intended to go, even though this evolution might be considered cultural appropriation. He, like several other interviewees, thinks that Western yoga is mostly benefiting everyone, because it helps people become more self-aware and harmonious. He describes some cases of yoga that he would consider to be cultural appropriation: "If someone takes a couple classes and teaches yoga and doesn't give any recognition to where the practice comes from, then this is cultural appropriation." To avoid this, he believes credit or money must be given back to the Indian teachers and that people must practice yoga for at least two years before training to become a teacher.

### **Western Yoga is sometimes Cultural Appropriation of Traditional Yoga**

Hans, trained in Sivananda yoga, believes that about half of yoga instructors in Western society are partaking in cultural appropriation of yoga because they are not capturing, and may not even be aware of, the true essence of traditional yoga within their classes. He also says that these culturally appropriative yogas might be able to assist people in finding the true essence of yoga. Meanwhile, he thinks that yoga instructors that strive to practice and teach yoga traditionally and have knowledge of Eastern practices are teaching in a way that embodies the heart of traditional yoga.

### **Western Yoga cannot be Cultural Appropriation because it is not even "Yoga"**

Demario was trained in Satyananda yoga and values the practice of yoga in everyday life. He teaches yoga very traditionally and has a direct relationship with his guru. Demario does not agree with the physicality of Western yoga practices and states that this is not cultural appropriation because he does not even view it as yoga. He says that Westerners are changing the objective of yoga to something purely physical.

### **Western Yoga is not Cultural Appropriation of Traditional Yoga**

Thomas teaches Kundalini yoga in Spain. He emphasizes that any yoga practice that is helping people to feel better, even if it strays from traditional aspects of yoga, is beneficial for society. In regards to his belief about whether Western yoga is cultural appropriation of traditional yoga, Thomas says no, highlighting that yoga can be taught in a manner that strays from its essence in both Spain and India, thus relating to Coskuner-Balli and Ertimur's point that the reappropriation of yoga in India is seen as a secular practice that strays from its Hindu roots.

Violet offers a much different perspective from my other interviewees because she teaches Hot Yoga and identifies as New Christian. She thus removes herself from the spiritual elements of traditional yoga and uses yoga as a purely physical practice. She does not believe that Western yoga is cultural appropriation of traditional yoga because she believes that helping people is at the core of yoga and that Western yoga helps people to improve their lives in a physical manner. This relates to the history that Gandhi contextualizes about the Abrahamic religions and their relationship with yoga. Gandhi states that in the late twentieth century, "the market was transforming yoga into non-religious exercise, and Indian yogis continued to sell yoga as a practice that is 'compatible with all of the world's great religions' (188)," and the effects of this are seen through Violet's beliefs.

### **Conclusion**

It appears that the interviewees in general are hesitant to label Western yoga as entirely culturally appropriative of traditional yoga, because they overwhelmingly realize that it is benefiting people and society. Several of the interviewees explain that gymnastics-like yoga does not capture the essence of traditional yoga, although it may be a beneficial practice, but that it offers a gateway to finding the more spiritual parts of yoga. While there does not seem to be a consensus between all interviewees about where to draw the line about what instances of yoga are cultural appropriation, it seems that most of them try to minimize the physical and emotional harm that can occur from the practice if not teaching correctly. It also seems that most of them strive to teach yoga in a way that embodies the essence of the practice to them. For example, Julie sums this idea:

If you have a strong connection to the mindfulness and the spiritual elements and that's what you feel comfortable teaching, you should use your strengths. If you feel more comfortable with it as an exercise, just do what you feel like you excel at to best help the people in your classes.

The interviewees seem to be predominantly unaware of the extent to which the cultural appropriation of yoga has been studied. Some are aware of the commercialization, commodification, the emphasis on the physical practice in the West, the harm that Western yoga

brings to India yoga instructors, and how Western yoga is causing damage to the practice in India. However, it also seems that some instructors view the purpose of yoga as a practice that helps people, so even if Western yoga is not the same as traditional yoga, they believe it to usually fulfill this purpose. Through careful analysis of the literature on this subject and the insight provided by the interviewees, it can be concluded that Western yoga can be considered culturally appropriative of traditional yoga in specific cases:

- Yoga instructors that are under-trained and/or place their students at risk of injury
- Yoga instructors that lack experience and a personal yoga practice
- Yoga instructors that are completely ignorant about the historical roots of the practice
- Yoga that has no direct lineage to India
- Yoga that does not provide credit to the masters that have influenced the system
- Yoga that promotes consumerism and materialism more than spiritual well-being
- Yoga that intentionally excludes certain populations from practicing it (e.g., race, socio-economic class, gender, nationality, sexuality)
- Practices that stray very far from the traditional purpose of yoga and are profiting off of the name (e.g., beer yoga, weed yoga, goat yoga)

Thus, yoga instructors who are well-trained, have an understanding and connection with yoga as it relates to India, and embody the ideals of yoga as stated by Ajeet, "Yoga is consciousness, fairness, openness, and understanding," are likely to be practicing and teaching yoga in a way that is culturally appreciative rather than appropriative.

### **Limitations**

The results are limited by the unrepresented yoga instructors that are from and teach in Eastern societies. This was not possible for the researcher due to lack of funding to be able to continue research in India as preferred. This is a limitation because Indian and other Eastern yoga instructor perspectives are necessary to include in the conversation about whether an aspect of their culture is being culturally appropriated. To minimize the effects of this limitation, several instructors with direct lineage to India or who have studied in India, as well as an instructor who is culturally Punjabi, were interviewed. Another limitation that the author recognizes is that many instructors are not familiar with the term or concept of "cultural appropriation." Although the listed definition of cultural appropriation was provided and explained before each interview, it is possible that some instructors might not have felt comfortable enough using the term and answering a question in regards to their thoughts about it.

### **Recommendations for Further Investigation**

As societies across the world continue to popularize different versions of yoga, it is important to continue to understand and interpret implications of cultural appropriation. For those interested in continuing this research, I would recommend that you interview a diverse array of yoga instructors, with a focus on instructors from and/or teaching in India as well as instructors outside of Europe and North America. These factors can help us to identify the relation between how yoga is practiced in certain parts of the world with the culture of those societies. There may be value in evaluating the cultural appropriation of yoga using a different

geographical classification other than East and West (e.g., Global North and Global South). I also suggest asking more about the instructors' means of receiving an income to see if there is a relationship between income and the way that the instructors teach. Lastly, I recommend that you have a follow-up question to the interview question: Do you think Western yoga is cultural appropriation of traditional yoga? that has the interviewee evaluate their stance. For example, if the answer was yes, then ask what solutions they have to offer.

### **Summary**

There is a general consensus from the participants of this study that Western yoga is beneficial for people living in Western societies, no matter how it is practiced or taught. This is because yoga improves people's health and, in some cases, leads to greater spiritual growth. In cases where yoga is taught by teachers with less training and teachers that do not understand the historical roots of yoga, yoga can be potentially harmful for the students, because they are physically at-risk when their instructors do not know the correct way to do postures. These cases are also more likely to be considered "cultural appropriation." This research provides Western yoga practitioners a better understanding of how cultural appropriation within Western yoga operates in our increasingly cosmopolitan society.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A: Recruitment Materials**

#### **English**

I am an undergraduate student at Bowling Green State University in Ohio conducting research on the practice of yoga in Western society. This study will contribute to the field of knowledge of the practice of yoga. I am searching for a yoga instructor at your studio who would be willing to be interviewed for this research project. If there are any instructors at your yoga studio who would be interested in participating and are fluent in English, please put me in contact with them. Thank you.

#### **Español**

Soy una estudiante de una universidad en Ohio. Este semestre, vivo en \_\_\_\_\_ para estudiar español. Estoy realizando una investigación sobre el arte del yoga. Busco instructores que hablen inglés en vuestro estudio para entrevistarlos. Por favor, si sois tan amables de pasar el siguiente mensaje a vuestros instructores que estén interesados en mi investigación. ¡Muchas gracias!

## Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

### Informed Consent Form, page 1



BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY

*Honors College*

024 Founders Hall, 707 E. Wooster Street  
Bowling Green, OH 43403  
Phone: (419) 372-8504 Fax: (419) 372-0393  
E-mail: [honors@bgsu.edu](mailto:honors@bgsu.edu)

#### Informed Consent for Adult Participants

**Introduction:** I am an undergraduate student in the Honors College at Bowling Green State University (BGSU). My adviser is Amanda McGuire Rzicznek, a BGSU General Studies Writing and Honors professor. The topic I am researching is yoga in Western society. I am asking you to participate in this research because as a unique yoga instructor, you will provide a different view point on the research topic, and your responses can assist in the growth of knowledge on the topic.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this research is to answer the question about whether Western yoga is cultural appropriation of traditional yoga. I define cultural appropriation to mean the "process of a dominant culture manipulating aspects of a marginalized culture for its benefit". While there are no direct benefits to you participating in this study, this study will benefit society by contributing to further the knowledge of yoga.

**Procedure:** Since the first contact with you, we have scheduled an interview meeting time and location. Upon this meeting, you will be guided through the consent process and can expect an interview with ten questions that all participants will be asked. There may also be other follow-up questions based on your responses. The interview can be expected to last about one hour. After the interview, your commitment is complete. If requested, I can email the transcript of the interview once completed for your review.

**Voluntary nature:** You must be 18 years of age in order to participate, and your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time. You may decide to not answer questions or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Deciding to participate or not will not affect your job or your relationship with BGSU. Participants are chosen based on the proximity and practice of the yoga studio in which they teach. For example, when I am staying close to Madrid, I will contact, in person or through email, yoga studios of different styles nearby about whether any of their instructors fluent in English are interested in participating. I am also open to receiving contact information of potential participants from yoga instructors I meet and know.

**Confidentiality protections:** The audio of your interview will be recorded, but this file will be destroyed as soon as it is transcribed on my password-protected laptop. No person other than me will be able to access this audio recording, as I will be the one transcribing it. The transcript will not have any identifiers such as your name or place of employment, and can be accessed only by the research team which consists of my adviser and me. There will be a locked file document on my laptop only accessible by me that will link your pseudonym to these identifiers to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. Quotes from the interview might be used when analyzing my results; however, only your pseudonym and vague geographic location will be used (i.e. central Spain). Data is not anonymous to me because I am interacting with you in person. Since you are signing this consent document physically, this information

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## Informed Consent Form, page 2



BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY

**Honors College**

024 Founders Hall, 707 E. Wooster Street  
Bowling Green, OH 43403  
Phone: (419) 372-8504 Fax: (419) 372-0393  
E-mail: [honors@bgsu.edu](mailto:honors@bgsu.edu)

is being stored separately from any other identifiers. The physical location of the interview can take place at a location you feel most secure, like a café or a private meeting room in a library.

**Risks:** The risk of participating is no greater than that in everyday life. However, if there is a breach of confidentiality and you say something that may put you at risk with your yoga studio, then your job or career may potentially be at risk. To minimize these risks, you will choose or be assigned a pseudonym. Please refer to the previous paragraph to see what other measures will be taken to ensure your confidentiality and anonymity.

**Contact information:** If you have any questions about this research or your participation in this research, please contact me at \_\_\_\_\_ You may also contact my adviser, Amanda McGuire Rzicznek, by calling her office phone at \_\_\_\_\_ or emailing \_\_\_\_\_ If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, feel free to contact the Chair, Institutional Review Board at +1-419-372-7716 or [orc@bgsu.edu](mailto:orc@bgsu.edu). Thank you for your time!

I have been informed of the purposes, procedures, risks, and benefits of this study. I have had the opportunity to have all my questions answered and I have been informed that my participation is completely voluntary. I agree to participate in this research.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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### **Appendix C: Interview Questions**

1. Tell me about your background with yoga. Where and how did you get certified?
2. How do you see yoga typically being taught in Western society? Do you agree/disagree with the way people use it and teach it?
3. What do you know about traditional yoga and the way yoga is taught in Eastern cultures?
4. What is your approach for teaching yoga?
5. How do you think yoga should be taught? How do you think yoga instructors should be certified?
6. How do you view, study, practice, and teach yogic philosophy?
7. Of the eight limbs of yoga, which is the most important to how you teach and practice yoga?
8. How do you practice yoga on your own?
9. Do you think Western yoga is cultural appropriation of traditional yoga?
10. What advice would you give to someone from a Western culture who wants to become a yoga instructor? Who do you think should be a yoga instructor?

### **Author's Note**

I am interested to gather generalizable knowledge about whether Western yoga is cultural appropriation of traditional yoga because I have been practicing yoga for roughly six years and strive to live an ethical and harm-reducing lifestyle under a cosmopolitan perspective. I began my yoga practice through my local gym classes and have since taken classes from many different instructors and styles of yoga ranging from very traditional to very Westernized. My interest in this topic began when I started practicing meditation during my first year at BGSU (2016-2017). Through my General Studies Writing 1120H course with Amanda McGuire Rzicznek, we practiced and read about many meditation styles and techniques. For my final paper, I wrote about the cultural appropriation of yoga. Although I argued that yoga is being culturally appropriated in this paper, I was not sure if I entirely agreed with this position. I wanted to hear from yoga instructors across the globe about their perspective on the matter, especially since they most likely have more experience in the field than me and are teaching yoga to others. Thus, I proposed this research study to truly examine whether or not yoga is being culturally appropriated and to draw a conclusion about the issue using knowledge and opinions from more experienced people in the field of yoga. I have worked to eliminate my biases and be open to the answers provided by my interviewees. My purpose for this research is not to criticize Western yoga, but to offer recommendations for yoga that may be considered cultural appropriation and to restore justice to the traditional yoga systems as concluded.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank yoga instructors Amanda Rzicznek for helping me to cultivate this project for the past three and a half years and Caroline Anne Dickinson for providing me resources, contacts, and inspiration for this project and throughout my own yoga journey. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Abhishek Bhati for being open to this research and for providing further mentorship. I appreciate BGSU's Center for Undergraduate Research and Scholarship for providing me a grant to complete this research during the Spring 2020 semester. I thank the Honors College for promoting that I do a creative project, which provided me with the motivation to take on this huge task during my undergraduate career. Lastly, I would like to extend my sincerest gratitude to all of the instructors that were interviewed throughout this process. I greatly appreciate all of your insight, your years of practice and experience, and your willingness to participate in this research.