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Citation:

Brown, SSJ (2024) "Spirituality: A Significant Factor in Yoga Access for People with Marginalised Identities?" In: Obadia, L and Pace, E, (eds.) Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion: The Sociology of Yoga, Meditation, and Asian Asceticism. Religious Studies, Theology and Philosophy E-Books Online, 14 (2024). Brill Academic Publishers, pp. 100-123. ISBN 978-90-04-68625-0, 978-90-04-68531-4 DOI: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004686250_007

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CHAPTER 5

Spirituality

A Significant Factor in Yoga Access for People with Marginalised Identities?

Sally SJ Brown

1 Introduction

This article draws on findings from my doctoral research which identifies spirituality as a significant factor impacting yoga access and participation for marginalised groups. This is the first study to look at yoga access and inclusion for people with a broad and intersectional range of marginalised identities in the United Kingdom (UK).

Yoga is a mind-body practice originating from the philosophy of the Indian subcontinent between two and five thousand years ago where it was used as preparation for meditation and connection with the Divine (De Michelis, 2007; Mallinson & Singleton, 2017; Singleton, 2010). Yoga traditionally comprises: physical movement (asana), breath work (pranayama), concentration (dhyana) and yoga philosophy (Mallinson & Singleton, 2017). The degree to which these elements are present in yoga in high-income countries today varies, is debated and is typically dependent upon factors including lineage, teacher and geographical location. Yoga was first introduced to the UK and other high-income countries in the early 20th century CE (Mallinson and Singleton 2017; (Newcombe, 2009)) since when it has grown in popularity (Ding & Stamatakis, 2014; Wang et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2021). Yoga is typically found today as a stand-alone physical exercise or part of developing forms of spirituality ('new age') and is participated in either as a group led activity or 'practised' alone.

Yoga is indicated in the literature as offering multiple physical and mental health and well-being benefits (Büssing, Michalsen et al. 2012; (Gothe et al., 2019); Laverack 2004). These include improvements in: mental well-being (Hendriks et al. 2017); anxiety and stress (Riley 2015);); depression (Cramer et al., 2017); and social connectedness (Gaiswinkler and Unterrainer 2016; Kinser et al. 2013; Kishida et al. 2019). Yoga is used as an adjunct treatment

for chronic conditions including depression, anxiety, lower back pain and insomnia (Khalsa, 2004). Whilst some criticism has been levelled at the lack of evidence for these claims, steps are increasingly being made to improve the effectiveness and consistency of these types of study (Moonaz et al. 2021). Yoga participation in high-income countries remains limited (Vergeer et al. 2017) and confined to a narrow, privileged societal group – namely white, middle class women. Cartwright's survey of UK yoga practitioners' records that 91% of yoga students and teachers are white, 87% female and 71% university educated (Cartwright et al. 2020). Statistics are similar in the United States (US), Australia and Germany (Ross et al. 2013; Vergeer et al. 2017; Zhang et al. 2021). This indicates that yoga is less accessible to marginalised groups. Barriers to yoga access for marginalised groups therefore contribute to their health inequity and experience of lower than average levels of health and wellbeing (Marmot 2020; Wilkinson and Pickett 2011).

It is timely to be looking at yoga accessibility in respect of spirituality as questions of cultural/religious appropriation and postcolonialism in yoga are the subject of increasing public debate (Gandhi and Wolff 2017; Singh et al. 2019). Christian and Hindu groups assert that yoga is inherently Hindu in nature and that failure to acknowledge this has negative accessibility and other impacts (Barkataki and Fiske 2020; Jain 2010, 2014a). However, yoga academics predominantly argue that the majority of the yoga practised in high-income countries today contains mainly just physical movement and use the term 'modern postural' to define this (De Michelis 2007; Singleton 2010). Amanda Lucia notes that a secular approach is seen as broadening yoga's appeal with teachers encouraged to take this approach (Lucia 2018). Spirituality in modern yoga in high-income countries remains an understudied area and only rarely the subject of research (Büssing, et al. 2012; Csala 2021; Greeson et al. 2011). However, a positive relationship between yoga and spirituality has been identified along with spiritual as well as physical motives for participating (Csala 2021).

My interest in this area arose from teaching a free community yoga class in a northern UK city in one of the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country (English Indices of Deprivation 2019). As a yoga teacher, I taught this class for 18 months in 2019/20. Class participants were atypically from a wide and intersectional range of marginalised groups. I used this experience to inform the design of my doctoral study. Whilst yoga access barriers and facilitators have been the focus of previous studies with specific marginalised groups in the US and Australia (Cagas, J. et al. 2021; Spadola et al. 2020), this is the first study to focus on people with a wide and intersectional range of marginalised identities and in the UK. Findings identify a number of factors that impact yoga accessibility for people with marginalised identities. Significant amongst these factors is spirituality. Spirituality is experienced as predominantly increasing yoga's accessibility, as a key reason for participation and as becoming more important with increasing participation.

2 Terminology

A number of the key terms used in this article, and the doctoral study it is drawn from, require definition. The term marginalised, in societal terms, is complex to define. Most simply it can be a governmental definition of disadvantaged groups in a society. However, a more nuanced and developing definition is that marginalisation is how individuals experience their lives in respect of lack of access to cultural norms, expectations and values (Mowat 2015) or to beneficial social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986).

Access and accessibility are concepts prominent in the field of disability studies and also in others including education and the built-environment. Access can be defined as opportunity-enabling contact (Fritch 2016). Accessibility can be defined in terms of exclusion and prohibition from participation (or access), whereby some people have unquestioning access to beneficial things, such as social space or privilege, while others do not (Titchkosky 2011). These terms are used here with reference to multiple forms of marginalised identities (see above).

The definition of spirituality is debated. A relatively recent concept, spirituality is typically differentiated from religion, however, there are many overlaps. When asked to define spirituality, many people rely on religious references or references to transcendence (Maffesoli 1995; Wixwat and Saucier 2021). Some scholars position spirituality as a search for answers to ultimate questions about life and a relationship to the sacred or transcendent (Koenig, H. G. 2008) whilst others define spirituality as ranging across the traditional secular and religious divide (Carette and King 2005). Defining religion has also long been problematic with the most popular current definition being a 'definition in use', or social constructivist, position that religion occurs when people make reference to it (Wixwat and Saucier 2021). Differentiating between spirituality and religion is challenging. For some they are different entities – Heelas and Woodhead state that religion takes place within an institutional setting whereas spirituality goes beyond such a frame (Heelas and Woodhead 2005). Another common differentiation is that religion is typically institutionalised and culturally accepted, whilst spirituality refers to an autonomous, individual experience (Csala 2021; Koenig, H. and et al. 2001). However, as people in high-income countries increasingly form 'neo-tribes', new forms of religious expression are perhaps emerging from spirituality (Maffesoli 1995). For others, spirituality is 'watered down' religion and half-way towards an inevitable secularisation (Taylor, C. 2009). They argue that spirituality is different to religion and is replacing it as people increasingly reject organised religion but still have what they term 'spiritual' beliefs – hence the increasing use of the term 'spiritual but not religious' (SBNR) Heelas and Woodhead 2005; Wixwat and Saucier 2021).

Defining yoga is equally problematic. Elizabeth De Michelis states that modern yoga is: "...what an average English speaker would understand when the word 'yoga' (by now a thoroughly assimilated loanword in English) is mentioned: i.e. the performance of yoga poses (*āsana*) within a classroom format, or the same type of practice performed at home with the help of books, audiovisual tools, or on the basis of one's memory and knowledge of the subject." (De Michelis 2007). Yoga scholars broadly consider 'modern postural' yoga, as currently practised in

high-income countries, as being primarily, or even exclusively, focused on physical movement (asana). This is differentiated from the original ancient South Asian practises (and some modern ones) which are held to include the other aspects of yoga: breathwork, mindfulness and elements of philosophy or spirituality. Mark Singleton identifies modern postural yoga as having been formed by combining original South Asian practices with European physical exercise systems, such as calisthenics, in the late 19th and early 20th Century BCE (Singleton 2010). This process is traced to the founding fathers of what are now established international yoga styles or lineages, notably BKS Iyengar and Patabi Jois (Ashtanga) (Newcombe, 2009; Singleton 2010). However, this interpretation is contested by Hindu groups who argue that yoga is an inherent part of Hinduism and was culturally/religiously appropriated as part of 18th and 19th Century European colonialist exploitation, and this is a process which continues to this day (Black 2021; Blu Wakpa 2018; Jain 2014b; Miller 2019). It is also contested by Christians who also assert yoga is part of Hinduism and is proselytising and therefore not suitable for their participation in its current popular form. The term 'yoga' is used throughout this article and study to refer to the yoga currently practised in the UK and other high-income countries.

3 Study Methodology

I selected a qualitative approach for my research study in order to obtain rich, thick data in what is a typically quantitative topic area (Braun & Clarke, 2021)). This method also places marginalised individuals' lived experience at the centre of the study – as advised in Critical Race Theory (Ford and Airhihenbuawa 2010). Northern UK cities were selected as locations due to the original study class and their historical association with areas of low income and high levels of deprivation.

I collected data from individuals from groups marginalised in society and under-represented in yoga about their experiences of accessing and participating in yoga. Of a sample size of 17, self-identification was as follows: Black, Brown or other person of colour (7); disabled (7); older (aged over 60) (5); LGBTQI+ (3); on a low income (10), from a religious or cultural background (5); having a larger body type (1); men (6).

. I employed purposive sampling in order to obtain data from people with as diverse a range of different marginalised identities as possible. As the majority of yoga participants and teachers are white, female and higher educated there is a high degree of correlation between marginalised population groups and those under-represented in yoga. I therefore developed a list of Marginalisation Categories based on the 'protected characteristics' set out in UK anti-discrimination legislation (Equality Act 2010), other identified groups that experience marginalisation and discrimination (Foldy 2004) and groups under-represented in yoga. This process resulted in the identification of eight Marginalisation Categories, or grounds on which people can be commonly marginalised or discriminated against by the societal majority. In addition, 19 sub-categories were identified in conjunction with study participants. Men are accepted as a sub-category as, although men are not typically marginalised in UK society, they are a minority in yoga and men identifying as trans or as having been born in a female body do experience marginalisation. (Other types of marginalisation are acknowledged to exist). The eight identified Marginalisation Categories are Ethnicity, Sexuality, Gender identity, Disability, Body type, Socioeconomic status, Religion, Age (see Table 5.1 and 5.2).

Table 5.1 Here Table 5.2 Here

One or more study participant was recruited who identified with each of the eight Marginalisation Categories and the 19 sub-categories. A high degree of intersectionality was present with many participants identifying with more than one category (intersectionality is significant itself in respect of marginalisation). Study inclusion criteria were: people with marginalised identities who had attended organised group yoga classes on a regular basis in a northern UK city. Four study participants had also taught yoga in community environments or with marginalised groups. A range of yoga styles were represented, including Iyengar, Hatha, Vinyasa, Ashtanga and Trauma Informed, and locations included sports centres, community centres, church halls, yoga studios and online. Differentiation between yoga styles was not felt

to be required as the majority of the yoga experienced contained similar composite elements (see above). Recruitment was via personal and professional contacts, yoga teacher social media groups and posters in a yoga studio and a sportswear retailer. Volunteers were sought 'for a research study about accessibility and diversity in yoga'.

As an accessible yoga teacher myself, working with marginalised and under-served groups in northern UK cities, I employed extensive reflexivity throughout the research. This was of particular significance as I also have a marginalised identity (neurodivergent/autistic) and belong to the dominant yoga demographic as a university-educated white, middle class CIS female. As such, I acknowledge the potential for these factors to influence data collection and interpretation (Miles et al., 2020) I therefore employed reflexivity via an ongoing journal and regular discussion with supervisors who were experienced senior academics.

I collected data by conducting semi-structured 1–1, approximately hour-long interviews with 17 individuals using video conferencing or phone over the course of 12 months from October 2021. I conducted the interviews remotely due to restrictions at the time resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. This form of interviewing is found to have equivalent effectiveness as face-to-face (Lobe et al 2020). I chose in-depth 1–1 interviews in preference to, for example, focus groups as these enable the building of rapport and allow a 'safe space' for the discussion of potentially personal topics (Braun & Clarke, 2021)). Study participants were given pseudonyms in results to protect anonymity.

In analysing the data I was able to identify to what extent spirituality is present in the yoga practised by these participants with marginalised identities and how it impacts its accessibility for them. I used Reflective Thematic Analysis, inductive method as it is a current best practise for qualitative, sociological research (Braun & Clarke, 2019) This resulted in the identification of a number of codes which I then reviewed and collated into eight sub-themes and then three overarching data themes. These are set out below and illustrated using participants' own words (see Table 5.3).

Table 5.3 Here

4 Findings

Spirituality was identified as a significant theme in the data with the majority of participants experiencing yoga as having a spiritual aspect. This identification was made by people participating in different styles and frequency of yoga and from a wide range of different, religious and non-religious, backgrounds – suggesting it was not dependent on prior experience. A range of terms were used to describe what are identified as the spiritual aspects of yoga. These included ‘love’ and ‘energy’, a feeling of peace, ‘spiritual stuff’ and feeling ‘grounded’ or ‘connected’. Where spiritual aspects were new or unfamiliar, growing to feel comfortable with them in a yoga context was seen to be a gradual process. Engaging with the spirituality in yoga was seen as something an individual could choose whether to do, and to what degree.

I think there's a lot of misunderstanding with yoga. I think people think it's religious, it's spiritual – which it can be. The spiritual side can be there, if that's what you're looking for.

SOPHIE

Where yoga was initially viewed in terms of physical exercise, it was subsequently acknowledged to have had more than just physical benefits. Stephanie, a white British female in her 30s who was gay and a yoga teacher, initially emphasised yoga's physical and emotional benefits although she actively engaged with its spirituality and key texts. This reluctance to acknowledge or flag up yoga's spirituality could be related to personal resistance or rejection of religion or spirituality; discomfort, lack of familiarity or not wishing to be associated with spiritual

matters; or wanting to 'downplay' something that might be considered to make yoga commercially less appealing.

Differentiation was made between spirituality and religion. Drew, who was in his 20s, male born in a female body and on a low income, described spirituality as involving less organisation and conformity and more individual freedom and interpretation than religion.

Yoga's spirituality was typically associated with 'Eastern' religions and associated with Hinduism by South Asian participants. This was the case for people from a range of different South Asian cultural and religious backgrounds, including Hindu and Muslim. Nina, a South Asian British woman in her 50s, who was Hindu with an Indian background and a yoga teacher, felt her South Asian students made the association between yoga and Hinduism too.

Participating in yoga was not seen as incompatible with faiths such as Christianity or Islam.

Susan, a white British Christian female in her 60s on a low income felt yoga supplemented her Catholic faith.

I am religious. Yeah, I'm a Catholic. And I do practice my faith. I did enjoy that spiritual side [of yoga]. And I didn't know if it was sort of disrespectful. But I didn't feel that. I just felt it was like a supplement to my faith, if you like.

SUSAN

Some adjustments were required to make yoga more acceptable for some groups. When she taught a group of Muslim students Nina felt they preferred her not to use the popular yoga phrase 'Namaste' as it is a traditional Hindu greeting. That Muslims and Christians participated in yoga, even though they appeared to consider it to be related to another faith, indicated that

the benefits may have been considered to outweigh any potential spiritual risk of impropriety or that avoiding the spiritual aspects meant that yoga could be focused on more as a form of exercise.

Yoga was not typically experienced as part of South Asian participants' cultural or religious influences growing up. They're discovery and engagement in yoga was through, and was associated with, 'Western' culture.

Because my family are from Bangladesh, and from an Islamic background. So, to me, yoga was just introduced to me in the West. So yeah, it's like most people.

SOPHIE

Now I see that more and more and more people are going into yoga. When I was a child growing up, I didn't know what yoga was. Yes, I'd heard of it ... But yoga wasn't a thing.

NINA

There was no sense from the data that yoga was felt to have been appropriated from India or South Asia or that it should only be taught by South Asians. Although Nina's South Asian students preferred to be taught by an 'Indian' teacher, she felt this was because they enjoyed chatting in their first language. Nina, who was British Asian and Hindu, went to India to train as a yoga teacher where her instructors and fellow students were all white people from developed countries. She was pleased, rather than offended, when white 'English' people tried to use Sanskrit yoga posture names.

It doesn't bother me at all. Like last night, I went to a vinyasa yoga class at my gym. And, you know, she was an English teacher. She said few words in Hindi, in the mantra sort of thing ... she was white. I just thought, "Yes, she's trying to learn this. I'm really, really pleased with it."

NINA

However, analysing these findings through the lens of Bourdieu's theory of Social Capital suggests this lack of negative interpretations of a predominantly white yoga teacher demographic, and their use of South Asian language and culture, may be the result of effects identified as Habitus and Field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). This proposes that there is a subconscious desire to conform to views dominant within a particular field in order not to risk loss of membership and social capital by challenging accepted positions – in this case, on issues such as yoga's lack of diversity and possible cultural appropriation. Thus, those South Asian's taking part in, and teaching, yoga may be accepting of rather than questioning the fact that white people overwhelmingly dominate in an activity of South Asian origin. There is evidence that poor pronunciation of Sanskrit yoga positions (asana) has caused offence to some South Asian yoga participants (Gandhi and Wolff 2017; Vazirani 2001).

Spirituality was identified as affecting yoga's accessibility. Primarily it was seen as a motivator, and therefore access enabler. Where it was seen as decreasing accessibility, this was initially or to people other than study participants. For Simon, a white, British male in his 40s, who was neurodivergent, working class, on a low income and a yoga teacher, having previously enjoyed the spiritual aspects of martial arts, spirituality was a motivator and enabler for his yoga participation. Claire, a white woman in her 40s who had a longstanding mental

health condition, identified yoga's spirituality as an element of a lifestyle she wanted to be part of and therefore a motivator and accessibility enabler for her.

I was really interested in the spiritual side of it. I think, if it had just been a physical yoga class without the spiritual element, that would have impacted on whether I would have had the longevity to keep going.

CLAIRE

The spiritual element of yoga was also a motivator for Anita, a South Asian British female in her 30s, who had a Pakistani Muslim background and was working class.

I'm quite spiritual myself. So, I understand how things are interconnected. And, yeah, the whole mind and body supporting each other, that's important to me.

ANITA

Meditative elements in yoga were also identified as motivators and as therefore increasing accessibility. These were present in a range of different yoga practices and could have a spiritual context, as part of identified yoga philosophy and practise, or a physiological or mental health emphasis. For Claire meditation was a significant benefit and the main reason she did yoga. Dave, a white British male in his 40s with a long-term mental health condition and on a low income, enjoyed meditation and found meditation comes naturally to him, although he didn't

feel he did it often enough. Alex, a white British female in her 30s with a larger body type who was gay/queer, had long-term mental health conditions and was on a low income, identified stilling the mind as her favourite yoga benefit – more than increased flexibility or physical strength. For Simon, the ‘awareness’ yoga gave him meditatively helped him with emotional regulation as an autistic person.

Spiritual elements were experienced as reducing yoga’s accessibility when yoga was initially accessed. However, this was explained retrospectively in terms of unfamiliarity or resistance due to issues such as background or health conditions.

I think I thought that yoga wasn’t really for me, because it seemed much more spiritual ... as somebody who is struggling with mental health, I didn’t really want to have time to pause and be with myself, if that makes sense?

ALEX

I remember first time I was in the class and they started with the Oms, I was “Oh my god”. It was like being at school where you’ve got to sing. I thought, “Oh no, I’m just going to mime. But I can’t really mime, I have to try and join in”. But it made me feel uncomfortable.

SIMON

The significance of this negative accessibility effect of spiritual aspects was felt to decrease over time and with sensitivity from the teacher:

When I first got into it, I was like, 'This seems like a load of bollocks. What's the headspace and heart space? What is that?' And then I think some of the things that she was getting at, I could start to understand. Like feeling grounded. I kind of understood that and like feeling settled.

DREW

Spirituality was acknowledged to have a potentially negatively effect on accessibility for 'other' people rather than the participants themselves. Drew thought that atheists might have a problem with yoga's spirituality. Grace felt that spirituality in yoga might put some people off because they saw it as pagan. Tom, a British male in his 60s of Chinese ethnicity, felt that some people were put off by the spirituality in yoga because they misunderstood it. Tom and Simon, both felt that there was a potentially off-putting image of yoga as being cultish. Simon stressed this wasn't the case for him, even though the leader of the style of yoga he practised and taught was the subject of abuse accusations. Analysing this using the Habitus and Field theory of Social Capital suggests that focusing on hypothetical 'others' may be a more comfortable and less status-threatening way to speak about negative personal experiences of yoga inaccessibility. Making a criticism in an abstract way about a third party can be designed to avoid potential negative fallout in terms of group ostracism or lack of standing.

A strong theme in the data was that spiritual aspects of yoga were unfamiliar or alien at first, and this couldact to reduce accessibility. Identified alien elements were various. For Simon it was being in silence with himself; for Grace, a Black British female in her 60s from a Caribbean background, it was lying on the floor; for Sophie, a South Asian British female in her 40s, from a Bangladeshi Islamic background and a yoga teacher, it was incense and chanting. This alien-ness ws felt to cease to be a barrier as the result of perseverance and broad-

mindedness. However, participants did not support removing these alien elements to enable access as they were part of yoga's beneficial experience.

It's still not a mainstream activity, but I suppose it's becoming more so. But ... culturally, because it's you know, like Middle Eastern or Eastern philosophies and stuff. You've got to be more broad-minded in order to take things on which are from that walk of life.

TOM

I think leaving the philosophy out, would actually encourage more people to do yoga. But I think the values still should be retained. ... I think that, it's the way it's taught, makes people feel that they shouldn't belong.

SOPHIE

5 Discussion

The study's findings indicate that spirituality in yoga is experienced across a variety of schools, styles and venues by people with a wide range of marginalised identities and backgrounds. Spirituality is found predominantly to have a positive effect on yoga accessibility; with any negative affects being primarily on initial access and declining over time and with continued participation. This seemingly contradicts the dominant scholarly position that there is an absence of spirituality in the majority of modern yoga in high-income countries and the claims of faith and other groups that yoga is inherently spiritual and/or a part of the religion of Hinduism.

Scholars' assert that 'modern postural' yoga is primarily, or even solely, physical and (ie without spiritual content) and that this as core to its cultural appeal (De Michelis 2007; De

Michelis 2004; Singleton 2010). Amanda Lucia observes that modern yoga is often offered as a fitness course along with exercise classes such as Pilates and Zumba and that many yoga studios actively instruct teachers to keep their teaching 'secular' to increase its accessibility (Lucia 2018). Many yoga scholars do not consider yoga to be spiritual and as not as sitting in any particular faith tradition (Blu Wakpa 2018; Jain 2014c; Mallinson and Singleton 2017; Singleton 2010). Yoga is seen as a neutral tool that can be used by people with any faith or none. This is due in part to what Jain refers to as yoga's 'malleability' (Jain 2012). However, Andrea Jain notes that, even when modern yoga focuses on physical postures (āsanas) it is still expressed as a "body of religious practice" (Jain 2014b, 99). And Csala observes that the principal modern yoga gurus of the twentieth century, B. K. S. Iyengar and K. Pattabhi Jois, both considered yoga to have an inner dimension that other forms of movement do not possess (Csala 2021). Commonly occurring elements of yoga appear spiritual in nature, including mantras (incantations), mudras (hand gestures), kirtan (chanting) and dedications to teachers or deities. The most widely respected yoga teacher training typically rests on an established spiritual or philosophical framework, referring to texts including the 15th or 16th Century Hatha Yoga Pradipika and the Yoga-Sutras of Patanjali, and including behavioural, diet and other precepts (Cramer et al. 2016; De Michelis 2007; Jain 2014b; Singleton 2010). Those participating in modern yoga in high-income countries frequently consider themselves to be engaged in something spiritual: the 2016 Yoga in America Study found that 78% of survey respondents considered yoga a spiritual path, while only 26% considered it gymnastics (Yoga Journal and Yoga Alliance 2016). The composite elements of yoga have also been to be found to differing degrees in various forms of yoga (Büssing, Michalsen et al. 2012; Wixwat and Saucier 2021).

There is evidence in the literature that spirituality in yoga does have significant negative impacts on yoga accessibility for some faith and other groups (Gunther Brown 2017; Thind et al. 2021). For some groups, yoga is definitely spiritual and identifiable with a specific religion –

Hinduism. This reduces yoga's accessibility for these groups. In California USA in 2021 Christian parent groups successfully campaigned to remove yoga from schools on the grounds it was promoting Hinduism (Gunther Brown 2017). In the UK in 2012, a yoga class was banned from a church hall for being a Hindu 'spiritual exercise' (BBC news 2013). Candy Gunther Brown identifies how Pentecostal Christians' embodied religious practices mean they are prohibited from yoga's physical movements as they are considered as opening up the individual to visitation by demonic spirits (Gunther Brown 2017).

Some Muslim groups also consider yoga to part of Hinduism. In India, Muslims have protested against the teaching yoga in schools as part of a Hindu nationalist agenda and what they see as effectively religious indoctrination (Jain 2014c). In Malaysia, a 2008 fatwa (religious ruling) resulted in a yoga ban in five states; and in the capital Kuala Lumpur, the physical activity of yoga is permitted but chanting and meditation are forbidden. In Indonesia a similar ruling has been made. In Iran, where yoga is popular, teachers must refer to "the sport of yoga" (BBC news 2013).

For some Hindus too, the yoga taught in high-income countries is not accessible as it does not acknowledge their position that yoga is an inherent part of Hinduism. Yoga taught without reference to this or its cultural or spiritual origins is experienced by these groups as disrespectful and offensive (Barkataki and Fiske 2020). The co-founder of The Hindu American Foundation, Aseem Shukla, has claimed that yoga is the intellectual property of Hinduism (Jain 2010). This perspective has been promoted by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Indian popular yoga guru and entrepreneur Baba Ramdev. Yoga scholars identify these positions as fuelled by Indian Hindu extremism and nationalism (Jain 2014a). However, Sheena Sood argues for a more nuanced interpretation that acknowledges Europeans and white supremacy but also class, caste, and religious hierarchies, such as Hindu supremacy and Islamophobia (Sood 2020).

Other emerging South Asian voices also point out that yoga can legitimately be seen to have been culturally appropriated by colonising European nations in the 19th Century, and subsequently fetishised as part of orientalist and exoticist attitudes (Gandhi and Wolff 2017; Jain 2012). In addition, there is South Asian criticism of yoga marketers for illegitimately co-opting yoga and selling it as a consumer product (Gandhi and Wolff 2017; Jain 2012). There are further criticisms of the incorporation of spiritual language and symbolism from belief systems and cultures not historically associated with India or yoga, such as south American Shamanism and Chinese traditional medicine (Lucia 2018). For many cultures, it is seen as disrespectful and offensive to use parts of indigenous practices out of their appropriate context (Blu Wakpa 2018).

However, there is also evidence in the literature that spirituality positively impacts accessibility for other marginalised groups, including African American women (Atkinson and Permuth-Levine 2009; Middleton et al. 2017). Spirituality is identified as a motivator, and therefore as increasing accessibility (Bahan 2016; Ivtzan and Jegatheeswaran 2015; Quilty et al. 2013). This includes groups such as men (a minority in yoga) (Cagas, J. et al. 2021); and millennials with no religious beliefs ('nones') (Bahan 2016). In addition – where yoga is initially accessed for fitness or flexibility – spiritual or philosophical aspects come to be viewed as a significant, or even primary, reason for participation (Büssing, Hedtstück et al. 2012; Park et al. 2016). Greeson calls this, in reference to secular mindfulness, a 'shift' towards spirituality over time (Greeson et al. 2011) and this shift can also be observed in yoga (Henrichsen-Schrembs 2011; Quilty et al. 2013). This gradual increase in sense of spirituality can also be analysed in terms of Bourdieu's theory of Habitus and Field as a behaviour acquired as part of joining the yoga world (Bourdieu 1986; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

6 Conclusion

The findings of this study identify spirituality as a significant factor affecting the accessibility of yoga to people with marginalised identities in the UK. Yoga is identified as having a spiritual aspect by individuals with a wide range of religious or non-religious backgrounds and types of

yoga experiences. Aspects defined as spiritual are experienced across a range of schools or styles, venues and study participants' backgrounds, suggesting this identification is not linked to previous religious or spiritual experiences. Spirituality is typically experienced as increasing yoga's accessibility, a key reason for participation and becoming more important with prolonged participation. This confirms previous findings with specific marginalised groups in the US and Australia (Park 2014; (Park et al., 2016); Quilty et al. 2013). Where spirituality in yoga is experienced as reducing accessibility, this is on initial access and declines over time. This seemingly contradicts the position that modern yoga is primarily, or exclusively, physical (De Michelis 2004; Singleton 2010).

Yoga is specifically associated with Hinduism by South Asian participants from a range of cultural and religious backgrounds. Links are also made to other faiths including Buddhism and Islam in, for example, sun salutations and the use of a mat. However, this association is not identified as reducing yoga accessibility by individuals of faith or of none. Those with an active faith see yoga as supplementing this. This contradicts propositions that spirituality in yoga acts as a barrier to access for some faith groups (Gunther Brown 2017; Thind et al. 2021). Whilst some curiosity is expressed about the connection between modern yoga and its ancient origins in South East Asia, no overt accusations are made regarding cultural appropriation. Analysis of the data through the lens of Critical Theory suggests this perspective may result from the dominant attitudes of the yoga world which is inherently non-critical and asserts that yoga is equitable and accessible. This aspect of data analysis is ongoing and results will be published when complete.

In summary, the findings of this study indicate that people with marginalised identities in the UK experience spiritual elements in yoga as increasing access and participation rather than as a barrier. Further research is recommended as participants in this study are, by definition, people who have successfully accessed yoga and those who may have experienced spirituality as a barrier to yoga access are likely to simply no longer be doing it. Future studies should therefore look at people with marginalised identities who have tried yoga but not continued. Nonetheless, it can be concluded from this study that retaining, or introducing, spiritual elements in yoga could help to increase access and inclusion for marginalised groups and, therefore, its diversity. This information may be helpful for those working to make yoga more accessible.

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Table 5.1 Sampling grid (17 participants)

Marginalisation category (8)	Number of study participants	Marginalisation sub-category (19)	Number of study participants
Ethnicity/race	6	Black African Caribbean	2
		South Asian Indian	1
		South Asian Bangladeshi/Pakistani	2
		South East Asian Chinese	1
		South East Asian Korean	1
Sexuality	2	Gay man	1
		Gay woman/lesbian	1
Gender	1	Man/male	6
		Man born in a woman's body/trans	1

Disability	7	Long-term mental health condition	3
		Long-term physical health condition/physically disabled	2
		Neurodivergent/neuro-atypical/autistic	2
Body type	1	Larger body type	1
Religion/religious background	6	Christian Catholic	1
		Muslim	1
		Hindu	1
		Atheist	2
Age	5	Aged over 60	5
Socioeconomic	10	Low income	8
		Working class	2

Table 5.2 Study participants identities

	Identity	Pronouns	Marginalisation category	City	Description
Dave	White, British, M, 40s	He/his	Disability, Socioeconomic	Yorkshire city 1	White British male, 40s, long-term mental health condition, low income
Grace	Black, British, F, 60s	She/her	Ethnicity, Age	Yorkshire city 1	Black British female, 60s from a Caribbean background
Susan	White, British, F, 60s	She/her	Socioeconomic, Religion, Age	Yorkshire city 1	White British female, 60s, low income
Tom	Chinese, British, M, 60s	He/his	Gender, Ethnicity, Age	Yorkshire city 1	British male in his 60s of Chinese ethnicity

Jane	Asian, British/Korean, F 30s	She/her	Ethnicity	Yorkshire city 1	Korean British female, 30s
Tabitha	White, British, F, 30s, teacher	She/her	Socioeconomic	Yorkshire city 1	White British female, 30s, low income, yoga teacher
Christine	Black, British, F, 60s,	She/her	Disability, Ethnicity, Age	Lancashire city 1	Black British woman, 60s from a Caribbean background, long-term physical health conditions
Alex	White, British, F, 30s	She/her	Gender, Sexuality, Body type, Socioeconomic	Scottish city 1	White British female, 30s with a larger body type, gay/queer, long-term mental health conditions, low income.
Claire	White, British, F, 40s,	She/her	Disability, Socioeconomic	Yorkshire city 1	White British woman, 40s, long-term mental health conditions, low income.
Steve	White, British, M, 60s	He/him	Gender, Sexuality, Age	Yorkshire city 1	White British male, 60s, gay
Anita	South Asian, British, F, 30s	She/her	Ethnicity	Lancashire city 1	South Asian British female, 30s, Pakistani Muslim background, working class
Sophie	South Asian, British, F, 50s	She/her	Ethnicity	Yorkshire city 1	South Asian British female, 40s, Bangladeshi Islamic background, yoga teacher.

Stephanie	White, British F, 30s	She/her	Sexuality	Scottish city 1	White British female, 30s, gay, yoga teacher
Simon	White British, M, 40s, teacher	He/him	Gender, Disability	Yorkshire city 2	White, British male, 40s, neurodivergent, working class, low income, yoga teacher
Jamie	White, British, Male 20s	He/him	Gender, Disability, Socioeconomic	Yorkshire city 2	White British male 20s, neurodivergent/autistic, long-term physical health condition, low income
Drew	White, British, Male 20s	He/him	Gender, Socioeconomic	Yorkshire city 1	White British male born into a female body 20s, low income
Nina	South Asian, British, 50s	She/her	Religion	Yorkshire city 1	South Asian British woman, 50s, Hindu, Indian background, yoga teacher

Table 5.3 Data themes

Themes	Sub-themes	Codes
1. External and Practical	Time and place	Environment/venue, Doing it at home, Practical issues, Yoga studios, Cost/time/location, community/safe space
	Sport and exercise	What is yoga, Impressions of yoga, Exercise/sport, Stretching/ flexibility, Relaxing
	Benefits	Sociability, Favourite bit, Benefits
2. Internal. Mental and Emotional	Feeling uncomfortable	Alien-ness, Self-conscious/embarrassed, Discomfort, Safe space
	Spirituality	Spirituality/Religion, Meditation/mindfulness, Philosophy, Faith, Cultural requirements
	Image and appearance	Body shape, clothing and appearance, Image, media and marketing

	Someone like me	Male stuff, No one like me
	I was lucky	Access catalysts, I was lucky, Someone to go with, Right class, Right teacher, First time, Why I started/ kept going, My accessibility experience, How to make yoga accessible
3. Yoga World and Culture	Yoga culture	Questioning within yoga, insider attitudes, competitiveness, Don't belong/uncool, Cultural appropriation
	The way it's taught	Touch and trauma, Power, Teachers' approach, Yoga styles

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