

The politics and poetics of yoga spaces: three case studies from the UK

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Drawing on survey data, interviews and field notes, this paper describes the economic, social, and ethical considerations balanced by mainstream yoga teachers in choosing where to teach –the politics of yoga spaces. Using three archetypal yoga spaces: church hall, multi-use gym, and yoga studio, the case studies highlight demographic trends and multi-generational perspectives, from older teachers working in community spaces to younger teachers increasingly working in yoga-specific spaces. The archetypes shed light on the complex relationship between popularized yoga and the social imaginary: the relationship between yoga, Christian faith, and the institutions of the Church; bodybuilding, identity, and spirituality in gym spaces; and the acculturation of South Asian religious traditions in yoga specific spaces. In the second half of the paper, drawing on Bachelard's philosophy of the imagination and the poetics of space (1958) the case studies elaborate on how these yoga spaces affect participant subjectivities and are themselves effected through the performative and discursive elements of practice, becoming 'heterotopias' or (re)imagined spaces (Foucault, 1968). As heterotopias, the material outer space contributes to liminal spaces of interiority and contemplation during a yoga class, metamorphizing participants' inner worlds on a spectrum ranging from metaphysical escape to loving connection. I ask how these consciousness-raising experiences contribute to identity and agency? As Newcombe (2018) has argued 'physical space becomes an exceptionally useful focus for understanding controversy, contested meanings and the complex and multivalent place of yoga in contemporary society.'

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