

*Changing Face of the Yoga Industry, Its
Dharmic Roots and Its Message to Women:
an Analysis of Yoga Journal Magazine
Covers, 1975–2020*

Agi Wittich & Patrick McCartney

Journal of Dharma Studies
Philosophy, Theology, Ethics, and
Culture

ISSN 2522-0926

DHARM
DOI 10.1007/s42240-020-00071-1



Your article is protected by copyright and all rights are held exclusively by Springer Nature Switzerland AG. This e-offprint is for personal use only and shall not be self-archived in electronic repositories. If you wish to self-archive your article, please use the accepted manuscript version for posting on your own website. You may further deposit the accepted manuscript version in any repository, provided it is only made publicly available 12 months after official publication or later and provided acknowledgement is given to the original source of publication and a link is inserted to the published article on Springer's website. The link must be accompanied by the following text: "The final publication is available at link.springer.com".



Changing Face of the Yoga Industry, Its Dharmic Roots and Its Message to Women: an Analysis of *Yoga Journal* Magazine Covers, 1975–2020

Agi Wittich¹  · Patrick McCartney² 

Published online: 11 April 2020
© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2020

Abstract

Contemporary yoga is popularly represented in various media by a fit, white woman. *Yoga Journal* is a magazine recognized by many as an industry cornerstone and an institution in and of itself. It represents the distinctive face of yoga. By analyzing the visual and textual content of the *Yoga Journal* magazine covers, from its first issue in 1975 to issue 313 (January 2020), we describe the produced and consumed portrait of yoga. By focusing on the cover themes, together with the objects and persons depicted, we recognize three phases of development that have contributed to the understanding of the changing image of yoga in the media. While, in the initial phase, yoga was represented as a mystical and mysterious spiritual discipline that originated in the Orientalized East, in the later phase, it was depicted first as a global and universal phenomenon and then as a mainstream everyday fitness regime. Yoga's depiction in the last phase is compatible with the scholarly representation of contemporary yoga as posture and body centered, but not with its earlier depictions. We found that in its mature phase, the yoga body, which is criticized for its lack of inclusiveness, emerged to become omnipresent. We conclude that the newly formed face of yoga is problematic, both for its female readers, who are encouraged to conform to a unique body type, and also for the yoga community, which encounters an appearance-based restriction of access.

Keywords Yoga · Body · Women · Globalization · *Yoga Journal*

✉ Agi Wittich
Agi.wittich@mail.huji.ac.il

Patrick McCartney
psdmccartney@gmail.com

¹ Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Israel

² Japan Society for the Promotion of Science – Post-Doctoral Fellow – Graduate School of Global Environmental Studies, Kyoto University, Kyoto, Japan

Yoga Journal is not just a job for us; yoga is not simply exercise, and you are not just people who spend money for our magazine. (*Yoga Journal* 1980: 4)

When representations of yoga are trivial and commonplace, it is often easy to take them for granted. Yoga has a face that stares back at you from online videos, websites, train platforms, and magazine covers. The orientalist and romanticized versions of an “authentic” and “traditional” yoga lifestyle and identity, conflating imprecision and interchangeability of to the actual religious and ethnic identity of the said *yogin*, is typically depicted by an underdressed, ascetic-looking, Indian man. However, the dominant identity promoted within the mainstream, contemporary, transnational yoga consumptionscape (the *-scape* within which things are consumed) typically represents a young, white, and fit woman. Yoga, in the broadest, most popular sense, has become institutionalized and commodified to the point where it is no longer depicted as an obscure and exotic spiritual discipline imported from the “mystical” East. Yet, *Yoga Journal* might help the urban *yoginī* to connect with something deeper, perceptibly timeless, and more profound, namely, an “archaic modernity” (Subramaniam 2019).

The *Yoga Journal*'s covers provide telling but controversial examples of how yoga is produced and imaginatively consumed worldwide. While *Yoga Journal* considers its US edition as its “flagship,” it is syndicated with 12 international editions in 28 countries (*Yoga Journal* 2019). Its covers reflect popular yoga's interplay with its older dharmic roots, as well as with globalized culture. They act as a social site that reflects reified norms and ideals, but they also act as an influential social force on their readership. Yoga's depiction in the media has been scrutinized by many scholars (Berila et al. 2016; Horton and Harvey 2012; Klein and Guest-Jelley 2014). A few scholars locate the depiction of yoga in the media as part of the current popular fitness culture, rather than as a sacred esoteric practice. Their main critique is focused on the neoliberal values that have replaced what are perceived as traditional yogic values, which results in yoga being portrayed as a body-centered trend, instead of a complex spiritual discipline (Dworkin and Wachs 2009; Jankowski et al. 2014). In a way, “yoga” has become embedded within a neoliberal wellness paradigm, through which the individual can supposedly become complete by means of consumption and responsabilization of one's own health and wellbeing (Pyysiäinen et al. 2017). Indeed, the journal enables the collapse of various contradictions, which are resolved through an undifferentiated strategic marketing approach that combines an inclusive wellness concept with subtle religious referencing (Banet-Weiser 2012; Telej and Gamble 2019). Scholars of contemporary yoga discuss the different ways in which yogic ideals are consumed within a religious logic, in which the yoga mat and/or the physical body become a locus for religious praxis, regardless of any spiritual-but-not-religious assertions made by individualistic claims to selfhood (Jain 2020; Lucia 2018; Foxen 2020).

Yoga Journal aims to provide what it regards as credible information about yoga in a manner that suits its readership. Its official website states that it seeks to provide “authoritative information and insights about yoga,” regarding yoga postures, anatomy, philosophy, nutrition, travel, beauty, and more and includes contributions from “the leading teachers and experts in the field” while “honoring the traditions and authenticity of this powerful, 5,000 year old practice” (*Yoga Journal* 2020a). While statements such as “Yoga is 5,000 years old” are undoubtedly problematic in the way they represent an imagined history of yoga (see McCartney 2019a, b), the journal acts as a conduit of perceived authenticity and as a “quest

on the part of consumers to experience what is really real” (Maclaran 2009: 41). This demand of the journal’s readers for a “true,” albeit monolithic, interpretation of “yoga” was addressed in a recent article that describes yoga as an ancient Hindu-Indian philosophy that promotes “conscious living,” which cannot be reduced to a mere workout (Joshi 2018). It is beyond doubt that yoga’s history is deeply syncretic and owes as much to Buddhist and other heterodox influences as it does to some imagined, single-sourced, orthodox Hindu traditions. Nevertheless, the covers of *Yoga Journal* reflect the negotiation between presenting what is perceived as “authentic” Indian-originated yoga and what are perceived as less “traditional” forms, although the latter may likewise be “modern” and orientalistically reimagined metaphors (Jacobsen 2018). As the former editor-in-chief, Linda Sparrowe, notes, the journal has “evolved to meet the needs of the culture it serves” (Sparrowe 2014:14). Indeed, this editorial balancing act between the perceived expectations of its consumers, the cultivated desires of its producers, and the syncretic historiography of yoga is a continually evolving and controversial conversation.

Although *Yoga Journal* is the earliest and plausibly the current leading yoga magazine in the USA, with a current readership of over 1.3 million people, it is not the only yoga-focused lifestyle magazine, and yet it dominates the market. In one comparison of the “Top 10 Yoga Magazines and Publications to Follow in 2020,” *Yoga Journal* was ranked first (Agarwal 2020). In a brief overview, the magazine’s editors explain that “for 40 years, *Yoga Journal* has been the #1 authority on yoga and the yoga lifestyle.” They claim that the journal offers “expert information on how to live a healthier, happier, more fulfilling life both on and off the mat.” Moreover, it constantly “engages its print, online, and live audience with top teacher insights and in-depth reporting on poses, breathing, meditation, nutrition, health, trends, and more”. They conclude that “*Yoga Journal* is the world’s largest and most influential yoga brand” (*Yoga Journal* 2020a).

Despite *Yoga Journal*’s popularity, it has been almost neglected by researchers of contemporary yoga. Webb et al. (2017a) studied the covers of yoga magazines, including *Yoga Journal*, and focused on the depiction of women’s bodies in the promotion of “traditional yogic philosophy” and fitness culture. The scope of her research was limited to the 2010–2015 time periods, and she concluded that the covers contribute to normalizing and desensitizing the objectification of female body competence, since the dominant marketing strategy tends to feature female cover models posed in active yoga postures in form-fitting attire. Markula (2014) examined the themes and concepts found in *Yoga Journal* covers as they changed over the years. Using Foucauldian discourse analysis, Markula examined the relationship of these notions to exercise culture in the USA, as well to as the emerging discourse of the “yoga body” and power dynamics in American society. Previous work analyzed a smaller sample of *Yoga Journal* covers (Vinoski et al. 2017)—in contrast to our analysis of 90% of all *Yoga Journal* issues—from its first publication in 1975 until the end of 2020 (284 issues out of 313).

The Evolution of the Yoga Magazine Industry in Three Phases

This paper focuses on the cover pages of *Yoga Journal* magazine and seeks to understand the interplay between the contemporary, globalized yogic culture and its

Indic-dharmic roots. As scholars recognize, magazines are cultural agents that contribute to the understanding of contemporary yoga within a Western cultural context (Frith et al. 2005; Markula 2014; Iqani 2009), and we therefore view *Yoga Journal* as an influential cultural force that shapes popular understandings of yoga. The current study considers three phases in the evolution of *Yoga Journal's* depiction of yoga, namely, the emergence phase (1975–1989), the growth phase (1990–1999), and the mature phase (2000–2020). While scholars of contemporary yoga have categorized it as modern postural yoga (De Michelis 2004), *āsana*-centered yoga (Newcombe 2005), embodied yoga (Alter 2004), posture-based yoga (Singleton 2010), and *āsana*-oriented yoga (Singleton and Goldberg 2013), we argue that these depictions correlate with the last three decades of *Yoga Journal*, and that the journal's first decade reflects a more complex, and possibly Orientalized and romanticist, picture of the way yoga was portrayed in the West.

The First Phase: Emergence (1975–1989)

Yoga Journal's early issues, from 1975 to 1989, depict yoga in an Indian context. This phase can be described as a Neo-Hindu representation of yoga, which is related to the reformation of Hinduism during the colonial period and the way in which yoga was modernized and instrumentalized, with complementary fitness regimes for women. While many covers depict photographs of people, as if presenting its readership with the face of yoga, a quarter of the covers display photos of statues, drawings, and artistic designs, as if hinting at yoga's mythical and philosophical context. The dharmic origins of yoga, and the cultural context in which it arose, are highlighted by titles such as "India: land of timeless flow," "Return of mother India," and "Glimpses of mother India," together with "Classical Indian music and dance" and "Indian love poems." India is depicted as a site for spiritual awakening through titles such as "Transformation through yoga in India" and as a suitable and welcoming place for tourists by titles such as *Auroville: City for the Future* and "A Christian in India." Moreover, the covers refer to other dharmic modalities, such as Tantra and Shaivism, with titles such as "Kundalini: Re-examination of ancient teachings," "Tantra, sex and spirituality," and "Tantra: A tradition unveiled." In this way, yoga is likened to a perception of a broader Hindu context.

The early issues emphasize yoga's medicinal values and locate it within a broader New Age movement. Many covers depict a medical view of yoga, with titles such as "Yoga as prevention and therapy," "Healing cycles: Yoga therapy auras," "Knee therapy," "Yoga and the immune system," "Restorative asanas for a healthy immune system", and "Holistic health maintenance." *Yoga Journal* cover titles also refer to homeopathy, Tai chi, Shamanism, Kabbalah, acupuncture, Taoism, Aikido, Zen, aura therapy, quartz, crystal and color therapy, massage, Reiki, Rolfing, Vipassana, and reflexology. In this way, yoga is assimilated into existing alternative therapeutic systems that aim to heal, rejuvenate, and increase well-being. It is striking that yoga postures, which became extremely popular in the last two decades of *Yoga Journal*, were hardly mentioned in this first phase and were referred to in only three issues.

From a cultural-gender perspective, *Yoga Journal* locates Indian men as authorities on yoga, while white women are its primary practitioners. The covers depict slightly more men than women (41:37), and many of them were famous male Indian yoga

teachers, such as the B.K.S. Iyengar, Satchidananda, Bhagwan Rajneesh, Swami Rama, Swami Kriyananda, and others. The general notion portrayed by the covers is of Indian masters as the source of yogic knowledge, with mostly close-up pictures of faces while dressed in traditional Indian attire, and not performing yoga postures. In contrast, women are depicted more as practitioners of yoga, since more than half of them are shown demonstrating yoga postures (compared to only a quarter of the men). Most of the women are depicted wearing what could be defined as athletic-yoga wear, thus locating them within the popular Western fitness culture during the age of aerobics (Cooper 2018). Thus, in the journal's first phase, women are visually represented as distant from the Indian origins of yoga.

The Second Phase: Growth (1990–1999)

In *Yoga Journal's* third decade, its focus shifted toward a more American, body-centered, and therapy-oriented form of yoga. One still finds the journal's earlier associations of yoga with the New Age movement, which is seen in titles referring to qigong, vision quests, mandalas, vegetarianism, herbology, Zen, aboriginal dreamtime, Native American shamanism, Feldenkrais, and arabesques. Indeed, the journal celebrated "100 years of yoga in America" and American yoga, and the direct association with India was considerably reduced. In this phase, yoga was associated with general notions of "healing," "love," "spirituality," and "mind." Yoga was framed as a tool that can take one on a spiritual journey, which could be characterized as a personal and "healing journey" that stemmed from "the heart" and could possibly lead to "the magic." The origins of this healing varied, from universal and abstract notions such as "the earth," "love," "light," "vibrations," and "prayer" to specific techniques such as music and "percussion." Its promised effects were all encompassing and ranged from psychotherapy ("healing the child within" and "10 asanas for depression") to physical-pathologies (chronic fatigue, arthritis, carpal tunnel pain, scoliosis, and even cancer). One cover title that best demonstrates the medicalization and scientification of yoga's health benefits declares "Medical proof: Yoga works."

Yoga was now understood as a profession that could function almost independently in its new and acculturated form. Although the covers still referred to Indian yoga ashrams, they also hinted at "A new view of ancient India" and the possibility of "Shrinking the guru." This was achieved not only by presenting an annual directory of yoga teachers and articles recommending "Who to study with: 1000 yoga teachers" but also by articles that guided its readership on "How to become a yoga teacher." Another cover title presents certain yoga teachers protesting at "being put on a pedestal" and quotes them saying that "we're not gods," which may reveal more about their social acceptance than about their humble self-beliefs. Moreover, the influx of yoga teachers, together with the demand for them by an ever-increasing number of "seekers," was identified by the journal as "the yoga boom" and was explicitly linked to the capitalistic economy and the yoga industry. One issue offers an interview on natural capitalism with the American economist and environmentalist Paul Hawken. Another issue informs the yoga seeker of the industrial commodities required for the practice of yoga, including "props, clothing, and more."

Although there were fewer covers representing Indian yoga teachers and gurus (with only two images of dharmic spiritual teachers, namely, the Dalai Lama in 1990 and

Deepak Chopra in 1993), there was a continuing identification of yoga practitioners with women during this period. The majority of the covers (66%) depict women, and more than half of the women depicted are performing postures. White women performing postures make up more than a quarter (28%) of all the covers during this phase, in comparison to only 14% of covers that depict men of any ethnicity performing yoga postures.

The Third Phase: Mature (2000–2020)

The last two decades of *Yoga Journal* could be understood as the mature phase, in which yoga was globalized as an American phenomenon, and its Indo-dharmic roots were scaled down as a vacation site and stress management techniques. Titles such as “How one man influences American yoga,” “Sting’s next gig: Rock’s most famous yogi makes his teaching debut,” and “Sarah Powers and Tim Miller on developing an authentic practice” accentuate yoga’s acculturation. Furthermore, when the Indian roots of yoga are mentioned, they were often framed as questions. For example, the covers asked whether one needed a guru, something that was considered a fundamental and traditional aspect of studentship in yoga. In this way, yoga evolved to a “post-lineage” form, in which consumers were less bounded by convention with regard to remaining with one charismatic authority figure (Wildcroft 2020).

Yoga wise, India was referred to mainly as a tourist site. Titles such as *A Passage to India* and “Pilgrimage to India” marked India as an inspiring spiritual destination for the yoga seeker. It was a place that held some wisdom, which could ultimately be brought “home.” This is reflected well in Beaman and Sikka’s book entitled *Constructions of Self and Other in Yoga, Travel, and Tourism* (2016). The “wisdom” referred to on the covers of *Yoga Journal* is mostly that of Ayurveda and occurs in the context of food recipes, such as “Healing Ayurvedic soups perfect for the holiday season” and “Ayurvedic tips for better digestion,” and self-care, such as “4 Ayurvedic self-care rituals for beauty” and “Guide to Ayurveda: Ancient cures for modern-day stress.” While it is often asserted that yoga and Ayurveda are “sister sciences” (Stiles 2008; Bhavanani and Ramanathan 2018), this amalgamation itself is a romantic reimagining that is not supported by the historiography of yoga and Ayurveda prior to the twentieth century (Birch 2018; Newcombe 2020). Meditation was referred to in a quarter of all the issues in this phase, in comparison to being barely being mentioned prior to 1999. When mentioned, it was largely presented as a stress reliever, in keeping with the fact that 16% of the *Yoga Journal* covers referred explicitly to “stress.”

The mature phase can best be defined as body-oriented and, more specifically, yoga posture centered. During this phase, 96% of all *Yoga Journal* covers explicitly refer to *āsana* or yoga posture. It is yoga postures, rather than yoga as a lifestyle or a philosophical discipline, that are described as having healing powers. According to the *Yoga Journal* covers, yoga postures can heal osteoporosis, chronic fatigue, and breast cancer and can also calm and “soothe the anxious mind” amid “chaos.” They can restore energy, bring happiness and joy, and create a sense of gratitude, empowerment, and self-confidence. However, if the seekers fail to embrace the healing and self-gratifying promised results, according to the journal’s covers, they can still turn to yoga postures for their more physical effects, such as reducing weight, increasing flexibility and balance, and tightening the hips. Instead of the health benefits of a yoga

practice, the magazine focuses on the yoga postures' proficiency in improving overall strength. A quarter of the *Yoga Journal* covers refer to how postures can contribute to creating more "strength," and their role in building a strong core or a "six-pack abs" is also acknowledged, with the *Yoga Journal* covers making frequent references to "core" (23%). The practice promoted on the covers could be as short as 20 min and could just include a few postures.

Body-related discourse and its connection to the growing presence of white women on the covers became even more prevalent during this phase. While more than 85% of all *Yoga Journal* covers directly mention yoga postures, more than 70% of the people depicted on the covers are women, and most of them are white women (85%). Moreover, the majority (74%) of the postures depicted on the covers are advanced postures (such as arm balances, strenuous twists, advanced backbends, and forward bends). Most of the advanced postures are demonstrated by white women (77%), and more than half (54%) of the women photographed in advanced postures are relatively thin, with less than half (44%) being muscular, and only a few (1%) curvy or heavy. Figure 1 demonstrates the increasing number of women depicted on the covers of *Yoga Journal* during the three phases discussed.

The preference for white women on the covers of *Yoga Journal* could be seen as a strategic reading of its consumer base by the editors. We know that by 2000, yoga was overwhelmingly consumed by 85% white, 72% female, 71% college educated, and 27% postgraduate educated readers (Farmer 2012). We know that by 2003, when Yoga Alliance first commissioned its now annual Yoga in American study, 83% of the 11.1 million yoga consumers were female (American Sports Data, Inc. 2003; Lamb 2006). Contemporary demographics indicate that the majority of people who consume yoga, particularly in the USA, are white, 30-something women (Park et al. 2015; Yoga Alliance 2016). *Yoga Journal* currently identifies its readership as about 70% women, 72% printed journal, and 68% digital journal (*Yoga Journal* 2020a, b). This could mean that the increase in women's representation on the covers of *Yoga Journal* during the last phase stems from marketing strategies. However, the majority of the journal's readership was female from the beginning, as its readers' surveys indicated during the

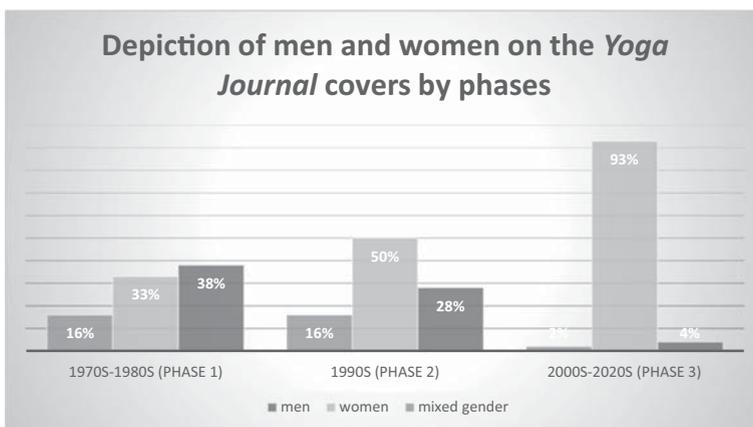


Fig. 1 The rising numbers of women depicted on the covers of *Yoga Journal* during the three phases discussed

initial phase (*Yoga Journal* 1976, 1980) that two-thirds of the respondents were women. However, since the covers only depict more women during the magazine's last phase, it is plausible that the reasons for this are not confined to readership demographics. Therefore, given that *Yoga Journal* reflects the face of contemporary yoga and given that women comprise the journal's primary audience, deciphering its messages to women is paramount.

***Yoga Journal's* Message to Women**

Yoga Journal addressed its female audience from its beginning. In its emergent phase, it addressed its female readership through special issues for women (*Yoga Journal* 1978, 1982) and other issues that featured "Women's spirituality," the "Emerging femininity," and "Woman's nature". It addressed breast cancer, bone health and osteoporosis, as well as yoga, pregnancy, and childbirth. This correlates to the rising of the natural childbirth movement (Gaskin 1975; Balaskas and Arthur 1983) and its association with yoga in the West (Newcombe 2007). While the covers do refer to dietary recommendations, these are associated with women's health (e.g., vegetarianism and Chinese medicine) rather than with fitness or outer appearance, as would be the case during later phases, when the cover titles refer to becoming flexible and having rounded bodies, aging and anti-aging, promoting beauty, achieving a stress-free life, and weight-loss. During the third phase, the journal continued to address women's issues that can be alleviated through yoga practice, such as "poses for every age" and "8 poses for happy, healthy pregnancy." Similarly to media representation of other fit bodies, the visible images of the yoga bodies on the covers of *Yoga Journal* invoke the esthetics of the healthy-looking collection (Dworkin and Wachs 2009; Markula 1995, 2014). The journal also advertised a women-only trek to the Himalayas and offered advice on fertility, breast cancer, and osteoporosis, together with anti-aging, body toning, and beauty regimes and products. Thus, *Yoga Journal* gradually diluted yoga's foreign origins in some ways and instead promoted the beauty myth (Wolf 1991).

According to Wolf's theory of the beauty myth (1991), women's magazines mediate the mass culture of women. Arguably, magazines have the power to promote ideas about what it means to be a woman, and although *Yoga Journal* does not identify itself as a women's magazine, it continues to address and focus on women's issues and accommodates women's bodies in the context of yoga practice. Since women's magazines are women oriented in content and presentation, they not only reflect social norms but also construct them. While some yoga practices are recognized as women oriented in their intent (Wittich 2017), in this context, we mean that the magazine's content, as reflected on the covers, is oriented toward women. For example, during this period, the covers included titles regarding pregnancy, menopause, menstruation, candidiasis, breast cancer, and also "Women poets in praise of the sacred." The promotion of the beauty myth, together with a specific kind of yoga body, increased over *Yoga Journal's* last two decades.

The *Yoga Journal* covers engage the female viewer to assimilate values and actions on the basis of familiarity and desire. At first glance, the covers invoke a sense of familiarity ("she looks like me"). Thornham (2003) argues that advertisements featuring women on covers tempt women to identify with the image as an object of fantasy

and desire, which then can be consumed (McRobbie 2009). Familiarity is evoked by presenting the face of the model staring straight into the reader's eyes, as if creating eye contact. It is worth noting that during the third phase, the majority of the white women depicted on the covers of *Yoga Journal* face the reader (in comparison to the early phases in which only 4 covers depict the faces of white women). The face is, arguably, the ultimate symbol of humanity and subjectivity. Levinas argued that the human face is understood as a symbolic form of communication and attention giving, which appeals to interaction with the other (Levinas 1998). Others argue that magazine covers featuring eye contact actively demand the viewer to interact with the person portrayed (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996: 122–3). It is a central theme of advertisements to depict human faces (Moser 2003: 60) and especially to use a “face making eye contact and smiling,” which is unthreatening and a “mirror image of the reader” (Owen 1992: 186). Such faces are understood to be a useful selling point of magazine covers (Iqani 2009), since they present a desirable state to aspire to (“I want to be like her”) that encourages the assimilation of values and action (“I’ll do what she does to become her”). We argue that, while the face encourages familiarity, it is the yoga body that evokes hope and action.

The yoga body, which can be recognized as health based by its outer appearance (Markula and Pringle 2006) and is also exemplified as the ideal fit feminine body (Lewis 2008), became normalized during *Yoga Journal's* mature phase, when the covers depicted mostly thin (48%) and muscular (41%) female bodies. Although only a third of the covers depicted yoga postures during the growth phase, more than half of the performers were thin white women, who performed advance postures (including postures such as *uttanāsana*, *ekapādarājapōtāsana* II, and *śīrṣāsana*). This increased even more in the magazine's last phase, when it came to predominantly depict white women demonstrating advanced yoga postures. Figure 2 demonstrates the increase in white women demonstrating postures on the covers of *Yoga Journal* according to phases, in comparison to non-white women and men. Young and thin white women have been overrepresented in women's and health magazines since the 2000s (Covert and Dixon 2008; Wasylikiw et al. 2009), which serves to encode meaning regarding the

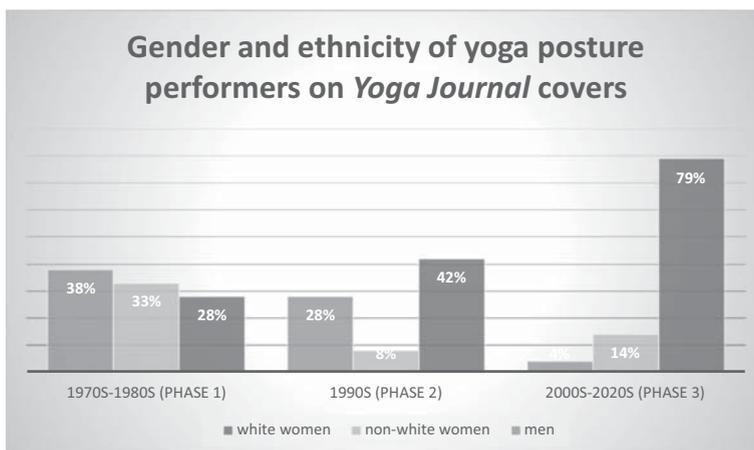


Fig. 2 The rise of white women demonstrating postures on the covers of *Yoga Journal* by phases

types of bodies that are valued and promoted by magazines (Iqani 2009) and which is related to broader issues of social power relations (Franckenstein 1997).

The normalization of the yoga body has adverse effects on women's body images and self-esteem. Exposure to idealized images of thin bodies and abled bodies has been shown to lower women's bodily functionality satisfaction and body appreciation (Alleva et al. 2016), together with their body satisfaction (Benton and Karaszia 2015; Homan et al. 2012). Moreover, emphasis on performance cues was found to elicit negative self-evaluations (Mulgrew and Tiggemann 2018; Mulgrew and Hennes 2015), increase negative mood and body dissatisfaction, and decrease state of self-esteem (Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2015). Media scholars assert that appearance-related titles correlate with traditional gender role stereotypes (Bazzini et al. 2015), which enhances bodily shame and appearance-related motivation (Aubrey 2010).

The idealized image of the yoga body has a damaging effect on the yoga community, since it reifies the dominant beauty ideals promoted in the broader media culture (Webb et al. 2017a, b). For example, curvy women were only shown four times on the journal's covers. Other magazine covers also systematically marginalize certain bodies, including anorexic, obese, pregnant, and postpartum bodies, (Ferris 2003; Iqani 2009), together with those of older women (Grove-White 2001). The exclusion of certain body types, including those of women of color, older age, disabled, and larger sized, stands in opposition to the inclusive approach represented by the earlier issues of *Yoga Journal* and its pledge to be "welcoming" by promoting an "inclusive point of view" (*Yoga Journal* 2020a). Indeed, studies show that Black women experience yoga as a predominately white space (Berger 2018), which is not always perceived to be calm and affirming (Jackson 2014).

Conclusion

This paper has sought to present a clear picture of the ways in which *Yoga Journal*, as a representative of the yoga industry, has portrayed yoga on its covers. We identified three major phases in the development of yoga's representation, which correlate to the industrial process modeling across the product and process lifecycle. Within these phases, we recognized major themes with regard to yoga's popular, uncontested, and assumed representation of itself. These included its perceived Hindu-Indian origins and its relation to social agency, especially with regard to the message it conveys to its female readership.

We discussed the ways in which yoga was initially represented as more complex and exotic and was often Orientalized and romanticized due to its Indo-dharmic origins and its compatibility with the broader New Age movement. In this initial phase, the face of yoga was Indian and male and was mainly depicted by famous Indian gurus and a small number of people (primarily white women) practicing yoga postures. Yoga's Indo-dharmic roots were emphasized less in the second phase, and by the third phase of the journal, they had been reduced to a vacation destination that provided stress-relief. This stands in contrast to the magazine's intention of "honoring" yoga's "traditions" (*Yoga Journal* 2020a, b). We identified how yoga's representation shifted into more globalized and glocalised forms, which increased the acculturation, medicalization, and industrialization of yoga. In addition, we identified the prevalence of yoga postures

and body centeredness during *Yoga Journal's* third phase, which was intentionally accompanied by a shift in gender representation on the covers.

The face of yoga is now attached to an idealized yoga body, which is white, female, thin/muscular, and able to perform advanced yoga postures. This new face of yoga has become detached from its initial complex origins and has become an advocate of the beauty myth and a social hazard. The newly formed, normalized thin white yoga body could have harmful effects on women's psyches and a damaging impact on the yoga community by creating restricting inclusion criteria based on outer appearance. This clearly contrasts with the journal's official declaration, to "meet readers wherever they are" (*Yoga Journal* 2020a, b), its pledge to be "welcoming" by promoting an "inclusive point of view" (*Yoga Journal* 2020a), and its explicit mission "to Help Make Yoga More Inclusive for All" (*Yoga Journal* 2017). We speculate that the focus on outer appearance may bring about the last phase of the yoga industry, as estimated in other "product" and "process" lifecycles, and lead to its ultimate decline. However, we do hope that the face of yoga may change and that it may cultivate greater awareness of the importance of diversity and inclusion. We intend to conduct a future analysis of further issues, including both non-English editions of *Yoga Journal* and other yoga-related magazines.

Acknowledgments The authors thank the anonymous reviewers for valuable feedback on an early draft of this manuscript.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

References

- Agarwal, A. (2020). Top 10 Yoga Magazines & Publications To Follow in 2020. Feedspot. https://blog.feedspot.com/yoga_magazines/.
- Alleva, J. M., Veldhuis, J., & Martijn, C. (2016). A pilot study investigating whether focusing on body functionality can protect women from the potential negative effects of viewing thin-ideal media images. *Body Image, 17*, 10–13.
- Alliance, Y. (2016). 2016 yoga in America study. Yoga Alliance. <https://www.yogaalliance.org/2016-yogainamericastudy>.
- Alter, J. S. (2004). *Yoga in modern India: The body between science and philosophy*. Princeton University Press.
- American Sports Data, Inc. (2003). *The superstudy of sports participation*. Hartsdale: American Sports Data, Inc..
- Aubrey, J. S. (2010). Looking good versus feeling good: An investigation of media frames of health advice and their effects on women's body-related self-perceptions. *Sex Roles, 63*, 50–63.
- Balaskas, J., & Arthur. (1983). *New life: The book of exercises for childbirth*. Sidgwick & Jackson.
- Banet-Weiser, S. (2012). *Authentic™: The politics of ambivalence in brand culture*. New York: New York University Press.
- Bazzini, D. G., Pepper, A., Swofford, R., & Cochran, K. (2015). How healthy are health magazines? A comparative content analysis of cover captions and images of women's and men's health magazine. *Sex Roles, 72*, 198–210.
- Beaman, L. G., & Sikka, S. (Eds.). (2016). *Constructions of self and other in yoga, travel, and tourism: A journey to elsewhere*. Springer.

- Benton, C., & Karazsia, B. T. (2015). The effect of thin and muscular images on women's body satisfaction. *Body Image, 13*, 22–27.
- Berger, M. T. (2018). I do practice yoga! Controlling images and recovering the black female body in 'skinny White girl' yoga culture. *Race and Yoga, 3*, 1.
- Berila, B., Klein, M., & Roberts, C. J. (2016). *Yoga, the body, and embodied social change: An intersectional feminist analysis*. Lexington Books.
- Bhavanani, A. B., & Ramanathan, M. (2018). Psychophysiology of yoga postures: Ancient and modern perspectives of Asanas. In *Research-based perspectives on the psychophysiology of yoga* (pp. 1–16). IGI Global.
- Birch, J. (2018). Premodern yoga traditions and Ayurveda. *History of Science in South Asia, 6*, 1–83.
- Cooper, K. H. (2018). The history of aerobics (50 years and still counting). *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport, 89*(2). <https://doi.org/10.1080/02701367.2018.1452469>.
- Covert, J. J., & Dixon, T. L. (2008). A changing view: representation and effects of the portrayal of women of color in mainstream women's magazines. *Communication Research, 35*(2), 232–256.
- De Michelis, E. (2004). *A history of modern yoga: Patanjali and western esotericism*. A&C Black.
- Dworkin, S. L., & Wachs, F. L. (2009). *Body panic: Gender, health, and the selling of fitness*. NYU Press.
- Farmer, J. (2012). Americanasana. *Reviews in American History, 40*(1), 145–158. <https://doi.org/10.1353/rah.2012.0016>.
- Ferris, J. E. (2003). Parallel discourses and “appropriate” bodies: media constructions of anorexia and obesity in the cases of Tracey Gold and Carnie Wilson. *Journal of Communication Inquiry, 27*(3), 256–273.
- Foxen, A. P. (2020). *Inhaling spirit harmonialism, orientalism, and the western roots of modern yoga*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Franckenstein, F. (1997). Making up Cher: A media analysis of the politics of the female body. In *The European Journal of Women's Studies*. Vol. 4, 7–22.
- Frith, K., Shaw, P., & Cheng, H. (2005). The construction of beauty: a cross-cultural analysis of women's magazine advertising. *Journal of Communication, 55*(1), 56–70.
- Gaskin, I. M. (1975). *Spiritual midwifery*. Tennessee: Summertown.
- Grove-White, A. (2001). No rules, only choices? Repositioning the self within the fashion system in relation to expertise and meaning: a case study of colour and image consultancy. *Journal of Material Culture, 6*(2), 193–211.
- Homan, K., McHugh, E., Wells, D., Watson, C., & King, C. (2012). The effect of viewing ultra-fit images on college women's body dissatisfaction. *Body Image, 9*(1), 50–56.
- Horton, C. A., & Harvey, R. (Eds.). (2012). *21st century yoga: Culture, politics, and practice*. Kleio Books.
- Iqani, M. (2009). *Consumer magazine covers in the public realm*. (doctoral dissertation). London School of Economics and Political Science. United Kingdom.
- Jackson, C. A. (2014). *Developing critical inner literacy: Reading the body, the word, and the world* (doctoral dissertation). Emory University.
- Jacobsen, K. A. (2018). *Yoga in modern Hinduism: Hariharānanda Āraṇya and sāmkyayoga*. New York: Routledge.
- Jain, A. (2020). *Peace, love, yoga: The politics of global spirituality*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Jankowski, G. S., Fawcner, H., Slater, A., & Tiggemann, M. (2014). Appearance potent? A content analysis of UK gay and straight men's magazines. *Body Image, 11*(4), 474–481.
- Joshi, P. (2018). Do you really know the true meaning of yoga? Thoughts from a British Indian Yogi. *Yoga Journal*. <https://www.yogajournal.com/yoga-101/the-true-meaning-of-yoga-thoughts-from-a-british-indian-yogi>.
- Klein, M. C., & Guest-Jelley, A. (2014). *Yoga and body image: 25 personal stories about beauty, bravery & loving your body*. Llewellyn Worldwide.
- Kress, G. R., & Van Leeuwen, T. (1996). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design*. Psychology Press.
- Lamb, T. (2006). *Yoga statistics and demographics*. Prescott: International Association of Yoga Therapists <https://c.ymcdn.com/sites/iaiyt.site-ym.com/resource/resmgr/bibliographies-members/stats.pdf>.
- Levinas, E. (1998). *Entre nous: On thinking-of-the-other*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lewis, D. (2008). *Convention: A philosophical study*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Lucia, A. (2018). Saving yogis: Spiritual nationalism and the proselytizing missions of global yoga. In B. E. Brown & B. S. A. Yeoh (Eds.), *Asian migrants and religious experience: From missionary journeys to labor mobility* (pp. 35–70). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Maclaran, P. (2009). Postmodern marketing and beyond. In E. Parsons & P. Maclaran (Eds.), *Contemporary issues in marketing and consumer behaviour* (pp. 37–54). Oxford: Elsevier.
- Markula, P. (1995). Firm but shapely, fit but sexy, strong but thin: the postmodern aerobicizing female bodies. *Sociology of Sport Journal, 12*(4), 424–453.

- Markula, P. (2014). Reading yoga: Changing discourses of postural yoga on yoga journal covers. *Communication & Sport*, 2(2), 143–171.
- Markula, P., & Pringle, R. (2006). *Foucault, sport and exercise: Power, Knowledge and transforming the self*. Routledge.
- McCartney, P. (2019a). Spiritual bypass and entanglement in Yogaland: How neoliberalism, soft Hindutva and banal nationalism facilitate yoga fundamentalism. *Politics and Religion*, 13(1), 137–175.
- McCartney, P. (2019b). Stretching into the shadows: Unlikely alliances, strategic syncretism, and De-post-colonizing Yogaland's Yogatopia(s). *Asian Ethnology*, 78(2), 373–401.
- McRobbie, A. (2009). *The aftermath of feminism: Gender, culture and social change*. Sage.
- Moser, M. (2003). *United we brand: How to create a cohesive brand that's seen, heard, and remembered*. Harvard Business Press.
- Mulgrew, K. E., & Hennes, S. M. (2015). The effect of functionality- and aesthetic-focused images on Australian women's body satisfaction. *Sex Roles*, 72(3–4), 127–139.
- Mulgrew, K. E., & Tiggemann, M. (2018). Form or function: Does focusing on body functionality protect women from body dissatisfaction when viewing media images? *Journal of Health Psychology*, 23(1), 84–94.
- Newcombe, S. (2005). Spirituality and 'mystical religion' in contemporary society: a case study of British practitioners of the Iyengar method of yoga. *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 20(3), 305–322.
- Newcombe, S. (2020). Connecting the threads: the convergence of yoga and Ayurveda from 1900-present. AyurYog blog. University of Vienna. <http://www.ayuryog.org/blog/connecting-threads-convergence-yoga-and-ayurveda-1900-present>.
- Newcombe, S. (2007). Stretching for health and well-being: Yoga and women in Britain, 1960-1980. *Asian medicine*, 3(1), 37–63.
- Owen, W. (1992). *Modern magazine design*. Dubuque: WMC Brown.
- Park, C. L., Braun, T., & Siegel, T. (2015). Who practices yoga? A systematic review of demographic, health-related, and psychosocial factors associated with yoga practice. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 38(3), 460–471.
- Pyysiäinen, J., D. Halpin & A. Guilfoyle. (2017). Neoliberal governance and 'responsibilization' of agents: Reassessing the mechanisms of responsibility-shift in neoliberal discursive environments. *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory*, 18(2), 215–235. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1600910X.2017.1331858>.
- Singleton, M. (2010). *Yoga body: the origins of modern posture practice*. Oxford University Press.
- Singleton, M., & Goldberg, E. (Eds.). (2013). *Gurus of modern yoga*. Oxford university press.
- Sparowe, L. (2014). Coming home to the body: Can yoga help or hinder. In M. Klein (Ed.), *Yoga and Body Image: 25 personal stories about beauty, bravery & loving your body*. Llewellyn Worldwide.
- Stiles, M. (2008). *Ayurvedic yoga therapy*. Lotus Press.
- Subramaniam, B. (2019). *Holy science: the biopolitics of Hindu nationalism*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Telej, E., & Gamble, J. (2019). Yoga wellness tourism: a study of marketing strategies in India. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 36(6), 794–805. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCM-07-2018-2788>.
- Thornham, S. (2003). A good body the case of/for feminist media studies. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 6(1), 75–94.
- Tiggemann, M., & Zaccardo, M. (2015). Exercise to be fit, not skinny: the effect of fitspiration imagery on women's body image. *Body Image*, 15, 61–67.
- Vinoski, E. R., Webb, J. E., Warren-Findlow, J., Brewer, K. A., & Kiffmeyer, K. A. (2017). Got yoga?: a longitudinal analysis of thematic content and models' appearance-related attributes in advertisements spanning four decades of yoga journal. *Body Image*, 21, 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2017.01.006>.
- Wasylikiw, L., Emms, A. A., Meuse, R., & Poirier, K. F. (2009). Are all models created equal? A content analysis of women in advertisements of fitness versus fashion magazines. *Body Image*, 6(2), 137–140.
- Webb, J. E., Vinoski, E. R., Warren-Findlow, J., Padro, M. P., Burris, E. N., & Suddreth, E. M. (2017a). Is the yoga Bod' the new skinny?: a comparative content analysis of mainstream yoga lifestyle magazine covers. *Body Image*, 20, 87–98. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2016.11.005>.
- Webb, J. E., Vinoski, E. R., Warren-Findlow, J., Padro, M. P., Burris, E. N., & Suddreth, E. M. (2017b). Downward dog becomes fit body, inc.: a content analysis of 40 years of female cover images of yoga Journal. *Body Image*, 22, 129–135. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2017.07.001>.
- Wildcroft, T. (2020). *Post-lineage yoga: From guru to #MeToo*. Equinox Publishing.
- Wittich, A. (2017). Iyengar yoga for women: A Practising tradition in the making. *Religions of South Asia*, 11(2–3), 231–253.
- Wolf, N. (1991). *The beauty myth: How images of beauty are used against women*. Harper Collins.

- Yoga Journal. (1976). Issue 11. <https://books.google.co.jp/books?id=3esDAAAAMBAJ&lpg=PA2&dq=yoga%20journal%20issue%2011&pg=PA2#v=onepage&q=yoga%20journal%20issue%2011&f=false>.
- Yoga Journal. (1978). Issue 20. https://books.google.co.jp/books?id=wesDAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.
- Yoga Journal. (1980). Issue 30. <https://books.google.co.jp/books?id=X-sDAAAAMBAJ&lpg=PA1&pg=PA1#v=onepage&q&f=false>.
- Yoga Journal. (1982). Issue 44. <https://books.google.co.il/books?id=4OsDAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=yoga+journal&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwisqr6Gw8PjAhWoQkEAHXaCDNg4WhDoAQg9MAU#v=onepage&q=yoga%20journal&f=false>.
- Yoga Journal. (2017). Issue 291. <https://www.yogajournallibrary.com/view/issue/291/>.
- Yoga Journal. (2019). International Editions. <https://www.yogajournal.com/page/yoga-journal-international-editions>.
- Yoga Journal. (2020a). About Us. <https://www.yogajournal.com/page/about-us>.
- Yoga Journal. (2020b). Media kit. <https://www.yogajournal.com/page/advertise>.

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.