AIN'T I A YOGI?: A CRITICAL EXPLORATION OF SYMBOLIC AND SOCIAL BOUNDARIES IN THE YOGA WORLD

by

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ABSTRACT

TEMEKA BROOKS. Ain't I a yogi?: A Critical exploration of boundaries in the yoga world. (Under the direction of DR. VAUGHN SCHMUTZ)

Recent sociological research considers the relationship between social and symbolic boundaries in a variety of social contexts. In this study, I build on such research by exploring how such boundaries are reproduced and potentially bridged in ostensibly inclusive spaces. To do so, I explore how Black yoginis, or female yoga practitioners, experience, interpret and navigate social and symbolic boundaries as well as the mechanisms that (re)produce or bridge them. Data collection consists of a brief survey, participant observation in yoga studios and schools, and semi-structured interviews with experienced practitioners. Data were analyzed thematically following an inductive approach, employing quasi-grounded theory methods. Findings suggest yoga world boundaries are created and reproduced through conventions of religion, assumptions of authenticity via consumerism and traditional media, and aesthetic values related to racial marking and size. Bridging occurs through social media, adaptable hooks, strategic selection, organizational diversity, and the role of instructors. I extend the boundaries literature by identifying several boundary bridging mechanisms in the yoga world that may be relevant to other social settings. This study is significant because it broadens scholarly understanding of boundary processes as they are experienced, interpreted, and navigated by Black women in yoga worlds, a collectively devalued status group in American society that may also shed light on patterns of exclusion and inclusion among marginalized groups in other contexts.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Sociological research has considered the complex relationship between social and symbolic boundaries in a variety of social worlds. Symbolic boundaries are cultural distinctions, often implicit, that categorize people, practices, objects, time and space (Lamont and Molnar, 2002). Social boundaries denote social differences that are linked to an unequal distribution of resources and opportunities and are typically based on perceived immutable facts such as race and sex, for example (Lamont and Molnar, 2002). Although analytically distinct, social boundaries tend to be similar to or overlap with symbolic boundaries (Lamont and Molnar, 2002). Racial boundaries are an example of a pervasive social distinction in American society that is associated with both unequal access to resources and power (i.e., social boundaries) as well as a set of cultural beliefs and assumptions (i.e., symbolic boundaries) that legitimate and reproduce a racial hierarchy. Scholarship on these concepts provides insights into individual and group identity formation, social inclusion, and inequalities. In this study, I explore the relationship between social and symbolic boundaries in the yoga world. I consider how social boundaries of race are linked to symbolic boundaries based on conventions of authenticity and aesthetic value in this ostensibly inclusive space. More specifically, I explore how Black yoginis experience, interpret, and navigate yoga world boundaries.

On one hand, the yoga world is a space of perceived inclusivity with the potential to bridge social boundaries. On the other hand, the prevailing image of a yogi[1] in American culture is a thin, White, affluent, and hyper-flexible woman (Berila, Klein and

[1] A practitioner of yoga who practices regularly, both on and off the mat that strives to or has fully adopted all 8-limbs of yoga philosophy into their lifestyle

Jackson-Roberts, 2016; Jackson-Roberts, 2017). In other words, the symbolic distinctions associated with an authentic yogi are often tacitly linked to social boundaries established by race, gender, and body type. This mismatch of philosophy and practice can be illuminated by a study of the boundary processes at work in this space, which leads to the following questions. First, how do symbolic and social boundaries interact in the experiences of Black yoginis in the metropolitan North Carolina yoga world? Second, what are the mechanisms that create, reproduce, or bridge said boundaries in these spaces?

There is limited sociological attention to bridging processes in the study of boundary work and to the mechanisms that drive the creation, maintenance, and reproduction of boundaries within ostensibly inclusive spaces. I address such gaps in this study of Black yoginis in North Carolina (BYNC) and look to the possible bounding and/or bridging mechanisms at play in the cultural experiences and perceptions of BYNC within the yoga world. Focusing on Black women as the individual unit of analysis is important because as a status group, Black women in America have been systematically devalued, seen and treated as generally 'less than' in society, which may lead to an underrepresentation and devaluation of them in the yoga world.

The underrepresentation and devaluation of Black women results primarily from the racialized formation of American culture, past and present. A racialized culture is one that consists of hierarchical socially constructed racial categories that underlie sociocultural organizations, institutions and interactions (Bonilla-Silva, 2015, 1994; Hill-Collins, 1986; hooks, 1981; Samson and Bobo, 2014). The hierarchical classifications

resulting from racialization appear to systematically and culturally normalize and make salient the pervasive negative and boundary creating attitudes and behaviors ascribed to Black women. This is significant because yoga is meant to be a practice of inclusivity and if institutionalized issues, such as racial boundaries, are permeating its practice, the issue must be addressed and hopefully remedied. Because of the innumerable connections between race and culture, analyzing the relationship between symbolic boundary processes and social boundaries based on race remains an important scholarly task. This project extends cultural sociological literature by addressing the mechanisms that may symbolically bridge and/or reproduce intersecting symbolic and social boundaries in seemingly inclusive spaces of cultural production.

LITERATURE REVIEW

WHAT IS YOGA?

Before turning to the cultural sociological literature on social and symbolic boundaries, I will first provide a brief introduction to yoga, particularly with respect to its practice in the United States. Yoga in its classic form focuses on going inward more than the focus on physical fitness that is central to much mainstream modern American yoga (Newcombe, 2009). It was established by marginalized inhabitants of India seeking solace from persecution and inequality on a spiritual level (Newcombe, 2009). The foundational 8-limbs of yoga are (1) yamas, which consist of five virtuous restraints: ahimsa (doing no harm), satya (truth), asteya (not stealing), bramhacharya (control of the senses), and aparagriha (not hoarding possessions), (2) niyamas, which consist of five virtuous observances: soucha (cleanliness/purity), santosha (contentment), tapas (purification), svadyaya (introspection), and ishvarapranidhana (surrender to the divine/spiritual devotion)] (3) asana (postures), (4) pranayama (the life force breath), (5) pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses from external objects), (6) dharana (concentration) (7) dhyana (meditative state), (8) samadhi (total enlightenment) (Eswaran, 2007). They are the guidelines for living a life of human empathy and detachment from desires (such as greed, fear and hate) and the foundation of much yoga philosophy and practice.

Western adoption of yoga, however, has shifted the perception of what yoga is, who practices it, and how it is practiced, to coincide with the racialized consumerist culture (Berila, Klein and Jackson Roberts, 2016; Newcombe, 2009). This may have implications for all that does not fit the Westernized definitions of yogis and yoga

practice(s)—especially those individuals from groups historically marginalized within and by Western cultural boundaries (symbolic and social), in this case BYNC. This study aims to explore how the resulting mechanisms may interact in the way BYNC experience, interpret, and navigate yoga world boundaries.

In looking to the connections of race with social and symbolic boundaries such as socially constructed definitions of authenticity and aesthetic values, scholars have found evidence of shared conventions employed as mechanisms of symbolic boundaries. For example, the belief that the standard of beauty is defined and measured by whiteness and size, or that an authentic Blues musician is a poor Black male from the deep south—regardless of reality (Grazian, 2004; Pachucki, Pendergrass and Lamont, 2007; Mears, 2009). Aesthetic values are categorizations based on sensory responses such as sight, sound and smell (Wohl, 2015). Authenticity is defined by subjective understandings of what is good and real. From explorations of the Chicago Blues scene to the Western fashion worlds to erotic art worlds and that of literature, cultural production scholarship has shown how boundaries are created and reproduced in art worlds as shared conventions of authenticity and aesthetics through institutional practices (Becker, 1982; Grazian, 2004; Pachucki, Pendergrass and Lamont, 2007; Mears, 2009; 2010; Chong, 2010; Wohl, 2015).

To do this, I first provide a summary of art worlds and conceptualize 'yoga worlds,' then I review scholarship on social and symbolic boundaries in cultural production, specifically exploring how race interacts with aesthetics, authenticity and boundary bridging processes in cultural production. 7

YOGA WORLDS

Drawing on Becker's (1982) seminal analysis, where he describes art worlds as interconnected networks of individuals and institutions that create and reproduce culture, I define "yoga worlds" as the many disjointed groups of yogis/yoginis as well as supporting organizations and institutions that produce and reproduce this yoga culture. Although this diverse group of actors in the yoga world are differentially categorized by style, location, and other symbolic distinctions, they are united by a certain set of shared conventions. Yoga worlds, like all art worlds, require multiple collaborators to maintain their existence, including yoga instructors and "serious" yogis as cultural producers—those who reproduce the norms, values and practices; yoga certification boards, schools and studios as legitimating gate keepers; and yoga students, people who purchase yoga "props" (e.g. mats, blocks, straps and other yoga-centered fitness equipment), literature (books, videos, online subscriptions) and attire (e.g. brand name yoga-specific pants and tops) as intermediary consumers of yoga culture (Becker, 1982; Beria, Intro 2016; Grazian, 2004; Mears, 2009).

In *Art Worlds* (1982), Becker offers insight into the mechanisms that generate cooperation among art world producers, patrons (audiences) and support personnel, notably "conventions" (Becker, 1982). Defining them as the rules and standards of interaction and group solidarity, conventions are thought to explicitly create and sustain symbolic boundaries by making cultural capital available to those who have, embrace, use and reproduce the correct combination of conventions; and, for those unfamiliar, bounding occurs (Becker, 1982). These conventions may also reproduce and support

social boundaries on an implicit level as well. For the purposes of this study, race is the primary social category of focus that may produce different experiences, interpretations and navigations related to yoga world boundaries and my aim is to understand how the conventions of the yoga world may produce boundaries that are experienced differently based on race.

Since Becker's seminal work, sociological studies of art worlds have shown that various elements of culture, including boundary processes and cultural norms, are (re)produced collaboratively (Lamont and Molnar, 2002; Grazian, 2004; Mears, 2009; Santos, 2009; Wohl, 2016). Scholars have found that race is often a determinant of social exclusion underlying symbolic exclusions expressed as sociocultural conventions of aesthetics, and authenticity (Grazian, 2004; Mears, 2009; Chong, 2010; Pachucki, Pendergrass and Lamont, 2007).

YOGA WORLD CONVENTIONS

In this study, I focus on two broad types of conventions in the yoga world: assumptions of authenticity and aesthetic values and distinctions. A review of the relevant literature makes it clear that authenticity and aesthetic judgments often overlap in scholarship. Aesthetic values may include elements of authenticity in the way individuals, groups and organizations may rely on the distinctions to define authenticity and vice versa. While this may not always be the case, the supporting research for this study reflects this reality. In this section, I review some key scholarship related to authenticity and aesthetic values to explain how I distinguish between the two analytically.

Assumptions of Authenticity

Authenticity, or subjective understandings of what is good and real, is a concept commonly used to describe several cultural practices from the visual arts to music and literature to name a few. Scholarship on this concept has shown that however defined, authenticity is constructed and replicated through shared conventions of what is "good," "legitimate," and "real" (see Adams and Bettis, 2003; Banks, 2010; Chong, 2010; Fleming and Roses, 2007; and Grazian, 2004). For example, Clay (2003) found that Black youth employ hip-hop culture conventions to (re)produce shared definitions of authentic blackness. Another recent study shows how the "Blues world" relies on static conventions of authentic blues world experiences and artists, where artists are Black, mostly male, downtrodden, lower class individuals regardless of their actual socioeconomic status and blues clubs as dilapidated and "divey" (Grazian, 2004). A convention reproduced collaboratively by Blues world consumers (patrons of blues clubs), producers (musicians), and gatekeepers (business owners) Grazian's analysis reflects the interactive efforts employed to ensure Blues world boundaries are reproduced by all actors, including cultural gatekeepers, producers and consumers alike. Grazian informs the collaborative boundary work being done to maintain boundaries of exclusion by race, class and gender. While these studies highlight the reproduction of authenticity, others inform the mechanisms used to counter boundaries created by conventions of authenticity. Because of this, I believe some BYNC as cultural producers in the yoga world may use their personal and professional yoga practice to challenge and/or escape the assumptions of authenticity borne from the negative ascribed statuses and imposed on them by racial boundaries that have historically excluded them from equitable cultural

participation both directly and symbolically in the yoga world. Critical race and cultural scholars have shown how cultural outsiders employ creative interpretive strategies to counter boundaries in academia and the underground hip hop world of Chicago (Harkness, 2012; Hill-Collins, 1986). For example, in the hip hop world, where blackness is a key marker of authenticity, White underground artists redefine definitions of authenticity by highlighting "being true to one's self" to counter the race-based boundaries that demarcate them as inauthentic (Harkness, 2012). I look to how the pervasive socially constructed "outsider within status" may lead to the creation of alternative strategies to reorder narratives of authenticity in the inclusive yoga world.

Feminist studies illustrate how women in subcultural art worlds challenge boundaries of authenticity. Welch (2015) shows how Black women who were excluded from Miss America pageant participation because of their race, motivating them to employ cultural participation—creating the Miss Black America pageant that coincided with White women boycotting the original Miss America pageant in protest of against sexism—to challenge the boundaries that mark Black women as inferior in relation to White women regarding authentic beauty. Welch's work aligns with Banks (2010) who shows how boundaries interact in how cultural membership is differentially experienced, interpreted and navigated among Black middle-class art consumers. Both Welch (2015) and Banks (2010) argue, as I do, that marginalized people may strategically navigate the exclusionary boundaries in order to create their own definitions of authenticity. Symbolic boundaries of authenticity often link to social boundaries of race and affect cultural experiences, interpretations and navigations of cultural worlds. Next, I discuss

connections between my study and research on aesthetic values as a type of symbolic boundary in various cultural fields.

Aesthetic Distinctions and Values

Aesthetic distinctions are symbolic categorizations based on sensory responses such as sight and sound that "make up an important part of the body of conventions by means of which members of art worlds collaborate to participate in and produce culture (Becker, 1982, p. 131)". Aesthetic values refer to those distinctions made salient and institutionalized by yoga world collaborators. Research on aesthetic boundaries supports the notion that institutionalized conventions in cultural participation and production are linked to social boundaries (race, class, and gender for example) (Pachucki, Pendergrass, and Lamont, 2007). I review research on aesthetic principles and judgments as the evaluative processes that strengthen or weaken one's sense of in-group belonging (Wohl, 2015).

Aesthetic values are evident in the Chicana (Mexican American woman) tattoo art world where women, in redefining countercultural identity formations, become literal canvases by wearing tattoos as resistance to racialized heteronormative boundaries of femininity (Santos, 2009). Their active resistance breaks boundary-making patriarchal conventions within the Chicano/a community that work to exclude them from full cultural participation (Santos, 2009). They are equally present in the mainstream literary world as critics use writers' racial backgrounds as markers of distinction and value in literature, however unnecessary it has proven to be in authenticating "good" works

(Chong, 2010). These racial markers as aesthetic boundary making mechanisms may also affect BYNC yoga world experiences as cultural producers.

Racial marking has proven to be a mechanism of aesthetic distinctions and these distinctions serve as conventions of cultural practice in many areas of American social life (see Chong, 2010; Fleming, Lamont, and Welburn, 2012; Jimenez, Fields, and Schachter, 2015; Mears, 2009). These ideas are supported by Chong's (2010) conceptualization of marking—how social differences are reflected in language. I explore marking in cultural practices as reflections of social differences of race. In addition, although her work does not address issues of race explicitly, Wohl (2015) finds that aesthetic judgments are the symbolic means for developing and maintaining community sense—the main expression of group identity. This concept informs my own conceptualization of racial aesthetic values as the multifaceted, affective mechanisms that are intersubjectively created and validated in group identity formations based on racial markers. I look to the effects of aesthetic distinctions, including racial marking in BYNC yoga world experiences.

Cultural studies reveal elements of racism, including the idealization of White women as the standard of beauty and femininity being maintained and reproduced following conventions of aesthetic values (e.g., race, size, age) as status indicators in consumer industries (Adams and Bettis, 2009; Hodes, 1993; Mears, 2009; Grazian, 2004; Washington, 2006. For example, Mears (2009) finds that the modeling world reproduces inequitable standards of beauty by implicitly and explicitly defining whiteness, higher status and being very thin as fashionable, beautiful, and normal. Mears's study does not

identify strategies of boundary bridging; however, it only notes an acute awareness of the reproduction of boundaries and the conventions being used to justify them.

These studies reveal how unequal cultural elements are reproduced in art worlds that affect identity formations, revealing the globally pervasive effects of social inequalities based on race, body type, and sex/gender (Mears, 2009). Studies on the fashion art world correlate to those of the tattoo art world, as they find that art world cultural producers rely on Anglo-centric conventions and stereotypes in their socially constructed (re)production of femininity in fashion (see Mears, 2009; Santos, 2009). Aesthetic distinctions and values are often complemented by those of authenticity and my research seeks to identify if and how they link with social boundaries and interact in yoga world cultural production as I explore the general interactions of boundaries in the experiences of BYNC.

BRIDGING

Although limited, cultural research is beginning to shed more light on the processes of bridging boundaries. Pugh (2010), investigates how children do boundary work to relate to each other and belong, contrasting most literature that suggests symbolic boundaries are a means of distinction. The adults in the study were found to use boundary work as processes of distinction. The children, whether consciously or not, appear to break the convention of boundary work as a marker of difference, and use it to instill feelings of relational sameness among their peers. Her work supports the possibility that BYNC use facework—especially contesting and bridging—to create sameness (bridge) and/or contest boundaries they experience. Although Pugh's study explicitly applies this

process to children, my study looks to find whether the same can be found for adults in inclusive spaces, as well as a deeper understanding of BYNC boundary work and what mechanisms potentially employed—if any—to bridge exclusionary boundaries with or because of their yoga practice.

Scholars have addressed marginalized groups enacting and asserting in-group solidarity and racial identity through cultural participation among the Black middle class (Banks, 2010; Fleming and Roses, 2007; Welch, 2015). Within this group, cultural participation becomes a show of racial solidarity in the form of supporting and valorizing Black cultural producers who have historically been restricted from full cultural participation (Banks, 2010). Though not always explicitly argued, cultural participation and production appears to bridge social boundaries related to race and aesthetic (symbolic) boundaries that exclude Black artists/artwork from mainstream perceptions of what is "good" art (Banks, 2010). Fleming and Roses (2007) conduct an analysis of one Black middle-class organization's work to counter racism and normalize Black artists/art in mainstream art worlds. Their historical and sociocultural analysis on Black cultural capitalists in early 20th century Boston art worlds sheds light on processes of bridging social boundaries at a time when the social climate was racially volatile. Seeing the potential for social and symbolic boundary bridging, my study explores an exploration of cultural participation as a potential mechanism of bridging boundary work.

DATA & METHOD

I explore how BYNC experience, interpret and navigate social and symbolic boundaries in the ostensibly inclusive yoga world through a phenomenological study. Data collection consisted of field work that included a demographic survey, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews.

PARTICIPANTS

To recruit eligible participants, I posted requests for participation in three private social media groups for Black yogis/yoginis in North Carolina—two on Facebook, one on Instagram. (see Appendix D and E for Requests for Participation scripts). I am a member of all three groups, which is how I initially gained access to the members of the groups. The request was posted for all members of the group, with instructions to contact me directly to retain anonymity. Ultimately, all but one participant was recruited from two of the three groups. This single participant was recruited via snowball sampling during a recruited participant's teacher training at which she was a student. See Appendix E for in-person request for participation script.

To be considered an eligible BYNC, potential participants must be Black women that at the time of the study were over 21 years of age, living in a metropolitan North Carolina area, have practiced yoga for at least three years and additionally fall into at least one of the following categories:

a) Current/former Yoga Alliance® registered yoga teacher (RYT)
b) BYNC teachers in training (yoginis currently working towards becoming certified teachers)

c) Alternatively, certified BYNC (yoginis registered with non-Yoga Alliance certifying organizations)

d) Entrepreneurial BYNC (e.g. yoga-related business owners; including: schools, spiritual centers, studios, retail shops, etc.)

Registration and/or teacher training with Yoga Alliance ® is useful for understanding how intra-status group cultural producers that are trained and/or practicing under similar sets of standards and conventions may differentially experience the same phenomenon such as being yoga instructors.

Participants ranged in age between 28-57 years. As shown in Table 1, the sample was fairly diverse in terms of age with multiple participants in their 20s, 30s, 40s, and 50s. There was also considerable variation in the teaching status of respondents in the sample. Four BYNC teach full time, four teach part time, and two are yoga teachers in training that are already teaching at least part time (one is certified to teach through Aerobics and Fitness Association of America (AFAA) The two teachers in training both expect to complete their programs by summer 2018.

The women in this study are mostly middle to upper-middle class and have at least a bachelor's degree apart from one participant who completed some college and holds a certification in massage therapy. Much of the sample fits the characteristics put forth by Banks (2009) as criteria to be identified as "Black middle class" including being college educated, holding white collar employment, and/or earning income at least twice the poverty level (see Table 1 below).

Table 1. Demographics for Study Participants

SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS		
		N = 9
Age	21-30	2
	31-40	2
	41-50	2
	51-60	3
Teaching Status	Full Time Instructor	3
	Part Time Instructor	4
	Studio/School Owner	3
	Yoga Teacher Training	2
Education Attainment	Some College	1
	Bachelor's Degree	4
	Master's Degree	5
	Doctoral/Professional Degree	1
Annual income	$10,001-$40k	2
	$40,001-$65k	1
	$65,001-$80k	0
	$80,001-$105k	1
	More than $105k	4
	Prefer not to answer	1

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

To protect participants and ensure their individual needs are met as participants in the study, this project was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of UNC Charlotte. I obtained informed consent from each confirmed participant in this study. Project goals (verbally and in writing), data collection and use were explained thoroughly at the level of participants understanding. I informed participants of their right to access full transcripts, findings and reports upon request. To protect anonymity, pseudonyms are used in place of actual names of participants and places in the study.

DATA

Data consist of a brief pen-and-paper demographic survey, descriptive field notes from participant observation, and semi-structured interviews.

Demographic Survey

The questionnaire served to gather demographic information, general yoga experience, opinions and attitudes about class/teacher selection, and racial dynamics in yoga prior to our interview. Overall, the survey provided beneficial descriptive data on participants' attitudes about yoga world behaviors, conventions, and inclusiveness. See Appendix A for the full questionnaire.

Participant Observation

Participant observation consisted of observing classes with a focus on teaching styles and teacher-student interactions. Observations gave me a deeper understanding of how BYNC experience the yoga world in a natural setting, providing clear context of how they are navigating this space. Handwritten or audio-recorded field notes were transcribed in a word processing program. I observed approximately 15 hours of BYNC teaching classes, conducting teacher trainings, and engaging in yoga business management. See Appendix B for observation guide.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews were structured around four broad concepts—conventions, authenticity, aesthetic values, and bridging—that enabled me to explore BYNC experiences and attitudes about yoga world boundaries they encountered as consumers, producers, and gatekeepers. All interviews were conducted face-to-face. I measured

BYNC perceptions of these concepts via targeted questions related to class structure and teaching norms, teaching style, perceptions of inclusion, authenticity, and alternative styles. To assess BYNC sentiments on yoga's potential for bridging boundaries, questions on perceived inclusiveness, power to challenge racial inequality, and whether their own yoga practice has shifted their views of people of diverse backgrounds/physical traits. There was much overlap between concepts and questions (e.g. questions measuring conventions that simultaneously measured perceptions of authenticity). I conducted interviews with nine participants (N=9). Each interview lasted 45-120 minutes, was audio recorded and transcribed. See Appendix C for the full interview guide.

SETTING

Observations and interviews occurred at various public and private (in-home) yoga studios in two metropolitan North Carolina cities. The cities selected have burgeoning yoga worlds. Data collection and analysis took place between November 2017 and March 2018.

ANALYSIS

Following an inductive approach, I read field notes and interview transcripts thoroughly numerous times and conducted a thematic analysis (Bernard, 2006; Braun and Clarke, 2006). I performed open coding for emergent themes related to the broad concepts. Once major themes were identified, comparisons across the transcripts via axial coding were then made, followed by systematic selective coding to determine a core category from the data. Throughout the analysis, analytic memos were written and coded to organize and systematically analyze the data as themes emerged.

RESEARCHER'S ROLE

As principal investigator, I collected all data firsthand. Due to my insider status as a BYNC and registered yoga teacher (RYT), I brought my own biases to the project, including assumptions of a) inclusivity in yoga worlds, b) of the commodification of traditional yoga culture in the West, and c) that social inequalities based on intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality remain problematic in American society. I believe my biases drove my objectivity in data collection and analysis as a yoga world cultural consumer and producer who is personally and professionally invested in right understanding of the philosophy and business of yoga, including sharing insights that lead to more inclusion in yoga world consumption and production. Although a cultural insider, the interview guide ensured consistency across participants.

FINDINGS

RACIALIZATION IN AMERICAN CULTURE

A consistent theme that came up in conversations to explain the boundaries BYNC encountered in the yoga world has to do with the broader role of race in American culture. Racialization, the social creation of racial categories that underlie all sociocultural interactions, is a key element impacting how BYNC experience, interpret and navigate boundaries in yoga world cultural participation, according to most respondents (Bonilla-Silva, 1994; Samson and Bobo, 2014). Inductively found to underlie feelings of inequality and unity alike in the yoga world, I found racialization reproduces social exclusions, identity formations, assumptions of authenticity, and aesthetic distinctions and values made by and about BYNC as yoga cultural consumers, producers and gatekeepers. This boundary forming process is based on hierarchical social categorizations that impact how Black women are perceived and treated in society. Their effects are expressed by Renee, a 48-year-old instructor, licensed therapist, and Reiki master who remarks on the differences between Black and White people in social interaction.

> "Every White person don't interact with Black people. We think just because in our world, we always got some Black [read White] person somewhere. But many of us as Black, we always have White people around. Some White people can live in worlds where they don't have to live around Black people! So, it's not really intentionally racial…So, I don't think a lot of times it's necessarily that they're being racial. They just may not have really—you can tell the difference between a White person that's had a lot of interaction with Black people and they're comfortable. Compared to those who do distant or maybe a co-worker, you know, had that interaction. But many don't. in their world, they don't really have to interact with us."

Renee's response reflects the attitude many BYNC have about the social inequalities based on racialized categories that create marked differences between racial groups in every area of social interaction from institutional to cultural interactions (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; 1994; Lamont and Fournier, 1992). Cleo, a vibrant 35-year old full-time instructor that has a spunky, intelligent, comedic and racially conscious attitude, defines her yoga world experience through a lens of racialization and size boundaries that she believes affects her real and perceived yoga world identity as an authentic practitioner and instructor. She describes the bounding effects of social and symbolic American racialization and its subsequent creation of hierarchical categories that produce exclusionary boundary making processes:

> "…We are told by White women, just be a part of our feminist movement and you shut your Black ass problems up. We told by Black men, you just be a part of our Black movement and you shut your feminist ass ideas up. Like, we're told by White men, you ain't shit [scoff laughs]. I don't even—who are you even [laughs] so it's like, we're a double minority and often…We are magic. 'Cause we push we push the culture forward…and I feel like sisters are getting to a point where they're like, I ain't puttin' up wit' yo shit Susan [sic] or yours Quant—you know, Quentin, (in conspiratorial tone) none of you niggas!" [laughs] and I'm here for it. Like I'm here for it. The boldest most radical thing you can do is be proud of yourself and have self-esteem. And not give it to somebody else. So yeah, I think those things are definitely needed."

Cleo's response speaks to the hierarchical overt and implicit gendered racialization by which Black women have been categorized into third-class citizen status. At the top of the hierarchy are White men; additionally, Black men and White women share the second "class" interchangeably, depending on the era and current sociocultural policy or practice (hooks, 1981). This social tug-of-war she describes is one Black women have been forced to play between Black men and White women and the related historical connection

between Black women and marginalization appears to be a primary reason behind BYNC actively creating and reproducing the aforementioned bridging mechanisms they employ. Cleo's perspective reflects the overarching institutionalized inequalities associated with race that women face individually and collectively. Ashanti, a 54-year old teacher in training who also notes a keen awareness of racialization in her yoga world experience and feels the yoga world in this area is racially exclusive, shares a similar viewpoint; however, describes the micro and mezzo effects racialization at the organizational level related to the macro-level devaluation of Black people and spaces.

Ashanti speaks with clear vexation about the effects of gentrification on one of the few predominately Black yoga spaces in her community and the distinctly racialized undertones she felt were at the foundation of the attitude and decision.

> "I think it's smoke and mirrors as to why they're cancelling the yoga class on Sunday at [YMCA]. They said they're cancelling it because of low participation. Yes, I've had a class where there's only one person. And when you think that 'would we have cancelled that class if we were at the [YMCA]? Or at [another YMCA]? Would we have tried to advertise to get the attendance up? And what's happening, in my humble opinion, is the same thing that's happening to my neighborhood. It is being gentrified. And on record, I was told—I don't know if I don't look Black, but I was told—I must not, because I was told 'you know, we are trying to change the demographics of this YMCA? Have you noticed the neighborhood is changing, so the YMCA needs to change based on how the demographics of the neighborhood is changing? All of the instructors that taught that Sunday class were African American. All of the participants that came to that class were African American except— I'm just convinced that if that class were held at…any other YMCA other than a YMCA that's located in a predominately African American community, they would have kept the class on the schedule. And, if the attendance went down, it would have been advertised and they would have found a way to increase that attendance."

Ashanti feels this treatment would not be tolerated if Black people were viewed and treated equitably, compared to the majority (White) population. Again, the racialization

of American culture creates hierarchical symbolic differences based on constructions of race based on phenotypical traits impact how BYNC experience the yoga world. This includes assumptions of authenticity and mechanisms used to counter them in practice. Nina recalls performing bridgework via expressions of "authentic" physicality, not so much for acceptance, but to symbolically "prove" that she belongs and is an authentic yogini, contrary to the perceived inauthenticity.

> "I definitely have been to yoga studios in various places and cities and pop that headstand so y'all would know. Know like for real…I can do that. I go to your yoga studio—and I know when I show up and move my mat to the front y'all are lookin' at me like—I've felt it. Like I am clear, and I'm really not a "race card" person. I don't think every single thing that happens is about race. But I think we know. I think weee know. We walk in this body and this and that. I think we know. When they're like…I've had people—as a student, they don't think this is something—like they may think this is my first rodeo…I definitely have felt the energy of people. I've never had anything said to me. But I've felt the energy."

Because of racialized assumptions of authenticity, participants like Nzingha reveal an awareness that race affects attitudes and interactions related to her as an instructor, whether consciously or otherwise.

> "I know I 'm a damn good teacher, but I'm also a damn good Black teacher, which kind of brings a flare to it. Where, I feel if I were White and had the same skills, I would be just another yoga teacher—to them. Yeah, they'd probably still come to my class, 'yeah she's good,' but I believe it gives me a little exotic flare. I really do. The Black, curvy yogi that can do all this stuff, teach these things, [PI: not like an anomaly, but anomaly to them] but just like it's an anomaly to me if I have a male instructor. I might be driven to their classes more than the 900 women instructors that are out there."

This idea that aesthetic differences can bridge boundaries is just another example of BYNC innovatively contesting racialized boundaries that mean to exclude them from full cultural participation. Racialized inequality and differences were found to be so salient in BYNC experiences that many have become teachers and/or started their own businesses

to provide alternatives to the homogeneity often portrayed to be the norm in the yoga world. For example, Michelle, a 30-year-old new studio owner that targets "African American women between 25-45" at her downtown studio, speaks of the differences in treatment in a mainstream (read predominantly White) studio she perceived compared to treatment in her own predominantly Black studio space.

> "When I was in a White studio it was definitely, like feeling challenged because I'm Black. Like how many years have you taught? What's your—like getting those questions from students. [PI: From students? But you don't feel that in your own studio?] No."

Michelle's experiences drove her to open her own studio—although her initial plan was to teach yoga as a source of income during her retirement—because negative yoga world experiences have led many BYNC to self-bound, choosing to be strategic in where they practice and/or teach, or to avoid 'White spaces' altogether to escape the "White shit" they have faced in the past (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). This includes having their authenticity questioned not because they've shown lack of skill, awareness or understanding, but simply because of how they are socially categorized based on the color of their skin and/or shape of their body. Add to that feeling excluded by instructors in spaces so often that when they receive what I consider authentic treatment in a class, they are overwhelmed with joy because the treatment is anomalous to their typical experiences. Ashanti explains:

> "I limit my experience—where I go to practice, to very few places…if I went to [yoga studio] I don't know what I would experience. If I went to [yoga studio], I don't know what I would experience…As it (her experience) is with the multitude of instructors at the Ys that I've been to, I attend [yoga studio]…they're not in existence as a yoga **studio** anymore…more of a teaching studio…I remember writing a letter to her and letting her know how much I genuinely appreciated the acceptance—and I do I believe I put 'as a Black female'—how much I

> appreciated her kindness…and I said 'as a Black female' because I've been to other yoga classes and studios where I would not be assisted, and I can only guess it was because of the color of my skin…and everyone that she employed was amazing. Everyone…Everyone can use an assist. Everyone…I know I'm supposed to be on my mat, in my own space; but it's a little hard when I hear you walk and stop in front of all the mats except mine. And I can see if it happened once, but when it happens more than once, it's deliberate. [PI: how many times?] It **feels** intentional. It probably happened about 4 or 5 times—I stopped going."

To be sure, the consensus of my participants is that a "good" instructor is one who is adaptable, attentive to the students' needs physically (and mentally), that has a solid personal practice and is working to incorporate the 8-limb yoga philosophy into their lifestyle. Although experiences of bounding and bridging were quite commonly and clearly stated related to perceived and real inequalities in the yoga world on several occasions throughout the course of this study, Ariel, an energetic, 28-year-old athletic former dancer, aspiring Disney princess and Instagram enthusiast who, like other participants, shared an alternative belief that the issue is not so much boundaries within the space, but those rooted in a racialized, size-based, hyper-Christian culture that bring their real world biases into the inclusive yoga world. She explains:

> "Yeah! I feel like it [inclusiveness] is …sometimes people [scoff]—yes, in the yogic sense, it is practiced. It's just when people who do not practice and kind of look from the inside out…That's usually—for me—I hate to say it, but I don't always see color, but when I do have that come across when people are right there, I'm just like 'oh.' I don't think of it like that...Like, I was in a Black community, but I went to school with White folks. It's just people are people. It's just when you have those people who do not experience anything outside of themselves that they don't like or disagree with your upbringing or something weird. That's when it's just like 'oh okay, I'm learning something new here.'"

Ariel calls attention to the boundary-making influences of racialization that sometimes creep into the yoga world via racialized assumptions of outsiders but venture into the

yoga world. She also shows how direct exposure to fellow Black yoginis/yogis is important in understanding the overall effects of racialized ideologies such as "colorblindness" that elevate "not seeing" realities like the lack of racial diversity in ostensibly inclusive spaces under the guise of oneness, when oneness appears more homogeneous than not. The remainder of this section covers yoga world conventions found most salient in how BYNC experience and interpret boundaries in this space and concludes with bridging mechanisms BYNC utilize to counter and contest said boundaries.

CONVENTIONS OF YOGA WORLDS

Just as creators of ballets rely on conventional attitudes about gender roles as the foundation on which to structure their art form, so too do yoga world gatekeepers rely on conventions of yoga to determine what is and is not "authentic" yoga (Becker, 1982). BYNC cultural producers and consumers also rely on symbolic gendered, racialized and consumerist beliefs when laying the foundation for which practices will primarily be supported, distributed and reproduced (Becker, 1982). I found BYNC experience, interpret, and navigate yoga world conventions as boundaries embedded in a racialized culture, as reflected in Figure 1 below.

To reiterate, conventions are those standardized norms, practices, and attitudes that shape interaction, enhance group solidarity, and facilitate categorization. Conventions are often taken-for-granted within any art world and they serve to create and sustain symbolic boundaries (Becker, 1982). As in most other art worlds, most respondents note numerous conventions in their yoga world experiences (Becker, 1982).

Among the most salient conventions in the yoga world are those associated with spirituality, related to knowledge and practice of 8-limb yoga philosophy and those associated with the physical practice, or asana. In terms of the spiritual conventions, Assata, a 54-year-old studio owner and full-time instructor that also identifies as Christian says: “For me, yoga is very spiritual. So, I respect any way that anybody wants to connect and share yoga.”

Figure: How BYNC experience yoga world boundaries

Religious Boundaries

Because of the spiritual conventions of yoga, religious boundaries were found to limit access to benefits and understanding of yoga practice. In this study, the commonly mentioned religion is Christianity. Respondents such as Ariel noted how this lack of understanding leads some Christians to have misconceptions that lead them to fear

participation in yoga practice, such as her grandmother who feels it will put you in need of soul saving.

> "I'm just thinking back to my grandparents and everybody…they're so weird. My grandmother was like, 'don't get caught up in that Hare Krishna bullshit. I did it once—saved my soul from it once. I did something, and I went crazy and I did it again and it's just coming back 10-fold in different ways.' And I'm just like 'Grandma?' Uh huh. She's not gonna come back to me. That's why I was thinking about the religion thing. 'Cause I see it as both. A religion and the non-religious side. It's just weird."

Another result is the forced exclusion Christian children in schools endure when their parents refuse to allow participation when the practice is offered. This exclusion frustrates Renee, who believes it is a greater social disservice and unnecessary boundary creating practice.

> "The only areas that I've had frustration…is that I teach at my son's school. And I hate when I have parents that won't let the children partake because they're Christians. And I think it's more harm seeing that one child sit—everybody havin' fun doin' yoga, and they gotta be ostracized on the outside. What are you really explaining to them on why they can't do it. But that's the thing that bothers me."

It was a common for BYNC to report having experienced or observed Christians misconceptions, creating and reproducing yoga world boundaries. For example, although Assata has experienced the effects of religious boundaries in the form of from fellow Christians about what yoga is and isn't with regards to religion, and the common misconceptions that yoga goes against Christian faith, that creates and reproduces exclusionary self-bounding from yoga world consumption:

> "I think yoga and whatever you practice or don't practice fit together so well. I think it can—yoga can underscore and support your faith. But, if there's anyone who's going to give me push back or the side-eye about the fact that I practice yoga or teach yoga, it's always another Christian. Y'all…(praisin'?) to the sun, y'all always…Christians give you the most grief!...Like, there's a woman I go to,

> she has—she says like her husband won't let her do it and because jus the whole Christian thing."

Michelle's perspective is similar to Assata's, reflecting the experience of misconceptions being utilized as symbolic boundaries to yoga world participation:

> "I think people have a lot of misconceptions about yoga. They think it's a religion or that it can't go hand in hand with Christianity."

There are those who feel these boundaries can and should be bridged through adaptive yoga styles and education. Ashanti, for example, intends to use 'holy yoga,' an alternative yoga style produced to bridge religious boundaries to extend the key components of Western yoga practice (breathwork, meditation, and asana) with a Christ-centered intention [holyyoga.net]:

> "Ultimately, I'd like to teach Holy Yoga so that I can engage from a Christian perspective and we can [pause] I can help other Christians get the benefit of yoga. Also invite them—in a comfortable space, because we're all there for the same purpose, the scriptures into it."

With respect to the yoga world convention of spirituality, Christianity appears to create boundaries of authenticity, just as conventions of aesthetics (re)produce and make space for bridging. Both influence the experiences of BYNC in the yoga world. Next, I review exactly how BYNC experience this yoga world convention as consumers, producers and gatekeepers of yoga culture with a focus on two central conventions highlighted throughout data collection: authenticity and aesthetics. Regarding authenticity, consumerist boundaries and traditional media are the primary focus. With respect to aesthetics, the link between race and size boundaries were found most often underlying Findings conclude with explanations on boundary bridge work and American racialization, the two final themes of this study that I view as American cultural

conventions many Black Americans experience when participating in cultural activities. I begin with findings on authenticity as a convention of the yoga world. I found BYNC to define and interpret the yoga world with a heightened awareness that they are not the perceived image of authentic yoginis for several reasons. Below, I describe their experiences and interpretations.

Assumptions of Authenticity

Authenticity, defined as what is considered subjectively "genuine," "good" and "real", is a fundamental convention in the yoga world I studied. Assumptions of authenticity are perceived to be primarily (re)produced through attitudes about and behaviors related to consumerism and traditional media, while almost always underscored by racialized cultural assumptions. The following is an explanation of what I found when probing respondents about their perspectives on yogic authenticity.

Consumerist Culture

One symbolic boundary marker evident from my observations and conversations with BYNC centers on the role of consumerist culture in their experiences. In this study, consumerist symbolic boundaries refer to conventions created by a consumer culture that defines authenticity through a certain image of authenticity via marketing and advertising campaigns and in terms of conspicuous consumption. Consumerism is seen as a sign of yoga world authenticity in the form of continuing ability to purchase "the right" gear (clothing and props), attend yoga retreats, and to pay for classes. Ariel notes the importance of having the "right" mat and attire *before* entering the yoga world.

> "That's how I got my start. I lived across the street from a Beall's Outlet and they had shirts, pants, and yoga mats. So, when I realized those tear-away mats are

> horrible, I was like 'alright, I'll go to Ross and get a $20 mat. 'Cause the mat's the biggest thing. As long as you have on—doesn't matter what you're wearing but that mat makes all the difference. People do get flashy with the name brands and crazy designs."

Ariel's viewpoint is an indicator of consumerist conventions of authenticity affecting how some BYNC experience the yoga world. Tracy, a 38-year-old "corporate American" currently enrolled in a local yoga teacher training, tells of the deeper consequences of a biased consumer culture and how impactful something as seemingly innocuous as an advert can be on determinants of authenticity.

> "So, if I'm being honest, when you look at all the advertisements, when you look on Instagram—even the clothing lines that sell yoga clothes, you think a yogi is a White woman. And that is a White woman. And that's the hardest thing to try and break in my own brain and within our society too. That that's not what yoga looks like"

Tracy echoes what most other respondents feel about the consumerist culture effect on the western yoga world, adding her thoughts on consumerist boundaries and the resulting exclusion based on assumptions of authenticity and aesthetics. When asked her opinion on inclusiveness being felt in the yoga world she states:

> "But in other studios I've been to in North Carolina, no. I've not felt that [included] at all. [PI: Why is that?] I think a lot of yoga in studios becomes about the poses and about your outfit. About the fanciest mat that you can buy. And, all of those things make me crazy…Like, I almost feel like you shouldn't bring your own mat. The mats are gonna be provided for you, you need to wear all black. Like, I don't wanna see any like [bursts out laughing] brands. Like, you need to focus. And like all that other stuff is just noise."

The idea that one must be able to afford to practice undoubtedly creates a symbolic boundary for BYNC who do not feel cost should determine their practice. Conversely, the consumerist boundary of authenticity appears to be an issue brought up by most participants. One concern is the cost of classes and teacher trainings that (re)produce

boundaries of exclusion for those who are unable to afford 9-12 month, $2500 and up teacher trainings, let alone classes ranging from $10-$20. Take Renee, who staunchly disagrees with paying $15 per class as either a student or as instructor:

> "Mmhmm, but a lot of times it's finances. You know, yoga teacher is not the most inexpensive thing. So financially, a lot of us are like pssh [sic], $3000? I gotta pay rent…priorities and stuff…. Because another reason I don't go to studios, I hate paying 15 damn dollars to go to yoga studios. I'm like, unless it's a friend or somebody I'm wantin' to go or teachers, my classmates that I wanna rep and show support…I want [them] to know they're supported. But, just the average--$15, most of us don't have that like that to come to a yoga class every week paying $15..."

Renee's concern counters that of Nzingha who feels sometimes BYNC are self-stifling regarding financial investments made that are greater than $5 for classes and $50 for workshops for example, something she feels would benefit BYNC practitioners:

> "We—it's just this knit community. I think though, that it does have a little—there's a little stifling from it though. Because, what I've seen, I'm finding myself having to go **outside** the [city] space because the folks here in the [social media group], they don't wanna step outside of the $5 zone…no one wants to pay $10. No one wants to invest $50 when a top-notch teacher comes here and I host them in my house. Dr. Gail Parker, she came from Detroit—yoga teacher, been practicing over 50 years. And **yes**, it was pricey, but worth it. But also advertised it in March so you had plenty of time. I also even offered out deals and scholarships to people. No one snagged on it. But it's like—and I understand you got other things to pay; but you wanna invest in having this richness here with you. Like, it was like pulling teeth to get the minimum 8 people we needed."

Comparing the two participants' (Nzingha and Renee) attitudes conveys the symbolic effects of consumerist boundaries of authenticity created and reproduced as normalized yoga world conventions that implicitly exclude those individuals unable or unwilling to afford the costs to participate in "authentic" yoga world consumption. Being able to afford the classes does not appear to be a concern for most participants who are, by definition, primarily middle-class. It seems the idea that yoga practice should be inclusive

inadvertently creates the idea that classes should be affordable for all people wanting to participate; however, on the flip side, it simultaneously appears to reproduce a symbolic boundary against BYNC that bounds them from being perceived as "authentic" in the yoga world and assumes they are cheap and unwilling to invest in themselves beyond a certain price. This assumption is related to the belief that conspicuous consumption is somehow a greater reflection of authenticity in the yoga world.

Ariel explains the link she perceives between representation and consumerist boundaries, remarking representation would not be as low (for Black Americans) if they'd just take more initiative on the consumption side. There will be more visible representation of Black yoginis if Black yoginis essentially "buy in" to a consumerist definition of authenticity, directly countering Renee and Tracy's attitudes on the apparent boundaries created by such consumerist foci:

> "So, if they don't feel they're being represented. And if they don't feel as such, then bitch, you represent yo'self [sic] and the people you think aren't being represented. That'd be the one thing I will say that pisses me off the most about people that do not take that initiative to hit the mat or the chair yoga or aerial yoga. Just—the trapeze; every time I see the comments 'why don't you have a thicker model?' Because bitch. Did you buy it? No. Then you're not the fucking model. The people that modeled that—seriously, they're not Nike models. It's the people that buy the fucking product. The company—it's Instagram! It's Instagram…But that's my biggest thing: if you feel like there's no representation of you, your culture, whatever. You have to take that initiative to actually just show. Buy the damn pants. Buy the ring. Buy whatever. The yoga wheel. There's not a lot of Black representation on the yoga wheel. Buy the damn thing. Use the hashtag. Share that information. You be the one that makes it aware, and there you go."

Ariel's perspective on representation is rare among participants. She is only one of two BYNC to argue that yoga worlds marketing and advertising representation is primarily in the hands of the consumer, not the cultural gatekeepers such as executives, hiring

managers and agencies. Consumerist boundaries are closely linked to traditional media outlets, which were also found to reproduce yoga world boundaries through conventions of authenticity.

Traditional Media

I found traditional media to be a symbolic mechanism that creates and reproduces boundaries through traditional outlets for entertainment, education, marketing and advertisement, e.g. magazines, TV shows, books commercials, etc. that impact BYNC yoga world experiences. American media's preference for White women as the standard of beauty appears to be just as salient in the yoga world, where inclusiveness is the perceived norm, but not necessarily the practice of all within yoga world boundaries. When I spoke with BYNC, they frequently voiced opinions about the lack of representation for all that is not White, female, nor thin, in the yoga world. Closely linked to consumerist conventions of authenticity, there is a slight overlap between the effects of traditional media and consumerist boundaries. Nzingha explains the overarching consequences she and other participants cite as the reason many people—including other BYNC—continue to (re)produce the assumption that Black women 'don't do yoga'.

> "[PI: What are the reasons Black people give for not going to the studios?]
> "Because of the image of the skinny White person. Or they've been to a studio before and they felt like they were overlooked…"

Nzingha views her experience as a consumer first and foremost, noting the importance of the business of yoga, marketing and advertising in a more explicit manner than other BYNC. She shares her understanding of Black yoginis being underrepresented in the mainstream yoga world, noting their long tenure and concurrent lack of social awareness

of their existence—something she does not seem to attribute to racialization, but to consumerist practices, somewhat insinuating (like Ariel) that representation is at least partially in the hands of those who do not feel they are represented.

> "That I was sort of ignorant as to what was out there. You know, I'm thinking we're not practicing, but there were a plethora of people that are now part of my bigger network and have even become my teachers and my gurus. And these people have been doing yoga since the '70s. It's just not advertised, publicized, and I don't wanna say they're overlooked, it's just not the mainstream. [PI: Doesn't that kind of mean they're being overlooked by the mainstream?] I don't know the answer to that because I think it's all too, a part of the business of yoga…And we do have some Black people that stepped up. Like Faith Hunter. She's out there. She's on the cover of Yoga Journal. I think now we're jumping out more and more and putting ourself [sic] out there."

Ashanti jokingly tells how she tries to stop other Black folk from looking at magazines:

> [PI: What about as a student? Because you made a comment earlier about people not seeing Black faces on the yoga magazines. [You said] they need to stop reading the magazines, right?] They need to stop looking at those bodies on the yoga magazines…Yoga Journal has done better. [PI: as a consumer of yoga, do you feel Black women are overlooked?] Yes. Yeah. I think Yoga Journal is trying because last year or the year before, I think they made a concerted effort to have more than one issue [laughs] with an African American female on it. You still don't see any African American males. I think that was a step in the right direction. I'm just starting my subscription again…"

Respondents agree that media affects attitudes about Black people, reproducing social boundaries of exclusions via negative symbolic imagery that paints them in negative, stereotypical, devaluing and dehumanizing ways or overlooks them as subjects altogether (Bonilla-Silva, 2011; hooks, 1981). Renee posits the inherent bias and resulting social effects of traditional media:

> "…It's just their world, they didn't have any interactions with Black people unless it was on TV. And they're seeing videos and things on the news and I always say that if I had to base my cultural perception on what's being shown in the media, I wouldn't fool with us either. I mean based upon what's being perceived and everything.

Renee's perception points to the permeation of racialized social boundaries being reproduced culturally through traditional media outlets such as TV and how attitudes and behaviors of White supremacy are reproduced symbolically under the guise of entertainment. Ashanti, who previously stated the need for Black people to 'stop looking at those magazines,' adds that practicing yoga and being in yoga teacher training has offset the effects of traditional media bias against larger-bodied women in yoga worlds:

> "It's nice to see, I guess I would say "curvy" women able to demonstrate the very high level of flexibility that I've seen. And I'm just so in awe. Very impressed. Very impressed. [PI: Why are you so impressed?] Because I am a product of media bias as well. So, when I look at Yoga Journal I don't see curvy women. When I look at yoga tv shows, I don't see curvy women. So, it's very impressive to see women with that level of flexibility, grace and beauty."

Ashanti sees yoga world boundaries being reproduced in the previous statement; however, the effects of media on her assumptions of plus-sized yogic authenticity are something other respondents mentioned regarding size. Her opinion is shared by other BYNC I interviewed and observed. She also expresses her opinion on the effects of size-based underrepresentation in traditional media that produces beliefs that plus-sized women don't, can't or shouldn't practice yoga. These beliefs appear to trickle down to BYNC who fall "victim [to] media bias" and assign aesthetic value to certain groups over others; i.e. "skinny" versus "curvy" yoginis. Traditional media is at the root of many aesthetic distinctions and markers of authenticity in the yoga world that, until very recently reproduced the image of the skinny White woman as the symbol of the 'authentic yogini.' Whether impacting instructor or class selection, assumptions of authenticity or simply creating aesthetic values, size is a symbolic boundary marker in the Western yoga world. I found the 'hyperflexible, skinny White woman in expensive gear''

image to be a prevalent boundary marker in Black yoginis' experiences. This image is rooted in the centuries old idealization of White women and devaluation of Black women reproduced in media and marketing such as newspapers, magazines, commercials and TV shows that typically feature White women as the standard of yogic authenticity against which others measure their own authenticity (Hodes, 2009; hooks, 1981; Mears, 2009. Tracy breaks down her appraisal of the skinny White woman image and how easily it could be changed through broadened representation in social, as well as yoga worlds.

> "I also think women of different sizes are excluded and not invited to everything that is yoga. Not able to participate. That they're only invited when it's something special or unique, and not just there in the everyday. Like Yoga Journal—the cover? Who's on the cover? White women…Skinny. Once a month or like once a year when they decide we wanna do 'EveryBody yoga' [PI: why do you think that is?] I think it's our society. And this is what we see. What we see on TV. This is what we see in our advertisements. This is what we see in commercials. We something different?' Can we do something else?"

From Tracy's point of view, the issue of exclusion doesn't begin at the individual, but at the societal level, where social constructions of authenticity are created and reproduced culturally through conventions of practice valorized by cultural gatekeepers, such as *Yoga Journal* editors who have the power to be inclusive or exclusive in the way they lay out the monthly magazine. Nina concurs, adding television as a primary source of aesthetic values and assumptions of authenticity Black women experience in the yoga world:

> "I was taking a class with this young lady, new teacher. She was [pause] I said she was early 20s, but she may have just turned 20. But she had just finished her teacher training and she was one of these naturally bendy types…Sweet as she could be. Brunette, blue eyed, lovely. You know, everything—everything TV tells you you ought to wanna be. [PI: What is it the TV tells you you ought to wanna be?] A skinny White woman…

The effects of traditional media were found to shape how BYNC interpret authenticity and aesthetic value in their yoga world experiences. How BYNC experience, interpret and navigate conventions of aesthetic distinctions and values is discussed next.

Aesthetic Distinctions and Values

Aesthetic distinctions, those subjective categorizations based on sensory responses such as how something or someone looks, or sounds were found to interact with how BYNC experience, interpret and navigate the yoga world, in some cases distinctions have become aesthetic values as they have become normalized in yoga world cultural reproduction. Particularly, racial marking and size-based boundaries are symbolically reproduced in conjunction with racialized social boundaries, as many BYNC are unable to distinguish between assumptions of their yogic authenticity that are based on size as well as race.

Racial Marking

Racial marking was found to be a mechanism underlying aesthetic distinctions and values that reproduce racial boundaries impacting Black yoginis' yoga world experiences (Chong, 2010). Recall, racial marking is the cultural practice of making hierarchical distinctions, such as marking Black women as inferior and comparing them to White women as the binary opposite is used as a reflection of social differences of race, creating many bounding assumptions. One assumption BYNC in this study often mentioned as one that leads them to have to "prove" their yogic authenticity to others as well as themselves, is that Black women don't do yoga. Nina highlights the interactions of social and symbolic boundaries as she talks about global categorizations related to

darkness, denoting Black or dark-skinned people, and lightness, denoting White or light skinned, "all around the world, there are certain things assigned to darkness and other things assigned to lightness and that's that." She shares the belief that these distinctions between light and dark are immutable social beliefs normalized into the global society through cultural socialization. One common effect of this belief is a feeling of exclusion and devaluation in the yoga world. Assata believes this to be so as she shares accounts of interactions with Whites that she says assume she is unaware of business-ownership and marketing tools because she is Black, a reflection of the racialized marking many Black women experience in social worlds, but especially BYNC in the yoga world.

> [PI: Do you feel Black women are excluded, overlooked, devalued in yoga worlds?] "By the overall world. So, yes. So yeah, it's just—the yoga world is part of that. There's always this assumption, even to maybe those that feel they're more conscious. And most aware. That they're just—it's that somehow you don't know. You know, there's this assumption that sometimes—you know I'll post something or write something and people are like, you know, "did you know??" Like, yeah I knew that. **Of** course I know that. How could I not know that? You know what I'm saying?...like having this business, they're like 'have you thought of…' Yeah, I thought of that. You know? But…the assumption of ignorance. It's like, you know, you're not given the benefit of the doubt of knowing…I think it is because there's just [pause] oftentimes it's this inherent belief that we are less than. That we are less prepared. Less educated. Less knowledgeable. Less."

Both Assata and Nina explicitly state how they interpret the deeply interconnected processes of racialized social boundaries and complementary symbolic mechanisms ensuring their continued salient existence. Their views centered on macro level assumptions; however, Nzingha provides an example of the effects of racial marking at the micro level, as she discusses an instance when she encountered someone of her own racial group's initial shock upon learning she was the instructor, that she even does yoga at all for that matter, for the class he was attending:

> "So, this new guy comes in and he's a Black guy and he's probably in his 20s and he was there because a girl invited him. So, I'm joking with him 'oh you're on a date' dah da da da da. So, through small talk, me checking him in, he says 'do you do yoga?'…I said, well I'm teaching the class. And he said 'oh, okay! Well I guess you do do yoga!' So, I don't know if that the perception that I was just the desk person; or, it's a Black, curvy woman doing yoga...But after class, he said, 'I'm coming back just for you, Kiesha I like what you did, so I'm coming back to this class. But what I did was I met him where he was at…I would assume though, that if you worked in a yoga studio that you would have at least taken a class. Or it's a job requirement that you…know something about yoga [chuckles] that's just my assumption. But yeah, I haven't that in a long time, but when he said, '*you* do yoga?' I was like 'I'm teaching the class.'"

The larger racialized and fallacious assumption that "Black people don't do yoga," is perpetuated through underrepresentation, lacking organizational diversity, marketing and advertising that positions whiteness as the hierarchical standard among and between racial groups, BYNC are often faced with what can only be perceived as "forced" boundary work, having to observe, experience, address and counter attitudes of inauthenticity in the yoga world from within and beyond the boundaries their racial group. This is due to the fallacy about blackness and yoga that leaves Black yoginis (and yogis) feeling as if they are anomalies because they practice, not just to others but among their own racial group as well. Nina tells me about facing this, while recognizing the complete difference within the boundaries of her yoga world community.

> "Because most of us still—even though I'm immersed in all these wonderful [Black] yogis and yoginis and I know so many of us are out there. So, I'm still surprised when I say that I teach yoga and people are surprised. I'm still surprised by it because…there's a whole bunch of people who still aren't really sure what that is, what it means, is it dance? Like why would you want that? Now, I don't run into—I don't have that experience—or I haven't, where you know people are giving lectures about religion and that sort of thing…Because those aren't the people I'm interacting with. I think in most circles, except for my yummy yoga community, I am an anomaly."

Nina believes she, as a BYNC, is an anomaly to most people outside of her yoga community because the culturally pervasive assumptions held by many that Black women (people) don't do yoga, which constantly draws into question her yogic authenticity. These feelings are made salient through the consumerist culture of the U.S. coupled with traditional media biases that idealize certain groups over others, for example White women are viewed as more virtuous, delicate and in need of protecting; whereas Black women are assumed strong enough to withstand any crisis—a viewpoint rooted in American culture since slavery (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005; Bromfield, N, 2016 Feagin, 2004; hooks, 1981).

Cleo recognizes there is a slow shift in Black representation occurring culturally while equally distinguishing between Black and White hierarchical categorizations within the industry that positions. Whites at a higher level of authenticity than even Indians, where the ancient practice was first globally popularized (Newcombe, 2009).

> "I think they're starting to recognize Black yogis. But, at the same time, I feel like there's still it's still a White woman, White man game…in the broader scheme of things, no. I think we're still underrepresented. When you got people still…I still got people—I still hear, where's Black yoga teachers? Or where is there a place where—or where is the Black owned yoga studio? I don't think we have any in [the city]. There's a couple in Atlanta—well Assata technically is a Black—she has her studio…Nzingha yeah yeah. But I would say like a mains—like people say that and… So, um that being said—because people don't know or are still asking that question then that means we still got work to do, and we're still underrepresented. And even on top of that, it's so Whitewashed that—I don't even see the Indians like I don't even see Indians on the covers! Like God, do they have to steal everybody's culture?! Y'all ain't got nothin'? You just got take everythang! Your stealin' asses! [sic] Just stealin' all the time! Just triflin' and shiftless! [laughs]"

Cleo profoundly expresses her interpretation of perceived concessions of inclusion that are overshadowed by realities of institutional exclusion and underrepresentation, as well

as lack of yoga world racial diversity. This lack of diversity symbolically bounds Black women from full cultural participation as that creates and reproduces the assumption that Black women don't "do" or teach yoga, even as strides are taken to debunk that fallacy. Another aesthetic distinction shown to impact BYNC experiences was the idea that one's size matters in how they are marked in the yoga world, including assumptions of authenticity.

Size Boundaries

Size-based boundaries interacting in BYNC experiences were found to be (re)produced through conventions of aesthetics in the yoga world. In particular, the 'skinny White woman' image as the assumed and real cultural standard of yoga world authenticity and aesthetic value that effects how BYNC experience, interpret and navigate yoga world boundaries. Nzingha makes plain the effects of size and race in this aspect,

> "[PI: What are the reasons Black people give for not going to the studios?] Because of the image of the skinny White person. Or they've been to a studio before and they felt like they were overlooked…"

Several respondents self-identify as, or empathize with, "curvy yogis" where curvy refers to larger "plus-sized" bodies. This is a recent phenomenon I found to be a source of pride and in-group solidarity among respondents. At the same time, some BYNC experience racial and symbolic boundaries in the form of size-based aesthetic distinctions that challenge their authenticity and inclusion in the yoga world. In the case of larger bodied BYNC, the label of "curvy" yogini appears a badge of honor and a bridging mechanism that creates spaces for yoginis who do not fit the prescribed aesthetic standard of the

skinny White woman. Assata talks about using her size, age and awareness that she isn't the stereotypical image of an "authentic yogi" to motivate students to practice:

> "I'm an older instructor, first of all. Curvy instructor second of all [pause] I don't think I look—I know I don't look like most instructors. And I'm fine with that. And I think what that does for students is [pause] if I can—well if she can, I can."

Assata, like most other "curvy" identifying yoginis in the study, uses herself as a cultural hook to attract and keep students. Fully aware of the aesthetic value placed on smaller, White, female bodies in the yoga world, one BYNC that is getting a lot of recognition in the yoga world and beyond for her (jessamynstanley.com). One yogini that is getting a lot of representation in traditional and social media is Jessamyn Stanley. Jessamyn is a plus-sized instructor, seen as a game changer, who is reordering the standard of Western yogic authenticity. Her very presence on social media is a source of motivation for my participants, who recognize the possibilities in a space where you're not judged by aesthetics, but by practice. Each participant in this study mentioned her name at least once when interviewed, including Ariel, who remarks:

> "Jessamyn Stanley and she's representing for all the plus-sized girls out there. Like, I love her for that. I be like go—just learn everything from her. Don't learn from me, learn everything from her. She is like my idol right now. If I have to quote anyone, she's the only one I know because she's everywhere!"

Although some participants use their size as a bridging mechanism, others experience it as a source of different treatment from instructors rooted in aesthetic distinctions and values related to size and race. I found BYNC interpret this as White instructors lacking empathy and not being inclusive when interacting with some Black and/or larger students unaware of how to "deal with" a larger body.

> "I have big thighs. I have a big butt. I have a belly. You know, a skinny White, woman might not see that you know? And even if you're a skinny Black woman, you have an aunt or somebody that looks like me. or you have a mother... You know what I'm saying?...You can still relate! And because you can relate, you can instruct that student on how to feel it in her body or his body, whatever it is. Even if you don't have the same body as his, you have people that look like him that you interact with on a daily basis. So, I think that's why it's important, it's because people can identify with you as an instructor, but also instructors can identify with that person. [PI: okay] And not saying White instructors can't identify, they just have to—they're not going to if they're not faced with it. Or if they're not forced."

Due to the many mechanisms of boundary creation and reproduction related to aesthetic distinctions and values and assumptions of authenticity, I found BYNC to actively use yoga world participation as mechanisms of boundary bridge work, contesting the aforementioned conventions and re-writing narratives of in-group solidarity and yoga world inclusion and authenticity. Next, I review the strategic and creative ways BYNC navigate and bridge yoga world boundaries.

BRIDGING BOUNDARIES

Bridging boundaries is the practice of creating sameness through cultural participation and production—filling cultural gaps of exclusion if you will. As shown above, BYNC experience yoga world boundaries in every aspect of their practice from the consumerist decisions of what to wear, what type of props are necessary, to if/where they will practice in-studio, to personal conflicts of religion and feelings of exclusion because of their race, size and/or other aesthetic values. Nevertheless, BYNC bridge yoga world boundaries as yoga culture consumers (practitioners), producers (instructors) and gatekeepers (studio and school owners) via social media, adaptable "hooks", strategic selection of classes and instructors, organizational diversity and the role of instructors. In addition to performing bridgework, BYNC also experience instances when they feel a

bridge is being made for them and feelings of inclusiveness are no longer being sought after; but, are being experienced authentically. Ashanti, for example, was so taken aback by the kindness and inclusiveness of one studio's staff in particular, she wrote to the owner to express her gratitude.

> "I remember writing a letter to her and letting her know how much I genuinely appreciated the acceptance—and I do I believe I put 'as a Black female'—how much I appreciated her kindness…and I said 'as a Black female' because I've been to other yoga classes and studios where I would not be assisted, and I can only guess it was because of the color of my skin…and everyone that she employed was amazing."

The viewpoint that race affects how Black yoginis are perceived and treated in the yoga world is one I found to be common among participants, and often an underlying reason for much of the bridgework performed by BYNC. Because BYNC experience yoga world boundaries, a convention among them is itself, boundary bridging. The following describes the variety of modalities used by BYNC to contest and close some of the cultural gaps to full cultural participation based on their experiences.

Social Media

Based on my observations and conversations with BYNC, I found that social media is used as a mechanism to change false narratives of authenticity and increase in-group solidarity, awareness, and representation. And it is being done in countless creative ways. In my study, participants navigate boundaries of exclusion and authenticity on social media by creating groups and using strategic hashtags, such as #blackgirlyogamagic #blackwomendoyoga #blackwomenDOworkout etc. Hashtagging is the practice of placing a "#" symbol before a word, phrase or name to increase its visibility in searches, thereby drawing more attention to whatever is attached to the

symbol. Nina tells of her interpretation of the importance of "hashtagging on social media to (re)build the Black community, spread awareness and increase representation.

> "So, I think that that hashtagging is, in some ways, to communicate with those people "those people" that are on their Facebook feed, from work, that's married to whomever. Whatever. A point of pride. That we got ours. And it matters. I mean, I get it now in a way I don't think I got it before.

Social media is helping BYNC reduce and/or debunk fallacies of yogic authenticity in the yoga and overall social world, remedying many of the effects of race and size-based media bias at the individual level. Cleo talks about how social media has broadened her understanding of yogic authenticity from the stereotypical and stereotypical to the spiritual, allowing her to see yoginis have no absolute race, physical composition, ability, or other aesthetically distinct markers.

> "Instagram has like, for me, changed the whole look of what a yogini looks like. I definitely—I mean, there's some White girls that I'm like that's a yogini! And I'm not talking about the latte carrying, you know, Ugz wearin' yogini. I'm like, yo that chick is a yogini! And then, there's obviously there's some Black people just I'm like yo, you're, you're definitely a yogini. So, it just—somebody who looks, there's no color I can—that comes specifically to mind. Like it's just, I can see it in you. If you would've asked me ten years ago—because I'm not—I wasn't deep into it, I was just doin' it I probably would have said the Ugz wearin', latte carryin' um White woman with blonde hair [chuckles] that you see at the grocery store."

Although social media is being actively employed as a bridging mechanism in the yoga world, some BYNC noted the difficulties in locating other Black yoginis/yogis when searching social media and streaming sites like Instagram and YouTube, for example. Ariel explains not seeing certain well-known—among BYNC at least, Black yoginis.

> "And I'm so obsessed with Instagram and everybody talks so much about Yoga Rachel and for me, I don't see them. They don't pop up. Unless someone tells me to follow them—she still doesn't pop up…and then, she represents North Carolina."

Interestingly, the mention of other Black yoginis not showing up in social media searches was a common theme among respondents. From my own experiences as a BYNC, and from several of my participants, finding Black yoginis' pages, photos and videos on social media sites like Instagram and YouTube is like doing academic research. You have to have the right, reliable sources (e.g. hashtags and group information) or you are unlikely to find a representative number of Black yoginis as you would by simply searching 'female yogi' 'yogini'; this disparity indeed influences how BYNC experience, interpret and navigate yoga world boundaries. Feeling the "us versus them" separations between Blacks and the rest of the country, BYNC employ newly established alternative styles of yoga called adaptable hooks. Adaptable hooks are often popularized through social media and used to make accessible a practice many Black women (and men, to be sure) assumed was "not for them" because of racial inequality reproduced symbolically and institutionally.

Adaptable "Hooks"

Of the many innovative alternative styles and modifications to the practice of yoga established to extend access and "hook" potential consumers of yoga—referred to as "adaptable hooks"—trap yoga was the most prevalent consumerist hook, with several participants having taught, practiced or at least heard enough about it to form an opinion at the time of our interviews. Trap yoga is a style of yoga that combines elements of hip hop culture and classic yoga philosophy against the backdrop of "trap music" a recently popularized hip hop genre that features sounds of the Atlanta rap scene. The style is one

that garners mixed opinions among BYNC who "get it" but do not find it authentic. Whereas, conversely other BYNC feel it can be the most authentic yoga one can practice.

> "…And, at first, I was like anti-trap yoga. Like ugh—especially fresh out of training. It was like 'oh my gosh, this is like the opposite of yoga.' The beautiful part of trap yoga is even if you're in a pose and you don't know the lyrics to the song, because you're singing along, you're breathing…, because you know the lyrics, you're singing along or humming along or whatever."
>
> —Michelle

Cleo teaches trap yoga at an Historically Black College/University (HBCU) and in public and private studios, uses adaptable hooks of music and modified language to make the practice and understanding of yoga more accessible to audiences otherwise not targeted as potential yoga consumers.

> "Well, I do teach a trap yoga class on Saturdays. I know that probably the language of trap yoga and things of that nature, a lot of people are conflicted with. But, I just look at this way. I think what we're experiencing in the yoga world is kind of similar to what people experienced in the Christian world when the likes of Kirk Franklin…and so I feel like the more—when I come—when I teach trap yoga, I get people who never would have thought to take yoga or would have thought yoga was 'for them' and I guess my parents and the way I was raised is, you gotta talk to people in their language. So, for me it's not—there's no conflict with me."

Renee also uses music and modified language to attract students at the HBCU where she teaches trap and hip-hop yoga, knowing that hip hop cultural identity formation and racialized cultural differences make this virtually a requirement to get them interested in the practice (Clay, 2003). Once hooked in, she educates on the philosophy of yoga and benefits of the practice.

> "At [HBCU], I do a trap yoga. I do a hip-hop yoga. Whatever I need to do to get them involved. Then yeah, the Tibetan bells and all that, they're gonna be like 'eh, that's some White people stuff… don't know if I wanna do this. But if they hear the music…and when I teach my classes in the gym they hear the music and people are looking like oh, I wanna be a part of her class. If that gets you into

> yoga. Boom! That's all I'm askin'. And once you're in there we can talk about the yams and niyamas and the 8 limbs and the different types of yoga. I have them then. The music I connect with the people. But, once I get 'em in, I got your ears, then it's a open door. Instead of starting out like that and boring people and being too much. Then they don't wanna come back. So, I just believe in meeting people where they're at."

Both Cleo and Renee draw their opinions from their tenure teaching at an HBCU. Michelle and Ariel, on the other hand, see the use of trap yoga as a bridging mechanism from consumerist attitudes. All with the same result, however: informing and attracting marginalized populations to the practice of yoga. Ariel, who views yoga from an athletic consumerist perspective remarks, "trap yoga is just something to make it accessible and bring 'em in…'Cause, it's only music that changes from what kind of yoga it is." Michelle agrees, both acknowledging the almost contradictory deeper meaning behind a style viewed by outsiders of the style as not "authentically yogic." Contradictory because she also recognizes the current trap music fad in the entertainment world is what also underlies its cultural creation.

> "It's seeing something familiar with something unfamiliar. So, people that would never ever try yoga…and they're trying it… [PI: So why do you think it's trap music that's making it accessible?] I just think it's the fad right now. Trap. There's trap karaoke. Trap everything. And it's like—for me, the way you know a Black person's teaching or a White person teaching. Because a Black person will call it trap. A[nd] White people are more likely to call it "hip hop" yoga. And I think that's the differentiator. [PI: You hear trap you know it's Black?] Yes."

Even when performing bridge work, underlying racial boundaries create cultural differences, perceived or real, between Black and White yoga cultural consumers, producers and gatekeepers. BYNC feel there is an inherent difference in how they define and deliver authenticity to marginalized groups, compared to their White counterparts. It is as though they feel White yoginis are more likely to teach an alternative style like

"trap" or "hip-hop" yoga because they know more students will take the classes, not because of the cultural connections and boundary bridging that occurs in these spaces. The effects of centuries of systematic social exclusions and the resulting assumed and real differences manifest in spaces where the intention can only be perceived as good—even if simply following the "fad,"—because adapting the practice to connect to the community's needs and create greater yoga world inclusivity still occurs. Because of so many racialized yoga world experiences, BYNC are also employing other bridging mechanisms as yoga world consumers, producers, and gatekeepers.

Strategic Selection

A mechanism employed by BYNC as yoga world consumers, strategic selection is the practice of strategically choosing where and with whom Black yoginis practice based on aesthetic diversity of studio or business staff. Aesthetic diversity, to put it plainly, refers to phenotypical traits, such as skin color, size and sex/gender. It may be referred to as heterogeneity of cultural producers in a given setting. So, for example, if a studio has a full staff of only one racial group or body type, they are not likely to earn the business of BYNC like Tracy, who bases her personal practice studio selection on how much aesthetic diversity she can see in the staff:

> "I've now become very conscious of looking at the roster of teachers. And if I look and see that the teachers all look alike, I think twice about going and practicing there. I need to see a diversity. I need to see a male. Or someone of color. Like I just need to see someone different. And not [pause] a blonde-haired blue eyed White woman [laughs]. Who's gonna tell me *namaste*. Like I got—I need—I need [trails off]"

Tracy appears to do contesting bridge work by choosing to avoid spaces that do not reflect diversity in their organizations (Pugh, 2010). This may be related to her personal

experience as a very light skinned woman who reports feeling like she was the "token" for her difference in appearance in spaces where people do not know:

> "…it has taken me 10 years to find this studio space and I found this space in July(?) and I've tried yoga at different studios, at the YMCA, I did prenatal yoga, but nothing felt like home. And I always felt like the token."

Yet, whatever the cause, Tracy and many other BYNC are strategically selecting what and whom they support instead of blindly giving their money to organizations that do not consider them in their business practices. Some BYNC were found to only practice with other BYNC—they are not seeking diversity in spaces where they feel they must work for something they believe should naturally occur and the links she makes between the social boundary of race and the symbolic boundary of authenticity:

> "Just often being tested there. You know, just any space where you just, only Black person, they always gotta, you know 'what affirmative action got *you* here' They just automatically assume that you didn't earn your place there…I honestly don't practice in White spaces. I'ma be honest with you. I just love being around diverse groups. Or groups of [pause] Black folk. So, I don't even venture into those spaces to be honest with you…I'm sure there are some noticeable—if I did go into those spaces, there's probably some noticeable stuff, but the YMCA is a diverse space."

This may be viewed as a reproduction of boundaries, but from an analytical perspective, the behavior of self-bounding—or choosing to exclude oneself from activities beyond one's own select status group—creates and reproduces in-group solidarity. It can be seen as a positive outcome borne of negative experiences, as many BYNC reported having experienced or observed sociocultural inequalities in the ostensibly inclusive yoga world. Racialized social boundaries of exclusion create and reproduce so many symbolic boundaries that many BYNC completely opt out of mainstream yoga world participation. However, because Black women are unfortunately used to social exclusion, BYNC

skillfully and actively navigate these boundaries and create more cohesion within their own racial group instead of allowing inequality to deter them from practice altogether. They are using their experiences in the overall social world to create inclusion where they have experienced exclusion. The practice of self-bounding counters exclusions by removing oneself from the space of inequality. Another innovative mechanism employed to contest yoga world boundaries is found in organizational diversity, which contests exclusions from an organizational standpoint through yoga world gatekeepers and cultural producers.

Organizational Diversity

By directly challenging the effects of underrepresentation and assumptions of authenticity, BYNC create organizational diversity through strategic hiring selections that increase representation of non-stereotypical "yoga bodies." Assata tells me about the reasons behind her strategic hiring practice at her rural dance and yoga studio just outside the city limits.

> "I've had White instructors here, but I've also had mostly [smiling] Black yoga instructors here. Intentionally…I've had a male instructor here I had a Jamaican instructor here, who happened to be a Rastafarian [chuckles] Um…um, let's see, I've had a Native American instructor. So, for me being inclusive and having representation, is important. So, I'll have brand new instructors, instructors of all body types, ages, experience levels."

Assata's view is similar to Michelle who also strives for organizational diversity as well; however, her diversity is akin to Cleo's strategic selection. Because her target demographic is Black women between 25 and 49 years old, she creates and reproduces diversity and in-group solidarity. Both participants' behaviors reflect an awareness of the

importance of an instructor's role to how consumers experience the yoga world. This role is the final key bridging mechanism employed by BYNC.

The role of instructors

As instructors/cultural producers, BYNC are using their positions to increase sociocultural awareness and empathy for all who wish to practice with them. Respondents convey their passion for teaching and, knowledge of the overarching benefits of yoga practice as instructors and students. Black instructors are themselves bridging mechanisms as their existence often draws other Black students and teachers to practice with them, increasing in-group solidarity. Assata discusses hearing about Black instructors

> "…If I hear there's a Black instructor, there's something going on, I just immediately um feel magnetized to go. But I also I don't have a lot of time to do that because I'm here [the studio] a lot, I'm working a lot. So, I'm very strategic and selective about the things I do. So, if I have a choice, I'm going to go with someone that I know. Or someone that I want to get to know."

While in-group support is socially beneficial, finding Black instructors remains a daunting task for some who remain shocked by the relatively small number of registered yoga teachers who are Black in this region. Nzingha, who conducted a private (non-sociological) study on Black people in yoga tells of the exponential growth in the number of Black yoga instructors in the last five years and the drive, like Assata, to support them

> "Like I wanna say when I was first trained there were probably five Black instructors. Now, there are like 40 Black instructors. So, when each of them started to—I found out about them, I would go to their classes intentionally. I wanted to experience them. I want to support them. I wanna know what's out there. I even have this one type of spin to it…

Renee explains the excitement she feels for the increasing number of Black yoga instructors in this area and Black registered yoga teacher trainers (those who train individuals to teach yoga according to Yoga Alliance standards:

> "Just for [the city], in general. Think about how many Black yoga teachers there are here. It's really a blessing. It's more than we think! Because I have people come and they're like 'I can't find the Black teachers'…But I think it's a good amount of us that's teaching now. And now that Nzingha is doing yoga teacher training—and I'm excited—she's a wonderful, wonderful, I would have loved to go through teacher training with her but we're really getting more visible. When I say oh no, we got choices of Black teachers in [the city] And they're like 'what?!' … 'cause I'm from [another city] and when I went home for the holidays, I wanted to know who the Black teacher... I wanted to know—it should not stop me from going to yoga class, but I wanted to know—I'm so used to—I'm spoiled here in [the city]. It's so many Black teachers, I go to [the Facebook group] and decide where I'ma go to yoga class instead of any other. So, when I go elsewhere, I be like y'all don't have any Black teachers teaching yoga? They were like it's none here. That's deep. That's why I wanted to join so I would be visible. So, the community would know that 'oh no! There are Black people that teach yoga."

Renee, Nzingha, and Assata responses speak volumes to the overt and implicit inequality of the overall social world being experienced symbolically in the North Carolina yoga world. Their awareness of the lack of representation, organizational diversity and general exposure to other Black instructors prior to teacher training are all offshoots of the racialization of American culture that creates different experiences for one group versus another, based on where it falls on the racialized social hierarchy.

Racialization aside, BYNC as cultural producers and gatekeepers are in the unique position of starting a dialogue on sensitive issues while creating a peaceful space in which to address social concerns while under the safety net of employing *ahimsa*—doing no harm. Cleo expands the use of this mechanism, explaining the connections between social issues and how she structures her classes:

> "There's a lot of things I try to consider when I'm planning a class. Like, one, what's my intention for the practice? It could be like what's going on in the world—you know, like the Charleston shooting. I believe I had something—or I think it was after the Charlottesville—I had something about race and equality and things like that. So, you know, like what's going on in the world."

Additionally, after the 2016 presidential election—feeling racial division was at the source of most of the feelings surrounding the topic and with a desire to create some solidarity, Assata explains doing just that and the positive results it brought forth.

> "I had to teach [pause] the morning after the most recent presidential election. [PI: how was that for you?] That night it was hard to sleep 'cause I had—I know how some of my students probably voted [pause]. So, it would have been so inauthentic for me to come in and act like that didn't just happen. You know? It was just not possible. I [pause] just had to s—I felt like [laughs] I was pissed. But I also knew it was an opportunity for me to [pause] bring awareness to those who voted one way and bring some peace for those who voted another way who were upset. So, I just I tried—I don't remember everything I said… but I just remember feeling [pause] a big responsibility that morning. I was like ugh. It was really interesting because this one woman I know was just, I know a big supporter—and I wasn't looking for this—but she came up after class and she was kind of in tears by what I said"

Respondents mentioned many instances where instructors made them feel unwelcomed, did not assist them as they did others, or generally did not engage the students. While others directly correlate ill-treatment from instructors to some form of racial bias rearing its ugly head in the seemingly inclusive yoga world, Nzingha offers a less racialized, more capitalist, service-based business perspective on these feelings.

> "So, there's a business side of me 'cause I have two degrees, you saw all that stuff, work corporate—there's a business side of me that knows what I need to do to get these people to keep coming back to class. And I think that's a missing element for some other folks where they might ignore people—it's customer service! You want people to come back to your class, treat them with customer service and make things accessible. Set them up for success, where they're gonna come back…I feel like some of it goes back to damn customer service! Now you're taking it as 'you did that to me because I'm Black. But when you sit around and wait for the next class come in, they've done it to somebody else."

Nzingha's viewpoint reflects a consumerist perspective so seem. Her belief that some instructors are just bad at customer service is not completely rare; however, for most other BYNC in the study, even if they felt instructors were not authentically inclusive in service, symbolically or directly, they connected it back to the racialization of American culture that often leads many White Americans to treat and perceive Black Americans unequally because of their race (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; 2011; 1994; Samson and Bob, 2014). Whether as consumers or producers of yoga culture, it is evident that the instructor's role matters in how BYNC experience, interpret and navigate the yoga world. As a recurrent theme throughout the study, BYNC awareness of and experience with (both firsthand and observations) how often students do not return to a class or studio because of their interaction, or lack thereof with the instructor. Also, because of their unique social position as a marginalized social group, experienced in navigating spaces previously deed not "for them," BYNC creatively employ bridging mechanisms to directly counter boundaries created by race and reproduced symbolically in the aforementioned ways. In the concluding section, I will discuss my interpretations of findings, study limitations and ideas for future research.

DISCUSSION

The primary objective of this study was to explore if and how BYNC experience interactions of social and symbolic boundaries in the yoga world, and what mechanisms are used to create, reproduce, and or bridge said boundaries. Past research on cultural production shows how a cultural object is strengthened through collaborative networks (Becker, 1982; Schudson, 2002). Studies on art worlds in particular reflect the institutionalized networks of actors required to (re)produce culture and the innovative ways the worlds change to fit the time and/or culture (Becker, 1982). Previous studies on boundary processes show the effects of social boundaries like race on institutionalized symbolic conventions in cultural participation and identity formation (Pachucki, Pendergrass and Lamont, 2007; Santos, 2009; Wohl, 2015).

Yoga world conventions of authenticity are created and reproduced via consumerist culture attitudes and traditional media biases. Religion, Christianity more specifically, was found to be a religious boundary, excluding people because yoga world conventions of spirituality are not easily understood by yoga world outsiders. Aesthetic distinctions and values based on race and size were the most salient boundary (re)producing convention. Because of real and perceived inequalities that are found to be rooted in societal level racialized attitudes, BYNC utilize strategic bridging mechanism to fill some of the cultural gaps of exclusion they've experienced or observed firsthand.

This study also found that BYNC experience American racialization as a combination social and symbolic boundary marker interacting in their yoga world experiences, creating and reproducing boundaries of authenticity and aesthetic values via

yoga world conventions. What is interesting is that due to early socialization into a racialized American culture—something that, for many Black Americans means being trained to treat whiteness as something inherently superior to all other racialized cultural constructs—the standard against which all is else is to be measured, if you will; coupled with the application of yoga philosophy in daily life, awareness, experiences and navigation of said boundaries in the yoga world are often strategically navigated and bridged by BYNC who, because of their resilience as Black women in America, are not deterred from continued yoga world participation even as they experience boundaries of inclusion in this ostensibly inclusive space (Lyaubansky, 2011). The ability to creatively navigate racial inequalities is rooted in the sexist, White idealizing constructs of the American social world that positions Black American women as double "minorities" and third-class citizens who must often creatively navigate social exclusions and counter the interactions of social and symbolic boundaries (Hill-Collins, 1986; hooks, 1981; Welch, 2015).

From these data, it is quite clear that racialized socialization is impacting BYNC yoga world experiences whether overtly or implicitly. This socialization leaves many of them unwilling or unable to separate their racial identities from their yogic identities as their navigate the yoga world as consumers, producers and gatekeepers, as they often feel they are outsiders within forced to play dual roles as Black women and authentic yoginis in a space where the two are contrasting concepts as far as the traditional media that supports America's consumerist culture is concerned (Hill-Collins, 1986). Certainly, outsider within status effects how they experience, interpret and navigate yoga world

boundaries. Cleo, for example passionately compares the realities of racism in America to the ostensibly inclusive space of the yoga world.

> "Specifically, in North Carolina, despite the climate—racism is the climate in North Carolina. North Carolina was one of the biggest slave holding states in America at the height of slavery. So that—this is the culture. Whether it's yoga, whether it's church whatever. I grew up here and my dad's from here. And that's always been the culture. But don't get it twisted, that's America. The Black Yoga Teacher's Alliance is in Boston. That's one of the most racist cities [pause] and I'm from there…yeah, I'm from there…That is, ya know, I don't have to tell you. This is America. So, everything in America's gonna reflect that. So, you see that in the yoga community as well."

The lasting effects of centuries of racialized cultural formations and systematic white supremacy are undeniable in the BYNC yoga world experience. Just as it remains prevalent in other areas of social life, such as work, education and leisure, the historical connections between slavery and assumptions about blackness and Black women in the yoga world are undeniable (Bonilla-Silva, 2011; Hill-Collins, 1986; Lamont & Fournier, 1992; Samson and Bobo, 2014). Recognizing these boundary-making processes in an ostensibly inclusive space, reveals just how pervasive racism remains in American culture. In addition, the feeling that symbolic distinctions that treat blackness as bad and negative lead to innumerable social consequences, especially for those people and places labeled and identifying as "Black" is one that, in the U.S, directly correlates to racialized inequality that maintains boundaries and preserves a White supremacist social structure. Such systemic beliefs and behaviors are almost guaranteed to permeate all other areas of social living. This study found that, not unlike the fashion world that also (re) produces boundaries drawn by race and size from conventions of aesthetics and authenticity, the "skinny White hyperflexible woman" image is a prevalent boundary marker in the

experiences of BYNC in North Carolina yoga worlds that drives how BYNC experience cultural participation in a space that is assumed and treated as not socio-culturally "for them". BYNC feel they are defined by their race and size first, ability and knowledge second, something relatively unavoidable in Western society that filters from the macro level social world into the yoga world (Mears, 2009).

The yoga world appears to be virtually identical to most other art worlds, with its many networks of people coming together to promote, produce and consume a cultural product. One exception is an expectation of inclusivity interpreted from ancient yogic texts that make up the foundation of the philosophy (See *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali and The Bhagavad Gita*) and the aspiration of yoga world gatekeepers to make the space more inclusive, bounding out fewer people than is the case in some other consumerist art worlds—with exception—including fashion, and high art. Black yoginis in North Carolina are reflections of Black women in American society. They feel devalued and excluded in this space, traversing racialized, size (aesthetic) and religious boundaries of exclusion and unequal treatment and perceptions simply to participate in the cultural practice of yoga beyond their homes with the forced aesthetic of strength in the face of adversity and they are tired. As Tracy explicates "I think we're exhausted. I'm exhausted. [laughs] and I'm not old enough to be exhausted but I'm exhausted." Tracy's shared exasperation is a reflection of many Black women in the overall social world who have for centuries carried the burden of racialized stereotypes about who and what they are in this society. The dual roles of eternally subservient property and workhorse, not expected to have or even want human emotions or treatment (see DeGruy, 2006; hooks, 1981

Rothenberg, 2001; Scales-Trent, 1998). The overt bigotry and inequality Black women face as they simply try to exist and "live the American dream" seems to have penetrated the boundaries of the yoga world, at least according to my participants' experiences. If my observations are reflective of majority BYNC attitudes, then BYNC, not unlike Sojourner Truth, who begged the question 'ain't I a woman?' in response to the inhumane and inhuman treatment women of African descent faced during (and prior to)19th century America created and reproduced culturally and institutionally, BYNC are symbolically and effectively posing the question 'ain't I a yogi?' in a space where they are often overlooked and marked undeserving of similar treatment to women born under the hierarchically higher 'white' social category (Berila, Klein, & Jackson-Roberts, 2016; Bonilla-Silva, 2011; 1994; Jackson-Roberts PhD, 2017; hooks, 1981). In addition, just as the organizers and participants of the first Miss Black America pageant who were torn between battling both racism and sexism simultaneously (Welch, 2015). The yoga world appears to have been at least unintentionally structured to align with other sociocultural institutions that are racialized and gendered, such as the hip-hop and blues worlds.

Like any social group, there is diversity in the opinions of these women; however, one consistent theme is, they are acutely aware of the ubiquitous effects of institutional and organizational inequality on cultural production, especially those related to group bounding phenotypical traits such as color and size. These women walk in their blackness proudly; and, cannot or will not separate that from their social experiences, deciding instead to let their blackness be a social guide within and throughout yoga worlds. Blackness is a tool for navigating a space they feel is no different from many other

sociocultural settings in the American south such as church. BYNC in this study believe Whiteness, Christianity and thinness are the standard measure of most societal, thereby yogic, classifications of authenticity. These beliefs are created culturally and reproduced in traditional media formats, such as magazines, advertisements, and television programming, which (re)produce aesthetic distinctions and values and assumptions of authenticity. The consequences of such biased cultural reproduction include unequal social environments and boundary markers created and reproduced that lead those not belonging to high status groups to either conform, reject or reorder the standards of inclusion.

In exploring the mechanisms that create, reproduce and potentially bridge social and symbolic boundary markers in the yoga world and I found that just as the revolutionary women before them who organized and educated about injustices during the abolitionist movement, the Black Star movement, the Black power movement, the 2nd wave Women's liberation movement and more recently the #BlackLivesMatter movement, there is a strong sense of obligation among BYNC—especially cultural producers and gatekeepers—to make space for open, honest dialogue about sensitive social issues when given the platform as instructors or social media users.

The hard truth that future studies should examine is that whether as a practicing student, teacher, business owner, BYNC must navigate boundaries of exclusion from the individual (micro) to the societal (macro) levels in both explicit and implicit ways. Yoga world conventions that highlight racialized, spiritual and size-based differences as innocuous norms effectively exclude individuals from full cultural participation resulting

from cultural inequalities that hierarchically categorize Black women, in general, as less than all others, especially White women.

Of the mechanisms identified, I note blackness to be the underlying concept synthesized from all bridging mechanisms discovered in the study. Because racialization so permeates the overall culture, Black people often create subcultures to counter the mainstream that intentionally and systematically excludes them from full cultural participation. blackness becomes a marker of mainstream exclusion, but also of in-group solidarity leading to creation and reproduction of bridging mechanisms to counter the negative effects of social boundaries.

Just as Black cultural producers, gatekeepers and consumers in academia, entertainment and other social, institutional and cultural spaces, intentionally bound together to debunk the conventional fallacy of Black inferiority in a space, so too do BYNC, who must perform this boundary work in a space that is expectedly inclusive (Fleming & Roses, 2007; Hill-Collins, 1986; Welch, 2015). There remains a need for human empathy and awareness, not only of the tenets of yoga philosophy but also of the truth of Africanness, African peoples and African history.

Limitations and Future Work

This study adds to the literature on boundary processes by identifying the creation, reproduction, and bridging mechanisms employed in ostensibly inclusive spaces; however, there were two main methodological limitations of note that future research may address. The first is the small sample size (N=9). Yet because of the interview guide I followed, which was structured to gather information about many areas

of experience in the yoga world from class structure, to music and dress, questions of authenticity, and racial inclusion and exclusion for example, the data collected were rich, allowing for a thorough analysis. The second methodological limitation is the concern of recruiting participants via private social media groups of which I am a member instead of more randomized sampling, from anonymous calls for participation at various studios around cities, for example. To ensure the purposive sampling employed did not simply provide data that mirrored my subjective opinions (researcher bias) or fall victim to social desirability biases and remained a valid and objective project, I again stuck to a semi-structured interview guide. Each interview gauged understanding of the deeper meanings BYNC identify and define in their yoga world experiences from numerous angles (see Appendix C for complete Interview guide).

I believe future research will benefit from exploration of the experiences of larger, more representative samples of Black yoginis, as well as White yoginis to conduct between group comparative analyses. In addition, an exploration of Black male yogis in the yoga world could investigate how males experience racialized and gendered boundaries in the contemporary American yoga world. Studies of White yoginis of North Carolina (and beyond) to explore attitudes they have about stereotypes as the 'standard' of yogic authenticity and perhaps a future focus group inclusive of racially diverse yoginis to explore and compare experiences, interpretations and navigations of yoga world boundaries. Finally, it would be sociologically interesting to explore the attitudes of Indian and African (Egyptian) yogis navigating yoga world boundaries, as both cultural groups are viewed as originators of the practice of yoga (see kemeticyoga);

however, individuals within this society are often overlooked in the mainstream yoga world for Whites as the standard of yogic authenticity, possibly impacting their yoga world experiences.

Conclusion

By focusing on the experiences of Black women in yoga worlds, this study demonstrates how marginalized groups counter social and symbolic boundaries and create their own narratives of authenticity, which contributes to our understanding of boundary processes in inclusive spaces and the broader social world. Regardless of the boundaries systematically placed on the path to full cultural participation, marginalized groups redefine conventions of aesthetics and authenticity through intentional bridge work. In the case of Black yoginis, they do so by directly countering consumerist, religion, media-based and most importantly, racialized boundaries. As there remains limited sociological information on the subject, there is much left to be examined on boundaries in seemingly inclusive spaces such as the yoga world.

Boundaries permeating an inclusive space so much that there remains a need for conventions to be contested—not just to evolve artistically, but to allow the true spirit and benefits of practicing yoga are to be realized. This is something that should not be ignored as the world becomes more globalized. If all areas of social life, especially culture remain unevenly balanced, there will never be actual social equity for all peoples. Yoga has the potential unite individuals' body and mind, as well as unite people of different sociocultural backgrounds and potentially embark on a real path to global human equality. Continued identification, contesting, and bridging of yoga world

boundary processes will be key in assuring the changes in human equity so many individuals and groups seek become a reality.

The most significant insight from this study is that BYNC are telling the world and themselves that no matter the obstacles placed before them, they understand and will promote the belief that inclusiveness matters, by any means necessary. Representation matters. **BYNC matter. Black women matter.**

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APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Respondent ID #_____

This is a voluntary demographic sheet for data collection purposes. Please fill out as completely as possible. Your identity and responses will remain confidential.

1. What is your current RYT certification status?
   _____

2. Which styles of yoga do you teach/practice? (list all that apply)
   _____
   _____

3. How long have you practiced yoga? Years _____ Months _____

4. How long have you taught yoga? Years _____ Months _____

5. What is your current yoga-related employment status?
   - Currently teaching yoga full time
   - Teach yoga part time as secondary employment
   - Certified, but not teaching yoga
   - Yoga teacher in training
   - Former yoga teacher/not currently certified
   - Non-yoga employment (please specify) _____

6. If you chose *non-yoga-related employment* on question 5, do you hope yoga will be your primary source of employment at some point?
   - Yes
   - No

7. If currently teaching, how many classes do you teach ____ daily ____weekly ____monthly on average?

8. In what type of environment do you teach?
   - In a commercially owned studio/gym (e.g. Planet Fitness®, franchise yoga studios)
   - In a privately-owned studio (including home studios)
   - I do private instruction (including, but not limited to in-home)
   - I do not teach currently
   - Other (Please specify) _____

9. Do you have personal/small business liability insurance for your teaching practice? [**skip to #10 if you are not self-employed]**

- Yes
- No

10. If you work for an agency (e.g. YMCA, privately owned studio), are you included on their liability insurance?
    - Yes
    - No
11. What is your date of birth? _____
12. What is your highest level of education?

- Less than a High School Diploma
- High School Diploma or GED
- Some college, but no degree
- Associate Degree
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Doctoral, or Professional Degree
- Other (Please specify) _____

13. What is your TOTAL ANNUAL household income?

- Less than $10,000
- Between $10,001 and $25,000
- Between $25,001 and $40,000
- Between $40,001 and $65,000
- Between $65,001 and $80,000
- Between $80,001 and $105,000
- More than $105,000
- Prefer not to answer

14. What is your current marital status? _____

15. What is your sexual orientation?

- Bisexual
- Lesbian
- Straight
- Transsexual
- Other (Please specify)_____
- Prefer to not Answer

16. In what state are/did you training/train to be a yoga instructor?

- North Carolina
- Other _____ Please fill in state of training/certification

17. For each of the following, please select ONE answer that best matches your feelings about yoga teacher training.

QUESTIONS	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I learned about yoga philosophy					
I understand human anatomy better because my training					
Yoga schools **should** have programs for business training (e.g. how to make money teaching yoga)					
It focused mostly on asana					
Non-hatha styles of yoga were taught					
The importance of empathy for **all** beings was emphasized					
Inclusivity should be taught as a priority in training					
I know about contraindications because of my training					
The business of yoga is just as important as the philosophy of yoga					
I learned about mantras					

18. On average, how many yoga classes do you teach per week? _____

19. How often do you incorporate each of the following in your teaching: (please select one choice per item)?

QUESTIONS	Never	Seldom	Occasionally	Always	n/a / Do not teach
I incorporate meditation in my classes					
Pranayama is practiced in each class					
Classes are 100% asana (movement)					
Mantras (affirming chants) are used					
Mudras are normally used in classes					
Pranayama is explained to students					

20. When practicing or teaching yoga, it's okay to:

QUESTIONS	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Wear form-fitting attire to teach yoga					
Welcome all interested in yoga into your class					
Judge students based on their ability to do certain poses					
Focus on meditation more than asana					

21. For each of the following, select the item that **best** relates to your teaching practice.

QUESTIONS	Never	Seldom	N/A	Sometimes	Always
My yoga practice includes meditation					
Yoga practice is inclusive of all people					
I can be *me* because of yoga					
I play lyrical (hip hop, pop) music when teaching					
I play ambient music when teaching					
I use Sanskrit words in my teaching					
Wearing shoes in a practice space is okay					
Cursing is okay in a practice space					

22. As a student, rate how racially inclusive you feel yoga is in North Carolina?

1 2 3 4 5

Racially Exclusive **Neutral** **Racially Inclusive**

23. How much of an influence do you feel your race has on your overall yoga experience? (Select One)

1 2 3 4 5

No Influence **Neutral** **Strong Influence**

24. As a teacher, rate how racially inclusive you feel yoga is in North Carolina?

1 2 3 4 5

Racially Exclusive **Neutral** **Racially Inclusive**

25. When practicing or teaching yoga, it's okay to:

QUESTIONS	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Assume one's ability based on race					
Choose a yoga class based on teacher race					
Leave a class based on instructor's race					

26. Practicing yoga has altered my view of individuals with different ethno-racial backgrounds

A) Positively B) Negatively C) Both a & b D) None of the above E) Other

27. **Yes or No** Yoga instructors should be certified to teach through a legitimating organization (e.g. Yoga Alliance ®)

28. If yes to #27, should instructors have to pay annual dues in order to legitimately teach?

APPENDIX B: OBSERVATION GUIDE

As part of this study, I will be observing and taking notes on naturally occurring interactions and conversations among Black yogini instructors and their students and other instructors in yoga practice or learning spaces. This stage of the research will not require additional time or activities from participants.

Participant observation will consist of observing classes taught, teachers' teaching styles and students' perception(s) of teachers—as evidenced in their behaviors and/or words spoken within the practice space before, during or after a class/training session. My observations will be for gaining deeper understanding of context and background information of BYNC. It will not be the primary source of data. Observation field notes will be hand written and recorded in Microsoft Word (and NVivo® qualitative analysis software, if necessary).

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Respondent ID #_____

1) Tell me about your experience as a yogini?
   a) What motivated you to become a yoga instructor?
   b) How has being a teacher shaped your experiences as a yoga practitioner?
   c) What, if any, challenges have you faced as a yoga instructor in this state?
2) What do you see as conventions/norms of yoga worlds?
   a) What does a yoga practice/class/teacher (guru) training look like to you?
      i) Describe how you structure your typical yoga class/private session/teacher training (verbiage depends on BYNC status—whether a yoga teacher and/or registered yoga school owner).
      ii) Do you feel this aligns with or differs from "traditional" yoga practice? Why/Why not?
   b) Do you think it's okay/good/bad to stray from traditional/classic yogic philosophy/practices?
3) How do you define what it means to be a yogi/yogini?
   a) Are there any practices/behaviors you believe make an "authentic yogi/yogini"?
   b) In your opinion, what characteristics does a "good" yoga instructor possess?
4) What are your thoughts on recently popularized "alternative" yoga styles, such as trap and BUTI yoga? (or) Do you think alternative styles of yoga are "real" yoga? Why or why not?
5) With what religious/spiritual identity do you identify?
   a) Has being a yogini impacted this identity in any way?
      i) [How] do you incorporate elements of the 8-limb path into your yoga practice?
6) What does a yogini look like to you?
   a) Describe how you typically dress to practice yoga?
      i) To teach? **[ask if they don't include teaching attire in their first reply]**
   b) How do you feel you are perceived as a Black yogini in NC yoga worlds?
   c) Do you believe your race affects individuals' choices when choosing/not choosing your class/studio for yoga practice?
      i) **[follow up] are there other traits you feel may affect teacher/studio selection?**
   d) Do you feel Black yoginis are excluded/overlooked/devalued in yoga worlds?
7) Are you familiar with phrases and hashtags (explain if necessary) 'blackgirlsDOyoga' and 'blackgirl[yoga]magic'
   a) Why do you think phrases (and hashtags) like these are used so widely by Black yoginis?
   b) In what other ways do you feel Black yoginis build community with their practice?
8) Classic yogic texts tout the view that God (Krishna) sees/treats all beings as equal, implying all people, regardless of background/physical traits/status should be treated

equally. Do you feel this "ideology of inclusiveness"[2] is being practiced in NC Yoga worlds? Why or why not?
   a) Do you think the exclusivity/inclusivity you've experienced in NC yoga world reflects that of national/global yoga worlds?
9) Has practicing/teaching yoga altered your view of individuals/groups of different physical characteristics (e.g. "race," size, age etc.)
10) Please explain any memories you have of yoga practice bringing people [with differences] together?
   a) Do you feel yoga practice has the sociocultural "power" to challenge the existence of racial inequalities?
   b) Please explain your answer **[if not already explained in original response]**
11) Do you have anything you would like to add?
   [CLOSE INTERVIEW]

[2] The belief that all beings are created by Krishna (God) and should be treated equally—do no harm to no thing/place/person

APPENDIX D: REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION (ONLINE)

Greetings yoginis! For those of you who I've not yet met, my name is Tee Brooks. I am a master's candidate at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. I am writing in hopes of recruiting you for my thesis study, which examines the experiences of Black/African American yoginis in the southeastern United States.

The following eligibility criteria were selected for my participants:

1) 21+ y/o Female, Black/African-American, living in North Carolina
2) Has practiced yoga at least (3) years
3) Previously completed or currently enrolled in certified yoga teacher training

Do you meet the selected criteria? If so, may I interview you? Should you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to engage in a 45 – 90-minute in person interview, which will be recorded using a handheld audio recorder. Prior to starting the interview, I will give you a short pen and paper questionnaire to give understanding of your experiences and provide demographic information. Additionally, if you are currently teaching, I ask that I may observe at least one, no more than three, of your classes to better grasp your teaching style.

The interview protocol questions are divided into sections (i.e., rapport questions, yoga experiences and the closing). The interviews will conclude by offering participants a platform to express any additional comments or concerns. Different locations (e.g. yoga teaching spaces, yoga schools, yoga instructor homes, etc.) will be used to conduct the interviews, accommodating the schedules of all participants.

If you agree to an interview, I will need you to sign an informed consent form. I will email you a copy as well as bring a copy of this document to our scheduled interview. Please email (tbrook38@uncc.edu) back specifying an interview date and time that works best with your schedule. Should you have any questions, please contact me at 704.669.8305.

I cannot thank you enough for assisting me in this matter, and I hope to hear from you soon.

Best,

Tee Brooks
UNC Charlotte
Sociology Department

APPENDIX E: REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION (IN-PERSON)

Hello, my name is Tee Brooks. I am a master's candidate in the Sociology department at UNC Charlotte. I've been recruiting participants for a research study and am in search of a few more as my original method for recruitment has proven unfruitful. You were identified by another yogi/yogini as someone who may be interested in my study exploring the experiences of Black yoginis in the southeastern United States.

To be sure, have you completed or are you currently enrolled in a yoga teacher training and are you over the age of 21 years? If so, may I interview you? Should you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to engage in a 45 – 90-minute in person interview, which will be recorded using a handheld audio recorder. Prior to starting the interview, I will give you a short pen and paper questionnaire to give understanding of your experiences and provide demographic information. Additionally, if you are currently teaching, I ask that I may observe at least one, no more than three, of your classes to better grasp your teaching methods. The first observation may occur on the same day as the interview, if possible.

The interview protocol questions are divided into sections (i.e., rapport questions, yoga experiences and opinions and the closing). I will conclude the interview by offering you a platform to express any additional comments or concerns. Your interview will be conducted in the space that makes you most comfortable but is also conducive to a confidential interview, such as yoga teaching spaces, yoga schools, yoga instructor homes, etc.; and will be used to conduct the interviews, accommodating the schedules of all participants.

If you agree to an interview, I will need you to sign an informed consent form. I have a copy here for your review now and will have a copy of this document at our scheduled interview for you to sign.

Please take my business card. It has my telephone number and email address for you to follow up specifying an interview date and time that works best with your schedule.

I cannot thank you enough for assisting me in this matter, and I hope to hear from you soon.